

Naval 8 - 208 News

The Annual Newsletter of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association



2022 Issue



NAVAL EIGHT 208

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Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings

The President's Foreword

What another tumultuous year we have had so far; things can only get better! The waning impact of Covid-19 on our daily lives is welcome although any residual risk to the more vulnerable amongst our members still persists. Once again, I hope, sincerely, that Association members have come through the worst of the pandemic with the typical 208 Squadron spirit, and more importantly that members and their families can once again enjoy the company of their loved ones.

Our optimism that the world had changed for the better when the Berlin Wall crumbled has been rudely broken with the recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The succession of strategic defence reviews since Options for Change in 1994 to the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy 2020 has changed the face of defence dramatically. In the 1980's the Royal Air Force had approximately 90,000 personnel on strength with this reducing to circa 30,000 today. Even though the current strategic focus has been on newer domains such as space and cyber, the "Special Military Operation" by Russia has once again put emphasis on the need for a good balance of traditional military skills and equipment. We can but hope that some of the capability lost over the last 3 decades will be re-instated, which might mean there is a remote chance that the 208 Squadron numberplate might be resurrected. We live in hope. Notwithstanding that we do not (as yet!) have an active squadron, nonetheless we do have an outstanding newsletter, one of the best. The previous newsletter piece on our Hunter Chapter and the stirring tales of our Bucc Boys in the Gulf in this 2022 edition are excellent and I am reminded, going back to the Ukrainian Battle for their homeland, that good training, determination and spirit can win any battle. I am thinking here of the role played by 208 Squadron during the troubles in Aden in 1963 and 1964. Squadron pilots were heavily engaged supporting Army patrols, including the SAS on the Yemen border and in the Radfan. These 'small wars' involved much skill and courage and, with the passage of time, can easily fade into history but our Hunter pilots and groundcrew maintained the squadron's tradition of being 'Forever Vigilant' - map, stopwatch and training!

The general view from the survey of members in 2018 was that the reunions should alternate between London (RAF Club) and somewhere in the Midlands (Nuneaton is the centre of gravity of the membership). As a result, the reunion dinner in 2019 was held at the Grimscote Manor Hotel (close to Birmingham). During the dinner a straw poll of those attending concluded that future reunions should take the form of a lunch rather than dinner. It was suggested that this format would mean that an overnight stay (with extra expense) would not be necessary for most attendees. With no reunion possible in 2020 and the easing of Covid-19 restrictions last year we had 29 members and their guests for lunch at the RAF Club on Sunday 24th October, with a strong presence of Hunter members whipped in by Iain Ross. After the lunch it was suggested that a further survey of the membership should be sent to garner views on the lunch versus dinner format. As a consequence, an email (only) survey was sent to members in early March; there was a 2 to 1 vote in favour of lunch reunions, although a significant number were happy to attend either a lunch or dinner.

The planning for the 2022 reunion is moving ahead at pace, with just the last-minute details to be finalised. All being well and subject to any changes, we will have an Association Reunion Lunch at the Coombe Abbey Hotel, Warwickshire on Saturday 22nd October 2022 (more details later in the Newsletter). I hope this venue will make it easier for more members to attend and I look forward to meeting you all again. Stay Vigilant!

Rob Wright
President

Chairman's Chunter

The terrible events unfolding in Ukraine remind us of how fragile democracy is around the world, with autocrats and right-wing populist/nationalist politicians doing rather too well in too many countries. I have been researching my father's history with the aim of writing a memoir/short biography for his grandchildren. He joined the Polish Air Force as a pilot in 1932 and flew all the way through WWII until he was demobbed in 1948. Reading various books about the inter-war period, especially in Central Europe, things seem rather too familiar to what is happening today, unfortunately. All the recce training we did during the Cold War comes flooding back when seeing the Russian tanks and APCs on the news. This "Chunter" is not meant to be a political diatribe, but rather a reminder of why we all served in the Royal Air Force on 208 Squadron and to remember the spirit and comradeship that we enjoyed and the hope that we can celebrate those good times once again in convivial surroundings. Thus, with the worst of Covid-19 behind us (hopefully) we can look forward to a bumper reunion get-together in October!

The Association Annual Reunion will be held on Saturday 22nd October (12pm to 5pm) at the Coombe Abbey Hotel. We will have a room to ourselves, with a private bar. The hotel is located just to the east of Coventry and not far from the A46 in its own large, landscaped grounds. Those of you that wish to make the most of the day can book a room through the hotel website (www.coombeabbey.com) or by phoning them on 44 (0)24 76 450 450.

This Newsletter contains an eclectic mix of stories from different eras, that share one common theme – it was great to be on 208. That reminds me of a 208 ditty: you know you are great, because you are on 208! I never was a poet! You will read the many interesting stories and anecdotes, which I am sure many of you will enjoy as much as I have, so get the keyboard out and get typing, as we would love to hear from you. The general financial situation of the Association remains stable, with the account hovering around £2,000. At the current rate of expenditure (mostly Newsletter printing and postage) we will have sufficient funds for around 4 - 5 years to cover costs. As you are aware membership is free and there are no running costs for the Association, thus any donations are most welcome.

David Trembaczowski-Ryder
Chairman

Gulf War 1 - Personal Perspectives

In the 2013 newsletter, Gp Capt Bill Cope wrote about the role that the Buccaneer and her crews played in Operation GRANBY. This was followed in last year's newsletter by an appraisal of 208 Sqn's contribution to the war by the Association's Historian, Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork. To complete the picture, now more than 30 years since the event, it seems appropriate to reflect on that time and consider the story from some of the other crews who participated in Gulf War 1 (before we all forget the truth). What follows is a series of anecdotal, mostly true, stories which give an idea of some of the things that went on way back in 1991. In all, 18 crews participated, with the original 12 crews being augmented by an additional 6. For completeness they are listed below:

First 12 Crews

Bill Cope/Carl Wilson
Glen "The Bishop" Mason/Norman "Nbe" Browne
Tony "TLW" Lunnon-Wood/Keith "Bunter" Nugent
Mike Saunders/Dickie Aitken
Ian "Beks" Baston/Stevie Tait
Tim Couston/Dave "DC" Castle
Dave "DB2" Bolsover/Steve "Singe" Gregory
Paul "Skids" Harrison/Clive "The Bone" Lambourne
Martin "Hoppy" Hopkinson/Russ Hall
John "Fras" Fraser/Red Thompson
Rick Philips/Roger "Harry" Hyslop
Mal Miller/Mike "Scarffie" Scarffe

