

Naval 8 - 208 News

The Annual Newsletter of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association



2020 Issue



NAVAL EIGHT 208

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The Moment and Eternity: Chris Draper's painting of 208 Sqn Audaxes taking a shufti at the Sphinx's inscrutable smile.



Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings

The President's Foreword

Most of you, like Maggie and I, are confined to home base during these extraordinary times. Whether or not life returns to normal in the near term we can all be confident that the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association spirit will not be infected and that it will remain as strong as ever.

Turning to Association matters and, following the outcome of the survey of Members in 2018 on the location of our annual reunion dinners, it was decided to hold the 2019 dinner in the West Midlands - that being the geographical centre of gravity for our Members – and so Malcolm Ward carried out a recce of suitable locations, your Committee selected a final venue, and Gp Capt Eugene Moriarty liaised with the hotel for all the accommodation and dinner requirements. All of this effort was much more time consuming than working with the RAF Club and so a sincere thank you to Malcolm and Eugene for that commitment.

The outcome was that thirty-six Members and guests attended the 2019 Reunion Dinner at the Grimscote Manor Hotel, Coleshill, near Birmingham on Saturday 19th October 2019. The location for the dinner proved to be very good, in a comfortable and well decorated dining room, reserved solely for the Association. Gp Capt (rtd) Neil Meadows decorated the room with an assortment of artwork and memorabilia to make us feel at home and in an RAF setting and so thank you to Neil, who was ably supported by the hotel staff who entered into the spirit of our event. This departure from the traditional concept was welcomed by all those that attended and on balance I think this experiment was a success; our thanks go to you all for supporting the initiative.

After the Dinner the Chairman carried out an informal straw poll of those present to gather views on another option for our Association gathering, namely to rendezvous for a lunch instead of a traditional dinner. To return to the RAF Club in 2020 for a dinner would entail at least a one night stay for many Members, which with travel and the cost of the dinner results in quite a high cost. Because of those factors, amongst others, the Committee felt that, potentially, more Members would likely attend a lunch, returning to the RAF Club. The straw poll overwhelmingly supported the option of organising a reunion lunch, in the Club, in 2020.

I am sure many of you will have seen or read that Association Life Vice-President Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Stear KCB CBE MA FRAeS DL passed away earlier this year. He was a stalwart of the Association along with his wife Lizzie, and they were great supporters of our reunion dinners as well as the 208 Squadron Open Days at RAF Valley. Sir Mike's demonstrable professionalism, passion, wisdom and kindness were evident throughout his long and distinguished career; he will be sorely missed by all and it is fitting that we have a full obituary of his life in this Newsletter.

Finally, all being well (as I hope you all are) and of course subject to an easing of the Government lockdown, we are planning to have an Association Reunion Lunch at the RAF Club on Saturday 24th October 2020. I hope this new arrangement will make it easier for Members to attend and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible. Stay Vigilant!

Chairman's Chunter

I trust that all of you have survived the Covid-19 virus lockdown and been able to maintain some semblance of normality and contact with family and friends, albeit virtually. These are strange times! I am a born optimist and have viewed the positive aspects of the Covid-19 restrictions, from my perspective. I work from home with no suit and tie; I no longer have my daily commute (20 kms) into the centre of Brussels; my garden has never looked better (more time to prepare for planting veg); my wife bought me a new bike for my birthday last year and now I get chance to use it every evening – no lycra (yet!); in Belgium over 60's jump the queue at the supermarket (I must admit I was disappointed not to be asked for proof of age at the entrance – there again when I look in the mirror I know why). I hope others are as lucky as me. In any case stay safe and dream of better times.

The Annual Reunion Dinner at the Grimscote Manor Hotel was very successful and proved the concept of alternating between the RAF Club and a location outside of London. As mentioned by the President we are trying another new format, namely a Reunion Lunch, we are nothing but innovative! The booking form can be found later in the Newsletter.

As I am running out of suitable stories to tell it would be great if you could come up with an anecdote – it doesn't have to be long but should provide an insight into your time on 208 Squadron. We would like to capture the spirit of life on 208, so please come forward. **SO IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND THE LUNCH AND WANT TO RECOUNT A TALE OF DARING DO PLEASE LET ME OR THE HON SEC KNOW SO WE CAN ARRANGE THE EVENT ACCORDINGLY.**

The Association Website continues to grow steadily under the stewardship of Neil Meadows. There are over 1000 pages with something for everyone. Members are encouraged to take a look at the excellent material on the website (<http://www.naval8-208-association.com>).

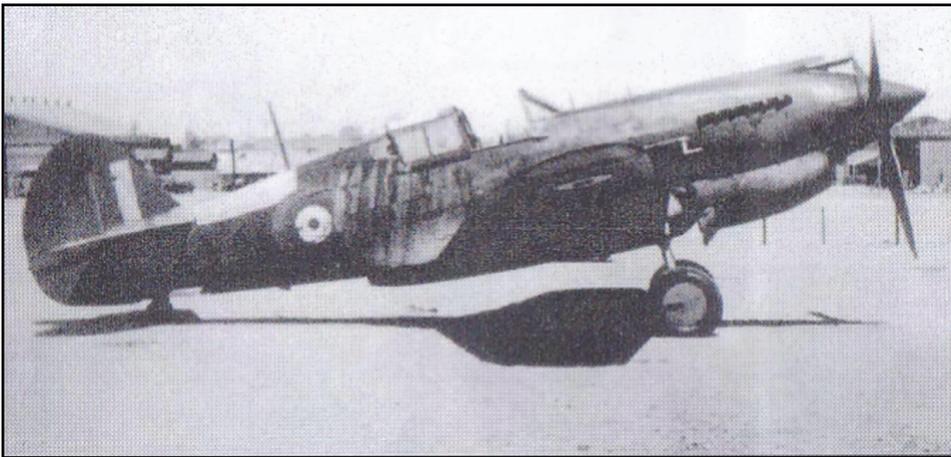
If something doesn't change it is my annual plea for DONATIONS! The general financial situation of the Association remains sound, although on a slow downhill slope. The modest balance sheet is sufficient for our short to medium term needs and we can continue to produce a Newsletter for a few more years to come. As you are aware membership is free and there are no running costs for the Association thus any donations are most welcome.

