

Naval 8 - 208 News

The Annual Newsletter of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association



2023 Issue

Naval 8 – 208 News - 2023



NAVAL EIGHT 208

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Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings

The President's Foreword

What an unsettled year since our last Newsletter: the war in Ukraine continues and seems to be grinding to a stalemate and I have not seen such an unsettled world, both home and abroad. What we did learn from the 1930s - and again in 2014 - is that appeasement does not work. Putin has been emboldened by getting away with grabbing pieces of neighbouring countries territory to "protect" Russian minorities – it sounds all too familiar and whilst it may encourage others to follow the example it has inevitably culminated in a pariah state. In the 1990s I remember well the MOD Options for Change review which looked to reap the benefits of the 'Peace Dividend' but which, along with subsequent Defence reviews, emaciated the British Armed Forces. The war in Ukraine shows how much conventional weaponry can be expended over a short time and how depleted stocks of ammunition in the stores of Western allies have become. The emergence of cyber warfare and the use of drones illustrate how the face of the battlefield has changed, but also that armies cannot take and hold land without troops on the ground and the use of conventional weapons. The call by Ukraine for modern aircraft shows that the control of the skies is as important as ever. Even though the UK Government has pledged to inject additional cash into the Defence budget, it remains uncertain how this money will be used; to restock depleted weapons, ammunition or other materials? In the unlikely event that this promised increase will lead to another squadron or two re-forming I will remain 'Forever Vigilant' and advocate that the 208 Squadron numberplate be returned to service.

Turning to less worldly matters, the attendance at the Reunion Lunch at the Coombe Abbey Hotel last October was disappointing, with only 15 attendees. Nevertheless, the lunch was most enjoyable with the single table allowing for plenty of anecdotes and banter for everyone to contribute and enjoy a very convivial atmosphere. However, it was obvious that the experiment with moving to a lunch format in the Midlands was not successful. The Association Committee held an ad hoc meeting immediately prior to the lunch to share views on the various options for future Reunions; hence the next Reunion Lunch this year will be the test! I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible for the Association Reunion Lunch at the RAF Club on Saturday 21st October 2023. Let us hope we can find a well-supported compromise and continue to celebrate our heritage in our traditional home.

Rob Wright
President

Chairman's Chunter

The Association Annual Reunion held on Saturday 22nd October at the Coombe Abbey Hotel, Warwickshire was a very pleasant event, although poorly supported as mentioned by the President. Before the lunch an ad-hoc Association Committee meeting discussed various options. The meeting concluded that the numbers attending (15) the 2022 lunch were disappointing. It was surmised that this was down to a number of factors, including: a potential drive for 1+ hours to get to the venue (a long way to go for lunch); drink/driving was a limiting factor; and no public transport to the venue. The experiment at holding a lunch event outside London was deemed unsuccessful with regards to attendance. The discussion on the future of reunions noted that: membership numbers were gradually reducing (although 305 members are still 'in contact'), but still attracts 30+ attendees in "normal – non-Covid years". In general, it was agreed that reunions should continue until the 'last man/woman standing', as long as the Association had a President, Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer.

The general financial situation of the Association is on a downward trend, with the account hovering around £1,300, but this should be enough to cover incidental expenses for some years to come. The Association Committee was concerned that at historical rates of expenditure (mostly Newsletter printing and postage) we would have sufficient funds for around 2 - 3 years to cover costs only. Depending upon the number of pages the cost of printing and postage is between £300 - £495. However, all is not lost as a very generous anonymous benefactor has stepped in and has offered to fund the cost of the Newsletter and postage for as long as needed. This is a wonderful gesture and means that a much-anticipated hard copy of the Newsletter can be dispatched to all those that prefer a paper copy this year and for years to come.

The Website continues to grow slowly with a total of 1230 pages to browse through. Recently, the Webmaster uploaded some great photographs featuring the "Squadron Car" in 1964/65 from Gordon Morris. Gordon was a Cpl Supplier on the Squadron between 1964 and 1965. So, when you are next sorting out your memorabilia and old photographs, please give a thought to sharing them with the Association. It is these pictures that demonstrate the enduring spirit and emotional bond that we all have for Naval 8/208 Squadron.

Association Website: <http://www.naval8-208-association.com>

David Trembaczowski-Ryder
Chairman

The One Hundred Sortie Day

Twenty years ago, 208 Sqn set a record that is unlikely ever to be beaten, by flying one hundred sorties in a single day. Neil Meadows recounts the build-up to that momentous day.

It was my privilege to take command of 208(R) Squadron at RAF Valley on 5 March 2001 although, as the eternal vagaries of the appointments system would have it, it was not my original posting, which was to be as the Chief Instructor at No 4 Flying Training School. However, as many may remember, the RAF's pilot training system had recently undergone a series of severe cutbacks to match the required reduction in the Defence Budget and the much smaller, projected RAF fast-jet front line: the 3 Basic Flying Training stations of Cranwell, Linton-on-Ouse and Church Fenton had been reduced to just one - RAF Linton-on-Ouse. The Advanced Flying Training combination of RAF Valley and the 2 Tactical Weapons Units at Brawdy and Chivenor had first been collapsed into the 'Mirror Image' arrangement at Valley and Chivenor, and then just to RAF Valley on its own, where 19 Squadron took on the role of the Tactical Weapons Unit, and 208 Squadron the Advanced Flying Training School in a re-invented, but very much smaller wheel. Nobody should have been surprised, therefore, that an RAF that was considerably larger than it is now was very short of fast jet pilots and, having severely reduced the training machine, had insufficient capacity to train them.