Second 6 Crews

(or as Eddie Jones, England's Rugby coach would have it, The Finishers)

Dave Gallie/Mike Wood
John McCrea/Phil Walters
John Sullivan/Ewan Fraser
Gary Kelly/John Davies
Jim Henderson/Chris "Sandman" Hilton
Steve Wilkins/Rob McCormick

Skids Harrison

We've already heard about the rushed departure from St Mawgan and some of the antics required to get 6 aircraft heading to Muharrag in time to save the RAF but you might not have heard about the first members of the deployment to arrive on-site: namely Sqn Ldr 'I don't have a temper' Mike Scarffe and me. After 14 hours on a C130, including a stopover in Cyprus, we were ejected on to the pan at Muharrag, dressed in full combat gear (we had to take the new labels off in transit), gas masks at the ready and eyes the size of sauce pans for incoming Scud missiles. Needless to say, we were slightly over stimulated. After the 'necessary' bureaucratic processing by the resident RAF movers (not the Bahraini authorities) we were shipped on to our residential accommodation; suspecting the worst, we were sure we were heading to 'Camp sh*thole'. Imagine our surprise when we pulled up at the Diplomat Hotel and were shown to our rooms. However, it wasn't all roses, as we were expected to share! Having 'settled' in and found the only set of relaxed rig we had, we ventured out to find other service personnel. We eventually tracked down the Jag Force (God bless them everyone), who were camped on the 14th floor in the 360 degree outlook, sky view, bar. Like two Jerrys sticking our noses out to see if Tom was around, we entered the establishment to some fairly indifferent greetings such as 'oh you got here then' and 'about time the Bucc Boys bought a round'. So basically the same lame banter we would get at Lossiemouth. The biggest surprise of the evening was not being bought a round though, it was the reaction to the first air attack warning. The sirens sounded and Scarffie and I looked around for an exit or strong table to hide under, only to stare aghast at the gathered masses who rushed to the same panoramic view to watch for those dreaded Scud impacts!! It was about now that we felt we might have overreacted a tad getting off the C130. In time, all 18 Bucc crews got to enjoy the view and thankfully we were all together there for the final 'Mother of all Parties' when the war was over.

My second vivid memory was during the work-up phase, yes believe it or not we hadn't really trained for this war so we needed to spend some time practising what we were going to do, or not as it happened. As we were new in theatre, we were teamed up with 'experienced' Jag and Tornado crews to fly around the local area, Saudi and Qatar, at low-level (we were good at that, we thought) and get used to the local procedures etc. The Jag mates had the advantage of having flown in Oman prior to the war and were pretty savvy in the ways of operational low flying over the desert. Indeed, this is the only time in my career that we were told there was no minimum height to be flown. So following a pair of Jags over the sea and sand sounded like it was going to be fun. It was, but it was also humbling: we expected to be a little slow at feeling comfortable over the sand but over the sea was our domain, we thought. Imagine our surprise as The Bone (God bless him) and I sitting well below 50ft in battle, looked over to the Jag of Sqn Ldr Stevie Thomas to see him sitting below us. Well, we said we can't have that, but the truth was we weren't going to win that fight and gracefully agreed to a draw (maybe). Having flown the Jag after, I can really appreciate how well that was flown by Stevie as we all know the Bucc was easy to fly low.



In-Theatre Work-Up, with Tornado

Bunter Nugent

We had three work up sorties over Saudi to practise Medium Level Spiking, working up with the Tornados and developing procedures with them. The first sortie into Iraq was on 2 Feb 91. Tony Lunnon-Wood (TLW) and I were the airborne spare. However, as we weren't required we were told that we couldn't put a green entry in our logbooks for that sortie. Apparently it didn't count, as we did not cross the border, which made us wonder if the F3s, tanker guys and AWACS crews could also not put green entries in their logbooks?

It didn't really matter though because we got to 'go live' the next day. We crossed the border with Mike Saunders and Dick Aitken (our constituted pair) and successfully attacked Muftul Wadam railway bridge. Hard to tell from the video if either end fell down but we definitely hit it! My main recollection of TLW was that he kept a running commentary all the time we were in the target area - comforting for me as I was heads-in on the pavespike. On a subsequent mission near Baghdad I can still vividly remember the scene as missile smoke trails came up towards us and then went unguided as the Iraqis turned off their radars. TLW and I were scared witless by a smoke trail streaking past the cockpit. It turned out to be a HARM from an American F-4 Wild Weasel as the missile then headed downwards!

Skids Harrison

The third story I'm going to tell occurred on 14 Feb 22. Whilst it was a very significant day for me (I got engaged whilst in theatre but that's another story), it was also one of the most significant days for the Bucc deployment. This was the day that one of the mixed formations of 4 Tornados and 2 Buccs was fired upon by an active SA3 site. Many of you will have read the story as seen from the Bucc crews but I want to focus on the impact it had on the detachment. On our arrival at Muharraq, Scarffie and I also met with the Tonker guys in their hotel (not the same as ours). I met up with an old course mate and later to be 2-Star, one David Cooper (the pilot). Coops provided insight into how the crews were coping given that his force had borne the brunt of the war and the battle scars were evident. The biggest reason for the Bucc deployment was to provide targeting capability once the decision to go to medium level was taken. In part, that decision was made due to the heavy losses being suffered by the Tornado Force. For the Bucc crews we had arrived after all the previous RAF losses and hadn't experienced any of the shock the Tornado crews had. Until 14 Feb. There are at least 4 Bucc crews who can tell the actual story of the downing of #8 far better than me, I just remember feeling that things had changed. Not unexpectedly, some of the bravado and confidence had been knocked out of us. A timely reminder that it wasn't a totally one-sided war and crews were still being shot down. Rupert Clarke was the pilot who survived that day and I was lucky enough to work with him and Budgie Burgess (also held captive by the Iraqis) when 208 Sqn reformed at Valley with the Hawk. Both were very humble about their experiences and a constant reminder of how lucky you can/cannot be.

