

Naval 8 - 208 News

The Annual Newsletter of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association

2017 Issue





NAVAL EIGHT

208

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On the Cover:

100 Years Vigilant. 208 Sqn Hawk T1 in the centenary markings.

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Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings

The President's Foreword

The 'End of an Era' is a much used phrase, but I think in our Association's case the disbandment of 208 Squadron last year can truly justify its use. With the exception of a 3 month period between 7 November 1919 and 1 February 1920, and a 3 year period between 10 September 1971 and 1 June 1974, the Squadron has been in continuous service for almost 97 years. The history of the Squadron is brilliantly captured in the book "Forever Vigilant" by Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork; a recommended read for all ex-Squadron members. I am particularly grateful to Graham for successfully managing, against the odds, to get the book published in time for the open day at RAF Valley on 1 April 2016.

The Annual Reunion dinner held on 22 October in the RAF Club was a resounding success, with over 60 attendees. Squadron Leader Dave ("The Boy") Southwood gave an impressive speech on how his time on 208 Squadron had provided the foundation for his future career as an internationally renowned test pilot. His speech appears later in this Newsletter.

Turning to Committee matters, at the Autumn meeting immediately preceding the Reunion dinner it was unanimously agreed to offer to Air Cdre Ben Laite, Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork and Desmond Penrose, Association Life Vice President status for their tireless support to the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association over many years. After 25 years of sterling service to the Association Malcolm Brown has finally stood down from the Hon Secretary role; I say finally because I refused to let him go for over 5 years! Malcolm has been a superb supporter and stalwart of the Association and his unstinting work is very much appreciated. Gp Capt Eugene Moriarty has agreed to step up to the task of Hon Secretary and he is a welcome new member of the Committee. Eugene was also instrumental in finding a volunteer to fill the vacant position of Hawk Chapter Representative: Sqn Ldr Jamie Buckle, formerly OC B Flt on the Sqn at Valley, now joins the Committee: welcome Jamie! Paul Smith has stood down as Association Treasurer after several years of keeping the Association on the financial straight and narrow; it is his turn to be a "following spouse" as his wife, Ann, has been appointed to a post at the French Nuclear Authority in Dijon, France. Paul will be in his element – wine and mustard! Paul is replaced by Capt Rick Page, former Squadron Standard bearer and a pilot on the squadron during the early eighties, now a Boeing 777 captain with British Airways. Rick is also a very welcome addition to the Committee. Finally, Air Cdre Ben Laite is standing down as the Association Membership Secretary following over ten years of sterling work; Gp Capt Nigel Huckins has agreed to take over from Ben. A grateful welcome to the four new members of the Committee, and also our huge thanks for all the work carried out so admirably by our departing committee members.

Notwithstanding that the Squadron has disbanded, the Association will continue as strongly as ever, a strength that, along with every other Royal Air Force squadron association, will underpin the Royal Air Force itself. The Association will continue to nurture the spirit of Naval 8/208 Squadron that has been such a feature of our history and with close to 400 members we can look forward to many successful reunions in the future; I hope to see as many of you as possible at the Association dinner at the RAF Club on 21 October 2017.

Chairman's Chunter

The President has already announced a number of changes to the Association Committee, but I would like to echo his warm and sincere thanks to the outgoing members of the Committee for their dedication and unstinting support for the Association over many years. We certainly hope to see them at reunion dinners and still enjoy their good comradeship. Also, a big welcome to the new Committee members; all of whom readily accepted the invitation to join the Committee with no arm twisting – it is a pleasure to welcome keen volunteers.

Neil Meadows has managed to fill over 800 pages on the Association website and is aiming for 1000 pages! The account of the last Reunion Dinner is excellent with full coverage of the speech by Dave Southwood; well worth a read (www.naval8-208-association.com). To help Neil achieve his target, please send him articles, short anecdotes, memorabilia or pictures so that we can capture the true life and spirit of 208 for posterity. The tales we tell and share are the very essence of what makes the Association for the "spirit of 208". Also if you have anything for the Newsletter please send your entry to Malcolm Ward.

DONATIONS – The general financial situation of the Association is sound, with a modest balance sufficient for our short to medium term needs, but as always it would be comforting to have a small buffer to ensure that we can fund the cost of future printing of the Newsletter. Of course we aim to keep membership of the Association free, but the Committee will keep this under review this should the need arise. We have very few costs and we plan to keep it that way. So my perennial plea: keep the donations rolling in!



Guest of Honour 2016

The guest of honour at the centenary reunion dinner was Dave Southwood, who rounded off the series of presentations on "Life on 208" with a personal perspective. Dave spoke without notes: the following text is a shortened version of a transcript produced by the Webmaster, Neil Meadows.

I joined 208 in 1980 and the first Association Dinner I went to was that same year. The President of the Squadron Association then was still Sir Geoffrey Bromet and he was the speaker that night. So, there I was, joining the Squadron as a first-tourist, with the President and speaker as the person who had formed the Squadron in 1916. Thirty-six years later, I am standing here as your speaker. It is a great honour. It is very, very humbling to follow in his footsteps.

When I went through Flying Training, the Squadron Commander of the Tactical Weapons Unit at Lossiemouth on the Hunter was Dougie Marr. After TWU, I arranged to go and hold at the Maintenance Unit at Kemble which, at the time, was the home of the Red Arrows, whose leader was Brian Hoskins. We were talking in the bar about Buccaneer squadrons: I remember saying that what I was after was the squadron that was going to give me the best flying and Brian said: "Go to 208". That was fantastic advice, because it was one of the first things that set me on the road to the rest of my career.

Three days after I finished the Buccaneer OCU Course, there was the catastrophic structural failure of the XV Squadron aeroplane out at Nellis on Red Flag, when Ken Tait and Rusty Ruston were killed. The Buccaneer fleet was then grounded for about seven months after that – this is not an auspicious start to your first tour. However, the decision was taken to get Hunters out of storage and deliver them to the Buccaneer squadrons at Laarbruch and Honington, to maintain flying proficiency until the Buccaneer came back. In that period, Graham Pitchfork was absolutely instrumental in driving very, very hard to keep 208 Squadron in existence and he succeeded, even though there were lots of things stacked against him.

