



CAPTAIN ERIC (WINKLE) BROWN CBE DSC AFC RN 1919 - 2016

It is with deep regret that the passing of Captain Eric Melrose Brown CBE DSC AFC is announced. Eric was the most decorated pilot of the Fleet Air Arm in which service he was universally known as 'Winkle' on account of his diminutive stature. He also held three absolute Guinness World Records, including for the number of aircraft carrier deck landings and types of aeroplane flown.

He was born in Leith, Scotland on 21 January 1919 and educated at Fettes College and the University of Edinburgh, where he learned to fly in the University Air Squadron. His early flying experiences were with his father, a member of the Royal Flying Corps during the First World War and later Air Attaché in Berlin. During trips to Berlin as a student, Eric Brown witnessed the 1936 Olympic Games and the first indoor helicopter flights by Hanna Reitsch, Germany's greatest female aviator, with whom he corresponded until her death in 1979.

Germany was to figure in Eric Brown's life for the next 75 years. He was a fluent speaker from time in the Third Reich as a language student, where, at one stage, he was arrested by the SS and deported.

To earn money for his studies, Eric Brown became a 'wall of death' rider on a small 250cc two-stroke motorbike, often sharing the wall with his boss and a fully-grown male lion riding pillion.

His flying skills were to send him to fly fighters from the world's smallest aircraft carrier, HMS *Audacity* where he survived the ship being sunk by U-Boat on 21 December 1941. During this time, he survived the first of 20 flying accidents and, mid-Atlantic, was wounded by return fire from a German long-range bomber, which he promptly shot down.

At the end of the war, he returned to Germany at the direction of Winston Churchill to capture and fly advanced German aeroplanes. He flew them all and questioned their designers in detail.

He witnessed the liberation of Bergen-Belsen camp, acting as interpreter for the trial of the camp commandants. Later, he interrogated prominent Nazis, including Hermann Göring, Heinrich Himmler and the senior Luftwaffe.

As Chief Naval Test Pilot, Eric Brown achieved some notable firsts, including the landing the first jet, the first twin-engined aeroplane, and the first with a tricycle undercarriage on an aircraft carrier. His work with the navalised Spitfire, called the Seafire, was fundamental to giving the Fleet Air Arm a modern fighter aeroplane on a par with land-based contemporaries.

Other notable aviation achievements immediately post-war included work with experimental aeroplanes which were reaching the sound barrier, the great unknown of contemporary flight. In fact, had the Attlee Government not given away the technology, Eric Brown would have been the first man to fly faster than the speed of sound in the Miles M52.

He tested the world's only jet-powered seaplane fighter in the Solent, learned to fly helicopters and was posted to support the American test programmes at Patuxent River, where he met the future astronauts.

In 1957, he put his German language skills to good use when he was appointed to train the embryonic German Naval Air Arm and he maintained his links with the country for the rest of his life, including addressing the Luftwaffe Veterans' Association annual meetings in Berlin. He was British Naval Attaché in Bonn and ADC to the Queen.

Eric Brown retired from the Royal Navy in 1970 in the rank of Captain and became the Director-General of the British Helicopter Advisory Board at a critical period when helicopters were brought into service for the North Sea oil business. He was President of the Royal Aeronautical Society 1982-83.

Before and after retirement, he wrote a series of autobiographical books including 'Wings on my Sleeve', 'Wings of the Luftwaffe' and 'Wings of the Weird and Wonderful'. He wrote detailed forewords for aviation books, the last one being 'Spitfire People' in 2015. Eric Brown was the subject of the 3000th edition of 'Desert Island Discs' in November 2014.

He was also honoured at No 10 Downing Street as a *Great Scot* in December 2015 and celebrated his 97th birthday with more than 100 pilots, including the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir George Zambellas, at Buck's Club in London on 27 January 2016.

In recent years, Eric Brown's unrivalled aviation knowledge and talents were still in demand, including by Lockheed Martin for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter's naval adaptation and the Airbus A 380 super-jumbo.

Eric Brown passed away on Sunday, 21 February at East Surrey Hospital, Redhill, Surrey after a short illness.

Eric Melrose Brown born 21 January 1919 at Leith; died 21 February 2016

His first wife, Lynn McCrory died in 1998 and his son, Glen, and his second wife, Jean Kelly Brown survive him.

Notes to Editors

1. Details of the funeral and memorial service have yet to be formalised.
2. Pictures of Eric Brown in recent years are available from John Goodman 07956 680270
3. Media and other enquiries to Paul Beaver 07836 622165

Issued on behalf of Captain Brown's family by Paul Beaver.