

Bill Taylor

1951 - 2018



Bill was born in Friskney, Lincolnshire, on 31 January 1951. A headmaster's report from Friskney Primary School commented that there was some unquantifiable outstanding latent quality about Bill Taylor, not yet even age seven!

While at Skegness Grammar School in 1964, Bill first submitted a proposal for a magazine article to *Railway Modeller* and although the article was rejected it presaged Bill's future prodigious written output.

In 1967 he joined the Royal Air Force, straight from school, inspired by the military aircraft activity (and long history of same) in his native county and also by the TSR-2, Cold War strike and reconnaissance aircraft, whose Government cancellation in 1965 he always lamented.

In Bill's own words:

"The aircraft activity over and around our family home close to RAF Wainfleet Air Weapons Range was instrumental in developing my aviation interests, first in aeromodelling and then as a career in the Royal Air Force. As a child and then as a teenager I spent countless hours on the range, watching the aircraft and the wildlife."

Bill was part of '113 Entry' at No 1 School of Technical Training, RAF Halton, Buckinghamshire, where he became an RAF Aircraft Technician Apprentice. Training covered airframe, propulsion, electrics and armament. He completed his Halton course in 1970 having achieved an ONC in Mechanical Engineering. Bill was second in the Order of Merit for the aircraft technicians, missing the top spot by 0.2 per cent. He graduated with the

**Group Captain Bill Taylor
OBE, IEng, FRAeS, RAF (Retd),
founding Chief Executive Officer of
de Havilland Support Ltd.,
died on Friday 13 April 2018.
This is a transcript of the tribute
to Bill's life and work which was
delivered at Bill's funeral by
DHSL's Chief Engineer,
Dr MARK MILLER**

non-commissioned rank of a Sergeant Apprentice, becoming a Corporal on his first posting.

Between 1970 and 1972 he served at RAF Honington (Suffolk) in a programme of RAF Aircraft Technician Improver Training and the formal consolidation of apprenticeship skills applied to operational aircraft. Following day/night release from duty, travelling to and from Cambridge, he qualified for his HNC in Mechanical Engineering.

Douglas Watt, a Royal Air Force Chief Technician, recognised Bill's great potential for advancement:

"Bill Taylor came to 12 Squadron, RAF Honington, straight from his trade training at RAF Halton. He continued his Improver Training with

Heading. Bill Taylor and his Tiger Moth G-AOGI in relaxed mood, probably prior to a station open-day, thought to be RAF West Raynham. Bill enjoyed the happiest times of his Service life in Norfolk.

us, mainly on the Blackburn Buccaneer which then had a nuclear role.

I have to say that Bill absolutely shone from the first. He bubbled with enthusiasm and was just simply a natural at every phase of his training. He was really keen on military airfields and knowledgeable on their history, right down to every detail of equipment such as runway arrester gear.

Although Bill did not particularly mix socially, I did not care to think of him falling into the ways of the Sergeants' Mess and propping up the bar. I felt sure that this man had massive potential to go further and so I reported up my chain that Corporal Taylor should be considered for Officer Training. Even the Station Commander was involved. And the rest, as they say, is history!"

Let me try to do justice to Bill's jam-packed career. Also a mention of just some of his interests and a few de Havilland moments. "Why use one superlative when ten will do?" Bill would have advised!

1973 to 1974 was taken up with Officer Cadet training, a year at RAF Henlow, then Engineering Officer Initial Training at RAF College, Cranwell.

His first posting was to RAF Brawdy in Pembrokeshire, to the Operational Conversion Unit, later the Tactical Weapons Unit. Bill told me that it comprised three squadrons, so 36 Hawker Hunters for the newly-minted officer to play with. Also, the unit still operated three Gloster Meteors for target towing, in one of which Bill was very pleased to have had a ride. A benefit of being at Brawdy, in the fast jet-centric RAF, was that Bill

came to know several aircrew who later attained high rank and would be useful allies in the future.

In the late 1970s it was off to RAF Bruggen, Germany. Bill became OC ASF, Officer Commanding Aircraft Servicing Flight, an even weightier task, with four squadrons of Jaguar nuclear strike aircraft to maintain, also oversight of NATO's cross-servicing commitment for Jaguars operated by other European nations. And this posting, of course, prompted Bill's seminal book *'Royal Air Force Germany since 1945'*, published by Midland in 2003.

Back home again in 1981, now as a Squadron Leader, Bill was straight into a desk job at HQ Strike Command, RAF High Wycombe, his task to direct engineering support for the introduction to RAF service of the Tornado aircraft.

