

Naval 8 - 208 News

The Annual Newsletter of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association



2018 Issue

Naval 8 – 208 News - 2018



NAVAL EIGHT 208 Squadron Association Committee:

President:

Air Marshal Sir Robert Wright
KBE AFC FRAeS

Life Vice-Presidents:

Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Stear
KCB CBE MA FRAeS DL

Air Cdre Ben Laite

Desmond Penrose

DTech BSc DLC CEng FRAeS FRSA

Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork MBE BA FRAeS

Chairman:

David Trembaczowski-Ryder BSc

Secretary:

Gp Capt Eugene Moriarty MA RAF

Treasurer:

Capt Rick Page BA

Membership Secretary:

Nigel Huckins

Committee:

Sqn Ldr Jamie Buckle RAF

David Gill

Sqn Ldr "Skids" Harrison RAF

Ian Ross

Webmaster:

Neil Meadows MA BSc

Newsletter Editor:

Malcolm Ward MDA BSc

Contents



3. *Naval 8 - 208 Rumbings*

The President's Foreword & Chairman's Chunter.

4. *After-Dinner Anecdotes*

A couple of tall (but true!) tales from the memories of those who attended the 2017 annual dinner.

6. *The Heyday of the Hunter*

208 Sqn Hunter pilots Ian Hall and Rod Dean recall the glory days of 208 as part of the Air Force (Middle East).

10. *Squadron Anniversaries*

The Association Historian, Graham Pitchfork, looks back at the events of 100 years and 70 years ago, on the Western Front and in Palestine.

12. *Gaza 1941*

Another extract from Sid Jefford's memoirs, this time relating to the Lysander in the desert.

13. *In Memoriam*

We bid farewell to those comrades who have passed away during the last year.

Association Update

14. *Membership & Keeping in Touch*

15. *The Annual Dinner*

A review of the Annual Reunion Dinner in 2017, plus details of how to book your place at the 2018 Dinner.

Back Page

Pictures from the 2017 Dinner.

On the Cover:

The stalwart Bristol Fighter: 208 Sqn's first post-war mount remained with the Sqn until replaced by the Atlas in 1930.



Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings

The President's Foreword

Since the disbandment of the Squadron in 2016, Naval 8/208 Squadron has now entered the third period of inactivity since its formation as Naval Eight in 1916. However, I am pleased to report that the Squadron Association remains as strong as ever. The demise of many illustrious squadrons in the Royal Air Force means that the odds are against 208 Squadron ever being reformed – but we never give up hope! There are only 2 current RAF squadrons (202 and 206 Squadrons) that were formed as Naval Air Service squadrons during World War One, although we understand that 207 Squadron has already been announced as the Lightning OCU, standing up in 2019. 201 Squadron is due to stand up as the second Poseidon P8 Maritime Patrol squadron, albeit not until 2021; perhaps there is room for another ex-Naval Air Service squadron, and so at the Air Marshals' Dinner held in the RAF Club in April to celebrate 100 years of the RAF, I presented Chief of the Air Staff with a copy of Graham Pitchfork's book, *Forever Vigilant*, as a reminder (and prompt to him!) of our illustrious history.

The Annual Reunion dinner held on 21 October in the RAF Club was a lively event despite the reduced numbers. The Chairman, David T-R, shared an anecdote on the planning and execution of the joint UK/Egyptian maritime/air Exercise Nile 90; extracts from the story appear later in this Newsletter. The story telling continued with some impromptu ditties from the assembled members. Following this successful telling of anecdotes it is proposed that members interested in recounting stories of daring-do should contact the Chairman with their offer. The anecdote should cover a time on 208 Squadron, but should try to appeal to the wider audience (spouses and partners) and not just bar room ditties. We aim to have only one anecdote telling at each reunion dinner, to allow for more time in the bar afterwards (where bar ditties are expected).

Turning to Committee matters, I am pleased to announce that Sqn Ldr Jamie Buckle was appointed as the new Hawk Chapter member. Welcome on board to Jamie, who we hope will be able to recruit Hawk members to the Association.

Finally, the Association Committee is again reviewing options for alternative locations for the annual Reunion Dinner. We have used the RAF Club for many years, but with the lower numbers we need to consider all options. A previous survey in 2007 was overwhelmingly in favour of the current venue, but it now seems timely to look again at the options. We shall report on the 2018 survey of members at the Reunion Dinner on 20 October at the RAF Club, where I hope to see as many of you as possible.



Chairman's Chunter

As noted by the President we are reviewing the location and the format of the annual Reunion Dinner as we need to keep it relevant and fresh. We are actively looking at the venue and I hope as many members as possible will have been able to complete the membership survey. The survey will form the basis for the Committee decisions on a way ahead given reduced numbers likely to attend the Reunion Dinner with the demise of an active squadron. Along with reviewing the location of the Reunion Dinner, we finished the Chapter stories in 2016 with Dave Southwood, and last year we tried a slightly new format. Many Association members have some interesting stories to tell that recall times on 208 Squadron; these stories will get lost in the mists of time if not told and recorded. The telling of stories has the added advantage of providing material for both the Newsletter and Website.

I always make a plea for articles, short anecdotes, memorabilia or pictures so that we can capture the true life and spirit of 208 for posterity. The stories we tell of the people and places are the very essence of what makes this Squadron Association such a tight community. If you have anything for the Newsletter please send your entry to Malcolm Ward. Contributions for the Website please send them to Neil Meadows.



After-Dinner Anecdotes

With the after-dinner speakers in recent years having covered the whole of the Squadron's post-war history, the Committee decided that, instead of inviting a guest speaker to the dinner, members would be given the opportunity to share stories and anecdotes from their time on 208 to take a different perspective of the spirit and characters of the Squadron. The following is a brief summary of two of the tales recounted at the 2017 dinner. A more comprehensive account is available on the Association Website.

