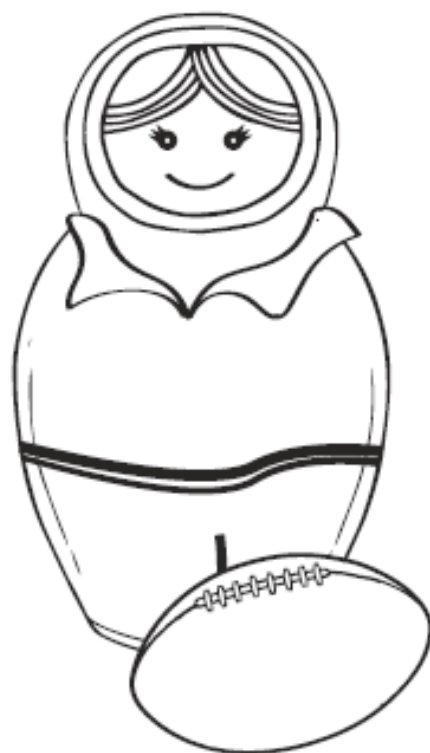
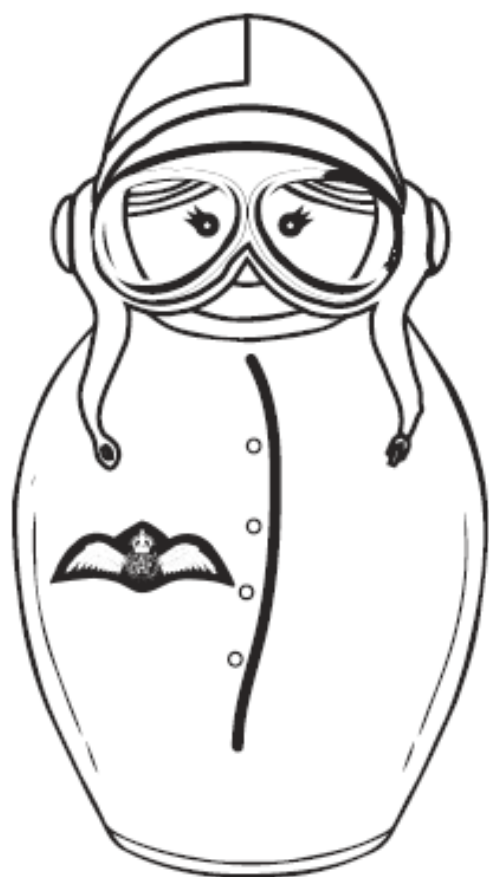
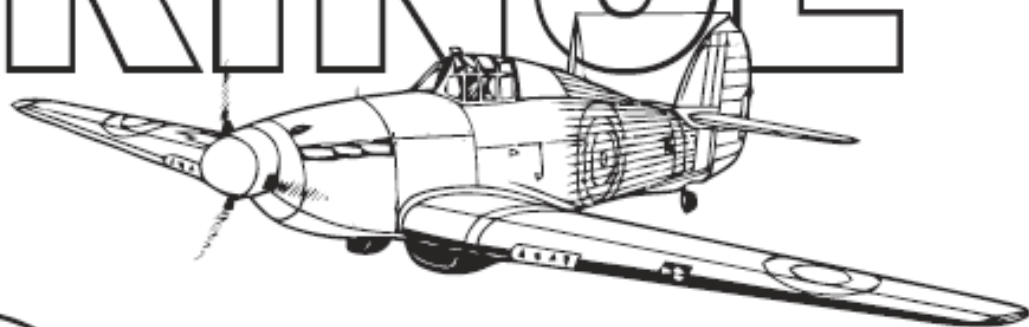


