

Naval 8 - 208 News

The Annual Newsletter of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association



2019 Issue

Naval 8 – 208 News - 2019



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Contents



3. *Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings*

The President's Foreword & Chairman's Chunter.

4. *A Very Dodgy Operation*

The Association Webmaster, Neil Meadows, recounts one of the many hair-raising tales from Sid Jefford's time on 208, as recorded in his memoirs "Two-Six".

7. *208 Sqn Heroes' Centenaries*

The Chairman, David T-Ryder, pays tribute to Flt Cdr Robert Little DSO & Bar, DSC & Bar, Croix de Guerre; Vice President Ben Laite pays a visit to Wg Cdr Donald Perrens DSO OBE DFC MA.

8. *Gibraltar - The Rock That Rocks*

Buccaneer Pilot Paul "Skids" Harrison recalls the joys of Overseas Training Flights to the Rock.

10. *Squadron Anniversaries*

The Association Historian, Graham Pitchfork, looks back at the events of 60 years and 25 years ago: the brief period operating the Venom and the end of the long era of the Buccaneer.

12. *In Memoriam & Chapter News*

We bid farewell to those comrades who have passed away during the last year.

A salutary tale from the Spitfire era, from the late Harry Tapner's memoirs; also a report on the Meteor Chapter's recent get-together, plus Al Thomas and Dick Northcote recount tales from the 1950s and 1960s, respectively.

14. *Membership & Keeping in Touch*

15. *The Annual Dinner*

Looking back at the Annual Dinner in 2018 and looking forward to this year's gathering, at a new venue.

Back Page

Naval 8 - 208 in Pictures.

On the Cover:

The mighty Buccaneer. A hard-working "cab" taxies out at Goose Bay in 1982.



Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings

The President's Foreword

Thirty-five members and guests attended the 2018 Reunion Dinner at the RAF Club on Saturday 20th October 2018 despite there being no permanent squadron since 2016. Neil Meadows read an extract from Sid Jefford's book, "Two/Six or My Service in the Middle East with 208 Squadron, Royal Air Force", one Chapter of which, "A Very Dodgy Operation", is recounted later in the Newsletter. But suffice it to say the bravery displayed by Sid (who was Mentioned in Dispatches for his action) and others from 208 Squadron in the Western Desert is a fitting tribute to the spirit of the Squadron, which still lives on today in the shape of the Association.

The Association Website continues to grow steadily under the careful stewardship of Neil Meadows. The current page count is close to 1000, with new pages to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the last piston-engined air combat, in which Spitfires of 208 Squadron shot down 4 Egyptian Spitfires, the 100th Anniversary of Robert Little's death (commemorated further in this Newsletter) and many others. Members are encouraged to take a look at the excellent material on the website (<http://www.naval8-208-association.com>) and contribute memorabilia, anecdotes and photographs to capture the essence of 208 Squadron for generations to come.

Last year a survey was sent to members to canvas their views on the location of the Annual Reunion Dinner. Forty Association members responded. There was an almost 50/50 split for those preferring to continue using the RAF Club and those wishing to use a location outside of London. However, a majority of respondents noted that they would support alternating the location of the dinner between the RAF Club and elsewhere. The Membership Secretary established that the centre of gravity for the membership is just south of Nuneaton (not surprisingly in the Midlands). The Chairman researched various locations in the Midlands for the dinner this year and came to a short list of 5 suitable hotels/restaurants. The Committee agreed that we should opt for the Grimscoe Manor Hotel, Coleshill, close to Birmingham, where I hope to see as many of you as possible.



Rob Wright

President

Chairman's Chunter

The review of the location and the format of the Annual Reunion Dinner is complete and we will try alternating between the RAF Club and another more geographically central location. This year the Annual Reunion Dinner will be at the Grimscoe Manor Hotel, Lichfield Road, Coleshill, B46 1LH (near Birmingham) on Saturday 19th October. The hotel has somewhat fewer rooms than the RAF Club, and we have reserved a total of 23 rooms. When booking for the Reunion Dinner, members will be asked to select a type of room they require (double, twin or single) and pay in advance through the Association. The hotel booking will be a first-come, first-served arrangement. **THE HOTEL WILL HOLD THE ALLOCATION OF ROOMS UP TO 8 WEEKS BEFORE THE DINNER – SO BOOK BY 2ND AUGUST 2019 TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT (OR NOWHERE TO SLEEP!).**

As noted last year, many Association members have some interesting stories to tell that recall times on 208 Squadron; these stories will get lost in the mists of time if not told and recorded. The telling of stories has the added advantage of providing material for both the Newsletter and Website. **SO IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND THE DINNER AND WANT TO RECOUNT A TALE OF DARING DO PLEASE LET ME OR THE HON SEC KNOW SO WE CAN ARRANGE THE EVENING ACCORDINGLY.**

Even though the website has extensive material there is always room for more. So, if you have an article, short anecdote, memorabilia or pictures they would be really appreciated. As always, the stories we tell of the people and places are the very essence of what makes this Squadron Association so special. Also if you have anything for the Newsletter please send your entry to Malcolm Ward. Contributions for the Website please send them to Gp Capt (rtd) Neil Meadows at 208webmaster@gmail.com.

DONATIONS – The general financial situation of the Association is sound, with a modest balance sheet sufficient for our short to medium term needs; we can produce a Newsletter for a few more years. There are no running costs for the Association and membership is free, so any donations are most welcome. My annual plea: please keep the donations rolling in no matter how small!

David Trembaczowski-Ryder

Chairman

A Very Dodgy Operation

Breaking with the tradition of inviting a guest of honour to speak at the annual dinner on a specific era of the Sqn's illustrious history, in 2018 the Association's Webmaster and former OC 208, Neil Meadows, delivered an extract from Sid Jefford's memoirs, which have now been published under the title: "Two-Six." The following text is a slightly edited version of Neil's talk, as delivered in the RAF Club.



Neil Meadows recounts Sid Jefford's story.

