

**REX HENRY SAMUEL EDWARDS**, aviator, patriarch, part-time cinematographer, part-time barman, traditional jazz connoisseur, great-grandfather, grandfather, father, brother and husband, was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1923 and died on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2005.

Born at 167 Clarence Road, Wimbledon into a middle class family, his father, Harry, was a car salesman at Newnhams of Hammersmith and his mother, Doris, was later to become a headmistress.

From an early age, he realized that life was to be enjoyed to the full. His childhood was spent at Rutlish School, where unlike one of his alumni, who went on to become a Conservative Prime Minister, Rex found the rigors of academic deliberation somewhat tedious. He much preferred to spend his time gazing at the flying machines that passed the classroom window on their way to Croydon Airport, or concocting pranks and practical jokes to play on his teachers, or much to his mother's angst, the neighbours. Indeed, upon returning from holiday, one neighbour found every door to their house booby-trapped in a manner that entailed a complete soaking for the first to enter the room.

It was also at this stage that Rex developed a "need for speed", beginning with the conversion of his baby sister's pram into a downhill kart, forgetting at times to remove her, much to her apparent delight, and culminating as a septuagenarian in exceeding the sound barrier aboard Concorde. If they had let him take the controls, then even The Concorde would have gone faster than it had ever done before.

His love of flying machines and all things that went fast developed into a passion that needed sustenance. And so on finishing school at 16 with...well lets say "not the best grades", and armed with a pat on the back from his head teacher..."don't worry Edwards, you will survive on your instincts", he embarked on what we today know as a "gap year". Only in those days, a gap year was certainly not something that one would admit he was doing when conversing with the Jones' next door. Young Rex joined his father at Newnham's helping to wash, clean, and on the odd occasion, deliver cars. He must have delivered a few judging by the mammoth pile of speeding fines he had accumulated during the year.

Which was to his detriment, or so he thought, when at the end of the gap year he volunteered to be a pilot in the Royal Air Force. These fines could have stopped his flying career even before it had been airborne and attracted undue attention from the aircrew selection panel. A member of the panel showed more than a passing interest, and he returned home to his mother despondent, only to receive a few weeks later his acceptance papers to train as a pilot in Canada. After all the country was at war and Rex's speeding tickets had demonstrated the exact competencies they were looking for in an RAF pilot. He was made of the right stuff.

So at 17 he embarked on what was to become a 43-year career as an aviator. Sgt Pilot Edwards obtained his wings on course #88 at the #4 Service Flying Training School in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. On his return in 1942 he was commissioned as an officer and was to play a role in both D-Day and Arnheim preparations and assaults, flying aircraft such as Wellingtons, Dakotas, and Sunderland Flying boats. A list that would later grow to over 70 different aircraft types and 29,000 flying hours, a feat that is no longer achievable in today's regulated climate.

He stayed in the air force following the war and had spells at such landmark bases as

RAF Wittering and RAF Hendon, interspersed with postings overseas in Aden, Cairo and for a short time as commanding officer of RAF Aqabah in Jordan.

However, in 1954, it was time to move on and Rex left the military to pursue a career in civil aviation, joining Hunting Clan at what is today a major airport in the South East, flying York freighters to the East African element of the British Empire.

His big break however came in 1958 when an opportunity to work for B.O.A.C. with one of their subsidiaries in Hong Kong was seized upon. The back bone of the B.O.A.C fleet, the Bristol Britannia, was not suited to the inclement weather conditions of the China Sea and so B.O.A.C. established a subsidiary called Hong Kong Airways to fly the route between Hong Kong and Tokyo with seasoned pilots and the Vickers Viscount. It was during this period that Rex's previously untapped cinematographic skills emerged. He made a series of short cine films that, and I quote from a related press clipping entitled "The Art of Film Making" *had astonished members with his results*. The prize winning puppet animation "The Three Little Pigs", shot a single frame at a time, was categorized as a children's fable. And one of my first recollections as a child is that of being terrified by one of Dad's movies where a ferocious looking wolf made various attempts to devour 3 very innocent looking piggies, in something akin to the *Road Runner* meets *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*. Although never quite reaching the same level of peer group acclaim as he did in the late 50s, Rex enjoyed movie making and videoing till his last. Consequently, the family now have over 1,000 used video cassettes available for sale at a steal.

However, upon arrival of the jet age and the withdrawal from service of the Britannias, Hong Kong Airways was closed down and Rex was moved to another subsidiary, serving the booming oil industry of the Middle East, based in Bahrain and operating under the name of Gulf Aviation, later to become Gulf Air. Here Rex obtained his command and joined the jet age himself, at one time becoming Deputy Chief Pilot. It was then the golden age of air travel, and Rex was part of it. A few years into what became a 23-year tenure, the veteran war ace Sir Douglas Bader was touring the Middle East in his capacity as Chief Pilot for Shell Oil. Unfamiliar with featureless terrain of the Arabian Peninsular, he requested the assistance of a pilot from Gulf Aviation. Rex was chosen and the two formed a close bond over the following weeks. We have on tape Sir Douglas making a speech at the end of the tour commending Rex with the words "and he has shown me that he is a jolly good pilot, in fact, I know of none better".

It was during the Bahrain days that Rex converted one of the front rooms of his house into a bar. And partook in another hobby of which he was passionate-the dispensing of some of the best cocktails and aperitifs seen between Cairo and Singapore, all funded by frequent raids of the Duty Frees in the Airports to which he flew. Certainly, if indeed there existed a better cocktail, there was absolutely none more potent. All were welcome. Upon a visit to the bar, Jimmy Edwards, the comedian, left a promotional poster lauding it as the best watering hole in the country. You have not lived if you did not get to polish off one of Rex's Pimms potions, resplendent with almost every fruit that exists. It wasn't only the drinks that were special, many also enjoyed the social dialogue and *camaraderie*.

The last decade of Rex's career was spent as a route captain on Boeing 737's. He was never an academic and somewhat struggled with administrative duties. And although he had long relinquished the deputy chief pilot role and had abandoned formal instructing, he never stopped coaching and mentoring the young pilots that came under his command, becoming truly revered and respected by both his

subordinates and peers alike. Even air traffic controllers were known to drop the aircraft's call sign and simply addressed the blip on their radar screens as "Rex".

Some 20 years after his retirement, myself beating the same routes as he used to fly, I often come across aviation employees who still fondly remember his name and the good times they shared.

Rex was a generous and principled individual. He spurned offers to become a Mason and did not believe in Union membership. He was his own man. And he did have his faults, as indeed do we all. He was not a good communicator but.. he was a good map-reader, which is just as well for a pilot. Those of you who are familiar with the book *"why men don't listen and women can't read maps"* will know from where I am coming.

He had a successful life, but never is the phrase "behind every successful man is a strong woman" more appropriate. It is therefore important on behalf of the family, including Rex, to say thanks to the matriarch of the family, Patsy.