Douglas Evans, DFC

In memory of a

10 Squadron Association Founding Member,

Guild of Air Pilots ‘Master Pilot’

and a thoroughly decent and likeable friend to so many.

Per Ardua Ad Astra - RAF
To Fly, To Serve - BA
Per Caelum Via Nostra - Hon Company of Air Pilots
A true Welshman, Douglas Evans was born near Fishguard, West Wales, on 27 January 1922 in Goodwick, Pembrokeshire. His aviation career spanned some 40 years, seeing wartime service with the RAF as a Halifax bomber captain - being awarded the DFC, participating in the Berlin Airlift and then spending 34 years in civil aviation.

His Pilots Log Book totalled some 16,200 flying hours, of which 1,850 hrs were military and 14,350 hrs civil flying.

Our condolences, repeated later on page 9, go to his remaining family.

Doug’s Goodwick home of Noddfa on Main Street, meaning refuge or shelter in Welsh, was probably named from his father and grandfather both being Master Mariner sea captains; a career in which Doug originally intended to follow in their footsteps.

The youngest of five children, he was especially close to his brother John, who was nearest to him in age, being born in 1919. Music played a big part in Doug's formative years playing the cornet in the Goodwick Brass Band and the piano accordion in a five-piece dance band known as "Reg Duggan and His Four Aces". Even until the 1990s Doug continued to sing with the Weybridge Male Voice Choir and Gemini Chorale, near to where he lived in Bookham, Surrey.

After leaving school he and John, who later also joined the RAF and like Doug also flew Halifaxes, began working for their uncle who ran a builders’ merchants in Swansea, where Doug learned how to lay roof slates and tiles. But, inspired he said, by stories of the WWI flying ace Captain Albert Ball VC, together with being an avid reader of Aeroplane magazine, he plucked up courage at the age of 18, to enter the local RAF recruiting office and joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve in 1941. Initially trained as a flight mechanic-airframe and aircraft rigger at RAF St Athan, Doug was selected for pilot training in 1942. On the same course as the later-to-become Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Michael Beetham, this took place in the USA under the US Army Air Corps' Arnold Scheme; the perils of a rough ocean crossing, during the period of high U-boat activity, being considered a better bet for pilot training than coping with unreliable British weather and threats over UK skies from the Luftwaffe. Doug honed his elementary flying skills on the Stearman (Boeing) PT-17 biplane, the Vultee BT-13A low-wing monoplane and the twin-engined Beechcraft AT10. Co-incidentally, Doug’s brother John was in Canada at that time, also undergoing flying training.

On returning to the UK in 1943, and after his conversion to the Halifax at No 1658 CU (conversion unit) at Riccall near Selby, Yorks, (1261958) Sgt Evans D. RAFVR was posted with his crew on 22 August 1943, to No 10 (Bomber) Squadron at nearby RAF Melbourne.
During his 10 Squadron tour Doug was commissioned as a pilot officer on 2 December 1943 being Gazetted some two months later on 22 February in the following year.

By the end of April 1944 Doug had been promoted to acting flight lieutenant rank and when their tour ended the following month, Doug’s crew were to have flown 32 missions with 10 Squadron.

His first sortie had been a bombing raid to Mannheim as second pilot to captain Flt Lt John Jenkins and crew on 5 September 1943, and his crew’s last operational mission was a mine-laying sortie to the area south of Heligoland at the entrances to Wilhemshaven and Bremerhaven Harbours on the night of 23/24 May 1944. He and his crew were then ‘screened’ or rested. As was customary, Doug always flew with the same six other crewmen and, having endured so much together and survived the war, the seven remained firm friends post-war.

Many of his contemporaries were not so lucky and were never to return. “We had to be very adaptable in our task”, Doug recalled, “and learned how to handle bad news of colleagues lost in action”.

Doug Evans (holding model Halifax- rear row) with his crew of 'Freddie' their Mk3 Halifax LV908 (ZA-F)

Note: With Doug based at RAF Melbourne his brother, FS John Haydn Evans was also flying Halifaxes on 158 Sqn at RAF Lisset, near Bridlington. They and their respective crews would often meet in the popular Betty’s Bar in York. In mid-May 1944, a worrying time for Doug and his family, just a week before his own ‘op’s tour ended, was when John was shot down over Belgium. Two of his crew became PoWs but fortunately John and the remaining five evaded capture, thanks to the bravery of the Belgian Underground Movement. John was back in the UK just four months later. He later lived until August 2017 when he died aged 98.

How fitting that, as the Bomber Command Memorial in London’s Green Park was inaugurated on 28 June 2012 by HM The Queen, Doug Evans was there to honour his fallen comrades and to also meet with (appropriately for a Welshman) HRH Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales. Using some sections of melted-down aluminium from a Halifax bomber, shot down over Belgium in May 1944 killing its eight crew, the Memorial recognises the contribution made by the 55,573 RAF aircrew who lost their lives.

