

**Hans Onderwater MBE
A Winged Gunner;**

The life and times of Air Commodore Andrew James Wray Geddes CBE DSO RAF 1906 – 1988

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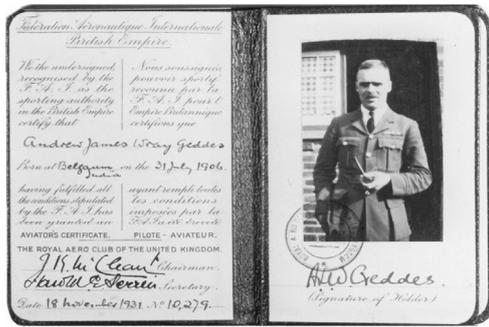
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A WINGED GUNNER

**The life and times of Air Commodore Andrew James Wray Geddes
CBE DSO RAF 1906 – 1988**



Geddes Pilot's Licence No.10,279: Federation Aéronautique Internationale British Empire: 'We the undersigned, recognised by the FAI as the sporting authority in the British Empire certify that Andrew James Wray Geddes, born at Belgaum, India on the 31 July 1906, having fulfilled all the conditions stipulated by the FAI, thus been granted an Aviator's Certificate. The Royal Aero Club of the United Kingdom. 18 November 1931. Right: Air Cdre Geddes addressing the 'Flying Grocers' at the 1985 reunion in the Netherlands.



St. Andrews church at Captain's Hill, Leasingham. It was the home of Rector, Mrs. Leach and their daughter Anstice. On 17 October 1929 Andrew Geddes and Anstice Leach were married by her father at the parish church and subsequently photographed on the lawn with the guests in the background.

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FOREWORD

H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands.

Inspector-General of the Armed Forces, Honorary Air Marshal Royal Air Force, President of the Manna Association and the International Manna/Chowhound Brotherhood, personal friend of Air Commodore Andrew Geddes. Shortly before he passed away, he invited the author and insisted that this foreword was published in this book. On 1 December 2004 Prince Bernhard died. He was laid to rest in the Royal Crypt at Delft.



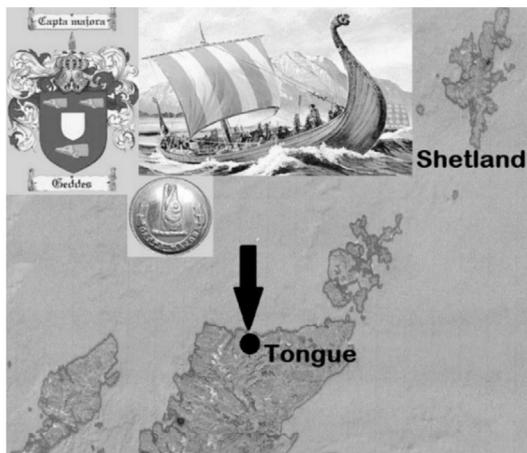
It gives me great pleasure to write a few words to introduce this book.

I have known and admired Andrew Geddes for many years. His life and his career are extremely interesting and an example for the younger generations. People are likely to forget what we owe to men like him. That is why a book like this is necessary - in fact it should have come out earlier! Now that it has appeared, I hope it will be widely read.

Prince of the Netherlands.

1. Those wonderful flying machines...

The family name Geddes, or Geds, as pronounced in Scotland, comes from the Swedish Viking name, which translates as pikes. Folklore says that the Viking Geds used to come to the northern coast of Scotland regularly, sailing in their long ships to carry out raids on the local inhabitants and on the McKay clan in particular. The Vikings used to row their ships coastwise to establish raiding bridgeheads around Tongue and Dounreay in the far north of Scotland. These raids took place annually, after which the Geds would return to their base. With their ships loaded with loot and girls, they would sail to their winter base in Scandinavia, on the border of what are now Norway and Sweden.



