

ALL THE EIGHTS

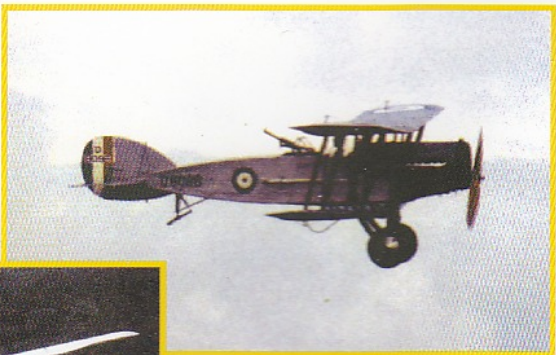
EIGHT DECADES OF NAVAL EIGHT / 208



David G Styles



The magnificent Sopwith Triplane on the left is not all it seems, for it is an outstanding full-scale reproduction of an original Naval Eight Triplane, the machine of Flt Cdr CM Arnold, N6290. It resides at the Shuttleworth Trust Collection at Old Warden Aerodrome in Bedfordshire. The smaller picture shows the top deck marking used on a number of Naval eight Triplanes at the time. Below is another Shuttleworth treasure, D8096, one of 208's Bristol Fighters, in flight and on the ground. This aircraft was struck off charge in 1932 and bought as a private aircraft. Today, it is one of the Shuttleworth Collection's main attractions.



Hunters of 208 Squadron in 1958, on the apron at Amman. All six of the Hunter F6s detached to Amman in the 1958 Jordan crisis can be seen here, though the two on the right are only just in the picture.



ALL THE EIGHTS - EIGHT DECADES OF NAVAL EIGHT/208

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1915, the advantage in the air battles of the Great War was held by the Germans, with the Fokker "Eindekker". It was not a particularly outstanding aeroplane, but it did have one significant feature which caused it to be seen as the scourge of the Allies. That feature was a synchronised gun - one which could be fired through the blades of the propeller without cutting the propeller in half.

Two Fokker engineers, Heinrich Luebbe and Fritz Heber, devised a cam operated mechanism that was connected to the oil pump drive of the E.1's Oberursel rotary engine and the trigger of the Parabellum machine gun. The result was that when the pilot pulled the trigger on the gun, the oil pump, on the feed stroke, would actuate the cam and interrupt the firing mechanism of the gun. Small wonder, then, that for a while

morale sank and some Allied pilots were heard to describe themselves as "Fokker fodder".

With the aim of raising British and French morale, a plan was put in hand for a major offensive, aimed for the spring of 1916. At this same time, Summer 1915, Wing Captain CL Lambe had been given command of the Naval Air Forces at Dover and Dunkirk and was in the process of re-organising and expanding in preparation for that Spring offensive. Approval had been given for an expansion to eight squadrons, each to have a complement of eighteen aircraft, with a central repair depot to be located at Dunkirk and a local defence and training squadron based in Dover.

Sites for new aerodromes were located between Dunkirk and Bergues, then by April 1916, No 1 Wing was positioned at St Pol, No 4 Wing at Petit-Synthe and No 5 Wing at Coudekerque. Wing Captain Lambe had also gained approval for a



This aircraft is a Fokker "Eindekker", the Germans' best fighting machine in the first year-and-a-half of the War, as it had a synchronised gun. This one is in fact an E.III, with a Spandau gun and 100hp engine.

new organisational structure, wherein a flight consisted of six aircraft, a squadron would be made up of two or more flights and a wing of two or more squadrons., which brought the RNAS closer in structure to the RFC.

The "Fokker scourge" continued through the winter of 1915/16 as the German army battered the town of Verdun relentlessly in an effort to "bleed France white". Then, two things happened which turned the tide of Allied morale. Major General Sir Hugh Trenchard ordered his pilots to "take the war to the enemy and keep it there" which, despite its high initial cost, seemed to work. The second factor was the inadvertent landing by a German pilot of a Fokker "Eindekker" on an Allied airfield on 8th April 1916. The aircraft was captured intact and it was pitched against a Morane-Saulnier monoplane in a head-on air-to-air battle. To the surprise of most observers and the two pilots, the Fokker was found to be inferior to the Morane in level speed, manoeuvrability and rate of climb. The spectre was laid and as the news of the confrontation spread across the front, British and French pilots became ever bolder and the Fourth Army commander, General Sir Henry Rawlinson reported "We have command of the air".

FORMATION OF NAVAL 8

During the summer of 1916, the major Allied offensive took place across the River Somme, aiming to divert German armour from Verdun, to the south. General Trenchard needed now to divert air activity from the Somme Front and so arrangements were made with Wing Captain Lambe for the RNAS to carry out bombing raids in the northern area. By the early autumn, it was realised that the RFC needed further

support on the Front, so the decision was taken to form a new RNAS squadron by taking one flight of Sopwith "Pups" from No 1 Wing, a flight of Nieuport Type 17B Scouts from No 4 Wing and a flight of Sopwith Type 9400s (better known as "One-and-a-Half Strutters because of the configuration of the inter-plane struts from the fuselage to the upper wing).

In early October, Wing Captain Lambe summoned a 25-year-old recently promoted officer, one Squadron Commander Geoffrey R Bromet, to his office at Guston Road Aerodrome in Dover. Sqn Cdr Bromet was offered the command of this new Naval squadron, which was to be numbered Eight Squadron RNAS and was to be located at le Vert Galant, near Amiens, near the western edge of the battle front. No 32 Squadron RFC was moving out to make room for Naval Eight, which was to be attached to the 22nd Wing, 5th Brigade RFC, a part of the 5th Army under the command of General Gough.

Sqn Cdr Bromet crossed the channel to Dunkirk aboard HMS "Nubian" on 25th October 1916 and reported for orders at HQ RNAS. The following day, he collected his newly appointed Records Officer, Flt Lt JA D'Albiac and they motored together to le Vert Galant. Arriving in mid-afternoon, he met Flt Cdr BL Huskisson (the Squadron's Second-in-Command), 2nd Lt VP Spurway RFC (the Equipment Officer) and a small advance party of men. This small team prepared for the main Squadron's arrival with the aircraft, finding their new home to consist of seven sheds on a farm owned by Monsieur Georges Bossu. There was little else: no supplies, no spare parts, little ammunition and no bedding. Whilst Sqn Cdr Bromet was organising things for the Squadron on site, unbeknown to him, Wing Captain Lambe was organising the movement of

the aircraft from Dunkirk to Vert Galant!

The three flights were brought together to await a break in the weather before heading for Vert Galant. By late afternoon, the rain eased and the Nieuports went first, five arriving safely before dark. A single Pup arrived a little later, but then it was too dark to fly and see safely, so the rest waited.

With this nucleus of men and machines, Naval Squadron Number Eight was formed - on 26th October 1916. The Squadron would consist of 24 Officers, 1 Warrant Officer and 120 Chief Petty Officers, Petty Officers and Ratings. Across the road, to the south of Naval 8's field was another squadron, No. 23, equipped with FE2Bs. 23 Squadron was also under the command of the 5th Brigade RFC, attached to the 5th Army.

On the ground at Vert Galant, unloading the eight trucks, the five tenders and the single trailer was left until morning, when it was thought it might be drier and the men would be less tired. So hammocks (this **was** the Royal Navy!) were slung in Monsieur Bossu's barn and vehicles parked up overnight as the Squadron settled down for a wet night's sleep. The next morning proved that it might have been just as well to unload the trucks the night before, for the rain was driving down against the windows and dripping through the roof.

Breakfast was next. Dry bread and tea has a remarkably poor capacity for girding the loins of young men about to do battle, so one of the first things to organise was a better supply of food. There was insufficient time to organise supplies and equipment before more aircraft started to arrive, so the second day of Naval Eight's existence was as busy as the first. This was the day the Squadron had a visit from Major-General Trenchard, concerned to know they were settled in and familiar with local support facilities.

INTO ACTION

On November 3rd, Naval Eight flew its first sortie of the war, a line patrol with four Nieuports from Bouzincourt to Chateau-de-la-Haie. On the 6th, another distinguished visitor came to see the new squadron. This time it was a mounted cavalcade of four lancers, General Sir Douglas Haig and two Staff Officers. The General was keen to see the aircraft and to know that the Squadron was battle-ready. On November 9th, his question was answered, when Naval Eight scored its first victory, as Flt Sub-Lt DMB Galbraith's Sopwith Pup (N5193) brought down a Roland over Bapaume.

