

# ***Naval 8 - 208 News***

*The Annual Newsletter of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association*



***2021 Issue***



## NAVAL EIGHT 208

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Rod Dean leads the flypast at the Sqn disbandment parade, RAF Muharraq, August 1971.



# Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings

## **The President's Foreword**

At this time last year the nation was hoping that with the arrival of the Summer the effects of Covid-19 would be on the wane; we know from our bitter experience that the pandemic continues to impact upon the lives of all of us to this day. I hope, sincerely, that Association members have weathered the pandemic with the typical 208 Squadron spirit and stoicism, and more importantly that Members and their families have come through relatively unscathed. The vaccination programme offers all of us hope that everyone will be able to travel freely to visit family and friends very soon; as important is the opportunity to meet with old comrades!

I am sure many of you will have read the Government Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy with great interest. It is worth noting that the UK exceeds NATO spending commitments, with defence spending now standing at 2.2% of GDP, and that the Government intention is to move forward a modernisation programme that embraces the newer domains of cyber and space, equipping our armed forces with cutting-edge technology. But, to the dismay of many, the Royal Air Force will be retiring over 100 aircraft from the inventory; greater capability in the next decade yes, but not for now - a familiar route. Regrettably the remote chance that the 208 Squadron numberplate would be resurrected now seems an unlikely outcome, especially as there was no specific announcement as to future F35 Lightning purchases. This all serves to emphasise the importance of keeping alive the many past achievements of 208 Squadron, and the essence and character of the Squadron, through our Association. This is the aim that is at the forefront of your Committee's endeavours so well marked by this excellent (and bumper) Newsletter and for which I give, on your behalf, our collective thanks.

As you will all be well aware it was, of course, with great regret that the Association was forced to cancel the Reunion Lunch in 2020, due to circumstances beyond our control. However, the planning for 2021 is now at an advanced stage, with just the last-minute details to be finalised. All being well and subject to any changes we will have an Association Reunion Lunch at the RAF Club on Sunday 24 October 2021. I hope this new lunchtime arrangement will make it easier for members to attend and I look forward to meeting you all again - and speaking to you without wearing a face mask or too much social distancing. Stay Vigilant!

*Rob Wright*

President

## **Chairman's Chunter**

A whole year has gone by in what has turned out to be an extraordinary year. I hope and trust that Association members and their families have come through this terrible time in good shape. There seems to be light at the end of the tunnel, as long as new variants of Covid-19 don't throw us off course. I am sure most Association members in the UK have received their Covid vaccination by now; not so lucky for those of us that live abroad in continental Europe. Although I am glad to say that I received my appointment on the day of writing this Chunter for my first vaccination on 21 April - Yippee! Having had a mild dose of Covid-19 in February I hope my anti-bodies will be supercharged after the vaccination!

With no Reunion in 2020 there is nothing to report! But all being well the Annual Reunion Lunch will be held on Sunday 24 October at the RAF Club. I hope that a Sunday fixture will not inconvenience members too much and that the train timetable/Sunday maintenance will allow for a good attendance. Barring any new travel restrictions, I plan to travel from Belgium and I hope to see many of you there.

The sharp ones amongst you will notice rather a lot of Hunter pictures and stories! This is to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disbandment of 208 as a Hunter squadron. These great stories embrace the life and times of 208 Squadron in the late 60s and early 70s; a really good read.

In this newsletter I recount the story of when I pulled the ejection seat handle, but didn't end up with a Martin-Baker tie (read the full story later). I am sure many of you have interesting stories or anecdotes to share, so please get the keyboard out and get typing. Most importantly the story should capture the spirit of life on 208, or just be a funny incident worth recounting.

You will see that we have expanded the 2021 newsletter to 20 pages from the usual 16. This comes at a little extra cost, but it is well worth the extra pages to celebrate our Hunter brethren in a suitable manner. The general financial situation of the Association remains sound, with around just over £2200 in the account. At the current rate of expenditure (mostly newsletter printing and postage) we have around 4 - 5 years to cover costs. As you are aware membership is free and we have no regular income to meet running costs for the Association, thus any donations are most welcome.

*David Trembaczowski-Ryder*

Chairman

# Hunter Formations

We're all aware of the unique 22-Hunter loop, the largest formation ever looped. When George Ord was on his second tour on 208 Squadron, as boss this time, Iain Ross remembers chatting to him about this: George showed him his log book, which had pages of the same thing: 2, 3 or 4 sorties each day, each sortie of only 15 or 20 minutes, and every one saying "Close formation, looping". Hard work and sheer dedication created a record that has lasted since 1958. Roger Hymans, a future 208 flight commander, was also in the display team, as a flying officer. Iain continues the story, with thanks to those named, Paul Kelly and the Air Historical Branch. (Editor's note: this is a shortened version of the original article, which appears in full on the Association Website.)



36-ship, RAF Chivenor Air Day in 1971 - Crown Copyright, Ministry of Defence.

For the Air Day on 23 August 1969, OC Flying Wing, then Nigel Price, led a 27-ship of Hunters, with each squadron on 229 OCU (63, 79 and 234) putting up a diamond 9, to create a vic of diamond 9s. In the summer of 1969 the whole of 229 OCU detached to St Mawgan for about 3 months while Chivenor's runway was being resurfaced. Nigel decided that the Hunters should leave and arrive in style. By then Roger Hymans had moved from being a flight commander on 208 to being a flight commander on 234, and although he doesn't remember the exact number of aircraft involved, it was all the serviceable Hunters that Chivenor could muster. Nigel's briefing was that they were to fly at low level and visit as many holiday beaches they could find in Devon and Cornwall. One pilot asked what was the minimum altitude authorized. "Next question," said Nigel.

Dave Stanley and I were students on 234 at the time, and we remember watching the take-off. All the aircraft lined up on the runway at the same time, with the leader having to use a lot of Chivenor's 6,000ft runway to let everyone on. In those days formations had to stream at 10-second intervals, singletons at 5-seconds, high-low. I recall it being a calm summer's day using runway 27, and watching the rather scary wing-drop from almost everyone after the first few aircraft, due to the amazing turbulence in the slipstream and jetwash, and that the low people didn't have much room over the barrier. Dave remembers that the take-off was in three-ships, perhaps fours, although we were usually in pairs, and that one aircraft ended up in the barrier. Nigel's RT call was, "Don't just sit there, go and get another one." Roger remembers the Hunters arriving in low-level battle formation in fours at St Mawgan, a sight never before seen at what to us was a very sleepy Nimrod base. The Station Commander there, still of Coastal Command, was in the tower, and asked if this was how the recently formed Strike Command's Hunters normally arrived. He was assured that this was indeed SOP - it wasn't that long since these pilots had been in Fighter Command - and thus was set the tone for the flying on the rest of our time at St Mawgan. We enjoyed that detachment, different from North Devon, but still a delight.

I was reminded of the 22-Hunter loop when Pete Jones, Roger's successor as 208 flight commander, sent this photo of a 36-ship, which was performed at the RAF Chivenor Air Day on 7 August 1971. Eric Sharp, also ex-208, was the senior of the three squadron commanders on 229 OCU, so he had to be deputy lead. Instead of leading his squadron he had, to his disgust, to fly as No 2 to OC Flying Wing, Ian Worby. Pete had the pleasure and honour of leading the 12 aircraft from 234. There were actually 40 Hunters airborne for this, as there were 2 airborne spares, and 2 FR10s doing the whipping and of course taking photos. The photo was taken on a practice on 5 August 1971.

Going back to earlier years, for the Air Day on 18 August 1970 Ian Worby led a 32-ship, two sets of four box-fours. The initial join up was as 2 x diamond 16s with the back 16 approaching with slightly too much overtake, enough to result in an early split off of the individual 4-ships, so that they could try again to take up their new positions. Pete wisely recorded the names, with other 208 members being Dave Ainge, Dick Howard and Eric Sharp. Of those who have left us, I recognize as ex-208 John Metcalfe and John Swain.



RAF Chivenor Air Day in 1970: 32-ship (2 sets of 4 x box fours).