Bunter Nugent

When the air raid sirens at Muharraq sounded it meant full donning of respirators and NBC suits. Yet when the same happened when we were in the Diplomat rooftop bar, we ordered another Guinness and peered out of the windows. There was a great camaraderie amongst the Bucc crews, the Jag mates in the same hotel, and the Tornado mates that we worked with. It was always fantastic getting mail from home - from family and friends and from the British public in general. You had to queue to use a payphone in the hotel and hope that the person you were calling was in. It was never easy but it got easier after a couple of missions and you thought that there was a very good chance that you would survive this war. Then Rupert Clark and Steve Hicks were shot down (14 Feb). We were due to fly in a 12-ship in the afternoon after they were shot down in the morning, but the formation was reduced to a 6-ship which we were all relieved about.

On 21 Feb 91, TLW and I dropped the first ever bomb in anger from a British Bucc but it missed the airfield (Qalat Sikar) we were attacking altogether! It was self-designated and I spiked it OK, but it either missed the basket or failed to guide. The next day we scored a self-designated Direct Hit doing the same thing. After 28 Feb there was a cease fire and we spent two weeks getting more and more frustrated not knowing when we would go home. There was a nasty rumour that some crews would need to stay out there on standby in case things flared up again. However, this didn't materialise and on 17 Mar 91, TLW and I led a 4-ship home; the arrival back at Lossie was very memorable. TLW's flypast on arrival was low at around 400 kts as he reckoned that speed was a better one to show off the aircraft. Anyway, I couldn't wait to be reunited with Babs and my family but had to shake hands with Mike Stear and Jon Ford first. You can almost see my impatience in a photo of that moment that ended up on the front page of the Lossie Lighthouse paper. Babs got a copy of the photo and put it on a t-shirt with the caption "Yeah, any time mate".



Keith Nugent welcomed back by the Stn Cdr, Jon Ford, and AOC 18 Gp, Mike Stear.

Timmy Couston

On the 8 hour transit back from Bahrain, I thought there was no way I could last the journey without a pee so I strapped one of those hot water bottle pee bags to my baby carrot. True enough, several hours in, I couldn't hold it in any longer and after overcoming the mental barrier of opening the sluice gate and the subsequent tsunami, I filled the external bladder..... and some! Do you remember, they had a little sponge in the bag to soak it up.....not a chance.

Anyway, having this overflowing hot water bottle strapped to my inner thigh was quite unpleasant, so I set to surgically remove it which was an airborne challenge in itself. I managed to get it off and elected to put it up on the glare shield against the canopy, the very cold canopy. In the remaining hours of the transit, the contents of the bag froze into an ice cube. Those of you who did physics know that water expands when frozen and this caused the bag to burst; which was fine until we approached Lossie. In the descent, the bag unfroze and the air conditioning pipes along the base of the windscreen/glare shield proceeded to blow the contents of the melting bag the full length of the canopy towards the rear seat. Luckily, I don't think DC noticed and I never mentioned it. When we eventually came onto the chocks, the near empty bag was still there on top of the glare shield, the canopy was minging and when I eventually unstrapped and stood up, my flying suit lower zip was very much undone and I smelled like an old people's home.

Sadly, over 30 years on, he still smells the same! (Compiler's post-script).



The End of the Detachment.

Final Comment

Having mentioned numerous crews and stories it is only right and proper to mention those who are no longer with us today. Tragically we lost Jim Henderson and Clive Lambourne on 7 Jul 92 flying XN976, the final Buccaneer fatality. Their loss was deeply felt across the force. Leighton Williams had left 208 Sqn just before GW1 kicked off and by coincidence had taken a Hunter job in Oman. Whilst he didn't fly during GW1 some of us met up with him during the detachment. His ginger whiskers will always be missed. Glenn 'The Bishop' Mason, 12 Sqn, did fly with the combined force during GW1 and went on to command 74 Sqn which was the sister sqn to 208 once relocated to Valley. Budgie Burgess never flew the Bucc but he was flying a T1 on 208 Sqn when he had a fatal accident flying the weather ship. This one always seemed so unfair given what he'd already been subjected to during GW1.



Left:
Jim Henderson (2nd from the left) with Mike Scarffe on left and Chris Hilton and Mal Miller on the right.



Right:
Clive Lambourne

Both of these photos were taken during GW1.

It's good that we are able to remember the good days and appreciate those that have passed away.



Skids Harrison
208 Sqn 1988-2016

Return of the Hunter

Iain Ross explains how 208 was still flying single-seat Hunters, almost a decade after the Hunter disbandment in 1971.

Last year's newsletter featured the disbandment of 208 as a Hunter squadron in 1971, so readers might find it a bit odd to see this photo of the Squadron from nearly 10 years later. It's one that our President, Sir Rob Wright, dug out from his archives from his time on the Squadron. It's genuine: in 1980 the Squadron was again equipped with Hunters. Those who still have eagle eyes will see that there's a navigator boss, Graham Pitchfork, and behind him the flight commanders are Rob, ex-8 Squadron Hunters, and Dave Ainge, ex-208 Squadron Hunters. I don't think there are any more ex-Hunter pilots in the photo. 1980 was when the Buccaneers were grounded with a wing problem, but the Buccaneer force had from its RN days been using two-seat Hunters for pilot check-rides. There were never any two-stick Buccaneers. Some Hunter T7s and T8s had been modified to have the Buccaneer's main instrument panel (the IFIS, Integrated Flight Instrumentation System, the same as in the Gnat and Lightning if my memory is correct) to make them T7As and T8Bs. When it was obvious that the Buccaneer fix would take a while, we were given some F6s to play with. Great sport, and a unique squadron photo. Just for the record, officially the Buccaneers weren't grounded, they were restricted to operational flights only, or some such wording. A pretty fine distinction, but one that mattered at a senior level, as it kept our NATO declarations. Those of us on Buccaneers in RAF Germany still had to do nuclear QRA. Also, Trevor Nattrass, boss of 15 Squadron, was allowed to bring back to Germany the jets stuck in Nellis, more-or-less straight and level all the way, no normal turns, no G. Trevor, another ex-Hunter pilot, did it in style, somehow managing within the restrictions to do a diamond-9 flypast on return to Laarbruch, escorted un-briefed by Norrie Bell leading a three-ship of F6s. So there we are, 208 Squadron again a Hunter squadron, this time in 1980. As our President says: "The point to remember about the photo, (and this was one of my whizzo ideas as Deputy Boss - all Deputies have whizzo ideas....) is that 208 had returned to single seat Hunters - with 208 markings and a navigator boss!"



