

Naval 8 - 208 News

The Annual Newsletter of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association



2025 Issue

Naval 8 – 208 News - 2025



NAVAL EIGHT 208

Squadron Association Committee:

President:

Air Marshal Sir Robert Wright
KBE AFC FRAeS

Life Vice-Presidents:

Air Cdre Ben Laite
Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork MBE BA FRAeS

Chairman:

David Trembaczowski-Ryder BSc

Secretary:

Eugene Moriarty MA

Treasurer:

Capt Rick Page BSc

Membership Secretary:

Nigel Huckins MBE BSc

Committee:

Gp Capt Jamie Buckle OBE BSc RAF
David Gill
Paul "Skids" Harrison
Iain Ross

Website:

www.naval8-208-association.com

Webmaster:

Neil Meadows MA BSc

Newsletter Editor:

Malcolm Ward MDA BSc

Contents



3. *Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings*

The President's Foreword & Chairman's Chunter.

4. *End of World War Two*

To mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day, the Association Historian, Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork, reviews 208 Squadron's contribution to World War II.

6. *Membership News*

7. *Keeping in Touch*

8. *Exercise Furbelow*

The Association Chairman, David Trembaczowski-Ryder, recalls the social side of a Squadron deployment to Norway.

9. *208 in Pictures*

Photographs from the heyday of the Hawk, courtesy of Eugene Moriarty.

10. *Squadron Standard 1955*

Bernie Holroyd provides a first-hand account of the parade to mark the presentation of 208 Sqn's first standard.

12. *What a Day That Was!*

Skids Harrison looks back on a memorable day as a pilot on 208 Sqn.

13. *In Memoriam*

We bid farewell to those comrades who have passed away during the last year, including Life Vice-President and Meteor Chapter Representative Desmond Penrose.

14. *The Final Formal Reunion*

An account of the 2024 gathering of the Naval 8/208 Sqn Association, the last in the traditional format.

On the Cover:

Sopwith Triplane
in Naval 8 Markings.



Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings

The President's Foreword

How we miss the clarity and certainty of the Cold War, where we certainly knew our enemies and equally who our friends were! In the political climate of today, we all need to be **Forever Vigilant** and trust that the world does not revert to the disastrous and xenophobic 30's. Now that the US appears to be indifferent to European problems (as in 1938) the calls for European rearmament today resonate with what happened in the late 1930's; can we re-arm in time to deter would-be aggressors? On holiday in Portugal last month, (and despite the complete failure of the electrical grid - heed the Chairman's input below) I managed to read Tim Bouverie's excellent book "*The Appeasement of Hitler*" and if ever there was a warning of the dangers of appeasement it can be reflected in today's world: we may be reliving that part of our history. In hindsight the 4 Strategic Defence Reviews between 1990 and 2010 may have been wishful thinking that a new world order was about to lead to never ending peace. The aggression by Putin's Russia in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014 should have been the wake-up call for politicians in the West, but those warning signals were not heeded. The subsequent 2022 invasion of Ukraine has seen a real seismic change in the way that wars are fought, with the rise and rise of drone warfare. If ever 208 Squadron is re-formed, it could be in the guise of a 'swarm' rather than a much loved 'squadron'. However, I doubt that AI could replicate our tales of 'life on 208' and the associated banter. However, if, and it is a big if, 208 Squadron were to be re-formed - in any guise - it would be most welcome.

The final formal Reunion dinner held at the RAF Club on 26 October 2024 was a big success with 37 in attendance, not least due to the efforts of the Hon Sec, Eugene Moriarty. However, I would like to take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to all the Association Committee for their dedication, hard work and commitment. At the Reunion Dinner I remarked that the Sir Geoffrey Bromet Trophy had always been awarded for excellence in the air over the previous year but, without a Squadron, that was no longer possible. However, and in thanks to the Committee for all their hard work over the last few years, I announced that I would award the Trophy for one last time, to the Association Committee, with the one reservation that, if the Squadron was ever to reform, it would be returned for future awards. In the meantime, it will stay safely on view at the RAF Club for all to see under the arrangement that the Association had made with the Club.

Finally, you can rest assured that the Association will continue, with news and anecdotes continuing to be shared on our excellent Website and Newsletter. The Committee will explore ideas of holding informal lunches/dinners at various locations around the country and we will keep everyone informed of the outcome. In recognition of the continuing spirit of 208 let us all remain Forever Vigilant.

Rob Wright
President

Chairman's Chunter

It was with great honour that I received the Sir Geoffrey Bromet Trophy at the 2024 Reunion Dinner from our President on behalf of the whole Association Committee. I can only reiterate the President's comments about the excellent work undertaken by all the Committee in keeping the Association going so strongly. This was exemplified by the very successful last 'formal' Association Reunion Dinner last October; this evening was very much enjoyed by all those that attended. The Committee will look at how we can get together in an informal setting in the future, perhaps with a UK regional focus. Members can rest assured that the Newsletter and Website will continue in their current form for as long as possible. The last edition of the Newsletter focussed on the Buccaneer, but this year we will look at other eras in more detail. We are always on the lookout for articles and photographs for the membership to enjoy. Please check out your memorabilia box to search out suitable photos and other items that we can use in future newsletters.

The Association Website <http://www.naval8-208-association.com> has a total of close to 1300 pages to browse through, so there is something for everyone. I am extremely grateful to our anonymous benefactor that pays for the printing and postage of the hard copies of the Newsletter – it is very much appreciated.

I live in Belgium, outside Brussels, and I thought it is worth sharing with you some advice being proffered by the Belgian Government in preparedness for the worst in these uncertain times! The Belgian Government advises the population to prepare an 'emergency kit' and they suggest the following items should be included:

- Basic first-aid packages, including an extra supply of essential medicines;
- Bottles of water (up to 80 litres for up to 72 hours);
- A mobile phone charger or power bank;
- Important documents;
- A torch, preferably wind-up with a handle;
- A battery powered radio;
- A lighter or matches;
- A multifunctional pocket knife;
- An evacuation checklist including a list of personal items;
- Tinned food etc for 72 hours.

Let us hope it doesn't come to this, but all of us being ex-RAF know the importance of being prepared. On that sombre note, I look forward to seeing at least some of you at some stage during 2025.

David Trembaczowski-Ryder
Chairman

End of World War Two

This year, the nation commemorates the 80th Anniversary of the ending of the war in Europe, and so it is appropriate to reflect on the squadron's significant role during five years of conflict.

When war against Germany was declared in September 1939, the squadron was at its long-term base at Heliopolis in Egypt. It exercised with the Army and conducted exercises at advanced landing grounds in the Western Desert. During May 1940 the peacetime atmosphere began to change. On 1 June, the squadron, less one flight, moved to its war station at Qasaba where it came under the control of the 7th Armoured Division. When Italy declared war on 10 June, four aircraft moved forward to Sidi Barrani, close to the Libyan border. The landing ground was to become very familiar to the pilots and ground crew of the squadron. Daily tactical reconnaissance (Tac R) and photographic sorties were flown along the border monitoring movements on the large Italian airfield at Fort Capuzzo and aiming to identify any build-up of troops. The squadron was soon flying its Lysander aircraft on its main Tac R role but, with guns and a limited bombing capability, the aircraft was able to supplement 7th Armoured Division's other limited attack assets. It was agreed that the squadron should have one aircraft on standby ready to carry out a close support sortie, and it was not long before the squadron flew its first bombing operation. On 15 October the squadron suffered its first casualties of the war. Pilot Officer Druce and Sergeant Muldowney took off from Siwa on a Tac R sortie and were shot down by Fiat CR 42 fighters. The Hurricane made its operational debut with the squadron on 4 December when Flight Lieutenant Burnand carried out a Tac R south of Sidi Barrani. The rugged Hurricane provided a significant capability and was to serve the squadron with distinction for the next 2-3 years. The Hurricanes took on the main role of reconnaissance and the remaining Lysanders were used for artillery spotting as the Army advanced westwards to surround Tobruk. As the advance continued, the squadron was constantly on the move with flights leap frogging each other to maintain aircraft at each advanced landing ground.