Exercise NILE 90

The Chairman began with an anecdote from his time on the Squadron about Exercise NILE '90. At that time, Egypt had been in the sphere of influence of the former Soviet Union, but had changed its allegiance to the West. As a consequence, 208 Squadron had been tasked at the beginning of 1990 to take part in a joint maritime/air exercise with Egyptian forces. This was the first time that British and Egyptian forces had operated together; the last time that they had been 'together' was as enemies in the North African campaigns of the 1940s. The Squadron's participation had been proposed because of its long association with the Middle East, and the Squadron Commander at the time, Bill Cope, had immediately accepted.

As OC 'A' Flight at the time, and having had plenty of experience in Exercise Plans at HQ 18 Group, the Chairman had been tasked to attend the Planning Exercise in Cairo. As the main Exercise was to include some Tornado F3s and some Royal Naval surface assets, HQ 18 Group's Wg Cdr Exercises (Jeff Jefford), a Flight Commander (Mike Barnes) from No. 11 Squadron Tornado F3s, and some Royal Navy colleagues were also invited. The plan was to fly from RAF Brize Norton to Cairo using a FRADU Falcon. The first stop was in Brindisi overnight. On the next day, they flew on to Cairo International Airport, where it was suggested that they change into uniform to meet their Egyptian military hosts and the Air Attaché. The Naval element of the contingent was due to travel straight to Alexandria to begin the first part of the Exercise planning, before returning to Cairo that evening. They therefore advised their RAF colleagues to 'leave their bags on board the aircraft' so that they could all be brought to the hotel in Cairo in a single load at the end of the day.

The first 2 'lessons identified' from the Exercise were: 'don't trust the Navy'; and 'always keep your bags with you' (*Ed: The 3 RAF members of the contingent were all navigators which, of course, explains a lot!*). The Chairman and his 2 RAF colleagues were ushered through the airport and taken to the Shepherds Hotel, which had a wonderful view of the Nile but, of course, their Navy colleagues did not pitch up with the luggage. They, and the bags, stayed in Alexandria for the next 2 nights. The Air Attaché played a blinder and provided everyone with T-shirts, so the 3 RAF officers wore T-shirts with their uniform trousers, which seemed fine! The next morning, the Air Attaché escorted them to the Egyptian Air Force Headquarters and told them: "*Don't worry because, if you come to the gate, you will see an Air Force-uniformed guy, who is the sentry, but there will also be a guy in a black leather jacket. He is the guy from the Intelligence Services, and he will decide whether you can go in or not. It is irrelevant whoever you are due to see in the Air Force Headquarters; the guy in the black leather jacket will decide and, if he says no, you will not get in*". Actually, they were allowed in!

They were taken into the Air Force Headquarters and up the stairs, at the top of which was a stairwell with lots of old settees that looked as if they had been thrown out. They sat in those settees until called forward to meet an Egyptian Air Force Colonel in his office. After a few minutes of talking, a steward brought in a salver of sweetmeats. However, he had obviously let them slip, and had pushed them all back into place on the tray with his fingers. The RAF colleagues naturally felt obliged to sample one or two of the sweetmeats but, given the prevalent sanitary conditions, also felt very concerned as to whether or not the steward had recently washed his hands.

The discussion continued with the Egyptian Colonel about what was planned for the Exercise, which comprised launching from Akrotiri to carry out an attack against Egyptian ships off the coast of Egypt, followed by a simulated attack on Alexandria Harbour. Knowing that the Harbour was central to the City, the Chairman asked for the height restrictions to fly over Alexandria. The Colonel asked his Air Defence colleague, an Air Commodore, to explain. The Air Commodore looked at the Chairman as if he were a bit stupid, and then said: "*There are no height restrictions.*" The Chairman later remembered that Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian President (a dictatorship), was an ex-Air Force Air Chief Marshal. Was anybody actually going to complain if they 'grazed' over a city of 3 million people at 'nought foot six'? Probably not!

The Chairman then shared some photographs, which showed some of the sights they had seen during the small amount of 'down time' they had enjoyed between discussions with the Egyptians. There were the Giza Pyramids just down the road from the hotel, and the chaotic scenes in Cairo, particularly one roundabout, which had six exits and twelve policemen: two policemen per exit. The Air Attaché explained that everyone in Egypt was required to do National Service, and this was one way of absorbing the numbers. At the same time, all of the drivers were sounding their horns. The Air Attaché also explained that, in fact, no-one was angry, but was just 'beeping' their horns to say that "I am here." This was evident everywhere they went. Eventually, their Naval colleagues arrived, along with their clothes, and the detachment headed back to the UK. Then, in April, came the time for the Exercise itself.

A formation of 5 Buccaneers launched from Lossiemouth, stopped in Rimini en-route, and landed in Akrotiri on 6 April 1990. The Red Arrows were there doing their work-up training and, in the bar on the Friday night, Bill Cope got talking to their very-famous Japanese photographer, Katsuhiko Tokunaga, and asked if he would like to come on the Exercise, and so he did. On Saturday 8 April 1990, the Chairman, piloted by Martin 'Hoppy' Hopkinson, led the formation out of Akrotiri. They carried out the simulated attack against the Egyptian ships and then approached Alexandria Harbour, at which point Colin Buxton shouted "chaff!" over the radio. As was normal procedure, in addition to the usual chaff



Buccaneer Four-Ship Over the Pyramids.

and flare dispensers, the formation was carrying chaff in their airbrakes. During the Planning Conference, the Chairman had asked for permission to overfly the Pyramids, and this had been received on the Friday 7th April, the day before the Exercise. Therefore, after carrying out the simulated attack on Alexandria, the formation climbed to 5000 ft and headed for them, past a large military airfield near Cairo. At this point, with just one minute to go, the aircraft's Radar Warning Receivers 'lit up like Christmas trees'. The formation was permitted to fly past the Pyramids at 1000 ft (although it was not stipulated whether this was 'AGL' or 'AMSL'), and a very good set of photographs was taken by the Japanese Photographer, which later appeared in the Squadron Calendar that year (and in many other publications since). It must be noted that the No 2 in the formation was slightly out of position. This was Tim Couston, who later went on to be a very successful member of the Red Arrows!