Two-Six

Here is another extract from our late Vice-President Sid Jefford's memoirs, which were edited by the Association Webmaster and former OC 208, Neil Meadows, prior to being published last year under the title: "Two-Six."

Tomahawk Tale

The newly-acquired Curtis Wright Tomahawks were flying both Tactical and Photo sorties and, in the air, they appeared to be doing a reasonable job. However, during landings and take-offs, they were vulnerable. According to the chatter among the ground crews, the P40 was not robust enough to stand up to the rough and tough conditions of the desert landing grounds, nor the inexperience of some of the newly-arrived pilots. Whatever the cause, we seemed to be losing them a little too quickly.



Despite being newly delivered to 208 Sqn, this Tomahawk already has copious oil stains.

On one occasion at LG148, a Tomahawk was in a landing circuit when it quite suddenly 'lost' all engine noise and then trailed smoke after the engine had been making loud and 'over-revving' sounds. The aircraft, now with full flap, undercarriage down and a dead engine, rapidly lost height, but still managed, even though it was swerving violently to both left and right, to scramble onto the landing surface of the field and, quite remarkably, remain on its wheels and upright. The speed at which it had 'arrived' took the Tomahawk diagonally and in a wide arc, with each of its wing-tips

alternately narrowly avoiding scraping the ground, almost to the opposite edge of the field, where it stood with smoke and oil pouring from the surrounds of its power unit.

The Engineering Officer and the two Workshops Senior NCOs, who had left their tented office when they had first heard the unusual noise coming from the approaching aircraft, went immediately in the Workshops pick-up to the now smoking and stationary aircraft that was standing some distance away and just off the edge of the very active landing strip. The duty flight crew and several others including the fire tender and ambulance had also rushed to its aid and helped the obviously shocked but relieved pilot from the cockpit. Someone who had a screwdriver took off the two engine panels but because Tomahawks, when stationary, were very nose high and not easy to inspect without the aid of a platform or steps, and because this one still had oil and smoke in large quantities pouring from around the engine housing, he found a close inspection to be very much more difficult than usual. Due to the smoke, all the bystanders (with the exception of the fire-fighters, who stood by with fire extinguishers at the ready), were kept at a safe distance away from the aircraft. On the return to the office the Engineering Officer, who had been allowed a close-up look at the aircraft, asked me to go to the Tomahawk with my tools and make an inspection, and to report where the oil was coming from and also assess what had caused the leak. On arrival at the aircraft, and with the aid of my toolbox used as a platform and the help of one of the fire-crew, I looked into the engine compartment and, to my complete surprise, was able to look into the inside of the engine through a large hole that had been made in the crank-case by the exit of a connecting rod and piston, together with one or two other bits and pieces that had 'exploded' from the tortured engine.

I carefully removed what was left of the ejected con-rod and piston 'assembly' from the floor of the engine compartment, wrapped them in a piece of sacking, and took them to the Workshops Office and invited the Engineering Officer and the NCOs to see at first-hand what was the cause of the oil leak. From the looks of astonishment on their faces, I think at first they did not believe me but eventually, after a joint return to the aircraft, they too were able, using tool boxes to stand on, to see what was remaining of the Allison engine. The main fault of this incident, that could quite easily have been a disaster, was later defined as pilot error. On his approach, he had misread the tachometer (the instrument showing the engine revolutions) and had given the engine more power, when in fact it was already revolving at a speed in excess of what was required.

A signal for a replacement engine was dispatched the same evening. It was at this time that I was sent to 'A' Flight at the Advanced Flight Landing Ground to temporarily fill in for a Corporal fitter who had been taken sick and was in hospital. After 11 days, I was returned to Sidi Azeiz to find the replacement engine had been fitted to the ailing Tomahawk, but had proved temperamental and would not start. It appeared that everything had been checked and checked again and, according to our Sergeant fitter, no reason could be found why the engine would not respond to

the correct starting procedures. A very irritated and tetchy Engineering Officer 'invited' me to investigate the cause of the non-starting power unit. That afternoon, and for best part of the following day, I and 'Lofty' Jones checked the engine for any reason or cause that prevented it from starting. We found nothing.

During a break period, after what had been a frustrating and fruitless effort to get it started, it was decided that perhaps using the old-fashioned and now seldom-used 'blow out' operation on the engine might be tried. Having tried almost every other thing, it was decided to 'give it a go'. This consisted of going through the start procedure with the fuel turned OFF, the throttle FULL OPEN, and the ignition switches ON. After a couple of these 'blow-out' procedures, a normal start procedure would be again implemented.

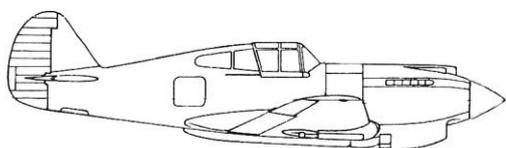
Having in the past carried out this procedure on smaller aircraft engines, I was given the doubtful 'honour' to occupy the cockpit. Very carefully, I set up the controls: Fuel OFF – throttle quadrant lever fully OPEN – ignition switches ON – electrics ON – energize the inertia starter, then switch to CONTACT. The screeching sound that accompanied the contact of the inertia contained in the flywheel of the starter to the engine via the magnetic clutch was accompanied by the rotation of the propeller and, much to everyone's surprise, puffs of smoke from the exhausts. My left hand, from the practice of many engine starts, was as always on the throttle lever, which I very hastily pulled back to the closed position. The engine continued to 'stutter' and smoke continued to emit from the exhausts. Then, after a few seconds, the propeller stopped rotating as the engine shuddered and came once more to rest. All this was proving to be very mysterious. When we had correctly set the controls and wanted the engine to start it wouldn't, and when we were trying to clear the induction system of any excess fuel, with the controls set in non-compliant positions, it had tried to start.

I had noticed that, during the start operation, the quadrant throttle lever when being pushed to the fully open position had felt stiff and 'spongy' to operate. I reported this to Sergeant Kay and to 'Lofty' so, before attempting anything else, we decided to investigate the 'sponginess'. After some deliberation, and checking the operating linkage between the throttle quadrant in the cockpit and the carburetor intake 'butterfly' on the engine, it was finally found that an error had been made in a linkage connection during the fitting of the replacement engine. This had resulted in the throttle being almost wide-open at the engine end when the cockpit control lever was in the closed position. We re-arranged the linkage and checked it by reference to that of a similar aircraft that was, at that time, in the adjoining aircraft bay undergoing an Intermediate Inspection by the Workshops fitters. At long last the engine responded to the correct starting procedure. It was ground tested and, as it had been standing for some considerable time, given a thorough 'going over' by fitters from 'A' Flight, then air-tested by their Flight Commander and returned to operations.