Losses soon made it very plain that the Squadron was at war and the Western



The Sopwith One-and-a-Half Strutter in two-seat fighter form equipped a flight of Naval Eight in October 1916.

This is a Nieuport 17B, according to RNAS lists of the time, powered by an 80hp Le Rhone engine. It was one of the first aircraft of "A" Flight Naval Eight and on 4th December 1916, was being flown by Flt Sub Lt GG Simpson when he shared in the "kill" of an Albatros D.I.



The prototype Sopwith Pup was 3691. After extensive test flying, it was transferred to Dunkerque and was modified to production Pup standard, then allocated to Naval 8. It brought down an Albatros D.II whilst being flown by Flt Sub Lt NE Woods on 2nd December 1916.

Front was made no more pleasant by the bitterly cold weather of that winter. But soon, the first of many moves came and at least the variety would relieve the difficulties of wet accommodation, frozen guns, engine failures and the food, which was poor and infrequent.

Now, Naval Eight was relieved by Naval Three, which took over all the aircraft as Eight withdrew by road to Dunkirk in February 1917. As they left, they had the comfort of a message to Dunkirk HQ from General Sir Douglas Haig, which said: "The care of machines has been

Sopwith Triplane N5439 was the mount of Flt Sub Lt JA ("Ally") Shaw, who flew it into Furnes as the Squadron took over that airfield from Naval One. Shaw left Naval Eight two days after this picture was taken to join Naval Nine.





A formal picture of Sqn Cdr Geoffrey R Bromet DSO RN (the picture was actually taken after his return to Dover, but before his promotion to Wing Commander was promulgated, having handed over command of the Squadron to Sqn Cdr Christopher Draper).

above reproach and the discipline of the unit has been very good". Praise of the best kind - and straight from the top!

Naval Eight re-formed at Dunkirk with more Pups, then was re-equipped with Sopwith Triplanes, as one flight of Pups went to form the nucleus of the newly-formed 9 Squadron RNAS and more went to other squadrons to make up attrition. Now, Naval Eight moved to Furnes to defend the Dunkirk area, then to Auchel to replace Naval One in support of the battle for Vimy Ridge. It was from Auchel that Flt Lt RA Little came across the legendary "Red Baron", a story best told in the words of Sqn Cdr Geoffrey Bromet, from the book: "Naval Eight":

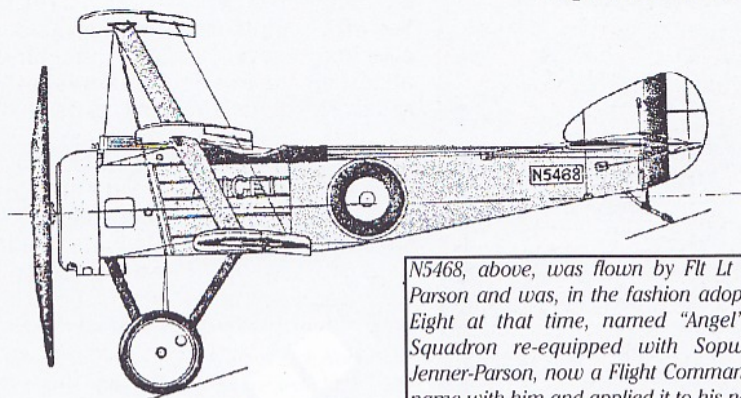
"....The second combat concerned a crowd of Albatros Scouts and the incident, as related by eye-witnesses in

the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Group of the 3rd Army is: 'At 6.45pm on 7/4/1917, a Sopwith Triplane, working alone, attacked eleven hostile machines, almost all Albatros Scouts, North-East of Arras. He completely out classed the whole patrol of hostile machines, diving through them and climbing above them. One Albatros Scout, painted red, which had been particularly noticed by this section, dived on to him and passed him. The Sopwith dived on him and then easily climbed again above the whole patrol, drawing them all the time towards the Anti-Aircraft guns. As soon as they were within range, the Anti-Aircraft guns opened fire on the patrol, which turned eastward, and the Sopwith returned safely. The Officers who witnessed the combat report that the manoeuvring of the Sopwith Triplane completely outclassed that of the Albatros Scout'."

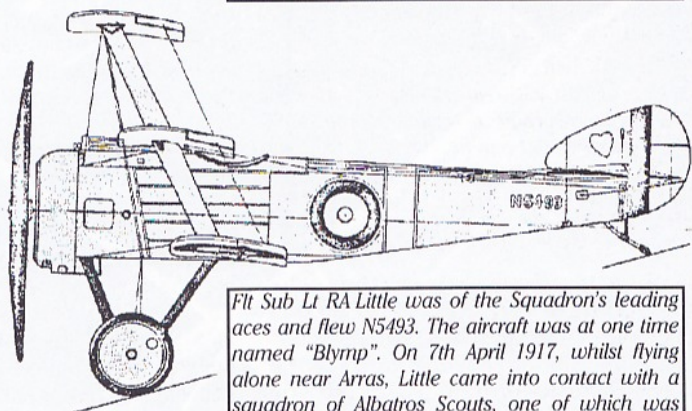
Then, from the same diary, comes this amusing little story: "On the 23rd May, the day ended with a sporting attempt by a Hun to bomb our aerodrome. Booker's flight had just landed when the shout went up: "Hun at 3,000 feet approaching the aerodrome! ". At the same time, all the A.A. for miles around (including our own Lewis guns) opened up on him and Booker, Soar and McCudden jumped into their machines and were away after him. The Hun turned for home as soon as he was spotted, but our fellows caught him over Souchez and gave him a hot time. In the failing light, he made good his escape and was last seen over Lens - a thrilling episode which did credit to both sides".

Now the Squadron moved up to Mont St. Eloi, where they supported the offensive at the Battle of Messines in the Ypres campaign. Whilst there, more re-equipment took place, with Sopwith Camels succeeding the Triplanes, names being carried over from one type