So in June 1980 I joined 208 Squadron as a Hunter pilot and then on 1st September 1980, I did my arrival check on 208 Squadron, in the Buccaneer, with Graham. On the same day, I also flew a single-seat Hunter and a two-seat Hunter: this was one of the things that has really set me up from there on in. I went the whole way through my first tour flying at least two types of aeroplanes which, even in those days, was quite unusual. When I arrived on 208 Squadron, I was crewed up with Bobby Anderson, who was a fantastic nav. I really enjoyed flying with him. He had come off 809 Squadron, with the Navy, so there was nothing I could do in an aeroplane that he hadn't seen before that was going to scare Bobby or faze him. I was basically the tallest pilot on the Squadron and he was definitely the shortest navigator, so I am sure that part of the crewing was for comedic effect to give as much scope as possible for interesting cartoons. I was the only first-tourist pilot on the Squadron for the first two years I was there. This can go one of two ways: you are either the tea-boy and get nowhere; or you are pushed forward to develop as much as you can, because you can make mistakes and, with the experience on the Squadron, they can soak up those mistakes and you can operate quite safely. The latter was where I sat: I had all the opportunities in the world and was really pushed forwards very hard, and I will come back to this theme later because that has been one of the most fundamental things that set up the foundations of my career for the next 35-odd years. I got Combat Ready, and then we went off to Maple Flag in 1981. I had already developed a sort of propensity for low flying, and I am not talking about 250ft, I am talking about flying an aeroplane properly low, so that the sort of heights and speeds I got accustomed to on run-and-breaks were not the norm throughout the Air Force. The 100ft OLF that we did on Maple Flag work-up really was tremendous. I thoroughly, thoroughly enjoyed it.



Above:
Dave "The Boy" Southwood.



Above: 208 Sqn Hunter FGA9 during the Buccaneer grounding.

We came back from Maple Flag, and then in the latter part of 1981, we had a trial deployment to Cold Lake again in Canada: Trial Tropical III, which was a Central Trials & Tactics Organisation (CTTO) Trial looking at the employment of laser-guided bombs, for the first time in an operational context. 208 were delivering the bombs, and 16 Squadron were designating with a Pave-Spike targeting pod, in addition to some ground-based laser target marking. This was fantastic fun: we were going off in a couple of waves a day, with four laser-guided bombs on each aeroplane, flying close formation at 550kts and 100ft, pulling up and throwing these bombs at the target. One of the things that struck me recently was, if you look at what the RAF is doing now, it is all precision-guided munitions, and

this was the very, very early stages of that sort of technology in the Air Force, and 208 was pivotal in developing the tactics for deploying these weapons operationally. That, as a first-tourist, I had the opportunity to go and do that is absolutely unparalleled.

Shortly after the end of that detachment, Graham handed over the Squadron to Ben Laite. I remember Ben asking me to come to his office one day. This happened fairly frequently for reasons various, but Ben said: *"Dave, tell me why I should send you on the QWI (Qualified Weapons Instructor) Course next year"*. So I told him why I thought he should not, and that was basically because if I did the Course, I felt I was going to get trapped on the Buccaneer, and I had long had an ambition to go to ETPS (Empire Test Pilots School) to become a test pilot on 'A' Squadron – Flight Test Squadron at Boscombe Down. Inevitably, off I went to the QWI Course! However, I really enjoyed it and learned a lot. In my early days in Flight Test, a lot of the work was in weapons development, weapons delivery, and the QWI course stood me in really good stead for the test flying that I did. Then we came to the end of 208 Squadron Buccaneers as an overland sqn from Honington, and on 31st July that year, I flew with Ben



Above: 208 Sqn Buccaneers in Close Formation.

as we led the final Buccaneer 6-ship farewell to East Anglia trip, around all the places we used to go to: the airfields; the ranges. It was a great privilege to lead that sortie. Looking back, the whole time the Squadron was there, it was a very, very, competent hard-flying unit. The Squadron then moved to Lossiemouth and I had a couple of months away on leave and doing some course that attempted to make me a better officer which, frankly, was doomed to failure. But, eventually, I arrived up at Lossiemouth, and had been there about 3 days when we got an airborne recall, which really didn't happen very often. We got back to Lossiemouth, with no idea why we'd been recalled, to see everybody running around like headless chickens: it was the start of Op PULSATOR. The mission was the support of the British forces in Beirut. At 5 o'clock the next morning, we went in and flew out to Cyprus. We landed there to be met with the lads with a bottle of moonshine made up in the Troodos Mountains – a 6-hours trip, a quick glug of that! We had been given pistols with real bullets to go out there. So, we had slugged this moonshine down and we then said: *"OK, we need to go to the Armoury to hand the guns in."* So: *"Sorry Sir, the Armoury is full. You're going to have to keep them with you."* *"OK, but we are going to the bar. We are going to have a few drinks. If we have still got these, somebody's going to get shot. Probably ourselves! Probably through the foot!"* *"I see what you mean, Sir, come this way."* So along we went and handed the guns in. That was the Friday, and on the Sunday we had Air Task Messages to go and do a 'Show of Force' - the Army troops in Beirut were a bit uncomfortable – they hadn't had any air support, and our mission there was, should they be shelled, to go and take the artillery guns out. So we went off to do this 'Show of Force' around the City. It was a mixed 208/12 Squadron detachment. We put 2 pairs around the City: Bill Graham and Nige Maddox were leading the first pair and I was No 2 in the second pair. We whizzed round the City of Beirut. It was the best two-and-a-half minutes flying of my life! It is the only time that I would ever get the opportunity to fly between buildings in a capital city. I've still got the tee-shirt: *"Real men fly through Beirut, not over it!"* Ben and Dutch Holland on the ship dug us out of the 'dwang' that the Americans seemed to be throwing at us because they did not appreciate that style of flying.