Curtiss-Wright Tomahawk undergoing servicing in the desert.

News was received some time later of the Tomahawk that had been difficult to start after its engine had been changed. This must have been a very unlucky aeroplane as, on a trip to a Base Unit, the engine seized, forcing the Tomahawk to land with its wheels up and, after the rebuild at the RSU, it was never returned to the Squadron.



Sid Jefford

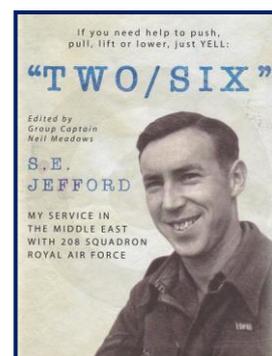
208 Sqn 1941-1945

Two-Six - Book Offer

"Two-Six" was reviewed in last year's newsletter. Copies are available priced at £20 from Troubador online Bookshop at the following link:

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

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



The Moment and Eternity

208 Sqn Audaxes over the Pyramids

The Guild of Aviation Artists holds an annual exhibition of aviation paintings, and three of 208 Squadron's Audax aircraft were the subject of last year's poster, flier and catalogue cover. The painting is "The Moment and Eternity", by Chris Draper, who is a member of the Guild and a well-known artist. Chris is no relation to "The Mad Major" Chris Draper, Naval 8's second commanding officer. Iain Ross reports:

The Audax was an army co-operation variant of the Hawker Hart, and was used by the Squadron in the 1930s. The Hart was a British two-seater light-bomber, designed during the 1920s by Sydney Camm, from the same stable that produced the Hurricane. The first Audax flew in late 1931 and over 700 were made. It had a hook to pick up messages, a single, fixed, forward-facing .303 Vickers machine gun and a single .303 Lewis gun on a swivel for the back-seater. Its Kestrel engine gave it a maximum speed of 170 mph. Chris takes up the story of his painting.

Being asked to paint the image for the annual exhibition poster is a massive honour, so when I was approached in late 2017 to paint the 2019 one I was blown away. With a deadline several months away, I started mulling around ideas.

The initial brief was pretty open, which can be a wonderful springboard for creativity or a curse. For me it was the latter, with endless possibilities for subjects.

In the last couple of years the poster has celebrated prominent anniversaries so I wanted to move away from that approach, and after some guidance started to focus on a "hangar" image in the vein of the mighty Sea Fury image. My first idea was to work at the BBMF hangar, but the logistics became too complex so I looked for other options. With the Shuttleworth collection being a huge source of inspiration, I went to the 2018 air show, camera and sketchbook in hand. I found a great angle of the Hawker Demon with polished metal cowling that I thought might be a good idea.

One of the tricky aspects of the commission is the image must work in portrait and landscape cropped versions, to suit the various publication needs. With that in mind I made a colour study and sent it off to be looked at by the committee. The general thought was that albeit a nice image, it wasn't punchy enough to stand out as a poster. They were right, the palette was too monochromatic with cool blues and greys. I was back at square one, and with the air show season over I was struggling to find a subject. The deadline now seemed perilously close. Along with the Shuttleworth collection I have always found the hangars at Duxford a goldmine so that was my next focus. It was filled with an incredible array of aircraft in various states of storage and restoration. Along with Duxford I also went to Hendon and the Tangmere museum in Sussex. With the help of the staff I had a great couple of days climbing all over the displays.

My mind full of potential images I made a series of quick colour studies and sent those off. I had gone from one extreme to the other. This time I was confident that dark moody views would strike a chord. The feedback however proved otherwise. Although the committee didn't think the images were suitable for the poster, Andrew Latham, one of the committee members, softened the news saying quite rightly that at least I had enough subjects to keep me busy for the next few years!! He was correct, my reference library and potential painting file has grown enormously!!

I was really starting to worry that I was the wrong person for the job. Andrew suggested something in flight or more dynamic might work better than the static hangar type images so that is where I turned my thoughts. But where to start narrowing down the options? I have a working knowledge of aviation history but nowhere near extensive enough to pick a certain event, and as I mentioned, I didn't want to do an anniversary image. I trawled through my photos and references trying over and over to generate a painting. It was torture for me and I'm sure even worse for the committee who started getting a scatter-gun deluge of random sketches. Needless to say, the ones I liked, the committee didn't and vice versa. Confidence is such a delicate thing and I started seriously questioning my ability to "find" an image.

During one of the many late-night inspiration hunts through my bookshelf I found an old black and white image which caught my eye. It was of a couple of Hawker Audax flying over Cairo with the Giza plateau in the background. What immediately struck me was the juxtaposition of the sleek aerodynamic shape of the aircraft and the ragged city. The sense of timelessness of the pyramids and sphinx, a millennia-old backdrop against which so much history has passed by. I began to formulate a concept of "contrasting elements" set against each other. I felt like I might have something that would tick the boxes as far as the poster was concerned and be an interesting image. Again, I made a couple of exploratory colour studies and this time I got the green light. At last!!

With the concept nailed down I started to research the subject in depth and fine-tune the composition. 208 Squadron was an Army co-operation squadron with a long association with Egypt, having been based there since the early 1920s. As an interesting side-note 208 Squadron was originally formed in 1916 as No 8 RNAS, its second commander was my namesake, Christopher Draper DSC, later known as the Mad Major after flying under the bridges of the Thames, and other shenanigans. Based at Heliopolis, they had flown the Hawker Audax since 1931. Their



Squadron badge reflected the association with Egypt with a winged eye and colour scheme of azure blue and yellow. However, in 1938 this was formalised into the standard RAF format, with the sphinx becoming the focus. A huge amount of archaeology had taken place during the 1930s including the excavation of the sphinx. Previously only the head was visibly sticking out of the sand. The sphinx also looked very different from what we see today after considerable reconstruction. My painting "The Moment and Eternity" celebrates that connection of the Squadron to the place.