After the flypast, the formation returned to Akrotiri via Alexandria, where more excellent photographs were taken at 100 feet over the sea. Having given this anecdote of Exercise NILE 90, the Chairman then invited other members to share their stories with the gathering.

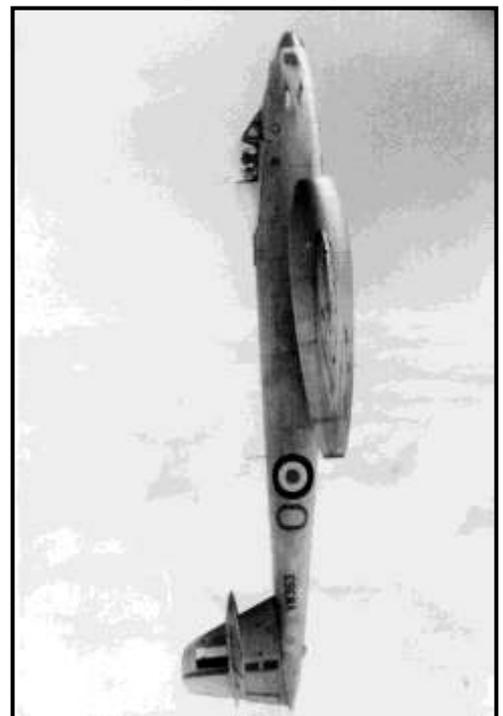
Exercise SUNRAY

Desmond Penrose recounted a story from an earlier exercise. It was 1953, Exercise SUNRAY, in Egypt. The invading force was escorted by Venoms; 208 was defending, and there was an enormous dogfight, during which Pete Greensmith on 208 was chased by the Venoms. So, he rolled over and pulled through, and the first thing that happened was that his tail fell off.

The Venom pilot did not see anybody eject. The Squadron searched for 4 days to find Pete, and couldn't find him. They couldn't even find the wreckage. So, he was presumed dead, his relatives were notified, and a Committee of Adjustment was arranged. His kit was all gathered together, or sold off so that the money could go to his relatives, and the funeral arrangements were handed over to the RAF Regiment. They provided the gun carriage, but there was no body. The family, of course, was not to know that there was no body – they had to know that it was a proper military funeral.

The RAF Regiment practised, and it was probably on the eighth day, the day before the funeral that everything was ready. However, on the ninth day, the day of the funeral, who appeared at the Guardroom, but Pete Greensmith. He had been picked up. He said that he landed in the middle of the desert, and he knew that there must be human habitation because the first thing that happened was a fly landed. He said that "if a fly lands, then there must be humans around."

The value of Pete was £25, which was given to the 3 Bedouins who brought him in. Unfortunately, the very first person that Pete met at the Guardroom was the RAF Regiment officer in charge of the burial party, who said: "*You Bastard! – You might have waited one more day!*"



Meteor FR9 in its element.

The Heyday of the Hunter

208 Sqn operated the Hunter from 1958 to 1971, exclusively in the Middle East. Here two pilots from the last days in Muharraq recount their experiences. Both stories have previously been published elsewhere and we gratefully acknowledge the authors' permission to reproduce them here.

"I'm an AFME Hunter Pilot ..."

The title stretches the truth, for I wasn't actually an 'AFME' Hunter pilot. Air Forces Middle East had ruled RAF operations on the Arabian Peninsula until a couple of years before my arrival. The withdrawal from Aden had prompted reorganisation, following which squadrons operated under HQ British Forces Gulf. But the older hands brought with them songs we used to perform in the bar late at night, amongst them the ditty whose first two lines went as follows:

*"I'm an AFME 'Unter pilot and me name is Joseph Soap,
I left the shores of UK and me 'eart was full of 'ope ..."*

We roared away the evenings at Muharraq and Sharjah with a repertoire of similar classics, keeping ourselves endlessly amused. Although, I fear, probably not amusing the other residents of those messes.

There was a custom on Hunter squadrons that no two pilots could have the same first name. Therefore, if a second Pete, for example, was posted in, he would be given an alternative name. 'Sid' was the favourite substitute, with 'Bert' following close behind. One of these (I think his real name was Dave) became immortalised in the Middle Eastern Hunter world by virtue of 'Bert's Boat' being named after him.



Number 9's view of the diamond nine flypast at Muharraq.

wheeled into his office and saluted smartly. *"I suppose I ought to say welcome,"* said he, *"but to be honest I've already got dozens like you and could well do without another one. Anyway, just for the form, welcome."* A greeting never to be forgotten. I don't recall him ever saying another word to me before he was posted half way through my tour. He was right, though, about the first tourists on his squadron, which had a somewhat unusual structure. He was a squadron leader — perhaps one of the last operational COs with that rank, for by that time most front-line units had wing commanders at the helm. The two flight commanders were flight lieutenants and they, together with a couple of QFIs, an IRE and two PAIs (pilot attack instructors — that qualification soon to be renamed qualified weapons instructors), formed the experienced cadre. The remainder of the twenty-two pilots were first-tour flying officers. This lack of balance led to the rest of the fighter force regarding the Bahrain Hunter squadrons as little more than advanced training units. There was a grain of truth in the notion but it wasn't altogether the case, for we did get involved in some limited ops.

The structure was made even odder by the fact that some of the 'top team' were also of flying officer rank. Yes, the two PAIs and the IRE (*Ed.: Paul Day, Rod Dean and Roger Wholey*). This derived from the apparent view of those three gentlemen that 'real' pilots would rather not get promoted because of the risk of being sent to staff appointments; they simply wished to keep flying. They wore their lowly rank as something of a badge of honour to show that they hadn't taken their 'B' exam. Passing that routine test would have seen them automatically promoted to flight lieutenant; it was, by the way, quite hard to fail.

