

## **Flight Lieutenant Douglas Coxell, 297 Squadron pilot**

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The following obituary appeared in the 'Daily Telegraph' on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2022 for Flt Lt Douglas Coxell, who flew with 297 Squadron, which was based at RAF Stoney Cross in 1943-44. He was a police motorcyclist turned pilot who towed gliders and dropped troops on D-Day in 1944.

“Flight Lieutenant Douglas Coxell, who has died aged 100, towed gliders and dropped parachute troops on the three great airborne operations in north-west Europe during the Second World War. He flew Albermarle bombers, converted to tow gliders, with 297 Squadron. After dropping supplies to the French Resistance, the squadron began intensive training on glider towing and parachute drops in preparation for the D-Day landings.



Douglas Coxell at the controls of his Albermarle

Coxell was aged just 22, when he took off shortly before midnight and at 1.00am on June 6 1944 dropped Pathfinder parachutists on Drop Zone “N” near Ranville in the vicinity of the Orne Canal and River bridges. On a second sortie that day, at 9pm, he returned to the same drop zone towing a Horsa glider carrying reinforcements. After a number of further supply drops to the French Resistance, the squadron moved to Manston in Kent. On September 17, Operation Market Garden began, the capture of the bridge at Arnhem, and Coxell took off with a Horsa glider in tow, which was released

just west of the city. The following day he returned to drop supplies to the airborne forces.



An Albermarle takes off towing a Horsa glider

After the Arnhem operations, the squadron received Halifax bombers which had been modified to tow gliders and drop paratroops and supplies. Coxell dropped arms and personnel to the Resistance movements in Norway and in France. On March 23 1945, he took part in his third major airborne operation, Operation Varsity, the crossing of the River Rhine, when he towed a Horsa glider and released it near Wesel. On April 26 1945 he completed his 20th and last operational sortie, which was a supply drop in a remote valley in what is now the Hardanger National Park, in the Telemark region of Norway. On the May 9 1945, the day after VE Day, he landed at Gardermoen airfield near Oslo with a contingent of the 1st Airborne Division to accept the surrender of the German garrison at the airfield and subsequently all German forces in Norway. He was Mentioned in Despatches.

Douglas John Coxell was born on August 12 1921 in a village near Peterborough. After attending Old Fletton School, he joined the Huntingdonshire police force, where he was a motorcyclist. Although in a reserved occupation, he volunteered to join the RAF in March 1942. After completing his elementary flying training as a pilot he sailed on the Queen Mary for Canada. On arrival he travelled by train to Terrell, near Dallas in Texas, where he trained at No 1 British Flying Training School. He graduated in May 1943, when he was commissioned. On return to England he converted to the Albermarle aircraft, an unsuccessful bomber, which was transferred to the new 38 (Transport) Group to support airborne operations. He joined 297 Squadron based in the New Forest and flew his first operation on March 11 1944, carrying supplies for SOE. But there was no reception committee, and he had to return with his stores.

Coxell was released from the RAF in September 1945, and he returned to the police force. He also joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve and did weekend flying on Tiger Moths and Chipmunks at Cambridge. In December 1952 he re-joined the RAF and over the next few years was a flying instructor, initially on piston-engine aircraft before converting to jets in 1954 and instructing on the Vampire.

In 1959 he left for a loan appointment with the Royal Malayan Air Force to train pilots on the Chipmunk. After six months, he led a ferry flight of three new Twin Pioneer light-

transport aircraft from Prestwick to Kuala Lumpur. The flight was completed in short stage lengths of no more than four hours at 95 knots, routing through France, the Middle East, India and Thailand. Each aircraft was airborne for 71 hours and the aircraft arrived in Malaya on schedule 14 days after leaving Scotland. After the Second World War Coxell trained new pilots and flew VIPs including royal families and other heads of state. Coxell qualified as a VIP pilot, flying royal families and other heads of state.

In June 1962 there was a visit by the King and Queen of Thailand. On a visit to the Cameron Highlands, accompanied by the Malayan royal family, there was some confusion over travel arrangements. In the event, Coxell carried both royal groups to the small 300-yard landing strip at Temerloh. He later commented: "I had on board two kings and queens, two prime ministers and two chiefs of staff." After three years he returned to England where he became the personal pilot to the Air Commander-in-Chief of Technical Training Command, Air Marshal Sir William Coles.



Aurigny Air Services Britten Norman Trilander

In March 1968 Coxell took early retirement to join the Alderney-based Aurigny Air Services, ending up as chief training captain and, in 1976, flight operations manager. The engineering base was with Anglo Normandy Aviation in Guernsey, an associate company of Aurigny, and he moved there in 1976, becoming a co-director of Anglo Normandy. After 18 years' flying Islanders, Trilanders and Twin Otters around the Channel Islands and adjacent coasts of France and England, Coxell was obliged to retire from public transport flying aged 65, on December 21 1986. However, he managed to fly until he was 86, as training captain for the Channel Islands Air Search, only hanging up his cap when he could no longer be insured.

He was invited back to celebrate Liberation Day in Oslo on many occasions and in 2021 was given a Norwegian Medal of Honour by the Norwegian defence attaché on behalf of the King of Norway. In 2019 he was appointed to the Legion of Honour by the French government.

A keen sailor, he owned a number of yachts and sailed the French coast and around the Channel Islands. Douglas Coxell is survived by his second wife Jan and by two daughters from his first marriage, together with a stepson and stepdaughter. Douglas Coxell, born August 12 1921, died March 10 2022.”