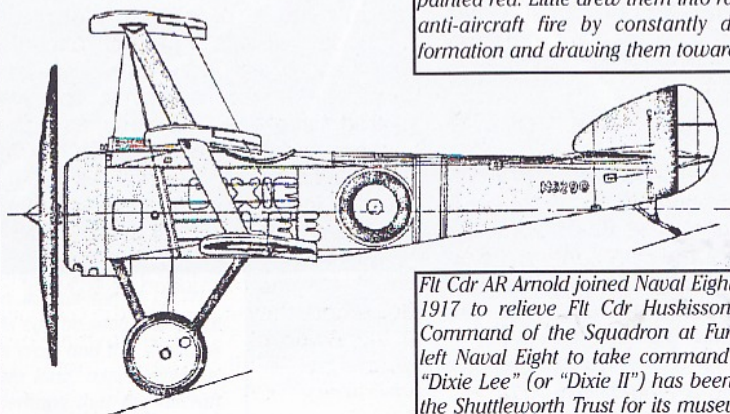
Triplanes of Naval Eight



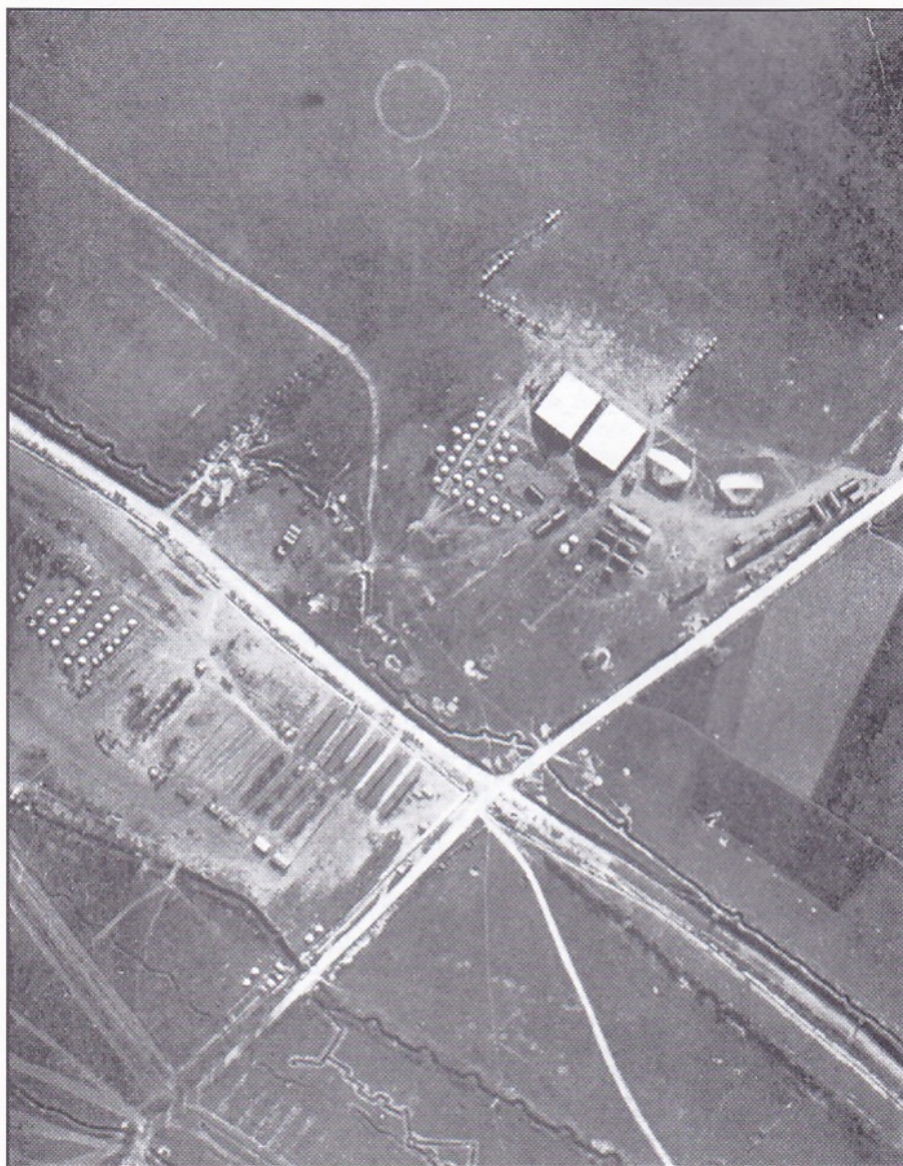
N5468, above, was flown by Flt Lt CHB Jenner-Parson and was, in the fashion adopted by Naval Eight at that time, named "Angel". When the Squadron re-equipped with Sopwith Camels, Jenner-Parson, now a Flight Commander, took the name with him and applied it to his new mount.



Flt Sub Lt RA Little was of the Squadron's leading aces and flew N5493. The aircraft was at one time named "Blymp". On 7th April 1917, whilst flying alone near Arras, Little came into contact with a squadron of Albatros Scouts, one of which was painted red. Little drew them into range of his own anti-aircraft fire by constantly diving into the formation and drawing them towards him.



Flt Cdr AR Arnold joined Naval Eight on 13th March 1917 to relieve Flt Cdr Huskisson as Second-in-Command of the Squadron at Furnes. Huskisson left Naval Eight to take command of Naval Four. "Dixie Lee" (or "Dixie II") has been reproduced by the Shuttleworth Trust for its museum collection. It is hard to tell the reproduction from an original.



An aerial photograph of Mont St Eloi airfield, taken in the spring of 1917 as Naval Eight moved in from Furnes. The dual perimeter defence wire can be seen bordering both sides of the domestic site on the bottom left of the picture, the airfield itself being to the top right of the picture.



Shortly after relocating to Mont St Eloi, Naval Eight exchanged their trusty Triplanes for Sopwith Camels. Fourteen of the new aircraft are seen here. These would have been Clerget 130hp engined examples, most built by Sopwith, but some were from Clayton & Shuttleworth production.

to the other to personalise their new 150 h.p. mounts. Flt Cdr Jenner-Parson took "Angel" from his Triplane N5468 to his new "Camel", while "Dixie Lee" came from Flt Cdr Arnold's Triplane N6290 to another "Camel". Shortly afterwards, Arnold left the Squadron and by September, there were several new aces with Naval Eight, culminating in a change of command just one year and a day after its formation.

After a rest period at Eastchurch, Flight Commander Christopher Draper DSC reported to Wing Captain Lambe at Dunkirk HQ, to be told: "I'm sending you

to Number 8 Squadron. It is my best squadron. Bromet is in command and it will be a great opportunity for you". After a few weeks as a flight commander, Draper was promoted Squadron Commander, whilst his predecessor went back to Guston Road, Dover, as a Wing Commander.

Soon the Squadron was doing bomber escorts, low-level strafing and "interference" flying, preventing enemy aircraft from spotting artillery positions. Such was the danger to Naval Eight pilots in this work that no less than eight were decorated in January 1918.

Starting Sopwith Camels in the winter of 1917/18. As can be seen, the snow is crisp and the shadows are long, which suggests perhaps that the aircraft are being warmed up for the first sortie of the day.





"A" Flight groundcrew photographed during the summer of 1917.

In the autumn and winter of 1917/18, Sqn Cdr Draper led an all ranks football team in a tournament between the squadrons of the line. Sqn Cdr Draper is second left.



At the end of March, after resting at Walmer in Kent, the Squadron returned to the fray at La Gorgue, now as Number 208 Squadron, Royal Air Force, with its CO re-badged as "Major" Draper, supporting the Portuguese defence of the line. It was tragic for 208, as the Portuguese were hard-pressed by the German advance and fog prevented flying, so the Squadron could give no support. The line collapsed and this abridged version of Major Draper's report tells the rest:

"..With reference to the destruction of the 16 machines of this Squadron, I have the honour to submit the following report: About 4.00am on the morning of the 9th (April) we were aroused by the sound of very heavy gunfire, which increased in intensity towards dawn. There was considerable hostile shelling

of Merville, la Gorgue and the surrounding districts. A large number of French civilians were passing west through our Camp, followed by considerable Portuguese troops in open disorder, without either rifles or equipment and apparently un-officered. I gave orders to have the machines removed from the hangars and spread out over the aerodrome in case of a concentrated shelling of the hangars. I ordered officers and men to pack all gear and stores as quickly as possible.

"..I decided I was not justified in risking personnel by flying away in the fog, though a majority volunteered to try. We collected the machines in one bunch in the middle of the aerodrome, the idea being for every-one to clear out and leave one officer with a motor cycle and sidecar to stand by until the last

moment with orders to destroy the machines if necessary. I was unable to get in touch with XV Corps, so I ordered

then burnt and everyone cleared out by 11.30".

One of the Squadron Leylands, a 3-tonner, used to transport the ground equipment and such portable items as they were able to take on the abandonment of la Gorgue.



the telephone exchange and compass station to pack up.

"The ammunition supply column which had been parked on the road alongside the hangars had gone, their guns having been captured. The machines were

Back at Serny aerodrome, Major Draper and his Squadron was re-equipped and ready for action again within 48 hours. In the five-month stay at Serny, they engaged the enemy 103 times and brought down 86 aircraft, with only six casualties of their own. So Major Draper

Naval Eight/208's fourth Sopwith type in a row was the Snipe, the most advanced fighting aircraft of its time. Snipes equipped only two RAF squadrons in France before the war's end. Aircraft E6175 was "S" of 208 Squadron. Here it is seen fitted with a Cooper bomb rack to carry four 25lb bombs under the fuselage, just aft of the landing gear. In the last three months of the war, 208 was located at Tramecourt, Foucaucourt, Estree-en-Chaussee and Morits, a Snipe carrying out its last line patrol at 10.00 on the morning of 11th November 1918.



was heartened, and much relieved no doubt, by a letter from Air Commodore Lambe, received as the Squadron enjoyed one of its better days, less than two weeks after la Gorgue, which read:

"Dear Draper,
 "Hearty congratulations to you and the Squadron on the success of yesterday. I hope you will keep it up. "I am so glad that the Squadron is doing so well.
 Yours sincerely,
 CL Lambe."

The Squadron moved to Tramecourt in August, then on to Fouacourt in late September right on the Somme. Then came another move less than two weeks later, to Estree-en-Chaussee where 208 stayed for only 17 days before going on to Moritz from where the Squadron carried out its last line patrol at 10.00am on Armistice Day, 11th November 1918.

