

# GROUP CAPTAIN LARRY OSBORNE

**Group Captain Larry Osborne, OBE, navigator, air traffic controller and supply specialist, died on March 12 aged 73. He was born on December 27, 1922.**

THE first black officer to reach the rank he did in the Royal Air Force, Larry Osborne was also one of the most charismatic officers in the service of his time. From a modest upbringing in the West Indies, he went on to serve in numerous capacities during and after the war, first as a navigator, then in air traffic control and finally, when his sight deteriorated, in the Equipment Branch. There he was responsible for the computerisation of the RAF's supply system.

Lawrence Theodore Osborne was born in Trinidad and joined the RAF in 1943 as a navigator. His desire to fly stemmed from an early interest in astronomy and the rapport he built up with Coastal Command crews operating Hudson reconnaissance aircraft from Trinidad during the Battle of the Atlantic. His initial training was in Canada, and he was soon commissioned. There he learnt to box, and represented the RAF detachment. After operational training in Northern Ireland, he went on to navigate Catalina flying boats and Liberator long-range reconnaissance bombers in Coastal Command.



in addition to his normal duties, he was a part-time member of the Anglo-German Technical Commission. As such, he was engaged in the training and resupply of the fledgeling post-war German Air Force. Typically he learnt German in his spare time and was thus able to conduct negotiations with the Germans in their own language. At Rheindalen, he also pursued his penchant for amateur dramatics, and he enjoyed taking a leading part in station productions. He also took part twice in the gruelling Nijmegen Marches,

well-earned promotion to group captain along the way. During 1975 he was privileged to lead the RAF contingent on his last Nijmegen March, and he retired in 1977.

In retirement, Osborne was not a man to potter in the garden. Apart from taking an Open University degree, he moved into supply training with the Crown Agents where he made an immediate impact, bringing with him from the RAF his experience, communication skills and an infectious sense of humour. In 1984 he was a founder member of

In 1945, with a vast surplus of pilots and navigators available for what was becoming a slimmed-down postwar Air Force, Osborne had to change his specialisation, and he became an air traffic controller. He thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of "bringing the boys down in bad weather" and his tours included a spell in the Middle East. But, not wishing to stay too long in the same trade and perhaps with a little friendly persuasion from the station medical officer, he had to change specialisation yet again because of poor eyesight. This time he chose to begin a new career in the Equipment Branch, embarking on this course in 1952.

This career took him on several tours before he attended the RAF Staff College, Bracknell, in 1958. This was followed by a posting to HQ 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force at Rheindalen in Germany. In

covering 100km in four days in full battlekit. He was posted back to the UK in 1961.

Following a tour in the Air Ministry, Osborne was posted in 1963 to RAF Valley in Anglesey where he learnt enough Welsh to become a member of the Holyhead Mixed Choir. He made many Welsh friends, with whom he always kept in touch.

In 1966 he was posted to the headquarters of RAF Maintenance Command at Andover. It was there that he had the responsibility for introducing the RAF's new computerised supply system into the main depots. His team soon became known unofficially as the Black and White Minstrel Show, a title he happily adopted. His work in Maintenance Command was recognised by his appointment as OBE in 1969.

Osborne spent most of the remainder of his career at the Ministry of Defence, with a

Finchfields Consultants which, among other things, worked on training courses for British Aerospace, and he continued to impart his knowledge on supply and control matters to various firms both at home and overseas until he retired in 1991.

When he did finally retire, Osborne was able to continue his hobbies of reading languages, electronics and walking. He will be remembered for his endless energy at work and his sense of humour. As far as his colour was concerned, he always said: "If people retain their prejudices after knowing me for a short while, it's probably my fault for failing to impress my personality on them." It was a credit to the RAF and all those he knew that this was never an issue.

Larry Osborne is survived by his wife Theodora, whom he met before leaving Trinidad, and by three sons.