Some time into my tour we got a new boss, and he decreed that all his flying officers must take the exam at the next annual sitting. Unfortunately, the exam that year was scheduled to be held at Muharraq slap bang in the middle of our annual live weapons (HE) armament practice camp at Masirah. Now this wasn't a problem for us young chaps — we were sorry to miss the APC, but there would be others. But to dispatch the Squadron on this important weapons event

without its two specialist PAIs was a big call. Because I was in Bahrain taking the exam I have no first-hand knowledge of what actually happened down at Masirah, but the bush telegraph did bring word of a couple of incidents that might have been avoided if the experts had been running the show.

Later in my RAF career we took very seriously the setting for a real or simulated operational mission. The political background would be well known to us and would be touched on briefly, followed by the intelligence situation pertaining to the particular mission. But I don't think that, on my first tour, we were at all politically aware or informed. On the odd occasions when we received an operational task I don't recall ever hearing any background to it. We knew, of course, that the UK had obligations to the Trucial States (broadly speaking, those states which would later form much of the UAE) and we were faintly aware of past unrest within the Jebel Akhdar region of Oman, the fighting during which the SAS had won its middle-eastern spurs. As far as we understood, things were generally quiet at the time we were out there,



208 Sqn flightline at Muharraq

although renegades were known still to be provoking occasional skirmishing. But for whatever reason we were, from time to time, tasked with 'flag wave' sorties from Bahrain, down across the Akhdar with a landing at RAF Masirah. I remember being awed by the spectacularly wild and rugged terrain of the Jebel, with our little Hunters being dwarfed by mountains rising to almost 10,000 feet. The vistas of agriculture being scraped out on those high, rocky escarpments were simply extraordinary. Yes, they were memorable trips. But were those flag waves designed to reassure loyal Omanis — or to deter rebel groups? What prompted our tasking on those particular occasions? Were we successful? To this day I have no idea.

Similarly, in November 1970 we deployed at short notice to Sharjah with the order to stand by for border patrols. The border in question was, I think, way down south of the Gulf between Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia — where today lies the southern extremity of the UAE. I say 'I think', because others with whom I've recently spoken recall the operating area as being up in the Musandam peninsula. Whichever way, we were issued with loaded pistols to be carried in shoulder holsters, so it must have been serious. But at whom we should have aimed our pistols had we ejected I've no idea. What exactly the problem was and who was causing it I simply don't recall — indeed I'm fairly certain that I never knew.

Ian Hall

208 Squadron 1970-71

The World's Best Vanishing Trick

Napalm has never been a favourite weapon of the RAF as far as I am aware. However, we did, occasionally, practise with the Hunter for its unlikely use by dropping two 100-gallon tanks full of water. One of the problems with practising is finding a decent target - the effect of 200 gallons of water doing 420 knots can be quite "interesting" and it would certainly have made a good anti-tank weapon in its own right. The usual targets used were 15-foot square scaffold tube frames with brown hessian stretched over the frame. These were fine for most normal uses such as gunnery and as the aiming point for rocketing or practice bombing but they would be destroyed instantaneously by a "420-knot wash." We needed something a great deal more substantial for that exercise.

On one particular detachment we had been given an allocation of 100-gallon drop tanks to use for level skip bombing; the usual method of delivery. Practice bombs were one thing but dropping a pair of 100s off the outboard pylons was going to be much more exciting. The delivery parameters were straight and level at 50 feet (minimum height 30 feet) at 420 knots. Alternatively, a shallow, 5 degree dive could be used with release coming at about 75 feet - each method was equally demanding with a fairly high "pucker" factor. I shared the "weapons man" task on 208 Sqn with the then Fg Off Paul Day, better known now as "The Major" of Battle of Britain Memorial Flight fame (or "Loins" to his real mates) - we were both flying officers with a fair amount of Hunter experience, Paul being on his fourth tour and me on my third. We were both determined to find something decent to use as a target but were at a total loss having tried every conceivable avenue. Well, it would have to be the old hessian targets after all - the range boys had better get a goodly number built as chances are that we will need a couple for each drop. It was at this stage that the Army came to the rescue - odd that, it was usually the other way round - when they asked the Sharjah MT section if they could dispose of a very large radar truck which was now surplus to their requirements.



Fg Off Rod Dean taxiing out for a range sortie. The outboard drop tanks have no fins, which made them tumble after release, thus enhancing the impact.

The MTO was a very seasoned warrant officer and he knew (because we had been nagging him) that we were on the look for something substantial and, as it appeared this might be just right, he grabbed it, quick. When Paul and I went down to see it in the MT yard we were most impressed. It was huge, reputed to weigh something in the order of 40 tons, and it was built like a brick with a massive chassis and what appeared to be armoured sides - exactly what we needed. Negotiations now opened with the MTO with a view to getting it out to the range - not an easy task. Dubai, in those days was somewhat different from now - no metalled roads, in fact no roads at all and no way of getting across the creek. The movement of the truck was, therefore, going to be a major logistics exercise over sand tracks around the end of the creek and down the coast to the range - being towed all the way.

Meanwhile, unknown to us until much later, the MTO had been approached by the local equivalent of Rodney and Del Boy who offered to buy the truck for £600 (cash only you understand) and, what is more, they would provide a clapped-out three-ton truck to use on the range as a target - smart, these boys, they even knew what we were going to use it for. The MTO being a man of great integrity, and a warrant officer to boot, told them they could stick their money followed, presumably, by the three-ton truck. He lived to regret this.

Now what, you are asking, should a pair of local wide boys want with a broken-down radar truck. Ah well, it seems that there was a lot of copper wiring in the vehicle, which was the main attraction, but I'm positive that the rest would have ended up as a bus in downtown Dubai. On the day of the move all went well for the early part of the journey, in fact until the truck and its tow truck reached the range and left the main track for the narrow access track to the range. At this point a small water tanker that had been delivering water to the range hut headed back towards the main track, head on to the radar truck. There was only room for one vehicle on the track and, naturally, it was the tow truck and radar truck combo, with their RAF drivers, that moved over to let the water truck pass (we really must stop playing cricket!) - disaster - the radar truck left the track, broke through the hard surface crust and was instantly bogged to the axles.