Many of you will remember our esteemed colleague, the late Sid Jefford, formerly the Spitfire Chapter and Groundcrew Representative, and a Life Vice-President of this Association, who passed away on Christmas Day 2016 at the age of 96, and might I take this opportunity to pass on the very best wishes of his daughter, Jilly, who was very sadly unable to attend this evening. In Sid's effects, was a wonderful manuscript autobiography, containing his first-hand account of his service with 208 Sqn in the Western Desert and Italian Campaigns from 1941 to 1944, and it is my privilege to be turning this manuscript into a book, 'Two/Six', which is due to be published at the turn of the year. It is from this book, that I would like to recount an incident, that Sid himself called 'A Very Dodgy Operation'.

It was February 1942 and the North African Campaign was not going well, and Axis forces were driving the Eighth Army back towards the Egyptian border. 208 Sqn, having been based at Tmimi in Libya since December 1941, had been forced back to Landing Ground 148 at Sidi Azeiz, some 50 miles west, leaving three unserviceable Hurricanes behind at Tmimi, such was the rapidity of their departure, in what was now 'no-man's land'. Two were very badly damaged, and had been repeatedly 'robbed' for spares. It was determined, however, that one of them could be made serviceable and flown out of Tmimi before the Germans overran. Sid Jefford writes on:

5 February

The expected increase in enemy activity exploded into a full-scale push which, after a short time, became an advance. The Advanced Flight was now located behind Tmimi at Acroma near Tobruk, and the main sqn party was hurriedly packing the transport for the move which took us some 50 miles further back - to LG148 at Sidi Azeiz.

At the morning work parade after settling in to LG148, the Engineering Officer had asked for volunteers to return to Tmimi, with the express intention to put into flying condition one of the three unserviceable Hurricanes still remaining on the strip, taking what was needed to do so from the other two. The volunteer party was to consist of a Senior NCO, two engine fitters, two airframe fitters, a wireless operator-mechanic and an NCO armourer. An arrangement had been made for this team to join with a South African Cavalry Armoured Car Unit, who would ferry them in and out of the field and supply them with food. The volunteer party moved out from Sidi Azeiz in the early hours of the following morning. Their precise orders were to prepare one aircraft for flying by 'robbing' the other two, then to remove all other useful components from the donor aircraft for use as spares. If an aircraft had been successfully repaired, the party was to radio for a pilot and 'mine' the other two aircraft for destruction.



Sid Jefford

7 February

The seven-man Volunteer Party had been chosen from those who had put their names forward. They were: Sgt Evans, an armourer, who had overall charge of the party; LACs Webb, Ward, Clarke and Watson, two of whom were engine fitters and two of whom were airframe fitters; Cpl Jackson, who was to be in charge of the work; and me as senior fitter. We had received machine pistols and explosives from the armoury store and set off in the Workshops open truck, before daylight, toward the west from Sidi Azeiz. Information had been received that German artillery was now in position on the escarpment overlooking the Tmimi landing ground, a distance of around five miles. They were firing at anything using the track that bisected the airfield. According to the Engineers who had been laying the mines on the airfield, there had been no direct attack on the three aircraft, which meant they were well hidden. The field had been mined, leaving taped paths marking those areas that were clear of mines, with taped paths from the main track to the bunker containing the three aircraft, and a taped runway, north to south. Before leaving Sidi Azeiz, the Hurricane to be made flyable had been chosen, and that night Sgt Evans, the armourer, and Cpl Jackson, the Fitter in Charge, together with me and LAC Watson, would go with the armoured car and an infantry foot patrol to check that the plan of action for the attempted repair remained viable.

Under cover of darkness, the party set out, all squeezed uncomfortably into a Cavalry Armoured Car for the two-mile journey to the Tmimi Landing Ground. After a detailed inspection of the aircraft and the listing of components needed from each to complete the operation, we decided to have our blankets brought over so that we could work during the night and sleep during some of the next day.

LACs Webb and Clarke went to work on the Hurricane that had originally suffered a very heavy landing to remove the coolant radiator and fairing, while LAC Ward and I worked to remove the damaged units from the aircraft to be repaired. Other fairings and panels that had also received damage were stripped from the 'now to be repaired' Hurricane and replaced with similar pieces from the donor aircraft. Cpl Jackson and LAC Watson went round the other two aircraft removing any other components that could later be useful to the Sqn. The compressed air receivers were removed from both 'donor' aircraft. These would be taken to the Cavalry Unit HQ to be re-charged on their tyre inflator: one to be used for test purposes; the other to be fitted to the repaired Hurricane. The two infantrymen, who had guided the party from the wadi to the hidden bunker, had also elected to stay overnight with us, which made us all feel a little safer. The two soldiers had the benefit of a radio link with their Command Post, and they were also good tea-makers! They gave aid to Sgt Evans, the armourer, to attach charges to the two redundant aircraft and to lay the signal wire with which to fire the explosives.

By a little after midnight, the replacement radiator had been removed and checked for any obvious damage. After a short time, the faulty radiator unit and badly-damaged fairing was disconnected and removed and, after a quick check around the radiator mountings and fuselage area to where it was to be fitted, the sound unit was lifted into position and secured. Now, while two

Hurricane undergoing servicing

fitters lay down for a well-earned rest, the remainder of the party took over the work of replacing and securing the fairings, cowling and panels, and generally tidying up.

The coolant system was partially refilled with a quantity of coolant saved from the other two aircraft. This was sufficient to fill the replaced radiator to enable it to be checked for leaks. As the oil cooler, which was part of the radiator assembly, also had been drained, oil brought with us from Sidi Azeiz was decanted and poured into the oil tank of the Hurricane to replace oil lost from it during the repair period. Finally, after a searching examination around the now-repaired aircraft by all the tradesmen, and with double-checks to anything that might offer problems, the immediate area around the inside of the bunker was cleared of tools and equipment. All of the repair gang who were not needed for the final action were ferried away by the South Africans, leaving just Sgt Evans, Cpl Jackson and me in the bunker. Finally, a starter accumulator trolley was plugged in.