I set the basic composition in Google SketchUp after finding a relatively accurate 3D model of a Hawker Demon. I had to employ some artistic licence with the exact relationship of the sphinx and the pyramids. It's near enough. After gathering many references of the aircraft and sphinx, I drew out a more comprehensive sketch including detailed studies of the two main aircraft. Although I love painting polished metal when it is sitting in front of me, doing it without specific references was a massive challenge. I built the old 1:48 scale Airfix Fury and spayed it silver to understand the logic of the reflections, and along with lots of photos tried to cobble together something that looks believable. The scale of the painting (it is pretty much the largest gouache painting I have worked on) took it well out of my comfort zone.



"The Moment and Eternity", Chris Draper's evocative painting of Audaxes in Egypt.

Gouache is my preferred medium so with the deadline only days away I dived in. Then it was just a case of knuckling down and painting it!! I wanted to keep the composition simple to allow maximum flexibility for the text and graphics that would be applied over it. The colour scheme is equally simple and draws inspiration from the Squadron's old badge. I worked on a hot-pressed Daler-Rowney watercolour board and after carefully drawing out the whole scene tinted the paper with a wash of yellow ochre. When that was entirely dry, I soaked the paper and washed over the main areas of colour. I did this a couple of times to get the density of colour I wanted then concentrated on individual shapes. From here on I concentrated on building up the layers and progressively adding detail. I worked over the whole painting trying to keep the brushwork lively, especially in the areas where I wanted to express speed. As the painting progressed, I transitioned to a more opaque style with the addition of gouache. Once again it was a process of working around the painting emphasising tones and colour to make it pop. The final stages are always the most enjoyable and that's where it starts to come together adding all the little dabs and dabs.

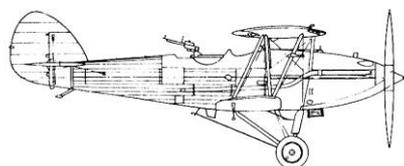
Thankfully it went along without too many disasters, although looking back at it I can certainly see areas that I would improve on. That's probably the case with every painting though. In a way the image went full circle, with the Audax being a derivative of the Hawker Demon that I first sketched out.

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Editor's Note:

Chris and the committee of the Guild of Aviation Artists had clearly made some good decisions, as "The Moment and Eternity" was Highly Commended by the Guild's Fellows in their Award for Excellence, sponsored by FlyPast magazine. The original painting measures 67 x 66 cms. You can see more of Chris's work on his website: www.christopherdraper.co.uk.

The Guild of Aviation Artists holds its exhibition in London's Mall Galleries each year, although the 2020 exhibition has been postponed until next year. For more information about this fascinating display of aviation art see www.gava.org.uk or contact: admin@gava.org.uk.

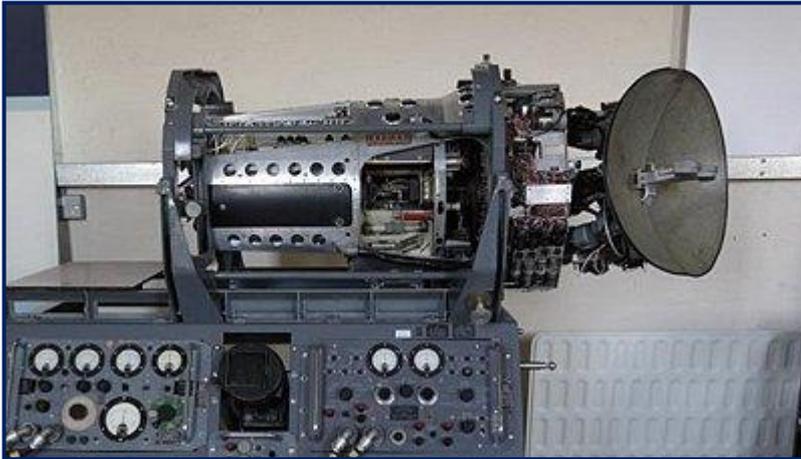


Iain Ross

Hunter Chapter, Naval 8/208 Sqn Association

Blue Parrot

26 June 1989 feels like a somewhat distant memory. That was the day that I crewed into a Buccaneer for the first time and was given the opportunity to operate the Buccaneer's ARI 5930 'Blue Parrot' Radar. I was fortunate to be posted to RAF Lossiemouth (Moray, Scotland) to undertake conversion training to the Buccaneer directly from Navigator training at RAF Finningley (South Yorkshire); selection for this aircraft was tough, so it was a great privilege to undertake the training alongside a group of very talented colleagues, most of whom are still serving officers. My experience of radars, limited primarily to that of the Dominie trainer, ensured that I was immediately impressed with the capability of the ARI 5930, but if I am truly honest, it was only when I left the aircraft and moved to more modern platforms that I realized just how 'advanced' the Blue Parrot was, especially when you consider its integration within the weapon system.



AIRPASS, the forerunner of Blue Parrot, on a test stand.

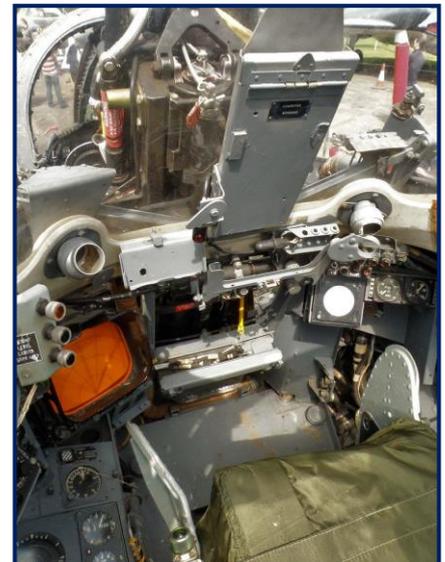
My early experiences of the radar were centred primarily around ergonomics and system management, as Operational Conversion Unit (OCU) flying was primarily focused on 'dumb bomb' weapon delivery, a new skill for those of us fresh from initial training, rather than maritime strike tactics, which would expose the superb long-range capabilities of the Blue Parrot. These latter capabilities would become immediately obvious after my arrival on 208 Squadron in November 1989.