Iain Ross

208 Sqn 1969-1970

Aerobatic Excellence

Last year's newsletter carried an article on Hunter aerobatic teams. However, the Hunter era was not the only one to enjoy aerobatics: 208 fielded two Meteor aerobatic teams in 1951, one from each flight.



Left:
B Flight's Aerobatic Team (L to R):
Twinkle Storey,
Jock Pratt,
Albert Horton and
Pete Turville.



Right:
The Team in Action
over Abu Sueir
in Egypt

Chanak Crisis - 100th Anniversary

Continuing the series of articles on key events in the squadron's history, Graham Pitchfork examines 208's role in a little-known episode in Turkey. 100 years ago, 208 Squadron found itself spearheading what today would be termed an Air Expeditionary Wing, when it was given orders to deploy to San Stefano near Constantinople in Turkey. It was a deployment that rarely features in the history of the RAF, and one that was to last for almost a year.

By 1922, the squadron had been based at Ismailia in Egypt for two years, with little to disturb the normal routine of life of gunnery exercises, message dropping and photography, almost all in support of the army. Then, in the late summer a deepening crisis in Turkey developed. Turkish nationalists under Mustapha Kemal Bey (later more generally known as Kemal Ataturk) were unhappy about the loss of territory in the Smyrna district and in eastern Thrace to Greece under the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920. They expelled the Greeks from Smyrna by force in August 1922 and threatened to cross the Dardanelles. The sudden appearance of Kemal's force on the borders of the strips of land on either side of the Gallipoli Straits, which had been declared neutral in the Sèvres treaty, created immediate tensions in European capitals. Britain feared for the security of the Straits and the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, supported by Churchill, decided to reinforce the British positions in Chanak, and, if necessary, go to war with Turkey to prevent the possible advance on Constantinople by the nationalists. There was no appetite amongst Britain's allies for a further conflict, but Lloyd George decided to press ahead without their support.

On 16 September, HQ Middle East in Cairo received orders to send a small headquarters staff, a stores park and a Bristol Fighter squadron to the Constantinople area. Squadron Leader A. ap. Ellis, 208's squadron commander, was summoned to a conference where he was ordered to prepare a headquarters and two flights of aircraft to support the British Army of Occupation, Constantinople. The following day, four aircraft were flown to Aboukir and dismantled ready for shipping to Turkey. Within a week, the remaining aircraft were prepared and the packing of squadron stores was completed ready for loading onto railway trucks at Moascar Siding. Orders came to delay this by twenty-four hours in order to add the squadron's third flight. On the 25th the whole squadron arrived at Alexandria Docks at 0600 hours and, after breakfast, the AOC, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Edward Ellington KCB, CMG inspected the squadron.

The shipping available in Egyptian waters at short notice was limited and, in view of the urgency, the SS Podesta, a very badly equipped ship, was taken over by the RAF to transport the squadron to Turkey. The whole of the day and following night was taken up loading the stores, vehicles and aircraft. Also on board were six Snipe aircraft of 56 Squadron. The ship finally sailed early the following morning. The Podesta passed Chanak and the carrier Argus lying at anchor there before arriving at Constantinople at 0800 hours on the 30th. Some of the squadron and most of the Snipes were transferred to trains and moved to San Stefano in Eastern Thrace. Despite the slow speed of disembarkation from Podesta, due in part to lack of facilities



208 Sqn's Temporary Base at San Stefano

such as cranes, the aircraft were erected at record speed and two of the squadron's Bristol Fighters and three Snipes were airborne within two days of arrival at San Stefano. After a flypast over Constantinople, Flying Officer J.W. Jones, with his observer Aircraftman 1 B.F. Cook, broke away from the formation and carried out a reconnaissance at 2,000 feet over the Belgrade Forest area. Everything was reported as 'normal'.

Within days, 208 Squadron had become part of Constantinople Wing RAF commanded by Group Captain P.F.M. Fellowes DSO. He was clearly happy with the manner in which the squadron had reacted to the emergency and completed its arrival within a few days of receiving orders for what at that time in the RAF's history, was a most unusual and groundbreaking operation of rapid mobility and long-range reinforcement. By the end of the first week of October all the aircraft had been erected and the stores transferred from Constantinople to San Stefano. Reconnaissance sorties to track Kemal's forces, their movements and their supply dumps were the priority and further formation flights were flown over Constantinople as a show of strength.

The political tension increased during the first weeks of October. Before all the RAF squadrons were in place, Lieutenant General Sir Charles Harington GBE, KCB, DSO, the Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in Turkey, had opened negotiations with Ismet Pasha, Kemal's representative at peace talks at Mudanya but with no positive results. The Turks had surrounded Chanak by 10 October and the local British general sought permission to open fire, which was refused. Harington made one final appeal to the Turks and Pasha relented. There



"C" Flt, 208 Sqn's Bristol Fighters at San Stefano

remained the fear that this could be a ruse and, although the immediate threat of war was reduced, the squadron began a series of regular reconnaissance flights, patrols and co-operation with the ground forces. In addition to the large number of strategic and photographic reconnaissance sorties flown, others monitored the disposition of Turkish troops and messages were dropped to the British cavalry units on patrol. With the arrival at the end of the month of other squadrons from the United Kingdom, the squadron had time to conduct bombing and wireless training flights and establish co-operation procedures with the artillery.



Leaving San Stefano

and gunnery training flights, the relevance of which was not lost on the Turks. A long succession of diplomatic talks took place during the summer resulting in the Lausanne Treaty signed on 23 August. The following day orders were issued for the RAF to evacuate and flying came to an end.