William Lonergan has a photo from the last Air Day before the move from Chivenor to Brawdy on 2 August 1972, when he was flying in a 36-ship making a formation for 229 OCU. Roger Hymans led 63 Squadron in their "2". William says, "After we had all done our individual number practice, Ian Worby decided to fly the big 229. As we overflew Chivenor the formation was photographed from the ground, great so far. When we got back into the briefing room there was a beautiful picture of a 229 formation but in mirror image. Oops! Ian Worby had seen a perfect 229 but from 3,000 feet above the formation. A quick conference with the squadron commanders and we got it the right way up later in the afternoon." Nick Spiller was in Roger's formation: "What I remember most is the take-off and recovery, very sporting – the formation bit was far less exciting. There were 40 aircraft on the runway, only 6,000ft, so the lead pairs had about 4,000ft ahead of them and the rear end were in such foul air that we had to go to 100% oxygen to be able to breathe. The engines definitely did not appreciate air that had already been through dozens of engines. JPTs were all over the place. Goodness knows what we would have done if anyone had aborted their take-off as there were at least 3 or 4 pairs behind already charging down the runway and all scraping off the end." They had a lot of fun practising, and Nick remembers that the break and landing were interesting. Amazing how many Hunters you can land in a compact stream on a 6,000ft runway. "I forget the exact numbers on the recovery but I do recall that when I called 'Finals, three greens', ATC responded with something like 'Clear to land, 4 ahead and 17 on the runway.'" Rick Willey was a student on 79 Squadron when there was a 28-ship flown as part of Chivenor celebrating its Freedom of Barnstaple. When he and his wife were watching the landing, they saw the combination of some with brake chutes and some without. This led to one or two aircraft overtaking the aircraft ahead, in spite of what was clearly heavy braking. They both thought there was going to be a pile-up on the runway. Interesting indeed.



Air Power Demo, Aden 1967: 16 Sea Vixens, 12 Buccaneers and 27 Hunters.

supposed to abort. Doug was near the back of the huge formation along with guys like Dai Heather Hays. All went well until it came to flying down Ma'ala Straight, because while the Navy at the front were flying at a reasonable height they might just have forgotten those at the back. Doug felt as though he was flying amongst the chimney pots, and afterwards some of the formations overflew the carriers.

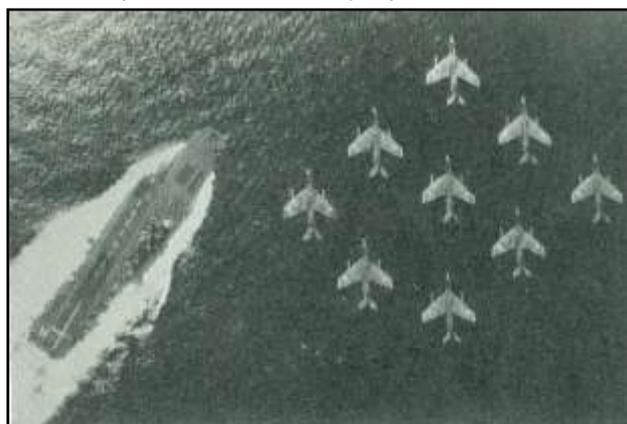
James Heath remembers that the roll-out to overfly one of the carriers didn't go exactly as planned, which led to some chatter with the FR10 doing the photography. Suddenly, on the RT came: "This is Mother here, would you like me to move?" Inter-service co-operation at its best. Tom Eeles was on secondment to HMS Victorious, and he was invited with the Fleet Air Arm crews to the Mess at RAF Khormaksar that evening. All assembled had a fine celebration - not quite the words he used. The Hunter pilots were invited back on Victorious the next night and Dai celebrated so well - again not an exact quote - that he found a cabin to sleep in, and nearly got taken back to the UK. Luckily for him, a boat was found to take him ashore just before the ship pulled up the anchor and left Aden for Malta.

Great fun. Amazing photographs, with formation sizes that we'll not see again.

Lastly on big formations involving 208 and Hunters, Pete Sturt and Doug Marr have shots of a 55-ship on 17 May 1967 to impress the Aden locals of the might of British power. That's the Fleet Air Arm's 16 Sea Vixens leading 12 Buccaneers, followed by 27 Hunters of 1417 Flight and 8, 43 and 208 Squadrons. There were 3 spares and 2 whips, a total of 60 aircraft. Pete was seconded in 1967 to 809 Squadron, flying Buccaneers from HMS Hermes, and he says: "We joined forces with HMS Victorious, which was now on the way home, and flew past Khormaksar with a mixture of Sea Vixens, Buccaneers and resident Hunters. The flypast was nearly a disaster when the lead Sea Vixen crew from Victorious, who probably had never led anything larger than a four ship, thought that we were 30 seconds early and suddenly with little warning slowed down from 350kts to 300kts. The cumulative effect on the formations especially at the back end was interesting to say the least. We eventually all got back, sort of together, as we overflew Khormaksar."

Doug was on exchange from 208 to 8 Squadron, to get some experience of their flying; at the time they were still flying operational sorties up country. For this big Air Power Demo, 208 flew down to Khormaksar to join Strike Wing. Doug has the press cutting. He remembers spending an inordinate amount of time in the cockpit on the ground waiting to taxi out, in his case 45 minutes, which was unheard of in the heat. Indeed, I seem to remember that in my time at Muharraq if you weren't airborne

within 15 minutes of strapping in, you were



HMS Hermes at speed.

Iain Ross

208 Sqn 1969-1970

# Muharraq Memories

I arrived in Muharraq 50 years ago (!) on the once-a-week Thursday VC10, 'Moon rocket', named thus because it delivered newly arrived 'Moonies' (referring to the colour of their knees). On the aircraft with me were Sqn Ldr Bill Stoker, the new CO of No. 8 Sqn, Bob Iveson who was also going to 8, and Derek North and Roger Hyde to join 208. We were the last to complete a Day Fighter Ground Attack course at Chivenor on the Hunter and as my surname began with a W, I have always considered myself the last first tourist to go to a front line Hunter squadron!

We were met from the aircraft by John Barrow, an old mate, and whisked off to the bar where it was traditional to be introduced to the senior leadership of the squadron. The following day we discovered that amongst others, the scruffy 'junior' officer who was a bit worse for wear in the corner the previous evening, was actually the Boss, and the 'Boss' was actually the Ground Liaison officer etc etc. I'm not quite sure why, I suppose because of the inevitable delays to the introduction of the Harrier and the F4, but the RAF were not short of pilots coming out of training at the time and as a result we were quite a large squadron with 22 pilots and 12 Hunter FGA9s (plus the odd 2 seat T7).



Hunter "A" flown by Stu Eastwood during a detachment to Masirah.

Only the Boss, flt cdrs, sqn QFI and PAI, could be accompanied, and only then if they were over 25, as we were not meant to get married younger than that and there was no support for having other wives in theatre. We were a pretty happy bunch, who wouldn't be, with a great aircraft and fantastic flying. But there was a bit of a rift I seem to remember between us (very) junior pilots and the squadron hierarchy, probably because there were too many of us.

208 had a well-deserved reputation for aircraft serviceability, which was the envy of our colleagues on our sister squadron (No. 8) on the base. Typically for units in the Middle East, we had an early start each morning. We normally achieved two waves of flying each day and then stood down to the Mess in the early afternoon when it became too hot. Then it was a few refreshing cold beers before covering ourselves in sun tan oil and going to lie in the sun by the officers' pool for

a couple of hours. Thereafter, the normal routine was to kip for an hour perhaps and then meet up in the bar before dinner. There was little else to do and John Barrow and I spent many an evening playing snooker. The meals were OK, but there was obviously not a lot of fresh food, even the eggs were injected with some sort of preservative. I seem to remember that I lived on a diet consisting mainly of locally caught prawns.

