

## GROUP CAPTAIN DENYS HEYWOOD (1926–2010)



Denys and I shared many common interests from our respective service careers and I feel very privileged to be writing this 'salute' to someone for whom I had the utmost personal and professional respect.

Denys was born in India but lived with relations in the UK during the war years. In 1944 he was allowed out of school to sign up for the Fleet Air Arm but was unable to find the RN recruiting office. He was about to give up when he saw the RAF office; the rest is history and the Navy lost a great flier.

In 1945 he was sent to the Middle East where aircraft and desert landings strips were often unreliable so accidents were common: in one he lost a couple of fingers, in another he had to bribe some Bedouins to guard the aircraft, rather than remove parts of it, while he went for help. The 1950s included time flying with the Royal Navy from aircraft carriers, so achieving his schoolboy ambition. Cold war operations based in Germany – where his Soviet opposite numbers patrolled within sight just the other side of the border – also meant he was close to ski slopes. This was a sport he pursued all his life achieving the distinction of a free ski pass at 75. More importantly though, it was on the ski slopes that he met Buffy whom he married in 1957.

In 1964 he was promoted Wing Commander and appointed CO of the Dambusters squadron. His task was to maintain the Blue Steel nuclear deterrent mounted on Vulcan aircraft at full alert 24 hours a day. This tour was followed by three years in America, working largely underground with Strategic Air Command, interspersed with family caravan holidays exploring the States.

In 1971 he was promoted again and appointed Group Captain Flying at Akrotiri in Cyprus, then the biggest RAF flying base in the world; so a perfect posting for Denys to complete a career in which he flew so many different aircraft that his peers called him '57 varieties'. The family, now including Rob, Annabel, Carol and Simon, found life on a Mediterranean island pretty perfect too!

The Heywoods moved to Deddington in 1977 just after Denys retired. For 10 years he was Bursar at Tudor Hall School, then retired again to look after the grounds of Deddington Manor and enjoy playing sport. He was a lead player in the Deddington Tennis Club at which he excelled with deceptively casual expertise – along with squash and later golf – and skiing of course.

Deddington will remember Denys as a quietly courteous and enormously supportive member of the community with a mischievous sense of humour and always a twinkle in his eye.

*Rob Forsyth*