At the beginning of December Major Draper took the Squadron to

Donstiennes where he handed over command of 208 to Major Smart who brought the Squadron home to Netheravon in November 1919 after a period of defending the peace in Belgium and Germany.

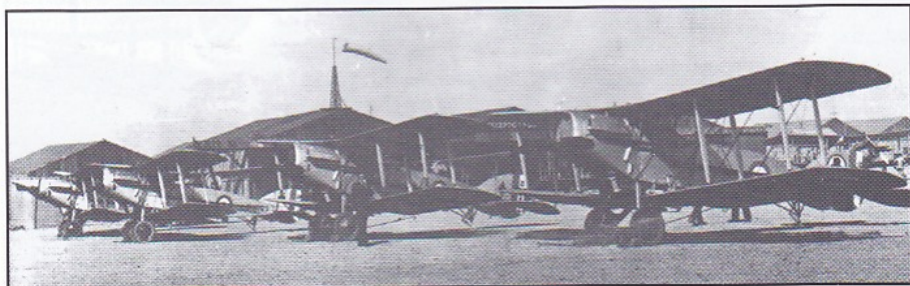
A RETURN TO PEACE

After disbandment in England on 7th November 1919 it was decided by "those on high" that the record of No. 208 Squadron justified it being among the Squadrons to survive the massive demobilisation of armed forces after the Great War so No. 113 Squadron stationed at Ismailia in Egypt which still had the RE8s it flew in the Palestine campaign of the Great War, against the Turkish 7th and 8th Armies, was re-numbered 208.

The Bristol F2B Fighter and the de Havilland DH9A were the two principal Army Co-operation aircraft chosen for use after the War, mainly because there



The RE8 (left) was still on the inventory of 113 Squadron as it was re-numbered 208. Bristol F2Bs were soon to replace the old "Arry Tate", though, and by the end of November 1920, "Brisfits" were the sole type (below) in use with the new 208 (AC) Squadron.



were so many aircraft of both types which had seen little or no active service. 208 was allocated "Brisfits" and received its new mounts during October and November 1920, the last RE8 in the RAF being in service with 208 before going to the scrapheap at the end of November.

Barely had the Squadron settled in at Ismailia than Kemal Ataturk, the Turkish dissident, drove the Greeks into the sea as he advanced on Constantinople in his drive to establish the Republic of Turkey. So began the Chanak Crisis, to which 208 Squadron was sent to fill a policing role, the first of many.

Located at San Stefano, 208 shared the

airfield with Nos. 1, 4, 25 and 207 Squadrons, 4 and 208 operating Bristols, 1 and 25 flying Snipes and 207 with DH9As. There were times when the mud was so bad that it was said to be dangerous to fly out of San Stefano, the only aircraft considered reasonably safe to do so being the Bristol Fighters of 4 and 208 Squadrons. As the risk of war passed, so the squadrons settled down to a routine of photo reconnaissance and patrols, 208 returning to Ismailia in late 1923.

The rest of the 1920s decade was relatively peaceful, though there was the odd detachment to deal with minor local troubles. For example, a flight of Brisfits was sent to Khartoum in 1924 to

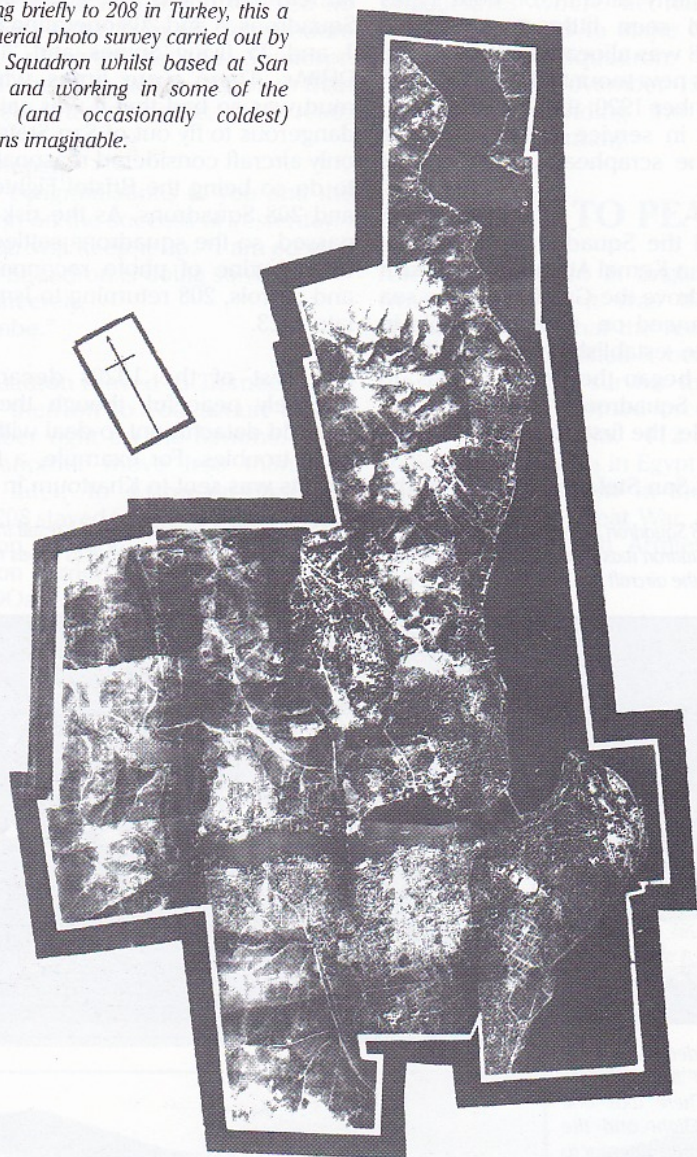
Barely had 208 Squadron settled in Egypt than the Chanak Crisis arose in Turkey, with the result that a large part of the Squadron was detached to San Stefano, outside Constantinople, or Istanbul as it was to become known. Here, the aircraft can be seen to the upper left of the picture.



In 1924, a detachment of four Bristols was sent to Khartoum. There was one from each Flight and the aircraft here are, from rear to front (left to right): Spade - Sqn Ldr Probyn, Diamond - Fg Off Hodgson, Heart - Fg Off Storrar and Club - Fg Off Millen. The first two and the last are also accompanied by their gunners.



Returning briefly to 208 in Turkey, this a typical aerial photo survey carried out by No 208 Squadron whilst based at San Stefano and working in some of the crudest (and occasionally coldest) conditions imaginable.



THE CITY OF
CONSTANTINOPLE

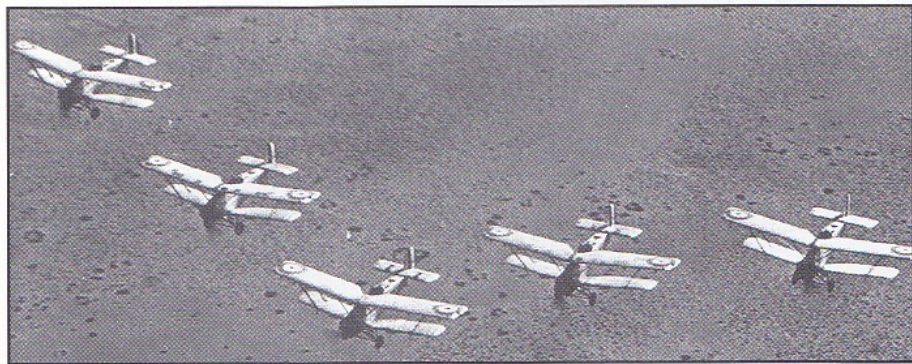


208 Squadron was nothing if not resourceful, as can be seen from this local conversion of an F2B to a two-seat (two-stick) trainer. This was to convert locally trained or re-trained aircrew from No 4FTS at Heliopolis to the Squadron's Bristols in the Army Co-op role.

help stabilise political unrest there, whilst shortly after the Squadron moved from Ismailia to Heliopolis, which took place in 1927, there were experiments with airborne radio which helped to bring it into operational service. Then there were the Arab/Jewish disturbances in Palestine during 1929 which caused a detachment of 208 Squadron to be sent to Ramleh in another policing task.