8 February

A change of gangs was made as daylight approached and, by midday, everything possible, with the obvious exception of an engine run-up, had been checked, re-checked and then double-checked and tested by the fresh crew. Having made sure of the action to be taken by all during the 'start-up' and pre-flight procedures, we settled down to a fitful sleep after a meal of tinned 'meat and veg' and a mug of the ever-needed 'brew'.

The pilot was expected to arrive that evening, sometime after midnight, when he would be brought to the bunker. Those not needed for the start-up and take-off had been taken to the Infantry Command Post. Then, just before day-break, the pilot would be made comfortable in the cockpit and, after a full briefing on the path to the 'clean' area of runway, the Hurricane would be topped up with the remainder of the coolant, which was being heated over a Primus Stove (to eliminate the need for excessive engine warm-up time). When the pilot was absolutely sure and ready, with the rest of the party except for me, the Senior Fitter, in the Armoured Car, the Hurricane's engine would be started and, as swiftly as possible, depart the bunker and make for an immediate and very rapid take-off.

It had been said by the Officer Commanding the Infantry Unit that the enemy guns on the top of the escarpment would come quickly into action. They, the Infantry Unit, at the sound of the aircraft engine, would lay down a salvo of smoke bombs with their mortars between the taped runway and the escarpment. The trolley accumulator would be attached to the get-away car by me, the remaining fitter, who would then climb into the vehicle. Then away in the armoured car, making a temporary halt at the Wadi crossing for Sgt Evans to leave the car and actuate the signal switch he had placed there earlier that would detonate the explosives placed to destroy the two donor aircraft. That was the plan!

9 February

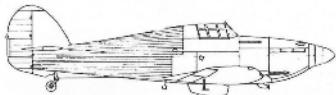
In the very early hours the crew were woken by the arrival of the pilot and an immediate practice of the plan, up to the engine start-up, was put into place. The pilot made his cockpit checks, checking and re-checking everything possible that could be checked with a dead engine. He was satisfied. He was then briefed by the Sgt of the Army Engineers of the 'clean area' leading to the taped and marked runway. Two empty fuel drums had been placed to mark the exit from the marked taxi track and the runway entry. In the dim light of the early hour, they would be difficult to see.

At approaching 03:00 hrs, the hot coolant was poured into the coolant system, rapid leak checks were made, then the engine panels were replaced. With the aid of the fitters, another cockpit check by the now strapped-in pilot proved all OK! It was now the decision of the pilot as to when the next part of the operation would commence – the engine start up. It seemed an age before he was ready, sitting high in his cockpit and straining to see the taped 30-foot wide lane down which he was to steer the aircraft, at take-off speed, on his one-chance-only effort.

At last, he crouched down, busy with the controls, gave a 'thumbs up', then a quick look toward me, the fitter, at the port wing. He gave a few seconds thought, then: "Contact". With a press of the button by my trembling thumb on the trolley acc, the propeller started to rotate, accompanied by the whirling noise of the engine starter motor. After what seemed an eternity, with a slightly different sound, a puff of smoke from the exhaust, and a slight acceleration in rotation of the propeller, the Merlin coughed, spluttered and then settled to its well-known roar. With a quick run to the cable plug, grasping it and giving it a twist and pull, I ducked backwards and down as the Hurricane started to move. As the wing passed over me, I picked myself up, coiled the cable round the trolley, then pulling it after me, made for the bunker entry and toward the armoured car now waiting beyond it. After a fumble, that seemed at the time to last an age, contact with the 'eye' of the trailer over hook of the car was made, and the trolley was secured to the vehicle. Helping hands from the car pulled me inside and, with shouts of "go", the vehicle was making for the bridge over the wadi. Crunches of the mortar bombs could be heard over the noise of the Hurricane which, by the time the car reached the bridge, to the cheers of the driver and LAC Webb, who were the only ones to have a clear view, had become airborne and, still climbing, was making a long turn toward the east.

According to the infantrymen at the post, shells were seen to be exploding around the burning bunker in which the aircraft had been hidden, which was a help to the departing troops, rather than a hindrance. By mid-day, after hand-shakes all round, a nerve-settling cup of hot tea, and after a sit-down meal with the South African Cavalry Unit, the airmen were in the workshops truck and heading east back to Sidi Azeiz, where they arrived, in plenty of time for the evening meal, to learn that the Hurricane had landed there safely, just 22 minutes after leaving them at Tmimi.

The de-brief of the operation took place late in the afternoon. The flight from Tmimi, according to the pilot, Flt Lt Grant, had been without problems. The Engineering Officer, who was also present and looking very proud, reported that the condition of the rescued Hurricane was, considering the conditions under which the operation had been attempted, very good. The Hurricane, looking as fresh as paint, was test flown by the Flight Commander of 'B' Flight. Some 40 minutes later it returned with no other work to be done except refuelling and re-arming.