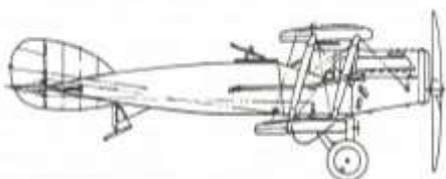
For the RAF, still only five years old, the 'Chanak Crisis' was the first post-war test of its capability to mobilise and transfer a fighting force to an overseas trouble spot in rapid time. A remarkable feature of the operation was the speed of reaction for the initial deployment and the efficiency of the withdrawal. The squadron had been away for twelve months. 1,685 flights had been made amounting to 1,077 flying hours. Conditions had been harsh yet the task of monitoring Turkish troop movements, aerial photography and maintaining a deterrent presence had been a great success. The Commander-in-Chief praised the squadron for its efforts, and paid particular tribute to the photographic and reconnaissance work of the squadron, which he described as invaluable.

Although the immediate threat of war had receded, there was a need to maintain the large British garrison as peace talks opened in Lausanne on 20 November. The routine for 208 Squadron continued through a particularly harsh winter, which created many difficulties and discomforts for the ground crew who had limited facilities with many aircraft having to be maintained outside. From November to the middle of March the conditions underfoot were very difficult and temperatures plummeted. The airfield at San Stefano was badly affected and on numerous occasions many aircraft had to be manhandled to the take off point and again when they landed.

The political stalemate continued throughout the winter months as the squadron continued with its regular reconnaissance patrols and training flights. The resumption of the Lausanne peace talks on 23 April 1923 coincided with improving weather, which allowed the RAF squadrons to conduct more intensive bombing,

Graham Pitchfork

Naval 8 - 208 Sqn Association Historian



Sopwith Triplanes

Naval 8 initially operated a mixture of single-seat scout aircraft, including the Nieuport 17, Sopwith Pup, and the Sopwith 1½ Strutter. The Squadron later consolidated on the Sopwith Triplane, the only 3-winged aircraft to see active service with the RNAS/RFC/RAF in WW I. The Triplane was itself replaced by the Sopwith Camel. The following account is taken from the private notes of Flt Sub Lt Soar:

Mont St Eloi 13th August 1917.

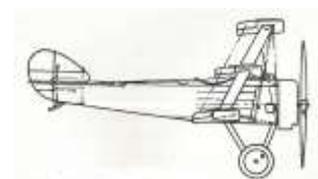
Did my last patrol today with the Squadron (Naval 8). Returning to England instead of Booker, who objected to transfer. On the 10th Booker up with Crundall, angry at being transferred home, and finding no enemy aircraft set about strafing Hun trenches. They both dived to ground level and machine-gunned anything they saw, until Crundall got a bullet in the ignition switch. The engine packed up and he piled up close to Oppy Wood, which was held by the Germans. After a long wait in a shell hole, with bullets continually hitting 'Doris' - No 5464 Sopwith Triplane - my erstwhile colleagues of the Royal Naval Division dug a shallow trench to him and they crawled back to the front line.

On the 10th, too, Thompson was lent to 'B' Flight and did an abortive patrol. I was now flying a rejuvenated 'High Jinks' - Sopwith Triplane 5421 - having taken 'Lily' my true love to depot, knackered. Neither Crundall nor Thompson flew on the 11th but Jenner-Parsons, McCrudden and I were led by Booker on an evening patrol beginning at 8:40 pm until about dark. We had difficulty in keeping together owing to large lumps of thunder clouds and lost Jenner somewhere the other side of Henin-Lietard-Mericourt district, who dived on an EA. Getting nearer the lines we saw a hell of a scrap going on over No-Man's-Land, Arras way.

By the way Booker led into that fracas showed he was still swearing about his having to leave the Squadron: no messing about getting in the sun or manoeuvring for a side-tackle, just under and into the middle of the sods. There seemed to be ten Albatrosses against six Nieuports and six SE 5s and us three triplanes, split-arsing, dodging collisions, finding out who's who and firing when the chance came. I peeled off right, saw McCrudden dive left, and I took after the last Hun. Booker went straight at the first he could get at, and as I turned back saw he had fastened on a black Hun which was going down with full engine on and smoke spewing out of the cockpit, obviously on fire. Good old Bookie. There were two machines under Booker's tail; as I shook off my first chap I could only make the last one on Booker and drove him off. Not watching the Hun on fire I did not see him crash, but Bookie himself was flopping about, now and at almost ground height. I saw him spread out near Farbus, which Jerry started to shell at once. The air was now clear of machines and we had left 13,000 feet to a few hundred in no time. That was the end of Booker's last Triplane. Now for those damned Camels.



Above: Many of Naval 8's aircraft had individual names. This is a replica of "Dixie II", N6290, a Sopwith Triplane flown by Flt Sub Lt Arnold. It is maintained in an airworthy condition by the Shuttleworth Trust at Old Warden.



Below: "Those damned Camels." The Triplane's successor on Naval 8, the Sopwith Camel. This photograph was taken at Mont St Eloi in 1917.



Memoirs of an MT Driver

I joined the Squadron on May 26th 1944 at Venafro just south of Cassino. The Spits were on photographic reconnaissance / army co-operation, they were blue and highly polished and if memory serves me, carried no guns. (Editor's note: The blue Spitfires were strategical photographic reconnaissance Spitfire PR XIs from 682 Squadron, often based with or near 208 Squadron Spitfire IXs, which operated in the Tactical Reconnaissance role.) According to my diary, the Cassino offensive began at 2300 hours on Thursday 11th May 1944 and as the Squadron took the first airfield to be over-run by the Army, they could only have been at Venafro a few days. The breakthrough being successful we then moved to the next airfield at Aquino on Sunday 4th June. To get there we had to pass through the remains of Cassino. Aquino was a deadly place - booby trapped all over the place and thick with mines. No place for sightseeing, although the German dug-outs and cave system were more than interesting. During this period the kites were making as many flights as possible and I do not remember any plane losses or incidents as the German Air Force just was not in evidence.

Our next airfield was 60 miles on at Osa near Rome where we stayed from 10th June to 17th June and the whole Squadron managed to get into Rome on leave during this time. We left Osa for Falerium air strip on 17th June and the journey was typical - craters and wrecked bridges all the way with all the rubbish of war lining the route. Then on 22nd June to Orvieto which had been quite a 'drome but was completely wrecked. Jerry had taken quite a battering around here and by the number of moves from May 26th it can be seen that we were always only 2/3 days behind the Army - in fact Germans were in control of the Orvieto area 6 days previously.

