



E.R. Braithwaite: RAF WWII Fighter Pilot

During World War II, a large number of Airmen of African and non-European descent from the British Commonwealth countries served in the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and flew missions over European cities. Some of the individuals who flew as air crew members were E. R. Braithwaite, Vincent Bunting and Flight Sergeant James Hyde. As an officer and fighter pilot, E. R. Braithwaite and other pilots of African and non-European descent were never recognized to the same degree as other pilots of European descent in the RAF.

I have not included any information on flight officers Vincent Bunting and Flight Sergeant James Hyde due to the fact that I cannot find any available information that states anything other than the fact that they were World War II RAF pilots. The only information that I could find that provided information that they were RAF pilots were photographs with them in RAF uniforms with no supporting text other than their names with the photographs.

Because of the variety of talents and skills Braithwaite possessed, he accomplished an astounding number of feats and is very well known; but not as a former RAF World War II fighter pilot. He is an Author, Poet, Writer, and PhD in Physics in addition to becoming a World War II fighter Pilot. My interest in him was piqued when I started research on world War II RAF pilots and found that he was a Royal Air Force World War II Fighter Pilot... not realizing until further investigation that he was the author of the book, "To Sir With Love," which was made into a movie.

Braithwaite had a privileged upbringing and both of his parents attended Oxford University. He attended Queens College, in Guyana and City College of New York. During World War II, he joined the RAF as a fighter Pilot. After the War, he went on to the University of Cambridge from which he earned a Bachelor's and PhD in Physics. After the war, in spite of his education, he could not find a job as a pilot, engineer or in his profession of Physics. Reluctantly, he took a job teaching school in the "East End" of the City of London, England. The East End of London is east of the old Walled city of London. This area of London is noted for being overcrowded, disease-ridden, and plagued with poverty and crime during its early days. Due to its location, which is close to the docks of London, it was bombed during WWII and during the fifties, it was rebuilt.

Primarily his work as a writer described his difficulties as a Black person, teacher, social worker and simply as an educated person who faced discrimination. His books were banned in South Africa until 1973, when the ban was lifted. After the ban was lifted, he applied for a Visa to visit the country and was granted the status as an honorary white, which gave him more freedom and privileges than the indigenous black population.

I could find very little published about Braithwaite's life in the RAF. Nor could I find many other pilots of African descent who served during WWII. Most of this information has no real detail and simply mentions Squadrons, Rank, and profession—such as Flight Sergeants, Wireless Operators, Gunners and



Ground Crew personnel. According to some of the research that I have conducted recently, a member of the Bomber Command Flight Crew Members of World War II at Cosford, England has set up a memorial to include members of that Command who were of non-European descent.

In 1998, I visited the Cosford Air Museum, where I had the opportunity to go through and look at all of the displays. I spent the better part of a day looking at the exhibits and was impressed with the display of World War II German aircraft. I think that the museum had a complete display of all of the German fighter aircraft that were active during World War II on display. It also included weapons other than aircraft, such as the V-1 and V-2 rockets used against the city of London. During my visit, I did not see any display of units that included pilots of non-European descent. This week I sent an e-mail to the museum at Cosford and asked them to provide me any information they had available on the subject of non-European flight crew members in the RAF. As soon as I get more information, I will revise and reprint this article. However, I understand that the museum currently has included such information in its collection; so once again, I am looking forward to making a trip to England to see what they have on display and perhaps get some good material for reference.

