

## SQUADRON LEADER MICHAEL FRANCIS HILARY DOBSON AFC (R34-42)

He was born on 10 September 1924 and left the College at 17½. He spent 6 months in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve Training (RAFVRT) at Christ Church College, Oxford, before joining the University Air Squadron first flying the Tiger Moth at RAF Abingdon. Following grading school at the Blackburn Aircraft Co airfield at Brough, he was graded as u/t (under training) Pilot.

Sailed to America in late 1943 to No 3 British Flying Training School in Miami, Oklahoma. Awarded Wings on 17 June 1944.

On return to UK he was drafted into the Glider Pilot Regiment, following the heavy losses at Arnhem. Joined "G" Squadron at Great Dunmow, Essex to prepare for Operation Varsity – the Rhine crossing. When the time came he was actually unable to take part, owing to an injury sustained in loading a jeep into a Horsa glider. Later he met **Leonard "David" Brook (S36-40)** "resting" at Lyme Regis, recovering from a wound in his shoulder.

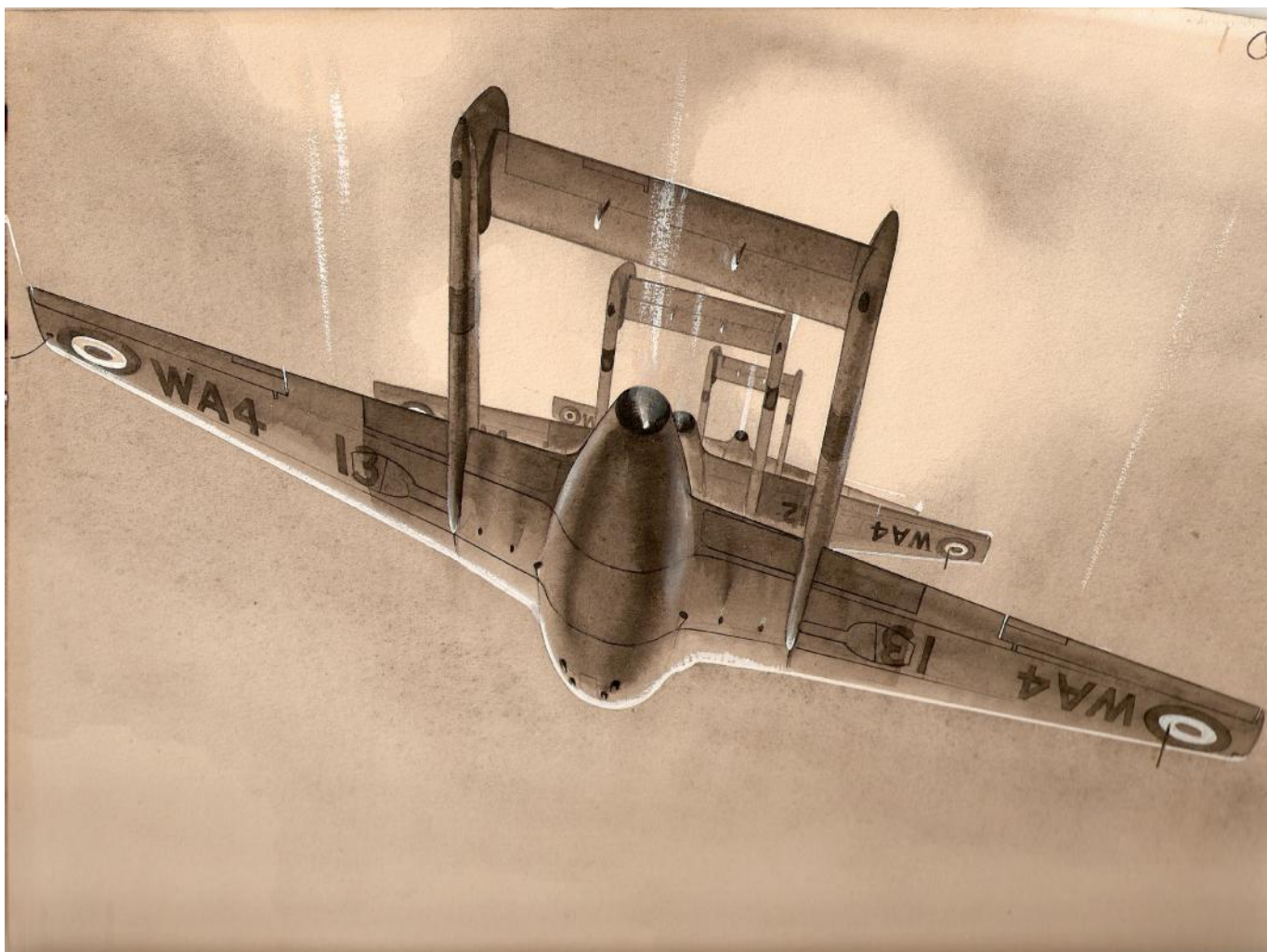
He decided to stay in the services after the war and began powered flying on the Airspeed Oxford. He converted to the De Haviland Mosquito and was posted to 98 Squadron at RAF Wahn, Germany, which was part of 139 Wing British Air Forces of Occupation (BAFO). Returned to UK after 2 years to attend Officer Cadet Training Units (OCTU) and commissioned after a 6 weeks course. Posted to 109 Squadron, Coningsby flying the Mosquito he was once again doing Path Finder Force (PFF), as used during the war.

