

Squadron Leader R P Beamont

Roland Beamont was born on 10th August 1920 and joined the RAF in January 1939. During his training at Drem, Bee was graded as "Exceptional" and in November 1939 was posted to Lille/Seclin in France with 87 Sqn. Whilst on leave in the UK, his squadron returned to the UK and he rejoined them at Church Fenton. The squadron moved to Exeter in July 1940 and Bee, flying Hurricanes, fought the Battle of Britain with them. Awarded the DFC in June 1941 and posted to 79 Sqn as a Flight Commander, Bee was now flying Hurricane Mk IIB's at Fairwood Common. In December 1941 he spent 6 months as a Hawker test pilot flying Hurricanes and the early Typhoons. In May 1942 he was posted to 55 Sqn at Manston and then in July, Bee arrived on 609 (WR) squadron. It is felt in some quarters that had "Bee" Beamont not been appointed to command 609 sqn on the 2nd Oct, the Typhoon would probably have been lost to the Allies as one of their war-winning weapons. Whilst Bee had been at Langley, he had not only been closely involved with the development of the Typhoon, but also helped the experimental test pilots (one of whom, Bill Humble, was an original 609 sqn pilot) to fly it intensively. He therefore not only had a knowledge of the new aircraft unrivalled by any other fighter pilot, but also believed in its viability when few others did.

Soon after taking command of 609, Bee was called to a meeting at HQ Fighter Command on the last day of the year by AOC 11 Group, Air Vice Marshal Saunders, hosted by the Commander-in-Chief Air Chief Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory. Bee recalls in his book "Phoenix into Ashes" (William Kimber, 1968):

"At this meeting, I was astonished to find that the whole future of the Typhoon was at issue, with a strong lobby mainly of Engineering Branch officers backed up by Spitfire men expressing in the strongest terms their opposition to the continuing production of the Typhoon on the grounds that it was an inferior machine and unsuitable for Fighter Command."

To this charge, Bee, then aged 22 and by far the youngest and most junior officer present, replied that far from this being the case, the Typhoon was undoubtedly superior to the Spitfire for all purposes at low level. When it was discovered that none of the opposition had ever flown one, the Typhoon was reprieved for the time being. Meanwhile, it was up to Sqn Ldr Beamont to show what they could do with it.

At the beginning of November, Bee developed the offensive patrols from Manston, 609's new temporary home, against the enemy's communications systems in France and Belgium. The AOC had promised Bee a free hand in this respect provided all the defensive commitments were achieved. On the 17th November Bee proved that the same could be done at night, and soon the sport of "locomotive-busting" on a moonlit night, or under heavy cloud cover, by single aircraft or pairs became the squadron's speciality. To help, Fighter Command Intelligence even provided the squadron with the timetable of the German troop movements.

The success which 609 enjoyed with these offensive sweeps soon earned the squadron a deserved amount of fame, and early in February 1943, Bee was summoned to the Sector HQ at Hornchurch to meet the Under Secretary of State, Captain Balfour. Six days later the Secretary of State himself, Sir Archibald Sinclair appeared at 609 dispersal displaying considerable knowledge of the squadron's successes and aircraft. He was closely followed by a horde of 35 journalists who all stayed to lunch at the Officers Mess, located at Doone House, a former Girls school. One of the journalists, Basil Cardew of the Express, apparently wrote such nonsense claiming Bee for the credit, that an official protest had to be lodged with the Editor, but it did not stop Bee receiving a set of bust measurements along with an invitation to meet their owner!

The Napier engine of the Typhoon was still prone to failure, although the other faults had, by now, been ironed out. Bee had his fair share of trouble when, on the 9th March 1943, he crash landed his Typhoon R8810, coded PR-R, at Deal, having just managed to scrape over the Dover cliffs after the engine failed. He sustained a fractured skull and two very black eyes, but continued to command the squadron from a bed in Deal hospital.

