

---

**Air Commodore Arthur Steele, born October 2 1923, died April 26 2012**



Arthur Steele (third from left) with his Valiant crew

Air Commodore Arthur Steele, who has died aged 88, was captain of a Valiant bomber during Operation Grapple, the testing of Britain's first thermonuclear weapon (the H-bomb) in the South Pacific in 1957.

Arthur George Steele was born on October 2 1923 at St John's Wood, north London, and educated at William Ellis Secondary School. He enlisted in the RAF in June 1941, at the age of 17, and trained as a pilot in Canada, where he remained as a flying instructor until his return to Britain in January 1945. After converting to the Mosquito he joined No 110 Squadron in Burma, flying ground-attack and bombing operations against the retreating Japanese forces. He was then deployed to Java during the early stages of the disturbances by Indonesian guerrillas.

Steele was released from the RAF in the summer of 1946 but rejoined three years later, when he became the flying instructor on No 31 Squadron at Hendon. He spent almost three years on Examination Wing at the Central Flying School and was awarded his first AFC.