Having looked at Trial Tropical, when we started off the employment of laser-guided bombs, the politicians had latched on to the fact that these bombs, on paper, had a 37-foot accuracy number, so they said we had to use laser-guided bombs. Our tactics at the time were to run in and toss them. Now all of the artillery guns were going to be up in the mountains, and myself and Caz Capewell, the 2 pilot QWIs there, worked out that we could only take out a target 300 feet above our run-in height from the profiles we had. And so, literally, on the back of a fag-packet in the crewroom, we came up with a dive profile that delivered these things from 15,000 feet onto the target. This had never been conceived in the RAF before: the medium-level deployment of laser-guided bombs. It had to be proven, so we got a guy out from CTTO. We had an allocation of 6 bombs, but CTTO really did not believe this was going to work. They put one target out, we dropped a bomb: 'doof!' Sunk the target. Second one: 'doof!' Sunk the target. Now CTTO said: *"OK, you've proved your point, you're not going to drop any more bombs – this actually works!"* Because they didn't believe this was going to work, we had a bet on: there was a bottle of champagne on every bomb. If it took out the target, they bought the champagne. If it missed, we bought the champagne. We conceded not to drop any more bombs on the basis they provided all 6 bottles of champagne which, in fairness, they did. Again, 208 was pivotal in terms of the initial employment of this sort of technology from medium level. It is taken for granted as the norm now, but I don't think it has ever really been captured, quite how much we actually did.

So that was 1983. Now we move on to 1984: I had always had a great desire for display flying, and it had been decided for the 1984 Display Season that the OCU, 208 and 12 would each provide a display pilot. I went to Ben and said: *"I'd like to be next season's display pilot."* Over the years on the Squadron with Graham and Ben, there had been some fairly robust discussions about my style of low flying: thankfully, this was in the pre-YouTube days, so there was a bit more scope for discussion. One thing about the Buccaneer was that within the low-flying arena, it was one of the most fantastic aeroplanes I have ever flown. As a pilot, you could really fly to your limits, plus or minus the regulations on top. When I went to Ben and told him I'd like to be the display pilot, he said: *"Yep, fine."* This was very



Above: Display Arrival at Kemble in 1984.

astute because, all of a sudden, there was a mechanism for capturing my enthusiasm, whilst sort of bringing me back into the legal arena, shall we say. T-R was my nav for this, so very many thanks to T-R for sitting there, hopefully with his eyes open, and his hands not on the handle for too much. Within the high-speed envelope, the Buccaneer was fantastic for being able to really fly it precisely. But it was a very, very difficult aeroplane at low speed: if you got it wrong, you were going to crash, you were going to lose the aeroplane, make no bones about it. I think for my future career in terms of flying, it gave me the opportunity to develop my skills in flying an aeroplane in parts of the flight envelope where you had to be on your mettle.

On May 20th 1984, we launched off on a 6-ship, in fairly marginal weather in a coordinated toss manoeuvre over the Moray Firth: the leader crashed into the water. I was in that formation: sadly Bill Graham and Tony Wright were killed and myself and Doug Carter as the deputy had to bring everyone back home. That was the first time 208 had suffered a fatal loss in a Buccaneer up to that point. It is one of those things that will never leave me: I have lost other friends in accidents, but one of the things that is quite notable looking at it today is, thankfully, we lose far fewer aeroplanes and people than we used to. But, when we do, people don't know how to handle it, and it is very difficult. We went to the bar that night and we were staying in. We had decided that we would launch the Wing next day: that we would fly every aeroplane. Ben came over to me and said: "*Dave, I've got this great idea for tomorrow. You're going to do a display practice and I'll fly with you to really wave the flag.*" Now it comes to this cross-over point where either you're so 'rattled' that you say "yes", or you are not quite there and you know this is not going to be a good idea, so I said: "*Boss, that is a fantastic idea, but I'm afraid I could only fly the display practice as a constituted crew with my nav, T-R, so I'm really sorry we can't do it.*" My logbook records that I flew the tanker the next day that was my level of stability.

At that stage, I applied for ETPS again. I got a very good recommendation from Ben, for which I thank you, and was accepted onto the Course. ETPS was everything that I had always wanted. I wanted to be a test pilot because I wanted to go and really understand the aeroplanes that I flew. I wanted to go and do things in aeroplanes that nobody had ever done before, and I wanted to go and fly as many types of aeroplanes that I could to gain knowledge. I had a fantastic time at ETPS, went and then got a posting to 'A' Squadron at Boscombe Down. So, what are the chances from age 18 at University Air Squadron of wanting to get to the one very specialised squadron there was, and actually getting there? Somebody has got to do it. Luck, fate, a lot of help but I actually made it.

Six months after joining the Squadron, I had a phone call one night from my Boss, Colin Cruikshanks. He said: "*Are you available to go to the States in 2 weeks' time for about 4 weeks?*" "*Yeah, sure.*" "*Right, we are off to see the Chief of the Air Staff tomorrow.*" Colin and I got the train down to London. We had no idea: we thought it was going to fly MiGs. However, it was the opportunity to go and do an assessment on the F-117 Stealth Fighter which, at the time, was completely in the black world: it did not exist. We went out there and we flew it from a base that also did not exist at the time. I was a 30-year-old flight lieutenant, six months out of test pilot school, having meetings with the Secretary of State for Defense, Kaspar Weinberger and the Pentagon; meetings in the White House. I knew at that time there was nothing professionally that I would ever do again that would top that, it was a phenomenal opportunity.



Above: F117 Stealth Fighter.

But there were echos of 208, because it had a targeting system in it, and my early experiences of tactics and profiles with Pave Spike and the laser-guided bombs really prepared me for going to the USA.

