

MEDALIST FOR 1952

For forty years of pioneering in military and commercial aircraft and the development of long-range jet transport.



SIR GEOFFREY DE HAVILLAND

From early hand-built biplanes to successful jet transports, the career of Sir Geoffrey de Havilland has spanned the whole developmental period of aeronautics.

Born in England July 27, 1882, he received his education at St. Edwards, Oxford, and The Crystal Palace School of Engineering. As a young man of 26, he left a position in the motor industry in London to satisfy an overwhelming desire to build an airplane and fly it. His first aircraft was a biplane powered by a 45-horsepower engine of his own design. It crashed on its first flight, but a simpler aircraft was built around the same engine, and with this in the summer of 1910 he taught himself to fly.

A few months later de Havilland joined the Army Balloon Factory at Farnborough. He was responsible for the design, early in 1911, of a canard machine for the Army, and a tractor biplane, the Bleriot Experimental No. 1, forerunner of the B.E. 2 used early in World War I. In May 1914 he joined The Aircraft Manufacturing Co., Ltd. as Chief Designer and pilot. His initial design there was the D.H. 1 two-seat pusher biplane fighter, first in the series of de Havilland aircraft. Throughout World War I, de Havilland was responsible for a number of military aircraft, notably the D.H. 4 (Rolls-Royce Eagle), the D.H. 9 (Siddley Puma) and the D.H. 10 twin-engined bomber. By 1918, a third of the total Allied air strength was comprised of airplanes of de Havilland design.

De Havilland founded The de Havilland Aircraft Co., Ltd., in 1920, and started activities in a small way at Stag Lane, Edgware, northwest London. The first scheduled air service between London and Paris was inaugurated with de Havilland D.H. 4A and D.H. 16 two-passenger and four-passenger aircraft. Thereafter de Havilland created a number of successful airliners for the British Empire services, notably the single-engined D.H. 34 and D.H. 50 and the three-engine Hercules D.H. 66. In the 1920's he pioneered the light airplane with his Moth, which he first flew on February 22, 1925.

Daniel Guggenheim Medal

World War II led de Havilland again into the military field. He conceived the idea of the high-speed general-purpose Mosquito, an outstanding combat craft, which was fastest in the fray for two and a half years. By early 1941 he had a jet engine, the Goblin, running on test. The company's extensive military experience made possible the introduction after the war of the first jet airliner, the famous Comet.

De Havilland was awarded the Air Force Cross for his services to military aviation; was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1934, was knighted in 1944, and was awarded the Order of Merit in 1962. As Technical Director, he was the leader of the de Havilland enterprise until his retirement in 1955.

He continued flying up to the age of seventy. He died aged 82 on 21 May 1965 at Watford Peace Memorial Hospital, Hertfordshire.