On the 5th July we moved on to Castiglione del Lago on Lake Trasimeno and as we had been working and travelling almost non-stop since Venafro, this stay on a lake-side was very welcome and the Squadron ignored risks of Italian sewage disposal in the lake and bathed! It was at Castiglione on July 27th that we were reviewed by King George - other than that the only other note records a single bomb dropped by Jerry smack in the middle of the lake - at breakfast. On 1st August we moved on to Malignano near Sienna. This was one of the hottest spells we had in Italy and I note that the MT Section rigged some showers up that were much used by the whole Squadron. Here we were visited by Churchill and Alexander on the 18th and Portal on the 22nd (102 degrees in the shade). 20th September to Florence airfield. The pace had slowed down and we had the autumn rains to contend with. The photographs show the mud we had to contend with on the airfield. Under canvas until 5th October when we moved into billets at Campi Bisenzio a few miles away. A tragic occurrence on the airfield on Monday 2nd October - a fighter squadron (No 43, I believe) had been directed to land at Florence, but they arrived after dark and we had no flare path. We lined our lorries up with headlights on, but one kite after the other pranged into our own Spits and lorries. We lost a driver killed, others injured. Some pilots were lost I believe. They had flown from Corsica or Sardinia but a boob had been made on their ETA.



King George VI visiting 208 Sqn at Castiglione



Bogged down in the mud at Florence

We spent the whole winter at Florence - Army bogged down - kites bogged down and made serious inroads into local wine stocks. The pilots had a fairly good time at their hotel billet in Florence. We were strafed on 3rd October but no serious damage was done and on Sunday 12th November Jerry looked us up again and dropped 3 bombs - again little damage was done. On 26th April 1945 we left Florence after a breakthrough by the Army via Bologna to an airfield at Villa Franca near Verona on 28th April. The war in Italy finished on 2nd May. On 14th May we had to make a quick move to Udine near the Yugoslav border and if I remember had to be ready for any move by the Red Army or Yugoslav forces wanting to come into Italy. From Udine we organised a number of trips and rest periods for all ranks in the Dolomites at Lorenzago and San Stefano. 20th June saw half the Squadron personnel posted - mostly home, but 208 had orders to get back to Palestine, and so after driving all the way up Italy towards home we then had to turn our backs and head

back to Taranto from which we sailed on 6th July 1945 in the Caernarvon Castle. So to Alexandria on 9th July, then to Ramat David. Not a happy time as the Palestine troubles had started.

I left the Squadron on 9th August posted home, eventually boarding SS Strathnaver on 16th September at Port Said, having been with 208 for 14 months. Not very informative on flying operations I am afraid, but the details covering the airfields are quite authentic and may be of interest to anyone logging the progress of the Squadron in Italy.

Corporal H Webb

MT Section
208 Sqn 1944 -1945

More About Naval 8

Naval 8 Sqn's first CO, Geoffrey Bromet wrote in the Sqn history 'Naval Eight' (published in 1931) that in 1917 his deputy Huskisson "left to take command of Naval Squadron No 4, and he took with him as stores officer B C Bennett, until recently an AC II in the Squadron, and now WO II. He got promoted straight up to Warrant Officer and, although he had to stand a lot of chaff about his somewhat freakish promotion, nobody earned it better." Bennett himself subsequently wrote an article, which was published in "Popular Flying" in 1937 and which adds further detail to the narrative of the Sqn's days in France during WWI. Here is a shortened extract from that article.

As one of the first members of No 8 Royal Naval Air Service Squadron on its formation, and to go with it into the Somme battle, I have read with much interest the articles in the January and February issues of 'Popular Flying' and feel that although these excellent reports go to prove very clearly what No 8 did (the 'first sailors to fly' so nick-named by the 23rd Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps with whom we were first linked up at Vert Galand), my friend Mr E G Johnstone's record only gives what was done after some six months of No 8's formation, and does not account for the strenuous work carried out on the Somme and at Furnes.

My diary I still have, and if I may be allowed, I should like to furnish briefly the missing link, so that after we have passed on and maybe history is written of the Air Arm in the Great War, No 8, of which I was proud and honoured to be a member, may receive the full share of the credit which it richly deserves. I think I am correct in saying that No 8 was born of officers and men of No 5 Wing, Coudequerke and No 4 Wing, except for two men only: W/O T Brice and myself, both of No 1 Wing, Dunkerque. Tribute has already been given to our Commanding Officer, Squadron Commander G R Bromet, and our first Lieut. - Squadron Leader B Huskisson, and I should like to add mine by saying that had it not been for the fact that they were men in every sense of the word, expecting nothing from the lowest to the highest rank under their command which they themselves would not give, life, under the dreadful conditions of the 1916 winter, would have become unbearable to us. Their cheery smiles and encouraging words made us one large family which brought out the best that was in us.



heavily Fit Cdr Compston

No 8 was born in the latter part of October 1916, and its birth was due to the urgent need of pilots on the battle fronts to repair losses in the Royal Flying Corps inflicted by the enemy who was then gaining the mastery of the air. On the 26th October of that year, eighteen picked pilots in Nieuports and Sopwith 1½ Strutters took the air, and with their course marked on a map rolled on a map case on the dash in front of them, landed safely at Vert Galand some few hours afterwards. Amongst those eighteen pals were Thom, 'Jerry' Hervey, Compston, Trapp, Hope, Little, Galbraith, Corbett, Todd, Croft, MacKenzie, Grange and Lawson, men who put up such a show in the field against superior odds that it stands out in the annals of the Royal Naval Air Service. One need not forget that the training which these pilots received was mainly under Naval direction and as such it was to a great extent different from that of the field work. No 23 Squadron RFC, on our arrival at Vert Galand, were rather puzzled to know what show we were going to put up with the 1½ Strutters and Nieuports as against their RE8s and FEs, beastly old buses which just crawled along in the sky; and it was soon observed that there was a spirit of rivalry, quite friendly, existing, which in the opinion of many of us proved an excellent thing.