I have spent most of the last 25 years as a tutor at ETPS. Here I am at quite advanced years: I am sure nobody of my age has ever been called a 'boy' before! My kids are now 23 and 26, and I think about what I was doing at their age. At 23, I was flying the Hunter; at 26, I was doing the QWI Course, and I am still doing the same stuff now. I am still flying Tornados for the Test Squadron as well as single-seat Hunters as they come in and out of the door. I have been exceptionally lucky. But, if I look back at the single most underpinning thing in all of this, I think it was the fact that as the sole first-tourist on 208, its Squadron commanders and execs gave me the opportunities, pushed me forward; soaked up the mistakes to help me to develop. That is the single, biggest influence that you guys gave me in my career going forwards. It is because of you as individual people, and the whole culture on 208. The navs I flew with also gave me phenomenal support: Bobby, Dutch, Graham, Gordon Robertson and obviously, T-R for the displays. I do not think that I would have had the career that I have had, had I not started off on 208 Squadron with those people. So, to you all, thank you.



Dave Southwood

208 Sqn 1980-84

Two - Six

Squadron and Association stalwart Sid Jefford passed away in 2016: his obituary is on page 12. Sid left behind an unpublished memoir, titled "Two - Six", which the Webmaster is in the process of scanning for publication on the website and, possibly, in print. Various extracts have previously been printed in the newsletter and elsewhere. As a tribute to Sid, we reprint here a gem.

ANNUAL LEAVE: Tel Aviv, Palestine - August 1943

Myself and two airmen had planned our fourteen days' leave with care. 208 Squadron was based at Rayak, a French Air Force Station situated at the junction of the Beirut - Damascus - Baalbec roads in the valley on the landward side of the Lebanon Mountains. We had decided to spend our leave at Tel Aviv in Palestine: there now remained the method of getting there. The first leg of the journey was fairly obvious: take the Friday ration wagon, over the Pass into Beirut, asking the driver for a "drop off" as near to the Airport as possible, then "get a lift" from an aircraft operating to a field in Palestine. The remainder of the trip should be easy. That was the plan!

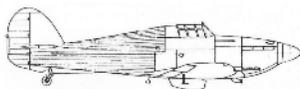
Seated on the hard wooden seat in the rear of a truck is not the most comfortable way to travel. Add to that the drop in temperature as we reached the apex of the pass, just a short distance below the snow line, and dressed in tropical kit makes comfort difficult to come by. At a point about halfway down, with the city of Beirut plainly visible, sweltering in the morning sun, the mixture of civilian and military vehicles was halted by a road repair gang, making the road good after a landslip. The vehicle directly ahead of the ration wagon was a large Staff car showing the "flashes" and emblems of the Greek forces. In the front seat beside the driver was a single passenger. An observation by one of my colleagues pointed out that to his knowledge there were no Greek troops in Syria but many in Palestine. "*What about asking the driver if he is going our way?*" The driver said they were and soon the three "hitch hikers" were settled comfortably in the rear seat and on the way toward the steamy atmosphere of Beirut.

The driver spoke English with no trace of accent and as he was wearing a khaki cardigan his rank could not be determined. His companion, a Greek Sergeant, had very little English. The journey was now well under way, the staff car making good time along the Coast road. The conversation was pleasant and varied, with considerable time given to the recent Greek/Crete campaign in which we three airmen had taken part. The Officer, who was driving, said he would be making a planned stop and if we cared to wait until his business was completed he would be pleased to take us as far as he could toward Tel Aviv before he turned off toward Jerusalem, that being his destination. We thanked him and said we would rather wait until he completed his stopover and continue with him.

We approached the Syrian - Palestine Border Control with vehicles of all types, nose to tail, waiting for clearance before crossing. At the first barrier the Officer and Sergeant exchanged seats: as the Sergeant walked around the car he unfurled a pennant attached to the front. The Officer had removed his cardigan and donned his cap. This revealed his epaulettes and for the first time we could see, not only a crown but other insignia. Not knowing their meaning we decided he was a Colonel. An Officer from the Provost's Post approached the car, saluted and spoke a few words to the Colonel, then stiffly at attention he again saluted, turned and marched quickly toward the Post.

A few miles after passing through into Palestine, the Colonel told his "guests" that his scheduled stop was just a short distance away and whilst he was attending his business the Sergeant would entertain us. Our arrival at the Camp was greeted by a Company of Greek Soldiers drawn up along the road side, brought smartly to "Attention" by an Officer who was offering a very correct and smart Salute. The Camp entrance was reached where a detachment, headed by an Officer and two NCOs, were at the "Present" as the car rolled slowly past. The car halted alongside a parade square where yet another Company of troops were drawn up with a reception party of Officers and Senior NCOs. The Senior Officer of the party saluted as the Colonel stepped out of the car which he returned. The Sergeant, drove to park beside a building marked both in Greek and English "Orderly Room". The Sergeant indicated to us to stand with him and watch the proceedings. It was now fully realised that our host was no mere Colonel: there was much too much gold braid, medals and insignia for that. Maybe he was a General? As soon as we were able to speak to someone who could understand, we would ask.

The Guard of Honour having been inspected, and salutes and handshakes exchanged, the party made its way to a building at the far end of this rather compact camp and filed inside. The Sergeant led the three of us to a building behind the Orderly Room that appeared to be the NCOs' canteen. Here we were given a glass of beer and were endeavouring to communicate using the very little amount of Greek we had obtained during our time in Greece and the limited amount of English our hosts could offer. After a while we were joined by two British Sergeants: one wore the Red Beret of the Airborne Division, the other a Green Beret of the Royal Marine Commando. Shoulder Flashes worn by each were of a Greek Commando Unit. After the usual introductions the Marine asked if we were "his" bodyguard. After this surprise we told our inquisitors that we were not aware of who "he" was, then gave details of our "hitching a lift" from Syria. This, according to the two Brits, was "unbelievable". They then told three astonished and embarrassed airmen they had "hitched a lift" from Prince Peter of Greece!



Sid Jefford
208 Sqn 1941-45

On Laughter-Silvered Wings

The 2012 Newsletter recorded the fact that Geoff Green, a Meteor pilot on 208 Sqn at Abu Sueir from 1953-1955, had later managed to get his hands on a Spitfire at Woodvale. Here, he recounts how the deed was accomplished. This article first appeared in the deHavilland Moth Club magazine in December 2016 and is reproduced here by kind permission of the Editor, Stuart McKay MBE. Geoff, who was already ill when he wrote the article, passed away in 2016.