Few will know that at this point, 37 years ago, Bill dodged a lethal bullet. His abnormal response to a routine sight test revealed a macroprolactinoma, a tumour of the pituitary gland. Trial of a pioneering medication was offered, and which, in Bill-speak, "sorted the job out" ever after. As sad as we are today, there is much for which to be thankful.

In 1983, Bill was made Senior Engineering Officer of the reformed 27 Squadron at RAF Marham, very much feeling its way with shortfalls of equipment and know-how, and more Tornado aircraft teething troubles than you can "shake a stick at." (Taylorisms intended!)

Bill's diary entries are painful to read. Imagine being put through the wringer for having only one of a dozen aircraft on line, unavoidably, and then to have that one wiped out by a birdstrike! Or, having to explain the uncommanded jettison of a drop tank over Downham Market!

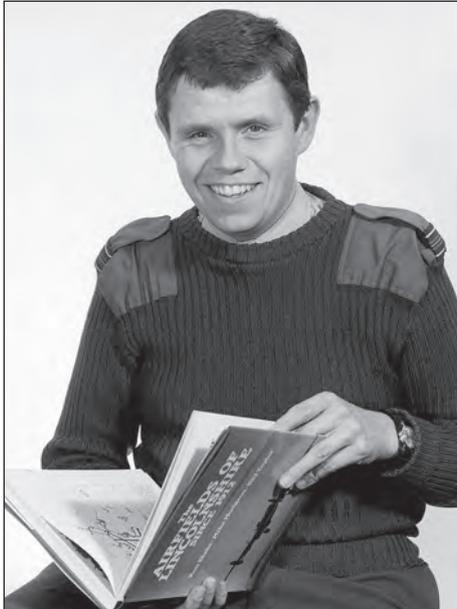
Above all, in the absence of a deputy, no JEngO, he became lonely and exhausted by excessively long and combative working days, often with the night flying programme to cover as well.

Bill wrote, characteristically: "There was a lot of pressure on individuals to get the aircraft fixed and my job was to keep the pressure off the backs of the people doing the job; but this added to the pressure on me."

Surely a portent of what was to come at de Havilland Support Ltd!

Fast-forwarding through Bill's next stint in the Old War Office, as the UK focal point for tri-national Tornado engineering liaison, we come to possibly the two happiest periods of his whole Service life, namely, his years in sleepy and beautiful Norfolk: a posting to RAF West Raynham, an airfield of such history, which appealed greatly to Bill, and a near ultimate toybox in terms of facilities to work on his own private Piper Cub and Pawnee aircraft. The day job as Bloodhound Force Engineer involved engineering standards and QA of the Bloodhound surface-to-air missile system, and ditto the Rapier which defended USAF bases. Regular visits to the missile site at North Coates, near home, were genuinely necessary. For his services to Air Defence, Bill was appointed OBE in The New Year's Honours in 1991.

Right. Bill the Wing Commander, at 37 years of age, OC Engineering Wing, Bloodhound Force Engineer, RAF West Raynham, 1988. It was a station full of history and allowed Bill the facilities to maintain his own aeroplanes.



Sqn. Ldr. Taylor, SEngO, 27 Sqn, RAF Marham, February 1984, with a copy of 'The Airfields of Lincolnshire since 1912' co-authored with Ron Blake and Mike Hodgson.

Following West Raynham he was OC Mechanical Engineering Wing of the Central Servicing Development Establishment at equally idyllic RAF Swanton Morley near Dereham. Another ideal match, troubleshooting real world problems affecting military aircraft, and overseeing the RAF's Non-Destructive Testing capability. Also, a dream-perfect grass airfield from which to fly his own aircraft! Bill always felt remorse at having been obliged to announce the Station's final closure over the Tannoy.

From 1993 to 1997, Bill was to be found at HQ RAF Logistics Command, RAF Brampton, as the Branch and Trade Sponsor for the professional training of all engineering personnel within the Royal Air Force. This put him into close contact

A memoir from Royal Air Force Halton

Bill Taylor and I first met when he was writing his book *'Halton and the Apprentice Scheme'*. He told me he had conceived the idea when in his bath! A major reference work, I have referred to Bill's book myself when writing articles or giving presentations on the Scheme. In recent years, two PhD students have referenced it in their theses. I remember at the 1995 Halton Apprentices' triennial reunion, attended by some 3,000 ex Brats, Bill brought along over 1,000 copies and sat all day at a desk signing them. He sold the lot and donated a considerable sum to the Halton Apprentices' Association. Originally priced at £10, I saw it on e-Bay recently for £50.