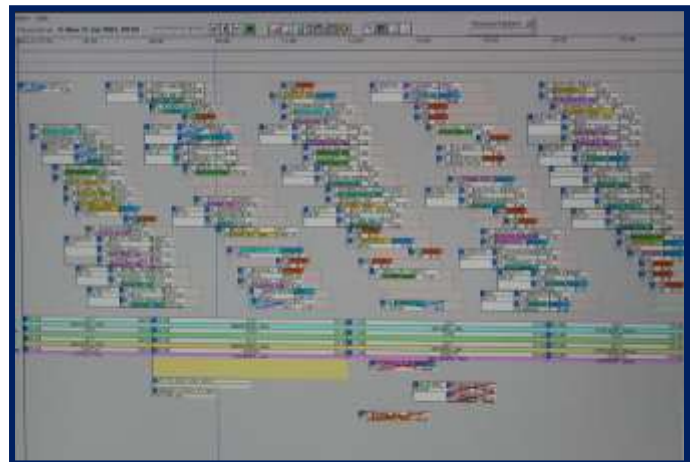


Flt Lt Martin Keer, Sqn Ldr Simon Stocker, Flt Lt Dave Kenworthy and Flt Lt Mitch Pymm complete the sortie authorisation

What met me on my arrival at 208 was, therefore, a complete reorganisation of Flying Wing at RAF Valley. There was to be an immense increase in the flying task, and an expansion of the Squadron to match the new 40-strong staff pilot establishment, with Sqn Ldr flight commanders and a new Wg Cdr boss (me). To illustrate the magnitude of the new requirement: when I arrived, the maximum daily flying programme comprised some 50 programmed sorties. To achieve the enormous new training requirement, the Squadron would have to AVERAGE 50 per day which, due to the prevailing Anglesey weather factor, meant programming an astonishing 84 sorties per day, every day to meet an annual task of some 11,500 sorties. 'Target 160' was the buzz-phrase of the day, which was the number of sorties that the entire Station would be required to fly per day. This is astonishing when you think that Heathrow, with all of its resources, does not fly very many more than this. 'Project Reformation' was the title of the Squadron's efforts to improve its efficiency. At this point, one might consider the wisdom of Albert Einstein, who described

insanity as *'doing the same thing while expecting a different result,'* or a quote often attributed to Henry Ford: *'If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.'* Stultifying bureaucracy and the (almost) immovable object of ingrained culture and tradition would be our biggest challenges in achieving this colossal flying task and an almost 50% increase in our flying rate (within existing resources, of course...).

2002 became predominantly a hectic flying year as we chased our target of 84 sorties per day. Fun was officially banned by the Air Staff at Headquarters as they removed anything that could possibly distract us from the task, to squeeze yet another quart out of a pint pot that had already produced gallons! So, how did we achieve the aim? Basically, it involved an analysis, led with my everlasting and grateful thanks by my Exec, Sqn Ldr Simon Stocker, OC 'A' Flt, of everything that the Squadron did to determine how we could make things more efficient. We questioned everything, and led many 'sacred cows' to slaughter as we implemented the necessary changes.



The programme at mid-day, with some weather-induced attrition

Examples of what we did include the following:

We redesigned the Ops Room to provide a one-way flow system to ensure that incoming and outgoing crews would not interfere with each other, and that supervision of this mammoth new task (and therefore Flight Safety) could be maximised.

Flying 9 sorties per hour (each with a half-hour brief and debrief) required 9 briefing rooms in constant use. We only had 6, so we replaced the traditional 4-coloured CFS board brief with standardised PowerPoint slides delivered on Smart boards. This upset the veteran QFIs, but improved standardisation and cut the briefing times by half.

As you will be aware, no flying can possibly take place without the aircrew first huddling around the Ops Room programme board, and giving 'helpful' advice to the duty authoriser. However, this somewhat gets in the way if you have 100 pilots on the Squadron. So, we followed up on a bright idea by one of our junior pilots and installed closed-circuit cameras in the Ops Room, with remote control to monitors in the crewroom. Therefore, not only did we invent a new video game of 'spot the Auth's bald patch', but we removed the congestion from the Ops Room and kept everyone better informed.

Astonishingly, because it was a training unit, 208 Squadron had no Adjutant or Ops Support staff.

All admin was done by the Squadron pilots, thus taking them away from their primary task. We therefore introduced some administrative support (a full-time Adjutant) and more operational support (2 Ops Support SNCOs), much to the delight of the QFIs, who could therefore spend more time in the cockpit and less time on 'secondary duties'. We even employed the Ops SNCOs to write the flying programme, which was a huge leap of faith, but which was extremely successful and released the duty programmer to fly up to 2 additional sorties per day.