Early on in the tour, most of my flying seemed to focus on high level battle formation which I found quite taxing, operating towards the edge of the aircraft's flight envelope. I then moved on to low levels, pairs strikes, medium level combat etc. Our normal operating area was southern Qatar at medium level down to the south east, staying out of Saudi Arabian airspace and then out over the desert to the east, down south as far as what was known as the Liwa Hollows; the dunes on the Saudi border with what is now the Arab Emirates, south of Abu Dhabi. There was at least one RN frigate in the area and we supported them flying practice interceptions at high level under their radar control, used them as targets for anti-ship attacks, and occasionally, they would tow splash targets for us to fire high explosive ammunition against. Every so often we would deploy to Sharjah to practise weapon delivery on Rashid Range at Jebajib, located about 40 miles south west of Sharjah down a rudimentary beach track. It was less than a mile from where the famous Palm Jebel Ali Hotel has since been built in Dubai. Back then, Dubai was a small town with, I seem to remember, just one small hotel and a shopping arcade. This was quite different to Muharraq, a very basic airfield built originally for civil traffic. The airport and the Rest House were built in the form of a fort (Al Mahatta Fort built by the Sheik in 1932) to protect travellers en route to India with Imperial Airways and latterly BOAC against the possibility of attacks from the Bedouin. We were accommodated in aluminum huts and the only point for gathering outside work was in a couple of sandy quadrangles outside the huts and the Officers' Mess. Clearly there was no TV or radio, so most of our evenings there seemed to consist of drinking cold beer and singing a variety of squadron songs – not least because the boss aspired to be an opera singer. There was an outside cinema on base where the NAAFI showed the occasional film in the evenings. Otherwise, we would gather a gaggle of motorbikes and head into Dubai for a drink in the one hotel there or very occasionally, hire a dhow for some fishing in Dubai creek. The Squadron was befriended by a locally employed Englishman who had a bungalow with a pool which he allowed us to use – I think he was glad of some company, albeit occasionally a bit boisterous!

On the range we practiced air to ground gunnery with the Hunter's 4 x 30mm Aden canons, 68mm SNEB rocket attacks and 3<sup>rd</sup> dive bombing with 4lb bombs simulating the dropping of 100 gal tanks of napalm from the outboard pylons. The targets were usually 15ft square hessian screens for strafe and a circle of oil drums for rocketry and bombing. The pilots took turns to act as Range Safety Officers (RSO), setting off to drive the one and a half to 2 hours to the range in Landrovers. It was just a sand road that had frequent very deep potholes that could (and did often) stop and contain a vehicle! On one occasion, one of our number was delayed reaching the range, and arrived just in time to clear a circling formation to join for strafe without carrying out the normal range safety checks.

Luckily the first live pass missed the target and the group of local Arabs who had been sheltering in the shade behind the hessian targets managed to affect a rapid, if undignified, hasty retreat! On exceedingly rare occasions, instead of dropping the 4lb bombs, some of us were allocated a pair of 100 gal tanks filled with water to drop on the range against more realistic targets. The ground crew took great pleasure in painting the fuel tanks in the squadron colours for their last flight! It was a very hot and sweaty environment in the cockpit, and pilots were working quite hard to get the parameters correct for their delivery with a minimum release height of 35 feet at 450 knots. On one dry pass, Derek North was lucky to survive when his damp leather flying gloved hand slipped off the control column as he initiated his 4G recovery. The RSO was horrified to see his aircraft virtually disappear behind the 15ft screen and very relieved to see it reappear out of a cloud of dust as it staggered to regain height back in to the circuit pattern! Once in a while more realistic targets were provided, such as the 25-ton truck that was gifted by the army to be 'bombed'. It took a very considerable effort to get this vehicle from Sharjah to the range. Finally, after hours of effort, at the end of a very long day, it was placed in position for the following morning's range detail. As a precaution, it was decided to cut all the axles on the truck so no one who might be so inclined, could tow it away. Suffice it to say there was a lot of head scratching when the range team arrived early the following morning to find the vehicle had not only disappeared but had done so without leaving a trace of how or where it had gone!

The flying was superb with minimal restrictions: in UK, the minimum height we could be cleared down to for practising air to air combat was 5,000 feet; with experience out there we were cleared down to 250 feet! There were of course few navigation features in the desert regions, but there were camel train tracks, which were reasonably reliable, a few very small oil installations and oases, and some well-known and accurately plotted oil drums. It was not unusual to come across the occasional Bedouin alone on his camel in the middle of nowhere! Indeed, as we relied on the mark one eyeball and a very inaccurate barometric altimeter, it was difficult to judge exactly how high we were above the desert when navigating across miles and miles of featureless sand – sometimes one would come across either an exceptionally large camel or discover one was flying very much closer to the sand than intended!

Prior to 1970, the Labour Government under Harold Wilson had decreed that the UK would pull all its forces back from locations East of Suez. When the Conservatives came into power, they planned to reverse this policy, but I think the plan was by then too close to fruition. In August 1971, the Emir of Bahrain reiterated his nation's independent status and it was decided that British Forces should leave Bahrain in September. Rumours were rife about our future and it was eventually made clear that 208 would disband and myself and a few of the other pilots would join No. 8 Sqn which would redeploy to Sharjah in September of that year; the remainder would be posted back to the UK.

The No. 208 Sqn disbandment parade was held at Muharraq on 21 Aug 1971 on the flight line outside the Squadron building. The Political Resident, His Excellency Sir Geoffrey Arthur, took the Royal Salute as a diamond nine of Hunters lead by Fg Off Rod Dean flew over. Shortly thereafter the Squadron Standard and silver were returned to the UK and taken to RAF Cranwell awaiting the unit's reformation. The Hunters left Muharraq for Sharjah where they operated whilst awaiting orders to return to the UK. We flew frequent recce sorties/flag waves over the islands of Greater and Lesser Tunbs belonging to Ras al-Khaimah and Abu Musa to Sharjah, at the entrance to the Gulf. However, on 30 November (the day before British Forces formally left the Middle East) we were stood down for a short period during which the islands were seized by Iranian forces!

So this was where we spent our last few weeks before returning home. I had a lucky escape at the end of October; during takeoff for a solo sortie, I was just starting to raise the undercarriage after I had lifted off, when the fire warning light illuminated in the cockpit. Luckily, I was able to put the aircraft back down on the last few feet of runway remaining, I missed the runway approach lights by pure chance, sunk into the sand and rapidly came to halt! I moved the switch to electrically roll the canopy open, unstrapped and went to jump out of what could have been a burning aircraft; unfortunately, the automatic crash switches had operated and as I got to my feet I banged my helmet into the cockpit canopy which hadn't moved as a result! I manually opened the hood and went to jump down to the ground, only to find myself still connected to the ejection seat by the emergency dinghy lanyard. By this time, a fire truck had arrived and a Landrover ambulance – it was clear the aircraft was not in flames, and I was bundled off to the medical centre by some of the more senior squadron pilots who wanted to help me get my story straight before the inevitable investigation! It seems there had been a small fuel leak towards the rear of the aircraft, where fuel had collected at the bottom of the fuselage because a drain hole had become blocked. The fuel had ignited and caused sufficient heat to activate the fire warning system. Although the aircraft had suffered quite a bit of damage, there was no way it was going to be left at Sharjah when we left for home so, despite the lack of a deep servicing facility, the engineers did wonders sorting out most of the issues, although the aircraft did demonstrate one or two 'unusual' traits on the final trip back home later.



Hunter "H" in the overrun at Sharjah, after a fuel fire in 1971.

Throughout the last 10 weeks at Sharjah, there were rumours and counter rumours about the date we would depart, the Squadron finally set off a week or two before Christmas via Tehran, Diyarbakir in Turkey, Cyprus and Malta – and that is another story in itself!

*John "Chalks" White*

208 Sqn 1970-71

# A Flying Engineer

Not long after I joined 208 Sqn in Aden as the Engineering Officer, I had the temerity to tell the Hunter Wg Cdr that I could find nothing wrong with the weapons system of the 208 Sqn 2-seat Hunter, having ground tested it and found it serviceable. As he had previously got airborne with the Khormaksar Stn Cdr, where neither guns nor rockets fired, he was not impressed with my statement, and having noticed that I was wearing wings, retorted: "Get your kit on, and we'll see about that." So, I flew my first sortie in a Hunter on 27 January 1964 on a gun and rocket training sortie. We taxied out quite normally, but I was surprised when the Wg Cdr pulled out a pair of glasses and put them on. Once airborne, he informed me that he wasn't going to waste range time and was going to try to fire a rocket out to sea. He did the checks and "whoosh" a 3 inch concrete-headed rocket disappeared out to sea. We duly turned and went to the range, fired the rest of the rockets, and emptied the Aden gun. Having only flown flying training aircraft and Canberras, I thought we got awfully close to the ground during these ground attack dives.



208 Sqn, Muhharaq, 1965. Back row, L to R: Fg Offs Wright, Watson, Lonergan, Marr, Davies, Haddock, Howick-Baker. Front row, L to R: Fg Offs Day, Wakling, Henson, Flt Lt Young, Wg Cdr Rhodes (OC 208), Flt Lts Maitland, Grant, Eastwood, Fg Off Tamlin.

