

## Air Vice-Marshal Charles Maughan

Air Vice-Marshal Charles Maughan, who has died aged 86, grabbed the headlines in July 1959 when he won the London to Paris Daily Mail Bleriot Anniversary Air Race flying a Hunter jet fighter.

Published: 6:03PM GMT 04 Jan 2010

Maughan was the commanding officer of No 65 Squadron based at Duxford when the newspaper announced that it would sponsor an air race between Marble Arch and the Arc de Triomphe to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the French pioneer's epic cross-Channel flight of 1909. Initially, Maughan and his pilots thought only that it would be "a good idea to enter", but this soon escalated into a major operation involving all the sections at Duxford.



Maughan (r) with his motorcyclist on the London-Paris race

To be near London, the race team deployed to Biggin Hill, where Maughan's Hunter was positioned. After numerous practice runs, during which the operation was refined to a high degree, Maughan made his attempt on July 22.

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From Marble Arch he travelled by an RAF police motorcycle to a hastily prepared helipad at Chelsea Reach, where a Sycamore helicopter was waiting to take him to Biggin Hill.

He jumped into a two-seat Hunter and flew to Villacoublay, followed by another helicopter ride to Issy, finishing, by RAF motorcycle again, at the Arc de Triomphe. His elapsed time was a remarkable 40 minutes 44 seconds.

Many techniques and devices had been used to shave seconds off the time, including the RAF police having brief control of traffic lights on the short journey through London. Unfortunately this did not help the pilot who recorded the second-fastest time. He was disqualified after his motor-cycle driver failed to notice a red traffic light as he cruised

past it at 80mph.

Maughan was presented with a cheque for £6,500, which was donated to charity, and a handsome trophy which he received from Lord Rothermere. The following February he was appointed a Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur and later that year was awarded the AFC.

Charles Gilbert Maughan was born in London on March 3 1923 and educated at St George Monoux College and Harrow County School. In January 1942 he joined the Fleet Air Arm, trained as a pilot and was commissioned in June 1943.

Maughan joined 836 squadron flying Swordfish from the merchant ship *Empire MacCallum*. These bulk grain carriers, built with a flight deck on top, served as bare-minimum aircraft carriers to sail with the Atlantic convoys as a deterrent to German U-boats.

With limited landing aids, a short deck and the Atlantic weather to contend with, flying operations were, at best, hazardous. On Christmas Eve 1944, Maughan was landing in difficult conditions when the wingtip of his Swordfish hit the superstructure and his aircraft fell into the sea. He was soon rescued.

Maughan flew Seafire fighters with 801 squadron in the latter months of the war before leaving the service in June 1946. He then worked for the control commission in Germany and, in May 1949, joined the RAF on a short service commission.

His early RAF career was as a fighter pilot flying Spitfires, Meteors and Venoms in the UK and in Germany. Attendance at the RAF college of air warfare was followed by command of No 65 Squadron.

After serving as the personal staff officer to the Assistant Chief of Air Staff (Operations) in the air ministry, Maughan was appointed to command a Vulcan squadron – a far cry from his many hours flying as a single-seat fighter pilot. As with all his appointments, Maughan tackled the demands of flying the big delta-wing aircraft with a single-minded dedication. He was determined to master the aircraft's unique capabilities and its role as Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent. Within a year he was promoted to group captain and left No IX Squadron to command the V-bomber base at Honington. Shortly after his departure, his Vulcan rear crew was killed in a landing accident, a tragedy that affected him deeply.

Maughan's RAF career was now firmly established in the bomber world, and after commanding the Vulcan base at Waddington he held a senior operations post at Headquarters Bomber Command. After a three-year period as the air attaché in Bonn, where he became deeply involved with the planning for the Multi-Role Combat Aircraft – eventually the Tornado – he became the senior air staff officer at headquarters No 1 (Bomber) Group. On promotion to air vice-marshal in 1974 he held two senior appointments at Headquarters Strike Command.

Maughan always worked very long hours, driving both himself and his staff hard. In his senior appointments he often opened the office and always locked it up at night having sent his staff officer back to his family. He was loyal, content to delegate responsibility, and recognised hard work. To one of his young fighter pilots who later reached senior rank, he was "firm and somewhat distant, but the best boss I ever served under".

After leaving the RAF in December 1977, Maughan became the general secretary of the Royal British Legion for five years. This was at a time of difficulty, with membership in decline but calls on benevolent funds increasing as the wartime generation aged. He introduced a number of radical changes, which did not always meet with approval, but the fortunes of the organisation were turned round and positioned to meet future demands.

In 1983 Maughan became an independent panel inspector for the department of the environment, a position he held until 1994. He conducted the inquiry for the highly controversial Winchester bypass, a two-mile stretch of the M3 that ran through part of Twyford Down and resulted in the loss of some land designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Some quarters vigorously opposed the project and Maughan and his family were subjected to some very distasteful abuse. But he stoically continued to evaluate the competing arguments, refusing to allow his judgment or his findings to be influenced.

07/02/2010

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Maughan was appointed CBE (1970) and CB (1976). He was also awarded the American Medal of Freedom. He was a dedicated fell walker and completed many of the country's long distance walks, often in the company of like-minded senior NCOs – rank held no thrall for him. For five years he devoted his life to the care of his wife Pamela, who suffered from increasing infirmity, insisting that he would keep her at their home where he could meet all her needs. She died in 2007.

Charles Maughan died on December 1. He married his wife in June 1947 and is survived by a son and a daughter.

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