

## Telegraph accessibility links

- [Skip to article](#)
- [Skip to Telegraph main navigation](#)

**Telegraph**.co.uk

## Air Vice-Marshall Donald Pocock

Commandant-General of the RAF Regiment who cut his teeth in action in the Western Desert, Italy and Aden

Last Updated: 12:48AM BST 11 Aug 2008

Air VICE-MARSHAL DONALD POCOCK, who has died aged 88, was one of the founder members of the RAF Regiment on its formation in 1942 and the first full-career officer of the Corps to become its Commandant-General.

Pocock was commissioned in July 1941 and left for the Middle East, where he established a school at Amman, in Transjordan, to train ground gunners. On the formation of the RAF Regiment on February 1 1942 he was automatically transferred to that Corps and soon afterwards left for the Western Desert, with responsibility for the ground and low-level air defence of a forward fighter wing. In April 1943, at Castel Benito, he formed one of the new RAF Regiment squadrons (No 2932) in the light anti-aircraft role and commanded it for the rest of the war.

Following the Axis defeat in Tunisia in May 1943 Pocock and his squadron were redeployed to Syria as part of Operation Turpitude, a move intended to divert German attention and to help persuade Turkey to declare for the Allies. The success of the Normandy landings in June 1944 led to the abandonment of Turpitude and No 2932 was sent to Italy to provide air defence at the major airfields of Foggia and Bari.

In October Pocock took his squadron to Vis, an island off the coast of Yugoslavia, to provide air defence for the RAF's base and Tito's rear partisan HQ established there. Almost immediately the squadron was incorporated into a joint raiding group of Army, Royal Marines and RAF Regiment commandos which operated from Vis against enemy forces on the Yugoslav mainland. These raiders inflicted many casualties on the enemy. Pocock's squadron also provided boarding parties in naval vessels engaged against enemy shipping in the Adriatic, their role being to capture as many enemy sailors as possible for interrogation.

After the German capitulation the squadron moved to Austria for occupational and disarmament duties. On promotion to wing commander Pocock took command of No 1328 Wing. When this disbanded in March 1946 he was posted to Aden to raise and command a new wing (battalion equivalent) of Aden Protectorate Levies (APL), an indigenous land-fighting force.

When the Palestine Mandate ended and war broke out in 1947, centuries of co-existence between Arabs and Jews in the Yemen and neighbouring territories came to an end. The indigenous police could not contain rioting in Aden Colony, and Pocock's wing was called in from the hinterland, with other APL units, to restore



Pocock: maintained discipline among troops and minimised casualties

order.

It was unprecedented for the tribal Levies to be deployed in the colony, but whilst some Levy units mutinied and attacked the Jews, Pocock succeeded in maintaining discipline among his troops. A distinguished civilian eyewitness described his immense relief at the sight of Pocock's powerful, commanding figure dominating a chaotic scene and bringing order to it. As a result, casualties were minimised. With RAF Regiment reinforcements sent from Egypt, the ring was held and the APL returned to their up-country garrisons. Pocock finally returned to Britain in 1948 after seven unbroken years overseas, much of it on active service.

Donald Arthur Pocock was born in London on July 5 1920 and educated at Crouch End School. As a youth he devoted most of his spare time to the Territorial Cadet Force (later Army Cadet Force) and rose steadily through the ranks, eventually being commissioned as a cadet officer. In July 1940 he enlisted in the RAF as a ground gunner, but was very quickly identified as officer material.

On his return from overseas Pocock served at HQ Transport Command identifying methods to make RAF Regiment units "air portable". He attended the RAF Staff College before a succession of staff and command appointments in British and Nato HQs at home and overseas, including Cyprus and, during the Confrontation in Indonesia, in HQ Far East Air Force, Singapore.

Shortly before this latter post, in 1965, he had led a working party at joint RAF/USAF talks in Washington to discuss possible RAF Regiment assistance to the USAF, which was suffering severe damage to its air assets on the ground in Vietnam. The talks resulted in a successful officer exchange programme which has continued uninterrupted to this day.

Pocock commanded the RAF Regiment Depot at Catterick and was an aide-de-camp to the Queen from 1967 to 1970. He was then promoted to air commodore and appointed to the MoD as Director of Ground Defence.

Two years later he assumed the top job in the RAF Regiment, a post he held for three years. During this five-year period the force underwent significant changes and developments, many of which form the foundations of today's capabilities.

A feature of the period was an increasing awareness of the need to bolster the defences of operational airfields and key installations against the air and ground threat posed by the forces of the Warsaw Pact. This crucial role fell to the RAF Regiment field and air defence squadrons.

Pocock was at the centre of plans to expand the force to meet this essential requirement, which involved the creation of new field squadrons and the introduction, in 1971, of the highly capable and successful British-built Rapier short-range air defence missile system.

With the potential air threat likely to be from low-flying aircraft, the RAF Regiment-manned Rapier squadrons became a key component of the air defence system at RAF airfields in Germany and the United Kingdom.

Pocock's time as the Commandant-General was often difficult. As he strove to improve the RAF Regiment's capabilities, he also had to contend with defence cuts and redundancy schemes initiated by Harold Wilson's government. However, his strong and forceful leadership ensured that the Regiment remained a crucial part of the RAF's wide-ranging operational capability. He took particular pride in having brought the Regiment into the missile era. He retired from the RAF in 1975.

He was appointed OBE in 1957 and CBE in 1975.

A dynamic and charismatic leader, Pocock's enduring legacy to the RAF was his absolute belief in the indispensability of organic local defence of air resources, an approach greatly influenced by his service during the Western Desert campaign; it is a doctrine which the parent RAF has reviewed regularly over the past 66 years, always to return to the same conclusion.

After retiring from the RAF, Pocock joined the British Aircraft Corporation Guided Weapons Division as air defence adviser.

He was subsequently appointed general manager for a large contract to supply and support the sale of the Rapier missile system to Iran, where he remained until the 1979 revolution that deposed the Shah. He then became director of the British Metallurgical Plant Constructor's Association.

He finally retired in 1986 and took up voluntary appointments with the RAF Association and St John Ambulance.

He was chairman of the League of RAF Regiment Associations.

Donald Pocock died on July 30. He married, in 1947, Dorothy Griffiths. She died in 2006, and he is survived by their two sons and three daughters.

---

[Back to top](#)

---

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2008