THE FLYING PRINCE

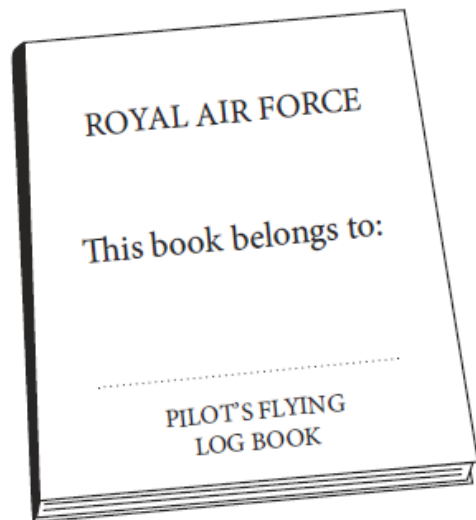


EVERY
DRAWING
TELLS A STORY BY BIG HISTORY

ROYAL AIR FORCE **museum**
COSFORD

This very special story has been written especially for you by the RAF Museum's author in residence, Tom Palmer, for the world's biggest drawing festival.

The theme of this years Big Draw is Every Drawing Tells A Story. Enjoy reading your very own copy of the Flying Prince. There are places all the way through the book for you to illustrate and colour.



THE FLYING PRINCE

①

Alexander Sergeevich Obolensky gazes across the rugby fields at a large house half hidden by trees. He has his hands on his knees as he waits for the ball to come out of the scrum.

The building has a stone front with a great tower at the centre. But it is no longer just a house: it is a school now. Alexander's school.

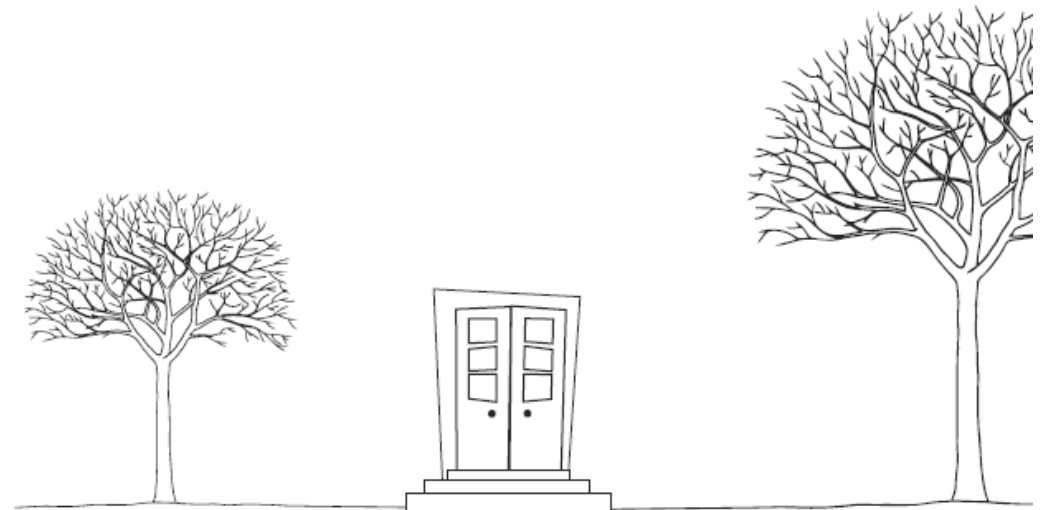
He is eleven.

The school masters always play Alexander on the wing. He is fast. So fast that the other boys swear that he can fly. That's why they call him the flying prince.

Because he's fast. And because he really is a prince. A Russian prince.

Alexander watches a line of birds high over the school grounds until the ball is out of the scrum. Then he clears his mind. Focusses.

The ball spins his way. He catches it, then runs.



Fast. Faster than he has ever run before. Because every time he runs he wants to run faster still.

No other player on the pitch can catch him as he powers towards the try line, placing the ball right under the posts.