It was only about 800 yards to go from where we needed it but it was far too close to the road for safety and just about in line with the range safety officers' hut. It would have to be moved one way or another. The saga then commenced. Firstly, the MT drivers and the local range personnel tried digging the radar truck out so that they could pull it with the tow truck. This was not a great idea and it resulted in the tow truck also becoming bogged down. Right, on to the second plan - back to base and get a bigger vehicle. When this also became bogged desperation was beginning to set in. Eventually, the Army was called in to help, much to the chagrin of the MTO. The Army appeared with all kinds of lifting gear, cranes and winches - most of which also became bogged. But, eventually, they moved it on to the track and over the last 800 yards - success - it was now exactly where we wanted it thanks to an outstanding effort on the part of all concerned. The whole deal had taken four days.

In the evening of that day, Paul and I went down to the range to confirm that it was correctly positioned. All was well and, as a final act as the sun sank in the west, the army fixed charges to the axles of the truck and with a huge roar, blew all the wheels off it. It settled on its chassis in a great cloud of dust. Now there was a target and it would certainly stand up to a great deal of battering. Now, as the two weapons guys, Paul and I had to have first crack at the beast so next morning we were airborne just after first light, 06:30 or so, for the five minute transit to the range. We were each carrying two 100-gallon drop tanks full of water on the outboard pylons. The brief was that, with Paul leading, we would carry out pairs close formation drop of all four tanks simultaneously with me releasing my tanks on Paul's radio call. We would, of course, carry out a few dummy passes first to get the whole thing sorted out.

Over to the range frequency and contact the range safety officer.

"Here we are, be with you in two minutes to join for live tanking."

"Er, there is a problem." responded the officer.

"What kind of problem?"

"Wait till you get here."



The "420 Kt wash" - 100 gall drop tanks filled with water.

We arrived over the range at 1,500 feet or so to recce the area and sort out the run-in heading etc, but where was the target? IT HAD GONE. We could not believe it. From overhead it should have stood out like the proverbial dog's whatnots - but there was nothing in the place it had been the previous night when its wheels had been blown off - and I mean nothing. Not a piece of debris, not a wheel, just nothing except the oldest, tattiest three-ton truck you have ever seen in your life. They had pinched it - Rodney and Del Boy. But how? It had no wheels and weighed 40 tons and it was in the middle of a totally empty desert. There were no wheel, or any other, tracks around the site. It had just been spirited away. We, eventually, decided that about 1,000 of them must have appeared in the night and either cut it up on site or picked it up and made off across the desert with it. There must also have been a rear party to remove all the tracks and signs of any disturbance - most fascinating. The Dubai police were informed and they searched for any sign of the vehicle for some

time, at least a couple of weeks, with no luck whatsoever - it had disappeared from the face of the earth.



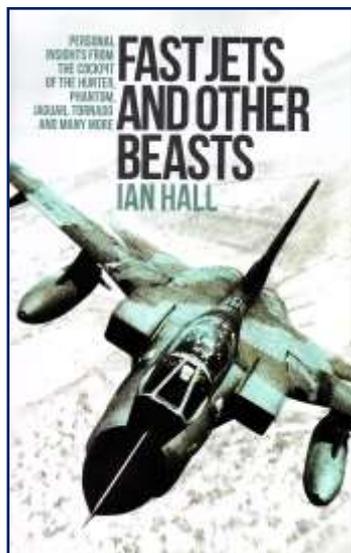
Diamond 9 flypast at the Sqn disbandment in 1971.

300 gallons of water doing the best part of 400 knots - a lot of energy - and it was most comprehensively dismantled. The body was removed completely from the chassis and deposited some 20 or 30 yards away from where it had stood. The rest of the chassis was twisted and bent beyond recognition. That will take some putting back together. It would have been interesting to see how the radar truck would have survived. Somewhat better, I suspect.

The rest of the boys had only the wreck to drop against so although it all went well, it was not quite as satisfying as it could have been. The only person who lucked out was the warrant officer MTO - not only did he have all of the effort of getting the radar truck into place but he was light by £600. That's life.

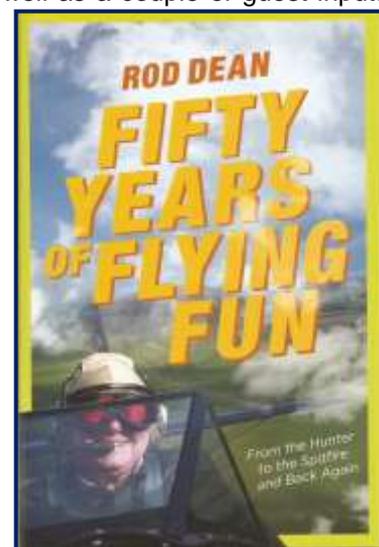
Rod Dean

208 Squadron 1969-71

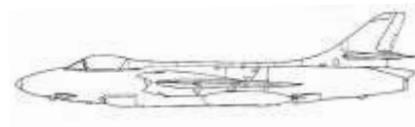


Ian Hall flew Hunters with 208 from 1970 to 71. After a career on various fighter bombers he moved to short-haul airliners. In retirement he's had six aviation-related books published: three non-fiction (*Jaguar Boys*, *Tornado Boys*, and *Goldstar Century* [the history of 31 Sqn]); and two novels (*Upwards* and *Storm at Sunset*). Ian's AFME article is an extract from his latest book *Fast Jets and Other Beasts*, which was published in 2017. Stories from the author's memory bank include tales from the Hunter, Phantom, Jaguar, Tornado and and F-5, as well as a couple of guest inputs from old friends. Also chapters, ranging from funny to poignant, on the subject of lost friends and of other RAF and allied aircraft types, as well as a sideways look at the army, the navy and life with the airlines.

