

REPORT OF SPECIAL MEETING

“The Post-War Search for Germany’s Technology” by Capt Eric Brown CBE DSC AFC RN

The audience of BWAG members and guests at The Stables in Bishop’s Waltham on the evening of 15th June 2010 was privileged to hear Captain Eric “Winkle” Brown speak on his personal recollections of his involvement in the search for German technology at the end of the Second World War. Eric was, by then, a highly experienced fighter pilot who first joined the University Air Squadron whilst at Edinburgh University in 1937 in which he gained his wings. Later, by the beginning of the war in 1939, he was commissioned in the Fleet Air Arm.

His early exploits included flying Martlets from the first escort carrier defending convoys in the Atlantic. His ship - the “Audacity - was later sunk by a U-boat and Eric spent some hours in the water before being rescued. He went on to be one of this country’s leading experimental test pilots serving eventually as Chief Naval Test Pilot at RAE Farnborough where he was the first Naval officer to command the Aerodynamics Flight.

The measure of his experience can be gained from the facts contained in his flying log books showing that he completed an exceptional number of deck landings and had flown a world record number - 487 - of basic types of aircraft. This latter figure excluded type variants - Spitfire, for example, was counted only once and he had flown the majority of the marks of that fine aircraft. So we knew we were in the company of one highly versed in the art of flying with a peculiarly Naval background.

But the main purpose of Eric’s visit - as the title implies - was to relate his experiences in seeking out German technical information in 1945 and 1946 where he seemingly had free rein to travel the continent in his “personal” Siebel Si 204D recovering aircraft and technical data. And what experiences those were! Eric spoke of his “hands-on” approach to flight testing and bringing to Britain some of the more exotic types - like the Me 163 and 262, the He 162 and the Arado 234 - among many others. One such flight - in a Blohm & Voss 222 Wiking heavy flying boat almost

ended in disaster when the Luftwaffe pilot sought to sabotage the flight by deliberately mishandling the controls. Eric's quick thinking averted what might have resulted in catastrophe.

His role also required him - helped by his fluency in German - to interrogate leading German designers and scientists and amazingly he was granted the opportunity of meeting Hermann Goering with whom he discussed, among other things, the outcome of the Battle of Britain which Goering regarded as a "draw". Eric expressed the opinion that the war could have lasted much longer if the Germans had been able fully to exploit their amazing technical lead in jet and rocket propulsion and he greatly admired the skill of their scientists and designers many of whom he met.

As someone well-versed in his subject, Eric spoke for two hours completely without notes or any hesitation illustrating his talk with well chosen images. At the end, he engaged in a lively question and answer discussion and it was a very satisfied group of members and friends who left the Stables at the end of a superb evening of aviation recollections by one of our leading experimental test pilots. Such was Eric's performance that we forgot that, having been born in 1919, he was 91 and had lived - and survived - through arguably the most eventful period in world history.

Those present felt that although Eric's work had been recognised by his peers - including many outside the UK - insufficient honour had been paid him by the country which he had served so well from 1937 to 1970 when he finally retired from the Fleet Air Arm. Eric was accompanied by his charming wife and the arrangements for their visit were made by Gordon Hamilton and Terry Giles to whom thanks are expressed for organising this unique evening for BWAG. A group photograph of Eric with the well-satisfied audience is shown.

There is a summary of Eric's career on Wikipedia where it can be found on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Brown_\(pilot\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Brown_(pilot)). Also recommended is his book "Wings on my Sleeve" which is currently being re-printed.