



Wing Commander Norman Want

Wing Commander Norman Want died peacefully at home, surrounded by family and friends, on 13th April after a long battle with cancer. He was OC B Flt 74 Squadron from 1967-69, serving at both Leuchars and Tengah. He and his wife Diana were both well loved and he will be greatly missed.

Norman was born on the 9th June 1935 and grew up around Stamford and attended Stamford School where he excelled at cross country running. On leaving school he joined the RAF but had to complete a few months of National Service first. When done, Norman's flying training began in Canada. Returning to the UK and after further training he was posted to Germany. Norman joined 20 Squadron and 124 Wing at Oldenburg flying Hunters in those heady days in the late 50s when the RAF aircrew community was young and life really was for living. He moved with the squadron to Ahlhorn and eventually to Gutersloh

His subsequent RAF career began with 72 Squadron, flying Javelins. During this short tour, in preparation for conversion to the Lightning he was unfortunate to land at night into the approach end Safeland barrier which had for some reason been wrongly raised. He was on the third Lightning Conversion course at Middleton St George under the tutelage of a certain Ken Goodwin and then served for a tour on 19 Squadron at Leconfield before joining AFDS (the Air Fighting Development Squadron) at Binbrook. One of the many tasks he performed there was the in-service acceptance of the Red Top missile. He also flew as a trials pilot with the French Air Force (Mirage III) and the United States Air Force (F-102 Delta Dagger and F-106 Delta Dart).

Then Norman joined the Tigers at RAF Leuchars before the move to Tengah. He arrived on 74 with an excellent reputation earned at AFDS. He was young, thoroughly professional, a firm disciplinarian but also a popular flight commander and foil for Ken Goodwin. They remained firm friends from that time on.

One story from the Tengah days is worth recounting. During April 1968 the Tigers captured the Tengah-Butterworth speed record. Over the previous months 74 and the RAAF's 75 Squadron had competed to transit as speedily as possible between the two airfields on Tiger Rag detachments. In March the Aussies had reduced the time to 27 minutes 30 seconds. Ken Goodwin retaliated immediately with a run in afterburner with fuel disappearing at an alarming rate but failed to regain the record. Obviously a more scientific approach was needed and as commander of the April detachment Norman was ordered to retrieve the record for 74.

I was summoned by the Boss and told to put the time out of reach for once and for all. There were various factors to consider, not least that Malaysia was tired of having sonic booms dropped across it. Also, there were restrictions on airframe and engine times at high Mach numbers. We didn't have much information on fuel consumption figures so given we were taking four aircraft I decided to send them individually. Clive Mitchell went first and was told to run at a relatively conservative M1.3 and to call back his fuel states. Ian McBride and then Tony Doidge were to follow, each basing their runs on the results of the former and pushing up the speeds and continuing to call back fuel and distance to me. But the plot got out and the Boss was told to 'bin it' by Phil Lageson, the Station Commander. The Boss being the Boss he accompanied me to my aircraft and uttered his immortal catchphrase 'don't worry about a thing' and told me to get on with it. Obviously our devious ways were well known because I received a personal directive from Phil Lageson as I taxied out not to attempt any records. But I was having all sorts of trouble with my R/T that morning and got airborne and went for it. The aircraft behaved beautifully and no fire warning lights came on. I landed with enough fuel to taxi in and we had the record! The distance was c.330 miles, the date was April 18th, the aircraft was XR768 and the time from tower to tower was 24 minutes 17seconds in a run which saw me initially accelerate to M1.6 and then to M1.99 at which the aircraft was far from full throttle.....

After Tengah a period of ground-based postings saw Norman involved in RAF recruitment, the development of pilots' notes and TACEVAL testing of northern NATO operations, based out of Norway. He returned to flying in the 1980s as OC Ops at Binbrook, flying the Lightning once again His final years in the RAF included postings to Kuwait liaising as Air Advisor with the Royal Kuwaiti Air Force (for which he was awarded the OBE), further service in Germany and then command of the Handling Squadron at Boscombe Down. On leaving the RAF Norman took up a Civil Service position at Boscombe Down until his retirement at 65. His was a very varied career during which those who worked with him almost invariably felt that this popular and professional officer never got the full recognition from his parent service that his loyalty and performance merited.

Norman married Diana in 1959 and they had a daughter, Fiona, in 1960 and a son, Stephen, in 1962. From the 1990s Norman and Diana lived in Old Sarum near Salisbury. In their retirement they played golf, travelled the world, gardened, enjoyed reunions with their many RAF friends and colleagues and spent time with their growing family of grand and great grandchildren.

RIP Norman.