Bearing in mind that the average life expectancy for a new squadron member in Bomber Command, was only three weeks, of his wartime experiences Doug was clear: "I don't like to think too often of the airmen of Bomber Command who died. I feel very lucky and humble to have survived along with my crew. We did what we were asked to do and everyone took on their responsibilities to the best of their ability."

Doug & HRH The Prince of Wales at the Bomber Command Memorial inauguration June 2012

Doug's ‘sustained and difficult period of operational flying’, as detailed in his citation, was deservedly recognised by the award of the Distinguished Flying Cross, Gazetted on 12 September 1944. All members of his crew were similarly awarded the DFC or DFM. With Doug’s first tour of operations safely over, he spent the next year as a Halifax flying instructor on a Heavy Conversion Unit. Ominously, by early 1945 his second operational tour beckoned but, to the relief of his wife Dorothy whom he’d married the previous December, hostilities in Europe came to an end in May.
Returning from his last trip on the HCU Doug’s flight track had the aircraft approaching the coast of Pembrokeshire …. He then proceeded to roar down the Goodwick Main Street in his mighty Halifax. There are still some elderly residents of Goodwick today who remember that day with nostalgia and pride. Without the benefit of a flight data recorder it is impossible to determine the exact height of the aircraft, but it has been variously described as anything between 50 to 200 feet; probably the former, because it certainly made an impression on many of Doug’s friends and relatives, all of whom clearly held him in the highest esteem.

Following this instructional tour Doug was posted to 78 Sqn (formed, coincidentally from 10 Sqn’s ‘B’ Flt, back in 1936). Now in Transport Command he flew their Dakotas on Middle-Eastern transport and air-sea-rescue missions based in Cairo, Egypt, until he was demobbed in October 1946.

With peace came a move into civil aviation and a job as a captain with the Lancashire Aircraft Corporation (LAC) flying charter operations worldwide in the Handley Page Halton, a derivative of the Halifax bomber. On one charter assignment in 1947, Doug flew a Halton all the way to Australia, on a journey taking him eight days and 17 sectors to complete.
By 1948 Doug was earning a comfortable £1,000 a year as a captain with the LAC. Nevertheless, and gambling on his future, he took a £400 pay cut and took a co-pilot position with the state-run British South American Airways (BSAA); its general manager being a former OC10 in 1942 and later of Pathfinder fame, AVM Don Bennett. With BSAA Doug flew the Avro Lancastrian, York and Tudor aircraft, mainly to South American and Caribbean destinations, via Portugal and West Africa or otherwise via Bermuda to the West Indies.

Notes of Interest:

1. It might be appropriate to mention here, especially to modern-day non-aviators, that these were of course in the days before reliable fan-jet engines, which nowadays allow safe long-haul flights across the world’s remote areas and oceans using modern navigational equipment, and it was also before meteorological knowledge of the upper atmosphere had discovered the presence of jet streams. BSAA lost a number of their aircraft without trace whilst crossing the Atlantic and in South America. One such example being the Tudor aircraft named ‘Star Dust’ which disappeared whilst approaching Santiago, Chile in August 1947. Its wreckage was not to be found until some 50 years later in the 1990s when a slowly melting glacier eventually revealed the aircraft’s remains. It was then deduced that the crew must have assumed, using dead-reckoning navigation above full cloud cover, that they had already crossed over the Andes mountains before commencing their descent, ignorant of the fact that a hitherto unknown phenomenon, now known as a jet stream, was the cause of an unforecast, very strong headwind. This had in fact put their true position much further back along track and the aircraft had therefore descended into the Andes, which the crew must have assumed had already been crossed.

2. On 1 January 1946 former OC10 Don Bennett with navigator R.Clifford Alabaster undertook the very first flight from London Heathrow Airport, in a BSAA Lancastrian ‘Star Girl’, on a proving flight. LHR Airport’s first commercial flight followed just some ten weeks later on 29 March, being made by the BSAA Lancastrian named ‘Starlight’ with Bennett again in command.
Between April and August 1949 BSAA was one of the 25 charter companies engaged on *Operation Plainfare*, more commonly known as the *Berlin Airlift*; the Allies' ambitious response to the Soviet blockade attempting to starve two and a half million Berliners into submission. Ranked by BSAA as a second officer, but temporarily operating and paid as a captain, Doug completed 84 flights on the Airlift to Berlin’s Tempelhof and Gatow Airports. His Avro Tudor aircraft, operating from Wunstorf in West Germany, carried mainly petrol and diesel supplies, flying up to 10,000ft in the 20-mile wide corridors to and from the beleaguered city, closely watched by the Soviets who would attack transgressors if they strayed outside the corridors, even when attempting to avoid bad weather.

