

AVM Charles Maughan - Thanksgiving Service - Tresham church Sunday 7 Feb 10

When I spoke at Charles' thanksgiving service last December at St Mary's Turnworth in Dorset, I directed my remarks particularly towards Charles' three grandchildren. It had occurred to me that, although my wife Jenny and I always thought of Charles as first and foremost an RAF officer, to the younger members of his family, they would not have been born during his time in the Royal Air Force.

But I began my story but saying that recently I had read that when elderly people have to go into a retirement or nursing home and have to reduce all their life long belongings to the space available in one tiny room, someone should always insist that a framed photograph, taken when the man or woman was in the prime of youth, should be placed in a position so that it would be immediately noticed by any one coming in to the room. It is too easy for busy nurses, care workers and visiting doctors to see the old person in front of them as just that - forgetting they too were young once. And in many cases, had done some amazing things and had had some extraordinary experiences in their lives.

And wouldn't that have been true of the man we think about especially today.

For Hannah, Daniel and Simon - they could only remember the elderly grandfather - perhaps the last 20 years or so of Charles' life. So let me take you back for a few moments to when we were their age.

Jenny and I had been married only a few months when we first met Wing Commander Maughan and his wife Pam. I was on my first operational tour out of Cranwell as a 22 year old flying officer copilot on Vulcan bombers at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire. We lived in a small cottage (at £5 a week rent) in a village close to the airfield and Jenny was teaching, at £500 a year, in the local village primary school. Charles arrived at Coningsby to be the commanding officer of IX Squadron and I joined his crew - there were 5 of us - and thus flew with him for most of his sorties. But then, 3 months later, he was suddenly promoted to group captain and posted to RAF Honington in Suffolk to be the station commander of a Victor bomber base. But from that brief (but I can tell you never to be forgotten) experience with him began a lifelong friendship that lasted until a couple of months ago. We kept in contact - mostly by letters - from then on. Charles wrote to me every time I was promoted - the only person ever to do so -- always gently saying how pleased and not surprised he was and full of encouragement.

Jenny recalls first meeting Charles in his and Pam's Married Quarter at a small party and being button holed in the way only Charles could do: direct eye contact, professional to professional, clear questions, argumentative but always kindly - Charles was never one of those people who look over your shoulder when having a conversation with you looking for somebody more interesting to talk to - asking questions about his son David's progress (or perhaps lack of progress!) at Tattershall school where she was teaching. Bearing in mind that Jenny was teaching the infant/reception class and David must have been in the top class, she had a quite a challenge - so much so she remembers the conversation to this day.

Jumping forward, for a year in 1976 as a sqn ldr, I worked directly for him as his personal staff officer when he was an AVM at the HQ at High Wycombe. David and his sister Sue will know only too well how hard their father worked and how wonderfully and calmly their mother supported him. Recently you have been able to read the excellent obituaries in the

Times and the Daily Telegraph (easy to get on line by the way from their websites), and learn about this intensely hard working and conscientious man. Tough and demanding he was, but he never forgot that that was his character and also his problem. While he expected others to work long and hard too, he also never forgot in my case that I had a wife and two young daughters at home. "Go off home now - I'll lock up" was almost a daily command. And then on opening up the secure cupboard in the office at about 7 o'clock the next morning, there was a pile of hand written letters, notes, instructions all ready for rapid actioning - many of them had to be handed to David's wife Alison's father Air Cdre Brian Plenderleith who was one of Charles' right hand men.

Later, in 1977, just before he retired from the RAF, I was by then commanding my own Vulcan squadron at Waddington. Charles paid a final staff visit to Cyprus and he flew his last flight in the RAF with me as my copilot (not that he admitted it!) from Akrotiri to Waddington. In a most appreciative letter to me afterwards he concluded *Finally I started to fly Vulcans with you and I have now made my last flight in an aircraft of the RAF in the same way. What a marvellous way to go!* Nobody, of course, was prouder than I was to have brought him back home.

So today I can take you back 45 years with Charles but before that I only know what we have been able to glean from newspaper accounts, the odd published aviation magazine, and the obituaries. He is rightly famed, of course, for winning the 1959 Daily Mail Bleriot Anniversary Air Race from Marble Arch in London to the Arc de Triomphe in Paris - by motor cycle, helicopter and a 2 seat Hunter fighter. In 40 minutes 44 seconds - that record will surely never be beaten.

But other than that, he was the devil of a person to get any thing out of about his early experiences. We know that on Christmas Eve in 1944 he was trying to land a Swordfish on a small aircraft carrier in filthy weather and the aircraft went over the edge. Fortunately for all of us he was soon rescued. He went on to fly Seafires (the naval version of the Spitfire) - a notoriously difficult aircraft to land on a carrier. After the war, having left the Royal Navy, we know he spent a couple of years working for the Control Commission - the organisation that tried to bring war devastated Germany back to life. I could never get Charles to talk about his experiences there - I have often wondered what he saw and what he had to do - and how it affected him.

Never a man to blow any sort of trumpet, unlike so many of his contemporaries who would make sure everyone knew of their military achievements, in Charles and Pam's house I only ever saw two pieces of memorabilia on show: the silver Daily Mail Air Race trophy on the mantelpiece and a photograph of Charles in flying kit with the only crew he ever had standing in front of a Vulcan. I am proud to be the fresh faced youth standing next to him.

Let me now finally jump back to one of my last images: it is of an elderly but very fit man pushing a wheel chair with a well wrapped up lady passenger along a country lane for a mile from Tresham to the main road - the A46. Then about turn and a push back home. Talking to her most of the time - a daily event in the early afternoon - wind, rain and sunshine. Hardly ever missed. Then back home to make her as comfortable as possible. That procedure went on most days for the last few years. He was determined that they would be together to the end - and they were. It's a poignant story - we will never forget him.

Air Vice-Marshal Nigel Baldwin