



# THE HONOURABLE COMPANY OF AIR PILOTS

incorporating Air Navigators

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Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

## **SQUADRON LEADER CHRIS FORD MBE BECOMES MASTER OF THE HONOURABLE COMPANY OF AIR PILOTS**

- **Former C-130 captain with 18,500 flying hours and 39 years of continuous RAF flying.**
- **27-year association with C-130 Hercules, principally special forces operations.**
- **“Every pilot, military or civilian, should know that he or she has a place in the Company. The greater our numbers, the greater our ability to influence the direction of all aviation”.**

Squadron Leader Chris Ford MBE has been invested as Master of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, one of the world's longest-established independent pilots' organisations. A member of the Company since 1979, Chris combines flying experience gained in some of the most demanding conditions around the world with a commitment to continuing the Air Pilots influence within the aviation fraternity, offering independent expert knowledge, experience and opinion, to enhance the skills of all.

*“The Air Pilots is properly balanced between past and future. Whilst preserving everything good and great about the traditions of a Livery Company in the City of London, our job is to look ahead and try to ensure that we, along with all the regulators and all the bureaucracies, move with the times.”*

*“It is the greatest honour and privilege to be the Master of a City of London Livery Company, but it is not the Master's Company – the Master is just the figurehead, elected by the members to be the representative and the ambassador in the aviation world for one year. I see the Master's role as promoting the good name and status of the Company within the aviation industry and the City. Every pilot, military or civilian, should know that he or she has a place in the Company because the greater our numbers, the greater our ability to influence the direction of all aviation”.*

Born into an RAF family, his father, John Ford, flew Bristol Bombays, Lockheed Hudsons and Douglas Dakotas with 216(BT) Sqn in the Middle East and DC-3s during the Berlin Airlift, Chris entered RAF Cranwell on the last-ever flight cadet entry in 1970, gaining his wings on the ubiquitous Jet Provost in 1973.

Chris Ford's first operational flying was on secondment to Oman, flying Britten-Norman Defenders before returning to the UK in 1976 to commence a 27-year relationship with the Lockheed C-130 Hercules. Operations included “Band Aid” relief flights to Ethiopia, flying in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, rescuing British oil workers from Iran, flying in the South Atlantic during the Falklands War, special operations during the first Gulf War, helping relieve the Siege of Sarajevo during the Balkans conflict and instructing on the type.

**ENDS**

Note: A fuller review of Chris Ford's flying career is included in the notes to editors below.

For further information please contact the Honourable Company of Air Pilots at:

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Notes to editors:

## **SQUADRON LEADER (ret'd) CHRIS FORD MBE. Biography and Flying Career.**

Christopher John Ford was born into an RAF family. His father, John Ford AFC, flew Bristol Bombays, Lockheed Hudsons and Douglas DC-3 Dakotas with 216(BT) Sqn in the Middle East, then DC-3s during the Berlin Airlift, ultimately retiring as a Group Captain.

Chris entered RAF Cranwell on the last-ever flight cadet entry in 1970, gaining his wings on the ubiquitous Jet Provost in 1973. He moved on to fly Gnats at RAF Valley, but fast jets were not his style and he found his true forte when he converted to Vickers Varsity aircraft at Oakington *"160 knots at low level with a Bristol Hercules radial engine either side of you – that's more like it"*.

When in 1974, the Sultan of Oman's Air Force acquired a fleet of Britten Norman Defender aircraft, Chris volunteered for secondment, and was accepted to fly them from Salalah and into the Mussandam Peninsular. *"I did 950 hours in 18 months and grew up rapidly, learnt from a mistake or two how to be a safe aviator and work through problems, and how to use one's initiative in the air. I was fired at once or twice and undertook some interesting jobs including ferrying two of the new aircraft from Bournemouth to Oman. No auto-pilot or anti-icing, only VMC and 5 days at 120 knots!"*