He was selected to do a Flying Instructor's course at the Central Flying School at Little Rissington and was awarded a B2 category in 1949. This began over 12 years in the role of a "trainer". He was first posted to 7 FTS Cottessmore, where he met **Peter Bailey (K34-38)** who was stationed at North Luffenham, Leicestershire, flying Dakotas. He applied to join a Meteor Advanced Flying School at Middleton, St George (now Teeside Airport) – the 2<sup>nd</sup> jet school to open. He later formed the next school at RAF Valley, Anglesey, where A2 category was awarded along with an instrument rating examiner's certificate. During this time as a Standards Officer, he taught the future commandant of the Central Flying School (CFS) to fly the Meteor (Air Vice Marshall Ivor Broom). He also taught 3 other senior officers who were about to take up station commander appointments.

In June 1953 he was detailed along with 3 other pilots to take part in a formation fly past over RAF Odiham, Hampshire. This was known as the Queen's Coronation Review. On 20 June 1953 they were detached to RAF Oakington, Cambridge, to rehearse for the event, flying Vampire Mk VBs. They represented No 25 group, which was part of Flying Training Command. On the day, 15 July 1953, a photographer from the magazine *Aeroplane* flew in the "box" position with an instructor, in Vampire t11 and described the formation as "Flying to Perfection". This picture was taken at the time and Mike's Vampire is highlighted with a red arrow.



Mike has sent an original painting by a "flight artist" of the Vampires "line astern" for the Royal Review, which you can see below. Mike's plane is WA4 13, which he says was subsequently written off by a trainee at RAF Valley!



After 3½ years at RAF Valley, he was posted to RAF Scampton in Bomber Command, flying the Canberra. His duties were to carry out Instrument rating tests on Squadron pilots in the role of Unit Master pilot. He learned of the award of the Air Force Cross (AFC) at this time (10 June 1954) <sup>1</sup>. There followed a ground tour at HQ No 1 Group Bawtry, where he flew the future Commandant of CFS to North Africa in the HQ Canberra – there and back in the day. When Air Commodore Whitworth was appointed Commandant, he asked Michael to join the staff of CFS, which started a new and rewarding spell as an examiner, presenting the opportunity to fly the boss to Salisbury, Rhodesia via Malta, El



Adem, Khartoum and Nairobi. Further overseas visits were made to Spain and Portugal with the Chief Flying Instructor and others on board the Valetta twin engined transport. Shortly promoted to Squadron Leader and posted to Command No 2 Squadron at the RAF Flying College in Manby, Lincolnshire, flying Canberras, Hunters and Meteors.

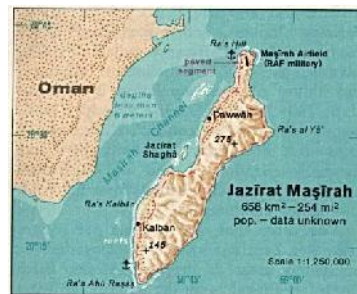
In 1961 it seemed that flying was over for a while, as a posting came through to become a selection officer at the Officers and Aircrew Selection Centre base at RAF Biggin Hill in Kent. Candidates for service in the RAF included Padres, Doctors, Aircrew and women applicants for the administrative trades. He found it interesting to interview all manner of British youth, likewise those seeking more mature careers.



Having opted for an overseas posting, he was interviewed for an appointment to join the British Joint Services Training Team (BJSTT) in Ghana, West Africa in 1964. The vacancy was for the OC of the Training School at Takoradi, flying Chipmunk, Beaver, Otter and Caribou. The duties also carried the CFS Agency Scheme, which meant recategorising both RAF and Ghanaian instructors and doing annual instrument rating tests. He returned to UK in 1966.

His next posting was to be Personal Staff Officer (PSO) to the Director of Engine Research & Development in St Giles Court, London. Duties included advising Director general of aero engine defects and making regular visits to Rolls Royce in Derby and Bristol, to study the progress of the Pegasus to power the Harrier. The main task of this department of the Ministry of Technology was to ensure the reliability of engines.

After 3½ years in Ministry of Technology, he got a surprise posting to a tiny island off the SE coast of Saudi Arabia in the Sultanate of Oman, called Masirah. My duties were Senior Admin Officer to support the CO Wing Commander Max Higson. This was an unaccompanied tour of about 6 months – a great challenge in the most unfamiliar surroundings. Masirah became a vital staging post for US and RAF aircraft passing through on their way to the Gulf War. It was here that he experienced the first signs of what turned out to be Meniere's Disease and though partly under control, he was obliged to attend the Chief Medical Examiner for aircrew fitness. Here he was seen by **Air Vice Marshal Peter King (S36-39)** in London, who has to categorise him as "unfit". However, one more posting was offered while various decisions were made about his future and this was back to RAF Biggin Hill on the staff of the Personal Selection Training School, until he retired in 1973. "A sad end to a wonderful career."



He died at Hethersett Hall Care Home, Norwich, on 28th July 2013, aged 88.



Michael was the brother of **General Sir Patrick Howard-Dobson GCB (R33-40)**

<http://www.oldframlinghamian.com/images/articles/GENERALSIRPATRICKHOWARD-DOBSONGCBR33-40.pdf>

- <sup>1</sup> Regarding the AFC, Mike says "In 1954 the London Gazette promulgated my name as having been awarded the Air Force Cross. Confirmation was later received stating that this officer had obtained exceptional assessments as a pilot and instructor on jet aircraft carrying out duties as unit standardisation and instrument rating examiner. Conversion of senior officers to solo standard in Meteor and Vampire aircraft completed my tour at 202 Advanced Flying School RAF Valley. Total instructional hours at this unit – 626.00. Total jet hours 883.30. Total flying hours on retirement – 3,900.45