

Obituary: Ex Flight Lieutenant Fred Weston DFC

A TROPHY-WINNING marksman, Fred Weston, who has died aged 95, joined the RAF at the outbreak of the War, became a Rear Gunner in Bomber Command and was awarded a DFC.

After the War, he went into Forestry, ending his career as District Forest Officer for Hambleton, and Deer Patrol Advisor for the North of England.

Born in Runcorn, Cheshire, Mr Weston was the eldest of the four sons of William and Ivy Weston.

He got a place at Wade Deacon Grammar School in Widnes where he was a hard-working pupil and excelled at rugby union, continuing to play in later life.

Leaving school, he joined the accounts department of the Mersey Power Company in Runcorn.

He took up shooting and competed at Bisley, winning a number of trophies including a BSA Shooting Trophy, and, in 1938, the Bromley-Davenport Silver Challenge Cup.

On joining Bomber Command at the outbreak of war, and completing a gunnery course, he became a Rear Gunner, initially flying in Whitleys and Blenheims.

In May 1941 he was posted to 101 Squadron, which sustained the heaviest losses in Bomber Command. With 101 he flew in Wellingtons until May 1942, and for the rest of his service in Stirlings.

On July 28, 1942, he had to bale out at low altitude after a mid-air collision with a Wellington as they left Cambridgeshire en route to Hamburg. His violent landing in a tree at Cherry Hinton, near Cambridge, caused a back problem from which he suffered for the rest of his life, but that night the remainder of the squadron suffered devastating losses.

From June 1943 he was a Gunnery Leader with 620 Squadron in dangerous missions against heavily-defended targets, including the German battleships, *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*.

In the many crash landings he experienced, he broke his nose at least twice and had his front teeth knocked out.

In June 1943, he received the DFC from George VI in recognition of his tenacity, courage and devotion to duty.

Mr Weston's last operational flights were during Operation Market Garden at Arnhem in September 1944, and special duties with Transport Group 38 on secret SOE

(Secret Operations Executive) missions, dropping supplies to the Resistance Movement and dropping and recovering agents.

He found relief from the stresses of those missions by playing rugby for the RAF and driving fast cars, a Bugatti, Lamborghini, Maserati and Alfa Romeo among them.

When the war ended, he went to Bangor University, played rugby for the university and gained a BSc in Forestry in 1948.

After a year as a Forestry Officer, he moved to Northern Ireland as a Field Officer and eventually as Chief Forest Officer. While there, he met and married Dorothy Barclay.

In 1952 he returned to the Forestry Commission in England as District Forest Officer in South Hampshire, based at Winchester, and in 1964 he moved to Helmsley as District Forest Officer for the vast Hambleton area and Deer Patrol Advisor for the North of England. At one time, he had the overall charge of seven beats and 128 men.

When he was 60, having spent 10 years at the Helmsley Office and two at Pickering, he retired, able now to spend more time fishing and shooting.

Mr Weston knew his own mind, and spoke it - particularly when he considered an injustice was being done. And fiercely independent, he would not be rushed into making a decision. It took two years to persuade him, at the age of 93, to have an Aid Call button.

An out-of-doors man, he did not feel the cold, and thought no-one else did either.

He loved music, particularly Gregorian chants, tango and jazz. He appreciated a good joke, even against himself, particularly if it was in service language and if he had a glass of whisky or a gin and tonic in his hand.

His tough exterior disguised a compassionate nature, testament to which was the very many charities he supported.

His most prized possession was his well-thumbed copy of the New Testament which went with him on every operation.

Mr Weston's three younger brothers pre-deceased him, and Mrs Weston died 8 years ago. The couple had no children, but he is survived by his cousin, Mrs Sylvia White, his God-Daughter Catherine Millington and his nephews and nieces.

A service for friends and family to celebrate his life was held at 2.45pm at the Chapel at Lister House, Ripon, on Wednesday, May 2.