

The 208 Squadron



The 208 Squadron you see today, started life on 26th October 1916 as No 8 Squadron, Royal Naval Air Service; its original role was to reinforce the Royal Flying Corps at Dunkirk.

The Squadron operated with the 5th Brigade near Amiens, flying Sopwith Pups, Nieuport Scouts and Sopwith 1 ? Strutters. On 1st April 1918, 'Naval 8' was incorporated into the newly formed Royal Air Force as No. 208 Squadron, flying Sopwith Camels on the Western Front, engaged in fighter and ground attack duties.

Towards the end of the First World War, the Squadron operated the Sopwith Snipe on deployment with the occupational forces. In November 1919, 208 squadron returned to the UK and was disbanded. It was soon to reform on 1st February 1920 at Ismailia in Egypt and was equipped with Royal Aircraft Factory RE 8s.

The Squadron began a period of duty in the Middle East, that was to last for an incredible 51 years.

In November 1920, the Squadron was re-equipped with Bristol F2b fighters for Army co-operation (AC) duties, but in 1922 was sent to Turkey for a year. The Squadron returned to Egypt in May 1930, and was equipped with the Armstrong Whitworth Atlas for pioneering work in the military reconnaissance role.

It was in this same year that the Shufti or 'Flying Eye' was approved as the unofficial squadron emblem, but it was not until 1936 that the Gizah Sphinx became incorporated officially onto the 208 Squadron badge. However, the Squadron motto 'Vigilant', adopted from the outset, was retained.

The Hawker Audax replaced the Atlas in August 1935, together with the Hawker Demon from September 1935 to March 1936. In January 1939, as war yet again became inevitable, the Squadron was re-equipped with the ubiquitous Westland Lysander.

At various times throughout World War II, the Squadron was equipped with Hawker Hurricanes, Curtiss Tomahawks and Supermarine Spitfires. During this period the Squadron was involved in operations in Palestine, Greece, Italy and, on the Western Front.

In the post-war era, until disbanding in 1971, 208 Squadron was continuously involved in the Middle East, flying operations in the Suez Canal Zone, Eritrea, Sharjah, Cyprus, Aden, Iraq and Kuwait. During this time, the Squadron flew Supermarine Spitfires,



Gloster Meteor FR9s, Hawker Hunter F6s, De Havilland Venoms and finally Hawker Hunter FGA9s.

208 Squadron was reformed on 1st July 1974 at RAF Honington, flying the Hawker Siddeley Buccaneer S2A. The Squadron became the first RAF participant in Exercise Red Flag in North America. On 1st July 1983 it moved to RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland and changed from an overland to a maritime role.

In September of that year, in support of the International Peacekeeping Force in Lebanon, the Squadron flew missions over Beirut as part of Operation Pulsator. In 1986, the Squadron's Buccaneer aircraft were

equipped with Sea Eagle anti-ship missile to enhance their maritime attack capability.

During the 1991 Gulf War, 208 Squadron took part in 'Operation Granby' as part of the highly successful RAF Buccaneer detachment, designating Laser Guided Bombs (LGB) for the Panavia Tornado and other Buccaneer aircraft.

At the end of March 1994, the Buccaneer was retired from service and, on 4th April, the Squadron moved to RAF Valley, where it was re-designated as 208 (Reserve) Squadron, flying Hawk T.Mk.1/1A aircraft.

Today the Squadron continues to operate as part of No.4 Flying Training School (FTS) at RAF Valley, training newly qualified pilots

in their final stages of advanced training, to become fully fledged combat pilots.

The badge on the tail fin of the Hawk dates from the 1930's when 208 Squadron was serving in the Middle East.

The wings denote flight, whilst the eye is that of the Egyptian god, Horus.

Together they depict the Squadron's role of Aerial Reconnaissance.

The verb 'to look' in Arabic is 'shouf', which over the years came to be pronounced 'shufti' by English speakers.

Thus, 208 Squadron came to be known as the 'Flying Shuftis'.

The 'Flying Shuftis'



*2005 Hawk T.Mk1/1A Display Pilot
Flight Lieutenant Philip Diacon*



Flight Lieutenant Phil Diacon, aged 32, is the eldest of five children. He was educated

at Wood Green school in Witney, Oxfordshire after which he joined the RAF as a sponsored student reading Aeronautical Engineering with German at Bath University.

He completed his elementary flying training on the Bulldog TMk1 at Bristol University Air Squadron before beginning Initial Officer Training at the Royal Air Force College Cranwell in mid 1995. Following flying training on the Tucano and the Hawk he was posted to the Tornado GR4 operational conversion unit and then to 12(B) Squadron at RAF Lossiemouth to fly in the strike/attack role.

During his 2 year tour Phil participated in exercises in Norway, North America, Egypt and Canada and flew missions during deployments to the Middle East.



In 2003 he completed the Qualified Flying Instructors (QFI) course and currently teaches students to fly the Hawk on 208 Sqn at RAF Valley on Anglesey.

Phil enjoys many outdoor sports including mountain biking, mountaineering, wind surfing and running.