In March 1965, I had my one and only sortie in the Hunter single-seat FGA 9. I flew for 45 minutes, apparently checking that the ailerons worked correctly. I gave air experience to a total of 15 sqn technicians, 3 army officers, and 2 non-sqn RAF officers during the rest of 1965. Sometime during the year, the Sqn Cdr decided that as I was flying so regularly, I would have to take the Hunter Simulator and Emergency (HSE) Course, so in July 1965, I arrived at RAF Chivenor in Devon. It caused much consternation as I had never passed through their clutches, and how could I be a Hunter pilot if I hadn't been through their conversion course? It proved to be horrendous for me, cooped up in the dark of a simulator. The Sqn had only allowed me to fly in clear blue sky, and NEVER at night. However, I didn't crash but I certainly went up and down at unusual intervals. My log book shows that between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> July 1965, I flew nine 1 hour simulator sorties, and carried out 2 successful ejections.

By this time I was probably flying in the 2-seater more than anyone. I was being used as safety pilot for squadron pilots practicing for their Instrument Rating Tests (IRTs). If it wasn't being used for pilot checks, I would ask to take technicians flying. During the year the pilot who had his name on the side of T7 went home. On enquiring as to whose name I should paint on, there was a reluctance by the junior pilots to commit. They were all waiting for single-seaters to become available. While they were dithering, I wheeled the 2-seater away, and had my painters put my name on. I put ENG OFF underneath, so as not to offend the pilots too much.

I left the Sqn in December 1965 with 51.30 Hunter flying hours, together with 9 Hunter simulator hours. My total flying time was 478.50 hours. As was often pointed out to some junior pilots on the Sqn, "the bloody engineer has got more flying hours than you have."



Fg Off A O Wright, Eng Off



Andy Wright

208 Sqn 1963-1965

# Disbandment Flypast - 1971

The following article is an extract from Rod Dean's memoirs "Fifty Years of Flying Fun", which were reviewed in the 2018 newsletter. The book is a highly entertaining read: it is available at £20 from the publisher [Grub Street](#).

Most of 1971 was spent trying to bolster the squadron fund for the inevitably expensive disbandment that we knew was looming towards the end of the year. The sale of substantial amounts of whisky at an outrageous price, during a detachment to Pakistan, had certainly helped in that respect. The parade took place on 21 August 1971 and I was fortunate enough to lead the flypast by a diamond nine of Hunters. Originally, Roger Wholey was going to lead it because his uniform was not fit to go on parade, but he got hepatitis and was grounded. My uniform was little better after three years in Bahrain, so on that basis I got to lead the flypast.

I led in a T7 (XL613) and the other eight, all but one from 8 Squadron (see, they have their uses after all) were in single seat FGA9s. The ample power available in the 9 over the T7 was to prove very useful, as will be recounted now. At the time we had a young pilot straight off the Jet Provost, Pilot Officer North, holding with us prior to advanced training and he flew with me in the T-bird to assist with the navigation and timing. We had to do two flypasts; one as the Reviewing Officer arrived at 1800 local time and the second one as the Squadron Standard was abeam the Reviewing Stand on the March Past. Timing, as ever, was to be critical if the event was to look good. Getting the 1800 overhead was straight forward, assuming the Reviewing Officer – Sir Geoffrey Arthur KCMG, the Queen's representative in the Persian Gulf – was on time; which, on the day, he was.

The second flypast is clearly more problematical depending, as it does, on a number of variables most of which hinge around the speed at which the Reviewing Officer carries out his inspection and gets back to the Reviewing Stand. In order to get the timing right we needed a series of accurate time checks and for this we used our tame "Pongo" from the Ground Liaison Section, an army Major with what proved to be very little brain! There were two time checks of which the "Quick March" as the Squadron started the march past was the accurate one – we knew exactly how many seconds it took from that point to the flag being alongside the dais. However, in any flypast hold, basically a trombone shaped pattern, there is a sector when, should you be in it at the "Quick March," there is little that can be done to get on time; you are too close to slow down effectively and a 360° turn will make you so late you will never catch-up. Consequently, there is a need for a "gross check" on the timing to ensure that you stay out of this sector by shortening or lengthening the trombone. In my case, this was when Ian Dick gave the salute at the end of the inspection. All we therefore needed to hear from our GLO over the radio was "Sword down now" and "Quick march now." All the practices (flown with only the T7) went well and the Major did his bit to perfection – "Sword down now" followed some moments later by "Quick march now" enabled us to get the timing pretty well sewn away! What fools.

On the day it all changed. Firstly, the Major got a nasty attack of runaway brain (such as it was) and instead of giving just the two short transmissions that were required (and which he had done through all the practices) he gave us a BBC style running commentary including what the Reviewing Officer's wife was wearing! Added to this, it sounded from the commentary as though the inspection was going "at speed." This subsequently proved to be correct – Sir Geoffrey Arthur KCMG seemingly sprinting around the inspection and not stopping to look at, let alone talk, to anyone. Unfortunately, because we could not get a word in edge-wise thanks to the Major's continuous transmit it took some while to confirm this. When at last I could speak I asked "Have we had the Sword Down yet?" "Oh yes. About 10 seconds ago." was the response. A groan from North – "We are going to be right in the middle of the no-go area and it is too late to correct." Then, in the background to the commentary, the sound of marching feet (thank god we still had hobnail boots in those days). Again, when I could speak – "Have we had the Quick March yet?" "Oh yes, a few seconds ago and the boys are doing really well etc. etc."



Bang on time! Fg Off Rod Dean leads the final Hunter flypast.

At this, North threw the map away. "We are screwed. We are way early but a 360° will just make us too late to correct it." Damn. Let's see what these 8 Squadron boys can do? "Hang on guys." I transmitted. "We are going to do a steep 360° turn, which will put us late, and I will then leave full power on and see what that does for the timing. Going hard right now."

The timing – by absolutely pure luck – was spot on. We were doing well in excess of 500 knots, about 530-540 if memory serves, at 500 feet and everyone on the ground said it was magnificent; nine black lines with a thundering Hunter on the front of each. Given that I had forgotten to get everyone to bring in the 10° of flap that we all had out – we thought we would be at about 300 knots – nobody had anything much in the way of pitch control and the whole formation was just locked together. Great.

The party that night was also great (except for the Major's debrief which was quite "pointed").

*Rod Dean*

208 Sqn 1969-71

# The Time I Pulled the Handle

David T-Ryder shares his recollections of the day when he pulled the bang seat handle, but didn't go through the roof.

208 Squadron transferred from RAF Honington to RAF Lossiemouth in July 1983 and changed role from Overland Strike/Attack to Maritime Strike/Attack. I flew from Honington to Lossie on 18 July 1983 with, the newly promoted, Sqn Ldr Jules Flood. To help the "old" overlanders remaining on 208, a number of crews were posted from 12 Squadron to teach us the maritime ropes and, thus, began the long journey for the Squadron to be declared in the new role. By May 1984, the Squadron was proficient in maritime tactics having practised Alfa 3s, Sierra 1s, Pavestrike tactics, MACEXs, and dropped numerous practice bombs at Tain and Rosie, as well as on splash targets and was preparing for the final declaration of 208 Squadron to NATO in the Maritime Strike/Attack role on 1 July 1984. The work-up was interrupted by Operation PULSATOR (the subject of previous stories) from October 1983 to March 1984. In the final stages of preparation for the formal declaration to NATO, the Squadron programmed several six ship sorties composed of a short low level overland transit then out over the Moray Firth or North Sea for practice Maritime Tactics. One of those sorties was a six-ship planned with an overland route through the Western Highlands followed by a simulated Alfa 3 attack in the Moray Firth on an unsuspecting trawler/ship. On that sortie, I was flying as Number 3, with the USAF exchange pilot – Captain Robin "Gary Golden Hands" Hanson. Somewhere to the south west of Inverness heading north, lead and number 2 deviated from track and headed north east down the wrong valley. I said to Robin that lead and number 2 had gone off track, but it was okay as we would meet them back on the timeline further up route.