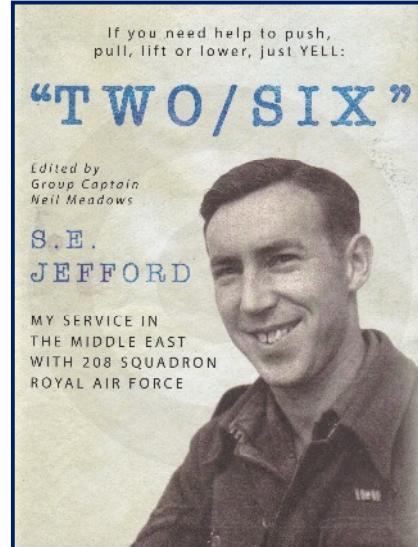


Neil Meadows

OC 208 Sqn 2001-03

Two-Six

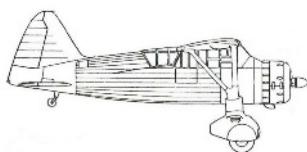
Much has been written about aircrew of all categories, and quite rightly so. But, very little has been documented about the hundreds of thousands of ordinary, yet quite extraordinary, men and women, who served their Country no less valiantly, often in the most arduous of conditions, to keep those aircrew and their aircraft flying. Sid Jefford's memoirs of his time on 208 Sqn during a large part of the Second World War constitute a wonderful collection of impressions and experiences as felt by a hardworking, humorous and genial ground crew engineer. Sid's easy style and comprehensive recall combine to deliver a very readable and often moving account of life on a front-line Squadron in war time. Superbly illustrated with many original photographs, this reproduction by Group Captain Neil Meadows does great credit to the original manuscript. The attention to detail in the narrative ensures a complete and convincing pen picture of the places and situations in which Sid found himself. Above all, what shines through is the determination and dedication of Sid and his contemporaries to strive to do their very best to succeed in whatever task was set before them. The inventiveness and resourcefulness of these characters beam out from the pages. The seriousness of the situations is not overstated and yet the constant humour is heart-warming rather than flippant. Sid Jefford rose to meet all the differing scenarios he encountered with determination and good will. His manner was wholesome and endearing and that continued through the rest of his life. He was an outstanding man and truly worthy of all the accolades which were heaped upon him. "Two-Six," is a valiant testament to his drive, determination and dedication, and is a worthy contender as a 'must read' for anyone interested in what life on the front line in war time was really like.



"Two-Six" is priced at £20 and may be purchased from the Troubador online Bookshop at the following link:

<https://www.troubador.co.uk/bookshop/history-politics-society/twosix-hb/>

It may also be purchased directly from the Editor, who is willing to add a personal dedication. He may be contacted via the Webmaster at: 208webmaster@gmail.com



Ben Laite

Vice-President, Naval 8/208 Sqn Association

208 Sqn Heroes' Centenaries

Flt Cdr Robert Little



David T-Ryder, centre, at the wreath-laying ceremony.

Robert Little's meteoric career ended on 27 May 1918. He had received reports of German Gotha bombers in the area, and took off on a moonlit evening to intercept the raiders. As he closed with one of the bombers, his aircraft was caught in a searchlight beam and he was struck by a bullet that passed through both his thighs. He crash-landed in a field near Noeux-lès-Auxi and bled to death before he was discovered the following morning by a passing gendarme. Robert Little was aged just 22 when he was killed.



Robert Little's Grave.

(Photographs courtesy of Bernard Grimaud: https://grimber44.piwigo.com/index?/category/303-dossier_centenaire_guerre_14_18)

Wg Cdr Donald Perrens

Wing Commander Donald Perrens DSO OBE DFC MA was a Flight Commander on 208 Sqn in Italy from October 1944 until April 1945. The details of his Spitfire sortie in January 1945, for which he was awarded the DSO, were recorded in our Newsletter of 2016. Barbara Carlin, a Carer in a Residential Care Home in Steyning, Sussex, where Donald now lives, contacted us to say that Donald was going to be 100 years old on 1st January 2019. As well as family celebrations on the day, it was planned to hold a party on Friday 4th January. Our ever efficient Webmaster, Neil Meadows, swung into action and approached RAF Swanwick, the nearest RAF unit. On 4th January, I arrived at the Home to meet Barbara, Wg Cdr Gez Currie from Swanwick and his two comrades, Lt Cdr "Digger" Evans RN and Warrant Officer Andy Cracknell, all very smart in their No 1 HD. Also gathered were the other residents of the Home, together with Charlotte, another Carer, who took the photos. Barbara then brought Donald into the party amidst great hurrahs and cheering and lots of good wishes. Donald was on good form, well turned out and certainly sprightly. Best of all, he was proudly wearing his 208 Sqn tie, with the gold Sphinx in pattern. Once we were all equipped with a "glass," we toasted Donald and his great achievements, before a passionate rendering of "*Happy Birthday to You!*" The Chef from the Home then appeared with a super, lavishly iced, sponge cake.



Wg Cdr Donald Perrens DSO OBE DFC MA and guests.

Donald was very pleased to see the officers from Swanwick and engaged them in easy conversation. I was also able to chat to Donald and as we looked through Graham Pitchfork's history of Naval 8/208 Sqn, "*Forever Vigilant*," we spoke of the exploits of the Sqn, including his Spitfire sortie in January 1945 for which he was awarded the DSO. He was typically modest and unassuming but very amusing and laughed a lot with us all. He was dismayed that 208 had disbanded and was adamant that something should be done about it immediately! During my time on the Association Committee, as Membership Secretary, Donald had often written to me. But I had never actually met him in person – what a super way to put that right on such a significant and convivial occasion as his 100th Birthday celebration!



Donald Perrens and Ben Laite

Ben Laite

Vice-President, Naval 8/208 Sqn Association

Gibraltar - The Rock That Rocks



Happy days: a four-ship round the rock.

go to the travel agent for currency after all. Anyway, I digress: working on the old adage “if you don’t ask you don’t get”, I asked if I could go. To my eternal surprise the then OC B Flt, none other than ‘yo shiddy’ Sqn Ldr Tony Lunnon-Wood or TLW for short, seemed supportive of the idea. So despite only being on the Sqn for 2 months and 4 days, I was told to go pack my bag, I was off to Gib. I did have to go and look at the atlas again just to make sure it was where I thought it was. Unusually for a transit to Gib we actually planned to stop and refuel which was a blessing as I hadn’t started my tanker conversion. Flt Lt Keith ‘Bunter’ Nugent had the dubious honour of sitting in the back seat of XV895 while we passed through RNAS Yeovilton before taking on the joys of the 10 West transit to stay outside of Spanish airspace (they never really liked us even before Brexit). Although extensively briefed on the ground, as we started the descent, both TLW and Bunter reminded me of the special features the Rock possesses: 5830ft of runway (according to latest ICAO data) which gets very wet at both ends (as both Flt Lts John, ‘JP’ aka Crap Pilot, Parker and Mal aka Mal Miller both almost found out in subsequent detachments (but that’s for later maybe)). Oh and, by the way, don’t forget those swirling winds as a result of the world’s largest hangar and the effect that can have on your approach. So not nervous at all then. After a quick wizz around the rock to have a look see we came in for the approach. I honestly can’t remember whether it was to 09 where you had to pick your way through the masts of all the gin palaces anchored off Biancas or the slightly easier approach to 27, either way making sure you stayed inside the buoys depicting Spanish airspace – otherwise you were heading for a one-sided conversation following a diplomatic incident. After touchdown, (which we obviously did) the trick was to try to stop before you reached the public road which had kindly been closed for us because even the best of us can’t deal with landing and avoiding moving traffic. As this was my first landing we didn’t try to stop quickly, which gave us plenty of time to get the wings folded (how I wished I’d done that during my first TACEVAL some months later – but that is definitely another story). Parked up, shut down and bags out the back, we were ready to party – or so I thought. After our post-debrief beer, TLW leans over to me and says something along the lines of ‘so you’re doing the role demonstration tomorrow tiger, but I’m putting Stevie (Tait) in the backseat to keep an eye on you’. Maybe I banged my head getting the bags out or maybe this is another one of those wind-ups