If anyone can write about the Hunter, it is Rod Dean. He was a Hunter pilot in the RAF from 1964 to 1981 and later flew the type with both SOAF and as a civilian display pilot, making his last display in the Hunter at RIAT in 2002. Rod's memoirs *Fifty Years of Flying Fun* first appeared in 2015, but remain an excellent record of the work hard, play hard (and drink hardened) Air Force of that era. The *Vanishing Trick* story comprises one chapter of the book, but there is much more to interest Association members, including an account of how Rod came to lead 208 Sqn's disbandment flypast at Muharraq in August 1971. The latter part of the book is given over to Rod's civilian display flying career after he left the RAF in 1983, hence the sub-title *From the Hunter to the Spitfire and Back Again*.



Both books retail at £20 and are available from bookshops, on line or from the publisher Grub Street.



Squadron Anniversaries

The year 2018 marks two significant Anniversaries in the history of Naval Eight/208 Squadron. One hundred years ago, on the formation of the Royal Air Force, No. 8 (Naval) Squadron became No. 208 Squadron RAF whilst serving on the Western Front, where it remained in action until the Armistice in November. Seventy years ago, 208 Squadron pilots were involved in one of the last aerial combats involving RAF piston-engine fighters, when squadron pilots shot down four Royal Egyptian Air Force Spitfires.

FORMATION OF No. 208 SQUADRON 100 YEARS AGO

On the day of the formation of the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918 the Squadron received orders to re-join the 10th Wing of the 1st Brigade, RAF and move to the aerodrome at La Gorgue. The Squadron was equipped with the highly effective Sopwith Camel. Squadron Commander Chris Draper commanded the Squadron.

Early in 1918, General Erich Ludendorff, the German mastermind behind the 1918 battles on the Western front, decided to risk the entire German reserves in a final effort to break the Allied line. After the attack against General Gough's Fifth Army on the Somme, which was launched on 21 March, Ludendorff turned his attention to Flanders and an attack on the Lys Valley against the First British Army. On 9 April the Germans launched their major offensive on a twenty-five mile front between Givenchy and Armentieres. The offensive opened with a heavy bombardment at 0400 hours and two hours later the situation on the airfield was looking serious. Divisions, positioned just a few miles ahead of the Squadron's aerodrome, fell apart and retreated and a gap of 15,000 yards opened up. The situation deteriorated rapidly with shrapnel and high explosive bursting very close and fragments falling on the squadron quarters. Orders were given to evacuate the aerodrome and by 0900 hours all the stores had been loaded on to lorries and shortly after left for Serny aerodrome. Pilots stood by their aircraft ready to fly off but a dense fog prevented them taking off. The Squadron Commander took off in the worsening conditions to assess the situation but landed soon after and confirmed that general flying was impossible. Draper now found himself in a virtually impossible situation and had to make a quick decision if he was to save his personnel. He gave orders to have all sixteen Camels stacked together in the centre of the aerodrome. Once all the squadron equipment and personnel, including most of the pilots had departed, and with shells landing on the aerodrome and a complete break down in telephone communication, the aircraft were burnt in order to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. The loss of aircraft was serious at a time when every available fighting machine was required to harass the enemy's advance with low-level bombing and strafing attacks. On the 10th, Draper wrote a long letter to 10th Wing explaining his actions.



Capt W.L. Jordan, DSC & Bar, DFC

The Squadron re-assembled at Serny where three other squadrons were based. On the 11th the pilots drove to the RAF Depot at Marquise to collect sixteen Camels, but this time powered by the older 140-hp Clerget engine. The Squadron was back in action the following day and Captain W.L. Jordan marked the occasion by shooting down a two-seat observation aircraft, one of his thirty-nine victories, which made him the Squadron's top-scoring pilot. Before the end of the war, he would be the first squadron pilot to be awarded the DFC, the RAF's new award for gallantry, having already been awarded the DSC and Bar. During the latter part of July, the Squadron was again heavily involved in air fighting. Much of the action involved the outstanding Jordan and his pilots of 'A' Flight. In many respects Jordan had taken on the mantle of Mackenzie, Little, Booker and Compston, the Squadron's earlier 'Aces'. In addition to leading in the air, he had become the de facto leader of the Squadron, not only in the air but also on the ground judging by the number of times Draper delegated the more unpleasant tasks to him. By early August the Allies were able to mount a major offensive, which proved to be a turning point in the war. The Squadron moved forward and became increasingly engaged in dropping Cooper bombs in support of the ground offensive and against enemy airfields.

By mid-September the Allies had recovered all the ground lost during the German's spring offensive. In preparation for the Allied push to capture the Hindenburg Line, Germany's last line of defence, the Squadron was ordered to move south to the Somme after sixteen months with the 10th Wing. All twenty-five aircraft took off for an airfield on the western outskirts of Foucaucourt, which had previously been used by the German's Jasta 37. The Squadron moved forward again on the 26 October when it took up residence at Marez from where their offensive bombing of the retreating German troops continued, particularly in connection with the final offensive operations of the Fourth Army. Two days after arriving at Marez, the Squadron's last air combats of the war occurred. A patrol of three

aircraft led by Lieutenant Green shot down a Fokker scout. In the last few days of the month, the Squadron started to replace its Camels with the Sopwith Snipe powered by a 230-hp Bentley BR2 rotary engine, which gave it a considerable speed advantage over the Camel, which continued to be used to bomb the retreating German ground forces.

At 0630 hours on the morning of 11 November, the Squadron Commander received a telephone call from the Wing Commander telling him that the Armistice would be signed at 1100 hours. He tasked the Squadron to fly a 'line patrol' at 1000 hours keeping well on the Allied side of the line and not to be offensive in any way. It was the Squadron's final war sortie.