②

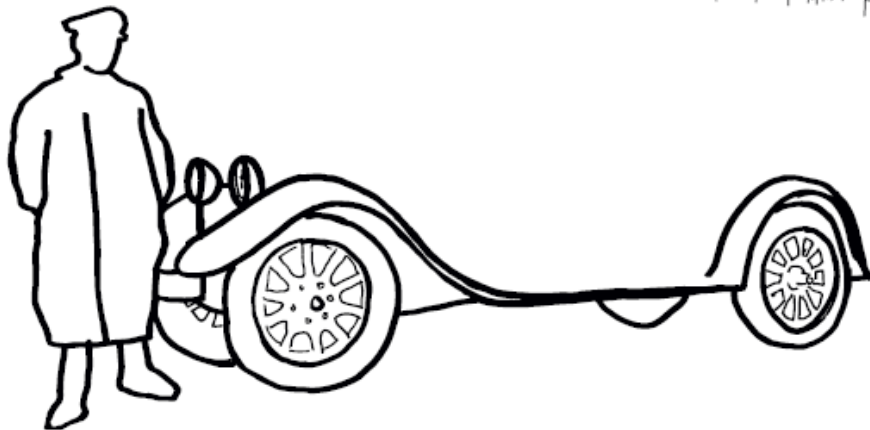
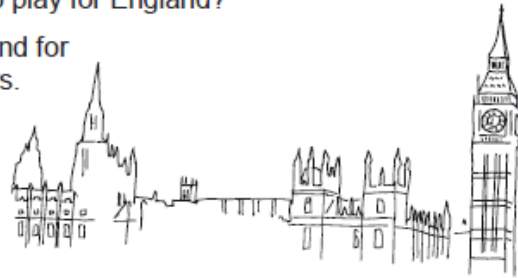
Alexander takes a taxi cab to Twickenham Stadium, joining crowds arriving on foot for what will become known as one of the greatest rugby matches ever played. Because England have never beaten New Zealand before. He wonders if today that will change.

He is twenty years old now and not here to join the crowds pushing through turnstiles to watch from the terraces. Alexander will be walking onto the pitch in a little over an hour as a member of the England team.

But not everyone is happy that a person born in Russia is about to play rugby for England. A member of the British royal family approaches him and asks:

'By what right do you have to play for England?'

Alexander has lived in England for seventeen of his twenty years.



When he was three his family fled his troubled homeland.

If they had stayed they would have been murdered, just like so many of Alexander's friends had been murdered. England gave the Obolensky's asylum. Gave them a new life.

Now Alexander has a chance to repay his new country.

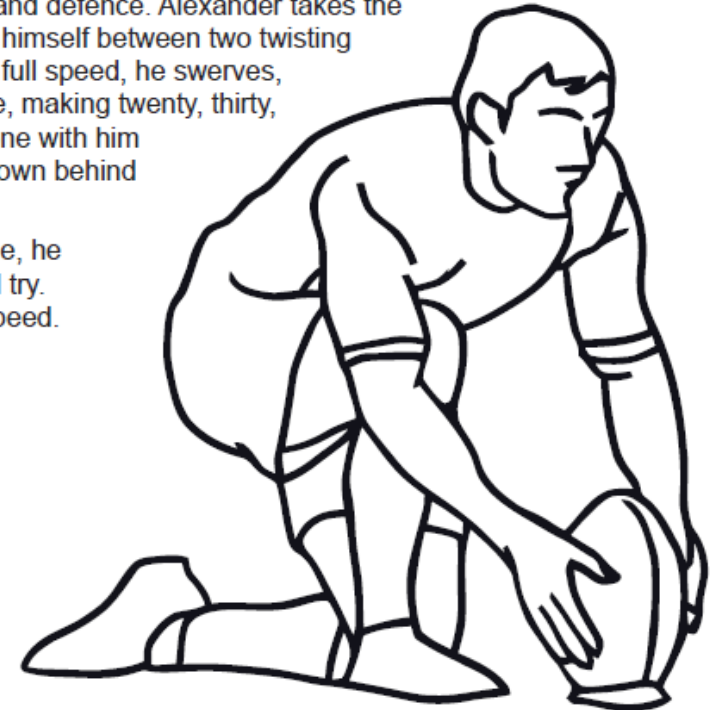
But he is angry about what the man said.

As kick-off approaches, Alexander's rage does not subside. Standing on the pitch he gazes up to see a line of birds high in the sky above Twickenham. They distract him for a moment, reminding him of something that he cannot quite remember. But he must focus on today. Forget half memories. Forget the eyes of the royal box upon him. And the question: *By what right do you have to play for England?*

Alexander's rage winds tighter and tighter. He is a coiled spring, ready to run hard. But every time he receives the ball he is closed down, tackled, cannot find space to attack.