So how were the ergonomics of the cockpit? Apart from the fact that any time spent looking inside the cockpit, especially down to the left, where the radar display was located, ran the risk of disorientation, as the aircraft lacked a rear seat artificial horizon, the Blue Parrot installation worked really well. A great deal of thought had clearly been expended by the engineering team in ensuring an efficient installation, including the radar visor design (which was adequate but not exactly sophisticated!), Martel and Sea Eagle integration, as well as the 'new' FIN 1063 Inertial Navigation system and the other elements of the attack system. In a little over a month on the OCU, we were expected to progress from a weapons novice, to a crew that could accurately deliver weapons utilizing a number of profiles, including laydown, academic and maritime bunt, and numerous toss profiles, day and night. This included the need to understand the nuances of coaxing the very best from the Blue Parrot; I never really understood how Monopulse Resolution Enhancement (MRE) worked, I just accepted its effectiveness. At the time, it seemed like a really steep learning curve, but we all coped; testament to the capabilities of the system.

So what was it like to work with the Blue Parrot on the Front Line? In researching this piece, I reviewed my logbook for reliability issues: I kept reasonably detailed notes. Pleasingly, and not surprisingly, I was only able to identify one occasion where I could consider the radar as impacting on the achievement of sortie objectives: the incident related to 'fumes in the cockpit', which were subsequently attributed to the radar controller overheating. To be honest, I only recall it in detail as I was sent to the medical centre on landing for a blood test, which was never a favoured pastime!

Unlike many Airborne Intercept Radars, such as the Lightning AI23, where finding the target was often described using torch beam or drinking straw analogies, finding potential maritime targets was easy using the ARI 5930; it could pick out warships, large merchant vessels, small merchant vessels (fishing boats), and small rocky outcrops (there are a number in UK coastal waters) with aplomb. We were always confident that the radar could detect targets out to close to 240nm at medium level, the theoretical Line of Sight (LOS) from 35,000ft, but I can also recall numerous occasions when the radar detected targets far further than LOS calculations would suggest, through a combination of 'atmospheric anomalies'.

This is a fine testament to the technology and capability of the radar but I have to admit that it made the task of finding the actual exercise target on a Joint Maritime Course event or an ARMILLA patrol work up really difficult – being suckered into attacking a fishing boat close to the RN target of the day was a potential pitfall we all sought to avoid!!



The crowded rear cockpit: radar screen on LHS

Overall though, when the Blue Parrot was used efficiently in conjunction with the rest of the attack system, it meant that the Buccaneer could act autonomously and effectively.



Taking a shufti at Kirov.

Although supported by an RAF Nimrod Maritime Patrol aircraft, the full capability of the system was superbly demonstrated when, as a junior navigator on 208 Sqn, I was instructed to go flying on a cold February Saturday morning to undertake a low level intercept of a Russian KIROV class Cruiser, our maritime Cold War nemesis, and its escort ships, requiring us to head several hundred miles west of the UK. It was deeply satisfying to find the target on the radar (there were not many radar returns in that particular part of the North Atlantic) and to then fly close to this formidable warship. I was left in no doubt that, if tasked for a real attack against such a vessel, the Blue Parrot had the capability to provide us with accurate, timely targeting information at significant standoff distances to enable target prosecution. When combined with the long-range capability (60nm+) of the Sea Eagle missile, 24 of which could be

simultaneously aimed at the enemy from a 6-ship Buccaneer formation, we were clearly a force to be reckoned with. It was also comforting to know that we would not need to get close enough to see the red painted decks, and witness the multitude of weapon systems trained against us, as we had when we said 'hello' on that wintry day.



P J Wallace

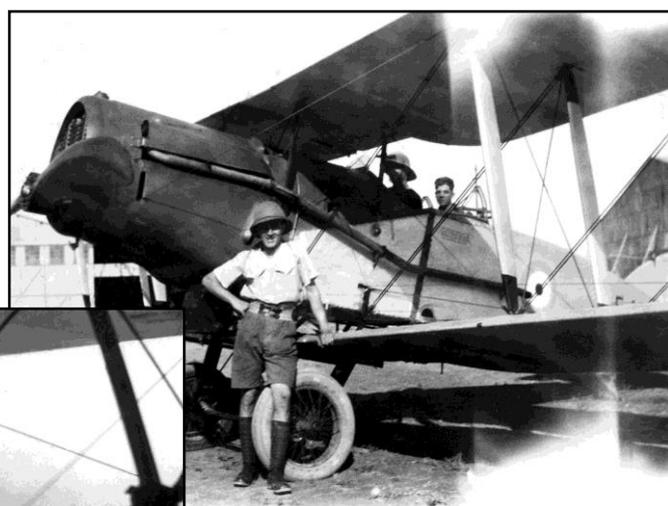
208 Sqn 1989 - 1994

Early Days in Egypt

The Association has recently received a set of photographs from the collection of George Brisley, who served on 208 Sqn in Ismalia, Egypt in 1925 as an AC 1 Fitter Aero Engine. The Sqn was then equipped with the Bristol F2b Fighter. The photographs were kindly provided by George's grandson, Paul Brisley. A selection of the photos is reproduced here, with the original captions.



Above:
F2b - working - George Brisley centre.



Above:
208 Sqn - F4687 - F2b - Our bus -
George Brisley (rear seat).

Right:
208 Sqn - On the way to Ramleh -
Mediterranean Sea to left.

Squadron Anniversaries

Continuing the series of articles on key events in the squadron's history, Graham Pitchfork has chosen just one anniversary this year, albeit a very significant one. Eighty years ago, the squadron went to war when the Italians declared war in June 1940. It marked the beginning of five years of conflict during which the squadron was to operate with great distinction.

80TH ANNIVERSARY – 208 GOES TO WAR

During May 1940 the peacetime atmosphere in the Canal Zone began to change. There was a gradual increase in the implementation of security measures and on the 16th the squadron was ordered to standby and aircraft were dispersed outside the airfield boundary and mobile patrols were mounted. On 1 June, the squadron, less one flight, moved to its war station at Qasaba, near Mersa Matruh, where it came under the control of the 7th Armoured Division. Within days the squadron was ordered to concentrate at Qasaba and all the ground party had arrived by the 10th, the day Italy declared war. Four aircraft moved forward to Sidi Barrani, close to the Libyan border and daily tactical reconnaissance (Tac R) and photographic sorties were flown along the border monitoring movements on the large Italian airfield at Fort Capuzzo with the aim of identifying any build up of enemy troops. The increased activity of Italian Fiat CR.42 fighters emphasised the problems faced by lone reconnaissance aircraft when the crew were intent on observing ground activity and had little time to check the threat from air attack. The need for a fighter escort soon became obvious. The value of an escort was reinforced on 4 July when Flying Officer Webber, with Aircraftman Goddard as his gunner, was ordered to carry out a Tac R south of Sidi Barrani. Two Gladiators of 33 Squadron provided an escort and during the sortie the Gladiators shot down two CR.42s as they tried to attack the Lysander. Webber was able to complete his sortie and return with valuable information.

