

Farewells

Sadly we have to record that Association member **Group Captain Sir Henry Riley** has died, aged 90. Henry's cremation was in Spain and there is to be a memorial service at mid-day on Friday 6th September at St Andrews Priory Church, Hamble.

Henry led a fascinating life both in and out of the RAF which he joined in the days of National Service in 1950. He wanted to be a pilot and serve a maximum of two years but he found that if he wanted to follow that path he had to sign for seven. At the time the RAF needed Engineering Officers who could be trained as pilots and test pilots, so he opted for that and after training in aeronautical and electronic engineering at RAF Henlow he was awarded his Commission in 1954. He began his flying training in 1955 at Hullavington and then Swinderby and won his wings, and was awarded the Sword of Honour, two years later.



Henry's first posting was to 74 Squadron as Engineering Officer. As part of that role he was the pilot responsible for routine air testing (*above*). His time on 74 coincided with deployments to Cyprus and Jordan where, in Henry's words, 'we were helping to put King Hussein on the throne.' During his first year on 74 there were two fatal accidents and pilots were told to prepare a 'death file' in case they didn't return from a sortie. This contained information that was meant to help the officer chosen to tell the wife of a pilot that he had been lost. Henry kept his file throughout his life.

74 was Henry's favourite squadron posting, so much so that he and his wife Antonia named their finca in Spain after it - Finca Los Tigres.



Henry described this as '74 Squadron Crew Room, with smokers, smoking themselves to death let alone falling out of the sky!'

After 74 he was posted to Marham to gain experience on the V-Force. It was here that Henry broke his ankle (a complicated fracture) but was still expected to fly and he did with one leg in plaster. No health and safety concerns in those days! But they were the days of the RAF's 'Flying Club' whereby aircraft could be 'borrowed' and Henry did so (one of 74's Hunters) to call in to say hello in advance of his posting to Marham. Unfortunately on departure from the base he jet blasted to smithereens an entire display of newly planted flowers for a royal visit. An inauspicious start to his new posting! After Marham he went to Boscombe Down and the RAF Flight Test Centre where he was involved in the conversion of RAF and Royal Navy aircraft to carry nuclear weapons. Whilst at Boscombe he visited the US Army nuclear weapons storage facility at Piccadilly Arsenal in New Jersey, as well as Naval Station Norfolk (Virginia) and the White Sands missile range in New Mexico.



Next came RAF Laarbruch before returning to the UK, the Staff College at Bracknell and promotion to Wing Commander before a posting to RAF Coltishall to set up the Lightning Conversion Unit. Of all the aircraft he flew in the RAF, the Lightning was Henry's favourite.

Further promotion to Group Captain preceded command of RAF Sealand (*left*) and then came three MoD appointments (Operational Requirements, Defence Procurement and Electrical Engineering) before retirement

from the RAF when Henry (a) took a post in industry and (b) bought a boat, *Sparrowsong* (*below*). In 1982 he joined the Royal Air Force Yacht Club.'

After retirement Henry found out that the RAF needed instructors for air cadets and, itching to get into the air again in any aircraft, he offered to instruct the youngsters on the Chipmunk. Henry always liked to relate a story of how the officer i/c instructor recruitment looked at Henry's log books, saw the thousands of hours on fighters and V-bombers and refused his application because he didn't have an instructor's licence. It took a bit of persuasion and a quick conversion course before he was allowed to get into a Chipmunk. 'He loved that job,' recalls Antonia, 'and he taught many kids to fly. He also taught me. I got my PPL in Miami and we had great fun flying over the Florida Keys, he in his Cessna and me in mine.' Henry and Antonia had married in 2007 at St Clement Dane's in London. See **Tiger News 45** on the website for the full story of that.



The post in industry that Henry initially took after his RAF retirement was with GEC Marconi Avionics. From there he moved to British Telecom in 1984 and then in 1987 he was appointed managing director of Signaal UK and was advisor to the president of the company in the Netherlands. On the merger of Signaalapparaten with Thomson-CSF he became UK Director, Naval Combat Systems, Detection Systems Group and when Thomson-CSF became Thales International NL he was made UK Director, continuing in this role until 2004. The year before, he had been granted the rare distinction of being elevated to be Knight in the Order of Orange Nassau by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands for services to UK-Netherlands trade promotion. He was instrumental in securing a huge contract - the Horizon Programme - which saw Thales NL long range radars being fitted to frigates of five European navies, securing work for the British and Dutch for years to come. Our own Queen Elizabeth allowed Henry to style himself Sir Henry and Antonia as Lady Riley.

After Thales, Henry moved on to a German company, Diehl BGT Defence GmbH and was with them until 2014 when at the age of 86 he finally retired.

Our Vice-President Boz Robinson was a personal friend of Henry's having served together at Horsham St Faith when 74 were flying Hunters. 'Our times together on the squadron were by far the best of those days,' writes Boz, 'and I fondly remember jousting with Henry over matters, but we always remained the very best of friends. What a sad loss it is.'



Henry with Princess Margaret, he always joked he was her next best Group Captain after Peter Townsend!

With my thanks to Lady Riley (Antonia) for all her assistance in preparing this farewell.