<i>Col. Andrew David Geddes</i> 1834-1888	<i>Emily Jane Eckford</i> 1839-1932
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<i>Maj. Malcolm Henry Burdett Geddes</i> 1874-1914	<i>Annie Vera Eleanor Christie</i> 1884-1954
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<i>Air Cdre. Andrew James Wray Geddes</i> 1906-1988	<i>Anstice Leach</i> 1905-1987
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<i>Angus Geddes</i> 1935 - today	<i>Wendy</i> 1938 - today
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Some say the Geddes tribe were fearsome Vikings who pillaged and robbed parts of Scotland. The name is also thought to be taken on from a place in the county of Nairn. The place name Geddes is said to have come from a Gaelic term for mountain ridge. It has also been suggested that the surname was a patronymic created from Ged or Geddie, meaning pike.

In the autumn there were lighter winds or, worse, no winds at all, which meant tiring rowing all the way down the coast of Scotland and then past the Low Countries and Denmark back home. Eventually the Geds arrived at the conclusion that it would be better to alter the seasonal plan and establish a permanent base near Tongue, formed an alliance with the McKays, and married their lassies. After this had been done, they continued raping and looting. However, this time their targets were the Sunderland clans in the south. The Geds were of Scandinavian origin, very blonde and tall, masters with the broadswords and the shield. They were skilled raiders, but they were also similar in appearance, status and skill at arms to the Sunderlands, they fought with the McKays, and this similarity between the two groups sometimes caused a problem. At times a McKay would think of having a go at a Sunderland, not being aware he was risking his life fighting a Ged. Therefore, it was arranged that the Geds should distinguish themselves by nailing a pike's head, a Geds, to their shields, by virtue of which the McKays could then differentiate their friendly Geds from the enemy Sunderlands. This became the first Geds coat of arms.

After a few of these joint raiding ventures it became evident that the Geds, being taller, blonder and stronger than the dark-haired Celtic McKays, were the captors of more loot and lassies. Therefore, at the debriefing clan meetings that followed the raids, it was decided that captives and loot should be divided into shares, of which the McKays would be allotted one-third, with the Geds of course claiming the remaining two thirds. While this happened many centuries ago, this history lives on in the family crest where the Latin motto 'Capta Majora', meaning 'Greater part of the loot' is inscribed under the head of a pike. They now established in Tongue, making it unnecessary to sail the Nordic waters, thus saving time for more pillaging.

Eventually, through marriage and good farming, the Viking Geds of the North became fully integrated with the local communities, and they were to be found as far south as Glen Eggis Castle in Perthshire. This castle became the headquarters of the family of Haldane, who later sold a large part of the family estate. It became known as Gleneagles and it is now famous for its hotel and superb golf course. At Glen Eggis (Glen of the Eagles), in Haldane House, there is a family chapel where the name of Andrew Geddes' father can still be seen, recorded on a stained-glass window. The chapel used to be part of the Castle of Glen Eggis; ruins of the castle still stand. These ruins are famous for containing the first manmade water closets in Scotland. Hence toilets were known colloquially not as a WC, but as a Gleneggis! The forefathers of Andrew Geddes were soldiers and explorers, scientists and artists, who settled all over the world.



JANUARY 1, 1889.

OBITUARY.

Colonel Andrew David Geddes, of the 83d Regiment District, and late Commander of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers (the 27th Regiment), who died on December 23, at Belfast, entered the Army as ensign in 1854, receiving his commission as lieutenant in the next year. The deceased officer had served on the North-West frontier during the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and 1859, receiving for his services a medal. He became captain in 1866, major in 1873, lieutenant-colonel in 1879, and colonel in 1883.



Andrew's grandfather was Colonel Andrew David Geddes. With his wife Emily Jane Eckford he had ten children. Three of the children died at a young age.

Andrew Geddes was born on 31 July 1906 in Belgaum, Bombay Presidency, India, during the British 'Raj'. His mother was Annie Vera Eleanor Christie. His father Malcolm Henry Burdett Geddes was a Major in the Indian Army. The family had many links with India, although these links also led to some of them meeting an untimely end in the Empire. His great-great-grandfather G.H. Eckford was seriously wounded during the siege of Agra, and a great-aunt was thrown into a well at Cawnpore during the Indian Mutiny. The Battle of Agra was a decisive action during the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (also known as the Indian Mutiny). Indian rebels attacked a column of British troops which had relieved a garrison at Agra, but although they surprised the column, they were defeated and dispersed. This allowed the British to establish communications across all of Northern India, and to concentrate troops for the vital Relief of Lucknow.