BRAMA Flight Line Mechanics Gareth Armstrong and Sue Green carry out a 2-man turnaround.



20 aircraft signed out.

We re-negotiated the engineering contract. Historically, rectification had been done at night to provide 18 aircraft serviceable at 08:00 for a 5-wave day. However, unserviceabilities reduced the availability throughout the day, so we rarely were able to fly the 84-sortie target. However, changing the rectification pattern to provide a steady flow of aircraft at a rate of 9 per hour solved this issue. After all, we only needed 1 aircraft serviceable at 08:00, as long as the others followed..... A flexible refuel support concept was introduced by the engineers to reduce post-sortie aircraft turn round times from one hour to less than 30 minutes to allow more use of the aircraft during the flying day.

We analysed the weather, to find that the weather factor at Valley is almost the same in any 6-month period throughout the year. Summer really is as bad (or as good) as winter in Anglesey! Scratching our heads further, we realised that the reason every

course is behind the line in winter is not because of the weather, but because of the lack of daylight. So, we reduced student numbers on winter courses and increased them on summer courses, and programmed some sorties, such as instrument flying to take place at night. As a result, we came out of winter 'on the line' for 2 years running. It did, however, upset the Headquarters programmers because having variable numbers of students on our courses spoiled their neat progress charts.....

Most significantly, we looked at the flying programme which, with 84 sorties, thus 168 pairings of over 100 aircrew, plus simulators and supervisory duties, had become too much for the human brain to encapsulate, and we were losing a number of sorties because of the inevitable errors that crept in. For example: pilots were programmed to fly when they were absent (for example, at medical appointments) and often too close to the previous sortie so that they could not make the next take off time. We searched for a computer-based solution, but realised that it is impossible to write a computer programme to write



The empty Sqn Crewroom during the day's operations.

a flying programme, because most of our variables are infinitely variable. What we did find, however, (and it is thanks to Sqn Ldr Dave Lord for his outstanding research) was a programme called 'Flight Pro' (by an Australian company called 'Ocean') that could easily identify and show us where the errors were, thus allowing us quickly to rectify them. My estimate was that this one factor alone saved us approximately 5 sorties per day that would otherwise have been lost.

So, as a result of these and many other improvements, in early 2003, we managed our first 84 sortie day. To put this in perspective, in 2002, we had mounted a huge effort in a fine summer's week and had flown 300 sorties in that week. In 2003, we were flying an average of 330 sorties per week as a matter of routine. When I arrived in 2001, maximum effort was a 50-sortie day. In 2003, we were averaging 50 sorties per day.

But why the 100-Sortie Day? Well, for 2 main reasons. Firstly, to test the robustness of the 'system' that we had devised. In order to achieve the annual training task, we had to be able to fly 84 sorties per day, every day when the weather allowed. If all of our efforts had us doing this at the limits of all of our engineering and aircrew resources, it would not be sustainable and we would ultimately fail. Therefore, we needed to prove that there was some additional capacity so that we knew we would not have to run indefinitely at 100%. The second is understandably for the same reason that you might climb Everest - because the challenge was there. To our knowledge, no squadron in history had ever achieved this feat, and it would certainly both 'make the point' about our achievements and put the Hawk era of 208 Squadron firmly in the history books along with the exploits of its previous chapters. What has always set 208 apart from other squadrons is its indomitable spirit, and we were determined to show that this spirit was equally prevalent in the Hawk era.

So, the question was 'when'. It would have to be in the summer in maximum daylight when the best weather was most likely as we would require good weather in order to fly all of the planned student solo sorties. Our engineering colleagues in BRAMA asked for it to be on a Monday to allow a concentrated rectification effort over the weekend to produce as many serviceable aircraft as possible for the day. Lastly, it would need to be in a period when we had 3 full student courses in residence with all of the associated solo sorties to be flown. The day was therefore set for Monday 21 July 2003 and, after a hopeful long-range forecast from the Met Man on the preceding Friday, and dedicated efforts from the Ops Support NCO, Sgt Mike Wilson who crafted the 100-Sortie programme, we lit the blue touch paper and retired for a well-deserved, albeit anticipatory weekend.

The Monday dawned clear and bright although, after his optimism of the preceding Friday, the Met Man had ominous 'heavy showers' in the mid-morning forecast. Should these reduce the conditions below the student minima, it would



Flt Lt Mitch Pymm, the leader of the formation pair, and Wg Cdr Neil Meadows, OC 208 Sqn, congratulate each other on the achievement of the final 2 sorties.

ruin the whole day as we did not have enough staff pilots to fly the additional sorties that had been programmed for the students. Breaking into the circuit after my first sortie of the day, the clouds were, indeed, 'ominous'. However, very fortunately, they quickly dispersed and thankfully did not affect the programme at all, and everything progressed exactly as planned. What was remarkable above all else is that it seemed to be just a normal working day (although the crewroom was unusually quiet!). The Flight Pro software had ensured that no-one had been obliged to exceed fatigue limits, and several of the Squadron pilots commented that they felt they could have flown more. Only one person did more than the norm, and that was me. I saw the first sortie off in the morning and flew the last - the hundredth one as the No 2 in a pairs formation sortie led by Flt Lt Mitch Pymm.