The absolute priority for the squadron's aircraft was Tac R but, with guns and a limited bombing capability, the aircraft



A 208 Sqn Lysander overflies a column of Italian POWs.

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. The first opportunity to use this capability occurred on the 23rd when Flying Officer R. Aldis, with Sergeant McCue, took off to bomb a reported column of enemy transports at Aziez. He located the target and dived from 5,000 feet dropping his eight 20-lb bombs and eight 25-lb incendiary bombs amongst the vehicles. This was the first time the squadron had carried out a bombing operation. The routine of daily Tac R and photographic flights continued throughout August and into September as the tempo of war began to rise. With France no longer in the war, and the United Kingdom embroiled in fighting for its survival during the Battle of Britain, the Italian commander-in-chief, Marshal R. Graziani, prepared to go on the offensive in North Africa.

During the first weeks of September, every Tac R sortie identified a build up of Italian forces on the Egyptian border. On the 9th the Italian 10th Army began a limited offensive along the coastal road. Italian Air Force air activity increased significantly and on the 13th, the Italians opened a big artillery barrage on Musaid before occupying the area. Five Italian divisions with 200 tanks crossed the frontier and occupied Sollum and the 7th Armoured and 4th Indian Divisions started a withdrawal. Its plan was to fight a delaying action back to Mersa Matruh and stand and fight there. The following morning Italian forces crossed the frontier wire and AOC 202 Group ordered a withdrawal of the detached flight at Sidi Barrani to Qasaba. After the hasty withdrawal from Sidi Barrani, the AOC ordered a party to return to destroy fuel and ammunition supplies. In effect, this amounted to a commando raid and was a new departure for the squadron. This small, and daring, operation was led by the flight commander, Flt Lt J. R. Wilson. The fuel dumps were destroyed together with cases of 25-lb incendiary bombs and 4,000 rounds of small arms munitions.

On 20 September the squadron was ordered to send two aircraft to operate from the Siwa Oasis under the command of Colonel Bather, head of the British Military Mission. Two Lysanders, one flown by Flight Lieutenant Legge with Sergeant McCue and the second by Pilot Officer D.B.M. Druce and Sergeant F.J. Muldowney, left that afternoon. Once established at Siwa, daily morning and evening Tac R sorties were flown to monitor activity in the Giarabub area. Other sorties were tasked to meet specific requirements when the movement of enemy transports was reported. Back on the main front the flying effort increased as the Italians became more aggressive. Squadron pilots also took opportunities to attack once they had carried out the essential Tac R task. On 28 September Pilot Officer Roberts and Sergeant Lord found a very large concentration of transports near Sidi Barrani. On the return flight Roberts attacked a

large lorry with the front gun and after a short burst, the lorry blew up. During an afternoon sortie Webber found what appeared to be a series of fuel dumps which he attacked with his gun. His gunner, Leading Aircraftman Payne, also opened up but no fires were started. The following day, Flight Lieutenant E. Black was undertaking a Tac R over the Sofafi area in the south when he found two columns of sixty open trucks, which he attacked with 20-lb bombs believing that he had damaged four. His aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and badly damaged. He managed to return to the advanced landing ground at Minqa Qaa'im. Black and his gunner Sergeant Dixon were uninjured but the aircraft was written off.

On 15 October the squadron suffered its first casualties of the war. Druce and Muldowney took off from Siwa on a Tac R sortie. Three CR.42s attacked the low flying Lysander, which took violent evasive action before it crashed. The bodies of the two airmen were recovered the next day and were buried at Siwa. Muldowney had been one of four gunners on the squadron who had recently been made a sergeant. On 7 November Siwa came under a sustained attack from six Savoia S.79 and six Breda Ba.65 ground attack aircraft bombers escorted by up to eighteen Fiat CR.42 fighters. The landing ground was hit and one of the squadron's Lysanders blew up as a result of machine-gun fire. Two days later the remaining aircraft and the ground party returned to Fg Offs Waymark and Brown enjoy a breakfast in the desert. Qasaba.



The long awaited arrival of the first Hurricanes to replace the Lysanders began on 22 November when the pilots of 'C' Flight left for Abu Sueir. They exchanged five Lysanders for Hurricane Is and spent the next two weeks at Amariya converting to the new type. A further Hurricane was being specially fitted out to carry cameras. This aircraft was to be used in areas considered too dangerous for the lumbering Lysander. The technique to be used was described in the squadron's operations book as, "a quick dash is the order of the moment and for this purpose the Hurricane will be used exclusively".

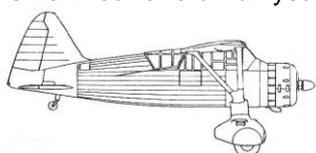


208 Sqn Lysander undergoing servicing in the desert.

The Hurricane made its operational debut with the squadron on 4 December when Flt Lt Burnand carried out a Tac R south of Sidi Barrani. By this time the Italian advance had been halted and on the 9th, Operation Compass commenced when an Indian division launched an attack to recapture a camp. The squadron's four Hurricanes supported this main attack and the Lysanders supported the 7th Armoured Division, which was protecting the southern flank. The attack made good progress and on the 11th, Sidi Barrani fell, Buq Buq was occupied and the camps at Sofafi and Rabia were surrendered with all equipment. 38,000 prisoners were taken, and 237 guns and 73 tanks were captured. By the end of the following day, the Italians had only three toeholds in Egypt, Sollum,

Fort Capuzzo and Sidi Omar. Despite having to contend with sand storms, the squadron had made a major contribution to the army's success.