Rising almost 1400ft from the Med, this 2.6 square mile, mainly limestone verruca on the foot of Spain has been a pain in our European neighbour’s backside since 1704 and, more recently, our respective flight commanders’. My own ‘love’ of Gibraltar began in 1988 when as a very recent arrival from (or should I say survivor of) 237 OCU, I noticed that there was a sign-up sheet for OTFs (overseas training flights) and there was a spare slot as a pilot for a weekend airshow in Gibraltar. I found this most peculiar and was somewhat cautious of tricks being played on the newbees. Many of you will remember being told that there was an upcoming detachment to Santa Megwan, rushing to check in an atlas (well it was pre-google days) which exotic location in France this might be near to, only to find that it was actually St Mawgan, close to Newquay and you weren’t going to need to



Standing, L to R: Mark Calthrop-Owen, Keith ‘Bunter’ Nugent, Tim Couston; kneeling L to R: Gary ‘Fat Boy’ Davies and Paul ‘Skids’ Harrison.

thinks I. But no, he was serious and on 1 Oct 88 I got to show the general public what a Buccaneer can really do! Well that's not quite true, we took off, flew around the Rock once or twice, approached the runway from 2 different directions, and landed – safely! Now I could enjoy what Gib had to offer.

So what was the attraction with Gib? Well, there's the fact that it's 3 hours south of Lossiemouth and generally a lot warmer (actually sometimes in February it could be colder). Whilst the delights of the nightlife in Elgin have been tasted by many a Bucc-mate, there's something holiday-like about being able to sit outside, in a bar, by the sea, watching the world go by. Then there's the flying: some sorties the first time we climbed above 100ft was after the break and that was only to position to land. Obviously, we didn't just go to Gib to party, we were there to work too. Much of our time was spent supporting the Armilla patrol. This was the Royal Navy's presence in the Persian Gulf; as the patrol transited through the Med and Suez, there was an ideal opportunity to work the crews up, which usually fell to one of the Bucc sqns. This generally involved attacking the ships and simulating some of the likely adversary tactics including attempting to shoot approaches to non-existent aircraft carriers using incredibly bad Arabic accents. All jolly good fun. Sometimes we would visit the ships when they were allowed 'a run ashore' and the RN should be complimented for their excellent hosting. Many a cockersP has led on to a boozy evening in town or La Linea, the Spanish ghetto that exists to block a free and easy exit from the Rock. On occasion, social events have led to extensive phone calls back to Lossie. One such occasion happened the very next year when a small, handpicked team of professionals was allowed to take 3 aircraft to the Gib air day. Led by TLW, this 3-ship included the legendary 'ginger minge' otherwise known as Flt Lt Leighton Williams (God rest his soul) and I had Fg Off Gary 'Fat Boy' Davies in my back seat: what could possibly go wrong? Quite a lot really. I do take some of the blame as I was unlucky to be bitten by the heavy centerline hose on a Tristar which whipped as I was withdrawing, leading to a bow wave the size the Titanic used to make and the rapid departure of the 'bullet' from the end of my probe. I had enough fuel to make it but was directed to RTB which we duly did. 2hrs and 30 mins later Fat Boy and I are on the pan at Lossie, TLW was on the pan in Gib! Leighton had gone u/s at start and was trying to get another aircraft; our return meant that another frame needed to be found. There were only 2 left and one was a tanker, which led to much debate about whether I should tank again that day. Decision made: FB and I get the tanker, Leighton gets to suck us dry and maybe we make it (it was always tight as you couldn't guarantee getting that 2000 lbs back from the pod). Once airborne our trip was uneventful until it came to the moment we had to give away our precious fuel. We gave what we could and then we waited to see whether we would end up in Portugal or Gib – thankfully the fuel transferred and we pressed on. Six hours and 30 mins flying that day but eventually we had 3 aircraft on the pan at Gib. After welcome drinks and the inevitable fines, we headed to a small pre-air day party at BVs during which we lost Leighton. Asking around, we found out that he was last seen sitting on the wall outside. As all good wingmen know, you never leave your leader and Leighton was usually very reliable. Despite the loss, we decided to press to La Linea for a night-cap. The next morning was bright and sunny but we were still missing Leighton at breakfast (not that he was a big eater). Further investigation was required: knocking on his door we got a sorry sounding reply and entered to find him lying in bed under his duvet. We encouraged him to tell his tale but he merely pulled back the duvet to reveal a pristine white cast covering a broken wrist. All became clear, he had disappeared 'off the wall' and somehow was patched up (we never found out how and by whom). FB and I went off to do the 'flypast' leaving TLW and Leighton to discuss how to get the third aircraft home. For once we were actually thankful that 12 Sqn were around as Phill O'Dell (Pod, now of Rolls-Royce test pilot fame) happened

to be down visiting his girlfriend for the weekend. Whilst Leighton and Pod weren't exactly the same size, an acceptable solution was found which meant that Pod flew the Bucc back on Monday and Leighton got to sip G&Ts on the Gib Air flight. In time our flypasts matured and in the final full year of service, Neil Benson and FB returned to Gib to do a proper display, but that's another story.

Most of the Bucc Boys have been to Gib at some time or other and all have our favourite stories. Whatever they are, we always have an affinity for the Rock, for the social scene, for the sun and for the excellent flying we did.

Role demonstration: a Bucc fast and low over Gibraltar.