In all, the Hawk Fleet set a new record for RAF Valley by flying an astonishing 146 sorties on that day, with 208 Squadron setting its own astounding record, which is believed

to be a feat unsurpassed by any other squadron in the history of the RAF (and perhaps even in the history of aviation): "Although the archive material does not lend itself to easy comparisons, nobody is aware of a squadron flying as many sorties in a single day," said Sebastian Cox, Head of the Air Historical Branch. It is a record which seems unlikely ever to be challenged, and puts the 208 Squadron Hawk Chapter firmly in the history books.



Neil Meadows
OC 208 Sqn 2001 - 2003

Single Seat Hunter Flying in the 1980s

Last year's newsletter recorded how 208 briefly returned to single-seat Hunter flying in 1980. Here Dave Southwood recalls that his early days as a Buccaneer pilot were spent ferrying Hunters to the Buccaneer sqns, in the UK and Germany.

On 7 Feb 1980, XV Sqn suffered a fatal Buccaneer accident on a Red Flag exercise in the USA, due to a catastrophic wing spar failure. This resulted in the Buccaneer fleet being grounded, just as I finished my Buccaneer conversion with 237 OCU. A decision was made to equip all of the Buccaneer sqns with Hunters, in order that the pilots could maintain flying proficiency. The Bucc force had always had some Hunters (T7As and T8Bs that had Bucc instruments) and they were used for all of the dual checks. Some of these were allotted now to individual sqns rather than being operated at station level. In addition some aircraft were recovered from deep storage at 5 MU at Kemble (T7s, F6s and F6As) and some were re-allocated from 1 TWU at Brawdy. Also some T8Cs from Yeovilton were loaned by the Royal Navy.



OC 208 and his team with their temporary aircraft.



208 were due to go on Red Flag in early 1980 just as I joined the Sqn but I could not go anyhow, as I was not Combat Ready so I had arranged to go back to 5 MU at Kemble, where I had held before, while the Sqn was away. This then turned into a formal detachment until June 1980 to help with recovering the Hunters from deep storage, and involved flying air tests and ferry flights to deliver the aircraft to the Bucc squadrons, including those in Germany at Laarbruch. This gave me a great understanding of the requirements of post-maintenance airtests and of the Hunter air test schedule, which all stood me in good stead for my future career, plus the opportunity to learn about crossing the North Sea and flying in Europe. The first single seater that I delivered to Honington for 208 was on 1 Apr 1980.

I first flew a Buccaneer on 208 on 1 Sep 1980 and the same day I also flew a Hunter T8C and an F6A; sadly such opportunities for varied flying like that, especially for a new first tourist, no longer exist. The last entry that I can find in my logbook of flying a single seater on 208 during this period was on 2 Sep 1980, so I am unsure as to when they were handed back, but I don't think we took any to Lossiemouth when the Sqn moved.

An interesting and fun time on 208 that needs to be recorded in the history. I was so lucky to be involved in it as I was.

Dave Southwood

208 Sqn 1980 - 1984

The Teddy Bear Trail

Each year, the Webmaster's local village holds a summer event called the 'Teddy Bear Trail' in which villagers are asked to dress up teddy bears in accordance with an annual theme and place them around the village. In a similar manner to a treasure hunt, the local children then tour the village to locate and identify the bears. There is a prize for the one who correctly names the most. This year's theme was 'Someone Beginning With 'B''. The obvious answer to the Webmaster's entry (pictured) was, of course, 'Biggles'. However, the more astute villagers may have noticed that there was sufficient information in the diorama to identify that the Sopwith Camel did, in fact, belong to 208 Squadron's own Flight Lieutenant Henry Botterell in his famous 'Balloon Buster' sortie of 29 August 1918 near Arras on the Western Front.

It was noted that, very much against the competition rules, there was a considerable amount of 'Google' searching (by the adults) when competitors arrived at this exhibit. It is not known however, how many claimed the extra bonus point for the real answer.



Someone beginning with "B": Biggles or Botterell?



Above: "Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth....." A 3-ship in 2003. Photo courtesy of G.H.Lee.

Below: The First World War Centenary Markings. Photo courtesy of RAF Valley. Crown Copyright, all rights reserved.





Above: *".....and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings."* Photo courtesy of G.H.Lee.

Below: *"Sunward I've climbed....."* Photo courtesy of G.H.Lee.



Rest and Enter the Spitfire

It was 80 years ago that the squadron was withdrawn from the Western Desert, where it had excelled itself for over two years, and left for a rest period before re-equipping with the Spitfire and making preparations to re-join the front line in Italy.