Then a short pass comes and – at last – he sees gaps in the New Zealand defence. Alexander takes the ball and pushes himself between two twisting tackles. Now, at full speed, he swerves, accelerates wide, making twenty, thirty, forty yards, no-one with him as he touches down behind the posts.

Later in the game, he scores a second try. Again, at high speed.



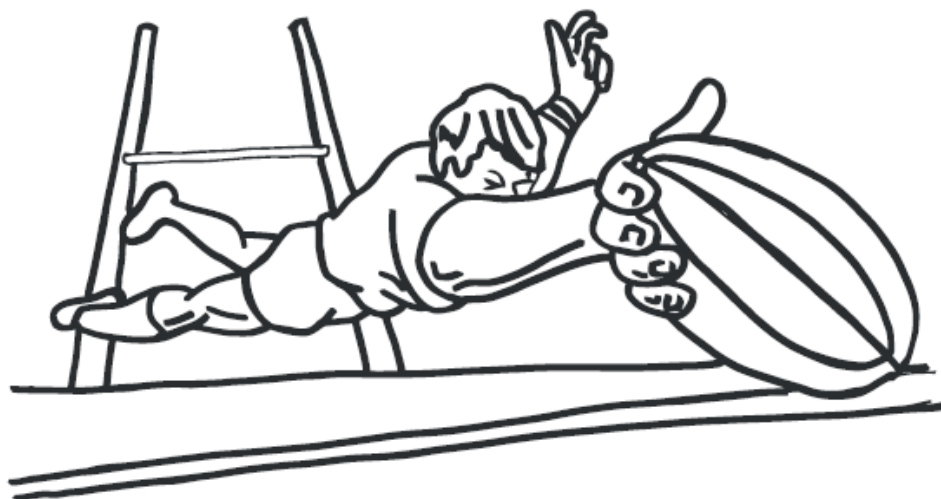
With his help, England have beaten the best team in the world for the very first time.

The newspapers call Alexander an *English hero*.

They also give him a name he has heard before: the Flying Prince.

③

But sport can be cruel and – after two more games for England – Alexander is left out of the England team. He has not scored any more tries since his debut. So he is replaced.



He spends the next day walking along the banks of the River Thames in London, his mind as clouded as the skies above him. The nearer to the water that he walks the more ships he sees coming and going. He likes the ships. They fill him with excitement. Goods from all over the world arriving in London. He looks out for vessels from Russia and wonders what might be on board.

He came to England on a ship. But he has no memory of the journey. He wishes he did.

Alexander feels disappointed that he is no longer in the England team. He had felt English when he represented his country like that. An *English hero*. That's what the newspapers said. How can he ever get that back?

After an hour he stops and unfolds his newspaper, sitting on the side of the docks to read. About Germany looking more and more like it wants to make war on the world. About Britain and Russia looking more and more likely to stand in their way.

Alexander fears there will be war, a war worse perhaps than the last one.

He feels the wind picking up off the Thames, as if a storm is coming. It snatches some of the newspaper from his hands. He loses one sheet as it floats high over the water. He holds on tight to the rest, folds it quickly on his knee, presses it flat.

On the page facing up there is an advertisement.

Airmen wanted. Join the Royal Air Force.



Alexander stands up.

How can he get that feeling back? Of being an English hero.

He has his answer.

④

Alexander signs up to for the Royal Air Force after he has spoken to his mother and father. He leaves his family home with their blessing.

He travels east by train to the flat countryside of Suffolk. Then – finding Martlesham Airfield – he walks down a long open road to a cluster of low buildings and huts at the side of a runway.

He is given a medical examination. He passes easily.

He is handed his uniform, a heavy blue jacket with gold buttons down the front. A white shirt. A small hat.

But no wings.

He has seen a small winged badge on the uniforms of some of the men on the base. They are pilots. Trained. Passed. Confirmed. Men who were equipped to defend their country.

Alexander wants to defend his country as much as he wants to play rugby for it.

He sleeps in a small wooden hut with fifteen other men. Every day they attend lectures, then are taken out in two-seater planes with an instructor.

To learn to fly.