Squadron Anniversaries

The year 2019 marks the anniversaries of two significant milestones in the history of Naval Eight/208 Squadron. In 1959 the squadron had just re-equipped with the Hunter, when it was decided that it was to be disbanded! The number plate passed to 142 Squadron, which was operating the Venom in Kenya. Thirty-five years later the squadron's long period operating the Buccaneer came to an end, as the type was finally withdrawn from RAF service.

60TH ANNIVERSARY – BRIEF DISBANDMENT

The squadron had only recently started to operate the Hunter and moved from the UK to Cyprus when news was received in January 1959 that it was to disband at the end of March. The one piece of good news was that the squadron's number plate, along with the standard, silver and long tradition of service in the Middle East, was to be handed over to the present 142 Squadron based at RAF Eastleigh in Kenya, thus continuing the squadron's thirty-nine years unbroken service in the region. On 26 March the squadron paraded for the last time before the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Air Force, Air Marshal Sir William MacDonald KCB, CBE, DFC. A flypast and aerobatic display followed, signalling the end of the squadron's brief stay in Cyprus operating the Hunter. Three days later, the commanding officer, Squadron Leader John Granville-White, left for Eastleigh accompanied by four officers and eleven airmen, for the ceremonial handing over of the squadron standard and silver to the new 208 Squadron. No. 142 Squadron had only recently been reformed with Venom FB 4s under the command of

Squadron Leader R. Ramirez. By a strange coincidence there was a remarkable similarity between the two squadron crests, 208 having a Sphinx portrayed from the front and 142 having a winged Sphinx sideways on.

On 1 April 1959 a short and impressive hand-over ceremony took place in the presence of His Excellency the Governor and Lady Baring and other VIPs. These included two former squadron commanders, Air Vice-Marshal H.G. Smart CBE, DFC, AFC and Air Commodore H.M. Probyn CB, DSO, OBE. Flying Officer P.G. Biddiscombe received the squadron standard from Flying Officer R.M.J. David of the retiring squadron standard party. With nine Venoms and two Vampire T.11s, the squadron was soon in full training. With an APC scheduled at Thornhill in Southern Rhodesia,

Rhodesia, emphasis was placed on simulated air-to-ground rocket sightings in the low flying area in the Rift Valley. The squadron left for Rhodesia in June and, after a very successful APC, a tour of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was undertaken. The squadron had barely had time to settle back at Eastleigh when six aircraft and a large support party left for Khormaksar en-route to Sharjah to participate in a large-scale exercise. The mobility for which the squadron had become justifiably renowned over previous decades was, once again, a feature of the squadron's operations and would remain so for the next decade.

The squadron commander formed an aerobatic team with Flight Lieutenants G.E. Ord, S.W.R.A. Key, P.R.E. McLeland and Flying Officer T.E. Riddihough. On 25 August they left for Dar-es-Salaam to participate in the celebrations for the Sultan of Zanzibar's 80th birthday. The team were in action again in December when they left for Entebbe and had barely returned when six aircraft of 'A' Flight left for Bahrain via Khormaksar and Sharjah on 4 January 1960. The detachment lasted for twelve weeks, with 'B' Flight completing the second six-week period. These long transit sorties were flown with rudimentary navigation aids and to the limit of fuel endurance. The serviceability achieved was a credit to the ground crew. With the return of 'B' Flight in mid-March 1960, the squadron left for RAF Stradishall in Suffolk to convert to the Hunter FGA. 9 and another new era was about to begin.



Flt Lt Peter Biddiscombe receiving the Sqn Standard.



The squadron on detachment to Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia.

25TH ANNIVERSARY – FAREWELL BUCCANEER

Twenty-five years ago this year, the squadron said farewell to the Buccaneer at a memorable reunion at Lossiemouth at the end of March 1994. It was not only the squadron that was losing the Buccaneer but it was also the end of the aircraft's outstanding twenty-five years of service in the Royal Air Force.



Nigel Huckins and the last 208 Squadron 'Buccaneer Boys'.

The squadron commander, Wing Commander Nigel Huckins, and his team worked as hard as ever and there was no let up in the flying effort. During the final year of service, a small detachment went to RAF Valley and successfully fired four AIM 9G Sidewinder air-to-air missiles – how we needed them from the outset. In July 1993 the Squadron paid a last visit to Cyprus, which provided the final opportunity to fly past the Pyramids, an iconic landmark that had been such a significant feature of the squadron's history for over 60 years. In February 1994, with just weeks before the final stand down, a visit was made to Gibraltar where there had been so many detachments in the later period of the squadron's

Royal Navy exercises including co-

ordinated attacks with the Sea Eagle missile. For very many years, the Buccaneer force had yearned for improved weapons attack systems and a powerful stand-off capability. How ironic that the squadron's capability in the anti-shipping role should reach such a peak with just weeks to go before the aircraft's withdrawal from the front line.

However, it was not in the nature of the Buccaneer Boys to go quietly and no-one will forget the final weekend. The organisation could not have been better and Nigel Huckins' orchestration of the final flying display was both outstanding and memorable. Nigel's brief to his crews was simple: '*lots of panache and style and an immaculate formation flypast, then we break up for the airfield attack when we will make*

lots of noise and stay low. Any questions?' At 1400 hours on 26 March 1994, he taxied out at the head of eight Buccaneers to the end of Runway 23. After a series of immaculate flypasts, the rules appeared to go out of the window for what was the very last official flight of the mighty Buccaneer. A series of 'airfield attacks' from every direction then followed. This final show was spectacular beyond words and displayed the skill and panache that has always been the hallmark of the squadron and the 'display' will live long in the memory. After forming up again for a final flypast followed by a perfect run-in and break, the aircraft taxied in through the crowds, turned into line, folded wings on the leader's command and then sixteen Spey engines wound down in unison. The silence was deafening and even the Buccaneer hard men in the large gathering were observed with a tear in their eye. Farwell to the Buccaneer.

Bye-bye Buccaneer: the final flypast, 26 March 1994.