Brief Respite

The year 1943 provided the squadron with a much-needed period of rest and an opportunity to re-charge its batteries. 1942 had been arduous with the squadron heavily involved in the war in the Western Desert culminating in support for the Battle of El Alamein. As the Allies advanced westwards in late October 1942, the Hurricane squadrons, including 208 Squadron, were withdrawn from the front line. At the beginning of January 1943, the squadron headed for Iraq. On 3 January a move to Aqsu between Baghdad and Kirkuk in Iraq commenced. The main ground party of six officers, seventeen NCOs and 217 airmen departed Burg-el-Arab under the command of the squadron adjutant, Flight Lieutenant A.O. Gaze. The convoy was made up of sixty-three prime movers and ten trailers. The party arrived in Baghdad on the 11th and two days later reached Aqsu after a journey of 1,330 miles, a prodigious effort with worn out vehicles and over difficult terrain.

The purpose of the move was to give the squadron a respite after almost two years of continuous action and an opportunity for training including exercising with and training Allied army units in the region working up for future operations. The squadron also provided an immediate force should further trouble flare up in the region following the abortive coup by Rashid Ali in the previous April. The squadron headquarters remained at Aqsu and 'A' and 'B' Flights moved to Landing Ground K 1 near Kirkuk to conduct exercises with the 5th Indian Division.

To celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the formation of the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1943, the three detachments all celebrated in fine style. Eight Hurricanes of 'A' Flight conducted a formation fly past and 'shoot up' over Baghdad. The Iraq Times reported, 'It seemed as though the RAF transferred Hendon air display to Baghdad in honour of the RAF anniversary.' (Forty-eight years later, No. 208 carried out a very different 'air display' over Baghdad when it destroyed numerous key targets during the Gulf War). 'B' Flight dropped leaflets on Damascus and Paish leading four Hurricanes 'shot up' Beirut airport and surrounding districts. The flight received a 'strawberry' from the local group captain for the excellent display they gave, remarking 'I was pleased to see that Pilot Officer Prune was not present', an oblique reference to the inept activities of the RAF's cartoon character. 'C' Flight gave formation displays over Mosul and Kirkuk.



Hurricanes over the Lebanon-Syrian border Sep 1943.

Spitfire Prelude

During April, it was announced that Army Co-operation squadrons were to be re-designated 'Fighter Reconnaissance' squadrons. Intensive training was carried out throughout the spring and summer with small detachments spending time at Shaibah, Baghdad and Beirut to provide local army units with opportunities to train with fighter reconnaissance



208 Sqn Spitfire at the end of 1943.

squadrons. The squadron moved to Rayak in Syria at the beginning of July. Training was stepped up to improve fighter and evasion tactics and interceptions. Strafing was also practiced in addition to training in the normal duties of an army co-operation squadron. Wing Commander Johnson, who had been in command of the squadron for almost a year, left in October. During the early days of November came news of a change of commanding officer, a move south and the replacement of the worn-out Hurricanes. In November the squadron moved to El Bassa a few miles north of Haifa in Palestine and a Spitfire Vb arrived on loan to give pilots experience. In December came the news that the squadron was to be re-equipped with Spitfires and each flight would convert in turn.

With sixteen Spitfires on strength, the squadron began a comprehensive work-up for a return to operations. In preparation it participated in a major exercise in the Suez area. The army was so impressed by the accuracy of the pinpointing of targets that it suspected the squadron of 'fixing' the sorties beforehand. The exercise afforded the squadron pilots an excellent opportunity to assess the Spitfire. They all agreed that the aircraft was a great improvement over the Hurricane, particularly in the photographic reconnaissance role.

So began the Spitfire years, a period when the squadron would enhance its already outstanding reputation.

Graham Pitchfork

Naval Eight/208 Sqn Association Historian

Membership News

The Association welcomes the following new members:

Gordon Morris	Hunter	Paul Kelly	Buccaneer
Mark Calthrop-Owen	Buccaneer		

Members Lost Contact:

Malcolm Ganner	Hurricane/Lysander	Charles Wavell	Hurricane/Spitfire
P Thompson	N/K	Peter Bristow	Meteor
Roy Harrison	Hunter	Kevin Brown	Hawk
D Davies	Hawk	S Eccles	Hawk
M Long	Hawk		

Members Found Again:

Ian "Fritz" Davidson	Buccaneer	Terry Summers	Buccaneer
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Current Membership:

Full (in contact)	288	Honorary	2
Lost contact	93	Associate	4
Total Full Members	381	Family	7



Nigel Huckins
Membership Secretary

Getting in Touch

New member Gordon Morris got in touch, to recall his days as the Sqn Supplier, including journeys in the Sqn Car. A wider selection of Gordon's photos appears on the [Association Website](#)

I really enjoyed Muharraq. Not a lot to do outside the base but my friends Mike ("The Pipe") Williams, Spud Murphy and I went into Manama a lot in the car (we had to have it approved to drive at the police station there before it was allowed on the road!). Other members will I am sure remember going down to the creek to have a curry on The Barge and we also had meals at the airport restaurant. Whilst at Sharjah I had a couple of rides in the Hunter T7 which was great! Anyone who was on the Squadron will know 'Chiefie' Beauchamp running around like mad seeing the aircraft off and trying to put out a 'wet start' on one of the Hunters with his beret!! The 'squadron car' was an Austin 7 1937 model: we got it over from Nairobi where it was rusting away behind the mess and gave them 10 bob for it! It was one of my best tours and I really enjoyed being with 208.



