

The Master's Speech at the Trophies and Awards Banquet 2013

Grand Master, Award Winners, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me enormous pleasure to welcome you to our annual Trophies and Awards Banquet, the jewel in the crown of the Guild's social calendar.

It is an opportunity to forget the issues which threaten both military and civil aviation, such as financial cutbacks, and the increasingly noisy green lobby who see aviation as an easy target for their ill-informed attacks.

This evening, we focus upon another important aspect of the Guild's work: Celebrating professionalism and excellence in aviation.

Your Royal Highness, we are honoured that you are able to join us this evening. We welcome you, Sir, not as a guest but as our Grand Master and ask you to convey to our Patron our very best wishes and our heart-felt gratitude for his long and continuing support and encouragement.

For my part, I was relieved that you were able to get through the tight security which surrounds Guildhall this evening without incident. The Commissioner of the City Police did assure me that, unlike some he could mention, his officers would have no difficulty recognising you!

We are proud to have many former and current members of the armed services in our Company and proud to have close and active affiliations with Units in each, several of which are represented here this evening.

We welcome Air Chief Marshal Sir Andrew Pulford and congratulate you upon your appointment as Chief of the Air Staff. I know you will be especially pleased, as a helicopter pilot, to see so many helicopter crews from across the world being honoured this evening.

From the Army, we welcome Colonel Murray Whiteside, Regimental Colonel of the Army Air Corps, one of our Affiliated Units. We are grateful to you for sparing time from your intense preparation for your next post as Defence Attaché to Pakistan – learning to speak Urdu!

We welcome Commander Nigel May representing HMS Illustrious, another of our Affiliated Units with whom we have a close relationship.

From the City, I am pleased to welcome three of my fellow Masters: Mrs Lesley Agutter – Master Fletcher, Gp Capt Gerry Bunn – Immediate Past Master of the Coachmakers, and Mr Dennis Woods - Master Fueller.

The Guild is an international organisation and I am delighted to see many members who have travelled thousands of miles to be here this evening, some from literally the other side of the world. I had the pleasure of meeting many members of our North America Region during my visit in August and look forward to meeting our members in New Zealand, Australia and Hong Kong very soon. Maria and I leave for New Zealand on Saturday.

I thank the Pikemen and Musketeers of the Honourable Artillery Company and two of our affiliated units, London Wing Air Training Corps and the University of London Air Squadron, for providing Guards of Honour this evening. I know Warden Benn is, like me, particularly pleased to see our old Squadron represented. Warden Spurrier tells me he has now just about forgiven ULAS for rejecting his application – in 1962!

Last, but certainly not least, I thank the Learned Clerk and our office staff for the many hours they have put in to ensuring this evening is such a success. If you look up, you will see our staff sitting in the expensive seats in the gallery.

The Guild was pleased and proud to introduce a new award this evening. The name Hanna is synonymous with the art of display flying in fighter aircraft, both historic and modern. Ray Hanna's leadership of the Red Arrows, another of our affiliated units, took

the team to new heights of excellence which earned worldwide acclaim and inspired countless young people to become pilots. His legendary Spitfire displays inspired yet more.

Ray taught Mark to fly when he was 16, and Mark went on to become an outstandingly talented and highly respected display pilot.

Father and son enjoyed a mutual, and entirely justified, respect and pride. Neither showed off their own exceptional flying skills – they used their exceptional skills to demonstrate the qualities of which ever aircraft they were displaying. They epitomised the art of the display pilot.

I flew frequently with both Ray and Mark and, as a friend of the family for almost a quarter of a century, it gave me great personal pleasure to present the inaugural 'Hanna Trophy' in my year as Master.

Mrs Eunice Hanna is not able to travel from her home in Suffolk to be with us this evening but I invite you to join me in expressing the Guild's gratitude to Sarah, and asking her to convey our appreciation to her mother.

I have found presenting the awards this evening both humbling and inspiring. I am humbled when I consider that nothing I have ever done in aviation comes even remotely close to the outstanding achievements of those whose hands I have been privileged to shake. I have been inspired by the many accounts of skill, courage, determination, professionalism and service to others that we have just heard.

The qualities exhibited by our award winners run counter to the current trend in society, the culture that places individual 'rights' first and foremost and leaves no particular place for any concept of duty or service. Society as a whole, as well as the aviation profession, is the better for the efforts of our award winners, and it is important that we, as the world's leading pilots organisation, recognise them.

Your achievements inspire others. We salute every one of you.

Almost 50 years ago, our Guest of Honour was selected by NASA to be an Astronaut. His record for time spent in space - a total of 715 hours and 5 minutes - remained unbroken until the Skylab flights.

43 years ago, the world watched anxiously as the crew of Apollo 13, under your command, faced and overcame one crisis after another. And then came the radio black-out that affects all spacecraft re-entering the Earth's atmosphere. For Apollo missions, those black-outs usually lasted about three minutes.

Three minutes came and went, and the world waited with bated breath – hoping for the best but fearing the worst. Four minutes passed, and then five and then, after six very long minutes we could breathe again – you and your team were safe.

Younger members and guests didn't live through the actual event, but many will be familiar with what you achieved from watching the movie 'Apollo 13' in which you were played by Hollywood star Tom Hanks.

Tom Hanks' production schedule prevented him from accepting my invitation to join us this evening but he sends you his warmest wishes and congratulations upon receiving the Guild's Award of Honour.

Captain Lovell, we are privileged to have you and your wife Marilyn with us this evening. We respect the enormous contributions you made to the space programme and, as a pilots' organisation, we recognise that on Apollo 13 - more than on any other lunar mission - your outstanding piloting skills were of crucial importance in coping with the emergencies that developed and enabled you to bring your spacecraft safely back to Earth.

It is our privilege to honour you Sir. We salute you.

May I ask all members of our Company to stand and join me in toasting: '*Our award winners and guests.*'