General Wavell decided to capitalise on the successes and he started preparations for an attack on the port of Bardia. The Hurricane flight was kept busy over the next few days with regular sorties to monitor the Italian military situation in Bardia and Tobruk. Wilson was promoted to squadron leader on 16 December and assumed command of the squadron from Squadron Leader Sprague who had been promoted to wing commander. He had commanded the squadron over a period of intense activity and a few weeks after his departure it was announced that he had been awarded the DFC, the first award to the squadron in World War Two. The end of December 1940 saw both the Hurricane and the Lysander flights heavily engaged in the Army's advance and on the 31st, the squadron received orders to support the assault on Bardia. The following day, the attack was launched. During the six months of 1940, following Italy's entry in to the war, the squadron had established a pattern of operations that would serve it well over the next four-and-a-half years.



Graham Pitchfork

Naval 8 - 208 Sqn Association Historian



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

John Pascoe-Watson	Spitfire	Donald Perrens	Spitfire
Mike Bradley	Meteor	Al Thomas	Meteor
Brian Weskett	Meteor	Mike Gibson	Hunter
Andrew Gilfillan	Hunter	Geoff Watling	Hunter
Sir Mike Stear	Hunter		

Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Stear KCB CBE MA FRAeS DL

Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Stear, Life Vice-President of the Association, passed away on 5th January 2020. Sir Mike underwent National Service in the RAF, serving in Hong Kong as a junior technician. He went up to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where he read Oriental Languages, joined the University Air Squadron and started training as a pilot. On graduation he joined the RAF as a regular officer. After training as a fighter pilot he joined No 1 Squadron based in East Anglia to fly Hunters in the fighter ground-attack role. After two years he left for the Middle East to be the weapons leader of 208 Squadron, then based in Bahrain. He co-ordinated the development of various low-level tactics including skip bombing from 50 feet and dive attacks with rockets. His work was recognised by the award of a Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air.



After leaving 208, Sir Mike rose through the ranks via a series of senior appointments in the RAF and NATO. In October 1989 he was promoted to Air Marshal to be the Air Officer Commanding No 18 (Maritime) Group, where he proved to be an excellent AOC who had a good and easy rapport with all ranks in the force. With his fast-jet background he paid particular attention to his Buccaneer strike/attack squadrons based at Lossiemouth. He converted to the aircraft and continued to fly it on exercises when time permitted. After Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, three of his Nimrods were deployed to Seeb in Oman to conduct patrols in the Persian Gulf, and they continued to operate throughout the conflict. The AOC believed his Buccaneers, with their unique low-level laser target-marking capability, should be deployed to the operational area. In preparation, he instructed the squadrons to devise medium-level tactics as a contingency plan. Initially, his pleas fell on deaf ears and, whilst visiting 208 Sqn on detachment at RAF St Mawgan, he told the Sqn Cdr, then Wg Cdr Bill Cope, that the powers that be "*saw no need for Buccaneer involvement.*" Just a few hours later, the Sqn was instructed to prepare to deploy within 72 hours. The first six aircraft were flown to Bahrain, where they provided critical support for the Tornado bomber force. When the Buccaneers, by then up to 12 aircraft, returned on 17th March 1991, Sir Mike flew to Lossiemouth to welcome them back. In 1993, on promotion to Air Chief Marshal, he became the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces Central Europe, with his headquarters at Brunssum in Holland. When told that the Hunter, which he had flown on 208 Sqn, was due to make its last flight in RAF service, he flew to Lossiemouth and later flew the aircraft at low level to Scampton, where he made the last landing by an RAF Hunter.

He retired from the RAF in October 1996. Sir Mike was a long-standing member of the Royal Air Forces Association and served as Vice-President of the European Area from 1992 to 1996; he was elected Vice-President of the national Association in 1997, before becoming President a year later. He was the President of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association from 1993 to 2002 and thereafter a Life Vice-President. He married Elizabeth "Lizzie" Macrae in 1966, and in retirement they bought a smallholding near Dulford in Devon, where they kept geese, chickens and sheep, which they had acquired "*to keep the grass down.*" He received devoted support from his wife, and her death in 2015 deeply affected him. He is survived by two sons and a daughter.

Association News

METEOR CHAPTER LUNCH

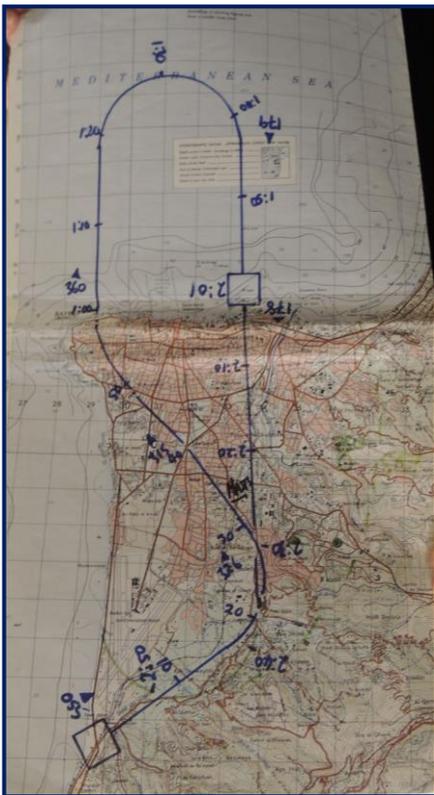
The Meteor Chapter was obliged to postpone its annual gathering this year, as the country was well and truly locked down in May, when the lunch is traditionally held. It is hoped to return to the usual format next year, with a lunch in the Running Horse Bar, at the RAF Club in London on the first Wednesday in May 2021. The first Old Comrades gathering of Naval 8/208 took place in 1919 in a pub in Soho. The Meteor Chapter has long continued that tradition on the first Wednesday of May each year, with an all ranks get together where old comrades can recall their time on the Squadron. If you are able to join us next year, please get in touch with Desmond Penrose. Desmond hopes that as many Old Comrades as are able to do so will join him and relive a part of your time with Glorious 208.



208 Sqn Meteor FR9s

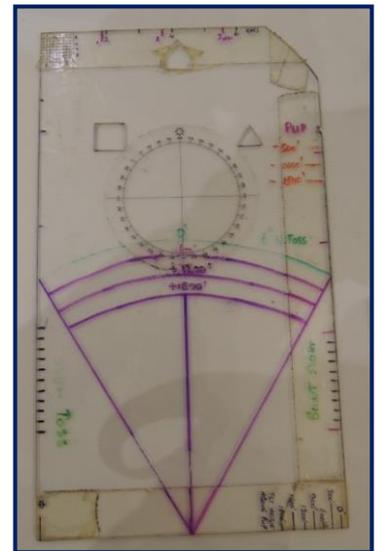
PULSATOR POSTSCRIPT

At the 2019 annual reunion dinner, the Association Chairman, David Trembaczowski-Ryder, shared his recollections of Operation PULSATOR, the show of force over Beirut in 1983. The following is a much shortened version of his story: the full text is available on the Association website.