The more recent family history shows a close association with India. A cousin of Geddes, Lord Haldane of Cloan, was involved with India as Secretary of State for War. He was an influential Liberal and later Labour politician, lawyer and philosopher. He was responsible for organising the Trooping Systems for the British Army. During his time the 'Haldane Reforms of the British Army were implemented. Depots and battalions in the United Kingdom became the suppliers of the same Regiment serving abroad. During the Trooping season in winter, the soldiers sailed to India and relieved the units serving there. This way, entire fresh units would replace the ones that had been in India for some time. Raised to the peerage as Viscount Haldane in 1911, he was Lord Chancellor between 1912 and 1915, when he was forced to resign because of false allegations of German sympathies. He later joined the Labour Party and once again served as Lord Chancellor in 1924 in the first Labour administration.



Left: One of these ten was Malcolm Henry Burdett, the fifth child and father of Andrew James Wray Geddes. Major Malcolm Henry Burdett Geddes served as an officer in the Indian army.

His son Andrew was born in Belgaum. Soon after the Major died his mother returned to England.

Right: Secretary of State for War Lord Richard Burdon Haldane of Cloan was a cousin.



Left: Lord Haldane first lived in this house in Edinburgh at 17 Charlotte Square. Later he moved to 28 Queen Anne's Gate in Westminster London. In 1954 the London County Council erected this plaque in his honour.

Soon after Andrew's birth in 1906, the family returned to England and settled in Stakes Hill, not far from Waterlooville, Hampshire. It had an electric tramway to Cosham and Southsea, enabling the family to take regular trips to the coast. Major Geddes had an army salary and allowances, which afforded the family a moderately comfortable living. After the birth of their daughter in 1907, the family felt very much at home in Stakes Hill and its beautiful surroundings. Young Andrew went to a Junior School run by the local vicar, and his little sister even had a governess at home.

In 1913, he went to Junior Boarding School at Farnborough in Hants. He must have been one of the luckiest boys alive, for it was there that his love for aviation began. That same year young Geddes arrived in Farnborough; the British Admiralty bought His Majesty's Airship

Parseval. It belonged to the Naval Wing of the Royal Aircraft Factory, where it was housed in a balloon shed built for a German Zeppelin that the British government intended to buy from Imperial Germany. Commander Masterman, whose son was Geddes' best friend, commanded HMAS Parseval. At his invitation, the entire school went to spend an afternoon at Farnborough to visit the 'lighter-than-air-craft' and to see the Parseval carry out a short flight. First, pupils were allowed short ascents in balloons inside the large Zeppelin hall. Then they all walked outside to see the airships Astra Torra, Alpha, Beta, and others.

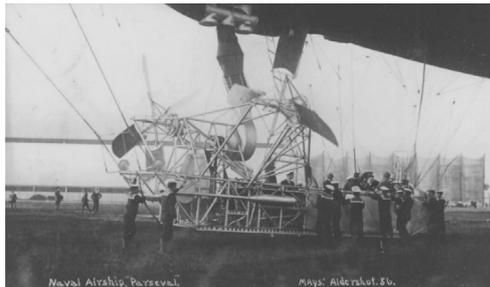
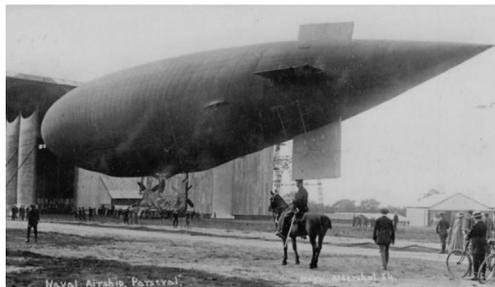
After they had seen these wonderful inventions, the pupils, their masters and mistresses gathered near the large windscreens in the open air to see the Parseval being carefully directed out of the shed on ropes by sailors. Young Masterman was chosen to join his father on this flight. When he was seated, he was allowed to pick one boy to go with him. 'Geddes', he said, and a delighted boy climbed on board. HMAS Parseval was very 'naval'. Spotless white ropes, brass pipes, wheels, handles, even an anchor, were ranged along the side of the gondola. There were huge propellers, driven by an enormous engine. Then Commander Masterman assumed command in the captain's seat in the bow; his crew and the two boys took position, ready for take-off. Andrew Geddes was allotted a duty to perform. 'When I order 'ballast away', he was told, 'you turn the handle over there anti-clockwise and pull it hard and quickly'. Geddes felt frightfully important and looked at the handle with the greatest possible determination to fulfil his task to the very best of his abilities. It looked like a handle in a 'small room' of a yacht, but it was slightly bigger.

