

208 Squadron 'Valley Wings' Article - June 2014

With the summer flying period upon us, the Squadron has seen a successful ramp up in flying tempo to meet the International Defence Training (IDT) and UK ab-initio pilot training task. 6 students from Tactical Weapons (TW) Courses 78 and 79 have graduated to front-line OCUs, a further 4 fast jet refresher students have been trained for 100 Sqn and the RAF Aerobatic Team; and we welcome 4 new ab-initio students from the RN and RAF.

The main effort these last few months has been for B Flight to train TW78 and 79 towards their end graduation date and role confirmation. To support this, our Babcock Engineering Team have tirelessly provided 8 to 10 jets each and every flying day; an impressive feat considering we only have 13 jets . including several in deep maintenance. The Hawk T1 has once again proved to be the most reliable jet in the RAF, meeting the relentless demands of the flying programme to almost 100% reliability. Sadly the spell of beautiful Mediterranean summer weather has been interrupted on occasion with *Liney-Sunshine* ie low cloud and high winds . we also experienced glorious flying conditions on the Station Total Safety Down Day . typical! This unpredictable British weather also meant that the graduation 6-ship flypast was unfortunately scrubbed in favour of a ground event.

TW78 and 79 were combined for their joint Role Disposal games held at the OfficerssqMess. After the standard aircrew misdemeanours and expected spoof postings the gents were given their fates. TW78: Dan Granger . Typhoon; Mike Highmoor . Typhoon; Karl Pilkington (Chalkers) - Tornado GR4; and Creamie Wannabe Deeno narrowly avoided 3 more years on the island and has also been posted to Tornado GR4. TW79: The ex Tucano Crewamies, Shippers and Fyvie-Rae, get to re-join their old friends on the Typhoon. From the 208 Sqn staff, a massive congratulation to all 6 TW graduates . this is no doubt the toughest fast jet training course in the World and you should proud of your achievements; as ever, the Typhoon and Tornado GR4 Operational Conversion Units (OCUs) will be impressed by the first-rate Hawk T1 graduates coming their way.

From the A Flt . Advanced Flight Training (AFT) - side of the house, our quartet of Kuwaitis on V146 course are progressing well through the navigation phase, only being hampered by the said British weather and pregnancies. We all would like to wish Capt Al-Qafidi our congratulations on the birth of his daughter in June; and we wish Capt Al-Senan our best for the birth of his first born. All Kuwaiti students will be returning home for the second half of Ramadan and Eid celebrations.

The Sqn has also re-trained a clutch of refresher students this period: Sqn Ldr Adam Collins will take on a flight commander tour on 100 Sqn, after his last tour as a British Army liaison officer; Sqn Ldr David Montenegro, who returns to be the Red Arrows Leader . Red 1 - after a flight commander tour at Linton-on-Ouse flying the Tucano; Sqn Ldr ~~Kendoq~~Kendall also returns to 100 Sqn after a 6-month out of area in Afghanistan; and, finally, Flt Lt Matt ~~Damonq~~Masters who, after 4 years flying remote controlled aircraft from Las Vegas, has decided he really needed to get airborne again for his sanity is also joining 100 Sqn. Best of luck to all of our refreshers with their next tours.

Back on TW, Stu ~~%~~Creamie+Roberts and Steve Iwanek, who enjoyed a bit of down time from flying due to the extensive TW load, managed to escape Valley for a bit of Adventurous Training (AT) and Force Development (FD). Having completed AFT in less than half the time it would have taken them on our sister Sqn, they have already completed the range phase and now look to complete their Air Combat phase in the blues skies of Cyprus (no excuses about the weather there boys!).

In the C Flt . Central Flying School (CFS) - corner, Paddy and James are now well into their TW QFI workups, starting with the Range before going on to enjoy the air defence arena which includes dog fighting. We welcome Sophie P, who joins us as a reservist from the Canadian Air Force. She has completed her conversion on to the Hawk T1 and now begins her instructor training sorties out in Cyprus.

We bid farewell to Emmet Cox, who, after moving across from Linton on Ouse, has convinced the Red Arrows he's good enough to join their team of formation display excellence.

By the time this article is published, the mighty 208 will be in Cyprus to maximise the training opportunities of uncluttered blue skies: TW80 will commence their air combat phase; C Flt TW trainee QFIs will do likewise; C Flt AFT will train Sophie in her airborne sequences; and A Flt will commence a period of staff consolidation training in preparation for the 4 UK ab-initio students on their return and several planned IDT courses in the autumn.