Above: Geoff Green later, as a 747 captain with BA.

I first flew as an ATC cadet in 1948 having grown up in southern England during the war and watched, fascinated and wondrous, the con-trails woven high in the sky as the RAF pilots battled it out with the Luftwaffe. Ask any school boy of the day the name of the most famous fighter plane. "Spitfire" would be the reply. We devoured stories of our heroes who flew and fought in them. What must it be like to fly a Spitfire?

I was to join the RAF myself and become a fighter pilot and was posted to the Middle East to 208 Squadron which had flown Spitfires but now were equipped with Meteors. The Spits had long since gone, giving way to the jet age. Some years later I was posted to RAF Woodvale as a flying instructor with a University Air Squadron. I inherited the grand title of Chief Harvard Instructor (nobody else wanted the job) but I liked the Harvard. It was an excellent training aircraft and I used to joke that it had taken me six years flying to get from the front seat to the back seat of a Harvard! It was to prove invaluable.

Woodvale was a delightful airfield situated between Southport and Formby in Lancashire, overlooking the shallow waters of the beach famous for the horse drawn carts of 'shrimpers' who would later ply their delicious potted shrimps. Woodvale was home to two University Air Squadrons, Meteors of 611 Auxiliary Squadron (later disbanded) and the THUM Flight. The task of the THUM Flight (the initials stood for Temperature and Humidity) was to gather daily weather information from the upper atmosphere. The aircraft had to climb in steps to be at 30,000ft at a point just north of Worcester (deemed to be the middle of England). The aircraft designated this task was none other than the PR19 Spitfire. The THUM Flight was an unusual unit in having RAF Spitfires but flown by civilian pilots (ex RAF) on contract to the Short & Harland Company. One of the pilots was ex Squadron Leader John Formby, nicknamed 'George' after the famous singer and ukulele player of the time. I got to know 'George' well and as it was every young pilot's dream to fly a Spitfire I would envy his daily flights, landing at Speke (Liverpool) to deliver his reports before flying on to Woodvale. We discussed the possibility of my obtaining official permission to have a fly in his Spitfire. No chance! The dream, so close, would have to remain just that. Then in late 1956 came the news that the Spitfires were to be withdrawn.

The morning of 16 September 1956 dawned bright and clear. It was Battle of Britain Sunday and a Commemorative Service was to be held in Formby's church. All were to attend; best 'blue' uniform to be worn. The Station could not be left unmanned: the Duty Officer would remain and as it was, by chance, my turn to be Orderly Officer, the lot fell to me. I sat alone in the Flight Office which overlooked the airfield and watched as 'George' landed from his mission and taxied in. I strolled over to the hangar where he had parked to have a natter and, as always, bask in the glory and beauty of the Spitfire glinting in the sun. Tempting! As I stood there on Battle of Britain Sunday in my 'best blue', before the aircraft of all aircraft, I think we both recognised the inevitable: I was going to fly PS915. I got up on the wing and strapped myself in. I knew all the speeds off by heart but George said, "I will make sure you start her OK then I am off! On your own head be it!"

The Griffon engine crackled into life, temperature and pressures all OK. I waved the chocks away. The air traffic controllers were all civilians and we knew each other. I called for clearance:

"Clear to taxi for local flight, 915."

At the runway threshold I did the engine run up and take-off checks. No words could explain how I felt. Jubilation? Fear? What if it all went wrong? To say that hell would be to pay made small of it! Too late now!

"915 ready for take off."

"915 cleared for take off, wind light and variable."



I taxied on to the runway swinging the nose from side to side to see where I was going. The lack of forward vision did not bother me as I was well accustomed to that back seat in the Harvard. I lined up, final checks, hood back, then gently opened the throttle. The mighty engine seemed anxious to go, and we rolled forward - keep her straight - more power - speed increased quickly - stick forward to lift the tail - full throttle - keep her straight - be ready and alert to counteract any tendency to swing. A last quick check of instruments and speed and then a gentle back pressure on the stick. She lifts off like a graceful bird. I am airborne in a Spitfire. Gear up, speed increases, flaps up, climb away towards Formby. For the next 20 minutes I fly as never before. What was it the Canadian Battle of Britain fighter pilot (John Gillespie Magee) wrote in his poem?

*"Oh I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings
Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds - and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of."*

My state of euphoria had to come to a close, there being one small thing to attend to: I had to return my precious charge safely to earth.

"Woodvale: 915 rejoining for landing."

"915 clear to rejoin."

Downwind checks completed it was time to concentrate on landing: a nice curved approach, more flap, reduce power.

"915 finals."

"915 clear to land, wind light and variable."

Wings level, lined up, power off, gently back on the stick, then the sweet 'kiss kiss' of the wheels as they touch the runway. Keep straight! Remember: 'the landing is not over until the aircraft is safely parked!' (Instructor's words!)

"915 clear of the runway."

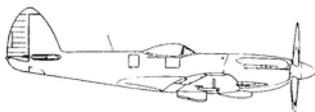
"Roger 915, well done!"

I taxied in and parked the aircraft and switched off. I just sat there. *"You all right Sir?"* the ground crewman asked. *"I'm in heaven,"* I replied. I strolled back to my Flight Office. I believe I even had the top button of my best blue undone, the mark of a fighter pilot! A while later everyone returned from the church service and the C.O. came in. *"Anything to report?"* he said. *"Nothing,"* I replied, *"all quiet."* *"George flew the Spitfire over the church. Nice touch,"* he said. *"Let's go for a beer!"* Some time later before leaving the Squadron I filled in the space I had left in my flying log book:

'16 September 1956. Spitfire PS915. First solo on type.'

And I confessed to the C.O. He was a good fellow and, whilst pointing out the possible penalties for misappropriating one of Her Majesty's aeroplanes, quietly congratulated me on having the cheek and spirit to have done it. He signed my log book to make it official.

