Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Gordon Beavis, KCB, CBE, AFC, was born in August 1929 and until his death in June 2020 aged 90, lived in Pissouri Village, near Limassol, Cyprus. He was married in the Willesden area of north-west London to the late Joy Marion Jones in 1950. Lady Beavis sadly passed away in January 2017. The couple had a daughter Lynn, and a son Simon during their life together.

Educated at Kilburn Grammar School, Beavis joined the Royal Air Force in 1947 and was commissioned two years later. In June 1961 he set the record for the fastest non-stop flight from the UK to Australia which he established by flying a Vulcan from RAF Scampton to RAAF Richmond in just over 20 hours.

He became Officer Commanding No 10 Squadron flying VC10s in 1966 and Group Captain Flying at RAF Akrotiri in 1968. He was appointed Assistant Director of Defence Policy at the Ministry of Defence in 1971, Senior Air Staff Officer at Headquarters RAF Germany in 1976 and Director General of RAF Training in 1977. He was later to become Commandant of the RAF Staff College, Bracknell in 1980, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief at Support Command in 1981 and Deputy Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces Central Europe in 1984. He retired in 1987.

Our gratitude goes to both Sir Michael and his daughter Lynn for their cooperation in allowing us the following personal viewpoint of Sir Michael’s career.

IN SIR MICHAEL’S OWN WORDS…………………………

Where do I start to describe such a privileged journey?

Well, the first thing was to commandeer my daughter to help me pen a summary of my love of, and life in, the Royal Air Force. She started by jogging my less than perfect memory via the rather dry content in Who’s Who, detailing the many and varied roles and opportunities I was so fortunate to have experienced during a hugely satisfying and happy 39-year career. There were so many wonderful memories and lasting friendships forged over those years, it will be tricky to précis the highlights – but here we go.........
I fell deeply in love with aircraft and flying at the age of 13 when, evacuated to Northampton during the war years, I joined the Air Training Corps, cheekily falsifying my age to do so.

The upshot was a fantastic chance to strike relationships with some of the charismatic chaps in the US Air Force based at nearby Molesworth, who were flying B-17s. Thanks to their willingness to take us under their wing, so to speak, I had completed 100 hours air experience and eight hours ‘stick time’ by the time I was 15. Add to this, 30 hours Link training, navigation tuition, including use of ‘Gee’, and gunnery training. Such thrilling good fortune irreversibly sealed my ambition! I just had to take to the skies.

Back in London in 1945 and having completed my education at Kilburn Grammar School, I was biding my time in a less than exciting job as a junior clerk-cum-reporter on the Boxing News. Walter and Mary, my none-too well-off parents, very generously coughed up the cash to enable me to use my weekends to gain a private pilot’s licence at Herts and Essex Aero Club, Broxbourne, for which I will ever be grateful.

It was during my time as a cub reporter that I met my beloved wife Joy – we were both 17. Joy was working on a glamorous fashion magazine, and undoubtedly had the looks, confidence and style to go with it, a fact that not only set my heart racing, but made an enormous difference and major contribution to our married life together in the RAF when she finally accepted my hand in marriage, aged 21.

By now, having joined the RAF in 1947, gained my “wings” and been commissioned two years later, I cannot describe how Joy threw herself into the life we set out on together with her charisma, social skills and famous feistiness.

My first posting was to 43 Squadron, flying Meteors, where I flew as number two in our five-aircraft formation aerobatic team from mid-tour to the end.

Next came 608 Sqn Royal Aux Air Force, where I flew Vampires for two years, very much a younger man among older chaps, most of whom had served in the war flying ‘ heavies’.

I was lucky enough to be given a two-year exchange tour with the RNZAF in 1954 flying Vampires. Under the command of Squadron Leader (later Group Captain) Norman Curtis, married to his wonderful wife Jean, I met and worked with a lifelong friend. It was quite simply thoroughly enjoyable.

Joy was able to join me once I was 25 (the rule in those days) and our first born Lynn arrived in Palmeston North shortly before the tour ended. The RAF being a great place to make lifetime friendships, Lynn is still close to the Curtiss offspring and her children to theirs. - Three generations now!
Returning to RAF Finningley in 1956 at a time when, sadly, Fighter Command had been decimated by a recent Defence Review, my next posting was to Bomber Command RAF Scampton and the terrific experience of flying Vulcans and being promoted to Squadron Leader. By now, our second child Simon had made his appearance.

An unforgettable highlight of that tour was the chance to captain the first non-stop flight from the UK to Australia - Scampton to Sydney - in 20 hours, 3 minutes and 17 seconds (a record that still stands today I believe), refueling over Cyprus, Karachi and North and South Malaysia.

My eldest grandson recently found a short 1961 Pathe News film of our arrival in Sydney on the internet, which I must say made my day and which I have to admit I have saved to ‘favourites’ on my laptop.

*Note; see Pathe News: [https://www.britishpathe.com/video/vulcans-wonder-record](https://www.britishpathe.com/video/vulcans-wonder-record)*

Staff College followed in 1963, and then a stint at the MOD between 1964 and 1966.