By early 1941, the situation in Greece had deteriorated with the arrival of powerful German forces and Middle East squadrons were rushed to reinforce the beleaguered Allied forces. The squadron left for Greece at the end of March 1941, but the situation was becoming chaotic as the squadron endeavoured to fly Tac R sorties from rudimentary airstrips with limited support, despite the valiant efforts of the ground crew. It was soon apparent that a withdrawal was inevitable, and the depleted squadron returned to Egypt at the beginning of May. The squadron moved to Gaza to reform and re-equip with detachments sent to Habbaniya near Baghdad with a second flight involved in the campaign against the Vichy French in Syria. Heavy fighting continued throughout Syria during the early part of July and the Hurricanes flew long-range sorties to Beirut, Tripoli and to Latakia in northern Syria in addition to three or four Tac R sorties each day. On 12 June, hostilities ended but not before the squadron had lost five pilots. The full squadron returned to the Western Desert in October having finally bid farewell to the Lysander. Field Marshal Rommel and his Afrika Corps had appeared on the scene and the next few months were to witness some of the squadron's most aggressive action. Operating from the forward ALGs, the squadron embarked on longer-range reconnaissance sorties to cover Benina, Magrun and Agedabia in addition to providing Tac R support. Losses mounted and the squadron commander, Squadron Leader L. Burnand, constantly fought for better support and fighter escorts for the long-range flights.

Axis forces began advancing in January 1942 and the squadron's Tac R sorties were invaluable and necessary. The Allied withdrawal presented the ground crew with more difficulties as they continued to provide aircraft whilst constantly falling back to other landing grounds. By the end of March 1942, it was time for the squadron to be rested as it headed for the Canal Zone. The five months in the desert had been arduous and uncomfortable with constant moves to landing grounds, air attacks and poor weather. The pilots had flown hard, often without an adequate escort, and casualties had been high with the loss of nine pilots in addition to others wounded. The squadron received the



208 Sqn Hurricanes in 1943.

under-performing Curtis Tomahawk to supplement its Hurricanes before returning to the desert in mid-May. Rommel's forces were advancing and soon isolated Tobruk before turning east to commence a very rapid advance, which was finally halted at El Alamein. Since operations had recommenced at the end of May, thirteen pilots had either been killed or posted as missing with two more non-effective because of wounds. Consequently, the squadron had absorbed many inexperienced pilots, including several South Africans. Throughout September, both armies recovered and replenished after the summer campaigning, but the squadron continued to fly regular tactical and photographic reconnaissance sorties to monitor the enemy's activities. General Montgomery had decided to launch his counter attack on the night of 23/24 October with a sharp bombardment of 900 guns, as the infantry of XXX Corps advanced through the minefields in the north. Just before last light, Flying

Officer Peter Perry took off to reconnoitre the area near Rahman. Two Spitfire fighter squadrons escorted him. He reported 800 stationary and dispersed transports near the coast and a further 500 on the southern road.

More importantly, there was no evidence of movement or preparation for battle. Later that night, the Eighth Army's bombardment commenced.

Over the next few days, the squadron flew over the battle area reporting large concentrations of transports. The squadron's work was recognised when a signal was received late in the day from Lieutenant General Horrocks congratulating and thanking the squadron for "the excellent tactical reconnaissance reports". On 3 January 1943 the squadron started a move to Aqsu between Baghdad and to Kirkuk in Iraq. The purpose of the move was to give the squadron a respite after almost two years of continuous action, provide an opportunity for training and finally, to provide a squadron to exercise and train Allied army units in the region working up for future operations. In December came the news that the squadron was to be equipped with Spitfires and each flight would convert in turn.

On 13 March 1944, three parties of Spitfires left for Cairo West, led by its South African commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Johnny Blaauw. The squadron arrived in Italy on the 17th at the recently constructed 1,200-yard airstrip at Trigno alongside the Adriatic Sea. It flew its first operational sortie in the Italian theatre the day after its arrival. The squadron soon got into its stride flying Tac R and artillery reconnaissance (Arty R) sorties with weavers to protect the spotting aircraft as its pilot concentrated on ground targets. In the build-up to the spring offensive, the squadron was kept very busy monitoring the German lines of communication, observing enemy movements and finding targets for the fighter-bombers. As the Allies prepared to attack the Gustav Line, the squadron expected to devote much of its effort to spotting enemy artillery. On 11 May, the squadron's Army Liaison Officer (ALO), Major Tipper, briefed the pilots on the offensive against the Gustav Line at Monte Cassino, which would herald the opening attack in the drive to reach Rome. At a mass briefing, he outlined the squadron's role in Operation Honker. Continuous Arty R cover on the heavy batteries in the Atina valley was to be maintained from 0800 hours to 1600 hours. The month of May 1944 stands out as an exceptional one in the history of the squadron. The number of operational sorties flown and the high standard of serviceability of the aircraft reflected great credit on the pilots, the ALO section and the ground crew. During the month 228 missions were carried out, involving 456 sorties. The total number of operational hours was 560 with each pilot flying an average of twenty-eight sorties.



208 Sqn Spitfire Mk IX.

area. This necessitated another move for the squadron, and they headed further north to Magliano near Sienna, which was very close to the front line. During September the squadron completed 173 Tac Rs, forty artillery reconnaissance and eighteen photographic reconnaissance missions, each involving two aircraft. This generated 553 hours with a maximum of thirty-six sorties flown in one day – a new record. This speaks volumes for the effort, ingenuity and skill of the ground crew who worked entirely from mobile facilities, away from main support depots and with aircraft that regularly returned with battle damage.

Towards the end of August, the squadrons of 285 Wing began re-equipping with the Spitfire IX. Although reconnaissance was the primary task for the squadron's Spitfires, armed with cannon they also had a formidable ground attack capability if opportunities arose once they had completed the primary reconnaissance task. On 20 September, the squadron was given orders to move to Peretola airfield three miles from Florence. During late October and much of November the weather was bad with heavy rain making it impossible to fly on some days. It also created significant problems for the ground crew working outside and having to deal with the mud. At times, whole areas of the airfield were flooded.

Rome fell on 5 June. The squadron flew many Tac R sorties along the major withdrawal routes, finding targets for the fighter-bombers, which formed a 'cab-rank' waiting to be called in to attack. The rapid advance of the ground forces created a huge demand for reconnaissance sorties and all the pilots flew at intensive rates. The squadron was on the move as it headed north to airfields nearer the front line. Following the capture of Rome, the Germans fell back on the next main defensive line known as the Gothic Line at the foot of the northern Apennines between Pisa in the west and Rimini in the east. Shortly afterwards, the squadron moved north to the former Italian Air Force base at Castiglione, which proved to be one of the most pleasant of all the Italian airfields.

Behind the Gothic Line there existed a limited number of main roads running north to the Po Valley and the Germans were dependent upon these roads for re-supply; 208 was required to maintain a constant watch in the



The main battle around Florence was mud!



