

# NAMING THE 'BATTLE OF BRITAIN' CLASS

J. Dacombe

explains the background to the choice of names for the Southern Railway's Bulleid Light 'Pacifics'.

## PART 1

“Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few”. Winston Churchill's immortal words resonate down the years ensuring the 'many', all of us, never forget the 'few', the pilots who fought in the 'Battle of Britain': the title given by Churchill to the dog-fights between the RAF and the Luftwaffe that took place over South East England between July 10 and October 31 1940.

The 'Battle for Britain' would probably have been a better title, because the ultimate prize for the victor was air supremacy over Britain. If Germany had won, an invasion was sure to follow. It would have been a question of 'when', not 'if'.

Post war austerity measures forced the Southern Railway's Directors to abandon plans for Kent Coast electrification for at least ten years. They conceded that steam power, in the form of Bulleid's light 'Pacifics', would be required for the foreseeable future and decided, as a public relations exercise, to create a separate class, albeit through nomenclature. The directors realised that names referring to West of England locations, as already being fitted to many new light 'Pacifics,' meant little to the residents of East Sussex and Kent, whereas commemorating people and places associated with the 'Battle of Britain' would have some resonance.

The Southern Railway contacted the Royal Air Force for suitable names and a list was submitted by the head of the RAF public relations section to Mr. C. Grasemann, the Southern Region's publicity officer. The schedule provided 73 names comprising: 12 airfields, 29 personalities, three aircraft types, 27 squadrons, plus *Fighter Command* and *No. 11 Group*.

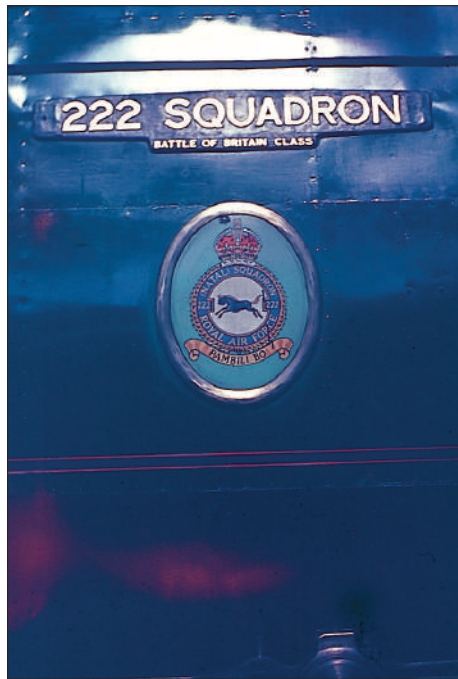
To qualify for commemoration there had to be a tangible link with the 'Battle of Britain', as defined above, and not just the RAF or the Second World War. As far as squadrons were concerned, the pilots had to be British and had to have taken part in the daytime sorties. Anything or anyone that did not meet these strict criteria were not considered.

The locomotives assigned 'Battle of Britain' names totalled 44: Nos 34049-34090, 34109 and 34110, whereas the eventual requirement for Kent Coast traffic was 36, including the dozen locomotives stored at Stewarts Lane every winter.

The 44 selected names represented six airfields, eight personalities, two aircraft types, ➤

Left: Rebuilt 'Battle of Britain' 4-6-2 No. 34071 *601 Squadron* approaches Esher station, from Hampton Court Junction, with the down 'Bournemouth Belle' Pullman express in March 1966. GEOFF RIXON





Above: Under BR some nameplates received black and others red backgrounds. Later 'sky blue' was adopted for the 'Battle of Britain' class but not all locomotives received it. On May 1 1954 No. 34078 222 Squadron carries a black-backed nameplates at Eastleigh works. COLOUR-RAIL

Right: One of the 'Battle of Britain' 4-6-2s to be allocated to West Country depots, No. 34060 25 Squadron of Exmouth Junction (72A) stands on shed carrying a red-backed nameplate and the black-painted lower cab sidesheets, while coupled to a cut-down tender carrying the later style BR crest. JIM OATWAY

Below: A very grimy rebuilt 'BoB' No. 34082 615 Squadron stands at its home shed, Eastleigh (70D) in April 1964. Under the dirt, the nameplate appears to be red-backed, quite unusual on a rebuilt 'Battle of Britain'. GEOFF RIXON



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► 24 squadrons, *Anti Aircraft Command*, *Royal Observer Corps*, *Fighter Pilot*, and *Fighter Command*. The order of names assigned to the locomotives defeated every law of logic known to man, producing a pedant's paradise.

Of the 27 squadrons submitted, three were discarded because they were not flown by British pilots while one other flew Blenheim night-fighters. The squadron list was presented to the Southern Railway as 'the order of battle for number 11 group at the end of the campaign on October 31 1940', namely: 25; 73; 17; 229; 615; 257; 249; 46; 264; 41; 603; 222; 141; 74; 92; 66; 605; 253; 501; 219; 145; 213; 602.

Unfortunately this incomprehensible (to the layman) order was applied to the locomotives in the same sequence except for squadrons 615 and 66. Only two of the 'squadron' locomotives had naming ceremonies and both involved alterations to the sequence.