When he is high in the sky Alexander finds it hard to concentrate. It is an extraordinary feeling. Every time he touches down he yearns for the next time he will take off.

After flying eight hours with an instructor Alexander is allowed – at last – to fly solo.

⑤

But almost as soon as Alexander is allowed to fly on his own, he is on a ship steaming across the sea, to South America. To play for the British Forces on the rugby field, not the airfield.

He finds a deckchair at the back of the ship and lies staring at the sky as he and his teammates cross the world's second widest ocean.

He sees planes. Other ships. And – at times – lines of birds migrating.

Birds again. Migrating birds. Why does that always make him feel so unsettled, so excited.

And then it happens. A memory of something comes back. A clear memory.

He was on another ocean. Years before. Very young. He was standing at the back of a ship, his mother gripping the collar of his fur coat because he was leaning too hard against the rail.

He stared at the frothing water below. And, above the sounds and vibrations of the churning sea and the ship's grumbling engines, he heard his mother weeping.

'Why are you crying?' Alexander asked his mother.

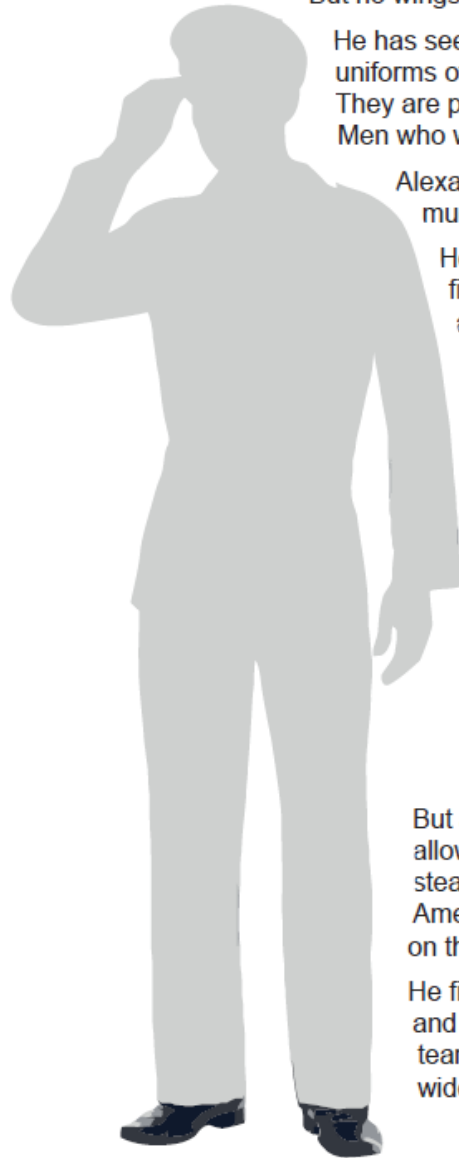
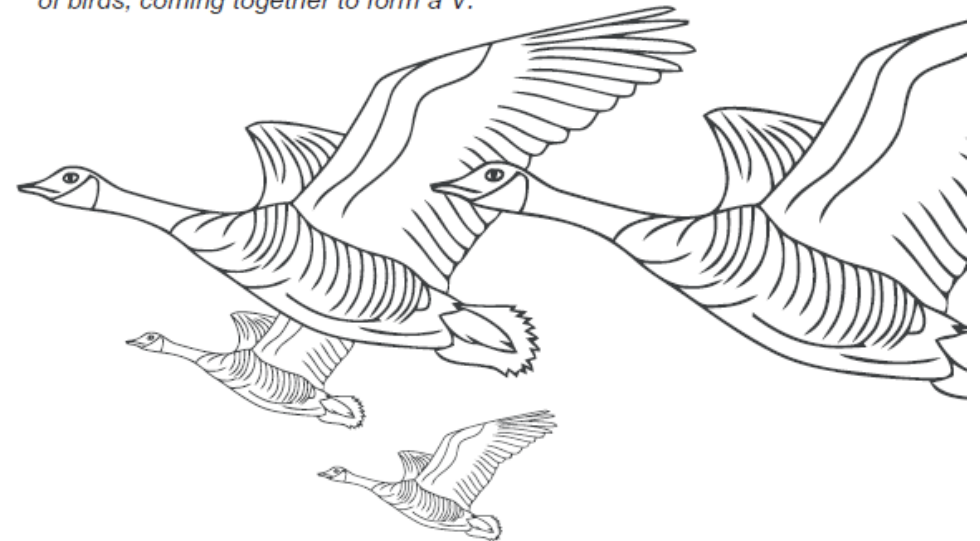
'Our home, Alexander,' his mother replied through her sobs. 'We will never see Russia again.'