Sqn Ldr Donald Perrens DSO (*standing*).

In early January 1945, Squadron Leader Donald Perrens completed a spectacular artillery shoot under extreme conditions despite his Spitfire being severely damaged, forcing him to crash land. He was badly injured and rescued by local Italians. His action resulted in the award of the Distinguished Service Order, the only such award to the squadron in World War Two.

As the weather started to improve during March there was an air of expectancy that the final assault against the German lines was approaching. The Tac R sorties monitored all lines of communication north of Bologna and in the Genoa and Spezia areas. The final Allied offensive opened on 9 April when the Eighth Army crossed the River Seino and established a bridgehead. The following day the squadron produced a maximum effort in support of Fifth Army when pilots searched for gun-pits and movements. On the 29th the Germans signed an unconditional surrender to come into effect on 2 May. The long haul for 208 Squadron from the Egyptian Desert on the Libyan border to northern Italy via Greece, Iraq and Syria was over. The cost was high, with 46 pilots and 10 ground crew lost. Squadron

personnel received 31 gallantry awards, including three to ground crew, in addition to many Mentioned-in-Despatches. The squadron's effort was a record to be justly proud of.

Graham Pitchfork

Naval Eight/208 Sqn Association Historian

Membership News

The Association welcomes the following new members:

Trevor Clarkson

Meteor

Peter Goad

Venom

Members Lost Contact:

W F Plumpton

Hurricane/Spitfire

A H Smith

Hurricane/Spitfire

Keith Trow

Spitfire/Meteor

J Manley

Meteor

Alan Meadows

Hunter

Ken Rhodes

Hunter

Chris Deen

Hawk

Members Found Again:

Ronald Martin

Spitfire

John Hall

Spitfire/Meteor

Pete Day

Hunter

R J Howard

Hunter

Mike Goodfellow

Hunter

Whitney Griffiths

Hunter

Glyn Ivory

Buccaneer

Current Membership:

Full (in contact)

277

Honorary

1

Lost contact

116

Associate

4

Total Full Members

393

Family

8



Nigel Huckins

Membership Secretary

Keeping in Touch

Malcolm Fraser (Hunter Chapter).

I joined 208 as one of the 34 Sqn pilots at Tangmere when 34 disbanded and 208 was recreated in Feb 1958. We flew to Istres & Luqa on 20 March and on to Nicosia the next day. I note from my log book I was on Battle Flight on 26 March and scrambled to intercept what turned out to be an Israeli Dakota. From 11 Apr to 28 May, we were detached to Akrotiri. Shortly after returning to Nicosia, 208 deployed to Amman as part of BRITFORJOR (Operation Fortitude). I moved there via a ship carrying a mobile radar from Famagusta, to Aqaba on 26 Jul (my wife arrived in Nic on 27 Jul!). In April 1959, 208 disbanded. I was to take an aircraft back to the UK, but on landing at El Adem ingested a bird and that was the end of my Hunter flying. I became a Truckie, a copilot on the new shiny Britannia – and I still had my moustache.



Larry McDonald (Hunter Chapter)

Greetings from sunny Jamaica. I too was a member of the 208 Hunter Chapter in Cyprus. In November I will be 90 years old. I still work full time and also drink my beer. To all my friends of 208 Hunter Chapter who are still alive, especially David Gill, "God Bless You All". Thanks.



Eric Sharp (Hunter Chapter)

Eric Sharp celebrated his 93rd birthday late last year. His granddaughter Becci has been in touch, to say that Eric now struggles using his laptop, so he has asked her to correspond on his behalf. He would like to pass on his greetings to all 208 members. He is no longer a resident at Foseway and has returned to be with Claire full time. The house has been modified to allow him to live a normal life and he enjoys a weekly outing to the carvery.



Paul Kelly (Buccaneer Chapter)

Paul has provided some notes on his time on 208 Sqn from 1977 – 1980.

In May 1978, 208 Sqn sent a 4-ship deployment to Bodø, Norway, escorted by RCAF F104s. On return to UK low level, we did a formation toss attack on Cowden using practice bombs from wing stations but Dave Ainge launched his suitcase, No 1 Uniform and a teddy bear from the bomb bay into the North Sea. In Feb 1979 Joe Hellyer and I led a 4-ship low level with attacks on Wainfleet range in the Wash. On landing, we were escorted to meet the police who had a low flying complaint from Sandringham Palace. Apparently, we had disturbed Prince Phillip in the middle of his duck shoot on the Wash marshes close to the range. We were proved to be on track and on target so we were exonerated. We met the Queen later and she made a joke about the incident. Great Lady. In Apr 1979, Joe Hellyer, Ron Trinder, Al Smith and I formed the advance party en route to Cold Lake Canada to set up the first RAF detachment (208 Sqn Buccaneers) on exercise Maple Flag. During the work up at Goose Bay I flew some missions with the Station Cdr (Gp Capt Ron Dick) who proved to be a very capable Buccaneer operator and extremely effective as the bounce. In May 1979 Brian Hoskins (ex Red Arrows) formed a 208 Sqn Buccaneer display team, we called the Green Marrows. The team were practicing for the upcoming Queen's visit to Honington: the final move was a bomb burst heading towards the Royal Dais and I was at the back #4 in the formation when I noticed a Victor Tanker and Lightning in tow heading from our right in towards the same display point on a collision course. Fortunately, we were able to execute an emergency abort and break upwards as the Victor turned out to be a minute ahead of its planned display time. Oooops! On 11 Sep 79 Terry Summers and I deployed to Scotland for the first trials of Buccaneer Pave Spike operations and the first launch of a live guided 1000lb bomb. Several sorties were flown over the next few months: this was the most significant development of RAF weapon systems and affected the future role of the Buccaneer. My last sortie on Buccs was 1 Feb 1980 doing work up for Red Flag. On 2nd Feb we deployed to Nellis Base Nevada to join 16 Sqn with their aircraft already on task. Five days later XV345 crashed killing the crew and the Buccaneer fleet was grounded.



Exercise Furbelow

David Trembaczowski-Ryder (with a contribution from "Fradge" Fradgley) recalls the social side of a Squadron deployment to Norway.

On 13 October 1982, 208 Squadron deployed to Bodø Air Base in Norway, to take part in Exercise Furbelow. Bodø is located in Northern Norway, within the Arctic Circle – it snowed whilst we were there, and we practised landing on a runway covered in packed snow. Bodø (population around 35,000) was the home air base for a Norwegian F16 squadron, which had not been in service with the Norwegian Air Force for long. One day we saw a very short, but impressive, display by an F16. The pilot took off and immediately pulled up and carried out a loop and on the downward slope he lowered his undercarriage and landed. The display lasted no more than a minute!