Little did I know that meeting on the timeline almost resulted in a head-on mid-air to the west of Inverness. The weather was fine with good visibility and a cloud base well above the mountain tops. As we crested over a ridge I caught out of the corner of my eye an aircraft heading directly towards us. I shouted "push" to Robin. We saw a Buccaneer go directly over the top of us and clear us by a whisker. After the strong push down Robin did a snap pull up as we were pointing our pink bodies towards the ground at a rapid rate of knots. Subsequently, number 2 (Carl Wilson was in the back seat), which was across the far side of a valley, told us that he saw our aircraft flick violently several times. During the ensuing negative and positive G (minus 3-4 and plus 7-8 ish) I thought we had pulled the tailplane off or we had lost control, so I pulled the



Typical highland terrain

bang seat handle. BUT during the heavy negative and positive G, I had not pulled hard enough (*more spinach needed!*) and suddenly we found ourselves straight and level. I looked in the mirror and saw that the tailplane was, indeed, still attached to the aircraft, and I thought I might as well stay with the aircraft. Robin declared to the formation that we had overstressed and that we were heading back to base.

During the transit at about 2000 ft to Lossie I told Robin that my bang seat handle was dagging between my legs and to fly back to base as smoothly as possible. We alerted air traffic that we had a problem with an ejection seat and would need to park in a safe place and we would need an armourer to meet us. On finals I reminded Robin to make his landing the smoothest ever – which he duly did. Now came the tricky bit. On shut down we discussed how we would exit the aircraft, bearing in mind my seat was very much live and I didn't know if standing on the seat to climb out of the aircraft would activate the ejection sequence. The most concerning element for me was that the canopy cross member would sit directly above my head when motored back. Robin jumped out first and with all my pins in, except the seat-pan handle, I climbed out very gingerly. Both of us were quite grey. The armourer made the seat safe, noting that there was less than ½ inch before the seat would have fired.

We walked in to brief the authoriser on what had happened. After a coffee to calm down, we waited for the other crews to walk in, to tell them why we had overstressed. In hindsight it was clear that Robin and I should have jettisoned the canopy on finals, as this would have saved me a few missed heart beats on closing down the aircraft and motoring the canopy back. Also, it is difficult to say whether I would have made it alive if I had pulled the ejection seat handle harder, as the terrain was very rough and mountainous; I could easily have been battered against the mountain side. But I am still here to tell the story!

"There, but by the grace of God, go I."



David Trembaczowski-Ryder

208 Sqn 1981-1984 & 1988-1990

## Three Centuries

Three of 208 Sqn's veterans celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays last year. They received birthday cards from the Chief of the Air Staff and other surprises on their big days.

**Raymond Hills** joined 208 Sqn at Heliopolis, Egypt in February 1940. He served as a mechanic, working on Lysanders. Raymond celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in Bridlington on 22 July 2020, with Betty his wife of 71 years, their son Raymond Jnr and their daughter Jane. The Association sent him a copy of *"Forever Vigilant"*, Graham Pitchfork's excellent history of the Sqn.

**George Birks** served in the RAF from 1940 to 1946 and was on 208 Sqn during the North African and Italy campaigns, working on the Lysander, Hurricane and Spitfire. He knew Sid Jefford, although they had lost touch with each other. George celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on 3 August 2020 with his daughter Susan Pearce and family in Harrogate and was delighted to receive a copy of Sid's memoirs *"Two-Six"*, with his first-hand accounts of the Sqn's many exploits of the era. Sadly, George passed away in September.

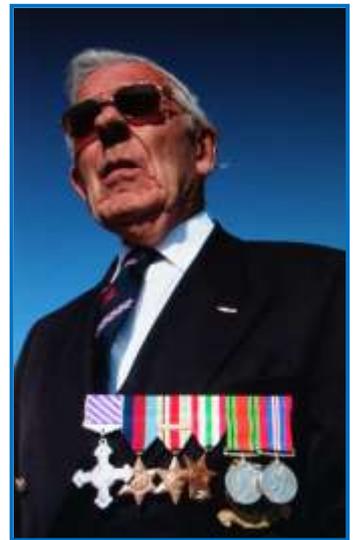
**Freddie Nicoll DFC** served on 208 Sqn, flying Hurricanes during the North Africa campaign; he reached his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on bonfire night, 5 November 2020. Our Chairman David T-Ryder phoned Freddie on his big day, to convey the best wishes of the Sqn Association. It took him some time to answer the phone, as he had been outside, enjoying a Spitfire flypast over his house! It was with profound regret that we learned that Freddie died in May this year.



Raymond Hills,  
Bridlington Church Parade in 1995



George Birks on his 100th birthday



Freddie Nicoll DFC

## 208 Dunked

The Dining-In Night had passed relatively peacefully, without too many bread rolls being launched at senior officers. None landed in the soup though a few scored head hits. Our CO glowered. However, the fun really started in the bar later. The Mess furniture was safe but our GLO, Major John Thraves, Royal Artillery, was being seriously teased. *"Pongo, Brown Job, never gets off the ground, etc."* Thraves took it all in good part, sipping his Stella beer. He pointed out there was a Parachute Regiment so the Army did get off the ground. *"Anyone can do that, you just fall out of an aircraft"* someone said. *"Well,"* said Thraves, *"we'll see. All of you?"* *"Yes!"* was the answer, thinking no more about it. The following day, 18 May 1954, slightly subdued, we were informed that a coach would take those willing to RAF Fayid for a parachute jump into the Bitter Lake. The GLO had called our bluff. With the exception of the CO, all of the pilots duly boarded the coach. At Fayid there was a cursory brief then straight to a Valetta, VW844. Thirty-five minutes after take-off the first of two "sticks" dropped from 800ft into the Bitter Lake. I was No. 3: exiting, the underside of the port tailplane seemed dangerously close. My only worry was not to release the harness too high before entering the water. An experience. Thraves was still teased - but with more caution.



*Desmond Penrose*

208 Sqn 1952 - 1955

# Gulf War - 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Continuing the series of articles on key events in the squadron's history, Graham Pitchfork examines the thirtieth anniversary of the Gulf War, a conflict that saw the squadron play a crucial role.



Muharraq, 1991.

In January 1991, 208 Squadron unexpectedly went to war. Operations against Saddam Hussein's forces in Kuwait and Iraq had commenced with Tornado attacks against Iraqi airfields. Once it was apparent that the Iraqi Air Force was effectively grounded, the Tornados commenced bombing from medium level with Second World War vintage, unguided 1,000-lb bombs. In order to provide greater accuracy from this bombing, it was decided to deploy a Buccaneer force equipped with the Pavespikes laser target marker. OC 208 Squadron, Wing Commander Bill Cope, was appointed to lead the detachment. In a matter of a few days, twelve aircraft had to be modified with IFF Mode 4, Have Quick II secure radios, new chaff and flare dispensers and a complete re-spray into 'Gulf pink.' The first aircraft left at 0400 hours on 26 January on their nine-hour flight to Muharraq in Bahrain. Some crews plus 230 ground crew had already left by Hercules.

So, after thirty years of continuous service, one of the most outstanding low-level bombers was finally going to war – at high level! When asked why such an old aircraft was being sent to the Gulf, the Secretary of State for Defence was quoted as saying, *'Because we need to improve the standard of precision bombing.'* Some accolade. The first six aircraft had arrived in Muharraq by 28 January and immediately commenced a week-long intensive training programme. With air supremacy firmly established, the priority for the Tornados had changed to interdicting the supply lines of the Iraqi Army, and bridges spanning the River Euphrates and Tigris became priority targets. On 2 February, seven days after arriving in theatre and just ten since the decision to deploy, the first mission was flown, with two Buccaneers 'spiking' for four Tornados bombing the Al Suwaira road bridge. Leading the first Buccaneer war sortie was the squadron commander and his navigator Flight Lieutenant Carl Wilson. This sortie set the pattern for many others and the arrival of six more Buccaneers by 8 February allowed more targets to be attacked. Lessons were learned quickly as the techniques used had never been practised before. It was the first time that most of the aircrew had flown in such large 'packages' with fighters, AWACS, Wild Weasels, ECM aircraft and tanker forces all flying in support of the attack formations. As it became increasingly apparent that the Iraqi Air Force would not take to the air, the Sidewinders were removed from the Buccaneers and each carried a Paveway 1,000-lb LGB. After the Tornado attack was complete, the Buccaneers had sufficient fuel to linger in the target area and drop self-designated bombs from a forty-degree dive attack before departing directly back to base. A real multi-role capability! To ensure a higher probability of success, tactics were devised to drop bombs from a sixty-degree dive.



Guinness Girl.



Miss Jolly Roger.