On the 8th May, Bee was urged by members of his own groundstaff, Sergeants Eric Ingall and "Darkie" Hanson, to accept the offer of another spell with Hawker's factory "before" as Darkie put it "he killed himself". Since its arrival at Manston at the end of 1942, 609 had hardly ever been released from duty or even been on thirty minutes standby until 198 sqn had arrived to help out in April. The maintenance effort in keeping the Typhoons airworthy was immense, for the "private" offensive sweeps the squadron had been carrying out took their own toll on the serviceability of the airframes. Thanks for this effort were largely due to Flying Officer "Jacko" Jackson, the Engineering Officer, and his Assistant, WO Abe Abraham. As Darkie put it "If Bee wanted it, Bee got it, even if it meant working all night. He handled us with the head of a man of forty." Flt Lt Zeigler once told Bee to read history, which prompted a reply from Bee "Read history? I'm making history!"

During the period of his command, 609 had accounted for 24 enemy aircraft destroyed, eight probables and thirteen damaged. The ground and sea targets included 111 locomotives, including 25 of them personally accounted for by Bee. During the same period eight DFC and one DSO had been awarded to the squadron, Bee ending up with one of the DFC's and the DSO.

Bee progressed onto the Tempest, and leading the Tempest wing in March 1944, at the age of 23, against the V1 flying bombs, the wing distinguished itself. As part of the 2nd TAF, on the 12th October 1944, whilst attacking a heavily defended troop train, Bee's engine failed and crash landed on the wrong side of the river Wesel. Captured and imprisoned at Stalag III at Luckenwald near Potsdam, he was eventually released by the Russians in September 1945 who liberated the camp in May 1945. Once back in the UK Bee served at the Central Flying Establishment at Tangmere, and then, as a Wing Commander Flying No 2 Wing at Chilbolton flying Tempests. In November He commanded the Air Fighting Development Unit at West Raynham, and in January 1946 he left the RAF. After the war, Bee progressed to the English Electric Company at Warton in Lancashire and was a test pilot for the Canberra, the P-1, the Lightning and the ill-fated TSR-2. When 609 was reformed in 1946, Bee signed up as the first flight commander, and enjoyed nothing more than to fly down to Yeadon at week-ends and transfer into a Mosquito XXXII. Bee himself describes the Mosquito as "a dangerous aircraft" which, coming from a man flying the Canberra, the Lightning and the TSR-2, might have caused his contemporary pilots on the squadron to shiver! The squadron had been gazetted as a fighter squadron on its reformation, and Bee was the only ex-fighter pilot, even though all the pilots and navigators were drawn from those who had been aircrew in the war.

In 1955, the squadron received its Town Headquarters at Headingley, something almost every other Auxiliary squadron had had for many years, and which 609 had been waiting for since 1936. It is ironic that the Auxiliary Air Force would be disbanded just eighteen months later, but Bee performed the opening ceremony in any case.

During his time with English Electric, Bee made record crossings of the Atlantic in the Canberra, and in 1955 became Manager, Flight Operations, and Special Director in 1960. In 1965 He was appointed as Director Flight Operations at BAC Warton, and in 1969 was awarded the CBE and promoted to Director Flight Operations, Panavia

Aircraft GmbH formed to build the Tornado MRCA. In 1977 Bee was created Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire.

609 was commanded by Squadron Leader Roland Beamont, the youngest Squadron Commander in the RAF, who was then aged 22 and who would later be awarded the Distinguished Service Order and Bar, and Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar. 'Bee', as he was known, was a veteran of the Battle of France and Battle of Britain, and had been a test pilot on the Typhoon at Hawkers. He had joined 609 a month before John, on July 1942 as a flight commander and was in the ideal position to take command on 3rd October at the recommendation of Squadron Leader Richey. It was a role in which he excelled, and he proved to be immensely popular amongst the men he led. 'Bee' pioneered the use of the Typhoon in night 'Intruder' sorties over France, attacking trains and other targets of opportunity, and later commanded the first Tempest Wing when it was formed, and after a busy summer of shooting down the V1 'Doodlebug' flying bombs, for which he personally accounted for 32, 'Bee' went on to become the first pilot to down a German aircraft whilst flying Tempests, on the 2nd October, when he downed a Focke Wulf Fw190 near Nijmegen in Holland. He was himself shot down by Flak on 12th October 1944 whilst leading his wing on a ground attack operation. He sat out the remaining few months of hostilities as a Prisoner of War in Germany, initially at Stalag Luft III at Sagan in Poland – famed as the scene of the 'Great Escape' - before being moved to Stalag IIIA at Luckenwalde, 35 miles south of Berlin, in the face of the Red Army's advance. Bee was eventually liberated from here by Russian forces. Post-war, he relinquished his commission and was to follow a long career as a test pilot, notably on the English Electric Lightning and Canberra, and the ill-fated TSR-2 project. 'Bee' also published several aviation books in later years, as well as regularly contributing articles to the aviation press.