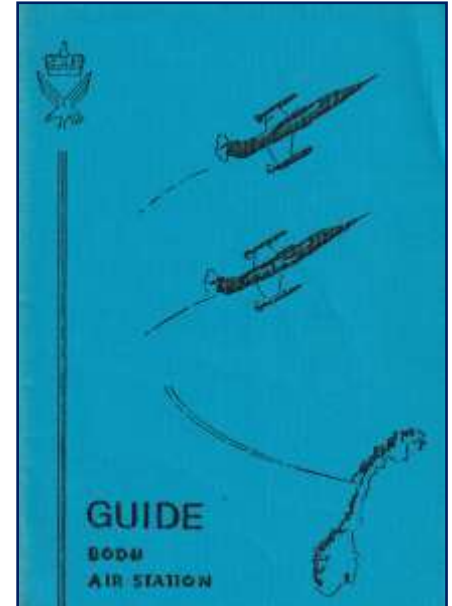
During the Cold War, 208 Squadron was assigned to the NATO Northern Region in the Overland Strike/Attack role in the Norwegian theatre of operations. This meant that if the Soviets (a/k/a Russians) decided to attack NATO (Norway) around the North Cape, 208 Squadron would be part of the effort to stop their attack. This meant that the Squadron could conduct simulated attacks against real potential targets, such as key bridges and airfields in Norway. I flew on a number of sorties where we carried out simulated attacks against Andøya Air Base (on the Lofoten Islands), Oerland Air Base, and Bardufoss Air Base. In the mountains in southern Norway the Norwegians had an inland weapons range, called Hjerkin Range. The actual range was in a valley and then off target you had to pull up and roll over a ridge and fly on the downwind leg in a parallel valley and then roll over a ridge again to the IP and run in to drop a practice bomb on the weapons range. Great fun. I was flying with Dave Harle and on the return from Hjerkin Range we flew at low level (of course) and had the opportunity to fly through steep glaciated valleys of the Svartisen Glacier. A real 'Star Wars' valley with sheer ice walls either side, which was spectacular.

All the aircrew and groundcrew were accommodated on base in standard on-base rooms. The breakfast routine at the Officers' and SNCOs' Club was an interesting experience! There was an abundance of cold fish with everything from herring, rollmops, mackerel, sardines, smoked salmon, and smoked eel etc. After breakfast ended, we had to make our sandwiches to take away for lunch. Yes, you've got it - a squashy mess of herring and mackerel stuffed between two slices of brown bread. Haha! What an awful prospect to face while nursing a hangover.

One afternoon I had a wander around the local open-air market to see what kind of things they sold. The fruit and veg stall was a revelation – they had NO fruit and only four types of root vegetables (swedes, potatoes, parsnips and turnips). You could only get frozen vegetables in the supermarket, nothing fresh.

In the evening, entertainment meant a trip to downtown Bodø. One evening, six of the junior junta decided to go for an (expensive) beer in the nightclub in the basement of the SAS Hotel. At the entrance to the nightclub, we were told that jeans were not allowed! This was a problem as three of us were wearing jeans. What to do? Someone, I can't remember who, had a brilliant idea! The three (Ron Wilder, Dave Harle and Jeremy 'Fradge' Fradgley) that were wearing ordinary trousers would go into the club and Ron Wilder would pop into a cubicle in the toilets and take his trousers off, whilst Dave or Fradge would roll Ron's trousers up and take them to the entrance and pass the trousers to Keith Robson, Dave Bye and me in turn. However, when the three 'trouserer' guys were in the cubicle they realised that Ron was a different height and stature to the three outside, so Dave Harle took his trousers off instead! Ron left the cubicle pulling up his zip and surprised a Norwegian waiting to use the facilities, who was further surprised when Fradge also left the cubicle: just when the Norwegian thought that the coast was clear he saw Dave Harle standing in the cubicle with no trousers on! He decided to find somewhere else to use the facilities. Dave did have a very stressful few minutes when he was standing in the cubicle with no trousers on as he suddenly realised that the boys might decide to do a runner! Luckily, the plan worked well with Keith, Dave Bye and me swapping our jeans for Dave's trousers in turn and we were let into the club with our jeans rolled up under our arms and then changed back into our jeans in the toilets. The successful adventure called for a bottle of wine! It was a Mateus Rosé and the equivalent of £20 (you could buy the same bottle in the UK for about £3).

We departed Bodø on or about 19 October 1982, clutching our 'Arctic Circle Certificates', after a great deployment.



RNoAF Guide for Visitors to Bodø
(No advice was offered on the dress code for trips downtown!)



David Trembaczowski-Ryder
208 Sqn 1981-1984 & 1988-1990

208 in Pictures

Top & Bottom of the Page:
A pair of 208 Sqn Hawks
on their way to Malta,
for the 2012 Air Show.



Left & Below:
Enroute to Bodø,
again for a 2012 Air Display.
(Photos courtesy of Eugene Moriarty)



Squadron Standard 1955

This article is based on the personal recollections of Bernie Holroyd of the events and experiences leading to the presentation of 208 Squadron's first standard on 18 November 1955.

I joined 208 Squadron as a corporal in August 1955: at Abu Sueir there were real flush toilets instead of the fearful 'honey buckets', and it was possible to indulge in the luxury of a hot bath - no water rationing! This was the life. The Meteor was a reasonable aircraft as far as servicing and serviceability was concerned, and we realised what it was to be on a great squadron. Being a self-contained squadron, we felt rather aloof from other mortals on the Station, a form of snobbery perhaps but, after all, we were 208! The flying hours were achieved, everyone was happy in spite of the ever-present guard duties and nowhere to go outside the camp gates, yes, morale was good. We even had a fish and chip shop, illuminated at night by a blue neon sign which extolled the virtues of 'Ali Osman - Fish and Chips' - they were bloody awful!

On 26 October 1955 the good morale was shattered at a stroke: we were told to report on the tarmac outside the hangar where the CO, Squadron Leader Neil (*Ed: Tom Neil DFC and Bar, a Battle of Britain veteran and OC 208 Sqn 1953-1955*), wanted to talk to the whole Squadron. We immediately visualised squadron moves and in a few short minutes, rumours of a move to all kinds of more exotic places than Abu Sueir were rife. We gathered around the Boss, expectant, hoping for great news such as leaving God-forsaken Egypt. Then came the punch-line: we were informed that in seven days hence the Squadron would be presented with a squadron standard, that it would be a moment we would remember the rest of our lives etc, etc. Drill for the presentation ceremony was to start that very day, the aircraft had to be painted up, in fact life was going to be all bed and work. After we were dismissed, the comments were simply unprintable - even the fact that the first CO of the Squadron was going to present the standard brought forth the remark that it would compensate for all the forthcoming upset and upheaval if Diana Dors came instead. It was a sad bunch of ground crew on 208 Squadron, especially shortly after the CO's announcement we were ordered to 'get fell in' by Flight Sergeant Shorthouse, our servicing Chief.

The drill then started, Chiefy giving orders, the Discip Flight Sergeant Heathcote shouting contrary orders, morale sank more through the floor and the drill parade was a shambles and a fiasco. Thus it continued for a few days, nobody had any heart in the business - aeroplanes and this sort of 'bull' just didn't mix. Suddenly, the two familiar chiefs were withdrawn from the drill parades and two RAF Regiment gentlemen appeared to shout and bawl at us. One, a Warrant Officer with a heavy Belfast accent who was formerly a Sergeant in the Irish Guards, and the second drill instructor, a Welsh Flight Sergeant who was also a member of the Guards Brigade before joining the RAF. The Flight Sergeant informed us that we had it all to get through, so why not put our backs into it.

The words of command from both drill instructors worked like magic - a case of every man to his trade! We soon found ourselves actually enjoying these drill sessions, the instructors had gained our confidence and we theirs, it was



208 Sqn "A" Flt Aerobatic Team.

a strange experience. We even thought that they were very likeable 'Rock Apes' and they had the obvious knack of getting the very best out of recalcitrant troops. We were told that the standard presentation had been put back to November 18th, so the pace slackened slightly, more time could be spent on aircraft, cleaning, helping the hard-worked 'painters and scratchers' in preparing the Meteors re-spraying. As if all this wasn't enough, the flying programme was heavier, practice formation flying and aerobatics, yet everyone pitched in. The morale again became as 208 Squadron's morale should be, but with a difference - to help us cope with the drill and hard work we amazed our non-Squadron colleagues in the Corporals' Club by not joining in the parties which were, incidentally, a regular occurrence. The drill became immaculate, we felt very pleased with ourselves as the format of the Presentation became apparent. The Boss had a lot to learn, some 87 different commands to be mastered and memorised. The Station Band, though they tried hard, threw us out of step occasionally and were by no means a success. Tempers began to fray sometimes: were we getting a bit 'stale'? This was something our drill instructors were worried about.