INTO THE THIRTIES AND FACING ANOTHER WAR

The arrival of Sqn Ldr Maurice Moore OBE heralded the last days of the Bristol F2B Fighter as 208 Squadron's aircraft. Less than a month after he took command the re-equipment with Armstrong-Whitworth Atlases began



As the Armstrong Whitworth Atlas joined 208 Squadron, there was a great deal of work to be done to work up to the new type. Above, we see a flight of five aircraft newly delivered to the Squadron, whilst the picture on the right shows an aircraft being fuelled and armed in preparation for another training sortie.



and the old faithful "Biff" was to be retired after a decade of reliable service.

This was the time when a Squadron badge was introduced for use on Squadron aircraft. The Royal Air Force was beginning to mark all of its aircraft with a badge on the fin which denoted the Squadron to which the aircraft belonged. Each badge was set inside a frame which identified the role of the particular Squadron. Fighters used an arrowhead, bombers used a symbolic round bomb with a fuse-head, whilst army co-operation squadrons used a six-pointed star.

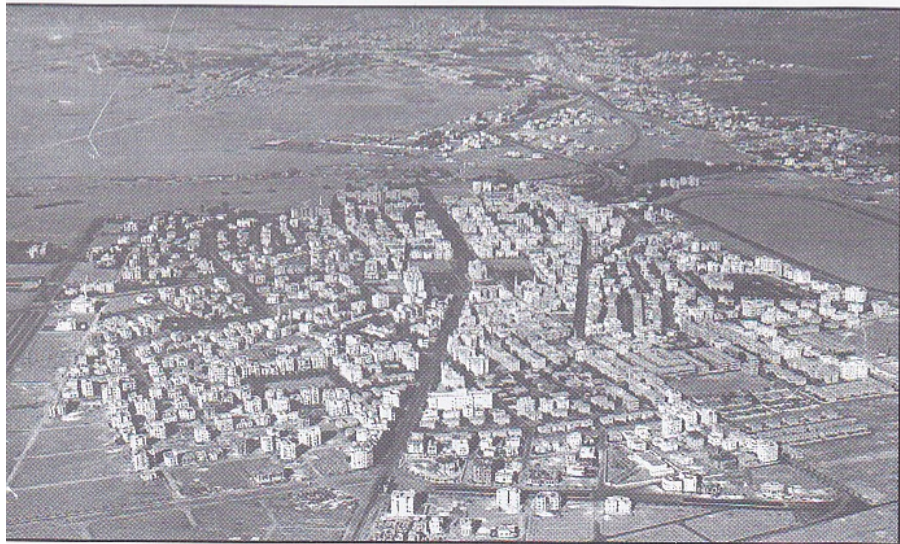
Whilst many RAF squadrons in the Middle East used the six-pointed star,

the connotations of the Star of David were thought too much of a risk for squadrons plying routes between Egypt and Palestine, so 208, being one of those squadrons, chose to use a disc instead. Remembering that army co-operation and reconnaissance were the Squadron's duties in those days, it was logical that they should try to find an emblem which was appropriate to the task.

As the Squadron's re-equipment with Atlases was almost complete, a badge was found and submitted by one of the Squadron's newly appointed flight commanders, Flt Lt Arthur Flower. Arthur Flower had already spent five years of his career with 208 Squadron



Flying over Heliopolis on patrol is a very well kept Atlas, whilst below is a photograph taken from a 208 aircraft of the city and airfield of Heliopolis. The airfield is to the upper left of the picture. Today, the city of Heliopolis is much larger and the old airfield has disappeared.



and had become familiar with much of what ancient Egypt's mysteries had to offer. Since the Squadron was stationed in Egypt and since observation was a primary task, why not, he reasoned, use the ancient Egyptian symbol of the Eye of Horus as the 208 emblem?

Horus was a hawk-headed god of Egyptian mythology, the son of Isis and Osiris, a guardian against evil spirits. The Eye of Horus was a symbol often used to protect the dead and many ancient Egyptian artefacts carry an image of the winged eye upon them. So the new 208 Squadron CO of the time, Sqn Ldr Maurice Moore, who took up his appointment in April 1930, approved the use of the "Flying Eye" as, presumably, did Headquarters Middle East since it appeared on all the Atlases and there is evidence to show that some if not most of the aircraft had the emblem painted upon them as they left the Coventry works of Sir W.G. Armstrong-Whitworth Limited. This badge had everything to recommend its use by 208 as it represented observation, it had clear links with Egypt, the Squadron's home then for ten years the wings denoted flight and of signal importance at the time - nobody else had come up with the suggestion for use elsewhere. "Vigilant" was the motto adopted from the outset. The 208 colours, too, seem to have originated in that time for the wings on the badge were yellow and the background disc was pale blue.

Seven years later however it was discovered that the use of an eye in English heraldry was not acceptable as it seemingly has connotations of evil spirits and so the Gizah Sphinx became the official emblem on the approved Squadron badge in 1936 though the old motto remained.

To complete the story of the badge it is only necessary to know that the verb to

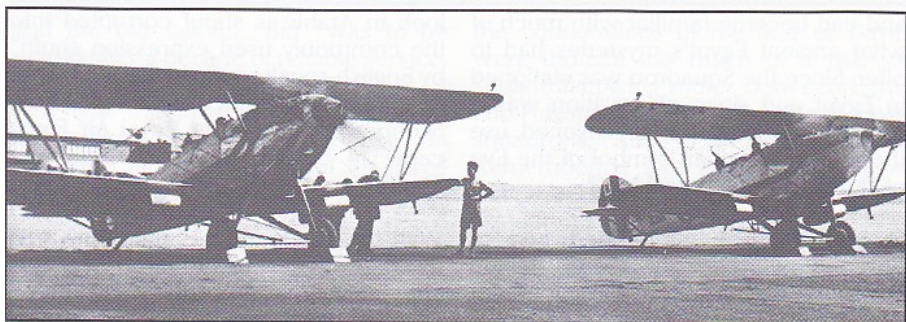
look in Arabic is *shouf* corrupted into the commonly used expression *shufti* by English-speakers. So in the manner of the time it is not difficult to imagine how Number 208 Squadron Royal Air Force came to be known as "The Flying Shuftis".

With the change in 14 Squadron's role from Army Co-op to Bomber, 208 became the only A.C. squadron in Egypt, despite which it won the Middle East Bombing Cup twice, in addition to which it also won the HQ Musketry and Pistol Cups and the Armament General Proficiency Cup during Sqn Ldr Moore's tenure of command, which ended with great praise from the G.O.C. British Troops in Egypt for his and his Squadron's close co-operation with the Army.

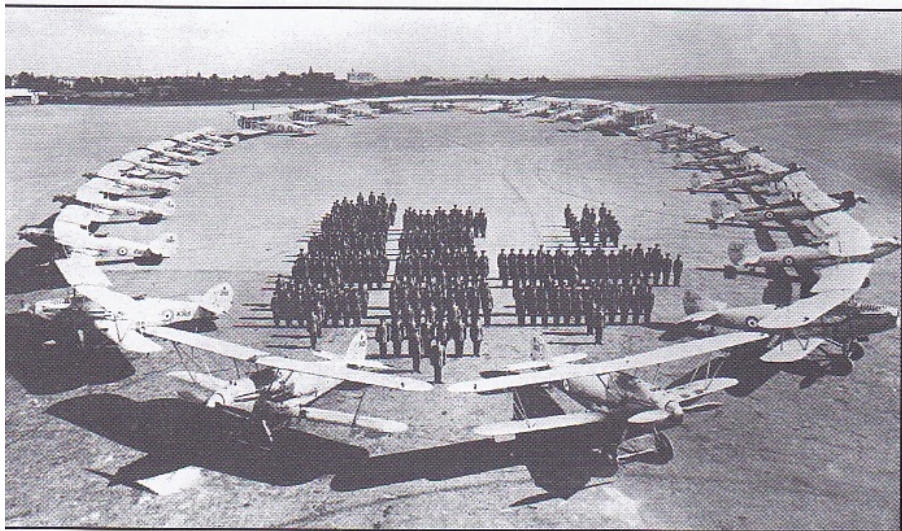
In April 1933, Sqn Ldr John Whitworth Jones took over command of 208 and during his period of command, the Squadron exchanged its Atlases for the Hawker Audax, which was the Army Co-operation version of the famous Hart bomber. By August 1935, the conversion from the Atlas was complete and a month after that, the Squadron was expanded to four flights, "D" Flight being equipped with another variant of the Hart, the Demon two-seat fighter.