BEAMONT, Roland Prosper, was granted a commission in the RAF shortly before the war. In November 1939 he was posted to France where he joined 87 Squadron, part of the Air Component. A quiet period followed until the 'Blitzkrieg' broke out in May 1940, and on the 13th of that month he shot down a Do17. He returned to England on leave, then rejoined the squadron at Church Fenton. On 24th July he destroyed a Ju88, and on 15th August, after the start of the Battle of Britain, he shot down two Bf110's, and damaged two others. Ten days later he shot down two more aircraft, this time a Bf109 and a Do17. During September he flew mainly night sorties, damaging three aircraft, but not being able to confirm any of them as destroyed. He then flew with a detachment at St. Mary's on the Scilly Isles, hunting enemy flying-boats, but saw no action. Shortly after, he received the DFC and was posted to 79 Squadron in South Wales. At the end of 1941 he spent some months production testing Hurricanes and early Typhoons, and in 1942 was posted to 56 Squadron as a flight commander to fly the Typhoon operationally. Shortly after he was posted to 609 Squadron, and ten weeks later became CO. During his period in command he did much to help iron out the snags in the Typhoon, he also flew many sorties along the French coast, including 'train busting' at night. In May 1943 his second tour expired, and he returned to Hawkers, where he was introduced to the Tempest, and in March 1944 became wing leader of the first Tempest wing of 3, 486 and 56 Squadrons. Until the invasion he led train-strafting attacks, and destroyed a Ju188 on the ground at Corneilles airfield. On 8th June 1944, just after the invasion, he at last met the enemy again, and destroyed two Bf109's over Dieppe, his first

victories for nearly four years. From then on he was heavily engaged with the V-1's, and by September had destroyed 32 of these. Late in September he led the wing to Europe, being based at Brussels, and then Volkel. On 2nd October he destroyed a Fw190, bringing his score to 10. He was then offered a job at Hawkers again, but as he had flown ninety-four sorties over enemy territory He decided to complete the 100th first. His next sortie over enemy territory, he was shot down by flak, and spent the remaining months of the war as a prisoner of war. Released by the Russians, he returned to England to form a Tempest II wing to fight in the Far East, but the war ended before they were ready. During the war a DSO and a Bar to his DFC were added to his decorations. After a spell at the Central Fighter Establishment, he joined Gloster Aircraft as a test pilot, and then became chief test pilot for English Electric, flying the prototype Canberra and Lightning, and setting up a cross-Atlantic record in the Canberra.

Roland	Prosper	Beamont
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Roland "Bee" Beamont was born in Chichester, Sussex, on August 10 1920. In 1927 he experienced his first flight, in an Avro 504, and sowed the seed of a lifetime of aviation interest. Beamont was educated at Eastbourne College. In 1942 Beamont married Shirley Adams, who died in 1945 while he was still a PoW. In 1946 he married Patricia née Raworth, who died in 1999. There was a daughter of his first marriage and two of his second.

Career	Details
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His entry into the RAF was delayed because he failed his Schools Certificate exam, but after a sixmonth crammer course he re-sat the exam. He posted his application for a shortservice commision the same day! Beamont was to report for flying training to No 13 Elementary Training School at White Waltham on January 2 1939. After posting at No 13 Advanced Training School at Dream and No 11 Group Fighter Pool Operational Conversion at St Athan, he was posted to 87 Sqn, part of the British Expeditionary Force in France. He joined his squadron on November 16 at Lille, France.

On May 1940, he scored his first kill, a Do17. He had a number of further combats before the fall of France, whereupon 87 Sqn was withdrawn to England on May 20. After the Battle of Britain had been fought and won, 87 Sqn took on the nightfighter role with Hurricanes. He was attached to Hawkers at Langley in December 1941 as a production and experimental test pilot, where he tested Hurricanes and the new Typhoon. By July 1942 he was back in the frontline with 609 Sqn, flying Typhoons. In November 1942 he was promoted to Squadron Commander of 609 Sqn.