The aircraft had been re-sprayed silver, 'A' Flight with red-painted noses and cheat lines; 'B' Flight with yellow noses and the same colour cheat lines. The CO's aircraft had a white nose, indeed, the Meteors looked like something from an American aerobatic team, although the aerobatics couldn't have been bettered by anyone.

On 15 November, one of the Regional RAF Bands came out from Uxbridge. By this time, we were all wearing blue, the weather becoming a little too cold for KD. The drill along with the Regional Band was again immaculate, and on the final

rehearsal on the 17th, everyone saw how good we all were, the CO was pleased and we knew in our heart of hearts that the 'Day' would be a great one. The afternoon before the Parade was spent in a final clean-up of the aircraft which were lined up behind the parade ground - the actual parade area being the tarmac between 208 Squadron's hangar and the smaller 'shed' which belonged to some obscure lot called 13 Squadron. In the evening the Regional Band gave a concert in the Station Cinema, very much enjoyed and with the cinema filled up to capacity. After a final check of uniforms, rifle slings and webbing belts, it was early to bed for everybody.

Reveille was early on the 18th, with a good breakfast - no-one was going to risk dropping down on this parade. Draw specially polished up rifles and assemble in the hangar. The sun had not appeared, it was very misty and the other side of the parade ground was not visible. Will it be put off, will it be held in the hangar, what about the flying display in these conditions? We need not have worried, the mist was vanishing quite quickly, we fell in after a final dust of shoes, adjusting of bayonet frogs, belts and caps.

Our Flight Commander, Flight Lieutenant Bradley, called us to attention then the CO spoke to us. He intimated that he was going to inspect us before we marched out, he said that he knew that there wasn't a man in either Flight who was below par, but there were a few too many on the parade and that if he thought anyone was a little too nervous, he would take them off the parade and have them stand by the aircraft at the back of the parade ground. Then happened something that I've never heard before that morning or since. There was an angry muttering in the ranks: "He'd better bloody well not send me off!" Another said: "I'll simply refuse to go off parade!" It was absolutely unbelievable - if one was ever told that he could be let off an AOC's parade or any other for that matter, the airman concerned would have been over the hills and far away, and quickly, but here were airmen actually saying that they wouldn't leave the parade even if ordered.

Inspection quickly over, a handful of men were taken off, but without any discredit - they must have felt very tensed up and it showed more than with the most of us. After all, when you realise that you are going on such a parade in front of 2,000 spectators, it can encourage butterfly stomachs. The party which was marched away to the aircraft looked a little crestfallen, tough on them. We were ready, the middle doors of the hangar were opened, "Slope arms, right turn, quick march" we were off to the Band crashing out the march 'Rising of the Lark'. The mist had cleared to a slight haze, the sun was breaking through - and the spectators, there seemed to be thousands. We knew all the Station personnel would be there, but half of the Canal Zone appeared to be there, Guardsmen, Fusiliers, Gunners. One caught a glimpse of the various uniforms, but once we really were marching out onto the parade ground the accent was on concentration, heads held that bit higher than usual, and the initial nervousness had miraculously vanished.

Onto the receiving base, both flights right dress and open order, order arms and wait for the Reviewing Officer, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Geoffrey Bromet. Punctually, at 0900 hrs, the AVM along with the Station Commander arrived on the flank of the parade ground and some seconds later walked to the saluting base. Arms presented, General Salute followed by slope arms and order arms. With a feeling of helplessness, I heard my medals tinkling on the ground - when ordering arms the safety catch of my rifle had caught in the medal mounting bar and pulled the gongs from my uniform. Should I quietly pick them up? Better not, all the years of discipline said do no such thing, so I remained frozen. Sir Geoffrey inspected the Squadron, and stepped over my medals during the inspection, the Band played 'Elizabethan Echoes' until the inspection was over and the Reviewing Officer had returned to the saluting base. The standard was consecrated before Sir Geoffrey Bromet presented it to the Squadron: Flying Officer Jones, the Ensign, receiving the Colours. The standard was marched in slow time back to the Squadron when the National Anthem was played.

Now the tricky bit, the rehearsal of which had caused some really hard work - firstly forming close column on the right flank, then passing the saluting base to the slow march 'Superna Petimus'. It went off perfectly, a difficult manoeuvre at the best of times, but slow march in line abreast without anyone struggling or being out of line was perfection itself. We all breathed a sigh of relief - we'd cracked it, the hardest bit was over. Then in quick time to the RAF March Past, again not a man out of place, back to the reviewing base, advance in Review Order - again crashed out in perfect time, General Salute, and the Boss asks permission to march off. This we do to the strains of 'The Jolly Airman'. We march to the Officers' Mess, grinning all over our faces, feeling on top of the world and putting on that bit of extra swagger, which comes automatically when you know you've done well. The Standard is handed over to the Station Commander, we march on towards the hangar where we are dismissed, I run back to the parade ground, retrieve my gongs, and join the Squadron in front of the hangar where the photographer was busy taking pictures of the whole Squadron. Then it was all over, elation tinged with some sadness, now that the culmination of much hard work had come and gone.

It was, as the CO had said, something we would remember the rest of our lives.



Sir Geoffrey Bromet presents the Standard to Fg Off Jones, closely watched by OC 208 Sqn, Sqn Ldr Tom Neil.



Bernie Holroyd

208 Sqn 1955-1957

What a Day That Was!

Skids Harrison reflects on an eventful 24 hours as a pilot on 208 Sqn.

I was recounting this story recently and I didn't think my small audience could believe it, but I swear that it is true (as recalled 33 years later) and backed up by documented evidence. Fellow Buccaneer operators, as you were, will well remember two truths from this story: the first is that our major services were undertaken at Abingdon and the second is that we had an annual spin familiarisation sortie, usually flown out of Lossie. This story begins with an unusually short heads-up to grab some kit as we were about to take a C-130 heading South to pick up that last Bucc from major servicing. The date was 11 May 92, the crew were Neil 'Delish' Devine and myself. Having grabbed the bare essentials (not even sure if we had time to head home and collect civvies), Delish and I were rapidly herded into the Herc and off to Oxfordshire we went. Minor detail was getting a return auth: more of that later. Having lived with the delights of 70 and 80 bob for 4 years, it was nice to have some good old-fashioned warm English beer in Oxford on a Monday evening. So far so good you say.

Tuesday morning brings the sortie prep, a clean Bucc, two crew and a phone auth with Pete Smith. The plan was to depart Abingdon, fly home and land – simple. Until we spoke to the engineers who pointed out that this was the last Bucc to ever leave Abingdon, and it would be a shame if we didn't say 'farewell' in style. Well, obviously we couldn't disappoint. Ironically, I was recently reintroduced to Les (another Pom in NZ) who has just started working for Airbus here, he said he used to work on the Bucc at Abingdon and remembered our departure (small world hey). There have definitely been better, faster and lower 'farewells' but the job was done.

