

Valete - Squadron Leader Peter Crouch, AFM (Retired)

We record with sadness and respect the passing of a long time FONFA Member and supporter, who knew Bernard Baily, our Founder Trustee, well. Peter Crouch had a long, successful, and varied RAF career, covering a multitude of postings and very different aircraft types, which are recorded below.

Peter sadly passed away on 14 January 2018, and is survived by his son Brian, who kindly assisted Ian Potts in compiling this tribute for FONFA.

Born in Reading in 1923, flying was in Peter's blood - his father had been an Air Observer in the RFC and RAF. Peter grew up in Hazlemere, near High Wycombe, then moved to Oxford and attended the School of Technology, Art, and Commerce.

With World War 2 well underway, Peter joined the RAF in 1942 and, following training in Canada on Fleet Finches and Harvards, he was awarded his Wings, promoted to Sergeant Pilot, and posted back to the UK. Eventually sent for further training on twin engined aircraft, Peter was then posted to 42 OTU at Ashbourne in Derbyshire, where he was flying Whitleys and Albemarle. The latter didn't impress him, preferring to fly the Whitley on training flights, which entailed glider towing and parachute troop drops.

Peter then moved on to a Heavy Conversion Unit, to complete a course flying Halifaxes, with more glider towing and parachute drops. On this posting Peter spent some time towing the 'monster' Hamilcar gliders, with a dummy load of 6 tons of concrete blocks(!) to simulate the tank they were intended to carry - Peter described these flights as "interesting".

With the war finally ended, Peter decided to stay in the RAF and served with 297 Squadron from December 1945. He and Mary (also RAF, a Flt Sgt(SIB) serving in the RAF Police) married in 1947, and had a son Brian, born in 1948.

Peter was posted to 47 Squadron in 1948, to fly the new Hastings transport, serving some time in Germany, flying in the Berlin Airlift.

Peter's next move was to No.1 Air Navigation School in 1949, flying the Anson Mk 21, followed by a posting to the Central Flying School at Little Rissington in 1951, eventually instructing on various types including Prentices, Harvards Chipmunks, Meteors, Vampires and Hunters, with moves to Moreton in the Marsh, Western Zoyland, Worksop, Swinderby and Oakington until 1960, when Peter was officially "grounded".

At this point in his RAF career, he headed to the Far East, with a posting as an Operations Officer, spending 2 years and 6 months in Singapore, but still flying, albeit with the Royal Singapore Flying Club, logging 600 hours as their Chief Flying Instructor!

Peter returned to the UK in 1962, to complete a conversion course at Thorney Island, flying Argosies, later appointed as an instructor on this type, at 242 OCU, from 1963 to 1966. In 1966 Peter was posted back to Singapore, to 215 Squadron, still flying the Argosy, moving to Cyprus in 1967 with 70 Squadron, again on Argosies, until 1970 when he was posted back to the UK, to the Air Support Examining Team, with responsibility for Argosy, Andover and Caribou operations, Peter then moved back to Thorney Island and 242 OCU, as Andover Wing pilot, until 1975.

He was posted back to Canada in 1975, as the Detachment Commander at Gander, Newfoundland, returning to the UK a few years later and finally retired from RAF duties in June 1978.

Peter had flown biplane trainers, bombers, jet fighters and four engined heavy transports in his RAF career, logging over 11,000 flying hours, on 75 different aircraft types, and had been awarded the Air Force Medal for his Instructing service in 1954.

Peter continued flying, employed as the Laura Ashley company pilot for 10 years, until 1988. He was actively involved with the Aircrew Association, Bournemouth branch, serving as Branch Secretary and then as Chairman, and also held office at National level, as the Aircrew Association Chairman, being appointed in 1984 and serving in this capacity until 1991. Peter was always an active and supportive member of FONFA, and enjoyed attending Open Days and Memorial events, happily meeting up with old friends and acquaintances; his presence, companionship, enthusiastic assistance, and anecdotes will be sorely missed.