In May 1943 Beamont returned to Hawker for experimental duties on Typhoons and Tempests. His first flight in a Tempest was on the Mk. I prototype, HM599, on June 2 1943. He shared with Bill Humble the final development of the Tempest V. In 1944 Beamont (now Acting Wing Commander) was charged to form the first Tempest Wing, No 150, in time for the D-Day. Two days after D-Day Beamont's Wing encountered Bf109s over the beaches and shot down three of them without loss. 150 Wing were also downing V1s over Kent and by August the unit had accounted 638, of which 32 had fallen to Beamont himself. On October 2 he shot down his ninth and final enemy aircraft, a Focke Wulf Fw190 near Nijmegen. On October 12 1944 he was shot down by Flak 8 miles Southeast of Bocholt whilst attacking a heavily defended troop train (flying Tempest JF-L EJ710). He was

captured and imprisoned at Stalag III at Luckenwald near Potsdam. He spent the rest of the war as a prisoner of war (POW) and was eventually released by the Russians in September 1945 who liberated the camp in May 1945.

Back in the Great Britain he served at the Central Flying Establishment at Tangmere, and then, as a Wing Commander Flying No 2 Wing at Chilbolton flying Tempests. In November he commanded the Air Fighting Development Unit at West Raynham, and in January 1946 he left the RAF. In 1947 Beamont joined the English Electric Company as Chief Test Pilot. He managed all the prototype tests in the Canberra and the P1/Lightning test programmes, during which he became the first pilot to fly a British aircraft at twice the speed of sound. He was closely associated with, and flew, the ill-fated TSR2 until its political end. From 1970 to 1979, as Director of Flight Operations, he was in charge of Tornado flight testing for British Aerospace and Panavia.

During World War II Roland Beamont was mentioned in despatches (Battle of Britain) and awarded the DSO and Bar, DFC and Bar and the DFC (USA). Post-war, for his test flying he received the OBE and the CBE and was made Honorary Fellow of the American Society of Experimental Test Pilots. He was a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society and a Deputy Lieutenant Lancashire (1977-81).

R-B (JN751), one of the first Tempests, was adopted by Roland Beamont as his personal aircraft in March 1944. It carried his initials, rank pennant and a yellow spinner. Before D-Day it was marked with invasion stripes. Beamont made the first Tempest victory over Rouen on D-Day +2 and most of his 31 V1 claims in this aircraft. JN751 was replaced as his personal aircraft in September 1944 by a new Serie 2 Tempest Mk. V, code-letters "RPB" (serial number unknown).

Date of Claim	Type Claimed	Aircraft Flown	Location of Claim	Unit
13 May 1940	Dornier Do17	Hurricane Mk. I		87 Sqn
May 1940	Messerschmitt Bf109	Hurricane Mk. I		87 Sqn
May 1940	Junkers Ju88	Hurricane Mk. I		87 Sqn
24 July 1940	Junkers Ju88	Hurricane Mk. I		87 Sqn
15 August 1940	Messerschmitt Bf110	Hurricane Mk. I		87 Sqn
15 August 1940	Messerschmitt Bf110 (probable)		Hurricane Mk. I	
			87 Sqn	
25 August 1940	Dornier Do17	Hurricane Mk. I		87 Sqn
25 August 1940	Messerschmitt Bf109	Hurricane Mk. I		87 Sqn
4/5 Sept 1942	Junkers Ju88 (damage)		Typhoon Mk. IB	609 Sqn
8 June 1944	Bf 109G	Tempest	R-B (JN751)	N Rouen 150Wing
2 Oct 1944	Fw 190	Tempest	US-I (EJ578)	Nijmegen area 122Wing

Obituary to Wg/Cdr Roland Prosper 'Bee' Beamont CBE OBE DSO + Bar, DFC + Bar "

