



# Alan Bristow: Helicopter Pioneer: The Autobiography

*Alan Bristow*

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## **Alan Bristow: Helicopter Pioneer: The Autobiography** Alan Bristow

Alan Bristow, founder of Bristow Helicopters, died on April 26, 2009, seven days after completing his autobiography. He was a truly remarkable man; his full-page obituary was published in The Times and The Daily Telegraph. As a merchant navy officer cadet during the war Bristow survived two sinkings, played a part in the evacuation of Rangoon and was credited with shooting down two Stukas in North Africa. He joined the Fleet Air Arm and trained as one of the first British helicopter pilots, he was the first man to land a helicopter on a battleship and became Westland's first helicopter test pilot. Sacked for knocking out the sales manager, he flew in France, Holland, Algeria, Senegal and elsewhere, narrowly escaping many helicopter crashes before winning the Croix de Guerre evacuating wounded French soldiers in Indochina. For four years he flew for Aristotle Onassis's pirate whaling fleet in Antarctica before joining Douglas Bader and providing support services to oil drillers in the Persian Gulf. Out of that grew Bristow Helicopters Ltd, the largest helicopter company in the world outside America

Bristow's circle included the great helicopter pioneers such as Igor Sikorsky and Stan Hiller, test pilots like Harold Penrose and Bill Waterton, Sheiks and Shahs and political leaders, business giants like Lord Cayzer and Freddie Laker – with whom he tossed a coin for £67,000 in 1969 – and the author James Clavell, a lifelong friend whose book 'Whirlwind' was a fictionalized account of Bristow's overnight evacuation of his people and helicopters from revolutionary Iran. Bristow represented Great Britain at four in hand carriage driving with the Duke of Edinburgh and precipitated the 'Westland Affair' when he made a takeover bid which eventually led to the resignation of Michael Heseltine and Leon Brittain, and almost to the downfall of Margaret Thatcher.

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