On the final graduation parade at Halton, the 155th Entry, only about 40 strong, was supported on parade by 120 former apprentices ranging from Junior Technicians to an Air Commodore, in two flights. Bill and I were the two flight commanders. He was very proud to have been on the last Apprentice parade at Halton.

Bill was earmarked to be chairman of the Halton Apprentices' Association on his retirement, but the onset of his illness put paid to that idea. He would have been, without doubt, an inspiring and creative leader. He was a most loyal and active supporter of our Association and is a massive loss to it. He will be remembered, not just as a gentleman who had time for everyone whatever their status in life or rank, but also for the exceptional contribution he made to documenting the heritage of RAF Halton.

*Grp Capt Min Larkin RAF (Retd)
Historian and Archivist, RAF Halton*





Left. When Group Captain Engineering for RAF Training Aircraft, Bill flew in a Red Arrows' Hawk from RAF Cranwell with Air Commodore Mal Prissick, CFS Commandant. It seems he may have enjoyed the experience.

with the UK Civil Aviation Authority, negotiating for civil recognition of military engineering training and experience.

For some of this time I was myself 'pretend RAF' (an MoD civilian) at nearby RAF Wyton, flying in and out regularly. I could see from the listing of overdue fitness tests in shared Station Routine Orders that the famous W.J. Taylor was close at hand, and hoped that my Moth and Chipmunk activities might flush him out! Strangely, they never did.

Bill's final Royal Air Force appointment was as Group Captain Engineering at the RAF Training Agency, Innsworth. Until retirement in 2001, at age 50, he held responsibilities for the entire RAF flying training fleet: miscellaneous gliders, Bulldog, Tucano, Hawk, Jetstream, Dominie, and what he called 'helly co peters'.

Having himself kept industry contractors on a tight rein, Bill was aghast at the 'ocean-going' foul-ups which have since destroyed the Air Training Corps gliding scene.

Quite some career for any Halton Brat, you will agree. A long way from 113 Entry. And all without a Mrs Taylor to glad-hand on Station occasions and aid the upward trajectory. Bill's attainments were down to sheer ability and applied hard slog, and to placing personal life on hold. Such great sacrifice, and that is before we come to our 17-year cycle in the de Havilland spin drier!

In 2000 Bill successfully completed his board for promotion to Air Rank. However, he was advised that there was no available establishment and he could possibly remain on the list for three years else exercise his option to leave the Service.

But before we go there, let me skim over a few other surfaces.

Bill's time was spread thinly and yet he contributed to every scene and every aircraft or vehicle-specific club that he ever touched. Take his written and photographic output alone, web postings, articles and co-authored books. Vintage aircraft preservation, historic and present-day road haulage, AEC lorries, aerial crop spraying, airfield buildings, RAF history, and local history, particularly of RAF Spilsby. 'Taylor's Tips' in the early *Vintage Aircraft* magazines were always worth a read and he greatly supported the BAPC's formative *Control Column* magazine. For 15-years Bill was the UK correspondent of *Ag-Pilot International*.

Yet this was not just talking the talk. Bill also walked the walk like very few others. He first learned to fly in 1975 and continued at Laarbruch when serving in Germany. Having worked on a static Percival Proctor, an exhibit for the Lincs Aviation Museum at Tattershall, Bill resolved that even old aeroplanes were meant to fly. With his brother Andy, he acquired, rebuilt and flew until recently, a very nice Piper Super Cub.



Above left. Tiger Moth G-AOGI in a sound technical condition prior to covering and assembly which was achieved at Boston.

Left. Bill in 'Woburn uniform' during his first visit to the International Rally in August 1985 with the paint on G-AOGI still drying.

Captivated like many of us by the 1979 Moth Rally from Hatfield to Strathallan, Bill next became fixated on owning a Tiger Moth. Starting with a project, and with help from the great enthusiasts at Boston Aerodrome, he broke the bank but managed it. Bill flew the finished Tiger Moth, G-AOGI, straight to the 1985 Woburn Moth Rally, with the dope still drying!

And then came what Bill confessed was his 'most crass and fundamental error of judgement.'

"Instead of just sticking with the Cub and Tiger Moth we obtained the Pawnee. Whilst it brought its moments of joy, there was a lot of heartache. In hindsight we should have stuck with what we had and made the most of it."

