

SERGEANT DEREK COLIN FOWLER DFM (G35-40)

He was born on 9 July 1923 and during WW2 served in 38 Squadron of the RAF.

On 1 January 1943 he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal. His citation in the London Gazette (see below) reads "One night in October 1942, this airman captained an aircraft which attacked a convoy consisting of a merchant ship, a tanker and 2 escorting destroyers. In spite of a thick smoke screen, which completely enshrouded the convoy, Sgt Fowler remained over the target area until, for a few moments, the smoke cleared and the tanker became visible. He immediately flew in to close range and attacked with telling effect. A violent explosion occurred and it was subsequently learned that the tanker was on fire. This airman has completed many sorties and has always displayed outstanding zeal and determination."

After the war he flew for BOAC on African routes, a charter company flying mail from Croydon and for several years was Onassis and then Niarchos' private pilot flying from St Moritz, Cannes & Athens. Used to own a Cessna Citation twin jet and a helicopter.

The London Gazette

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Air Ministry, 1st January, 1943.

ROYAL AIR FORCE.

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the following awards in recognition of gallantry displayed in flying operations against the enemy:—

Distinguished Flying Cross.

Flying Officer Edward Anzac DUPLEX (Aus.400142), Royal Australian Air Force, No. 160 Squadron.

This officer has completed many sorties, several of them in daylight. On one occasion his aircraft was severely damaged when subjected to a series of attacks by an enemy fighter. Two engines were hit, the hydraulics damaged and the turrets rendered unserviceable. Other damage was sustained, making the aircraft extremely difficult to control. In spite of this, Flying Officer Duplex flew it to base and landed it safely. On another occasion, engine trouble developed on the outward flight of his mission, compelling him to return to base. On the return flight, however, he successfully attacked an alternative target. Throughout his operational career, Flying Officer Duplex has displayed outstanding determination and devotion to duty.

Flying Officer Henry TILSON, (Can/J.7343), Royal Canadian Air Force, No. 15 Squadron.

As captain of aircraft, Flying Officer Tilson has taken part in many sorties. Whatever the odds he has always endeavoured to press home his attacks with determination. In November, 1942, he participated in an attack on Genoa, securing a photograph of the target. Some days later, he took part in a successful raid on Turin. Flying Officer Tilson has set a courageous example.

Distinguished Flying Medal.

N.Z.402206 Flight Sergeant Alwyn Metcalf LATELY, Royal New Zealand Air Force, No. 38 Squadron.

This airman has completed numerous sorties as pilot. Throughout, his high skill and unflinching devotion to duty have been worthy of high praise. In September, 1942, at night, he attacked an enemy merchant ship, escorted by a destroyer. Despite intense opposing fire, Flight Sergeant Lately flew in at an extremely low level. Hits were obtained on the merchant vessel causing two large explosions. Although his aircraft was hit by a shell, which burst in the cabin, wounding the navigator and wireless operator, Flight Sergeant Lately manoeuvred it to safety. On the return journey, after handing over the controls to the second pilot, he dressed the wounds of his comrades. When base was reached he accomplished a difficult landing in safety.

1332209 Sergeant Derek Colin FOWLER, No. 38 Squadron.

One night in October, 1942, this airman captained an aircraft which attacked a convoy consist-

ing of a merchant ship, a tanker and 2 escorting destroyers. In spite of a thick smoke screen, which completely enshrouded the convoy, Sergeant Fowler remained over the target area until, for a few moments, the smoke cleared and the tanker became visible. He immediately flew in to close range and attacked with telling effect. A violent explosion occurred and it was subsequently learned that the tanker was on fire. This airman has completed many sorties and has always displayed outstanding zeal and determination.

956988 Sergeant Albert SHAYSHUTT, No. 10 Squadron.

In November, 1942, this airman was the flight engineer of an aircraft which attacked Stuttgart. On the return journey, the aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and sustained much damage. Sergeant Shayshutt was wounded in the left thigh, groin and in the right leg. Although bleeding profusely and in great pain he refused to leave his post and continued his duties until the English coast was crossed. Here, his captain informed the crew that he intended to attempt to land the damaged aircraft alone and ordered them to prepare to leave by parachute. Sergeant Shayshutt insisted on staying with his captain and, despite his sufferings, rendered valuable assistance. When the aircraft was eventually landed safely, Sergeant Shayshutt was delirious and too weak to move through loss of blood. By his courage, fortitude and devotion to duty this airman set an example worthy of the highest praise.

1377121 Sergeant Francis James Lyle WYATT, No. 462 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron.

This airman has completed numerous sorties. Whilst operating from this country he took part in the attack on the Renault Works, near Paris, and in the raids on Cologne and the Ruhr when a thousand of our bombers attacked these targets. In the Middle East he has continued his good work. One night in October, 1942, he captained an aircraft which attacked Tobruk. Immediately after releasing his bombs a heavy shell burst under one of the wings. It was then observed that one of the bombs was hung up. In the circumstances, Sergeant Wyatt decided not to re-open the bomb doors, thus lessening the risk of losing height and speed. Although 1 engine began over-heating he continued his course and eventually made a safe landing at an advanced landing field. Sergeant Wyatt has invariably set a courageous and inspiring example.

1315669 Sergeant Douglas Patrick OLIVER, No. 103 Squadron.

One night in December, 1942, this airman was the rear gunner of an aircraft detailed to attack Frankfurt. When nearing the target area, the aircraft was intercepted by 2 enemy fighters. One of them attacked from the rear but Sergeant

He died on 17 October 2008 and the following is an obituary written by his friend **David Brook (S36-40)** :-

Derek Fowler died at his home in Switzerland on 17th October 2008. On leaving the College in 1940 at the age of 17, Derek added a year to his age in order to join the RAF. He was awarded the DFM for sinking an enemy tanker in the Mediterranean in 1942. He was flying a Wellington bomber, which had a crude sighting device in order to launch a torpedo at a very low altitude. In spite of escorting destroyers putting up a thick smoke screen, Derek remained over the target area until the smoke momentarily cleared. He hit the tanker with a violent explosion and set it on fire. Later in the war Derek piloted Lancasters as a Pathfinder over Germany.

After the war Derek became a Captain in BOAC. One day while he was in a Parisian hotel, Onassis, the Greek shipping magnate invited him to become his personal pilot, which he did. On Onassis' death he became pilot for Niarchos. He flew the large 4-jet-engined converted airliners of the time and was, of course, privy to all the flying movements of those two extraordinary men. On flying to America with one of them to choose and buy a new aircraft, he met, and later married Peta. On retirement he lived in Silvaplana, Switzerland. Derek and Peta owned a Citation twin-jet aircraft and in 1994 they flew Wendy and me from Stanstead to Silvaplana. This entailed losing several thousand feet down a gorge, which to me was uncomfortably narrow, but was the only way to Silvaplana. The aircraft had no landing aids. But with Derek at the controls and his over 10,000 flying hours this was no problem.

Derek is survived by his wife Peta, two sons who are both professional pilots and a daughter from his first marriage.

An obituary, very similar to the one written above by David Brook, appeared in The Times on 26 November 2008 – see <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article5232614.ece>