As the success of the interdiction war grew and the number of bridges decreased, the LGB attacks transferred, on 12 February, to destroying Iraqi Air Force installations. The Tornados and Buccaneers were tasked to destroy hardened aircraft shelters, petroleum sites, weapon storage dumps and hangars. Later in the month, the Tornados started to receive the thermal imaging airborne laser designators (TIALD) for self-designation and this released the Buccaneers to add their own considerable weight of bombs to the counter-air campaign. As the day for the beginning of the ground war approached, there was a fear that the Iraqi Air Force might make one last attempt to influence the war. As a result, their southern airfields were targeted and the Buccaneers made a major contribution. Perhaps the most

newsworthy of these was an opportunity attack on 27 February, the last day of operations, at Shayka Mazhar airfield.

After supporting a Tornado attack, transport aircraft were seen on the ground and the Buccaneers attacked them in a steep dive dropping two Paveway 1,000-lb bombs each. One pair hit a Cub transport. Although the bombs failed to explode, 2,000-lbs of iron at terminal velocity is very effective! The second, marked by the squadron commander's navigator, Carl Wilson, hit a captured Kuwaiti Hercules and destroyed it. A fitting climax to the final sortie.

Throughout the detachment, the ground crew worked wonders. Under the outstanding leadership of Squadron Leaders George Baber and David Tasker they achieved an unbelievable record of 100 per cent serviceability under very difficult conditions. By the end of the war, over 200 sorties had been flown and there was always a spare aircraft in case of unserviceability. The Buccaneers dropped forty-eight



En route with the Tornados.



Mission accomplished, homeward bound, 17 March 1991.

LGBs and 'spiked' 169 for the Tornados. As all aircrew know well, the ground crews have always played a vital supportive role, one that becomes even more important in wartime. They are a familiar face to strap the crew in, offer a word of support and comfort and wave them away, and they are the first to welcome them back and share in the success. Without them, there would have been very little success.

On 17 March 1991, the twelve Buccaneers flew back non-stop to Lossiemouth, air-to-air refuelling three times during the 4,000-mile journey home, where they arrived on a typical murky day. Air Marshal Sir Michael Stear the AOC 18 Group and our former President, who had done so much to promote the Buccaneer's capability, flew to join the families for the very warm, emotional and well-deserved reception for a job well done.

*Graham Pitchfork*

Naval 8 - 208 Sqn Association Historian

# A Short Conversation with Air Traffic Control

It was early in 1982, late February, to be exact. I had taken over command of 208 Squadron from Graham Pitchfork in December 1981 and had survived initiation on receiving a One in a NATO Taceval in January. The full R Hour Scramble in foul weather leading to all aircraft on return being diverted to Mildenhall had helped that score. But now, February was the month for a Squadron Deployment to Goose Bay for winter low level training. The plan was for eight Buccaneers to transit to Goose from Honington direct, using in-flight refuelling from Victor Tankers. Malcolm Brown and I were to lead the first pair. After an uneventful pairs take off and climb out, we made a successful RV with the Tanker and all settled down for a relatively straightforward transit to Goose Bay. Our route took us over Lossie and on out towards Iceland where we took on our first upload of fuel. Another turn to the left as we approached Iceland and we headed for the next turning point just South of the southern tip of Greenland. On our way there, Malcolm and I became aware of a discrepancy in our compass information – the readings did not quite match up and were certainly all a little different from what we had expected. The next and final refuelling bracket was planned for the last part of the leg to southern Greenland. As we approached the refuelling bracket, we were still concerned that our compasses were suspect so asked the Victor crew for a compass check. Disappointingly, the Victor crew admitted that they felt their own compasses were unreliable and could not guarantee giving us any useful information. Our number two was equally doubtful. Well, it wasn't that bad, was it? It must have been roughly alright to get us to where we were, surely! Both Buccaneers successfully completed our uplift of fuel, uncoupled and the Victor turned serenely through 180 degrees and headed back to Marham.

With empty sky and a lot of ocean a long way ahead of us, Malcolm and I discussed our predicament. We felt it was now too late to turn back for home – what convinced us was that “home” in this case would mean a diversion to Keflavik due to our fuel state – we would not reach a diversion to Lossie. Should we continue? Well, I surmised, we are wanting to go West. It was then noon local time and, as it happens, our ETA Goose Bay was also roughly noon local time. That meant to me that we were keeping pace with the Sun! And noon meant the Sun was in the South and would stay in the South relative to us. As we were wanting to point West, all we had to do was to keep the Sun on our left shoulder. Although it was some considerable distance away, the coast of Canada would be relatively simple to recognise on my radar screen – the only feature in that rough direction. Furthermore, the part of the coastline close to our track to Goose Bay was the Hamilton Inlet and that would be recognisable from our topo maps and identifiable on the radar. The Sun was shining brightly from a relatively clear blue sky, with only a light scattering of small clouds. We decided we would set off for Hamilton Inlet keeping a close eye on the Sun. The transit was uneventful – the Sun was in sight at all times and, thanks to Malcolm's Golden Hand technique, it stayed on our left shoulders. Around the estimated time we should have been about 200 miles from the Canadian coast, I turned on the radar and watched each sweep of the scanner with sharp interest. The Canadian coastline duly appeared, ahead of us of course, and then began the detailed search for the shape and outline of the Hamilton Inlet. Very soon, I had a good idea I had seen what we were looking for, a little way to the right of the nose. But wishing to be just a bit cautious, I waited a few more minutes until I was certain. Then, eagerly I gave Malcolm the “Go!” for a right turn of about eight or ten degrees. Great! We checked in with Monkton Centre and carried on towards our point on the coast. As we were just about to coast in, it was obvious that the weather was fine – with very little cloud and good visibility right down to ground level. We had plenty of fuel in reserve and relished the thought of descending and completing the final leg of our journey to Goose at Low Level. Monkton Centre were co-operative and gave us clearance to descend and continue at low level, VFR. Great, again! That proved to be straightforward in the excellent visibility and we made a successful visual approach and landing at Goose Bay. DCO 5 Hours 50 Minutes.

After clambering out of our bang seats and checking in with the ground crew, we went up to the Ops Room where our advance party of the Ops Room Team were waiting to welcome us. After a few moments, one of the Ops Clerks came over to me and reported that Monkton Centre were on the phone and they would like a word with me. I took the phone and said, “Hello!” The man on the other end asked, “Were you the lead navigator of the pair of Buccaneers just landed at Goose?” I replied, “Oh, yes, I was!” “Well!” he said. “Did you know that when you crossed into Canadian Airspace you were 50 miles off track?” “Only 50 miles!” I said. “That's fantastic! Thank you very much indeed!” I put the phone down. And we never heard another word about it!



Ben Laite (back row, centre)  
and Malcolm Brown (back row, 4<sup>th</sup> from left)



*Ben Laite*

OC 208 Sqn 1981 - 1984

# Cloughie's Court-Martial

The addition to the Association's website of photos of Dave Clough at a netball match triggered Iain Ross' memory of his court-martial in early 1970: Iain was lumbered with being his escorting officer. (Editor's note: this is a shortened version of the original article, which appears in full on the Association Website.)



Dave Clough (far left)

There had been the usual New Year's Eve party at Muharraq and in the early hours, off we all trooped to our accommodation. Cloughie decided that it would clear his head to have a quick spin on his motorbike before he went to bed. No-one missed Cloughie that night, but at breakfast the next morning he looked somewhat battered. "What happened Cloughie?" asked one of us. "Nothing much," he mumbled, "Fell off my bike last night." "How's the bike?" "Oh, it's fine." That was the end of it - we thought.

Not many days later there were huddled discussions in the Boss's office, then Cloughie was called. "I'm in the pooh" was all he said. Les Foksett, the Station Commander, was keen on dealing with all the misdemeanours by his Hunter pilots at Station level, as he'd presumably been young once. We knew things were out of his hands when he called for a summary of evidence. It turned out that not long after Cloughie had left the Mess on his bike, he had approached 4 men. As they were on his side of the road, he thought he'd show them that they should have been on the other side, facing oncoming traffic instead of with their backs to it. His way of doing this was to drive past fairly close to them. One of

them thought he'd encourage the driver not to come too close, so he stuck his arm out. Luckily all that happened was that Cloughie had a bit of a thump in the chest. The next thing we know from the evidence at the court martial is that John Houghton, the recce flight commander on 8 Squadron, had just set off to drive home, and came across Cloughie having what was obviously a row with 4 men in a recess by a locked vehicle gate in the fence. He defused things, then once all was calm, he said "Cloughie, it's late, it's time to go to bed." It wasn't clear exactly what happened next, but for some reason Cloughie did not leave immediately. It turned out that these men were Royal Irish Rangers: they'd come from their barracks on the other side of the island to celebrate New Year. Well, the Rangers were happy to let the argument escalate into a fight. It didn't matter to them that Cloughie was obviously an officer. And it didn't matter to them that another officer had seen them. Cloughie was happy to take them on, but given the numbers he did end up receiving at least as much as he gave, hence his rather battered appearance the next day.

