

Bentley Alfred Mulock (RAF n°33220)

CBE, OBE, Air Force Cross, Mentioned in Dispatches,
The Independence Commemorative Decoration Rhodesia,
King's Commendation for Valuable Service, War Medal 1939-45, 1939-45 Star, ...



(Collection)

Air Vice-Marshal Alfred "Raff" Bentley, who has died aged 83, 22 July 1999, was an RAF fighter leader and Chief of Air Staff of the Southern Rhodesia Air Force. After serving the Rhodesian government as Chief of Air Staff from 1961 to 1964, Bentley was appointed in 1965 to represent Rhodesia as resident minister in Washington. When in that year Ian Smith, the Rhodesian prime minister - himself a wartime RAF fighter pilot - unilaterally declared independence, Bentley was required to decide for or against Smith's government. As a former permanent-commission RAF officer, Bentley re-affirmed his loyalty to the Crown and United Kingdom, whereupon he was immediately required to leave the United States. Earlier, in 1947, after sterling service in the war, Bentley had been posted to RAF Kumalo as liaison officer to the Rhodesian government, which in 1949 persuaded him to join its military staff and help form an embryo air force. Together with a handful of like-minded officers, Bentley fashioned the new air force in the pattern of the RAF. He helped to design squadron badges and arranged their registration at the College of Arms. When trouble erupted in the Congo in 1960, Bentley co-ordinated an airlift of more than 6,000 Belgian refugees. At this time he enjoyed the experience of inspecting on the same parade his father, a former member of the Rhodesian Home Guard, and his elder son, an SAS member. Before he retired from the Royal Rhodesian Air Force (as the Southern Rhodesia Air Force had become), Bentley was accorded the Bayete, the royal salute of the Matabele people. Alfred Mulock Bentley was born of pioneering parents on New Year's Day 1916 at Broken Hill, Northern Rhodesia, and brought up in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, where he was educated at Plumtree School as a Beit scholar. In 1934 he received the Governor of Northern Rhodesia's nomination for RAF College, Cranwell. He graduated in 1936 and joined No 43 Squadron, the famous "Fighting Cocks", flying Hawker Fury biplane fighters at Tangmere in West Sussex. The next year he was posted to No 14 Squadron, the "Winged Crusaders", stationed at Amman, flying Fairey Gordon day-bombers in support of Transjordan and its Hashemite ruler, Emir Abdullah. In 1938 Bentley transferred to No 223 Squadron at Nairobi, equipped with the single-engine two-seat Vickers Wellesley bomber, the first type to be built to Barnes Wallis's geodetic design. With the outbreak of war in 1939 he moved as a flight commander squadron based at Heliopolis in Egypt. In 1940 he was raiding an Italian target in Libya when his aircraft was hit. Although an anti-aircraft shell burst in the cockpit and killed his navigator, Bentley, who was seriously wounded, managed to land his aircraft safely. Following treatment, he was posted to Rhodesia to convalesce and to command the training squadron at Thornhill. After returning home in 1942, he twice led the air cover operating from the carrier Furious for a Mediterranean convoy running desperately needed Spitfires to Malta. Subsequently he commanded the Spitfire wing at Hornchurch, Essex, before attending Staff College. Promoted group captain, he then commanded the fighter leaders school at Aston Down. Further station commands

followed until 1945, when he was appointed director of RAF flying training with the British delegation in Washington. After a spell as second-in-command RAF West Africa, he returned to Rhodesia. Following UDI, Bentley was appointed chairman of Central African Airways. When it closed, he became chairman of Air Rhodesia. In 1971 he bought the yacht Shamwari (meaning "close friend"), and with his wife, Jenny, and his cat Kathryn, sailed the Mediterranean, Atlantic and Caribbean. Eventually rheumatoid arthritis compelled him to "swallow the anchor" and the Bentleys settled near Oxford. Bentley was appointed OBE in 1946 and CBE in 1962. He was awarded the AFC in 1944 and mentioned in despatches in 1943. His first wife Mary predeceased him. He married Jenny Willing in 1975. He leaves four children.

His claims are :

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