Graham Pitchfork

Naval 8 - 208 Sqn Association Historian



The Association records with regret the passing away of the following members:

E. A. "Ted" Brentnall*	Hurricane/Spitfire	Tim McElhaw	Spitfire
Harry Tapner	Spitfire	Ted Thompson	Spitfire
Tom Neil	Meteor (OC 208 1953-55)	Les Phipps	Meteor
Tom Buckland	Hunter	John Clark	Hunter
Dave Goodwins	Hunter	Peter Harvey	Hunter
John Peirce	Hunter	Peter "Chalkie" Whyte	Buccaneer

* Ted Brentnall died over 10 years ago, but his passing has not previously been recorded in the newsletter.

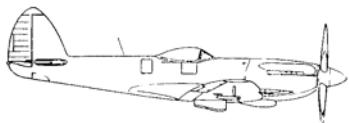


Chapter News

A CHRISTMAS CRACKER

Harry Tapner served on 208 Sqn at the end of WWII, flying the Spitfire on Tactical Reconnaissance operations in Italy. Sadly, Harry passed away in May 2019, after a long illness. The following story is an extract from his memoirs, entitled: "**So you're going to be a pilot?**", which we reprint here with kind permission from Harry's family. The book was published ten years ago, but is still available from the publishers, Lulu (www.lulu.com).

The tradition of Christmas required the officers to visit the various sections after the dinner to take a festive drink with the men. I had earlier stated that I was not teetotal, but not a heavy drinker; for this statement I had been rostered for a dawn flight on Boxing Day. The visits to the various sections meant that a considerable amount of alcohol was offered and it would have been extremely bad form not to have a drink with any particular section. This meant that more was consumed than should have been. Each section had its own favourite drink, which resulted in mixing a considerable variety of beverages. The weather had decided on a belated white Christmas and the snow started to fall in the late evening; when returning to the Mess, a few hours before dawn, the ground was very white. At first light on Boxing Day the effect of the lack of sleep, the excess of alcohol and the intense whiteness of the terrain tended to induce drowsiness. After weaving and keeping a constant lookout over endless whiteness for over an hour, it was on the landing approach when I found it difficult to keep my eyes open. They did however, open very quickly when I heard and felt the aeroplane touch something. I had lost too much height in my torpid condition and brushed the tops of some trees on my approach to the airfield. With an instant waking reaction I slammed open the throttle: I had set the mixture to rich on the approach, so the engine responded instantly and managed to lift the aeroplane back into the air. I was now too far down the runway to make a safe landing, so I kept the throttle open. The undercarriage was raised and when height and speed had been reached the flaps were raised. On the new approach I remained fully alert and brought the aeroplane down in the manner to which it was accustomed. I learned a few hours later that the radiators had been filled with twigs, which was not a good thing for the engine.



Harry Tapner
208 Sqn 1944-46

METEOR CHAPTER LUNCH

The Meteor Chapter held its annual gathering with a lunch in the Running Horse Bar, at the RAF Club in London on Wednesday, 1st May 2019. The lunch was a very convivial affair, although time continues to take its toll on those able to attend. The first Old Comrades gathering of Naval 8/208 took place in 1919 in a pub in Soho. The Meteor Chapter continues that tradition on the first Wednesday of May each year, with an all ranks get together where old comrades can recall their time on the Squadron. If you wish to join us on Wednesday 6th May 2020, please get in touch with Desmond Penrose. Desmond hopes that as many Old Comrades as possible will join him and relive a part of your time with Glorious 208.

EGYPTIAN EXCITEMENT

The after dinner story about Exercise Nile 90 (2018 Newsletter - Ed.) has provoked a memory of our dealings and cooperation with the Egyptian Air Force. I joined 208 at Abu Sueir in January 1955 as a first tourist on Meteors FR9. At that time the Egyptian Air Force was re-equipping with its first jet aircraft, Meteor NF11 and Vampire and was working up at Deversoir, an airfield on the Bitter Lakes. The boss got an order from AHQ(ME) to send our PAI, Chris Bushe (Pee Wee) to help with the gunnery practice whilst we were to provide air-to-air banner towing. In early October the programme began, Pee Wee went to Deversoir by car each morning and on our scheduled programme we got airborne with the banner and made our way to the range over Sinai where we would meet up with the Vampires. I did two or three of these sorties and apart from the difficulty in meeting up all went well. Pee Wee used to come back in the late afternoon and give us a rundown on the Egyptians' performance and we presented any "bitches" we had, but generally all was reasonably OK. One afternoon, Pee Wee returned and informed us that one of the Egyptian pilots had stood up at the morning briefing and proudly announced that he had the problem beaten: the answer was to fire from line astern. The live firing was cancelled!!

Pee Wee established a good relationship with the Egyptians and in chatting with them he asked them whether it would be advantageous to both air forces if we could "bounce" them if we met in the air. They agreed. Later Pee Wee was leading a section of four Meteors over the Nile delta: they spotted a section of three NF11 Meteors and bounced them, causing havoc to the NFs. On landing, Pee Wee was called into see the Boss. The Meteors were being flown by very senior Egyptian officers who thought that another war had broken out!! A few days later we saw Pee Wee in his best bib and tucker climb into a car for "coffee with the AOC."

Al Thomas

208 Sqn 1955-57

SOME YOU WIN.....

Memory may be a bit lacking these days as the following incident took place in 1968 or thereabouts. Some of my facts may be a tad out but the gist is true and correct! Graham Thomson and I - first tourists and a little green around the edges - were tasked as No. 2 and No. 4 on a 4-ship to Sharjah from Muharraq. Take off was planned for '0 dark 30' on the morning in question, so Graham and I thought we'd have one quick drink the night before and get our heads down. OK, we perhaps lingered a little too long in the bar but there were some very important world affairs that needed sorting out. I awoke next morning with 10 mins to briefing. Graham, 2 doors down in the bachelor block was still dreaming of I know not what. I shook him awake, we dived into our flying suits, jumped on our Honda 50cc bikes (no expense spared in those days) and rushed to briefing in the Sqn, 15 mins late. A definite no-no and we were left in no doubt that a severe

bollocking and appropriate punishment would ensue when we got to Sharjah. Pairs take-offs went off reasonably well, even in the dark, and it was with some relief that the sun came up and we could relax from close into battle formation for the low-level trip to Sharjah. I wondered en-route what punishment would ensue for our misdemeanour. Banned from the bar? (not for the first time), interview with the Boss?, maybe in the worst case sent home? (it was not unknown in those days!). I heard our leader call for a 4-ship battle break with RAF Sharjah tower. "Roger" replied the tower "No visual yet." Lead called again: "Red formation at 2 miles" "Roger" replied the tower "Still no visual, check your position." There was a long pause and a large 'thinks bubble' appeared over Red lead's Hunter. I then heard "Red formation 90 degrees port go!" We had in fact lined up on Dubai International, about 12 miles south of RAF Sharjah. 10 mins later we were in the crew room for the debrief - it was rather short and no mention was made about Graham and I being late! Some you win