That there was a fight between an officer and other ranks was bad news, and that it involved the RAF and the Army meant that the Station Commander had no option but to pass the matter for court martial. There was a further complication. At midnight on New Year's Eve, the Station Commander had announced the New Year promotions and awards, and to great cheers was the news of John's promotion to squadron leader. So, although he'd been a fellow junior officer until then, after midnight he had become a senior officer: someone decided that what both John and Cloughie took to be advice to leave was in fact an order. Cloughie was accused of disobeying a lawful command. Wow, this was really serious. The court martial started with John giving his evidence, then the prosecuting officer called the first of the Rangers. The Ranger was happy to tell all, in that charming Irish way, and the Judge Advocate had to keep interrupting his full flow, to tell him that he could and indeed should decline to answer questions that might incriminate him at any future disciplinary proceedings against him. The Judge Advocate was crystal clear in his choice of words, but the Ranger completely ignored his advice, and told it as he saw it. He was quite happy to tell all about it being 4 v 1, as in his view Cloughie had started it by driving too close to them. It was exactly the same when the second Ranger was sworn in, then the third, then the fourth. After the Board had adjourned and considered the evidence, we were called back in. The President looked at the Judge Advocate, looked at his colleagues on the Board, and looked Cloughie in the eye. All he said was: "Not guilty." The gasps around the court were audible, Cloughie's face was a picture of relief and delight. We heard later that the Judge Advocate had recommended that the Board visit the site of the fight to see for themselves where the incident had occurred. A wise lawyer indeed. Presumably as a result of their review of the scene, the Board decided that the Rangers might have had Cloughie effectively trapped in the recess by the closed gate, so he might, just might, have been unable to obey the order to leave. So, not guilty of disobeying a lawful command. Furthermore, as it was 4 v 1, the Board came to the conclusion that Cloughie's part of the fight could possibly have been self - defence. No guilt unless it's beyond reasonable doubt, and all that. What a relief for Cloughie! The Rangers' CO had not surprisingly been mightily annoyed by the whole affair. It was an inter-service incident that had brought his regiment into disrepute. The Rangers had given their self-incriminating evidence on oath in spite of the Judge Advocate's warnings, so there was no more they could say. Given that Cloughie had been found not guilty, the Rangers' CO had no option but to throw the book at them.

The Royal Irish Rangers are now part of the Royal Irish Regiment, advertising themselves as "the sharp point of the bayonet, built with fighting spirit, tradition, and Irish character". Apparently what really upset the Rangers' CO was that a single officer had been able to hold his own against 4 of his Rangers - and an RAF officer at that. This humiliation is probably talked about in the Regiment even today. If you ever meet an Irish Ranger, or an ex-Irish Ranger, perhaps it would be wise not to say that you are or were in the RAF, and particularly not to say that you were on 208 Squadron.

RIP Cloughie.

Iain Ross

208 Sqn 1969-1970



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

George Birks	Lysander/Hurricane/Spitfire	Freddie Nicoll	Hurricane
Arthur "Geoff" Smith	Spitfire	Ron Walsh	Spitfire
Hugh Field	Meteor	Geoffrey "Benny" Goodman	Meteor
Peter Biddiscombe	Hunter	RJM "Moose" David	Hunter
Jim Fotheringham	Hunter	Derek North	Hunter

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## Memories of WWII

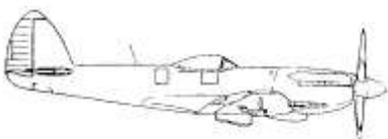
*Arthur "Geoff" Smith, a post-war Spitfire pilot on 208 Sqn, recently shared his memories of the war. Sadly, Geoff passed away before this issue of the newsletter went to print, but his reminiscences are published here by kind permission of his family.*

My first memory of WWII is of listening to the Prime Minister – Mr Neville Chamberlain - announcing the declaration of War with Germany and wondering what was going to happen next. My father, who survived the trauma of trench warfare in WWI, was shaken by the realisation that it was only a mere 21 years since the end of WWI. In 1941 I was employed as a junior engineer at a BBC radio transmitting station near Huddersfield. I remember walking back to my lodgings late one evening when the sound of approaching German bombers was heard. Very soon I could hear the whistle of falling bombs, and wondered where they would land! Fortunately they exploded harmlessly in a field some 300 yards away. We found out later that Liverpool had been badly bombed that night.

Having been keen on flying ever since my first flight in an old 1920s biplane back in 1931, I joined the Royal Air Force in 1943 to start aircrew training. To my delight I was selected for training as a pilot and vividly remember my first solo in an old Tiger Moth at what is now Birmingham Airport, then known as RAF Station Elmdon. The next stage was a four week voyage to South Africa in a large troopship named the Monarch of Bermuda. We boarded her at Gourcock on the river Clyde and our ultimate destination was Durban. We were packed in the mess decks like sardines! The winter weather in the North Atlantic Ocean is not pleasant and I was soon very seasick – along with very many others! I ate nothing for a whole week and eventually realised that eating was in fact the cure for seasickness and I was OK from then on. The crews on the escorting Royal Navy corvettes and destroyers must have had a rough time, because we could see them being almost submerged in sea water as they ploughed into massive bow waves caused by gale force winds. After we had called at Gibraltar, the weather was good for the rest of the trip. Of course, our main worry was the threat of a U-Boat attack and I worried about how we would get out of a packed mess deck below the water line, in the event of being hit by a German torpedo!

The flying training in the Transvaal was thrilling and exciting and took place in more or less continually glorious weather. The training schools lay at an altitude of some 5,000 feet, so it was never too hot. After our passing-out parade, when we were awarded our pilots flying badges, we proceeded to operational training on Hurricane fighters lasting three months. By now VE Day had taken place and we were all geared up to be posted to squadrons in the Far East. However, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki put a stop to that. Instead I was posted to a Spitfire squadron (No. 208) based in Palestine (now Israel) on internal security duties. The Jewish underground fighters known as the Hagana were engaged in efforts to get the British out of the country by attacks of sabotage etc. All the pilots had to take their turn at guarding the airfield at night. On one occasion I was an acting guard commander at one of the many guard posts when the Hagana attacked under cover of darkness. Seven Spitfires were destroyed by the terrorists, who dropped home-made bombs in the radiators of the aircraft. There was plenty of machine-gun fire but we were unable to capture any of them.

After some months I was posted to another squadron (No. 213) flying American Mustang fighters, based in Northern Palestine. The squadron was later moved to Nicosia in Cyprus, a beautiful island where we could start to relax somewhat. I loved flying and saw many wonderful places during my time overseas, including the Pyramids of Egypt, and the ancient sites in Israel and Jordan. I enjoyed my life on the squadrons, and the wartime spirit and comradeship that existed. The time finally arrived for my demobilisation in 1946 and I sailed back to the UK from Port Said to Liverpool – home at last, one of the lucky ones!



*Geoff Smith*

208 Sqn 1945-1946

## Images of WWII

George Birks, one of three 208 Sqn veterans who celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays in 2020 (see page 11), passed away in September. However, his family have generously shared his photo collection with the Sqn Association. A small selection is reproduced here: a wider set of these historic images will be published on the [website](#).



Left: Unloading a camera from a Hurricane. The original caption is "Photo Blokes."

Right: George Birks (centre), with Jimmy Williams (left) and Jock Brash (right).

Below: "C" Flt, 208 Sqn, at Rayak in Syria, 1943. George Birks is seated on the port wing, next to the fuselage.