The rain never seemed to stop: day in, day out, we took it to bed with us, in hangars, stables, and other places and woke with it in the morning. It was that cold drizzling which made life so cheerless. However, even with this you could not have found a more cheery bunch of officers and men in a 'week of Sundays', and nothing daunted their spirits or flying even when it was known that the rations had been missed and there was not enough to go round, due to trucks at the railhead at Bel Eglise being blown up or shelled. Our cookie, 'Buttons', always found something for us if only tea and biscuits, which he produced from his galley (tin hut made of open-out biscuit tins on framing, in

which was installed a Barford Perkins boiler) in the yard behind the Estaminet, a spot much frequented by Andre, the son of the proprietor, whose only English could not be put into print. This galley was 'Buttons' sanctum sanctorum where the stomachs of No 8 had his first consideration.

One could already add to the praise given to our friends Booker, Compston and Goble, the latter two spared to the world after all the hell of 1914-1918, and I feel that they themselves if permitted, would praise their other war-time pals of No 8 whose names are mentioned herein and who have unfortunately been forgotten in the articles already published. Our air scraps went well for some time until on the 24th November we lost our first pilot, Sub-Lt Hope, a fine fighter, on Sopwith machine 5190, Engine 5184. He was reported missing over the lines after having tackled single-handed a bunch of 'Huns', put up a splendid fight, but found that the odds were against him. He died fighting. Sub-Lt Hope had only been with us just one month, but even in that short space of time he had proved his worth to the Service and we all felt his loss deeply. Every day the battles of the air were strenuously fought by No 8, and praise was personally given to the CO and the Officers of the Squadron by General Lake when he inspected us on November 1st, and by Sir Douglas Haig when he made an unexpected visit on November 6th. November 16th turned out to be a red letter day for us, for it was on this day we brought down six of the enemy. Flt-Sub-Lt Galbraith accounting for three of them. From what we were told by our officers, all of whom took to the air on that day, the sky was full of EAs, and the going was pretty hot.

On Monday, November 20th, a copy of His Majesty's telegram to Sir Douglas Haig was posted on the notice board, and in it one was surprised to note that King George V referred to the rain and the conditions under which the troops had to fight. Rain ceased about the 24th November and it was on the 28th November that heavy falls of snow began which, with the bleak, cold winds, made conditions even worse. However, all ranks kept their smiles in company with the CO. Our next loss came on the 4th December when Sub-Lt Corbett, in Nieuport Machine 5194, was shot in the head and stomach over the Australian lines at Fleurs. Sub-Lt Corbett, a fine fellow, got into a thick bunch of the enemy, put up a fine show, but was beaten by overwhelming numbers. His body was recovered from the front-line trenches by Flt-Lt Compston, CPO Scott and a party of volunteers, and buried next day, with all the honour he deserved at Beauval, the spot being marked by a cross made of two propeller blades. Two gone after just five weeks of the hardest fighting of the whole war, both sad losses, but even with these it went to show that the pilots of No 8 could teach the enemy that he had not the mastery of the air so far as our little patch was concerned. Two losses to sixteen gains was the record to date, one enemy for every good flying day.

December 10th proved another unlucky day for No 8, for it was in the afternoon of this day that Flt-Sub-Lt Trapp was killed in a Sopwith machine over the aerodrome. He had just taken off when his machine in a turn just crumpled up at full speed, the wings fell off; it nose-dived into the ground and caught fire. We removed our friend from the wreckage which we extinguished with Pyrenes, and buried him with honours at Beauval next day, with his friend Sub-Lt Hope. Three pals passed over. On this day it was pleasing to have a visit from our old friend Commander Muhlock from Dunkerque with Lieut Clayton. Flying, however, was still going strong, and on Wednesday 20th December, we added a further seven Huns to our credit after some very stiff fighting, making a total to date, after less than two months' flying, of 23. Not a bad record for No 8.

On Christmas Eve, the troops entertained the officers with carols until 11 pm. Holidays were unknown on the Somme, and on Boxing Day 'business as usual' was the order of the day. Our boys were up early in the morning chasing Mr Hun over the lines and at lunch-time news reached us that Flt Sub-Lt Hervey (Jerry) was down at Mericourt, on the fringe of Delville Wood, where some of the thickest fighting had recently taking place. Flt Sub-Lt Hervey's engine had



Naval 8's First Home at Vert Galand

'petered out' in a scrap and he had been successful in landing just behind our own lines, unhurt but badly shaken. The place in which he had landed was covered with shell holes and craters, barbed wire, and other left-over materials, and volunteers were called for to bring it home again. The job was not an easy one, but it was a great experience for four of us, besides the transport drivers, who undertook the task. Arriving at our destination partly by lorry and partly by foot, marching over duckboards and through mud, with only the light of star shells to guide us, to a dug-out in which we slept (or, should I say, spent the night), part of which was blown away, to the music of heavy artillery, with countless rats who kept us company and ate and drank our rations. We sallied forth next morning across shell-torn ground full of craters, mud, and old iron, to the machine and dismantled it, sometimes under shell fire. The fun began after the engine was taken out, for we had to carry this and drag the machine for a mile or so to the nearest made up road. During this task one of our number fell into a mud pool and was only pulled out with the greatest difficulty. The job was successfully completed and we all landed back at Vert Galand with our prize at 7:30 pm without a wound, except scratches from barbed wire, which is extremely 'pally' when it greets you. Jerry Hervey was ill for some days suffering from shock, but eventually pulled round and gave the enemy some more fun. All went well with our pilots until January 5th when, after a hellish scrap, we lost Sub-Lt Todd in Machine A.626 over the lines, who was shot down only after putting up a stern fight, and also Flt Sub-Lt Croft on Machine 5196. Both were fine fighters and plucky fellows. Total loss now five.

Fighting in the air was now at its height, and on January 7th 'our boys' barged into a big bunch of Huns and put up a fine scrap. Two were wounded in the fray, Lieut Grange in the left shoulder, and Flt Sub-Lt Lawson of USA on Machine 9898. Lawson brought his machine back to the Camp, bullet-holed in every conceivable place, with landing wires gone. He had flown in this condition for over half an hour and how he succeeded in reaching the Camp was a complete mystery. Sheer pluck and determination got him there. Flt Sub-Lt Lawson was a smart officer, even when flying, and wore one of the finest pairs of streamlined breeches that could be found for miles around. He was wounded in the shoulder and thigh, and I remember that when we ran over to his machine, when he landed, his only complaint was that 'Jerry' had spoiled his streamlined trousers by pinning him to his bucket seat through the thigh with a fair-sized piece of shrapnel. He had to be sawn out, but he smiled all through the ordeal. Total five dead, two wounded to date. Although air fighting was extremely heavy and all our pilots kept busy, no further losses occurred until January 24th, when great numbers of EA were met and dealt with. In one of the scraps on this day we lost Flight-Commander MacKenzie over the lines. Eight officers of the Squadron now gone.

