

1192577 Flight Sergeant Alan 'Babe' Haddon

Alan Haddon was born on 20th August 1920 at 8 Edward Terrace, Pelton Lane Ends, Pelton Road, Chester-Le-Street, County Durham, in the north of England, where he grew up. His younger brother Ronald was 14 months old when their mother, Catherine Ann Haddon, died, and went to live with one of his paternal aunts until he was five, before returning to his father's household until the age of seven - when he left to live with his paternal grandparents until the age of 15. Alan stayed with his father, Joseph Hutchinson Haddon, a veteran of the First World War who had been seriously affected by the death of his wife. Well liked by his peer group, Alan enjoyed reading, and riding his bicycle - he also had an eye for girls, and was a keen sportsman - playing cricket, and excelling at bowls (much to the chagrin of some of the old men he beat).. He had a studious turn of mind and did well at school. Although Alan and Ron didn't see much of each other when they were growing up, Ron recalls that in the 1920's and 30's food wasn't as available as now and you ate what you were given. The only time the two boys fell out was one dinner time at their grandparents when they argued over who was going to get the top of an apple charlotte. As an elder brother, Alan would sometimes partake in a spot of the usual brotherly bullying if he could do so undetected.

At the age of 15, Alan moved to Leicester to find work, living with his father, and enrolled on an evening course for technical drawing and associated subjects. At this time he was working for the company of Ashwell and Nesbit (engineers and iron founders) and training to be a draughtsman. His father also worked for this company and became a highly regarded foreman. With the coming of war, Alan decided that he would like to join the Royal Air Force as aircrew. However, he was rejected due to insufficient expansion of the chest. Still determined to join, he purchased a Charles Atlas body-building course and altered his physique. He was subsequently successful, and soon left for pilot training. Ron was working in Bedfordshire from the age of fifteen, waiting until he himself was old enough to join up, and was allowed home by his firm for his birthday in October 1942. Alan arrived home on leave a couple of days later. While together, they visited their maternal grandfather who was very ill. With Ron returning to Bedfordshire and Alan returning to his squadron at Biggin Hill, the brothers were destined not to see each other again.

Alan was posted to 609 (West Riding) Squadron, arriving on 9th December 1941, in the company of Sgt's McConnel and Dickson from New Zealand, and Sgt's Young and Patterson. According to F/Sgt Bob Walling's diary "'Babe' looks about 15 years old". On 19th July 1942, Alan damaged the squadron Miles Magister while low-flying with Johnny Payne as passenger - he hit a tree with the pitot head and was punished by Group Captain John Grandy. On 12th October, Alan, who was on leave at the time, was promoted to Flight Sergeant. On 23rd October, at around 1550 hrs, P/O Raymond Dopere flew into a hill in very poor weather at Ashburnham Pottery near Hastings, Sussex. in Hawker Typhoon R8812 PR-K and was killed. Alan was flying with him at the time and climbed, while Dopere chose to descend. On 15th December 1942, Alan was flying with 122331 P/O Henry Amor as his No. 2 (it was not unusual for an inexperienced officer to be wingman to a more experienced SNCO) when they became involved in a dogfight with an unknown number of Fw190's which had crossed the south coast. F/O Peter Raw, S/Ldr Roland Beamont and F/Lt John Baldwin joined in the fight just as P/O Amor called over the R/T "I've hit him". Both

Haddon and Raw saw Amor attacking a Fw190 with his aircraft ablaze. Alan called to Amor to bale out, which he did, but at 900 feet it was too low and too late. He had already been attacked and the aircraft was all but destroyed by Unteroffizier Josef Zirngibl of 1./JG 26. The aircraft, Typhoon MK1A R7689 PR-B crashed into the sea and Amor's body was later washed ashore and buried at Margate Cemetery. Alan got the only confirmed kill that day, a Messerschmitt Bf109 which was shot down at 16:00hrs, the pilot bailing out. Although Amor's claim was officially one damaged, it is likely that the aircraft he hit was destroyed. Baldwin claimed a probable. 4 days later, on the 19th, Alan was flying with Raymond Lallemand when they got involved in a combat with two Fw190's. Each made a claim, with Lallemand's being confirmed by Alan, who saw it burst into flames, and Babe claiming a damaged, as all four of his guns jammed. He continued to take photographs of the Fw190, and while he could not cause further damage, it was felt that its chances of making it back to France were slim.

By a curious coincidence, Ronald was also posted to 609 (West Riding) Squadron at RAF Manston from Skegness in 1943. Having joined the RAF as an airframe fitter, he was sent there on general duties. He recalls the Engineering Officer asking him what he would like to do. Not at all what he was used to! Serving under 'Groupie' Walker, and his brother (one was a Sergeant, the other a Corporal; both were pre-war auxiliaries) he was with the squadron for three months, and left them whilst they were stationed at RAF Lympne, after having spent time at RAF Coltishall's satellite, RAF Matlaske. An airfield of primitive means, the squadron were most pleased to see smart new buildings being erected. Until it was discovered it was for the Americans who would shortly be taking over. The Mess, at the cold, decrepit and haunted Barningham Hall, was situated some distance from both the airmens billets and the airfield itself the latter involving a long walk through a cornfield. Often they were served hard-tack, and water was fetched from a lake – and tasted awful. There was one pub, and it only served cider. It was very strong, scrumpy-style cider, and drinking water after would set the effects off again. The locals would sit in a small square, and the pilots would sit around and get very drunk – to the extent that Ron recalls that some were taken off flying.

Having been shot down over the Channel, Alan's loss is commemorated on Panel 136 of the Runnymede Memorial in Surrey.

Ron Haddon
0116 2781374

RAF - Trained at Skegness. At Matlaske, drank cider. Pilots got very drunk, and some were stopped from flying. Trained at Skegness, with 609 for 3 months on GD (airframe fitter) in 1943 (about 5 of them joined together at the same time), after Babe was killed. Remembers Groupie Walker. Manston, Matlaske, Lympne. Hard tack biscuits and lake water. EO asked him what he wanted to do. Alan and Ron were always split up. Born 18th August 1920. Liked the girls. Liked sport. Played cricket and bowls. Father fought in France WW1 - Highland Light Infantry (nearly all from the Gorbals!) (Signals). Was brought up by his parents as a gentleman, authoritarian. Never spoke of the war. Mother died when Ron was 13 months. Lived with dad's elder sister until 5 yrs, dad until 7, then grandparents. Dad went off the rails when mum died, drinking and gambling. Grandfather had very Victorian principles. Alan went to Leicester when 15, father followed. Worked together at Ashwell and Nesbitts, Engineers/foundry. Alan in office, training as draughtsman, father also in office. Alan went to night school. Company tried to make his a reserved occupation - he wanted to fly! From Chester-le-Street in County Durham. Chest wouldn't expand enough for RAF, so took a Charles Atlas course and altered his physique. Ron went to Blackpool just after the 200th kill party, on a mechanics course. (didn't attend

party). Matlaske - a fence marked off 'gas square' with skull and crossbones. Still there? Ablutions - auxiliary fire pump pumped water from lake, which stunk. New buildings built for the yanks.