The new flight was formed as a result of Mussolini's expanded ambitions in North Africa, which caused him to build a wire fence along the length of the border between Libya and Egypt, so the British response was to build a base at Mersa Matruh and expand the scope of 208 Squadron's task. "C" Flight was detached to Mersa Matruh in October 1935, followed by "A" Flight in December, whilst "D" Flight went to Amariya in January 1936. Political tension was rising.

As the summer of 1936 advanced,



Above: 208 Audaxes on the line at Heliopolis, starting up for an early morning patrol. Left: K3111 wasn't about to do any more patrols over the desert! Below: a well known picture of 208 and 216 Squadrons together, along with aircraft of the AOC's and Communications Flights. It may not be too easy to see, but the Audax in the right fore-ground is K3112 and was fitted with a modified engine cowl which had a special sand filter, fitted at Mersah Matruih to exclude sand from the engine air intakes, consisting of a fine mesh gauze soaked in oil. It gave the aircraft an extra 5mph!





The classic picture of 208 in Egypt, this one was taken in 1936. "Audaxes over the Pyramids". It's interesting to see the level of agriculture, which is not the same today.

Above: not only did 208 Squadron fly a full complement of Audaxes, but one flight of six Demon Two-Seat Fighters as well. This flight was "hived off" in the summer of 1936 to form the basis of the re-formed 64 Squadron. Right: "It ain't an Audax - it ain't an 'Ind an' it ain't an 'Art - it's an 'Ardy". The Hawker Hardy was developed out of the Audax for a wider range of general purpose duties than the specialised role of Army Co-op. This one was on loan to 208 at the time of air exercises in 1936 - hence the camouflage and "B" Type fuselage roundel. Some Desert Hardys were fitted with balloon tyres for landing on unprepared strips.



Palestine was in turmoil again and two flights of 208 were detached there. "A" Flight went to Jerusalem and "C" to Haifa, whilst D" Flight had already been separated from the Squadron to become the nucleus of the re-formed 64 Squadron in March. The task in Palestine was once again to try to settle disputes between Arab and Jew, an impossible job.

By the end of the year, the Squadron was reunited at Heliopolis and becoming increasingly active in desert exercises which improved its

George VI approved the official badge of No. 208 Squadron, which now bore the image of the Gizah Sphinx shown head-on and carrying the motto "Vigilant". The motto was the only item of the original, unofficial, badge used up until that time, since the Chester Herald could not accept the "Flying Shufti" as the heraldic symbol of the Squadron as an eye is not used in British heraldry. But, like the old one, the new badge had strong associations with Egypt, where the Squadron had now spent almost twenty years. The badge was presented to the Squadron Commander, Sqn Ldr

In October 1938, the British Ambassador decided to visit Heliopolis and took in 208 Squadron as part of his visit. The whole airfield was meticulously laid out in preparation for the visit, as can be seen from this aerial view, with all the aircraft completing a square of the site.



operational readiness for whatever might occur in the ever-more volatile world of the late 1930s. October 1937 brought some light relief, however, as both Squadron and Old Comrades celebrated, both in Heliopolis and in London, No 208's coming of age.

In February 1938, His Majesty King

WAD Brook, by Air Vice.Marshal CT McLean CB DSO MC.

As Hitler and Mussolini expanded their power base in Europe, the Axis powers closed ranks and tension increased, both in Europe and in North Africa. January 1939 was a historic milestone in the history of 208 Squadron, as this was

208 IN COLOUR



Above: Hunters in Amman again. "Foxtro" and "Tango" sit at the ready on the apron, just in case General Kassem's men decided to cross the border - needless to say, they did not.



Left: soon after the re-formation of 208, these Buccaneers, in the early finish of grey/green/light grey are seen refuelling (in pairs) at Honington.

On the right, 208's first "Red Flag" at Nellis was rated a total success, especially since the Aggressors did not expect the performance they saw. Here, a pair of Buccaneers fly out to the Nellis range on another sortie.





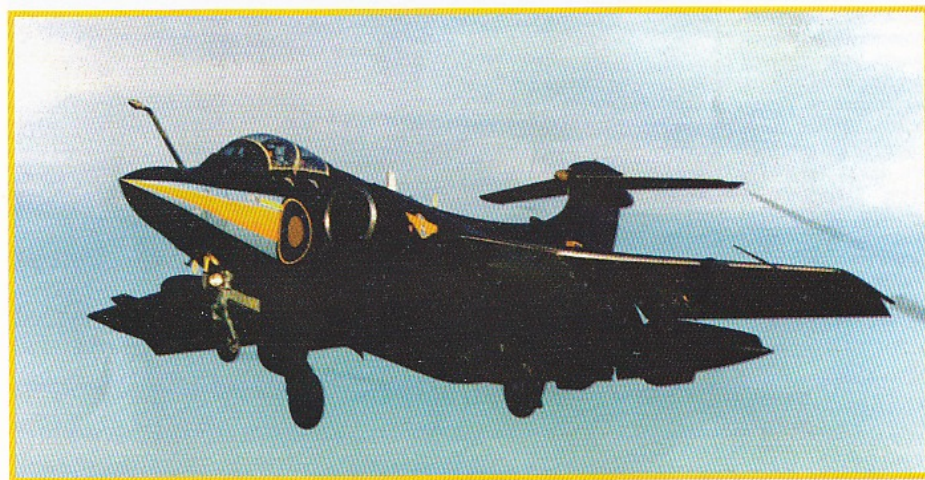
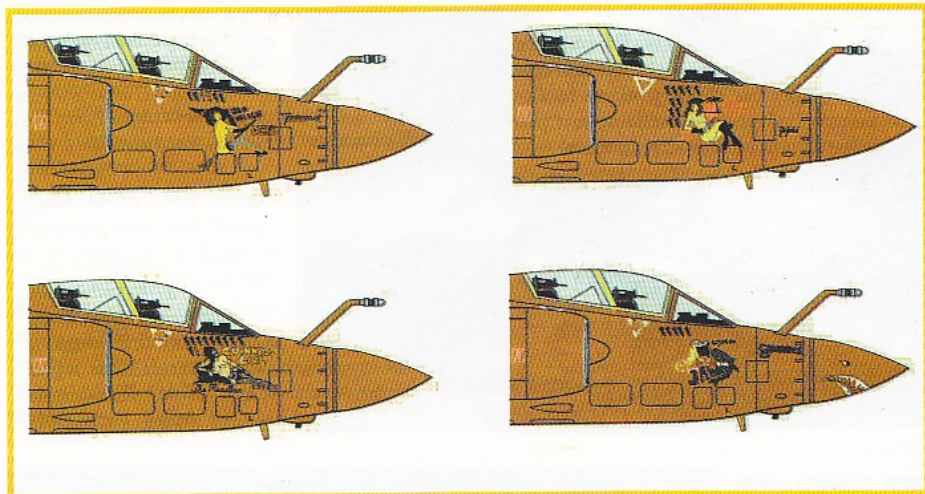
In April 1990, the Squadron visited its old stamping ground, Egypt, as a guest of the post-revision government. Couldn't resist it, could they? Here's a "Bucc" making for a pyramid, just to show where he was.

Right: A Buccaneer with a full complement of Sea Eagles and no external fuel tanks.



Below: Operation "Granby" was an opportunity for the Buccaneer to shine - and shine it did. Here's XX901, "N" - "the Flying Mermaid", in between sorties.





Top: four more examples of "Desert Storm" ("Granby") nose art on Buccaneers. They are: XV863 (S) "Sea Witch", XW533 (A) "Miss Jolly Roger", XW547 (R) "Guinness Girl" and XX895 (G) "Lynn - Jaws".

Centre: In preparation for the 75th Anniversary of 208, this Buccaneer, the oldest in service, was painted black with the much enlarged Squadron marking.

Right: in April 1994, the Buccaneer flew off into the Sunset.....



