

TIMES
9/3/98

WING COMMANDER CHRISTOPHER DEANESLY

**Wing Commander
Christopher Deanesly,
DFC, wartime fighter
pilot, died on February 19
aged 88. He was born on
January 27, 1910.**

ALTHOUGH Christopher Deanesly did not achieve the magic figure of five combat victories to enable him to qualify as an ace, his tally of four "kills", shot down at night in a single month, is much more meritorious than it might seem to the layman. The time was early 1941. The London Blitz was at its height. Night-fighting tactics were still in their infancy. The best equipment, the powerful, radar equipped Beaufighter with its formidable battery of four forward-firing cannon and six machineguns, had not yet been issued to 256 Squadron, of which Deanesly was a flight commander.

No 256 was still operating the Boulton Paul Defiant which mounted a mere four machine guns firing from a dorsal turret. This prevented the aircraft from engaging targets dead ahead, or from above, and rendered it vulnerable to the nose gunners of enemy bombers. The design had suffered appalling day-time casualties in the air fighting of 1940 when enemy fighters had shot it down in droves in head-on attacks. It required great skill and co-operation between the pilot and the air gunner, isolated in his power-operated turret, to achieve the success it did in the hands of 256.

Between Deanesly and his air gunner there was perfect understanding. And in the spring of 1941 his Defiant shot down four German bombers while defending British airspace, gaining Deanesly a well-earned DFC.

Christopher Deanesly was the son of a Wolverhampton surgeon. He was educated at Wellington College and Birmingham University, where he read commerce. At

the same time he became a part-time soldier, serving for six years with the South Staffordshire Territorials in the 1930s. In 1937 he turned to flying, with No 605 County of Warwick Squadron, Royal Auxiliary Air Force. It was at this period he acquired the nickname "Jumbo" by which he was ever afterwards known, because of his considerable bulk, a comforting factor if one was on his side in a tight corner.

But when hostilities opened in September 1939 he was posted to No 152 Hyderabad Squadron, with which he fought throughout the Battle of Britain. He was twice shot down during the Battle. In July 1940 his Spitfire had to ditch in the sea after being hit by return fire from a Ju87 over the Channel, and in September he was shot down over the sea again. He was wounded on both occasions.

These somewhat dispiriting circumstances might have discouraged a less resolute man, but his nerve held, and he survived to become a well-respected nightfighter pilot and wingleader. After his spell on night-fighting he went to North Africa where he commanded fighter wings during the desert campaign and subsequently in the Mediterranean theatre from January 1943 to March 1944. In the run-up to D-Day he was back in Britain training glider pilots for the invasion, and during the Rhine crossings of spring 1945 he commanded a glider towing squadron.

Returning to civilian life after the end of the war in the Far East, he ran a plastics business in Birmingham, retiring in 1971.

He is survived by his wife, Kuni, whom he had married as a WAAF officer in 1941, and by their two daughters.