208 Sqn Sopwith Snipes at Donstiennes, 1918

70TH ANNIVERSARY – AIR COMBAT OVER PALESTINE

The British withdrawal from Palestine had started in the latter part of 1947 and on 4 April 1948, the Squadron had moved to the airfield at Ramat David in an enclave around Haifa in the north from which the final evacuation would take place in mid 1948. The date for the final evacuation from Haifa to Cyprus was fixed to be 22 May when the Squadron was to fly a final reconnaissance of the southern sector before departing. However, at 0600 hours the early morning peace was shattered. A Spitfire appeared overhead and dropped a bomb amongst the two rows of eight Spitfires on the hard-standing. The pilots rushed to their aircraft as a second Spitfire appeared on a strafing run damaging more of the RAF Spitfires sending the pilots for cover. Three of the Squadron's pilots immediately took off in three of the undamaged Spitfires to investigate activity over the airfields in the south of Palestine. As they returned, Flying Officers G. Cooper and R. Bowie took off to mount a standing patrol. At 0730 hours, just as three Dakotas were landing, the 'rogue' Spitfires returned and the Squadron Commander came on the R/T and told his two pilots to engage them. Bowie immediately attacked one, recognising the markings of the Royal Egyptian Air Force (REAF), and shot it down as the second dropped a bomb destroying one of the Dakotas. It escaped at ground level and Cooper closed in and shot it down.

Shortly after 0900 hours there was a third attack. Flying Officers T. McElhaw and L. Hully were patrolling over Haifa when two Spitfires attacked the airfield. McElhaw immediately engaged one at very low level as it attempted to escape. He fired three short bursts and the Egyptian Spitfire immediately flew into the ground.



Fg Off T. McElhaw in 1947



208 Sqn Spitfire FR XVIII in 1948

As he turned he saw another Spitfire, checked its markings and he and Hully engaged it. McElhaw fired a long burst and it dived into the ground. Following this frantic morning, six more Spitfires arrived from Cyprus as reinforcements. The Egyptians immediately made a public apology claiming that their aircraft had intended to attack the Israeli-held airfield at Megiddo but had misidentified Ramat David losing five Spitfires during the ill-fated attack.

The ground crew worked frantically to patch up the Squadron's Spitfires and the following day nine left for Cyprus immediately followed by the ground crews aboard Dakotas. So ended a very unhappy period of occupation as the British withdrew from Palestine and the Jewish state of Israel was proclaimed heralding many more years of turmoil in the region.

Graham Pitchfork

Naval Eight/208 Sqn Association Historian

Gaza 1941

The following anecdote is an extract from Sid Jefford's memoirs, "Two-Six." Sid served on 208 Squadron in Greece, Syria, Iraq, North Africa and Palestine for four years, throughout some of the most turbulent times of the Squadron's history. Sid, a stalwart supporter of the Association, passed away in 2016.

For the 'new hands', or those who had joined the Squadron within the last twelve months, Palestine was a 'new' experience. In looks, it was similar to Egypt or Libya but at Sunday school, we had been taught that Palestine was the land in which our Christian teachings had their beginnings. Gaza was, of course, the City in which Samson had exhibited his strength by wrecking part of it. However, although some of us searched, we could find no evidence of this. In fact, there was no temple at all among the generally squalid buildings of the town.

At Gaza, the whole Squadron was, to all intents, being reformed after the sad and deeply-felt humiliation of the Greek Operation. Just one Flight, 'B', was to retain Lysanders. The remaining Flights, 'A' and 'C', were to be completely equipped with Hawker Hurricanes as they became available. For most of the Squadron's 'old hands', the Hurricane, an aircraft that at that time was rare in the Middle East, was a 'new' piece of machinery and something to get used to and this, to their considerable pride, they did. Some of those who had recently joined the Squadron had been with units in the UK equipped with this aircraft, and were being relied on to offer support to those needing help. And this they did. Having lost all but one of the Squadron aircraft during the Greece/Crete debacle, replacements were being received from Base Maintenance Units in Egypt: not new aircraft - refurbished maybe, but well-used ones. Each of these had to go through an acceptance check carried out by Workshops. This was a very thorough check, after which it had to be flight checked by a pilot conversant with the type.

Less than five months previously, the fitters who had recently returned from their Greece / Crete experience had still been in the UK, serving with fighter squadrons, mainly using Hawker Hurricanes or Supermarine Spitfires. The recently-arrived engine fitters had all been on an intensive course on the Rolls-Royce Merlin Engine and Rotol Airscrews prior to being posted overseas. We all thought it odd to be now on a Squadron with aircraft using Bristol radial engines; that was until we were informed that two of the Squadron's Flights were to be equipped with Rolls-Royce powered Hurricanes. In the meantime, we were working with the rest of the Squadron to get it into something like its former efficient condition.

A detachment from 'B' Flight was operating from a pumping station in Jordan known as 'H4', and a signal had been received that a Lysander had been 'grounded' with an ignition problem in the form of an excessive 'mag drop', and required the help of Workshops to look into it. The two senior fitters, 'Lofty' Jones and I, were ordered to select replacement components and our tools, and to be ready at first light to fly as passengers in two recently-received Lysanders to H4 and to investigate the problem. And so it was that Leading Aircraftsmen Jones and Jefford, together with their tools and spare components, took up the rear seats of two replacement Lysanders to fly to H4. It was, for both of us, our first time in a Lysander and, as a keen 'flyer', I was very impressed with what was a large amount of 'elbow room' in the Wireless Operator/Air Gunner's cockpit. This particular aeroplane was the normal-range type, with no long-range fuel tank fitted. This made for better vision forward, with a good view of what was happening in the 'driver's seat'. Listening in on the head-set gave a fair idea of what was happening and where we were and what was

happening, especially when we were joined by a Hurricane on the final part of the trip.



Lysander under repair in the desert.

resulted in the abnormal 'drop' returning. The problem was now known to be in the cable or switch gear that, by relatively simple work by the electricians equipped with the required spares, could be overcome. And so it was. The suspect components were changed, and the resultant engine run-up and flight check were perfect.