Fast forward to the Borders and the old LOTAs with Scottish Mil asking if '*we were embellished*'; clean with loads of fuel, what else could we say, 'Yes'. Two F-3s v a clean Bucc should have been a Turkey Shoot but we held our own, details are now vague but it brought a smile to our collective faces at the time. In fact, I think Delish got a little too excited, more of later. So take off - tick, transit - tick, landing - tick (only not ideal as the right tyre burst on landing: if I say it wasn't my fault you wouldn't accept it anyway - but it wasn't.) Having just managed to get XV899 off the active runway, I was surprised to be met by the fire crews and Stn Cdr - obviously asking after our health. No harm done, the engineers will jack it up and have it flying tomorrow, so back to work. The time was now around 1030.

Back on the Squadron and it's into the day-to-day tasks; for me that was writing the programme for the next day. Only it wasn't to be, as I heard chortles coming down the corridor followed by, '*really, 2 F-3s*'. This was followed shortly after by a summons to Sqn Ldr Pete Smith, Flt Cdr's office for a one-sided chat on exceeding his authorisation, not for the Flypast obviously as that was a given, but the F-3s, well that was a No, No. I did say that Delish was a tad over-excited. 11 o'clock, one flight safety report still to write and one verbal spanking well and truly received. It was going to be a good day!

As sure as '*Dolly Parton sleeps on her back*', it really was going to get worse. I was now summoned to go and do a spinex sortie on the Tucano as the boss couldn't make his slot. Due to our rapid departure the previous day, I hadn't been present for any of the mandatory safety brief; compounded as this was the first time we had ever seen a Tucano, never mind flown in one. "*It will be OK*" said Bill Himners, the Tucano captain who I had known previously from Church Fenton (before his move to the C-130). Now returned to fast jet lead-in training, we discussed the sortie. He pointed out that the Tucano was able to do an inverted spin, something the venerable JP couldn't do (legally). So why don't we do that - seemed fair at the time. As did the option for me to sit in the front seat, as you could start the Tucano from the rear seat. Nothing to do with the possibility of decapitating the front seater if you both ejected, honest.

I know some of you have many hours on prop aircraft, even I have now, but at the time I was not an aficionado of the use of rudder to counter torque, needless to say the take-off was hilarious. As was the first attempt by Bill to enter an inverted spin. However, he sorted it on the second go and soon we were spinning, then recovering, then doing the bottom half of an outside loop - funny I thought, that wasn't in the brief. Turns out it wasn't in Bill's plan either. Seventeen minutes airborne in ZF316, followed by a very rapid departure care of Martin Baker, a short parachute ride, too close an encounter with a barbed wire fence and a little time to reflect on the day. Then the Sea King arrived, great I thought off to hospital for a couple of paracetamol and cup of tea. Alas, there was one last insult to be inflicted to my bruised and pierced body. The Sea King didn't go direct, instead, and to this day I have no idea why, it made a short stop back at Lossie. Once again, the Stn Cdr came to check on my welfare, as well as half the Sqn (it seemed).

However, the quote of the day went to none of the aforementioned, that honour is saved for the RAF doctor who came to '*check up*' on me after every single bone, tendon, ligament and sinew had been X-rayed. Laying back reflecting on how 12 May 92 had worked out, he turned to me in a bit of a fluster and said '*I'm sorry I'm a bit of a mess, I don't get to do this every day*'. To which I replied: '*Do you think I do mate?*'



A more successful recent flight in a turboprop.



Skids Harrison

208 Sqn 1988 - 1997 & 2009 - 2016



In Memoriam



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

Ross Clark - Meteor
Desmond Penrose - Meteor
Denis Clark - Hunter
Bruce Salman - Hunter

Alex Imlah - Meteor
Ron Campbell - Hunter
Dick Davis - Hunter

Desmond Penrose

Desmond Penrose passed away on 13 May 2025, shortly after his 95th birthday. 208 Squadron formed the bookends of Desmond's long career. His first posting in the RAF was to 208, flying fighter-recce Meteors in Egypt. He was also a very enthusiastic and active representative for the Meteor Chapter of the Association, organising an annual all ranks get-together in London until recently. This was very much in the spirit of the first gathering of the Naval 8/208 Sqn Old Comrades Association. He was subsequently appointed as a Vice President of the 208 Squadron Association and remained so until his dying day. After leaving 208, Desmond trained as a test pilot and had a distinguished career at the Royal Aircraft Establishment and, later, at de Havilland. A near-disaster occurred when Desmond was test flying the de Havilland Trident. The trainee captain in the left-hand seat reported that the controls had seized. Desmond confirmed that they had. The trainee anxiously insisted that they must declare an emergency, but Desmond overruled him, pointing out: "*what do you think they can do: send someone up to help us?*" He calmly swapped seats with the other pilot, then proceeded to fly the Trident smoothly back to Hatfield on differential power alone. Not wanting to reveal to RT eavesdroppers that the company's pride and joy had a problem, he casually requested air traffic to: "*ask the gentleman below you to get the gentlemen below him to meet us on the runway.*" Flight Ops was one floor below the tower and the fire section was on the ground floor. Desmond executed a safe landing on power alone, whereupon the obstruction cleared itself. John Cunningham told him that he was worthy of a Queen's Commendation (for valuable service in the air), but that he would not get it, presumably because the company had no intention of publicising the incident.

Desmond was also a prolific air display pilot, flying the diminutive Arrow Active and Alex Henshaw's record-breaking Mew Gull, both of which he owned. His skills as a display pilot were much in demand and he flew many of the historic aircraft of the Shuttleworth collection at Old Warden, including the original ex-208 Sqn Bristol Fighter. Prior to joining the RAF, he had studied aeronautical engineering at Loughborough College; in 2015 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Loughborough University. He was also highly regarded in the USA and was inducted as an Honorary Fellow of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots in 2016. Desmond's transatlantic connections led to him fly a rebuilt de Havilland DH-4, as well as a MiG-17, which he was well qualified to assess against its contemporary, the Meteor.



Desmond Penrose and the DH-4

Desmond continued flying into his late 80s and was often asked to display the Tiger Moth, giving a flowing and elegant display of this classic but cantankerous aeroplane. He had made his first solo in a Tiger Moth on 14 April 1948 and he celebrated the 69th anniversary with 35 minutes of aerobatics and circuits in another Tiger Moth on 14 April 2017. Ever the consummate professional, he decided a year later that it was time to give up flying. His valedictory flight was in a Tiger Moth on 12 Aug 2018: after seven decades, his last solo landing was better than his first.

Desmond's personal life was touched by tragedy. His son died early: Desmond scattered his ashes from an open cockpit in the same spot where he had earlier taken him - as a small boy - for a loop. Both of his daughters also pre-deceased him. He spent his last months in a nursing home, after several falls had robbed him of his mobility and his independence. It was the same home in which his late wife Francine had been cared for, before she passed away some years ago. Desmond always said that he "*didn't want a fuss*" when visitors tried to get him out and about. He was a grand old gentleman, who was genuinely interested in and anxious to help others. It is an over-used phrase, but we will not see his like again.

Desmond Penrose DTech BSc DLC CEng FRAeS FRSA
1st May 1930 - 13th May 2025



Naval 8/208 Reunion - 2024

In view of declining numbers attending the reunion in recent years, the committee had taken the difficult decision to make the 2024 gathering the final one in the traditional format of a dinner at the RAF Club in Piccadilly, London. The following summary of the event is provided courtesy of the Association Webmaster, Neil Meadows. A more comprehensive account is available on the website.

