

Admiral Sir Raymond Lygo KCB

Born 15th March 1924 – Died 7th March 2012

Raymond Derek Lygo was born in 1924. He left Ilford High School at 14 and followed his father into the printing trade, but unable to obtain an apprenticeship joined the staff of Times Newspapers as a messenger boy and worked through the Blitz. Having risen to sergeant in the Air Defence Cadet Corps he doggedly overcame educational and eyesight deficiencies to join the Fleet Air Arm in 1942 as a naval airman. Taught to fly in the US he was commissioned as a sub-lieutenant RNVR and trained as a Seafire (the naval version of the Spitfire) pilot at Yeovilton.

His squadron joined the carrier Indefatigable in 1944 and was employed covering attacks on the battleship Tirpitz and strafing Norwegian airfields, experiencing the normal incidence of crashes and losses to enemy action. In late 1944 Indefatigable joined the British Pacific Fleet and contributed to attacks on Japanese installations in Sumatra, Formosa (Taiwan) and eventually the Japanese mainland. On one occasion Lygo was horrified to see an aircraft with red spot markings flash by just as he took off from the deck. This kamikaze struck Indefatigable abreast the island, killing many. Lygo "selfishly" wondered if the carrier would be operable before he ran out of fuel, as a result of sound armoured deck construction, it was.

On return after the war he transferred to the regular Navy and became a highly qualified flying instructor. In 1949 he returned to the US, joined the US Navy's first East Coast jet squadron and flew Phantoms and Banshees ashore and in the carrier Philippine Sea. Here he met and married Pepper van Osten in Florida.

Back in Britain in 1951, Lygo commanded the Navy's first jet training squadron. He obtained useful seafaring qualifications in the frigate Vervan Bay in the South Atlantic followed by command of the Navy's first jet squadron to embark in Ark Royal. Early promotion to Commander in 1956 was followed by two staff jobs and command of the new frigate Lowestoft.

Promoted to Captain at the early age of 39, he was appointed to his first Ministry of Defence post as deputy director of Naval Air Warfare, during which period he took part in the notorious "carrier battle" which eventually removed fast jet aircraft and the vital airborne early warning capability from the Naval inventory. It was one of his staff who discovered that the RAF had moved Australia 200 miles westward in documentation supporting the case for a land based Indian Ocean solution, a cause celebre in its day.

Two incidents concerning his appointment in command of the new frigate Juno and the 5th frigate squadron were revealing of Lygo's character. He had previously crossed swords with the formidable Admiral John Frewin in a lecture hall. When calling on him as CinC the Admiral said "The last time we met, Lygo, there was an unfortunate scene. It was my fault and I regret it, but you are an extremely irritating man". Lygo remarked later "He was right, I am irritating"

At the end of his tour during which Juno was noted for smartness and efficiency, he was "dined out" in the wardroom as is the custom. Unusually his wife Pepper was also invited, the second in command, John Caughey, revealing that the officer's, after three weeks of Lygo, had met and said that they were not going to be able to survive this Captain and his impossibly high standards. But having met his delightful wife they reckoned that if she could stand 20 years they could endure two, and the farewell was for her.

After successfully running the naval entry in the Transatlantic Air Race won by an RN Phantom, Lygo was unusually again sent back to sea in command of Ark Royal, having been given the task of extracting her from a delaying dockyard refit. In 1972 he was promoted to Rear Admiral as Flag Officer Carriers and Amphibious Ships, then as Director of Naval Manpower and Training, followed by Vice Chief of the Naval Staff (VCNS). Here his concerns were the unwinnable so-called Cod Wars against a NATO ally, Iceland, and the future of the nuclear deterrent which under the Chevaline update programme was heading for expensive failure while managed by the in-house scientific establishment.

The untimely death of the Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Andrew Humphries caused a high-level reshuffle which made Lygo briefly First Sea Lord as well as VCNS until the arrival of Admiral Terry Lewin. He retired as a full Admiral in 1978 while only 54, being appointed KCB.