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Wg/Cdr Roland 'Bee' Beamont has died aged 81. He enlisted into the RAF in January 1939 and was granted a short service commission to train as a pilot. In November 1939 he joined 87 Sqn flying Hurricanes from Lille in France and in May 1940 opened his account by shooting down a Dornier 17. By the end of May France had

fallen and the Sqdn returned to Debden moving quickly to Church Fenton, then in July to Exeter - during the B of B in August he shot down two ME110 fighters over Lyme Regis. He was posted in June 1942 to 56 Sqdn Snailwell the first Sqdn to be re-equipped with Typhoons and after a month arrived as Flight Commander at 609 Sqdn Duxford. He led the 'Tiffies' on low level day and night across the Channel on what could be described as 'hair raising' Operations. In June 1943 he went to Hawkers as a Test Pilot and flew the Tempest preparing it for its forthcoming role a year later during the D-day landings. Returning to operational flying in February 1944 he led 150 Wing Tempests (3, 56 and 486 Sqdns) from Newchurch and on June 8th shot down an ME109 over Rouen, the first aircraft to fall to a Tempest. He shot down 31 V1's and by October had moved the Wing to Vokel in Holland - soon after he himself was shot down and became a POW. After repatriation he became a test pilot with Glosters and then De Havillands before joining English Electric in 1947 and so began his association with the Canberra. In 1949 he gave an astonishing display at the Farnborough Air Show which ensured sales to the fourteen Air Forces. In the 1950's he began the test flying of the Lightning and became the first pilot to fly at the speed of sound in level flight. In September 1964 he flew the TSR2 on its maiden flight which when abandoned April 1965 must have been the saddest moment in his flying career. In 1970 he was responsible for international flight testing of the Tornado and retired in 1979. He wrote many books about his war and post war period and was much honoured by the aviation community.

Wing Commander Roland Beaumont

Fighter ace and test pilot who brought flair, bravery and technical knowledge to flying aircraft from the biplane era to the age of Mach 2 flight.

The flying career of Roland Beaumont began with the 150mph biplanes on which he did his basic training before the Second World War, progressed through the Battles of France and Britain in which aerial combat was at more than twice this speed, and ended in the era of Mach 2 flight with the Lightning fighter and the TSR2 bomber. The cancellation of the latter, which threw away for ever the British lead in this branch of military aviation, was one of his most bitter disappointments.

“Bee” Beaumont was one of the last of that generation of military test pilots who were known to the public because of the skill and daring they devoted to developing new aircraft types. It was an era when these things had an aura of greater glamour than they do in today’s space age.

Beginning his war as a fighter pilot, he was an ace (five kills) by the middle of the Battle of Britain. But his later excellent development work on the Typhoon fighter bomber saw him switched to ground attack, which meant that his final tally of kills was lower than it might otherwise have been. In 1944 his innovative expertise made him one of the first aces against the V1s and he commanded the first wing of Tempests in the battle against them.

Roland Prosper Beaumont was born in 1920 and educated at Eastbourne College. He took a short service commission in the RAF just before the outbreak of war in 1939, and was sent to France with the Air Component of the British Expeditionary Force during the days of the “Phoney” War. When this peace was disturbed with the irruption of German armoured forces into the Low Countries in May 1940, he found

himself in the thick of the action, and on May 13 he shot down his first German bomber.

After the Allied collapse in France he returned to England, where he subsequently flew in the Battle of Britain, bringing down a number of German aircraft and being mentioned in dispatches.

At the end of 1941 he was seconded to Hawker as a test pilot. A previous rebuke for flying a WAAF officer to a dance in his single-seater Hurricane may have contributed to his being withdrawn from operations. In any event, his flying skills were badly needed to help iron out the serious problems besetting Hawker's new fighter design, the Typhoon. In the event the Typhoon never did fulfil its intended role as an interceptor fighter. But it made a good ground-attack aircraft, and Beamont flew it with great effect in "train busting" operations over France at night.

After a further spell test flying with Hawker, he was back on operations, first leading a wing of Tempests in the strafing attacks which preceded D-Day, and later pioneering tactics in the struggle to neutralise the threat from the V1. He was an exponent of the difficult technique of tipping up the flying bomb's wing with his own, which he regarded as more effective and cheaper than trying to bring it down with cannon fire.

In September 1944, with a personal tally of 10 enemy aircraft and 32 flying bombs to his credit, Beamont was himself shot down by flak, while attacking targets in Holland. He was able to soft land his Tempest, and spent the remaining months of the war a prisoner.

