

## Ken Goodwin



74 Squadron lost one of its most charismatic Commanding Officers when Air Commodore Ken Goodwin C.B.E. A.F.C. died peacefully on the afternoon of 5<sup>th</sup> September surrounded by his family. He was 92. Ken, who as a Wing Commander was OC 74 between October 1966 and 31st March 1969, was a much loved and respected Commanding Officer who together with his wife Sue, who herself sadly passed away at the end of 2019, personified all that goes to make up the spirit of the Tigers. His funeral was held on 25<sup>th</sup> September but sadly was subject to coronavirus restrictions in terms of numbers attending. Nevertheless Ken's son and daughter Richard and Penny arranged a moving service at which Ian McBride spoke of his memories of his former Boss.

Ken Goodwin was a legendary aerobatic display pilot in the Hunter and Lightning eras. Whilst in Germany during the 50s he was one of the instigators of a Pythonesque company known as the Jever Steam Laundry whose aim was to promote camaraderie, professional excellence in

the air and a riotous style of living. This statement epitomised Ken's approach to life from there onwards. He achieved great success in his operational duties and was at the centre of many social events which would often feature him energetically playing the piano or appearing in wild fancy dress.

I had the pleasure and honour of serving under Ken continuously at RAF Leuchars in Fife and then at Tengah in Singapore. He was blessed with a number of strengths which characterised his career from a basic tradesman to Commandant of RAF Air Cadets. The first was his motivation and determination to succeed which earned him a place on the prestigious cadet Drill Display Team, shortly to be followed by selection for elevation to officer rank and training as a pilot. No mean feat when you remember that the RAF was awash with officers and pilots after the Second World War. They clearly recognised a good 'un who they wished to retain and develop. When he graduated with his wings in January 1950 he was categorised as being 'proficient' which in simple terms meant that he was unlikely to kill himself in the near future. A mere five years later he was considered the best aerobatic pilot in RAF Germany and probably the RAF as a whole - an astonishing trajectory. Nor was he a one trick pony because he was also exceptional in gunnery and all the other skills that defined the day fighter pilot of that era. It was these skills which led to him being selected to play a pivotal role in the introduction of the Lightning into service and performing solo aerobatics at Farnborough and the Paris Air Shows in this exciting new aircraft alongside the RAF formation display team, mounted by No 74 Squadron.

When Ken resumed his connection with the Tigers in 1966 it was to take command of a unit which had just been equipped with the latest and most capable version of the mighty Lightning. It was also the period when Soviet air forces were starting to appear around the UK and the Tigers – within weeks of Ken taking charge – managed to pull off a well photographed interception of these aircraft. So great was the excitement around the UK that the BBC, in what would now be called

fake news, broadcast a report of the event using aircraft and (worse still) crews from RAF Wattisham rather than the Tigers. Ken, seeing an opportunity to be exploited, mounted a sortie from Leuchars to Wattisham and back during which he dropped leaflets over the station debunking the impression that Wattisham had done the job. His style was beginning to surface as he prepared his squadron for a major event, namely the deployment of 74 from Scotland to Singapore.

As part of the build up to the deployment the squadron was sent to Cyprus to gain experience in another theatre. Part of our duties was to hold Quick Reaction Alert during daylight hours. On Christmas Eve Ken and most of his aircrew were enjoying a party at Episcopi, the headquarters of the Middle East Command, made up of mainly Army and RAF staff. As the sun set in the west somebody thought it was the perfect setting for a Lightning fly-past. Ken, without hesitation, scrambled the duty Lightning which shortly thereafter laid on one of the most memorable and noisy displays seen for a while. Surprisingly the Air Commander gave it a massive thumbs down and instituted a disciplinary procedure to start on Christmas Day. However this process turned into farce when the Army Commander-in-Chief congratulated the Tigers on the splendid display!

