

**Air Chief Marshal Sir John Barraclough
KCB, CBE, DFC, AFC, FRAeS
1918-2008**

The death of Air Chief Marshal Sir John Barraclough at the age of 90 marks the end of an exceptionally long period of devoted service to the Crown and to defence affairs. After serving in the RAF for 38 years, he was invited on his retirement to conduct various studies for the Air Force Board and the Chiefs of Staff and he became a distinguished commentator on air power and defence issues.

John Barraclough was born in Hounslow on 2 May 1918 and educated at Cranbrook School. After three years' volunteer service with the Artists' Rifles while working in the City of London, he was granted a four-year commission in the RAF in 1938 to train as a pilot.

Barraclough was a Coastal Command man at heart. He joined the Command in late 1938, two years after it had been formed, at a time when it was starved of the latest aircraft and weapons in favour of other, apparently more 'cutting edge' branches of the RAF, but its vital importance to a maritime power like Britain was soon to be realised.

Before the war he flew Ansons with No 269 Squadron from Abbotsinch near Glasgow, and with a taste of what might lie ahead, he was engaged in the air searches for the submarine *Thetis* when she failed to surface in Liverpool Bay in June 1939. During WW2, he flew continuously on maritime air duties with Coastal Command and over the Indian Ocean.

As war broke out, he converted to flying boats and in 1940 he operated from the Shetland Islands with No 240 Squadron equipped with the London and Stranraer. Flying over the northern North Sea he flew in support of the ill-fated British Expeditionary Force to Norway and on searches for German naval forces seeking to break out from the Baltic. After a period flying anti-submarine patrols and convoy escorts off the west coast of Scotland, he was made chief instructor of the Flying Boat Conversion Unit at Invergordon where he was awarded the AFC for developing innovative methods of operational training.

In February 1942 he reformed No 209 Squadron, equipped with the Catalina flying boat, before leaving in June for the Indian Ocean to support the Eastern Fleet for the Madagascar campaign. Operating with the barest facilities

from Comoro Island in the Mozambique Channel, and from other island bases, he flew intensive operations and was awarded the DFC. The citation concluded, 'this officer has shown the greatest devotion to duty and is a born leader of men'.

Barraclough continued to operate with No 209 over the vast areas of the Indian Ocean providing convoy escorts and seeking out U-Boats and their mother ship, the *Elizabeth Schliemann*. Promoted to wing commander aged 24, he commanded the captured Italian airfield at Mogadishu in Somaliland where Wellingtons conducted anti-submarine operations. On his return to the United Kingdom in May 1944 he was the chief instructor at a flying boat training unit and was mentioned in dispatches.

At the end of the war, Barraclough was negotiating his admission to the Middle Temple as a student when he was offered a permanent commission in the RAF, which he accepted. After completing a period of service in Egypt, he joined the Central Flying School and was appointed to the School's prestigious examining wing, first as a flight commander and then in command of the Wing responsible for the flying instructional standards in the RAF and many other national air forces where the RAF was held in world-wide esteem.

Barraclough was very much one of the RAF's thinking airmen, both on the tactical and strategic front. As a staff officer at the headquarters of Training Command, he wrote an imaginative paper on the pros and cons of using a basic jet aircraft for initial pilot training and this paved the way for the introduction into service of the long-serving Jet Provost aircraft. He was always a restive staff officer who hankered after action — he flew more than 70 different types of aircraft — and he was able to persuade his commander-in-chief that he should take the first Vampire training aircraft on a trial flight to Southern Rhodesia. With little or no navigation aids for the venture, Barraclough and his fellow pilot completed the 10,000-mile round trip in the cramped cockpit of the short range, single-engine jet without mishap. He was awarded a Queen's Commendation for Valuable Services in the air.

After commanding the two



Sir John following his Tornado flight in 1995.

fighter stations at Biggin Hill and Middleton St George (now Teeside Airport), he served in the Far East during the campaign against the communist terrorists in Malaya. On promotion to air commodore in 1960 he took up the post of director of public relations at the Air Ministry, a post where his intellectual skills and his tactful and friendly manner were a great asset. He was deeply engaged in defending the philosophy and strategy of nuclear deterrence then exercised by Bomber Command and sheltering, unavailingly in the end, the emerging TSR2 from its political opponents. His efforts on these sensitive issues were recognised by his appointment as CBE.