After restoring the Pawnee to top notch condition, Bill and his brother, Andy, took enthusiast interest to the ultimate. They obtained what became the last fixed wing Aerial Application Certificate in the UK and ran it as a small business. One customer was the Royal Estate at Sandringham. I leave you to imagine how all this fitted around Bill's RAF career! Somehow, Bill went even further by restoring three more Pawnees as glider tugs, all of them active today.

And still there was more! Until leaving the RAF, Bill was Vice-Chairman Engineering of the RAF Gliding & Soaring Association, quite some 'Secondary Duty', with over 100 gliders, motor gliders and tugs in scope.

Deep involvement also applied where HGV licences and road vehicles were concerned. AEC lorries had always held a fascination, the favourite marque of Lincolnshire farmers with crops to move to store or market. As youngsters, Bill and Andy accompanied friendly local drivers far and wide on such trips. Eventually it became Bill's crusade to reunite a quartet of lorries once owned by the firm of A.E. Lenton Ltd. in their home village of Friskney. Yet again, a near impossible objective was achieved.

And so to my first meeting, 21 years ago, with Bill Taylor, at a de Havilland Moth Club Technical Support Group meeting. This was a buffer organisation to sit between the enthusiast owners of vintage de Havilland aeroplanes (some a bit rabid!) and British Aerospace who had inherited technical responsibility for these aircraft.

The off-duty Bill was not quite as I had imagined: a big teddy bear of a figure, wearing blue 'overalls' and a beanie hat!

From these origins and after the formation of BAE Systems grew de Havilland Support Limited. BAE contracted out to us their product support task for most of the legacy piston engine de Havilland aircraft types, with the Beagle Pup and Scottish Aviation Bulldog to follow. The die was cast and Bill embarked on a life sentence, this time at Duxford, where he bought his 'little house' to be close by the offices which we established in a former WAAF accommodation block.

I was wary of going into business with a Senior Officer, fearing that all the work might become mine to do, but sources at Wyton and Brampton insisted my fellow Director would be like no other, and how right they were! Bill was an absolute powerhouse, from start to finish.

We went first to Chadderton to gather up the de Havilland data, and caused upset by staying

Right. Bill the CEO of de Havilland Support playing host in the company's Duxford offices to Alex Henshaw, one of his great aviation heroes.



Bill the Group Captain, supporting the final Apprentice Graduation Parade at RAF Halton, 24 June 1993.

in the factory long after all but the cleaners had gone. Bill wrote our initial Civil Aviation Authority Exposition and Procedures Manual from a standing start, on the basis of which we gained a CAA Design Approval and, much later, a spares Manufacturing Approval. Many will know all about our travails since 2001. With something like 1,000 aircraft in scope, worldwide, there has never been a dull moment.

I will dwell on only a few things. Firstly, the enormous pleasure that Bill derived from hosting the surviving great names of our industry, while we still could. To think that we had round to tea the

Captain, Co-pilot and Flight Test Observer of the first jet airliner flight in the world: the de Havilland Comet. And, through his visits to our offices, that boldest Lincolnshire airman of all, Alex Henshaw, who became a friend of us both. Likewise, the veterans we met at numerous BBMF functions.

Secondly, I think of Bill's approach to handling Regulation. He determined early that if a situation is unworkable, then campaign rationally to change it. To this end he represented trade associations on EASA Working Groups in Cologne. Bill it was who called out, when such a meeting was adjourned because a wartime bomb was unearthed in the street outside: *"Don't worry, it's one of ours!"* Bill's impassioned but constructive pleas to our own Regulator led directly to the A8-21 CAA Approvals under which we work today.

Finally, there was Bill's inspired leadership and determination. When BAE Systems told us in their London HQ in 2010, in no uncertain terms, that financial support of de Havilland would be ceasing, Bill's flightpath barely wobbled.

He punched the air and declared that we would *"fight like alley cats"* to preserve our creation. And then, to me afterwards, *"come to my Club,"* the RAF Club which he had joined in 1973. I followed my leader across Green Park to the sanctuary of 128 Piccadilly, and there we hatched a plan which has perpetuated the de Havilland dream to date, the only tragedy being that Bill was denied almost all leisure time ever after. A very high price to pay.

However, there was one unlikely grass roots activity of the greatest consolation to Bill, on occasions when he could return to Lincolnshire. These were his Saturday mornings of trading road haulage banter in the workshop at Benton Brothers Transport in Sibsey. Then he would move on for an afternoon snoop round the yard of Kevin Dennis in Wainfleet, there to examine the latest 'pre-owned' lorry stock.

But now, to quote Bill, *"We are where we are."* Such a very cruel ending, to be taken by a brain tumour, but **WHAT** a Lifelong Achiever!