In 1991 RAF Woodvale celebrated its 50th anniversary and I returned as a guest to join the party. By chance, also there was the Spitfire Association, among its members was Tom Neil, a Battle of Britain Spitfire (and Hurricane) pilot who had been my C.O. on 208 Squadron in the Middle East. *"Hello,"* he said, *"what are you doing here?"* *"I was an instructor on the University Air Squadron,"* I said. I did not mention my one and only Spitfire flight. It seemed a little insignificant against his record! Today PS915 still flies proudly with the RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Tom Neil at 95 is one of the very few remaining of 'The Few.' And me? I have retired and hung up my flying helmet long since, but in a quiet moment I look back with much satisfaction and pride, able to claim: I flew a Spitfire! Thank you George.



Geoffrey Green

208 Sqn 1953-55

Squadron Anniversaries

The year 2017 marks two significant Anniversaries in the history of Naval Eight/208 Squadron. In 1917 the Squadron was heavily involved in intensive fighting during the Battle of Arras and October also marked the departure of the squadron's first Commanding Officer, Squadron Commander G.R. Bromet. Twenty-five years later the squadron's Hurricanes played a significant role during the Battle of El Alamein in October 1942, claimed by many historians to have been the turning point in World War Two.

SPRING OFFENSIVE OF 1917 - BATTLE OF ARRAS

After a period out of the front line, during which the squadron was re-equipped with the Sopwith Triplane, Naval Eight returned to action at the end of March 1917 in preparation for the 'Spring Offensive' better known as the Battle of Arras.

The air offensive for the battle opened along the whole front on 4 April, five days before the ground action began. The squadron's senior pilots were immediately in action with Flight Commander R. Compston and Flight Lieutenant R. Little the most prominent. Compston achieved the squadron's first success with the Triplane when he forced down a Halberstadt out of control having intercepted it at 17,000 feet. The following day, Little achieved his first success in the Triplane, which made him an 'ace' (five victories) and the beginning of a long run of successes. Naval Eight was to produce several exceptional 'aces' during 1917 and their successes started to mount during the fierce fighting of April.

The intense aerial fighting of April (known ever since as 'Bloody April') set the tone for the next three months, the most hectic period of activity throughout the war for Naval Eight. On 16 May the squadron moved to Mont St. Eloi a better airfield where the men were under canvas and the aircraft could be serviced in Bessoneau hangars. With the move, the squadron's role changed to some extent. Offensive patrols were still flown but the priority was to attack aircraft directing enemy artillery – often referred to as 'wireless interception' - and hostile aircraft over the front line. The squadron enjoyed a successful period in its new role.



Above: Flight Commander R. Compston



Above: Flt Lt R. Little.

During the first two weeks of June, many of the squadron's pilots had successes. Not only did Little, Compston and Flight Commander Booker add to their scores but the newer pilots were making significant contributions. The squadron was now establishing itself as one of the best scout squadrons on the Western Front. In July, the busiest month of the war for Naval Eight, the first Sopwith Camels arrived to start replacing the Triplanes. The Camels went over the lines for the first time on the 11th and the following day, Little achieved the squadrons' first success in the new aircraft when he drove down an Albatros DV out of control. Over twenty enemy machines were shot down or sent out of control in July with Little accounting for thirteen of them. Towards the end of the month, Little, flew his final air combat when he achieved his thirty-second success. There are many who would claim that Robert Little was the squadron's finest pilot during World War One. Compston described him as, 'A very gallant fighter with the courage of a lion'.

The intensive air activity during July was the run-up to the Third Battle of Ypres, which opened on 30 July and would continue until 10 November. During this battle much use was made of scout aircraft in the ground attack role in support of the ground advance. In the build up to the Battle of Passchendaele the squadron saw little air combat, but was heavily engaged in

strafing enemy trenches when 3,350 rounds of ammunition were expended in a two-week period. It was also the period when Flight Commander R. Munday excelled with a number of night bombing raids against balloons and hangars on enemy airfields. His daring tactics resulted in him being awarded a DSC.

At the end of October, the squadron said goodbye to its inspirational commanding officer, Geoffrey Bromet. The squadron went on to achieve further successes, but it was the intense fighting of 1917 that established Naval Eight Squadron as one of the most successful fighting on the Western Front. Its pilots had received no fewer than eighteen decorations.

Below: Naval 8 Sqn Camels at Mont St Eloi 1917



75TH ANNIVERSARY – BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

After the fall of Tobruk on the 21 June 1942, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and his Panzers turned east and commenced a very rapid advance. Nine days later the British Eighth Army had retreated to El Alamein where defensive positions were taken up. Intermittent heavy fighting continued and 208 Squadron's pilots flew tactical reconnaissance (Tac R) sorties in support of XIII Corps, but losses were high with fourteen pilots, including the squadron commander, Wing Commander J.K. Rogers, failing to return. Two had been taken prisoner.

The new GOC Eighth Army, Lieutenant General Sir Bernard Montgomery issued his plans on 14 September for Operation Lightfoot to be launched during the October moon period. Lieutenant General B.G. Horrocks, the dynamic GOC of XIII Corps, visited the squadron and briefed the pilots on the ground situation and future plans. The unique relationship that existed between the Eighth Army and the Desert Air Force (DAF) extended down to unit level where army liaison officers (ALO) served on the squadron.

As the Eighth Army prepared to launch its attack, squadron HQ was established at Wadi Natrun (LG 202) with one flight operating from Burg-el-Arab. The squadron was in constant demand to provide reports on enemy movements and build up of forces. On the 19th over 700 motor transports were found together with tanks and fifty artillery pieces. The following day a further 800 transports were observed. As the time for the commencement of the Battle of El Alamein approached, these reconnaissance flights became crucially important and fighters of 243 Wing, in addition to a weaver supplied by 40 Squadron SAAF, accompanied each Tac R and photographic reconnaissance sorties.