On completion of his time as AOC No 19 Group in Coastal Command, Barraclough took a sabbatical and, at his own expense and on unpaid leave, was the first British serving officer to complete the Advanced Management Course at the Harvard Business School. On his return in 1968, the RAF told him that, since he was so well versed in organisational matters, it had been decided to appoint him as the Air Officer (Administration) of Bomber Command to manage the imminent, and highly emotional,

mergers of Bomber, Fighter, Coastal and Signals Commands. Such was his success that he was promoted and appointed CB.

He served as Vice Chief of the Defence Staff before becoming the Air Secretary, an appointment he did not relish. His final post before retiring from the RAF in 1978 was as the Commandant of the Royal College of Defence Studies, the country's senior defence college. He was appointed KCB in 1970.

Barraclough had a boundless energy and enthusiasm and was not the sort of man to 'retire' and he was much in demand when he left the RAF. For 12 years he served as a commissioner and vice-chairman of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. In 1976 he was appointed an Honorary Air Commodore in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and, with the force employed in the ground defence role, he found himself very much at home as a former territorial rifleman and he greatly enjoyed meeting the volunteers.

For five years he was the Inspector General of the Force, during which time he was appointed as a Gentleman Usher to the Sword of State with occasional ceremonial duties. He was able to take

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advantage of an informal opportunity after a State Opening of Parliament to seek the Queen's agreement to the award of a Colour. This was subsequently agreed and 750 serving members of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force paraded at RAF Benson in June 1989 on the occasion of the presentation of the Queen's Colour. On his farewell as the Inspector in 1995, Barraclough flew a bombing sortie in a Tornado — the 57th anniversary of his first flight in the RAF.

Barraclough was an entertaining and popular speaker with a sharp intellect, dry wit and a great command of the English language. He also had an eloquent and persuasive pen and was an influential defence writer. For six years in the 1970s he was editorial director of the defence magazine *NATO's Nations* and among his other many literary contributions on defence, he was a co-author with General Sir John Hackett of the best-selling book *The Third World War* in which he wrote the air aspects.

In 1980 he became president of the Air Power Association and the following year sponsored the

Barraclough Trophy awarded annually to the unit or individual member of the RAF who has made an outstanding contribution to RAF public relations in the previous year. He gave many years of devoted support to the Royal Air Force Historical Society and was a regular attendee at the Society's seminars.

Among positions he held in the academies of defence and international relations were those of chairman of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies and then vice chairman of the Air League from which he received the League's Gold Medal for distinguished services to British aviation. He was a Liveryman of the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society in June 1988.

In 2002 Barraclough was approached to support an initiative to commemorate all those who had lost their lives in Coastal Command. He was appointed chairman of the Maritime Air Trust and under his guidance and management, the Trust launched a formidable fundraising target with charitable

status under the rubric of the Command motto 'Constant Endeavour' with HRH Prince Philip as its very supportive patron. On 16 March 2004, HM The Queen dedicated a sculptured tribute and roll of honour in the South Cloister of Westminster Abbey. At the age of 86 he handed over the reigns of the Trust to a former Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Peter Squire, whose father had been a contemporary of Barraclough in Coastal Command during the war. He always considered it a privilege to have been associated with the project, one he described as among the most important he had been involved with, and he was greatly honoured when he was appointed President Emeritus of the Association in recognition of his devoted work on the project.

In his later years, Barraclough, who had settled in Bath, was invited to be chairman, and later president, of the city's Royal Crescent Society, an organisation he led with his usual vigour, and to acclaim, in countering the adverse effects of un-managed tourism in the Georgian city.

A tall man with a commanding

presence, but unassuming manner, Barraclough was a fine sailor and horseman. He navigated the Irish yacht *Clarion* to success in her division of the Fastnet Race in the Admiral's Cup in 1973. In the winter he hunted regularly with the foxhound pack, which was nearest to his current posting, and he followed three-day eventing with keen interest. He was a past president of the RAF Modern Pentathlon Association and of the Combined Services Equestration Association. He also listed among his hobbies, stilt walking (retired).

Despite being diagnosed with terminal cancer, Sir John Barraclough faced the future with stoical courage and his enthusiasm for RAF and defence issues, and his other activities, never wavered. Shortly before his death on 10 May he paid handsome tribute to his wife when he wrote 'her devoted and unselfish support during a taxing career was quite simply immeasurable.' He had married Maureen McCormack in 1946 and she died in 2001. His daughter survives him.

**Air Cdre G.R. Pitchfork
MBE, BA, FRAeS**