

IN MEMORIAM

AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR DOUGLAS CHARLES LOWE GCB DFC AFC (1933-38)

Sir Douglas Lowe who has died, aged 95, was the senior surviving Past President of the Old Redingensians Association (his year of Office fell in 1978/79).

He achieved a higher rank in the Royal Air Force than any other old boy of the School to date. There have indeed been only 140 serving officers who became Air Chief Marshals in the entire 100-year old history of the service.

An impressive career took him to become Chief of Defence Procurement for not only the Air Force but also the Navy and Army Systems – the first officer to assume such wide-ranging responsibility. He became highly regarded internationally.



Image courtesy of Air Historical Branch RAF

Dougie won a scholarship to Reading School and was in West House initially, moving to County House in 1935. When he left from VI.Sc.B, at age 16 he had been a Corporal in the Officer Training Corps and was armed with Certificate A, a Royal Life Saving Society Bronze Medal and his School Certificate.

Aircraft were a passion; his father worked for Miles Aircraft Limited at Woodley Aerodrome and was able to introduce his son to the Company. From there it was natural that he should join the Royal Air Force when war engulfed the country. He enlisted in November 1940 when he was 18.

His training as a pilot was in the United States, under an exchange scheme, and he returned to the UK as a Sergeant Pilot. He trained on Wellingtons and in 1942 flew on a 1000 bomber raid to Bremen. Dougie then converted to Stirlings flying five operations as a second pilot before being commissioned in January 1943 and posted to No 75 Squadron at Newmarket. From there, during the Battle of the Ruhr, he flew on raids to attack industrial targets in Hamburg, Essen and Berlin suffering damage to his aircraft a number of times although always making it back to base. After this tour, he was awarded the DFC, the citation reading *An outstanding captain who was an inspiration to the Squadron.*

He became a bombing instructor and was mentioned in despatches. At the end of the war in Europe he became a senior instructor at the Bomber Command School. His expertise in this post brought him the AFC in 1946.

A number of appointments followed which included flying the Mosquito (his favourite plane) and the Canberra jet before attending Staff College after which, in 1955, he was posted to the Operational Requirements Directorate at the Air Ministry, where he became involved in the TSR 2 Bomber project. Further increasingly senior appointments in the Directorate followed.

In December 1958 it was back to bombers for Dougie, by then a Wing Commander, with the Vickers Valiant - part of the UK's nuclear deterrent – and with responsibility for operations at RAF Marham before taking command of 148 Squadron there.

He was now amongst the RAF's most experienced bomber pilots and in 1961 was appointed to HQ at USAF's Strategic Air Command in Nebraska. He was there at the height of the Cold War and during the period of the Cuban Missile Crisis. He left the US in 1963 as a Group Captain and became Officer Commanding RAF Cranwell for three years.

Further promotion, the Imperial Defence College and then a return to the MoD, this time as Director of Operational requirements with special responsibility for maritime, transport and training aircraft (including Nimrod) followed.

He became Senior Air Staff Officer at HQ in Cyprus in 1969 and in 1971 came his third appointment in RAF operational requirements as Assistant Chief of Air Staff in the rank of Air Vice Marshal.

In 1973 he was commanding the RAF Maritime Forces and had a Nato appointment giving him responsibility for operations in the Eastern Atlantic and the English Channel using Nimrod on surveillance flights. (Inter alia in the 'Cod War'.)

In 1975, as an Air Chief Marshal, he was Controller Aircraft, MOD and from September 1972 Chief of Defence Procurement. From 1978-83 Dougie Lowe was Air ADC to The Queen. He was appointed CB (1971), KCB (1974), and GCB (1977) and was a Companion of the Royal Aeronautical Society. He chose as his motto on being admitted to the Order of the Bath: *Fere Non Satis Est*, which translates as *Near enough is not good enough*.

In retirement, he became a non-executive director of Rolls Royce and Chairman of Mercury Communications.

Dougie married Betty Nichols in 1944 and they moved to Byfleet in 1956 and eventually into Westland Cottage; more than a home - the very hub of their existence. St Mary's Church, where Dougie's funeral service took place on 13 February, was similarly of great importance to the couple: for Betty until her death in 2008 and for Dougie right up to and including his final year which was spent in Kings Lodge Care Home. A large congregation paid their respects at the service, held on a rainswept day and in the presence of the representative of HM The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Lord Craig of Radley.

The Rev Dr John McCabe referred to Dougie as 'a man who walked faithfully with the gracious God who has now called him home'.

Douglas Lowe is survived by his son, John and his daughter, Frances (Lady Glanusk). He was a grandfather and great grandfather. KCB

D C Lowe, born 14 March 1922 died 24 January 2018 aged 95.