

FROM BOUNCING BOMBS TO CONCORDE

THE AUTHORISED BIOGRAPHY
OF AVIATION PIONEER
**SIR GEORGE
EDWARDS OM**

ROBERT
GARDNER

FOREWORD BY SIR JOHN MAJOR



First published in the United Kingdom in 2006 by
Sutton Publishing Limited · Phoenix Mill
Thrupp · Stroud · Gloucestershire · GL5 2BU

Copyright © Robert Gardner, 2006

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher and copyright holder.

Robert Gardner has asserted the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-7509-4389-0

Typeset in 10.5/14.5pt Photina MT.
Typesetting and origination by
Sutton Publishing Limited.
Printed and bound in England by
J.H. Haynes & Co. Ltd, Sparkford.

Contents

	<i>Foreword</i>	vii
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
	<i>Author's Note</i>	xi
1	In the Beginning	1
2	A Job at Vickers	8
3	Preparing for War	17
4	'Down with 'Itler'	24
5	Working for Beaverbrook	32
6	Bouncing Bombs	40
7	Mission to Germany	50
8	Chief Designer	60
9	'The Heat and Burden of the Viscount'	70
10	'Falling in Love with the Viscount'	80
11	Britain's First V-bomber	88
12	Managing Director	98
13	Ethel Merman, Bob Six, but Mostly Howard Hughes	108
14	'The Biggest Blunder of All'	116
15	Accolades, Worries and the Vanguard	122
16	The VC10 – 'A Sorry Story'	132

17	Rationalisation	139
18	TSR.2 and a New Partner	145
19	British Aircraft Corporation	153
20	TSR.2 – the Beginning of the End	161
21	TSR.2 – the End	171
22	Life After Death, but Only Just	181
23	Concorde – the Beginnings	190
24	‘She Flies’	199
25	Trouble with the French	212
26	Guided Weapons and Defence Contracts	219
27	His Last Aircraft	228
28	Enter the Wide-Bodies	239
29	Changes at the Top	247
30	‘Merger-itis’ and Nationalisation	256
31	Into Retirement	265
32	Pastimes, Painting and ‘Cricket, Lovely Cricket’	271
33	The University of Surrey and a Personal Crusade	281
34	‘A Man of Absolute Rectitude’	289
35	Last Overs	297
	<i>Envoi</i>	305
	<i>Appendix One: Abbreviations</i>	309
	<i>Appendix Two: Chronology</i>	311
	<i>Bibliography</i>	316
	<i>Index</i>	322

Foreword

by The Rt Hon. Sir John Major, KG CH

Very few people rise from the very bottom to the very top, build up achievements as they go, and leave a beneficial legacy behind them. One such is George Edwards. George Edwards was a rounded man, a man with a hinterland far wider than his genius for engineering. From his boyhood he had a love of cricket and used his knowledge of the game to help Barnes Wallis make the 'bouncing bomb' bounce in the Second World War. The dams of the Ruhr were destroyed by leg spin. George loved painting, a passion that came to him late in life, and was sufficiently good at it to have a canvas accepted for the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy at the age of 92. It was an achievement that gave him great satisfaction. We all owe a great deal to George Edwards, though few people will know how much until they read this biography. His life merged with history at key moments in war and peace, and his genius for innovation shaped events in the Second World War and in the general history of aviation. In wartime, apart from helping to destroy the great German dams, he designed an innovative system to detonate enemy magnetic mines to protect our shipping lanes, modified aircraft for special assignments, and was a member of the team that uncovered vital aeronautical information from Germany at the war's end. In peacetime, in his work for Vickers, he led the programme on the TSR.2 supersonic strike aircraft and the BAC One-Eleven jet-liner. He had earlier headed the design teams responsible for the Viking and Viscount airliners and the Valiant, Britain's first V-bomber. Later he was instrumental in the development of the most famous airliner of all: the Anglo-French Concorde. I first met Sir George Edwards, OM, designer, inventor and former chairman of BAC, at The Oval. An elderly, modest, undemonstrative man, a flat cap perched on his head, his vowels less precise

than his remarkable mind, he sat quietly while watching the cricket. Beside him were two fellow spectators talking of their respective fathers' significant contributions to the Second World War. If only they had known . . . This biography will enable many more to know that George Edwards is part of our nation's history; and it is time his story was told.

'Mach 2 travel feels no different,' a passenger commented on an early Concorde flight. 'Yes,' Sir George replied. 'That was the difficult bit.'

Sir George Edwards, quoted in Kenneth Owen,
Concorde: New Shape in the Sky



'We all owe a great deal to George Edwards . . . His life merged with history at key moments in war and peace, and his genius for innovation shaped events in the Second World War and in the general history of aviation.'

The Rt Hon. Sir John Major, KG CH

ISBN 0-7509-4389-0



9 780750 943895



SUTTON
PUBLISHING

www.suttonpublishing.co.uk