37 members and guests attended the reunion on Saturday 26th October 2024:

Stuart and Jo Ager, Vic and Jean Blackwood, Nigel Champness, Sebastien Colmant, Peter Fenlon-Smith, Jon Ford, Nigel and Sarah Huckins, Iain and Jane Johnston, Air Cdre Ben Laite and Mrs Helen Laite, Neil and Cathy Meadows, Eugene and Charlotte Moriarty, Rick Page, Brian Parson, Air Cdre Phil Pinney, Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork, Axelle Richard, Ian and June Ross, Mike and Mary Snelling, Dave Southwood, David Trembaczowski-Ryder, Anne Wharmby, Keith Whiley, John White, David and Patti Wilby, Ron Wilder, Air Marshal Sir Rob Wright and Lady Maggie Wright.

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

Michael Asher, Hammy Armstrong, Malcolm Bartle, John Broadbent, Liz Davis (*widow of the late Dick Davis*), Mike Goodfellow, Whitney Griffiths, Ian Hall, Pete Jones, Doug Marr, Dick Northcote, Stuart Levett, Paul Smith, Malcolm Ward and Jock Watson.

For the final formal reunion of the Naval Eight/208 Squadron Association, members and their guests assembled in the 601 Squadron Room for pre-dinner drinks, and the inevitable exchange of anecdotes, before moving to the elegant Presidents' Room for a sumptuous dinner, served by the ever-attentive Club staff. Grace was read by Ben Laite, after which a starter of Scottish lobster & Cornish crab cocktail with tarragon and cucumber was served. The guests then enjoyed a main course of roast cutlet of pork with mixed bean cassoulet, grain mustard mash, buttered greens and herb crumb, which was followed by Bailey's crème brûlée with a coffee sable cookie, and coffee & petits fours. The meal was accompanied by the RAF Club Sauvignon Pays D'Oc and Rio Del Mar Merlot which, along with the after-dinner Kopke Ruby Port, had been provided by the Association Fund to mark this very special occasion.

The Association's Belgian guest, Sebastien Colmant, undertook the duties of "Mr Vice", and proposed two loyal toasts: the first to His Majesty The King, and then a second to His Majesty King Philippe, The King of the Belgians. The Chairman began the after-dinner speeches by thanking the RAF Club staff for the delicious meal and their outstandingly attentive service, before welcoming everyone to the last formal reunion, although he hoped that there would be informal reunions in the future in different places around the country. He noted his extraordinary privilege to have seven ex-Commanding Officers of 208 Squadron in the room, who were: Phil Pinney (Buccaneer Nov '76 - Jun '79); Graham Pitchfork (Buccaneer Jun '79 - Dec '81); Ben Laite (Buccaneer Dec '81 - Jul '84); Jon Ford (Buccaneer Jul '84 - Mar '87); Nigel Huckins, the last Buccaneer OC (Mar '92 - Mar '94); Neil Meadows (Hawk Mar '01 - Sep '03); and Eugene Moriarty (Hawk Oct '10 - Oct '12). He also took pains to reassure members that the Association would continue in strength, due to the

outstanding efforts of the Committee, whom he thanked individually: Desmond Penrose, the Meteor Chapter Representative; Jamie Buckle, the Hawk Chapter Representative; Paul 'Skids' Harrison, the Buccaneer Chapter Representative; Dave Gill, the Groundcrew Representative; Iain Ross, the Hunter Chapter Representative; Rick Page, the Treasurer; Nigel Huckins, the Membership Secretary; Graham Pitchfork, the Association's Historian; Ben Laite, a Life-Vice President; Eugene Moriarty, the Association Secretary; Malcolm Ward, the Newsletter Editor; Neil Meadows, the Webmaster; and last, but certainly not least, Air Marshal Sir Rob Wright, the Association's President.

The Chairman then recounted a short anecdote illustrating the team spirit on 208 Squadron. In 1983, 208 was based at RAF Honington and was about to move to RAF Lossiemouth to transfer from the overland strike/attack role to the maritime strike/attack role. Ben Laite was the Squadron Boss and the Squadron had just embarked in its last overland strike/attack exercise: Maple Flag in Northern Alberta in Canada. He had been crewed with Dave Bye as a constituted crew and, on one particular sortie, they were at 100 feet, flying pretty fast, and it was quite noisy in the cockpit. However, when they landed and taxied in, the groundcrew pointed at their port wing, in which there was a huge hole. They had obviously had a birdstrike, an operational hazard at ultra-low level. What exemplified the team



The Magnificent Seven: (L to R) Eugene Moriarty, Neil Meadows, Nigel Huckins, Jon Ford, Ben Laite, Graham Pitchfork and Phil Pinney.

spirit on the Squadron at the time were the actions of 'Team Groundcrew' under the JEngO (Malcolm Ward) who went to the Canadian support staff to 'scrounge' a suitable piece of metal, which they moulded into the shape of the leading edge, and welded it on. This was done overnight and, the next morning, the aircraft was back on the line.

The same day as they had their birdstrike, an American F-15 air defence fighter also had a birdstrike. Their Squadron Commander, not the calibre of Ben Laite of course, considered that it would be career-limiting for him if his squadron suffered another birdstrike, and directed his Eagles to operate at 5,000 feet to defend the targets that the 208 Squadron Buccaneers were attacking. In the following sorties, therefore, the Buccaneers, trucking along at 100 feet, would detect the F-15s on their Radar Warning Receivers, pick them up visually and zoom-climb up behind them to launch simulated air-to-air missiles (AIM 9G at the time) before diving back down again to claim not only the target destroyed, but also an air-to-air "kill". Much embarrassment for the Americans, but an excellent example of the teamwork that 208 Squadron had at the time, not just from the aircrew, but also from the groundcrew, whose exceptional overnight efforts put the aircraft back on the line.

The Chairman then offered the opportunity for anyone else to regale the gathering with another anecdote, a challenge that was taken up by Ben Laite, who had a very special story from Op PULSATOR, the Squadron's operational deployment to Beirut in 1983/84. He recounted that, on one particular day, he was at the morning operations briefing, when the Army Liaison Officer stood up and said: *"I've been invited to go to the aircraft carrier that the Americans have got out there for lunch. Would any of you like to join me?"* All of the Army officers present sat down and said nothing, but Ben said enthusiastically: *"Excuse me, Sir, I'd like to come."* When questioned about why, he answered that French fighters had been launched off their carrier about 2 days previously and it would be good to know where they had dropped their bombs, how they got the information, and where their intelligence came from. It was agreed that this was a good idea and, the next day, a helicopter picked them up and took them out to the French, wonderful, huge aircraft carrier (the 'Foch'). The Captain welcomed them: *"Bonjour, mes amis, we're going to have a nice chat and have some lovely lunch."* Ben got the word that there was a photographic interpreter who would take him down to be briefed on what had happened with the French sortie.