During that day, 'Lofty' and I had been informed of a fire at Gaza that had resulted in the complete evacuation of our hut. We were flown back to Gaza on the next day, both of us squeezed into the rear cockpit. The damage to the camp could be clearly seen during our approach to the field: closer inspection showed that our hut, No 2 in a line of six, had been burned to the ground, as had Nos 1 - 3 and 4. The two remaining huts in the line were very badly scorched and charred. Tents had been erected on the Camp parade square to give 'temporary' quarters for those evicted: about a third of the ground crews. This arrangement was adequate for the present, but also interfered with other Squadron activities. My personal losses in the fire included all the mail I had recently received.

S E Jefford

208 Squadron 1941-45



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

Capt Murray Johnstone RN	Family Member <i>(son of Flt Sub Lt E G Johnstone of Naval 8, compiler of the original Sqn history)</i>		
Geoff Bradshaw	Hurricane/Spitfire	Eric Townsend	Hurricane/Spitfire
Dennis Patrick	Spitfire	Ron White	Meteor
John Barwell	Hunter	Brian Edson	Hunter
Tony Chaplin	Hunter (OC 208 1966-68)		
A R "Thommy" Thomson	Hunter		

Association Update

HM The Queen's Centenary Message to the Royal Air Force

1st April 2018 marked the centenary of the creation of the Royal Air Force, as the world's first independent air service. To honour the occasion, HM The Queen issued the following message:

"On this, the centenary of its formation, I send my heartfelt congratulations to the Royal Air Force at home and overseas, and to all of its families and loved ones.

The anniversary of the world's first independent Air Force is of great significance, and it is fitting to pay tribute to the tenacity, skill and sacrifice of the men and women who have served within its ranks over the last century, and who have defended our freedom so gallantly. Through its enduring focus on professionalism, excellence and innovation, the Royal Air Force stands as a shining example of inspiration around the World today and for the next generations.

May the glory and honour that all ranks have bestowed on the Royal Air Force light its pathway to the future, guarding our skies and reaching for the stars.

Per Ardua ad Astra.

ELIZABETH R. "

Meteor Chapter Annual Lunch

The Meteor Chapter held its annual gathering with a lunch at the Running Horse Bar in The RAF Club, Piccadilly on Wednesday, 2nd May 2018. Time continues to take its toll on those able to attend, but the lunch was a great success even though numbers were well down: we had two pilots, one groundcrew, plus a widow. Yet, there was laughter and reminiscences galore. The next gathering is on Wednesday, 1st May 2019 at 12:00 noon in the Running Horse. If you wish to take part, 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 members:

John Hall	Spitfire	Terrence Johnson	Meteor
Robert Swann	Buccaneer		

Members Lost Contact:

M Telford	Hunter	Roger Carr	Buccaneer
M Barker	Hawk	J Norris	Hawk
Andy Watson	Hawk		

Members Found Again:

Peter Turville	Spitfire/Meteor	Stuart Ager	Buccaneer
----------------	-----------------	-------------	-----------

Current Membership:

Full (in contact)	349	Honorary	3
Lost contact	73	Associate	4
Total Full Members	422	Family	6



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: Nigel Huckins

Naval 8/208 Annual Reunion Dinner

34 members and guests attended the Naval 8/208 Sqn Association Annual Dinner at the RAF Club, Piccadilly, on Saturday 21st October 2017:

Mrs J Abell, Mr M Brown, Mrs H Brown, Sqn Ldr J Buckle, Mrs C Buckle, Mr K Griffin, Mrs L Hansen, Sqn Ldr P Harrison, Mr N Huckins, Mrs S Huckins, Mr I Johnston, Mrs J Johnston, Mr C Kidd, Mrs E Kidd, Air Cdre B C Laite, Mrs H Laite, Mr N Meadows, Mrs C Meadows, Air Cdre M Milligan, Gp Capt E Moriarty, Mrs C Moriarty, Mr J D Penrose, Air Cdre G Pitchfork, Mr A Ryder-Hansen, Mr T Ryder-Hansen, Ms J Schon, Mr E Sharp, Mrs C Sharp, Mr D Trembaczowski-Ryder, Mr M M Ward, Mrs L Ward, Mr K M Whiley, Air Marshal Sir Robert Wright and Lady Maggie Wright.

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

Michael Asher, Reg Calvert, Nigel Champness, C M Draper, Alan C George, Raymond Hills, Freddie Nicol, John Pascoe-Watson, Air Vice-Marshal Les W Phipps, Brian Robinson, Iain Ross, A G Smith, Keith Trow, Peter Vicary, John White CBE and Air Cdre David Wilby.



The 2018 Reunion Dinner will be held at the RAF Club at 6.00 for 7:00 pm on Saturday 20th October 2018. The venue for our annual gatherings in subsequent years is under active review, so please let us have your views, if you have not already responded to the survey. The ticket price this year is £50 per head for the three course dinner, including coffee. Dress code, as usual, is lounge suits. Please reserve your place via the [Association Website](#) or by using the booking form below. Please book promptly and not later than one month before the dinner (*i.e. no later than 20th September.*)

Naval 8/208 Squadron Association – Annual Reunion Dinner Booking

Please return slip to the Secretary:

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

Full Address.....

Telephone: eMail:.....

I will / will* not be attending the Annual Reunion Dinner on Saturday 20th October 2018.

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: £.....

I enclose a cheque/postal order for £.....

* Please delete as appropriate

Please make cheques payable to: 208 Squadron Association

Naval 8/208 - 2017 Reunion Dinner



Left: Gathering in the bar before dinner.

Below: Graham Pitchfork, the Sqn's first Buccaneer navigator and "Skids" Harrison, one of the last Buccaneer pilots, reminisce in the bar.



Below:
The Bromet Trophy
took pride of place
on the President's
Table.



Left & Below:
The dining room
was decorated with
many pictures from 208's
glorious history, thanks to
Neil Meadows.