Gordon Morris
208 Sqn 1964-1965

Letter to the Editor

I enjoyed Iain Ross's well illustrated article on Hunter formations in the 2021 newsletter, and it was a pleasure to read Andy Wright's article, as he was our 'plumber' when I joined the Squadron. No SEngOs or JEngOs then, just one Eng Off leading the team who gave us lots of serviceable aircraft. I thought that those who are scratching their heads about the names in the photo of the Squadron officers would like to know that Andy had a caption error and a minor spelling mistake. In the back row the pilot identified as John Haddock was in fact Paul Wilcox, and in the front row Kiwi Tamplin's surname has that "p".

Keep up the excellent work,

Doug Marr

208 Sqn 1965-1967



The RAF's Blonde Bombshell

The American artist Andy Warhol once said: 'In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes.' Here Neil Meadows recounts the tale of how he had his moment in The Sun.

The 'phone rang very early on Wednesday 11 April 2001, which was a bit rude as I was in the middle of a week of leave and looking forward to a lie-in, and a relaxed and enjoyable day with my young family. When the Squadron Duty Authoriser introduced himself, I feared the worst. Had there been an aircraft accident? Had someone been injured or, God forbid, killed? I was therefore initially relieved, but somewhat bemused when he asked me if I had seen the morning papers. I confessed that I had not and he recommended that I urgently obtained a copy of The Sun before calling the Station Commander for an equally urgent discussion of its contents. A short trip down to the village newsagent quickly revealed the source of the consternation in The Sun's front-page headline 'RAF ban emblem for being too sexy,' resplendent with a cartoon representation of the Buccaneer era's 'Naked Lady' badge.



The Sun's front page - 11 April 2001.

John Kay, 'The Sun's Reporter of the Year', wrote that 'an RAF chief has banned this sexy emblem worn by pilots in his historic squadron for 30 YEARS. He condemned the cartoon of the nude blonde as politically incorrect. But his men are furious at the "claptrap" ruling.' In the ensuing article on Page 9 under the title 'RAF's Blonde Bombshell', John Kay continued the story describing how 'Furious RAF pilots blasted their new chief last night for banning their pin-up style badge. The bombshell decision ordered by Wing Commander Neil Meadows shocked the heroic flyers of renowned 208 Squadron.' And it went on..... 'The Sun Says' on page 8 posed the question 'Why do we have bomber pilots?' and suggested that 'the idea that the badge of the RAF's famous 208 Squadron is politically incorrect because it shows a cartoon of a nude woman is laughable.'

I felt as if I should have been wearing sunglasses to disguise my identity as I crept surreptitiously out of the newsagent and returned home to find the 'phone ringing again. This time it was the Office of the Minister for the Armed Forces and the pointed question: 'What the hell are you doing?' I am not sure how the Minister had acquired my home telephone number, but at least it gave me the opportunity to add some facts to The Sun's extravagant claims, not that my side of the story would ever be published.....

I doubt that I need to explain, particularly to the Buccaneer Chapter, the Naked Lady's place in the Squadron's history and the reverence with which many view it. I am not sure how it translated from the Buccaneer to the Hawk era, but it had come to be awarded to the student pilots on the occasion of their First Solo on the Hawk, to recognise their achievement and to

differentiate them from the staff. The badge was not (and never was) worn by the Qualified Flying Instructor (staff) Squadron pilots, who wore the official 'Gizah Sphinx' crest with pride. However, having presented the badges to Nos 57 & 58 courses, we had run out of stock of the 'Naked Lady'. Now it has to be said that the view of the badge amongst the Squadron pilots was mixed. Whilst everyone recognised its place in the Squadron's history, a number were uncomfortable with its use, and some were of the separate view that a new badge should be created to reflect the Squadron's modern Hawk training role. We had also received adverse comments from 2 visiting senior officers, particularly in the light of the Government's, the MoD's and the RAF's burgeoning Equal Opportunity policies at the time. The comments to the Station Commander of a visiting local dignitary had been very much more pointed. Stories were rife in the Service of senior officers being brought to book at Equal Opportunities tribunals for such things as having 'Pilots' Pals' calendars on the wall and for having 'gentlemens' magazines in the crewroom. In the prevailing circumstances, it was obvious that the 'Naked Lady' had had its day and I doubt I need to illustrate the potential consequences, even then, of forcing an individual to wear an emblem that comprised a picture of a naked woman (straddling another object) with the word 'penetrate' underneath. It was certainly time to move on. Some weeks beforehand, I had therefore asked the senior students to design an appropriate replacement to fully reflect the Squadron's history, to reinforce their sense of pride in belonging, and to properly reflect the Squadron's current training role. There had been no 'ban' as The Sun had described (I would not be so dictatorial). Those on the current courses would continue to wear the badge until they graduated, and it would be replaced, in due course, by a worthy successor, quietly and with no fuss, or so I thought. However, more was to come....

