

Record

J. E. D. Williams

J. E. D. Williams ('Jed' to all), who died on 30 September 1992 aged 68, will be remembered by the Institute for his active, unselfish dedication to all its affairs since its formation in 1947, but particularly for the inspiration, experience and wisdom he brought to the fundamental review of the Institute completed during his presidency (1984–7), which serves as the solid foundation on which the Institute continues to build today.

He was a skilled professional navigator with years of military and airline experience, an entrepreneur with an outstanding business career in airline management and finance, underpinned by a scholarly intellect and a deeply rooted interest in the influence of different disciplines on the evolution of the art and science of navigation. He once described himself with typical modesty as a 'Jack of all trades', but could never be regarded as a master of none.

In the aviation world, his outstanding achievement in the early 1960s was successfully to pioneer his idea of a vertically integrated travel system to include both tour operator and airline in an overall package, offering it at an attractive price to a public already displaying a rapidly developing taste for foreign holidays in the sun, sea and sand. It led to the formation of an airline and an outstanding business career, and to his being described as 'very professional, very entrepreneurial, very efficient and very ambitious' – which ignores the inspired conceptual capacity which lay at the root of his many qualities.

His most notable contribution to the Institute was also in the realm of intellectual analysis coupled with extensive financial experience. At a time when the Institute faced serious financial difficulties and when a variety of views were being canvassed about its future, Jed's clarity of mind and vision effected the rescue. The principal policy issue was whether the Institute should remain 'of navigation' or become 'of navigators'. It was not Jed's style to impose solutions but, when the constitution and bye-laws were finally revised, the original concept of the Institute remained substantially unchanged due largely to his wise guidance. His persuasiveness with industry, together with improved financial disciplines, also helped solve the financial problems.

Jed was always modest, even shy perhaps, about his many achievements and personal success. He was happy in his own company, and whilst warm and utterly loyal to those fortunate enough to become close friends, he was incisively critical of loose thinking and intolerant of the lazy. He combined dignity and poise in an impressive leadership presence, seeking to influence by persuasion rather than dictate by command to create an enthusiastic culture for positive action. He had a sharp mind and a distinctive style which was greatly admired by his colleagues.

John Ernest Derek Williams was born in Liverpool in 1923 and entered Liverpool University in 1940 to become a scientist. He joined the University Air Squadron for his first compulsive sight of the aviation world, and in 1941 abandoned his science course, entered the Royal Air Force and at the age of nineteen was on active service as a Beaufighter's navigator based in Egypt. Operational duties varied from escorting convoys to Malta to strikes against shipping off the Greek islands, followed later by air support to the invasions of Sicily and Italy. These were the only RAF operations in which the navigator was also rear gunner, wireless operator, reconnaissance photographer and

Aldis lamp communicator with the Royal Navy. As he is wryly known to have remarked: 'This was my introduction to the value of a multi-disciplinary approach'.

As the war drew to a close, Jed completed a specialist signals course at Cranwell and served on the signals staff at Transport Command, but when the civil examinations restarted he gained a civil navigator's licence first class. At the end of 1946, armed with the qualification which was to be his career passport for at least the next ten years, he opted for demobilization.

Airline operations as chief navigator first with Aerolineas Argentinas and then with El Al gave Jed valuable international experience. During this period (in his spare time), he took a degree in mathematics at London University, studied aerodynamics and aircraft performance, served as vice-president of the International Airline Navigators' Council and wrote, in his own words, 'a ponderous tome on astronomical navigation which (mercifully) no one would publish'.

In 1956 he was appointed Manager of Operational Development in El Al and later Technical Adviser to the Chairman. Detached from routine operations, he took the opportunity to apply his creative and now mathematical skills to the art of flying aircraft more economically through greater navigational precision and, at the same time, gained an insight into the economics of airline operations which proved to be invaluable in later challenges.

In 1959, whilst retaining valuable links with El Al, he set up his own aviation consultancy company in London: two decisions which put him in the right position for the vital role he was now to play. The age of mass foreign holidays was dawning, and Jed was convinced conceptually of the attraction of complete overseas holidays in a single package. Thus in December 1961, when Universal Sky Tours invited him to start an airline, providing financial support to buy three Lockheed Constellation aircraft from El Al, Euravia (London) Limited was born, with Jed as managing director. On 5 May 1962 Euravia made its inaugural flight from its base at Luton via Manchester to Palma – a milestone event in the history of charter aviation. Skilful management and acquisition expanded Euravia's operations and, in August 1964, with six turboprop Britannia aircraft about to join the fleet, Jed marked the start of a new era by re-registering the company as Britannia Airways.

In 1965 the International Thomson Organization acquired Britannia Airways, and shortly afterwards Jed as chief executive pursued his strategy of moving towards an all-jet fleet with a courageous purchase of Boeing 737 aircraft straight from the drawing board. Again, in his spare time, he served as treasurer of this Institute, president of the British Air Transport Association, and on the council of the Royal Aeronautical Society. He also completed a book on 'The Operation of Airliners' – this time a great success.

His active mind was now searching for new intellectual challenges for the second half of an already distinguished career in aviation. So in 1969 he left Britannia to become president of an international finance house newly set up specifically to finance ship and aircraft projects. He was probably the only financier in Europe who was also an examiner of MSc theses on transport engineering.

By 1974 he had exhausted his interest in 'the arcane mysteries of high finance' and left to develop further his own engineering enterprises, which he sold to a conglomerate in the early 1980s, dividing his time from then on between his light aircraft business in Luxembourg, Institute affairs and his farm home and olive groves overlooking the Apennine hills of Tuscany. The peace and tranquillity of this setting gave him much pleasure in his later years.

From 1950 Jed lectured widely and wrote extensively on matters related to air transport engineering, economics and management. His writing was fluent, characterized

by its logical argument and precision, using elegant language and a delightful turn of phrase. His numerous contributions to the *Journal* range from 'Loxodromic Distance on the Terrestrial Spheroid' in 1950, through a series of papers in 1988–90 reviewing air navigation systems in commercial aviation, to a carefully argued defence in the last issue of the *Journal* of his strongly held views on the probability of true position lying inside the 'cocked hat'.

But his masterpiece must be his recently published work *From Sails to Satellites*, reviewed so well by John Kemp in the January 1993 *Journal*. The book illustrates so convincingly the passionate feeling within Jed for the interweaving of art, science, mathematics, economics and even politics in the historical evolution of navigation over the centuries. The factors are traced with a great depth of research, scholarship, elegance and textual precision and, not least, with refreshing flashes of humour so characteristic of the intellectual stature of the man.

Last year the completion of the work was a race against time, but he seemed to draw reserves of strength from his determination to achieve a lifelong ambition despite great pain and suffering. We must be deeply grateful that he fought to complete this work, because of its unique place in the bibliography of navigation. It is typical of his love of the Institute and his generosity that he has donated the copyright of the book to the Institute. As John Kemp so rightly concludes; 'Jed Williams served the Institute with great distinction over many years as a past President, a gold medallist and a double bronze medallist. We are now even more in his debt.'

Many in the Institute are the richer for having enjoyed the privilege of the friendship of this man of so many outstanding talents. His presence in our corridors will be sadly missed.

Jed is survived by his wife Marianne, and by a son.

John Charnley