Despite being a small Sqn of just 14 QFIs, including the executive staff, and 6 admin/ops support staff, the efficiency of this professional, dedicated and happy team has ensured that through thorough foresight and tenacity, detachments to engage the British public at airshows and to enhance training output in Cyprus are achievable. AT activities such as the 1:1,100 000 Snowdon challenge (of which Skids has led the Squadron to 700,000 feet climbed so far); Staff Rides and Charity Bike Events have been part of a healthy work, play and home life balance.

It is with great sadness that we learnt that our good friend and ex 208 Squadron member, Dougie Mee died on 4 July 14. The Sqn Commander and his team pass on their sincere condolences to his family and friends.

208 Sqn Adventurous Training Challenges – Exercise Dover Roller

6 aircrew from 208 Sqn at RAF Valley recently completed a 400mile relay from RAF Valley to Dover over a 2 day period before heading across the channel to complete a WW1 staff ride.

The first day consisted of 9 legs from Valley to RAF Wittering, starting with an unsavoury 0630L start. The morale; although slightly hampered by drizzle / rain / wind (a standard RAF Valley day!!) was high until the Sqn's resident malcontent went sent on his leg with the Sqn's own "*Duracell Buddy*." Luckily, tempers only frayed when the support wagon made a slight navigational error resulting in the "*Happy Two*" cycling another 8 miles together.

The next few legs, which passed through Llangollen, Stoke-on-Trent and Loughborough, were pretty uneventful with the weather gods easing up as the team crossed the English border. Even with the miles adding, the team upped their pace, getting to their relay points ahead of the planned times allowing the final leg to be started well ahead of schedule. The final leg took the team passed Rutland water and into RAF Wittering for the night stop.

The second day started with a more acceptable 0800L start for the final 8 legs to Dover, which, in theory should have been an easier day, in both distance and [lack of] hills. The "*Duracell Bunny*" started the first leg with Sqn adj. a powerhouse in his own right, taking the team down to RAF Alconbury for the relay. The next stage took the team into Cambridge via the Busway. high speed bus-tramway allowing the buses to get around at ease. This cycle way was lovely and smooth (unlike some of the poor condition roads experienced on other legs) but into a strong headwind. Luckily for one member of the team, the large amount of draft cause by the other guy made most of this leg pretty easy.

Post Cambridge, it was another fast leg for "*The Bunny*", but he lost his temper after several Lorries and van drivers tried their best to remove him from the road. After that, it was a quick loading of the bikes to cross the Thames to re-start the relay at Rochester. The final legs allowed fairly good progress (except for one minor accident with the Sqn's own stuntman departing a cycle path on an extensive section of mud) to final arrive in Dover in the early evening.

With the bikes packed up and left in safe custody at Dover Police station, the team enjoyed a well earned leg stretch and relaxed evening before the early start to get to France for their WW1 battle field tour.

In total, the team completed 405 miles (a few miles more due to ~~navigation~~ navigational errors) in 17 legs with over 16000ft of height climbed in less than 24hrs of actual cycling . not a bad effort, but not quite in the league of Bradley Wiggins just yet!

Exercise Million Feet

On the other major 208 AT front: **Ex Million Feet**; ascending 1.1 million feet in celebration of the 1.1 million T1 flying hours, is now past the half way stage [mid Thermosphere if it had been a constant climb) is on target to be finished this year. The team completed the Y Garn and the Nantlle Ridge back in May - sadly Snowdon had a snowline for the last 500ft making it un-ascendable with our Mountain Leaders.

The second walk was around Carnedd Llewellyn in glorious June weather. Our IDT students, scared by their first exposure to the Welsh weather made their excuses and stayed at Valley to complete some sims. The walk up was a gaggle, with Skids leading the way whilst Sawley took up the rear. The blissful quiet was broken by a member of SARTU conducting winch training on the mountain and the odd F-15 screaming through the NWMTA. At the top, the team split in half; the gentle ramblers taking the sensible route back to the vehicles whilst the mountain leopards took the longer run down to the café. This splinter group of fell running was hampered by Neil Battersby's dog, which, after racing around all morning, vetoed the final leg resulting in Neil taking on dog carrying duties.

The latest AT day, at the end of June was the ascent of this *Great Land's* highest peak, Snowdon. Skids somehow managed to hold off the showers of rain battering the rest of Wales which meant the team completed the walk in relative dryness. Luckily on this walk, the Sqn mentalists, also known as ~~ironmen~~ ironmen had jetted off to Klagenfurt to finally complete their ~~beasting~~ competition. Without the splinter group of fell runners, the pace was reasonable for the whole day. The next AT day should put the Sqn to a height comparable with the ISS and we are well on track to complete the 1.1 Million feet before the winter storms ravage Anglesey.