A piece of history:
The Beirut flythrough map.

Many of you may have heard of Operation PULSATOR, during the Lebanese Civil War in 1983/84 when Buccaneers deployed to RAF Akrotiri. Details of the actual Operation by Air Commodore Ben Laite, who was one of the Squadron Commanders out there that led the team, are included in the Buccaneer Chapter of the website. However, when the Detachment was over, I rescued several items from the bin. They included things such as the map that was used by Nigel Maddox and Bill Graham to fly through the high-rise blocks in Beirut. I also rescued a home-made 'gizmo', which was used to plan the way you did the different kinds of attacks. What we were using there were laser-guided bombs and laser designation pods, and this was to determine how you would best do that. It looks pretty simplistic to say the least.



The mission planning "gizmo."

Until the ground troops were pulled out at the end of February 1984, there was a small contingent of British troops in Beirut: a Company of 110 - 120 personnel. Afterwards, I was chatting to one of the officers in the bar, and I said: "You know, well, you're out of the trouble because that's the Americans and French Marines that have all been blown up and quite a few guys have been killed." However, he replied: "Oh, no, it's terrible, we didn't want to leave. The Druz or Hezbollah would 'phone us up and say "we're going to do some shooting now, keep your heads down," and if a bullet strayed into our compound, they would 'phone up and apologise." He then said: "Actually, we didn't want to leave because we had lots of dinner parties we had to go to, and when we had to leave, we had to cancel them all." That just goes to show you that actually life is not always what it seems. Although Beirut was a war zone, people were still having fun.

David Trembaczowski-Ryder

Chairman



Membership News

The Association welcomes the following new member:

Geoffrey Parks Hunter

Members Lost Contact:

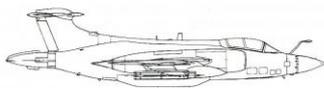
Graham White	Meteor	Mike Telford	Hunter
Terry Summers	Buccaneer		

Members Found Again:

Peter Biddiscombe	Hunter	John Kershaw	Buccaneer
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Current Membership:

Full (in contact)	349	Honorary	3
Lost contact	77	Associate	4
Total Full Members	426	Family	9



Nigel Huckins
Membership Secretary

Keeping in Touch

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

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

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

Name.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Telephone: eMail:.....

Please forward to the Membership Secretary via the Website: 208webmaster@gmail.com

Naval 8/208 Annual Reunion

36 members and guests attended last year's reunion dinner of the Naval 8/208 Sqn Association at the Grimscote Manor Hotel, near Birmingham, on Saturday 19th October 2019:

Mrs J Abell, Wg Cdr J Buckle, Mrs C Buckle, Mr R Dean, Mrs V Dean, Mr N Huckins, Mrs S Huckins, Mr I Johnston, Mrs J Johnston, Air Cdre B Laite, Mrs H Laite, Mr B Mahaffey, Mrs J Mahaffey, Mr N Meadows, Mrs C Meadows, Mr P Millard, Mrs C Millard, Air Cdre M Milligan, Mrs G Milligan, Gp Capt E Moriarty, Mr D Penrose, Ms J Schon, Air Cdre G Pitchfork, Mr G Reekie, Mrs L Reekie, Mr E Sharp, Mrs C Sharp, Mr A Sharp, Ms D Sharp, Mr P Smith, Mrs A Smith, Mr D Trembaczowski-Ryder, Mr M M Ward, Mrs L Ward, AM Sir Rob Wright and Lady Wright.

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

K Allen, P Armstrong, M Asher, Nigel Champness, Ian Dick, Dave Drake, Peter Foster, John Fraser, Paul "Skids" Harrison, Jamie Hunter, Dougie Marr, Phil Pinney, Iain Ross, A G Smith, Mike Snelling, Dave Southwood, Dave Stanley, Jock Watson and John White.

The 2020 Reunion marks a return to the RAF Club and as agreed last year, will take the form of a lunch. The menu is: Starter: Chicken Liver Parfait; Main Course: Slow Cooked Gressingham Duck Leg; Dessert: Lemon Posset. Vegetarian/Vegan alternatives will be available. We will meet at 12:00 for 13:00 on Saturday 24th October 2020. The ticket price this year is £50 per head. Dress code, as usual, is lounge suits. You can reserve your place via the [Association Website](#) or by using the booking form below.

The booking and payment deadline is 24 September. Please book promptly: if you are uncertain whether you can make it, please make a reservation, as it is easier to deal with a late cancellation than to accommodate a late booking.

Cancellations Policy: If the Association is obliged to cancel the lunch, a full refund will of course be paid. If members cancel before we have confirmed the final numbers to the RAF Club (expected to be 7 days prior to the lunch - i.e. 17 October), a full refund will be made; members will also have the choice of carrying forward their booking and payment to the next year.

Naval 8/208 Squadron Association – Annual Reunion Luncheon Booking

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

eMail via the Website at: 208webmaster@gmail.com

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

Full Address.....

Telephone: eMail:.....

I will* / will not* be attending the Annual Reunion Luncheon on Saturday 24th October 2020.

Please reserve places.

Names of guests:

Special dietary requirements (if any):

Payment: Reunion Lunch (£50.00 per person) £.....

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

Total: £.....

* I have paid by bank transfer (Please contact the Secretary for the Account No & Sort Code).
Please use your name as the reference, so that we know who has paid.

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

Naval 8/208 in Pictures

Right:
Grimscote Manor Hotel,
the venue for the 2019 reunion.



Below:
Assembling for pre-dinner drinks.



Above right (L to R):
Graham Pitchfork, Sir Rob Wright and "Spike" Milligan



Above Left:
The Sqn's miniature medals collection and other memorabilia on display.

Left:
A glimpse of history:
The Chairman, David T-Ryder, explains
the Beirut map from Op PULSATOR in 1983.



Right:
A vision of eternity:
The Sphinx, represented by the
Sir Geoffrey Bromet Trophy.