208 Sqn Hunter taxies out.

Dick Northcote

208 Sqn 1967-69

Membership News

The Association welcomes the following new members:

Alistair Allcroft	Hunter	Richard Handscombe	Hunter
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Members Lost Contact:

W Thomas	Spitfire	Alan George	Meteor
Peter Biddiscombe	Hunter	Neville Brind	Hunter
John Kershaw	Buccaneer		

Members Found Again:

Roger Carr	Buccaneer
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Current Membership:

Full (in contact)	352	Honorary	3
Lost contact	79	Associate	4
Total Full Members	431	Family	6



Nigel Huckins
Membership Secretary

Keeping in Touch

The Squadron Association is always striving to update its records of former members of 208 Squadron. If you know of anyone who served with the Squadron and is not in touch with the Association, please let us know. It would help if you would take a moment to enter the details below. We will do the rest.

I believe that the following person served with No. 208 Squadron in (*approximate year*)

at RAF: The Squadron was flying.....

Name.....

Address.....
.....
.....

Telephone: eMail:.....

Please forward to the Membership Secretary: Nigel Huckins.

Naval 8/208 Annual Reunion Dinner

35 members and guests attended the Naval 8/208 Sqn Association Annual Dinner at the RAF Club, Piccadilly, on Saturday 20th October 2018:

Mr S Colmant, Mrs A Colmant, Mr D Drake, Mr B Griffin, Mr K Griffin, Mrs L Hansen, Mr N Huckins, Mrs S Huckins, Mr I Johnston, Mrs J Johnston, Mr C Kidd, Air Cdre B C Laite, Mrs H Laite, Ms J Mann, Air Cdre M Milligan, Mrs G Milligan, Mr N Meadows, Mrs C Meadows, Gp Capt E Moriarty, Mrs C Moriarty, Mr J D Penrose, Air Cdre G Pitchfork, Mrs J Pitchfork, Mr I Ross, Mrs J Ross, Mr T Ryder-Hansen, Mrs J Schon, Mr D Trembaczowski-Ryder, Mr M M Ward, Mrs L Ward, Mr K M Whiley, Mr J White, Mrs G White, AM Sir Robert Wright and Lady Wright.

24 members were unable to attend, but sent their best wishes:

P W Armstrong, M Asher, J Babbington, Sqn Ldr J Buckle, N Champness, P Comer, J Ford, I Hall, Sqn Ldr P Harrison, Air Cdre J Hunter, P Lee-Preston, B Mahaffey, P Millard, F Nicholl, R Northcote, AVM L Phipps, G Reekie, Flt Lt T Sawle, B Sellers, E Sharp, A G Smith, P Smith, K Trow and J Watson.

The 2019 Reunion Dinner will be held at the Grimscoate Manor Hotel, Lichfield Road, Coleshill, B46 1LH at 6.30 for 7:00 pm on Saturday 19th October 2019. Those attending may wish to visit the nearby RAF Museum and Cold War Museum at Cosford, or to take in a round of Golf: the world class course "The Belfry" is nearby. The ticket price for this year's dinner is just £35 per head. Please note that all drinks must be paid for in cash! If you require a family room, this can be arranged, with a supplementary charge: please ask. Dress code, as usual, is lounge suits. You can reserve your place via the [Association Website](#) or by using the booking form below. **The booking and payment deadline is 2nd August.** Please book promptly: the hotel have reserved all of their rooms for us, but they will only be held for a limited time. Please also note that the Association is only handling accommodation bookings for the night of the dinner itself: if you wish to arrive the day before, or stay the day after, you will need to make your own arrangements direct with the hotel.

Naval 8/208 Squadron Association – Annual Reunion Dinner Booking

Please return slip to: Eugene Moriarty or eMail: 208Secretary@gmail.com

From (Name) Chapter/Period with 208.....

Full Address.....

Telephone: eMail:

I will / will* not be attending the Annual Reunion Dinner on Saturday 19th October 2019.

Please reserve places. I require one/two* single/double/twin* rooms
Please send me details of price and availability of family rooms. *

Names of guests:

Special dietary requirements (if any):

Payment: Reunion Dinner (£35.00 per person) £.....

Double*/Twin* Room(s) (£118.00 per room, inc. breakfast) £.....

Single Room(s) (£75.00 per room, inc. breakfast) £.....

I also wish to make a donation to the Squadron Association Funds: £.....

Total: £.....

* I have paid by bank transfer. Please use your name as the reference, so that we know who has paid.

*I enclose a cheque (payable to 208 Sqn Association).

Naval 8/208 in Pictures



Left:
Association members and guests gathering in the bar prior to the last year's reunion dinner at the RAF Club on 20 October 2018.

Below:
Not the Bromet Trophy, but the 'Brew-It' Trophy?
Vice President Ben Laite receives the golfing teapot from President Sir Rob Wright.



Left:
The Chairman in full flow.

Below:
The dining room at the 2018 dinner decorated with 208 Sqn pictures and memorabilia, courtesy of Neil Meadows.



Left:
What was: 208 Sqn's first jet aircraft, the Meteor, represented on Horse Guards' Parade for the RAF 100 celebrations in July 2018.

Right:
What might have been:
The RAF's latest jet aircraft, the F-35 Lightning II, flown not (yet) by 208, but by 207 Sqn.