All the Squadron's officers were kept hard at it until January 31st, when we received orders to return to Dunkerque for a well-earned rest, leaving behind us six comrades who had shown that No 8 knew their business. Here my diary of No 8 ends, for I left with the rank of WO, which had been given me at the hands of our CO G R Bromet. I went over to No 4 Squadron, but that is another story, one which was inspired by the fine leadership of Squadron-Commander Huskisson.

I think the foregoing gives the missing link in the chain of history of old No 8 as told in your two issues, and I trust it will prove interesting to all who had the honour of being in old No 8, the 'sailors who flew'.



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

Colin Denton*	Lysander	Raymond Hills	Lysander
W F Henderson*	Hurricane	Lawrence "Laurie" Walker	Spitfire
Leslie Hully	Spitfire	Pete Turville	Spitfire/Meteor
Norman Haffenden	Meteor	J R "Ray" Leask	Meteor
John Crank	Hunter	John Francis	Hunter
Steve Hodgson*	Hunter	Eric Laidler	Hunter
Jim Lunn*	Hunter	George Ord (OC 208 1970-71)	Hunter
"Q" Oswald*	Hunter	Pete Sawyer	Hunter
"Kiwi" Tamplin*	Hunter	Mike Telford*	Hunter
Ivor Timperley	Hunter		

*We understand that Colin Denton, W F Henderson, Steve Hodgson, Jim Lunn, Q Oswald, Kiwi Tamplin and Mike Telford all passed away some years ago. However, the Association has only recently been notified.



Membership Update

The Association welcomes the following new members:

Stuart Levett	Hunter	Brian Parsons	Buccaneer
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Members Lost Contact:

K Allen	Hurricane	R Calvert	Hunter
Simon Coates	Buccaneer	Peggy Fryer	Family

Members Found Again:

Malcolm Bartle	Hunter	Herbie Larkman	Hunter
Alfie Ferguson	Buccaneer		

Current Membership:

Full (in contact)	299	Honorary	3
Lost contact	83	Associate	4
Total Full Members	382	Family	9



Nigel Huckins
Membership Secretary

Naval 8/208 - Reunion

After the covid-induced pause in the Association's annual gatherings, last year saw a return to business as usual, with a splendid lunch in the RAF Club, enjoyed by 29 members and guests:

Judy Abell, Nigel Champness, Sebastien Colmant, Nigel & Sara Huckins, Iain & Jane Johnston, Air Cdre Ben Laite, Bob McLellan, Neil & Cathy Meadows, Eugene Moriarty, Desmond Penrose, Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork, Gordon & Laura Reekie, Iain & June Ross, Mike & Mary Snelling, Dave Southwood, Dave & Jane Stanley, Dave Trembacowski-Ryder, Malcolm & Lesley Ward, John White, Air Marshal Sir Rob and Lady Maggie Wright.

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

Wg Cdr J Buckle, Dave Drake, Pete Jones, Paul Lee-Preston, David Lott, Doug Marr, Pete Millard, Dick Northcote, Graham Thompson, Laurence Wallace, Jock Watson and Keith Whiley.

The 2022 reunion will be held as a lunch, at the [Coombe Abbey Hotel](#), near Coventry. The address is: Brinklow Road, Binley, Warwickshire, CV3 2AB. We will gather in the Cloisters Room for pre-lunch drinks at 12:00 for 13:00 on **Saturday 22 October 2022**. At the lunch, wine and other drinks will be available for purchase. Car parking is charged at £2 for up to 8 hours, or £5 for 8-24 hours. Please note that the hotel is currently accepting cashless payments only: do not forget to bring your bank card! The ticket price this year is £55 per head; this includes pre-lunch drinks and canapés, the three-course meal, plus tea and coffee. As usual, the dress code is jacket and tie.

The booking and payment deadline is 22 September. Please reserve your place via the [Association Website](#) or by using the booking form below. Please book promptly: if you are uncertain whether you can make it, please make a reservation, as it is easier to deal with a late cancellation than to handle a late booking. The preferred method of payment is by bank transfer, but cheques are also acceptable. If you wish to stay overnight, please make your own arrangements direct with the hotel.

Naval 8/208 Squadron Association – 2022 Reunion Booking

Please return slip to: Eugene Moriarty, Naval 8/208 Sqn Association Secretary.

eMail: 208secretary@gmail.com

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

Full Address.....

Telephone: eMail:.....

I will* / will not* be attending the Reunion at the Coombe Abbey Hotel on Saturday 22 October 2022.

Please reserve places.

Names of guest(s):
.....

Special dietary requirements (if any):

Payment: Reunion Lunch (£55.00 per person) £.....

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

Total: £.....

* I have paid by bank transfer (Contact the Webmaster for the Association's Bank Account Details).

Please use your name as the reference, so that we know who has paid.

N.B. The above bank details are for the Association's new account. Please do not use last year's!

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

Pictures from the 2021 Reunion



Left:
The President,
Sir Rob Wright,
delivers his address.



Above: The Hunter Boys and Girls: (L to R) Laura Reekie, Iain Ross, June Ross, John White, Gordon Reekie, Nigel Champness, Mary Snelling, Jane Stanley, Dave Stanley and Mike Snelling.

Right: Jane Stanley
Iain Ross,
Gordon Reekie and
Dave Southwood
chatting in the bar.



Above (L to R): Graham Pitchfork,
Nigel Champness and
Sir Rob Wright.

Right: The dining room was once again graced with works of art, brought along by Neil Meadows. Here, the Hunter Boys gather with Mike Rondot's classic painting of a 208 Sqn Hunter.



Far Right:
The Chairman, Dave T-R, in expansive mood.