General Montgomery had decided to launch his 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. Lieutenant General Horrocks paid another visit to the squadron; he had lunch with the pilots and briefed them on the plan of action. He emphasised the type of information the army required from the late afternoon sortie, to be flown by Flying Officer Peter Perry. Just before last light Perry took off to reconnoitre the area near Rahman. Two Spitfire fighter squadrons escorted him. Perry 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. Perry took off at first light the following morning to cover the same area to report any changes to the German dispositions. He observed that tanks on transporters were heading east and there was heavy artillery activity. As the battle commenced more sorties were flown throughout the day. Over the next few days, the squadron flew over the battle area reporting large concentrations of transports and the progress of heavy fighting. Over 1,000 transports 'digging in' were reported on the 27th when the squadron conducted an artillery shoot for the 7th Medium Regiment, Royal Artillery. Large tank concentrations were reported on the 28th and the following day, the squadron observed that Rommel was concentrating his forces in the northern area. Montgomery immediately changed his plan.

Below: Fg Off Peter Perry in 1942.



The squadron's hard work was recognised when a signal was received from General Horrocks congratulating and thanking the squadron for *'the excellent tactical reconnaissance reports'*. The squadron continued to fly at maximum rates over the next few days despite the loss of two pilots. A major Allied attack was launched on 2 November and the call for Tac R sorties increased. There was a major tank battle on the 3rd when the Axis armoured forces were defeated. By mid-day there were the first signs of an enemy withdrawal and the Eighth Army followed up as Rommel's forces began a rapid retreat.

Within days, the squadron, together with other Hurricane-equipped squadrons, was withdrawn from the front-line after its period of intense activity and major contribution to the success of the Battle of El Alamein. No. 208 Squadron had played a key role in the crucial Battle of El Alamein and this was recognised by the army commanders who signalled:

"Please convey to all the pilots and other personnel of your squadron my great appreciation of the splendid work done both before and during the present operations. The information they have provided has been of the utmost value to XXX Corps."

Below:

208 Sqn Hurricane at Burg-el-Arab



Below: Hurricanes.



Graham Pitchfork

Naval 8 - 208 Sqn Association Historian



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

Sid Jefford	Lysander, Hurricane & Spitfire		
Victor Brown	Spitfire	Ellis Knowlton	Spitfire
Monty Burton	Meteor	Chris Bushe	Meteor
Brian Cross	Meteor	Geoff Green	Meteor
Peter Newman	Venom/Hunter	Bob Ramirez	Venom/Hunter
John Sweetman	Hunter	Tim Webb	Hunter



SID JEFFORD – A SQUADRON STALWART

With the passing of Sid Jefford, who died on Christmas Day 2016 aged 96, the Squadron Association has lost one of its final links with the North African and Greek campaigns. We also lost one of the Association's great stalwarts who rarely missed a reunion and who served on the committee as the ground crew representative for many years. His devotion to the Squadron and to the Association can rarely have been matched.

Sid joined the RAF in December 1939 and after training as a flight mechanic (airframe) sailed for the Middle East. In March 1941 he was posted to 208 Squadron and joined Workshops Flight, which was responsible for the servicing and repair of aircraft and the maintenance of mechanical equipment. Within days of arriving at Barce in the desert, the squadron headed for Greece.

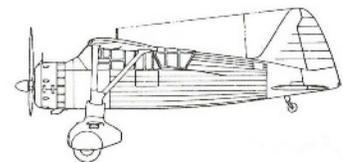
Sid's adventures over the next four years encapsulated every aspect of squadron life. He progressed from the Lysander to the Hurricane and then to the Spitfire V and IX. From Greece to Syria, to Iraq, back to the desert and then to Palestine before heading for Italy, Sid and his colleagues travelled miles by road and track. They encountered many situations when ground crew resourcefulness and initiative resolved countless difficulties, they came under enemy fire, worked under the most arduous conditions and suffered the loss of pilots, whom they had waved off on operational sorties.

Sid's skills, stoicism, sense of irreverent humour and intense loyalty typified all that is so good about the Squadron's ground crew over its 100 years of history. He was a wonderful example of those men and his brilliant service to 208 Squadron was recognised when he was one of the few to be 'Mentioned in Despatches'. He left the Squadron on New Year's Day 1945 having served for a few weeks short of four years. But, as we know, it was not the end of his close involvement with No. 208: few squadron associations have been served for so long and with such deep loyalty.

Sid was a great friend to everyone in the Association and he was a wonderful example of the loyalty and skill of generations of 208 Squadron's ground crew.



Above: Sid Jefford during the war.



GROUP CAPTAIN TIM WEBB AFC

Tim Webb, who died on 7 May 2017 aged 75, was a long-standing and active member of the Association's committee, the originator and webmaster of the Association's website, and Hunter representative for many years. He was a regular supporter of our annual reunion dinners, and was our guest of honour in 2008, when he gave an entertaining and highly acclaimed after-dinner speech covering the Squadron's history from 1958 to 1965.

He was born in South Africa, and he applied to join the South African Air Force, the Rhodesian Air Force and the Royal Air Force. The RAF replied first, and in October 1960 Tim boarded the Capetown Castle. En route there was a fire, so Tim and the other passengers and crew took to the lifeboats, a most unusual start to an RAF career.

Following flying training on Piston Provosts and Meteors, his first posting was to 208 Squadron Hunters based at Khormaksar, Aden. He described some of his many escapades in the after-dinner speech which he gave to the Association, and he features in the books *Hunter Boys* and *Storm Front*.

After 208 he became a QFI, with tours including a secondment to the Iraqi Air Force on Hunters, Chief Instructor at Valley from 1980-84, and Station Commander at Brawdy from 1988-1991. During his time at Valley the BBC were making the series *Fighter Pilot*, and Tim appears in it.

He was awarded the Air Force Cross for introducing the Hawk to the RAF in the role of a tactical weapons trainer.

Tim leaves a wife, Sally, whom he met at Khormaksar, two sons and five grandchildren. A full version of Tim's obituary appears on the Association's website.

With thanks to Phil Price, who gave Tim's eulogy, and to Mike Webb.



Above: Tim Webb in the Hunter.



Chapter News

Meteor Chapter Representative Desmond Penrose celebrated the 69th anniversary of his 1st solo on 14th April 2017. He had 35 minutes of aerobatics and circuits in a Tiger Moth - it was cold!