So, during the lunch, he received a tap on the shoulder and was escorted down to the bowels of this French aircraft carrier where a Frenchman came up and said: *"You wanna know what happened?"* He replied: *"Yes, I wanna know what happened."* The Frenchman said: *"Nothing."* Ben replied: *"What do you mean, nothing?"* The Frenchman said: *"We were in cloud. We couldn't see a thing, and because we had live weapons on board, we could not come back to the carrier. So, we jettisoned them, we know not where."* Ben retorted: *"But the Press was full of the fact that you had destroyed a gun mount of some sort."* The Frenchman said: *"Well, that was the Press."*

The President then took over the microphone and, in a short digression from his planned speech, he recounted a similar occurrence when he had been in Sarajevo in 1997, when he was quizzed in a Press interview about the air sorties that the RAF had flown over Serbia during the Balkans War. They asked: *"Is it true that the French flew more sorties than you?"* He replied: *"Yes, but we hit more targets."*

He noted that the Dinner would be the Association's 'Last Supper' and doubted regretfully that there would be a 'Second Coming.' However, should there be one, he would look forward to it, given that this event had been a marvellous evening and a true reflection of the Squadron spirit that the Chairman had talked about. He reflected that, in the early days of his Presidency, he had lobbied the Air Force Board for the restoration of the Squadron, even to the point of giving them a gift of Graham Pitchfork's book 'Forever Vigilant.' Disappointingly, although they accepted the book, there was no forthcoming new Squadron. He had very much hoped that because Naval Eight/208 had provided some 56% of aircrews on the UK's previous fixed-wing carriers, and that the Squadron under Neil Meadows' and Eugene Moriarty's command had trained RAF and RN fast-jet pilots for many years, it would be an ideal choice for 208 to be the F-35 OCU. But, despite all of that accomplishment, the Air Force Board resurrected 207 Squadron instead. So, the battle had been lost.

However, he was grateful for all of the support from the Association over the years, and the fact that seven former Squadron Commanders had attended this final event was the most marvellous reflection of the spirit of the Squadron. He reiterated that, irrespective of the format of future gatherings, the Association would continue with the Website and the Newsletter to provide a conduit for all ex-members to reconnect. He was hopeful that there would be many informal gatherings in the future. Speaking of the Association's Chapters of all types, he noted that perhaps the largest Chapter of all was the Ladies, including Lady Maggie, his wife, who had been extremely supportive over the years. He therefore proposed a toast to the Ladies for all of their support.

Looking back in history, the President reflected that when he first came to an Association Dinner at the RAF Club, it was next door in what is now the Sovereign's Room, and there were 120 male participants, including Sir Geoffrey Bromet, who was the first CO of the Squadron. There was also Air Marshal Sir Humphrey Edwardes-Jones, who was a very stiff task-master at the time, and the format of the day was to sit down and talk about life on the Squadron. These were wonderful times, and were very much appreciated because there was representation from many Chapters



Vice President Ben Laite reveals the truth about French tactics.

at the event. There was the Hurricane/Spitfire Chapter, the Meteor/Vampire Chapter, the Hunter Chapter, the Buccaneer Chapter and, latterly, the Hawk Chapter, and tables of distinguished people. These Chapters were a wonderful way of reflecting on the spirit of the Squadron and you could reflect on how things had changed over the years through the history of the Squadron, from the Middle East, then back to the UK, up to Scotland, and back down to Wales where the Squadron's history finished, three months short of a hundred years.

The President reflected on the theme that had been introduced to the Reunion dinners where Chapter members were asked to give 10-minute chats about the spirit on 208 at the time in which they served, and these had been fascinating records of the Squadron's history. He recalled the one by Ken Pugh, Cotswold farmer and Spitfire pilot, who told of flak at 30,000 feet on a PR mission: Ken said in his speech that the most two frightening things in his life were experiencing flak going off alongside his cockpit; and the second thing was being asked by the President to give a little chat to the Reunion. He recalled 'Twinkle' Storey of the Meteor Chapter, who came into work one morning and 'A' Flight were flying with 4 Meteors doing aerobatics. He asked: "What's going on?" They said: "Well, 'A' Flight Commander's just got airborne with 4 Meteors doing aerobatics." He said: "Right, 'B' Flight, let's go," and they did the same thing. That was the spirit on the Squadron at the time.

The President had served for only two years on 208 Squadron, but they had been two memorable years. He had been privileged, having come back from America, to join the Buccaneers, and was then told that his Boss was to be a Navigator (Graham Pitchfork), the first fast-jet Navigator Squadron Commander, to which he thought: *"Oh, dear, we have an issue here."* But it went very well, until he dropped the Boss's suitcase on Cowden Range. They had been on the way to Lossiemouth for the Tactical Bombing Competition (TBC) and they agreed between them that, on arrival, that they would keep quiet about it (apparently, it was '50 at 6,' which wasn't bad, for a suitcase!). So they walked into the bar, laid back and cool about the whole thing, and there were about 300 aircrew in the bar and, all around the walls, there were cartoon pictures of him in a Buccaneer with his head sticking out of the cockpit, and suitcases falling out onto the Cowden Range. Then, Sandy Wilson, who was the Station Commander at Lossiemouth at the time, came in with a flight bag that was dripping with water and he announced (in an obviously low-key approach) that *"Squadron Leader Wright has dropped a suitcase on Cowden Range, but luckily the SAR boys have recovered it, and here it is."* He then brought out a soaking bra and panties, to much merriment all around. Pointing at Graham Pitchfork he recounted that, after the subsequent insurance claim, he became the best-dressed Wing Commander in the Royal Air Force. He also recalled the Tactical Bombing Competition 'after event' which was held in the RAF Lossiemouth Airmen's Mess on the Saturday night because, when they walked into it for the big celebration with the groundcrew, every airman on 208 Squadron was wearing a badge and a t-shirt (and he has never found out how they managed to do this so quickly) which said 'TBC 1981 - OutWright Winners.' This, of course, was the Tactical Baggage Competition, and OutWright, with a 'W.' The groundcrew on 208 Squadron were the most marvellous, enterprising group that you will ever meet.

He also recalled the TACEVAL. Graham Pitchfork had left, but what was he given? - another Navigator Squadron Commander! I mean, give me a break! He had 2 months with Ben Laite as the Squadron Commander in the run-up to TACEVAL, and he would always remember Mike Cunningham, who was on the TACEVAL Team, saying that in the final launch at Honington, he could hear 208 Squadron all taxiing out, but he couldn't see any of the aircraft. They had lined up on the runway, and with 50 metres fog, all took off and completed the mission, but they could not get back to Honington because the weather was so bad, and they all ended up at Mildenhall. As a result of their efforts, the Squadron was awarded a '1' - the highest mark possible, and a true reflection of the astounding spirit of 208 Squadron.

The Squadron had been disbanded three months short of a hundred years, which he found to be a particular disappointment. However, he recalled that in 2003, under Neil Meadows' command, the Squadron had flown one hundred sorties in one day, so he reckoned that that made up for it. The Squadron had made 100 after all. Lastly, the President wished to reinforce what the Chairman had said and give his particular thanks to the Committee because, without their resilience, spirit and determination, the Association would not be continuing, and it was going to continue. It had the most marvellous website and a terrific newsletter, and that would enable it to act as a conduit to keep the Squadron spirit going, and if there was to be anything beyond this, then the Association would let everyone know.

He spoke about the Geoffrey Bromet Trophy on the table in front of him. The Trophy was always awarded to the pilot on the Squadron who had the best performance of the year. However, now that there was no longer a Squadron, that was no longer possible. However, in thanks to the Committee, for all their hard work over the last few years, the President announced that he would award the Trophy for one last time, to the Committee, with the one reservation that, if the Squadron was ever to reform, that they would return it for future presentations. In the meanwhile, it would stay safely on view at the RAF Club for all to see under an arrangement that the Association had made with the Club.

To great applause, the President then asked the Chairman to receive the Trophy on behalf of the Committee. Finally, before everyone repaired to the bar to swap even more anecdotes, the President proposed a final toast:

"The 208 Squadron Association - Ever Vigilant"



Association President, Air Mshl Sir Rob Wright presents the Bromet Trophy to the Chairman, David T-Ryder on behalf the whole Committee.