## Membership Update

The Association welcomes the following new members:

Laurence Walker  
Kelvin Turner

Spitfire  
Buccaneer

David Frost

Buccaneer

Members Lost Contact:

C M "Sandy" Sanders

Buccaneer

Flt Lt S Morris

Hawk

Current Membership:

Full (in contact)

318

Honorary

3

Lost contact

79

Associate

4

Total Full Members

397

Family

13



*Nigel Huckins*  
Membership Secretary

## Meteor Chapter Lunch

Although the Association was obliged to postpone its annual gathering last year, the Meteor Chapter held a celebratory lunch on Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> October. Attendance was high: Hugh Field and Desmond Penrose! The lunch was in a pub in Old Warden village, close to the Shuttleworth Collection where ex-208 Bristol Fighter D8096 is kept airworthy. Both Hugh and Desmond were Shuttleworth pilots. It was a good day of reminiscences and, of course, they raised a glass to absent friends and glorious Naval 8/208.



Desmond Penrose flying the ex-208 Sqn Bristol Fighter

## Memories of RAF Masirah and RAF Sharjah

RAF stations Masirah and Sharjah were vital bases supporting the RAF when Britain played a global role in world politics and peacekeeping. Little known, and rarely reported in RAF and aviation history, they acted as staging posts and refuelling stops for Britain's developing civil aviation links to the Far East and Australia when aircraft were slow and had short ranges. These airfields were capable of rapid expansion and were pressed into use during WWII and remained in military hands when Britain's presence east of Suez came to an end. Former Kipper Fleet pilot Colin Pomeroy has released a self-published history of RAF Masirah and RAF Sharjah, which runs to 108 x A4 pages and contains 290 photographs, mainly in colour. Primarily through these photographs, it covers the history of these desert outpost airfields from their first brushes with aviation in the 1930s up to their closure in the 1970s. Although there is only one mention of 208 Squadron - that 208's Hunters were the last operational aircraft to leave RAF Sharjah - and only a handful of photographs of 208 Squadron aircraft and personnel, it is a trip down Memory Lane for those who were ever stationed at, or deployed to these outposts. "Memories of RAF Masirah and RAF Sharjah" is available directly from the author at: [CPomeroy@aol.com](mailto:CPomeroy@aol.com)

## Keeping in Touch

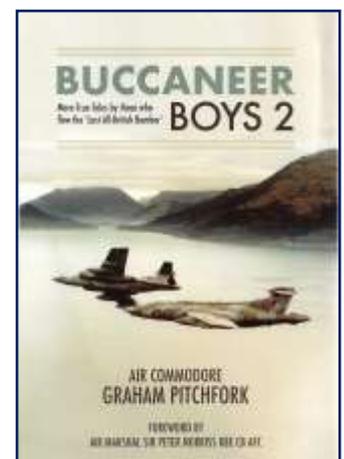
Leslie Hully of the Spitfire Chapter wrote last year, to share his memories of fellow Spitfire pilot John Pascoe-Watson, whose death was announced in the 2020 newsletter. They served together in Cyprus in 1948 and had a trip out to Mount Troodos. Leslie was instructed to carry out a formal investigation into a motor-cycle accident, in which John had been injured, and was subsequently "ticked off" by Group HQ, after failing to conclude that John was to blame! Leslie reported that John was one of the very few pilots who stuck to orange juice, even on party nights. Leslie left 208 in 1949, just before the squadron converted to jets: he wonders how many of the Spitfire Chapter are still around, as they must all now be in their nineties!

## Buccaneer Boys 2

Following the success of *Buccaneer Boys* published in 2013, Graham Pitchfork has managed to coerce another group of Buccaneer Boys to write accounts of their experiences flying the "Last All-British Bomber." These range from the earliest days of operations with the Fleet Air Arm to the introduction of the aircraft into service with the RAF in UK and in Germany, and tales of 208 Squadron in North America and Norway. There is an amazing chapter on the South African Bush War, later the tactics of the Lossiemouth Strike Wing are described and there is a chapter on activities in the Gulf War. The final chapter is a description of the delivery flight to South Africa of the last Buccaneer.

The book is lavishly illustrated with colour and black and white photographs, the majority not having been published before. It will be available from Grub Street Publishers in mid July and a bargain at £25! Copies can be ordered direct from the publishers at: <https://grubstreet.co.uk>

If you attend the annual reunion in October, you may be able to persuade the author to sign your copy!



# Naval 8/208 - 2021 Reunion

For the first time since the post-war resumption of the Naval 8/208 Sqn Association reunions, last year's planned event at the RAF Club in October 2020 had to be cancelled. Several stalwarts had booked early, whilst others declared their intention to join, if circumstances allowed. Sadly it was not to be.

The 2021 reunion will be held in the Sovereigns' Room at the RAF Club and will take the form of a lunch. The menu is:- *Starter*: Chicken Liver Parfait; *Main Course*: Gressingham Duck Leg; *Dessert*: Bailey's Crème Brûlée. Vegetarian/vegan alternatives will be available, on prior request. We will gather in the Churchill Bar at 12:00 for 13:00 on **Sunday 24 October 2021**. The ticket price this year is £50 per head; the dress code is jacket and tie. You can reserve your place via the [Association Website](#) or by using the booking form below.

**The booking and payment deadline is 24 September.** Please book promptly: if you are uncertain whether you can make it, please make a reservation, as it is easier to deal with a late cancellation than to accommodate a late booking. The preferred method of payment is by bank transfer, but cheques are also acceptable.

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



## Naval 8/208 Squadron Association – 2021 Reunion Luncheon Booking

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

eMail: [208secretary@gmail.com](mailto:208secretary@gmail.com)

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

Full Address.....

Telephone: ..... eMail:.....

**I will\* / will not\* be attending the Reunion Luncheon on Sunday 24 October 2021.**

Please reserve ..... places.

Names of guest(s): .....

Special dietary requirements (if any): .....

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

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

Total: £.....

\* I have paid by bank transfer.  
*Please use your name as the reference, so that we know who has paid.*

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

# Hunter Paintings

## Masirah



This original watercolour was commissioned for me in 1972 by my then girlfriend, now my wife. It was painted by Christine Marr, the Head of Art at the Middle School at RAF Laarbruch, Germany. This was Christine's second foray into aviation art, her first one being a Buccaneer in the cloudy skies of Germany. I was pleased with that painting, so my girlfriend asked her to do another aircraft painting. At the time Laarbruch had Canberras, Phantoms and Buccaneers, so she was used to seeing aircraft with canopies much larger than the Hunter's. That explains why it has always rather looked to me as if there's a child flying it, although my wife says that this is nit-picking. Aviation-art purists might have other criticisms, but I think Christine has captured both the aircraft and the background very well, quite atmospheric. It's unusual to have aircraft paintings in a

loose watercolour, as the desire for precision often makes them look like photographs. The painting was based on this photo (*right*) taken in November 1970 by John Metcalfe, of me flying a 208 Squadron Hunter FGA9 over the wreck of the SS World Jury at the south end of Masirah Island, Oman. 208 were on a live FAC exercise on Masirah, great fun: live SNEB rockets and cannon against old vehicles. The problem with firing weapons near friendly forces, then as now, was identifying which particular vehicle was the target. In those days we practised a low-level run-in to a pop-up attack, with very little time for target acquisition and weapon aiming. It was a good test of our abilities, very satisfying to get it right.



*Iain Ross*

208 Sqn 1969-1970

## Muharraq

I arrived on 208 at Muharraq in Dec 1967, on a typically stifflingly hot and humid Bahrain evening, despite the time of year. Keen to make a good first impression on this, my first squadron, I was dressed in a three-piece wool suit and was met off the aircraft by Jim Uprichard, one of the Squadron pilots. How hospitable, I thought, what a friendly welcome. "No time to change" said Jim, "*the Boss is waiting to meet you in the bar.*"

A pity about the suit, I don't know who said wool was cool, but what a great squadron, I thought. The Boss (Mike Shaw) introduced me to the Squadron drunk (Tony Chaplin), the Padre (Dai Heather Hays) and various other personalities, who proceeded to take advantage of my naivety. It was not until I saw the 'Padre' throwing up in the unlit fireplace that the penny dropped! Mike was one of the junior pilots, Dai was a JP from 8 Sqn our sister Sqn and Tony the 'drunk' was the actual Boss. The rest of my tour continued in this high-spirited way, and I could not have wished for a more exciting, fun and professional introduction to life as a fighter pilot.

Some 2 years later in early 1970 Chris Golds was doing a sales pitch for his aviation artwork at Coningsby. By then I was on 54 Sqn, flying F-4s and I asked him to do me a painting of a 208 Hunter over Muharraq. This is the result.



*Dick Northcote*

208 Sqn 1967 - 1969