Thursday 12 April dawned to reveal a full Page 3 article in The Sun featuring Miss Jacqui Degg posing topless as the de facto 'Naked Lady' under the banner headline 'Top Buns'. John Kay described how The Sun 'yesterday flew to the rescue of angry RAF Top Guns deprived of their sexy blonde bombshell badge.' Jacqui, who had a Union Flag temporarily tattooed on her behind to complete the pose said: 'It was great fun. I'd love it if the lads made me their unofficial mascot.' For the cost of a stamped addressed envelope, The Sun also offered a fabulous free poster of the Page 3 photo. I sent for one immediately! If that was not enough, as I was preparing to return to RAF Valley, the Saturday 14 April edition of The Sun ran a half-page article on Page 7 entitled 'I Am Nude RAF Pin-Up' in which they had tracked down Sue Steele who, some 22 years previously, had posed for a drawing of the original badge by her then husband Sergeant James Law. 'I am the original 'Blonde Bombshell,' she was purported to have said, 'and I want to be back on all those flying suits.' Sue's local newspaper in Immingham also ran a similar article under the headline 'You're Busted.' I looked forward with some trepidation to the Station Execs Meeting on Monday morning. But The Sun had not quite finished with the story and, under the headline 'PC pin-up killjoys will wreck forces morale', the main focus of its Letters Page 'Dear Sun' on Tuesday 17 April was a collection of letters from readers indicating their displeasure with my decision to 'ban the badge'. Apparently, I was the most hated RAF chief around. The 'hate mail' that had begun to arrive at the Squadron was, however, of a much more intense nature, to the point at which I had to tell the Adjutant not to open my letters for fear of the offence it might cause. I know we are advised never to



The inside story: The Sun, Page Nine - 11 April 2001.

believe what we read in the newspapers, but it was genuinely surprising to discover how many actually do, and then seek to add their own personal vitriol to the situation. Perhaps this was a 'hard copy' precursor to what we see in modern social media exchanges.

The only question that remained from my initial conversation with the Minister for the Armed Forces' Office was: Who on the Squadron had leaked the story to the press? That, fortunately, was very easy to answer - no-one. Apart from the understandable, natural and unavoidable ribaldry, I had received full support from everyone on the Squadron, the Station Commander, the Director of Corporate Communications in the MoD and, I suspect, eventually even from the Minister. What the seniors appeared to have been unaware of was the growing internet-based 'chatroom' the 'Professional Pilots Rumour Network (PPRuNe)' in which anyone could log in pseudonymously to add their opinion to any particular 'thread'. In the 'Military Aircrew' section under the title 'Political

Correctness - Has The World Gone Mad?' an individual under the pseudonym 'litle B. Alright' had posted a lead statement: 'Heard a rumour that 208 at Valley are having to change their badge because the new sqn boss thinks that the back of a naked young lady looking over her shoulder with the word 'PENETRATE' underneath is not PC. By all accounts nobody's complained, but just in case. Is PC taking over?' This was posted on 1 April 2001 and the 'story' grew from there. Of several dozen comments posted in the ensuing days, many were insulting and 'righteously indignant' albeit obviously borne of ignorance of the real situation. A few (particularly from an individual entitled 'Flatus Veteranus') were understanding and supportive. However, it was very instructive that every one of The Sun's published quotes was a direct lift from the dozens of posts added to the PPRuNe thread in the next few days. Indeed, even those who 'contributed' to the thread came to realize, perhaps just a little too late, that they had actually written the entire Sun article. So much for John Kay - the 'Reporter of the Year'. Fortunately (at least for me), the Royal Navy took over The Sun's lurid headlines on Tuesday 17 April with 'The Navy's Ship of Shame' but that, of course, was another story.

Apart from the inevitable mickey-taking, my only regret about the whole issue is that we could not make something entirely more positive about the story. Timing is, of course, everything and I was on leave in the West Country when the story broke and The Sun's photographer arrived at RAF Valley. Had I been there, perhaps we could have added some facts to the ignorant PPRuNe opinions and deflected the lurid headlines. It was a great shame that we could not have invited Miss Jacqui Degg (the model who posed on Page 3) to visit the Squadron. In the words of the late Rik Mayall, in Blackadder's 'Private Plane' I am sure that one of the young pilots would have very much liked to have taken her to heaven and back!



Neil Meadows
OC 208 Sqn 2001 - 2003



In Memoriam



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

Joseph McConnachie	Meteor	Arthur "Dickie" Dicken	Hunter
Ray Herrington	Hunter	Dave Stanley	Hunter
Air Mshl John Thompson	Hunter	Pete Hill	Buccaneer
Brian "Boots" Mahaffey	Buccaneer (OC 208 1987-1989)		



Dave Stanley sadly passed away earlier this year. His contemporary on 208, Rod Dean, gave us the following recollection of a day in the life of a first-tourist Hunter pilot.

