

Supreme Courage

by

Philip E. West

Philip E. West is recognised as one of the world's finest aviation artists. Collectors of his original oil paintings span the globe, many waiting patiently for his next breathtaking canvas to appear. Self taught, Philip has won many accolades for his paintings, not the least of which was the prestigious Duane Whitney Award for Excellence at the 1997 American Society of Aviation Artists Exhibition.

We do hope you will find these biographies of interest. Each has been reproduced here with no editing from SWA Fine Art. We hope by knowing a little about the men behind the signatures it will help you obtain more pleasure from your copy of "Supreme Courage".

**** These men have signed only the Artist Proof and Remarque editions.**

****Squadron Leader Douglas J.G. Harcourt DFC (Pilot)** joined the navy at *H.M.S. Ganges* in January 1933. He was drafted to *H.M.S. York* in January 1934 before setting sail for the USA and West Indies. Based in Bermuda the ship covered both North and South America coasts as well as north to Canada. *H.M.S. York* returned to England in August 1936.

In 1937 Douglas was drafted to *H.M.S. Sussex*; the time of the Spanish Civil War. After this he was sent for pilot training at Rochester. This was followed by Observer training in Sharks at Ford and Skua drogue towing at Hatston. He was then sent to Lee on Solent on general service before going to Alexandria as Coxswain to carry out inshore mine patrols on a former pleasure cruiser. Douglas then requested to join the RAF and was accepted on to the Air Sea Rescue flight, which became 294 Squadron. He flew Wellingtons, Walrus and Fairchild Amphibian, and was responsible for several rescues. He was commissioned Pilot Officer F/Lt and then taken off operations to Air Headquarters Eastern Med. Then promoted to Sqn. Ldr. as Marine and Air Sea Rescue Officer. Douglas was sent home in March 1945 and posted to RAF Henlow Station. He was demobbed in October 1945.

****Captain Eric Brown R.N. (Pilot)** had a 31-year career in the Royal Navy, and is the Fleet Air Arm's most decorated pilot. After a distinguished operational tour flying from Britain's first escort carrier, he was selected as a test pilot in 1942 and then served at A&AEE Boscombe Down before being appointed as Chief Naval Test Pilot at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough, where he remained for six years. During that time he commanded the Enemy Aircraft Flight, the High Speed Flight and finally the prestigious Aerodynamics Flight.

During the Korean War he served as a test pilot at the US Naval Air Test Center at Patuxent River for two years. While in his appointment as Head of the British Naval Air Mission to Germany from 1957-60 he was seconded to the Focke-Wulf Co. for a spell as their test pilot.

In his test-flying career he has flown a world record 487 basic types of aircraft, and made a world record 2,407 aircraft carrier landings in fixed-wing aircraft. He is a past President of the Royal Aeronautical Society, an Honorary Fellow of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots and a Master Pilot of Russia. In 1995 he was inducted into the US Navy's Carrier Aviation Test Pilot Hall of Honor, the only non-American to have received this accolade.

****Lieutenant Commander George R. Blackburn VRD, RNR (Pilot)** learned to fly as a civilian pilot before WW2 at Marshall's Flying School, Cambridge, where he obtained a Private Pilots Licence. The RAF turned him down for flying at the outbreak of WW2 owing to defective eyesight. The Royal Navy accepted him with corrected vision. He served in the Army as a Private from 1940-1941 and the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) from 1941-1946. Whilst in the FAA he was in the following squadrons: 813 & 836 TBR/TSR/AIL Swordfish A/C (Operational Squadrons) and 752, 780, 793 and 785 Training and Non-Operational Squadrons. George flew throughout the war in the UK, Trinidad, Canada, Gibraltar/Mediterranean, North Africa and Atlantic convoys. He finished as Commanding Officer Aircraft Ferry Squadron. He continued flying after the war in the RAFVR. from 1949-1952 and the RNVR/RNR from 1952-1958. After this George continued flying as a civilian pilot.

CPO (A) Eric Bond LS/GCM & BAR RNVR (Telegraphist Air Gunner / TAG)

joined the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm in August 1940. He served on the aircraft carriers *HMS Furious*, *Ark Royal* and *Illustrious* in the Mediterranean and Atlantic. In February 1942 he was drafted to Gibraltar to fly in Skua, Fulmar and Swordfish aircraft for exercise attacks on the Fleet and Gibraltar fortress. He was then transferred to North Africa (Oran) for four months, then back operationally to Gibraltar with 833 Squadron. Eric's next move was back to the UK with the carrier *HMS Stalker* and then he qualified at the School of Air Combat. He left the Royal Navy in October 1945.