After two years, in Chris's words, he was *"dragged back kicking and screaming to RAF Lyneham to start my proper RAF career"*. He little knew that he was starting a 27-year connection with the Lockheed C-130 Hercules. After OCU, Chris joined 30 Squadron as a co-pilot flying in a strategic transport role, but escape route to his favoured form of tactical flying in the form of a two-year tour with the Special Forces Flight of 47 Squadron. *"Their role was low-level flying, parachute and stores dropping and Special Forces would do these in all sorts of interesting places!"*

Among the operations in which Chris and the Hercules force were involved over the years were the "Band Aid" relief flights to Ethiopia, operations in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, rescuing British oil workers from Iran following the toppling of the Shah, the South Atlantic during the Falklands War (including one sortie of 25 hours duration), the first Gulf War, resupply missions in the Balkans, including helping relieve the Siege of Sarajevo, watching the crossfire going underneath the aircraft *"like a red tracer washing line"*. Chris additionally became a training and standards evaluation pilot, and Air to Air Refuelling Instructor (AARI) on the C-130. He prepared pilots for the second Gulf War by training them in flying with both night vision goggles and wearing NBC, nuclear, biological and chemical warfare protection.

In 2003, Chris bade farewell to RAF Lyneham and the Hercules fleet after clocking up 14,500 flying hours on the type. Between 2003 and 2011 he flew Britten Norman Islander aircraft from RAF Northolt before at the age of 60, retirement from his military flying career beckoned after 41 years of RAF service. His time at Northolt provided the ideal opportunity to become more involved in the Guild. He became a Trustee of the Company's Benevolent Fund, was invited to stand as a Warden and now takes the role of Master.

Since leaving the RAF Chris has sampled a range of flying. He enjoyed paragliding *"rewarding, exhilarating, working with the elements"* and is today a keen hot air balloonist, having flown a variety of balloons in an equal variety of locations. Chris is also working on gaining a WSET Diploma in Wines and Spirits and in line with this interest he regularly holidays in wine-growing regions.

What special memories or experiences does Chris savour from his military flying years? *"Air-to-air refuelling, playing darts with a Hercules, was always exciting – particularly blacked out at night, wearing night-vision goggles. And in my early days, going supersonic in the Gnat. I went trans-sonic, solo, before I could drive a car on my own!"*

Is there anything Chris still hankers to fly? *"With my background in Special Forces flying, I've always been fascinated by the wartime exploits of pilots like Hugh Verity, Peter Arkell and Lewis Hodges in SOE Westland Lysanders. There's an aeroplane I'd love to get a seat in!"*



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## 1. The Honourable Company of Air Pilots

*The Air Pilots was established as the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators in 1929. It is based in London but has an internationally based membership of professional and private pilots. The principal activities of the organisation are centred on developing action and activities to ensure that aircraft are piloted and navigated safely by aviators who are highly competent, self-reliant, dependable and respected.*

*2. The Grand Master of the Air Pilots, His Royal Highness Prince Andrew, Duke of York and his father, Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh who is Patron, are both pilots and actively supported the recent grant of the Royal Charter. In addition, both the Duke of Cambridge and Prince Harry are qualified helicopter pilots, making the Air Pilots unique among City of London livery companies in having active Royal participation in its profession.*

*3. The Air Pilots support the education and training of pilots from the initial instruction of young pilots to specialist training at the highest levels. Through its charitable activities, education and training, technical committees, aircrew selection, scholarships and sponsorships, advice and recognition of the achievements of fellow aviators worldwide, the Honourable Company keeps itself at the forefront of the aviation world.*

*4. The Air Pilots also provides expert, impartial input to regulators, government and media on areas including aviation and the environment, airport capacity in south east England, aircrew flight time limitations and the maintenance of piloting skills in increasingly automated aircraft. Air Pilots experts are also available to all media on request, to ensure accurate and fully informed reporting of any aviation events. If you need our assistance, please contact us on the numbers or e-mail addresses above.*



**Sqn Ldr Chris Ford MBE.** High-definition images also available. Please contact [pr1@airpilots.org](mailto:pr1@airpilots.org)