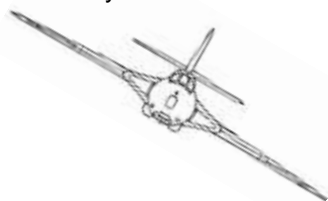
One particular afternoon I was at home when one of our Junior Pilots – Dave Stanley – called to say he had a problem and could I help. We didn't normally fly in the afternoons, but the groundcrew had a shift on duty to try and get as many serviceable aircraft as possible for the next morning. Consequently, there was always the odd thing needed doing like a compass swing or an air test. Dave had been down to do a compass swing that afternoon on Delta – a single seat Hunter – a good way of losing weight under that canopy, in the sun and with pressurisation off! When he got to the aircraft the groundcrew asked if he could do a taxi test to check out the left brake as well as the compass swing. "How do I do that?" enquired young Stanley, never having done one before. "No problem, Sir. Just take it down the runway and at about 100 knots chop the power and stand on the anchors and see what happens."



"Delta" taxis out at Muhharag

This our intrepid aviator did and, as could be foreseen by those with great perception, the right brake worked, the left one didn't, and Stanley and the Hunter left the runway smartly to the right where they became embedded in soft sand. No damage was done to either – pride excepted – but there was no way the aircraft was going to move out of the sand under its own power. Help. Being that I am a soft-hearted soul who loves Junior Pilots, Stanley decided to call me to see if I could help. By the time I got into work the groundcrew had tried all they knew to drag it out without any luck and it was time to call in the heavy gear from the Station Motor Transport Section – but this would make it "official" which we were trying to avoid. Along with the MT people came Wally (*Flt Lt Walter Willman, Flt Cdr*), slightly worse for wear (lunchtime beers always knock you out), who proceeded to give Stanley a hard time about not being authorised and not being strapped in (for once Wally was right with this one) and a whole list of other misdemeanours. MT yanked the Hunter out with no sweat and Wally disappeared telling Stanley he would see him in the morning.

Next day, Wally went all over it yet again and just after he had given young Stanley his third rocket the word came through that "Delta was ready for another taxi test." At this, Wally leaped forward and insisted that he would do it, that he would be authorised, strapped in and prepared to fly if that was the best option – Stanley please take note. Orf he jolly well went – 100 knots, chop the power, stand on the anchors, right one worked, left one didn't – he ended up about 10 yards further down the airfield than Stanley had the afternoon before but otherwise in exactly the same position. Tee hee! I went out to pick Wally up in the squadron Landrover but he had disappeared – despite it being the hot season he had walked the mile or so back to his office (in full flying kit) whence he disappeared for the next three days – a result!



Rod Dean
208 Sqn 1969-1971

Naval 8/208 Annual Reunion

Fifteen members and guests attended the Naval 8/208 Sqn Association Annual Reunion lunch at the Coombe Abbey Hotel, on Saturday 22nd October 2022:

Air Mshl Sir Rob and Lady Maggie Wright; Air Cdre Ben Laite; Nigel and Sarah Huckins; Neil Meadows; Desmond Penrose; Gordon and Laura Reekie; Kim and Elaine Smith; Dave Southwood; David Trembaczowski-Ryder; Malcolm and Lesley Ward.

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

Air Cdre "Spike" Milligan; Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork; Nigel Champness; Doug Marr; Eugene Moriarty; Iain Ross; Mike Snelling; Dave Stanley and John White.



This year's gathering will return to the traditional venue of the RAF Club and will be held on Saturday 21st October 2023, at 1200 for 1300. The menu is: Salmon starter; Coq au Vin main course and Apple, Plum and Frangipane Tart for dessert. Vegetarian options will be available on request. The ticket price this year is £60 per head for the three-course lunch, including the RAF Club's service charge. Dress code, as usual, is jacket and tie. Please reserve your place via the Association Website or by using the booking form below. The preferred method of payment is by bank transfer, but cheques are also acceptable. Please book promptly and not later than one month before the dinner (*i.e. no later than 21st September.*)

Naval 8/208 Squadron Association – Annual Reunion Luncheon Booking

Please send your booking to: Eugene Moriarty, Naval 8/208 Sqn Association Secretary, who will provide details of the Association's bank account to enable a bank transfer.

eMail: 208secretary@gmail.com

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

Full Address.....

Telephone: eMail:.....

I will / will* not be attending the Annual Reunion on Saturday 21st October 2023.

Please reserve places.

Names of guests:

Special dietary requirements (if any):

Payment: Reunion Lunch (£60.00 each) £.....

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

Total £.....

* I will pay 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).

* **Please delete as appropriate**

Pictures from the 2022 Reunion

A small but select group of members and their guests enjoyed a splendid day out at the Naval 8/208 Sqn Association Reunion in 2022, with a superb lunch at the Coombe Abbey Hotel, at Binley near Coventry.



Left: The Association President, Sir Rob Wright, chatting to Desmond Penrose, the Meteor Chapter Representative.

Below: The Chairman, David T-Ryder, with Buccaneer "Boy" Dave Southwood and Lady Maggie Wright.



Below: The table laid for lunch and decorated with 208 Sqn paintings and memorabilia, courtesy of Neil Meadows.



Below: The splendid surroundings of Coombe Abbey Hotel.



Above: Members and their guests at lunch.

Right: The table was enhanced with chapter markers, again courtesy of Neil Meadows.