In 1950 Eric joined the RNVR and served as CPO (A) aircrew and joined 1840 & 1842 Channel Air Division, flying in Firefly, Gannet and helicopter aircraft. On the disbandment of RNVR squadrons, Eric served as Chief Radio Supervisor involving duties at Whitehall and Faslane. He left the RNVR in 1971, having served 26½ years.

Lt. Cdr. Derek T.R. Martin RN (Pilot) was accepted by the Admiralty Board for pilot training in 1938. He attended Course No. 5 set up in *HMS Frobisher* in early March 1939. He was transferred to the Naval College at Greenwich in early May 1939 for flying training at Gravesend. From there he went to RAF Netheravon for intermediate and advanced flying and was awarded "Wings" in November 1939. In January 1940 Derek transferred to RN Fighter Training School at *HMS Raven* – now known as Southampton Airport. In April 1940 he was appointed to his first operational squadron of Skuas at Donibristle (Firth of Forth); from there he flew to Prestwick en-route to *HMS Ark Royal* waiting in the Clyde before proceeding for operations off Norway. However, on the way, at about 800 feet Derek's aircraft suffered total engine failure and he crash landed (safely) into a ploughed field at Troon. He subsequently flew another Skua aircraft to join *Ark Royal* and 800 Squadron before making way to Norway where they were to carry out protective patrols over naval operations in the region of Narvik and the Fleet anchorage at Hartstad.

Early in June, the Norwegian campaign was abandoned and with evacuation complete the fleet, with *HMS Ark Royal* and *HMS Glorious*, sailed for Scapa convoying the merchant ships with recovered troops. On 7th June "*Glorious*", with two destroyers was detached and sailed independently for Scapa. Having no air patrols she was sighted by two German battleships on

June 8th, and all three ships were sunk with the loss of 1520 men. Subsequently, 15 Skuas from 800 & 803 Squadrons from *Ark Royal* attacked German naval forces in Trondheim on 13th June at 0100 in daylight. Observed when still 70 miles from their targets they encountered on arrival very heavy flak and many Me109s and 110s. Eight aircraft were destroyed, seven aircrew killed and nine captured. Seven aircraft returned to the *Ark* – two having aborted their attack. Lt. Cdr. Martin was captured and remained a POW until

May 1945. He was in at least seven different POW camps, the last one being Stalag Luft III (north camp), from which in January 1945 they were marched out ahead of the Russian forces. He was finally released in Lubeck, arriving back in England on VE day. He resigned the Royal Navy as a ND (dagger) in June 1966.

Naval Airman Lloyd Richards (Telegraphist Air Gunner / TAG) joined the Royal Navy in December 1934. He joined *HMS Royal Sovereign* in 1936 and then *HMS Royal Oak* for duties on the south coast of Spain on intervention patrols during the Spanish Civil War. His next appointment was to *HMS Guardian* for anti-submarine net laying and target towing. Lloyd then joined the Fleet Air Arm in 1938 and trained at *HMS Raven* (now Southampton airport) and RAF Aldergrove Signal School. He then flew to RNAS Hatston to reform 803 squadron for duties on *HMS Ark Royal*. In June 1940 Lloyd was shot down during the attack by the “Scharnhorst”, taken prisoner and held in a German POW camp but escaped a few months before the end of the war.

CPO Ron Skinner (Ship’s Writer) joined the Royal Navy as a Writer in January 1937, and served as Captain Warburton-Lee’s Writer in *H.M.S. Effingham* in 1937/38. (Captain Warburton-Lee was the first VC in WW2 – posthumous, Narvick). After five weeks in *H.M.S. Enterprise* during the Munich crisis, Ron joined *H.M.S. Ark Royal* in Cammell Laird’s yard on 13th November 1938 and remained on board until taken off by *H.M.S. Legion* on 13th November 1941. Ron was onboard with the ship in action with Force H in the Mediterranean, against the “*Bismarck*”, Oran & Mers el Kebir, Dakar, the hunt for the “*Graf Spee*” and during the Norwegian campaign. As the ship’s Writer Ron was responsible for maintaining and posting the record of air operations (counting them out and counting them back). Post-Ark he served in stone frigates – in *H.M.S. President 111* (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships) where he met and married P.O. Wren Edna Newman in 1945 before transferring to *HMS Copra* (Combined Ops.) He left the Royal navy from *H.M.S. Daedalus* in February 1947 and remained in R.F.R until 1957.