Alexander stared back across the sea at Russia as it faded. The port. Distant buildings. Hills.

His mother pointed at the sky.

'Look Alexander,' she said.

Alexander looked. High above the sea in the cold blue sky are two lines of birds, coming together to form a V.



'They are geese, Alexander Sergeevich,' his mother explained. 'Leaving Russia for the winter. Watch them fly. They are so fast, so high. No-one can catch them. And in the spring they will go home. To Russia.'

'Will we go home in the spring, Mother?' Alexander asked.

His mother did not reply.

The rugby tour to South America is a huge success. In just one game Alexander scores seventeen tries. The British Forces win 82-0.

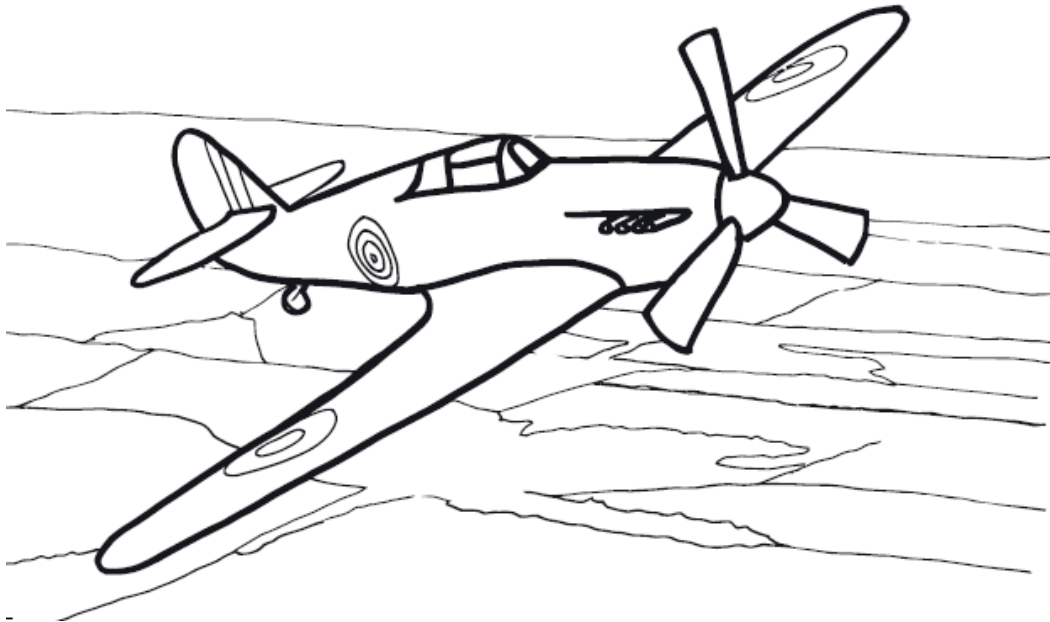
When Alexander and his teammates return to Europe, it is a continent at war. Alexander is now a wartime fighter pilot.

He receives a telegram, dated 28 March 1940. After his remarkable performances for the British Forces, Prince Alexander Sergeevich Obolensky has been called up to play for rugby for England again.

Now he can represent his country on the pitch and in the air.

⑥

The day after his call up, Alexander returns from solo patrolling the skies over England. His mission had been to search for German planes, to defend England from attack. But he is low on fuel.



It is time to return to base. The airfield at RAF Martlesham Heath.