Retiring from the RAF with two DSOs and two DFCs, he spent periods flying with Gloster and de Havilland, before going, in 1947, to English Electric, as Chief Test Pilot. Here, he was responsible for bringing into the air some of the most remarkable British aircraft of the postwar period, the Canberra bomber, the P1 prototype (later the Lightning and Britain's first Mach 2 fighter) and the low level supersonic intruder, the TSR2. In the P1 he was, in 1954, the first British pilot to break the sound barrier in level flight, and, in 1958, he became the first to exceed Mach 2.

He would have retired as a test pilot at the end of 1964, but the appearance of the revolutionary TSR2 led the British Aircraft Corporation, as it was by then, to request his staying on at least to see the aircraft through preliminary testing. Beamont took the aircraft on its maiden flight, and was immediately enthusiastic about it. Subsequent flights only confirmed his opinion that the TSR2 was one of the most remarkable aircraft he had ever flown — no mean testimony from a man of such wide experience. With its ability to penetrate enemy defences at low level at supersonic speed, the aircraft would have provided Britain for up to two decades ahead with a strategic bomber of a calibre possessed by no other nation. But it was not to be. The new Labour Government scrapped the project in 1965. At the same time it ordered the jigs on which the aircraft had been made, to be cut up, so that no future administration could hope to revive it.

Besides robbing Britain of a lead in military aviation technology, this step also led to the exodus to continental Europe and the US of large numbers of the finest of the country's engineers and technicians who had been involved in the TSR2 and its associated avionics. Beamont, a thinking strategist as well as a fine flyer, felt the blow keenly.

From 1965 to 1978 he served as Director of Flight Operations at the British Aircraft Corporation (Preston), being seconded from 1971 to Panavia, the multinational company which built the Tornado, for which he was in charge of flight testing.

Both before and after his retirement in 1979 Beamont wrote a number of books about his experiences as a fighter and test pilot. His memoir, *Phoenix Into Ashes* (1968) was critical of the government decision which scrapped the TSR2. Among his other publications were *Typhoon and Tempest at War* (1975); books on his various test flying programmes; *Tempest Over Europe* (1994); and *The Years Flew Past*, which covered the last 40 years of his life, published last month.

Beamont was a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society, a Master Pilot and a Liveryman of the Guild of Air Pilots. He was president of the Popular Flying Association from 1979 to 1984, and was a Deputy Lieutenant for Lancashire from 1977 to 1981.

Brave though he was, Beamont was a careful flyer who thought deeply about the capabilities of the aircraft he flew. It was a source of quiet pride to him that he had never broken an aircraft, nor had to bale out. Even when shot down he had brought his Tempest in to the best landing that could be hoped for in the circumstances and got out, free of injury.

Beamont married, in 1942, Shirley Adams, who died in 1945, while he was still a PoW. In 1946 he married Patricia, née Raworth, who died in 1999. There was a daughter of his first marriage and two daughters of his second. They and a stepson survive him.

Wing Commander Roland Beamont, CBE, DSO and Bar, DFC and Bar, was born on August 10, 1920. He died on November 19, 2001, aged 81.

BEAMONT, Roland Prosper, S/L, DFC (41819, Royal Air Force) - No.609 Squadron - Distinguished Service Order - awarded as per London Gazette dated 25 May 1943.

This officer is an outstanding leader whose great skill, drive and determination have contributed in a large measure to the high standard of operational efficiency of the squadron which has achieved much success. Since January 1943, Squadron Leader Beamont has put out of action 13 locomotives and many lorries in determined attacks at night. This officer has set a most inspiring example.

BEAMONT, Roland Prosper, W/C, DSO, DFC (41819, Royal Air Force) - No.150 Wing - Bar to Distinguished Service Order - awarded as per London Gazette dated 25 July 1944.

This officer, by his exceptional skill, brilliant leadership and great drive, has quickly built up a fine fighting force whose notable successes are a splendid testimony to their efficiency and resolution. Within a short period recently, Wing Commander Beamont has destroyed two enemy aircraft and attacked numerous locomotives, barges and mechanical transport. His record is most impressive.