Hunter Chapter Member Alan Meadows was an SAC Photographer on 208 in Cyprus, when when Sqn Ldr Granville-White was the CO. After leaving the RAF, Alan and his family emigrated to Australia. He and his wife have one son and three daughters: their son Nigel served as a navigator in the RAAF before doing a pilots' course. Nigel flew the F111 for about 20 years and then transferred to the RAF, where he completed his conversion training at RAF Valley with, yes!! 208 Sqn: OC 208 at the time was Wg Cdr Neil Meadows, now our Webmaster. Alan's son Nigel went on to fly the Tornado GR4 with our sister sqn, 12 Sqn. Life turns full circle.

The Meteor Chapter continues the tradition established in 1919 in a pub in Soho, at the first Old Comrades gathering of Naval 8/208, with an all ranks get-together on the first Wednesday of May each year. We meet annually to recall our time on the Squadron. This year's reunion on Wednesday 3rd May 2017 took the form of a lunch at the Coach and Horses in Soho. The lunch was well supported, with a good turnout of Chapter members and one widow. However, after many years, a change of venue has been decided upon for next year's gathering, which will be in the Running Horse Bar at the RAF Club. If you wish to join us on Wednesday 2nd May 2018, please get in touch with Desmond Penrose. Desmond hopes that as many Old Comrades as possible will join him and relive a part of your time with Glorious 208.



Membership News

The Association welcomes the following new full members:

John Quinn	Meteor	Derek North	Hunter
George Ord	Hunter	Anthony Bland	Buccaneer
Claude Robert	Hawk		

And the following new associate members:

"Spike" Milligan	Hawk	Gill Howie	Hawk
Berry Vissers	Hawk		

Members Lost Contact:

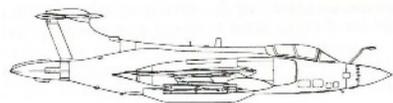
J W Coulson	Unknown	M McGrogan	Lysander
K P Jones	Meteor	Paul Steele	Buccaneer

Members Found Again:

Alan Tyler	Hunter	Ed Wyer	Buccaneer
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Current Membership:

Full (in contact)	358	Honorary	3
Lost contact	70	Associate	4
Total Full Members	428	Family	5



Ben Laite
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 new Membership Secretary: Nigel Huckins

Naval 8/208 Annual Dinner

63 members and guests attended the Naval 8/208 Sqn Association Centenary Dinner at the RAF Club, Piccadilly, on Saturday 22nd October 2016:

Mrs J Abell, Mr M Bradley, Mrs T Bradley, Mr C Bushe, Mrs S Bush, Mr N Champness, Mr S Colmant, Mrs A Colmant, Mr P Day, Mrs B Day, Mr D Drake, Mrs P Friar, Mr G Goodman, Mrs S Goodman, Mr K Griffin, Ms L Hansen, Mr I Johnston, Mrs J Johnston, Mr N Meadows, Mrs C Meadows, Mr B Hoskins, Mrs E Hoskins, Mr N Huckins, Mrs S Huckins, Air Cdre B C Laite, Mr P Large, Mrs N Large, Mr B Mahaffey, Mrs J Mahaffey, Mr D Marr, Mrs C Marr, Air Cdre M Milligan, Mr F J Nicoll, Mr J Pascoe-Watson, Mr J D Penrose, Air Cdre G Pitchfork, Mr I Ross, Mrs J Ross, Mr T Ryder-Hansen, Mr R Ryder-Hansen, Mr E Sharp, Mrs C Sharp, Mr P Smith, Mrs A Smith, Mr M Snelling, Mrs M Snelling, Mr D Southwood, Mr J Sweetman, Mrs J Sweetman, Mr D Sweetman, Mr D Trembaczowski-Ryder, Mr I Turner, Mrs D Turner, Mr W Turner, Mr M M Ward, Mrs L Ward, Miss M Warner, Mr K M Whaley, Mr J White, Air Cdre D Wilby, Mrs P Wilby, Air Mshl Sir Robert Wright and Lady Wright.

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

Don Beer, John Clark, Ian Dick, Ian Hall, Paul Lee-Preston, Pete Millard, Dick Northcote, Philip Pinney, Brian Porritt (in memory of his late father, Flt Lt Reggie Porritt), Ian Semple, Ted Thompson, Alan Tyler, Jock Watson and Roj Wholey.



The 2017 Reunion Dinner will be held at the RAF Club at 6:00 for 7:00 pm on Saturday 21st October 2017. The ticket price is £50 per head for the three course dinner, including coffee. A selection of wines will be available for purchase. Dress code, as usual, is lounge suits. Please reserve your place via the [Association Website](#) or by using the booking form below. In order to ease the admin, please make your reservation as soon as convenient, but not later than one month prior to the dinner (i.e. by 21st September.)

Naval 8/208 Squadron Association – Annual Reunion Dinner Booking

Please return slip to: Eugene Moriarty

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

Full Address.....

Telephone: eMail:.....

I will / * will not be attending the Annual Reunion Dinner on Saturday 21st October 2017.

Please reserve places.

Names of guests:

Special dietary requirements (if any):

Payment: Reunion Dinner (£50.00 each) £.....

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

Total: £.....

Either: * I will pay by bank transfer (please send me details).
Or: * I enclose a cheque made payable to 208 Sqn Association.

*** Please delete as appropriate**

Naval 8/208 in Pictures



Left:
Graham Pitchfork, Dave Southwood and Duggie Marr chat to 208 Sqn Hurricane Pilot and El Alamein veteran Freddie Nicoll, at the Centenary Dinner at the RAF Club on 22 October 2016.

Below:
Hawker Hurricane of the BBMF.



Left:
The Ballroom at the Royal Air Force Club, on the occasion of the Naval 8/208 Sqn Centenary Dinner on 22 October 2016. The Squadron Standard is conspicuous by its absence, having been laid up in the RAF Church at St Clement Danes earlier in the year.

Below:
Gathering in the bar before dinner.



Left:
The end of an era. 208 Sqn's last flight with the Hawk in 2016.