The journey to Singapore was a major event, the first time that an entire squadron had deployed to the region with air refuelling support. On his final sector from the Maldives to Singapore Ken's ability to make rapid decisions in the air was tested. A tanker malfunction during the last refuelling bracket should, according to the rules, have resulted in a diversion to Ceylon. As the formation was turning in that direction, Ken evaluated the situation and over-rode the approved decision, setting course for Butterworth near Penang which they reached with reasonable fuel margins. A diversion to Ceylon would have caused chaos and a major delay. Ken arrived in Singapore a few hours late and the final wave arrived on time a few days later, a great success. His bold decision had been crucial.

The subsequent period at Tengah was a triumph for Ken. He led the Tigers from the front and achieved the performance goals set for him. We worked hard but, again with Ken in the van, we played hard too. Visits to Singapore city were regular and memorable excursions, slackening off slightly when the squadron Land Rover, our primary means of conveyance, was stolen when parked in one of the seedier parts of the city. From time to time Ken would get clearance to take a Lightning on a solo flight - in his words 'to blow away the cobwebs!' After a short delay he would reappear inverted over the airfield in the first manoeuvre of an immaculate aerobatic display thus showing us all how he had earned his distinguished reputation in former years. However all good things have to come to an end, and he moved on to further stages of his career leaving us in awe at the personality and skill of this charismatic leader.

In his appointment as Commandant of RAF Air Cadets his devotion to the Royal Air Force imbued the girls and boys of Air Cadet units throughout the country with the ethos of the parent service and highlighted the attractions of making a career in the RAF. The energy and excitement that he brought to his own life would have been powerful motivational forces in the performance of this his last tour in the RAF. The legend that was Ken left the scene to those for whom political correctness was more important than the lifestyle which he and his many admirers enjoyed.

If you had polled members of the Jever Steam Laundry on Ken's likely path through the RAF they would almost certainly have been wide of the mark. Few, if any, would have predicted that he would have filled posts requiring political sensitivity and the highest standards of decorum required by royal appointments, notably to the Queen's Flight and the High Commission in Canada. It was the mark of the man that he again distinguished himself, albeit not in the rough and tumble of the fighter world where taking a horse to a party in the officers mess or being driven home whilst

playing a piano in the back of a Land Rover were par for the course. Significantly Ken was an excellent mentor ensuring that his charges made the very best of their abilities and grew in well-founded confidence. He was also a very caring man and invariably tried to lift the spirits of those with concerns, usually by employing his trademark injunction of 'don't worry about a thing'.

His drive, enthusiasm, stamina and compassion for his fellow man endeared him to all who had the honour and joy of working for him. He enjoyed a full life, and his positive influence on those put in his trust was immense. At a reception to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tigers I was talking to one of his former senior NCOs and as we watched Ken in animated conversation with others who had served under him, my comrade said 'that Mr Goodwin was a grand squadron boss, the best, but he is also a lovely man.' Not a bad epitaph.

Ken came to 74 at RAF Leuchars on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1966 from the Far East Air Force where he had been Flight Safety Officer. He had travelled widely in this capacity and part of his brief involved advising on the preparation of Tengah on Singapore Island 'to receive an air defence squadron from the UK in the near future.' At the time of course he had no idea he would be commanding that squadron and he was candid enough to admit afterwards that many of the things he recommended he changed once he arrived in his capacity as OC 74! Ken had had previous contact with the Tigers in the early 1960s whilst he was with the Air Fighting Development Squadron at Coltishall. Now to the new young Tigers on the squadron he seemed to do the most outrageous things. They quickly fell under his spell however and willingly followed him wherever he led, although it must be said that there were times when Ken did make the job of his senior officers that much more difficult by virtue of his unorthodox approach. It cannot be denied that during the two and a half years he led 74 he had an extremely happy squadron with a tremendous spirit permeating all ranks.

He handed over command to Wing Commander Dennis Caldwell on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1969. At his dining out he was presented with a pewter tankard inscribed with his catchphrase *Don't Worry About A Thing*.



*Sue and Ken*