

South Carlton Airfield

In July 1918, the airfield at South Carlton was a busy and dangerous place. Commanded by Lt Col Louis Strange, the airfield had been newly designated as no 46 Training Depot Station with the responsibility of training pilots for front line duties. The losses of trained pilots and aircraft over the previous 2 years had been huge. 700 pilots and observers had been killed during the Somme battle and many more killed in the German offensive of March 1918. While many aircraft had been lost in combat, 1000s more were lost in flying accidents, often as the result of inadequate flying training. The training plan for the newly formed RAF called for an output of 400 pilots a month to meet the demands of the War Office.

The TDSs were established to speed up the training of aircrew, starting with basic flying training, followed by conversion on to operational aircraft before the instructors and newly trained pilots flew out as a Squadron with their aircraft to front line duties in France. South Carlton with Brattleby (later Scampton) and Waddington were 3 airfields opened in November 1916 to provide basic flying training for pilots destined for the front. The choice of the Lincolnshire sites was no accident. The area was sparsely populated and the prevailing south-west winds over the ridge gave additional lift on take off for the AV 504, BE2s and Armstrong Whitworth aircraft which formed the backbone of the training system.

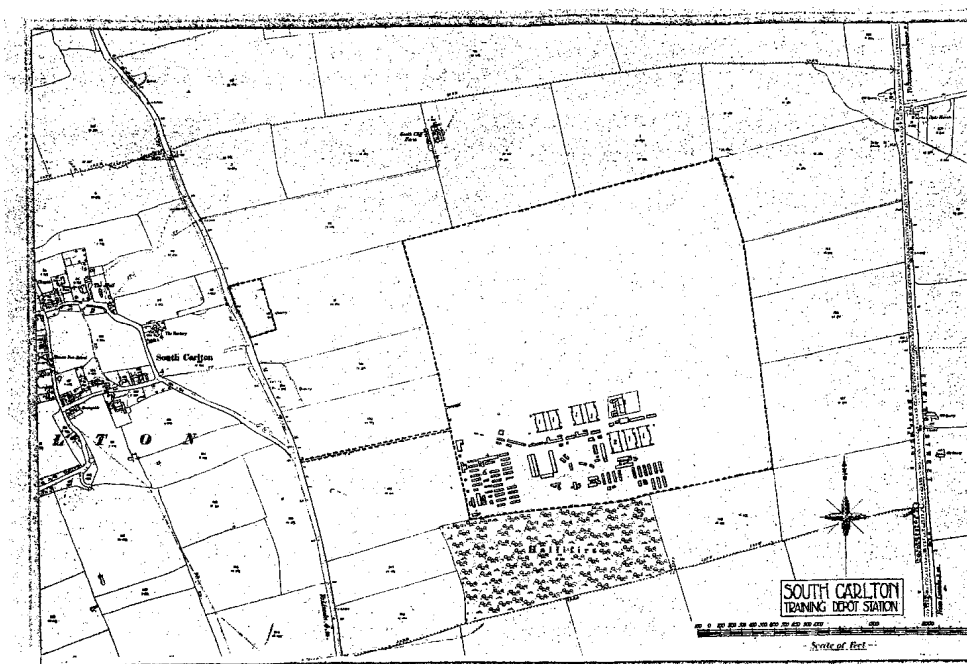
Col Strange having served as a reconnaissance pilot in France, was promoted and posted back to England in 1916 as the Deputy Commandant of the Central Flying School (CFS) tasked with training qualified flying instructors (QFIs). He was posted to South Carlton in March 1918 to take command of the newly formed No 23 Training Wing.

Col Strange had earlier gained fame in France when he was thrown from the cockpit of his spinning aircraft and grabbing the Lewis gun mounted on the wing, he managed to tip the aircraft right way up and land back in the cockpit. His command of 23 Training Wing also covered 34 TDS at Scampton. He wrote in his memoirs:

“Work in a Training Wing was no joke. The write off on one machine for every 140 hours flying meant losses of between 30-40 aircraft a month, in addition to 70-80 minor crashes. In May 1918 we had 16 fatal crashes in the 23rd wing.... But work had to go on at a feverish pace in order to cope with the overseas requirements”

The airfield at South Carlton was situated on the North side of the Hallifirs plantation and consisted of 7 large canvas and brick hangars on a grass area with 2000 yard sides. Living quarters stores and office were all wooden huts but some more permanent brick buildings can be seen on an early aerial photograph. In 1918 the station was equipped with AV 504, Camel and Dolphin aircraft. Aircrew were not only British but those under training included Americans at Scampton, Canadian at Carlton and at Waddington, White Russian émigrés!

When the airfield closed in 1920, the vicar, the Revd Wardale-Hall (1917-1926), a skilled carpenter, carved the pulpit in memory of those who served at South Carlton during the Great War. The fall on the lectern with the RFC badge, was recently commissioned by Lady Monson and embroidered by Pauline Bruce. You will find photographs with a detail history of the airfield behind the curtain screen by the pulpit.



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A survey of the airfield dated 1918 showing the hangars and buildings. The airfield was 2000 yards square and accessed by the existing track above South Carlton. One or two brick buildings remain, one of which is known as “the old cinema.” This use may well date from WW11 when airmen from Scampton were billeted locally.