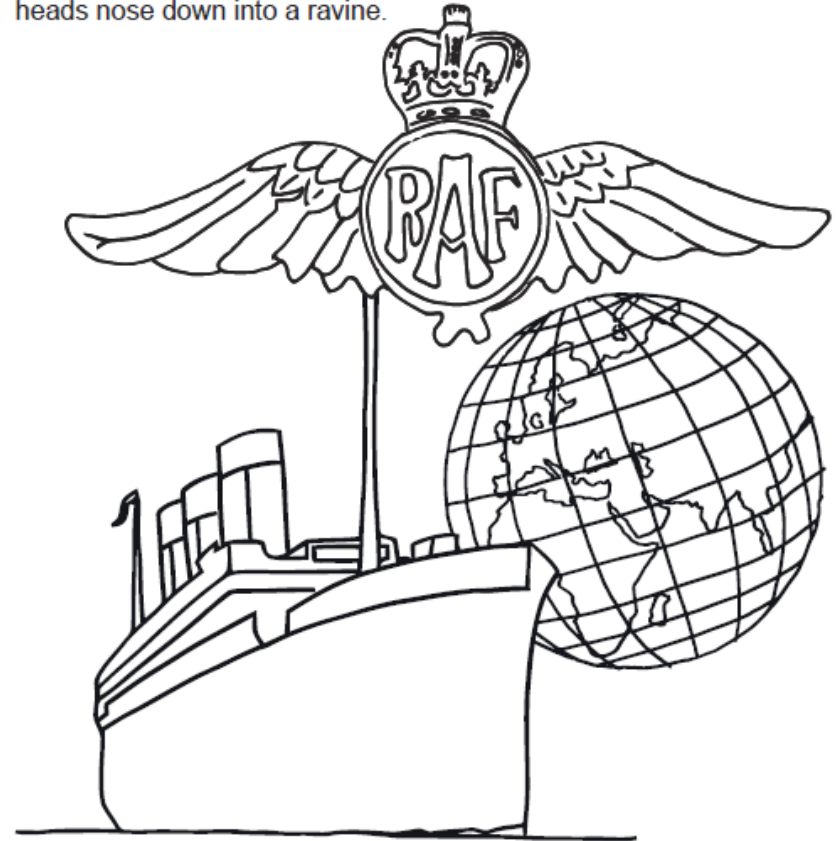
As he flies west, he sees a V of geese heading north east.

He smiles. Perhaps they are returning to their home in Russia, like his mother said all those years ago.

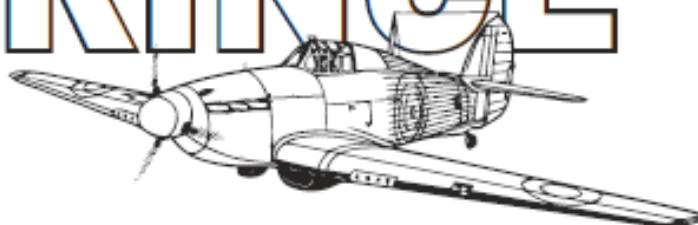
Landing the Hawker Hurricane plane is Alexander's least favourite part of flying. So he always takes extra care, pushing the stick forward, then back. In line with the airfield now as he drops to within touching distance of the ground.

The wheels bounce. Once. Twice.

Alexander tries to slow his plane down. But something is wrong. He is not slowing down. He is going too fast. He tries to control it. But there is no more airfield and his Hawker Hurricane heads nose down into a ravine.



THE FLYING PRINCE



Prince Alexander Obolensky was three-years-old when his parents had to flee Russia to escape their certain death in the 1917 revolution.

And it seemed that the Prince was always destined to fly. At school in England he became a speedy winger on the rugby field. Age 19 he made his debut for his new country, scoring the two tries that meant England defeated New Zealand for the first time. Both tries were scored at high speed, he was unstoppable. Months later he joined the RAF, volunteering to fight the Germans even before the war had begun.

In the air, on the wing, this is the story of the Flying Prince.

ABOUT TOM

Tom Palmer is a children's author. Best known for his Football Academy and Foul Play series, his recent books have featured exciting RAF storylines. His latest series, Rugby Academy, is as much about children with mums and dads in the RAF as it is rugby. And in 2016 his new Wings series is about the great RAF planes, the Sopwith Camel, Spitfire and Typhoon. The RAF Museum have helped Tom to write those books.

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