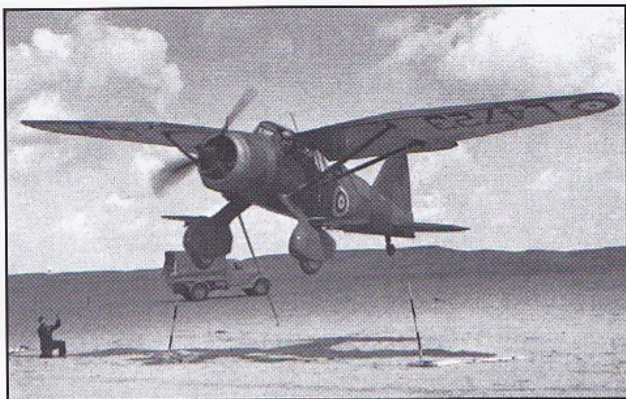


.....so the Hawk rises to the new dawn, bringing the future of 208 Squadron with it.

Right: "There's black 'Awws, there's grey 'Awws and then there's black and grey 'Awws!". In the interests of economy, the grey Hawks were repainted black as they fell due for major servicing. In the meantime, new parts are finished in the new standard colour, so if a grey Hawk needs a new rudder, it gets a black one. Below: already the new 208 is breaking new ground. Here, a detachment to Hungary has its picture taken with a Hawk (right), "Fishbed" (MiG21 - left) and "Fulcrum" (MiG29 - centre).



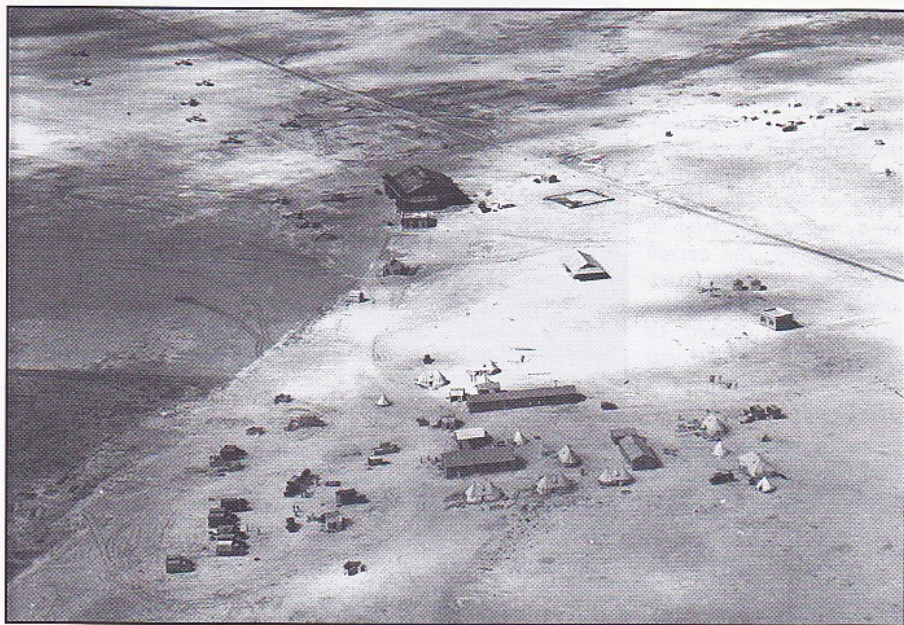
The Lysander was designed to have excellent low-speed handling characteristics and they quickly became legendary. It was a large aeroplane, yet remarkably nimble to fly. This picture shows an early 208 "Lizzie" on a message pick-up in desert training. The aircraft still wears its home camouflage finish and no codes have yet been applied. Of course, at this time 208 was coded "GA".



208 Squadron used to just love flying its aeroplanes over the Pyramids and here is the obligatory shot of a Lysander "doing its thing". However, this picture has more about it of interest, for this aircraft is now wearing desert camouflage, though still no squadron codes, which suggests the picture was taken before April 1939, when codes were introduced.

Another Lysander in desert camouflage (in black and white, desert camouflage shows up with greater contrast than the home finish of green and brown). This one is pictured at Mersah Matruh, some time between April and September 1939. The timing is confirmed by the fact that the aircraft is wearing the code "GA-H". Codes were changed at the start of the war.





Mersah Matruh airfield was established as a desert outpost from the main Egyptian bases and was regularly used by 208 Squadron before the war began in earnest. Of course, then, with the constant to-ing and fro-ing of the battle front, everybody who was in the war used it at some time.

when the Squadron converted to its first ever monoplane, the Westland Lysander. When World War II began in 3rd September 1939, the Squadron was located at Qasaba in a state of full readiness.

BATTLES ACROSS THE DESERT - THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Early wartime sorties involved patrols along the border wire from Sollum to Maddalena and light bombing of transport convoys as Italy joined the war in June 1940, though this was not a very successful exercise, as the "Lizzie" was slow and a sitting target for enemy aircraft, three of which picked off 208's first casualty of the war on 15th October, when a Lysander was pursued to the

ground and shot up, killing both of the aircraft's occupants.

The diary notes of one of 208's Flight Commanders, Flt Lt EHI Webber, tell us a little about how the Squadron tried to make the "Lizzie" a little more effective:-

"June 1940 - 208 Sqn was then at Qasaba, having moved from its permanent base at Heliopolis. "B" Flight was detached to Sidi Barrani and carried out the first reconnaissance of the war with Italy. We experimented with two 40mm cannon, but they weren't successful owing to the sandy conditions. During this period, we flew with and without fighter protection, doing tactical, photographic and artillery reces before and during the first capture of Tobruk".

A flight of Hurricanes was assigned to

Taken at Heliopolis in January 1940, this picture depicts "B" Flight with one of their Lysanders. Only the officers (seated in the middle row) are named and they are: Plt Off Waymark, Plt Off McCrostie, Fg Off Webber, Sqn Ldr Weed, Fg Off Beavis, Fg Off Brown and Plt Off Holdsworth.



208 in November 1940 and the photographic role was confirmed as part of the Squadron's duties, so after a two-week conversion course, 208 pilots began to produce photomosaics of Bardia, Tobruk and el Adem in readiness for the Australian assault on Bardia in January 1941. The G.O.C. Western Desert, General Wavell, congratulated 208 Squadron for its contribution to the success of that attack. Then, in March, the Squadron was sent to Greece, in support of the Australians and the Black Watch.

The Squadron was hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned. Notes written by the late Sqn Ldr Bill Weeks (who was then a Sergeant) take up the story: "That was when the skies above us were never clear of German bombers and fighters; when German troops were racing towards Athens after the battle over Larissa and smashed the Expeditionary Force's air power.

The last of 208's aircraft were destroyed at Argos and the men marched, under W.O. Taplin's leadership, undisturbed during the night, but harried throughout the day, dispersing among trees, diving into ditches and snatching small arms

shots as we could. Then we watched Air Cdre d'Albiac (himself an ex-Naval Eight pilot in the days of Geoffrey Bromet's command) standing in the open, calmly and contemptuously firing a revolver at the hunting ME110s.

We gathered at a beach that evening and were led to boats which took us to a Royal Navy vessel which had ventured into these hostile waters in darkness. That was when an unlit boatload of troops was mown down by a blacked-out warship, so near to safety. Then the packed ship took us to Crete - and later still escorted us from that Island while men we knew stood to face the German paratroops with dwindling ammunition and finally, bayonets. Then, there will be no record of the farmer and his wife above Suda Bay, who filled an empty water bottle for a battered Sergeant fitter - with brandy. Such splendid, kind people".

It is interesting to note here that the German High Command had broadcast on radio the news that : "...No. 208 Squadron, that invaluable link between Army and Air Force in Greece, has been destroyed and all personnel killed, seriously wounded or captured".

Tell that to people like Bill Weeks and Sid Jefford!

The invasion of Syria was next on the calendar of major events for 208, when a flight was sent in under the command of the 7th Australian Brigade and our story returns to Bill Weeks' notes: The invasion of Syria was to aid our French allies in their mandated territory, who were being over-run by the Germans. They had already attacked us, causing some damage. We pushed up to Palmyra, only to find the French did not welcome us at all! Our aircraft losses and casualty list continued to mount. Well, we got there! And I remember the Sergeant who happily drank some of General Auchinleck's gin while the big

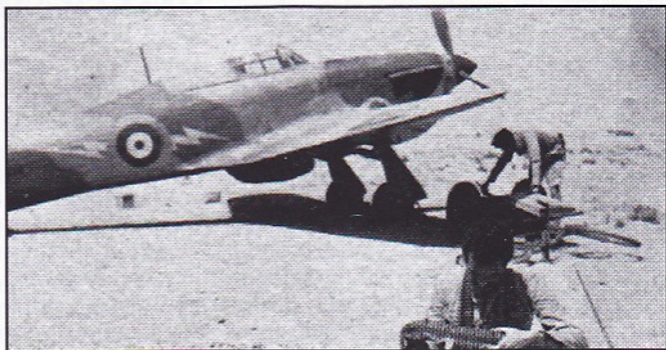
man inspected a parade of troops. Then our little detachment flew Glubb Pasha back to his base in a Lysander".