Routing inbound to Berlin via the Northern Corridor and returning to Wunstorf through the Centre Corridor, the aircraft were allocated altitudes between 2,500 feet and 6,500 feet with a separation between successive aircraft of 3 to 4 minutes. Radar was available to arriving aircraft within the Berlin Control Zone and traffic was vectored onto a base leg and thence finals to the active runway. However, if an initial corridor entry slot-time could not be achieved, aircraft had to return back to their departure airfields.

BSAA’s Tudors had been modified for the Airlift with aircraft fuel tanks in the passenger cabin. In this configuration, the load was either 2,000 gallons of diesel or 2,300 gallons of petrol that was drained into a bowser during the quick turn-rounds (QTRs).

Doug’s annual salary was £1,000 and he received a £50 bonus from the airline when the Airlift ended in May 1949. With this bonus he purchased the luxury item of the time; an electric washing machine for his house in Carshalton. His overall impression of the Airlift was of an operation brilliantly planned and executed, with much of the credit going to Air Cdre J.W.F. Merer, AOC 46 Group, who was second in command of the Combined Airlift Task Force.
When BSAA was merged with BOAC with effect from 1 January 1950, Doug was amongst a group who were transferred to BEA, the short-haul division of the state carrier. Initially he flew as a first officer on Vikings but was soon promoted to captaincy on Dakotas and by 1957 he was a base-training captain on the DC3. He subsequently flew Viscounts, BAC1-11s, Tridents and Lockheed L1011 Tristars, being a training captain and flight manager on both the latter fleets. Whilst a flight manager on the Trident 3 fleet Doug was one of those called as a witness to the inquiry investigating the Staines crash of the BEA Trident 1C ‘Papa India’ on 18 June 1972 and his subsequent Tristar management role involved him having overall flight operations’ responsibility for introducing the Tristar into BEA service.

During the early 1970s Doug met his later good friend Douglas Newham who had joined 10 Sqn as its navigation leader just after Doug himself had left in 1944. Douglas had subsequently joined BOAC after leaving the RAF and together they became involved in establishing contingency plans for BOAC/BEA which were to be activated in the event of a future high-jacking of the Airlines’ aircraft. - This followed the September 1970 PLO high-jackings of four aircraft to Dawson’s Field in Jordan.

Doug remembered the Lockheed Tristar affectionately: “Of all the aircraft I had flown since leaving the RAF, it was the TriStar I loved the most. BEA led the world in the development of Autoland and all-weather operations and I am particularly proud of the part the TriStar played in this, along with the Trident.”
Retiring in 1977 from what had by then become British Airways, a spell of part-time flying followed as a Tristar captain with Gulf Air but, so that he could be nearer home, he later left them and returned to Britain, joining Air UK as a Handley Page Herald captain before he finally retired from flying in 1980.

In 1944, as a ground interest, Doug aged just 22 years old, had joined the then-named ‘Guild of Air Pilots & Air Navigators’, now known as ‘The Honourable Company of Air Pilots’, first joining as a Temporary Associate Member, attracting a subscription fee of one guinea (£1.05) a year. He may have first heard about the Guild as early as 1930, as he was aware of the R101 airship accident in which the Guild’s Master, Deputy Master and others perished. However, he learned much more of the Guild and its reputation from reading their advertisements in Aeroplane magazine. He felt it important, as new joiners do today, to network among the flying fraternity and also to keep aware of aviation developments. During the war, of course, there was little Guild activity for members and certainly no publication to read.

"What interested me in particular was the Guild's role in protecting the profession", Doug recalled. "Its aims and principles remain the same as they were when I joined, although today the Guild has added a social programme, which I always enjoy."

In 67 years as a Guild member Doug saw three Guild Grand Masters and 58 Masters and he also held Guild offices himself: as an Assistant to the Court for three years from 1975-78, and a member of the Trophies and Awards Committee, which included much acclaimed Master Air Pilot selections. Doug worked closely with his friend the distinguished air-safety expert Hugh Gordon-Burge, in whose name an award is given annually by the Guild.

Nobody could have been more astonished when, as a Liveryman in February 2012, Doug was celebrating his 90th birthday with Guild friends at the RAF Club in London when the then Guild Master, Captain Wally Epton, presented him with a Master Air Pilot (MAP) certificate. It was a moment Doug would never forget and the certificate remained on his wall until he died.