To generate maximum publicity, Group Captain Max Aitken, DSO, DFC, a director of Express Newspapers was invited to perform the unveiling ceremony of 'Battle of Britain' locomotive No. 34071, being the first of the class to emerge from Brighton Works for the newly nationalised 'British Railways', entering traffic in April 1948. As No. 34071



Above: The nameplate of No. 34051 *Winston Churchill*. The wing shape of the plate varied according to the length of the name, so longer names like this looked more wing-like. Unusually, the motto of the Duke of Marlborough was in Spanish rather than Latin. GEOFF RIXON

had been working from Dover MPD carrying the allocated 615 Squadron a monumental

faux-pas was in the offing because this Group Captain had been the Commanding Officer



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**Above:** The very short nameplate of No. 34066 *Spitfire*. The badge and motto are those of the Royal Air Force. This locomotive was sometimes considered jinxed, having been involved in several incidents including the major accident at Lewisham on December 4 1957 in which 90 people died. GEOFF RIXON

of 601 Squadron. Although not originally submitted, this squadron was among 18 others which qualified for inclusion and the new plates were fitted in time for the ceremony at Brighton on September 15.

The plates for 615 *Squadron* were allocated to No. 34082, displacing 66 *Squadron* which appeared on the last of the class, No. 34110. The switch came about as 615 *Squadron*, (having been disbanded in September 1945) was reformed in May 1946 in connection with the reactivation of the RAAF (Royal Auxiliary Air Force). They were recruiting and requested a naming ceremony for the relevant locomotive at Guildford, with the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Sir Malcolm Fraser officiating. Fraser had not been associated with aircraft since 1918, but he was a journalist, so there would be more than casual publicity about the naming which took place in October 1948.

No. 34110 66 *Squadron* did not appear until January 1951, eight months after No. 34109 *Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory*. It was rumoured that No. 34110 was to be a test bed for a two-cylinder 'Pacific' which, until the advent of No. 70000 *Britannia* during the same month, did not exist; as hard as that is to believe today.

Curiously, No. 34110 was never fitted with the squadron's plaques despite their existence at Eastleigh Works for several years. The airfields and aircraft shown in the accompanying table are relevant, only, to the dates of the Battle of Britain as defined above. Most squadrons operated from different airfields and, obviously, with different aircraft during their lifetime. The locomotive numbers are those carried after nationalisation.

The only 'squadrons' built by the Southern Railway were Nos. 21C160-3 which became 34060-3.(see table 1)

**Left:** Rebuilt 'Battle of Britain' 4-6-2 No. 34056 *Croydon* passes Esher with a typical Basingstoke semi-fast in June 1966. Nameplates and badges were re-arranged to suit rebuilt locomotives. GEOFF RIXON





## ► Notes:

The literal translation of German term for this conflict: Luftschlacht um England, is 'Air Battle for England'.

One of the four groups defending the skies over the UK; number 11 was responsible for London, the Thames Estuary and South East England.)

By the time the first 70 locomotives were built the Southern Railway appears to have forgotten the reason for creating two nomenclature-based classes. Despite the apparent rush to start the 'Battle of Britain' series with No. 34049, locomotives 34049/51/52/59/60 were never allocated to the Eastern Section, while Nos. 34050/53/58/61 saw less than a year there. All nine of these spent most of their lives at Salisbury or Exmouth Junction. Conversely 'West Country' locomotives Nos. 34091/92/96-99/34100-104 were sent new to Stewarts Lane or Ramsgate, remaining there until they were displaced by electrification between June 1959 and June 1961.

## Bibliography

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Above: 'Battle of Britain' 4-6-2 No. 34064 *Fighter Command* was the unique example fitted experimentally with a Giesel exhaust. It was photographed on the turntable at Nine Elms in February 1965 shortly after doing duty, at Staines, as the standby locomotive for Sir Winston Churchill's funeral train. GEOFF RIXON

## NAMING THE 'BATTLE OF BRITAIN' CLASS

TABLE 1

Squadron No	Locomotive No.	Principal Airfield	Aircraft
17	34062	Hawkinge	Spitfire
25	34060	Hawkinge	Spitfire
41	34076	Catterick	Spitfire
46	34074	North Weald	Hurricane
66	34110	Kenley	Spitfire
73	34061	Debden	Hurricane
74	34080	North Weald	Spitfire
92	34081	Biggin Hill	Spitfire
141	34079	Biggin Hill	Spitfire
145	34087	various	Hurricane
213	34088	various	Spitfire
219	34086	Tangmere	Spitfire
222	34078	Hornchurch	Spitfire
229	34063	Northolt	Hurricane
249	34073	Church Fenton	Hurricane
253	34084	Kenley	Hurricane
257	34072	Northolt	Hurricane
264	34075	various	various
501	34085	Croydon	Hurricane
601	34071	Tangmere	Hurricane
602	34089	various	Spitfire
603	34077	Hornchurch	Spitfire
605	34083	Croydon	Hurricane
615	34082	Kenley	Hurricane