

T & A Speech

Air Marshal Atha, Masters etc

Welcome to Guildhall and this, our annual Trophies and Awards Banquet. I'd like to begin with some thanks. Firstly, to our office staff. To our Learned & Gallant Clerk, Paul Tacon, and to Ruth, James, Angie and Anna, all of whom have worked very hard to arrange this event. Without them it simply would not have been possible and I owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Next, our thanks go to the staff and caterers here at Guildhall. To cater for so many guests so efficiently is no mean feat. Again, my very many thanks. And lastly, to the London Banqueting Ensemble, directed by Steve Fletcher, and their trumpeters, although they have now left. We always appreciate the post horn gallop competition.

It is a particular privilege to welcome Air Marshal Stuart Atha, Deputy Commander Operations, and kindly representing CDS who, due to an urgent change to his schedule, is unable to join us this evening.

When I was taught public speaking, many years ago it was impressed on me that it doesn't matter what I say. What matters is what you, the audience, think you hear. Very brief amusement goes in here.

Fortunately there's no chance of ambiguity in what I'm about to say. At least, I don't think there is. Earlier this year the Lord Mayor reminded us that the three pillars on which the Livery movement is founded are Stewardship, Fellowship and Philanthropy.

Firstly, Fellowship. I think we do that rather well. Just look around this room. Are you all enjoying the evening? Of course you are.

Next, Philanthropy. You, our members, contribute most generously to the Air Pilots Benevolent Fund. That enables us to do an enormous amount, both in helping distressed aviators and their families and in funding scholarships and gliding courses for young people. Of course, if anyone wishes to contribute more, the money box is always open.

And lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Stewardship. Aviation, whether it is done as a hobby or a profession, is very rewarding. It is also an expensive path to follow. Most of us are aware of the looming shortage of pilots. Thanks to the efforts of Past Master Roger Gault we have put three apprentices through flight instructors' courses and Roger is continuing to develop that scheme. We also work with many outside bodies to promote

safety and to develop the UK aviation industry. At the moment we are represented on the Department for Transport's consultation for their Future Aviation Strategy. That is a huge opportunity for us to help them get it right. We have members working on, among other things the dangers of unregulated drones, laser strikes on aircraft and on changing heading reference in aviation from Magnetic North to True. In all these ways we are working towards the future.

One of the most important ways in which we can encourage and promote Stewardship, and the purpose of this evening, is to recognise and to honour those who have contributed so much to aviation during the year. Flying any aircraft can be challenging. Many years ago General Doolittle said that aviation is not itself inherently dangerous but, to an even greater degree than the sea, it is terribly unforgiving of any carelessness, incapacity or neglect.

Those words remain true today and, although we have made great strides in designing machinery and systems which lessen the opportunities for things to go wrong, there is a well-known law which states that if things can go wrong, eventually they will go wrong. And usually at the worst possible moment. That is when crews are called on to use all the skills they have learnt and practised. Some of those here tonight have shown great courage and determination in the face of danger. Others have exhibited extraordinary skill in their calling and some have worked long and hard to make aviation safer.

Tonight we've rewarded unstinting long service to the Company and to the aviation profession. Awards have gone to engineers and software developers. To display pilots. To a record breaker. To crews flying into extraordinarily difficult areas, sometimes at great risk. To a chap who deliberately exposed himself to danger to save an aeroplane. To those who helped or rescued others, again at some risk to themselves And to pilots who have found themselves in those situations which just should not have happened, but the law I mentioned earlier cropped up and bit them.

There is just one award which I'd like to single out for mention, though. That to Commander Bertie Vigrass. Bertie is a truly nice man who has done so much for naval aviation and to promote gliding for young people. An aviator of many years standing, his first operational aircraft was the Swordfish and in World War Two he flew in every theatre. He's also got some very good stories to tell.

I began by mentioning the three pillars; Stewardship, Fellowship and Philanthropy. In our own little world of the Air Pilots we sometimes forget the wider concept of this great Livery movement and the City of London it supports. Every Master is given an

extraordinary opportunity to enter and explore this wider world, meeting members of the hundred and ten Livery companies and visiting some wonderful halls. Friendships are forged throughout the year. We all have one common aim - to support the Livery. And, of course, we all wear very brightly coloured dressing gowns. It's easy to make friends when everyone looks silly. That's true fellowship.

As to stewardship, many companies are ancient and their crafts no longer relevant in today's world but most others do support their original skills. Earlier this month I was at ceremony to present awards to young people who had just completed Livery apprenticeships. It was good to hear what they had achieved.

For philanthropy, well, I am told that the Livery raises over 40 million pounds each year for charitable purposes. That is no small sum. So there you have it, Fellowship, Stewardship and Philanthropy. Led by the Lord Mayor, personified in this, our own Livery company and exemplified by our award winners today.

Ladies and gentlemen, the toast is: Our award winners and guests.