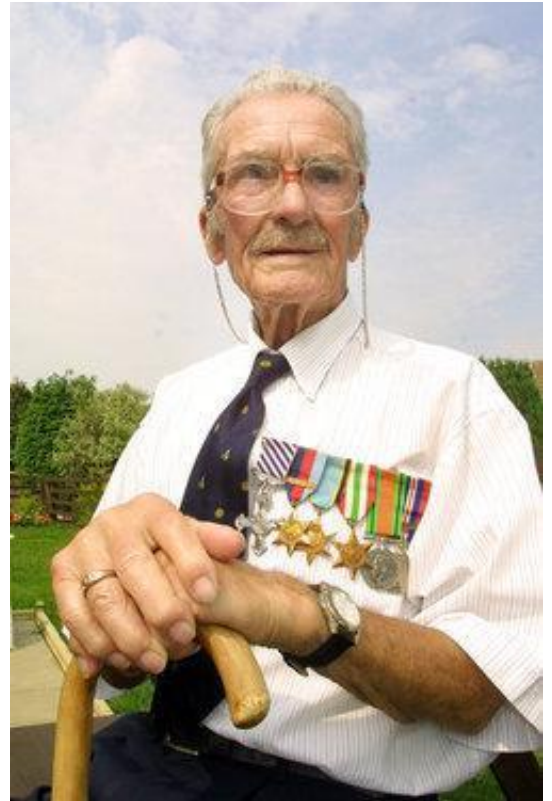


George Herman Bennions, DFC (15 March 1913 – 30 January 2004)

The Ace Pilot Turned Educator

George Herman Bennions, affectionately known as "Ben," was a British flying ace whose remarkable life story blends heroism in the skies with a dedication to his community in later years. As an RAF pilot during the Second World War, Bennions earned acclaim as a decorated ace, shooting down at least twelve enemy aircraft. Later, he became a respected teacher at Risedale School in Catterick, shaping young minds with the same dedication he brought to his wartime service. His life stands as a testament to the power of resilience and commitment, both in combat and in the community, he called home.

Born on 15 March 1913 in Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, Bennions was raised by parents Edward and Mary, who worked in the pottery industry. In 1929, Bennions joined the Royal Air Force as an aircraft apprentice at RAF Halton, where he trained as an engine fitter. After qualifying in 1932, he quickly rose through the ranks, eventually training as a pilot. In 1935, he married Avis Brown, with whom he had three daughters; their son sadly passed away in infancy. Avis, who would pass in 2000, was a constant support in his life.



Bennions' RAF career began in earnest in 1936, when he was assigned to No. 41 Squadron RAF as a sergeant pilot in Aden, flying Hawker Demon fighters. Later that year, the squadron returned to England, where it was equipped with Hawker Furies and, in 1940, with Supermarine Spitfires. In April 1940, Bennions received his commission, advancing to the rank of pilot officer.

His first confirmed victory came on 28 July 1940, while stationed at RAF Hornchurch. Bennions shot down a Messerschmitt Bf 109 of JG 51, marking the start of a successful combat record. The next day, after downing another Bf 109, his Spitfire was damaged, forcing him to crash-land in Kent. On 15 August 1940, while on temporary assignment at RAF Catterick, Bennions engaged a force of 120 bombers and 21 Bf 110 fighters near Hartlepool, destroying one Bf 110 and damaging another. Returning to RAF Hornchurch, Bennions quickly added to his tally: on 5 September, he shot down a Junkers Ju 88 and likely destroyed a Bf 109. Over the next days, he downed several more fighters, including two Bf 109s on 6 September and another on 9 September.

By the end of September, Bennions had achieved twelve confirmed kills—eleven fighters and one bomber—as well as five probable kills and five damaged aircraft. Among these encounters, Bennions is credited with shooting down the future Luftwaffe ace Hans-Joachim Marseille over the English Channel on 23 September. Though Marseille survived and would go on to become one of Germany's top aces, Bennions' early actions disrupted his rise.

However, Bennions' career as a fighter pilot was nearly cut short. On 1 October 1940, just before he was to go on leave, Bennions was scrambled in his Spitfire to intercept enemy Messerschmitts. During the battle, he successfully downed another enemy plane before a shell struck his cockpit, causing severe injuries: his left eye was blinded, his right arm and leg were badly damaged, and he was severely burned. Despite the extensive injuries and heavy bleeding, Bennions managed to bail out and parachute to safety before losing consciousness. He was found in a field near Hatfield and rushed to hospital, where doctors managed to save his right eye. His left eye, however, was beyond repair.

During his recovery, Bennions became one of the first patients of Sir Archibald McIndoe, a pioneer in plastic surgery who treated many of Britain's wounded pilots. As one of "Archie's Guinea Pigs," Bennions joined the Guinea Pig Club, a support network for severely burned aircrew. As a parachute survivor, he was also eligible to join the Caterpillar Club.

On the very day he was wounded, Bennions' Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) was announced in The London Gazette. The citation commended his leadership and bravery, noting that he had "destroyed seven enemy aircraft and possibly several others." His courage and cool-headed determination were credited with having a "splendid influence" on his squadron.

Though unable to return to combat, Bennions continued to serve with distinction. After recovering, he was assigned as a fighter controller and rose to the rank of squadron leader. In January 1943, he was mentioned in dispatches for his exceptional service. He later served in North Africa, liaising with an American fighter group and assisting in operations. While he was cleared only for limited flying, Bennions nonetheless flew on convoy patrols to support the war effort.

In October 1943, while commanding a Ground Control Interception unit in Corsica, Bennions was wounded a second time when a nearby enemy glide bomb exploded. Once again, he found himself in McIndoe's care at East Grinstead. For the remainder of the war, he served as a senior fighter controller across various units in northern England.

After the war, Bennions left the RAF in 1946. He embraced civilian life by pursuing a teaching career, becoming an instructor in woodwork, metalwork, and technical drawing at **Risedale School in Hipswell, Catterick Garrison**, settling in **Catterick Village** where he lived for the rest of his life. As an avid and talented silversmith, Bennions even obtained his own hallmark. In his free time, he enjoyed building and sailing dinghies with friends and was known for flying his beloved de Havilland Tiger Moth well into his seventies. A keen golfer, he was elected captain of his local golf club and later made an honorary life member. He was also a longstanding honorary member of the **RAF Catterick Officers' Mess**, where his humility and quiet manner belied his remarkable wartime achievements.

Bennions passed away on 30 January 2004 and was buried at St Anne's Church in Catterick. His funeral was attended by flight crew from RAF Leeming, who honoured him as pallbearers. In a tribute to his contributions, a thoroughfare in Catterick Village was named Bennions Way, serving as a lasting reminder of his legacy.

George Bennions' life reflects both extraordinary bravery and profound humility. His courage in battle and quiet dedication to community life after the war underscore the lasting values of service and resilience, leaving an indelible mark on those who knew him and the generations he taught and inspired.