Like on a vessel, all the brass was beautifully polished. Naval ratings held the airship steady until the Commander told them to let go. During this time, Geddes became sure that his future was in flying. With the establishment of the RAF on 1 April 1918, Masterman transferred to the new service. In 1922 Masterman was appointed Commandant of the RAF's Central Flying School. Following this, he joined the Royal Observer Corps as a part-time volunteer with the rank of Captain and served as Western Area Commandant between 1937 and 1942. As a young boy, Andrew Geddes watched the American aviator and self-proclaimed Colonel Cody flying from Farnborough in his famous flying machine 'The Cathedral'.

Geddes did not have the slightest idea what the handle was for or what the result of his action would be. Since the Captain had given him a specific order, this handle had to be a very important contraption. When the sailors had pulled the airship to its launching position and released the ropes, Masterman, without even looking at the boy, gave the order 'ballast away!' Young Andrew felt this was his big moment and with great determination, he pulled the plug. The airship immediately bounced upwards, and Geddes looked over the side of the gondola to see if any of his classmates or teachers had seen the result of his masterly move. They were all dressed in Sunday rig for this important visit, with Eaton suits and clean white starched collars. The masters and mistresses were also well-turned-out. At that very moment, to Geddes' horror, they were being deluged by a tremendous wave of rusty water, which came gushing from the gondola. Andrew, who had hoped to be the hero of the day, turned out to be the very cause of their distress. He had showered them with ballast water. Suddenly the whole party looked far less well-dressed than a few seconds before. It was Geddes' first taste of air power and the moment when flying became a major interest in his life. That day he decided that someday he would be a pilot.

In 1914 disaster struck when his father Major Geddes suddenly died of diabetes. He was only 40 years old and not entitled to a full major's pension. Therefore his widow was to try to bring up two children on an Indian Army major's widow's pension at a time when inflation drove prices up and lowered the value of a fixed income pension. However, it was quite remarkable

how the young widow coped. She worked as a matron at Portsmouth High School for girls. She became a nurse at the local hospital for the war-wounded and to raise more money, she would ride around the local farms on her bicycle buying eggs from the farmers. She sold these eggs, together with the eggs from her own chickens, for a small profit, and these earnings helped her to ease cash flow problems throughout the War. They were fortunate that a friend of Andrew's father, who lived nearby, sprang to their aid, advising Mrs. Geddes where to apply for help and finding out what help was available. Such assistance was essential as the pension was quite inadequate.



Geddes' first experience in flying was when naval Commander Masterman allowed own his son to take his friend Andrew with him for a short trip on HMAS Parseval.

At Farnborough, Andrew saw the Cathedral of Col. Cody fly and crash. All he now wanted was to be an airman.

Meanwhile, young Andrew's education had to be taken care of and for that, the greatest gratitude should be expressed to Wellington College, Berkshire. This organisation was established as a national orphanage for the sons of deceased Army officers and dedicated to the memory of the Duke of Wellington. It incorporated into its crest the motto *Heroum Filii*, or the Sons of Heroes. The history of the school is quite interesting. After the death of the great soldier and statesman the Duke of Wellington, victor of Waterloo, in 1852, the public wanted to pay tribute to this great man. He was acknowledged not only as a great and daring soldier and strategist, but also as an astute Prime Minister and Statesman.

It was decided that his memory should be honoured in a way that would cover the widest scope and area, and that funding should come from national subscription. A small memorial was to be placed in every town and village wherever possible, to serve as a reminder of how he had saved Britain and in fact Europe from the French dictator and conqueror Napoleon. A larger memorial in the form of a national orphanage was also to be built and to be known as Wellington College. It was built on an area near the Royal Military College Sandhurst and the Army Staff College at Camberley. There were also additional funds left after these plans were undertaken and these were used to pay for the famous Achilles statue, which was erected opposite Wellington's house at Hyde Park Corner, London. The memorial plans were a great success.