Until that time the Master of the Guild had always assumed that Doug was already an MAP holder, since he was one of the Guild's longest serving members. When the MAP omission came to light the Guild acted quickly and the award had the express approval of the Grand Master, His Royal Highness Prince Andrew, The Duke of York. Presenting Doug with his certificate the Master told Doug, "I am pleased and proud to announce that this master pilot, of all master pilots, is to be recognised. By instructions of the Grand Master, Captain Douglas Evans is to be - from today - a Master Air Pilot, in recognition that he has actually been one for many years already, but will now have a certificate to prove it."

There were more surprises, too: Doug was given a copy of his original Guild membership form, a copy of the book Empire of the Clouds - when British aircraft ruled the skies, and two synoptic charts - one for the date and place of his birth and the other relating to one of his wartime sorties.
During his long life Doug witnessed the 100th anniversary of ‘his’ 10 Squadron in 2015 and also that of the Royal Air Force in 2018.

Did he ever wish he had pursued a different career from flying, such as music?

Doug was adamant:

"Definitely no. Flying was the right career for me. I have been happy and aviation has been kind to me. I have loved every minute. It has brought great privileges and experiences, pleasures and friends. I would not have changed it for any other way of life."
Doug’s first wife Dorothy, a former Royal Navy Wren, died in 1996, and Doug was then into his eighties when he was married again to Maud, a former wartime WAAF and widow of a great friend. She sadly pre-deceased Doug when she too passed away in November 2015.

And then Master Pilot Captain Douglas Evans, himself aged 96 yrs and 11 mths, finally passed away peacefully in Woodbridge, Suffolk on 23 December 2018.

Our condolences go to his daughter Paula, step-daughter Elaine, and their families.

In addition to his Guild of Air Pilots membership, Doug also belonged to the RAF Association, the Bomber Command Association and was a member of the Royal Aeronautical Society. However, it was through his membership of the 4 Group [Bomber Command] Association which had formed in the 1980s that Doug Evans is probably best remembered by younger readers. In 1984 together with a few ex-10 Sqn members of the 4 Gp Association, which was later to dissolve in 1999, Doug became one of the founding members of the 10 Squadron Association.

He became its secretary and its co-historian together with Tom Thackray, a former WW2 Halifax flight engineer. In the age before computers Doug spent much time at the National Archives in Kew, diligently copying pages from the wartime 10 Squadron Operations Record Books (Forms 540/541). These in turn were published in a bi-annual Association Newsletter, of which Tom was the editor. Through Doug’s interest in preserving 10 Squadron’s past and the contribution made by its Halifax crews during the war, the Association grew in numbers, as contributions from former Squadron members were then incorporated into the Newsletters adding to Doug’s ‘official’ historical records. He also gave the benefit of his knowledge to the Yorkshire Air Museum, Elvington, Yorks. That said Doug always remained forward-thinking in his outlook by keeping up-to-date in modern aviation matters as well as using modern technology until shortly before his death.

Every year without fail, he would attend the Squadron Association’s Reunions as well its annual Remembrance Sunday service, held each year at the 10 Squadron War Memorial which was built in 1985 at the entrance to the former RAF Melbourne, East Yorkshire wartime airfield. With funds raised by Doug and his other wartime colleagues, the Memorial honours those of his contemporaries who had failed to return or who died helping achieve 10 Squadron's wartime record of 300 missions; this sadly being accomplished with the loss of 128 seven-man Halifax bombers. The Memorial further pays tribute to the local area’s residents, who did much to make the RAF personnel welcome between August 1942 and September 1945 and today it is now the focus of remembrance for all who have ever served on the Squadron at any time.

Doug (left) with with former air gunner Fred Tiller (rt) would often be an escort with the Association Standard Party on Remembrance Sunday at Melbourne. Even into his early nineties Doug’s marching onto parade looked as smart as it would have have been in his former RAF days.
Doug too will now always be remembered here

We think Doug would now be slightly amused to learn that, in its draft stages it was planned to write 10 pages here for this short biography, in his honour and memory. In fact, there are now 11+ pages, since just one more was added to allow space for the two photos of him above with his dear wives Dorothy and Maud.

We trust he would forgive us for not sticking to 10. – ‘We were a bit ‘off-target’ skipper.’

Grateful thanks go to Linda Fulton of The Honourable Company of Air Pilots for her kind help in providing information, and unknown others whose photographs we have used.

To say that we will miss Doug is a gross understatement. He was a much-liked, charming and delightful man to know and was one who possessed so many attributes which are often considered old-fashioned and almost unnecessary in today's modern world; those of patriotism, courage, honour, integrity, humour, consideration for others, determination and above all, decency.

Put very simply he was a man whom we came to both admire and love and he was a true friend to so many. – Not a bad pilot either!

Rest in peace Doug. God Bless - We'll miss you.

Douglas Evans, DFC

January 1922 – December 2018