Few people enjoy a desk-bound posting and I was no exception, but good staff work is essential to successful operations.
Flying became everyday life again when I joined as Officer Commanding, the newly re-formed No 10 Sqn, flying VC10s in 1966. We started with just one aircraft and two crews, based at Brize Norton. However, we had to train out of Fairford and operate up and down the route from Lyneham for nine months while the runway lighting at Brize was being renewed. I can't quite remember, but I think by the end of that tour in 1968 we were approaching some fourteen aircraft, with 32 crews and nearly 200 cabin staff. - Marvellous.

Among our varied duties, we took on Royal and VIP flights as well as our conventional role as troop transporters. I honestly think my command of 10 Squadron was the best posting of my career. The words ‘teamwork’, ‘camaraderie’ and ‘job satisfaction’ particularly spring to mind.

Our terrific station commander Group Captain Bob Wilson and his wife Margaret ensured a very happy station.
One amusing memory and tale of my crew involved the fictitious ‘Golden Flip-Flop Cabaret Club Addu Atoll’ - (a mere 5-minute swim through shark-infested waters from the Aircrew Mess at RAF Gan), and a pilot officer (WRAF) Air Traffic Controller from Brize Norton.

She had managed to get herself a staff/supernumerary seat out to Singapore and back and we had the privilege of her presence at Gan on the evening of her 21st birthday.

I believe it was the flight engineer Cliff Hall who suggested to her that we would be delighted to make a special foray to the Golden Flip-Flop in honour of the occasion. She scampered off to change and returned beautifully attired for a sophisticated evening. Sadly, the slow dawning that the Golden Flip-Flop’s existence was purely a gag produced a near hysterical outburst of tears, mollified only by the hasty purchase of champagne – mainly, as I recall it, at my and not Cliff Hall’s expense.
After my 10 Squadron VC10 flying tour my next job from 1 January 1969, was at RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus, as Group Captain Flying. It was by then the largest operational RAF station in the world, commanded by Air Commodore (later Air Chief Marshal) Sir John Stacey.

That posting was the start of a lifetime association with the island of Cyprus. Joy found a lovely little cottage holiday home in Pissouri Village which she enjoyed renovating and, on retirement, we built another house that became our main home.

Note: In May 2007 the doors of the newly-created RAF Akrotiri Museum were opened officially by ACM Sir Michael Beavis, a former RAF Akrotiri Gp Capt Flying.

Another MOD posting as Assistant Director Defence Policy between 1971-73 meant a return to Whitehall and wearing civvies – enough said!

In 1974 I was fortunate enough to be selected to the Royal College of Defence Studies, which proved to be a great experience. That was followed by three years at RAF Rheindahlen in Germany, first as Group Captain Offensive Ops and mid-tour, on promotion to Air Commodore, (on 27 September 1975), the role of Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO).

Back to the MOD yet again in 1977-80 as Director General of RAF Training. This time, happily, it led to my appointment as Commandant RAF Staff College in Bracknell. I like to think that, although it was very hard work for the students, there was always a good relationship between them and the staff. The job came with a lovely spacious residence, and many a formal and informal dinner party took place!

It was then on to Huntingdon, Cambs, where I became C-in-C RAF Support Command – a big job that I thoroughly enjoyed, and the venue from which my daughter was married in 1982. One stand-out memory was hosting the then Defence Secretary Sir Michael (now Lord) Heseltine to dinner and then breakfast. It was a source of great pride that my son Simon, following my daughter Lynn into journalism, started his career on Flight International. He was later to join The Guardian following his coverage of the long-running Westland Helicopters saga, which had put Margaret Thatcher at loggerheads with Mr Heseltine.

Note: It was during the week in early 1986, when the Westland Saga came to a head that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, accompanied by husband Denis, took time off to attend a 10 Squadron Dining-in night at RAF Brize Norton to celebrate her 10 years in No 10. The guests were hosted by OC10 Wg Cdr Len Marshal, MBE and his wife Jan.

And finally, I was promoted to Deputy C-in-C Allied Forces Central Europe under a German General. We enjoyed a fabulous home near Maastricht and the chance to entertain countless international dignitaries, blue-sky thinkers and movers and shakers. Really challenging at times, as ever Joy was the greatest of assets. It was a fascinating end to a privileged career.

I went on to do a couple of commercial non-executive directorships with Alliance Aircraft USA and Skyepharma, before finally hanging up my hat in 2002.
Writing this in 2017 brings great sadness as well as tremendous memories…..

We lost Joy in January this year -, such a blow.

Meanwhile, I bumble along with a view from my sitting room across the bay to the Akrotiri peninsular and its runway. My goodness, they've been busy of late.

I often wonder where life would have taken us had I joined the Royal Air Force 50 years later…………..

Note: Sir Michael, who passed away peacefully at his home in Pissouri, Cyprus on 7 June 2020, recounted these memories to his daughter Lynn in late 2017 and mentioned the view he had of RAF Akrotiri from his home.

Then, and to date, 10 Squadron crews, nowadays equipped with Airbus A330 Voyager tanker/transport aircraft, are detached to Akrotiri flying daily tanking missions in support of Coalition aircraft over Syria and Iraq in the conflict against Islamic State (Daesh) forces.

Lady Joy Beavis (1929-2017)

Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael G. Beavis, KCB, CBE, AFC (1929 – 2020)

RIP