

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT DEREK COLIN FOWLER DFM (G35-40)

He was born on 9 July 1923 and was just 17 when he joined the RAF immediately after leaving the College. He lied about his age in order to join and therefore he was one of the youngest pilots to serve in WW2.



During the war he served with Bomber Command's 38th, 69th, 77th and 635th squadrons. He flew Wellingtons, Halifax 1 & 2 and eventually flew Lancasters on the Pathfinder Force (see badge).

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." (the picture on the left was taken in 1943 and you can notice the ribbon under his wings to attach the "gong", which is pictured right).

After the war he realised he knew little else and therefore decided to make a career of flying. At first he joined BOAC, then went on to West African Airways Corporation before joining Transair in Croydon, flying newspapers and lobsters to Brussels and Paris. When Transair furnished a DC3 Dakota for executive luxury travel, he was seconded to fly both Aristotle Onassis and Stavros Niarchos, until the two shipping magnets had a disagreement and Niarchos bought the Onassis share of the arrangement. He and his crew of four became directly employed by Niarchos, where he loyally remained for the following 32 years.



Aircraft were being changed and upgraded all along. From the DC3, there followed the Grumman Gulfstream 1, then a Gulfstream 11, then the Dassault Mystere 20, followed by a Learjet (that after an explosive decompression episode in which Niarchos passed out, was immediately sold!). Then followed another Mystere 20 and then the Boeing 737 and later on the Boeing 737-200 series. Many seats were removed and these aircraft were all adapted for passenger comfort and luxury. The larger ones had full galleys and incorporated full king size beds.

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

Derek Fowler died in hospital near 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.

In 1962 he met and later married Yela "Peter". On retirement he lived in Silvaplana, Switzerland. Derek and "Peter" owned a Citation 1 twin-jet aircraft and in 1994 they flew Wendy and me from Stanstead to Samedan, Switzerland. This entailed losing several thousand feet down a gorge, which to me was uncomfortably narrow, but was the only way to enter a particular valley. The airfield had no landing aids, due to the many minerals in the nearby mountains, which would have resulted in false indications on the instruments. But with Derek at the controls and his over 10,000 flying hours this was no problem.

Derek is survived by his wife "Peter", 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>

Subsequently we are grateful to his widow, Yela "Peter" Fowler for some additional/revised information and photos. She also tells us that his medals and other items will be donated to the Southwold Museum at some point in the future. She goes on to say :-

"Derek was simultaneously the private pilot for both Onassis and Niarchos until they had a disagreement, and Niarchos bought-out the DC 3 for his personal use flying between St. Moritz, Nice, Paris, Athens, London and so on. Derek was stationed in St. Moritz, in winters, and in Nice and later on in Athens during the summers...for the rest it was a bit of a gypsy life. I often flew with him as stewardess and enjoyed meeting the fancy people we carried. Derek flew for Niarchos for 32 years and when he retired at 60 years of age, in 1983, I started flying as well. We bought a Cessna 182 Skylane, and then exchanged that for a twin-engine Piper Navajo, then exchanged that for a small jet, the Citation 1 S/P and also bought a Hughes 500E helicopter. We flew wherever our fancy took us... to the USA, Oman, Mexico, you name it! As you can see we had a very happy and privileged life! Derek died of Prostate Cancer on October 17, 2008 at 85 years of age.

I don't know whether it is of interest or not, but Derek was stationed at Shallufa, Malta and ultimately at Downham Market. The rest I do not know, however I do have photocopies sent to me by the MoD, and the Archives at Kew, that describe all of that, plus movements and bombing activities over the Mediterranean and Germany. What is seldom known is that bombing flights over Germany carried yellow cages with two homing pigeons in case of lost communications due to crash landing etc. What amazing advances have been made in Aviation since that time!"

The following are the other medals awarded to him during WW2.



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.2.402206. Flight Sergeant Alwyn Metcalf LATLEY, Royal New Zealand Air Force, No. 38 Squadron.

This airman has completed numerous sorties as pilot. Throughout, his high skill and unfailing 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 Latley 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

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