Back to the main Desert War, 208 re-equipped again, this time taking on a flight of Curtiss Tomahawks and flew back and forth across the desert, changing landing grounds more regularly than the shirts on their backs! El Alamein was part of this sequence of moves and during the battle, one Hurricane TacR I (Trop), (T9536), was seen in both British and German markings and changed hands at least twice! The Squadron ceased operational flying for a while in January 1943, moving to Aqsu in Iraq for a spell of winter training.



208 Squadron Tomahawks were painted in desert camouflage and, as the Squadron was going through a period of inordinately high mobility at the time it received its flight of "Tommies", it was some time before codes were applied to all aircraft. However, all bore a small blue inverted triangle on the

fin, as can just be seen on this example, which bears quite an early pattern of desert camouflage finish. It has been said that many Tomahawks ended up on their noses quite regularly in landing incidents, which may explain why the later Kittyhawk sported a longer fuselage. Below, a very interesting finish appears on this Hurricane of 208. The pale blue lightning flash is clear to see, but the nose and leading edges of the wings were painted in Italian desert finish, to fool gunners on the ground into thinking they were facing a friendly aircraft - until it was too late! P2638, was a PR1 (Trop) and, on return from a lone sortie over the desert on 24th July 1942, was shot down by three Bf109s near Burg-el-Arab. 208 flew a mixture of TacR and PR Hurricanes.



April saw 208 back in action, now officially tasked as a Fighter Reconnaissance Squadron. Locations included Rayak in Syria, el Bassa in Palestine, Meggido and then the big move over to Italy with Spitfire IXs at Trigno by March 1944. As Allied troops broke through the "Gustav Line", so 208 went North, too, gathering information to make the

advance easier and safer. His Majesty the King visited Castiglione while the Squadron was there, then it moved on to Risano, where it saw out the war. Some 78 awards and distinctions were conferred on 208 personnel through that war, then it moved back to Palestine, the only squadron of 285 Wing not to be disbanded as hostilities ceased.

This was a scene which became more and more common in Italy, as the Allies took mastery of the air. Here, Spitfire 9s are undergoing major service work after the early battles over Italian skies.



"Mud, Glorious Mud...." - the one thing of which there was plenty in Italy during the early spring. How you would move aircraft in this is almost beyond belief.

The spoils of war! So rapid was the Allied advance into Italy - and the German withdrawal - that many German aircraft were left intact as their owners beat a hasty retreat. 208 crews had a bit of fun with this one before it was handed over to officialdom.





Above: RG-W taxis into Firenze after a tactical reconn-aissance over Bologna and Modena. Don Groom was the pilot. To the right we see a C-61 Argus FZ727, Squadron "hack" of the time, taxiing out for another communications flight. Below: "It's over!" B Flight poses for a photo at Villa Franca after the news that VE-Day had finally come.



RETURN TO PEACE - AND TO THE DESERT

Palestine was not a peaceful place in the early post-war days, however, and 208's policing task was no easy one up to the British withdrawal in 1948. For example, there was the incident at Ramat David, when an Egyptian Spitfire shot up seven 208 aircraft on the ground in a dawn raid. A couple of hours later, three more bombed the airfield, but this time there were two Squadron "Spits" airborne, which quickly despatched the attackers. The Egyptians explained that it was all a "navigational error" and apologised.

There was another incident involving the Squadron's Spitfire Mk XVIIIs after the withdrawal from Palestine as the infant state of Israel was asserting its

presence. It was on 8th January 1949, when four 208 Spitfires were sent from Fayid, to the area of the al Auja-Rafah road to update information on extensive military activity, in which it had been reported that an Egyptian Spitfire had been seen being towed by road across the border into Israel. Warned not to cross the border in their reconnaissance, the four pilots took off at 11.15, flying a route to Abu Ageila, splitting now into two sections, the top pair acting as cover from 1,500 feet, whilst the other pair went down to 500 feet to survey the area.

Their route was to take them east to al Auja from Abu Ageila, then north to Rafah along the border and west to return to base. They were unaware that there were five Egyptian Spitfires in the area, which would almost certainly attract Israeli aircraft. During the

On the right is Sqn Ldr JM Morgan and some of his aircrew at Ramat David in Palestine a short time before the Squadron withdrew as the state of Israel was born and the British presence was no longer welcome.



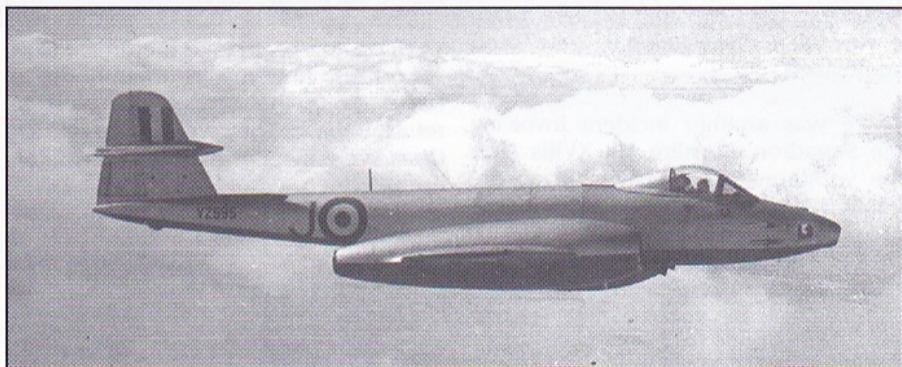
Below is a Spitfire FRXVIII flying over its new home in Egypt, back in Fayid and soon to convert to jets.



reconnaissance, the four 208 Spitfires had "strayed" across the Israeli border to examine a smoke plume. Ground fire ripped into one of the Spitfires and as the other three watched the pilot (Flt Sgt Pilot Frank Close) parachute to the ground, they were "jumped" by Israeli aircraft and shot down before they had any chance of defending themselves. There were stories that the four 208 "Spits" were unarmed, though one of the pilots involved in the incident insists that they were, but it was an attack which brought the Israelis no credit,

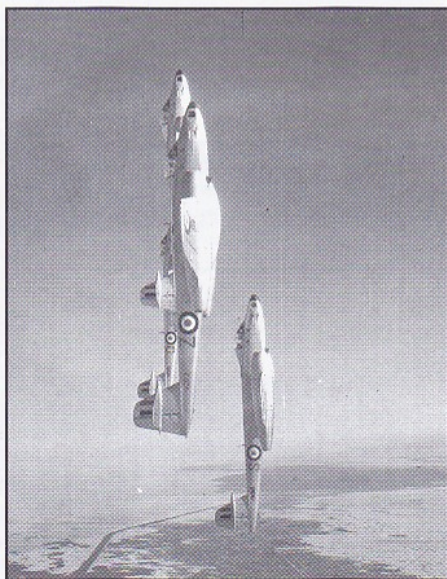
especially as the international ceasefire was timed to take place at 16.00 hours on that same day.

By the summer of 1950, the Squadron was receiving its first jet aircraft at Fayid, in Egypt, in the form of Gloster Meteors. With a couple of T7s and two experienced pilots, conversion was carried on location and Meteor FR9s were with the Squadron by January 1951. 208 celebrated the Coronation of H.M. Queen Elizabeth II with an aerobatic display, then a couple of years



Above: the classic shape of the second generation Meteor, slightly marred only by the revised camera nose, is demonstrated by this shot of a Meteor FR9 over Egypt. This is clearly very early in the Meteor's career with 208 Squadron, as the underside of the aircraft is painted sky blue, a practice quite quickly abandoned in favour of overall natural metal finish.

Right: these three Meteors, flying in formation over their Fayid home, show the natural metal undersides very clearly. Squadron codes had been dropped by now, but the coloured flash on either side of the fuselage roundel had not yet been adopted.



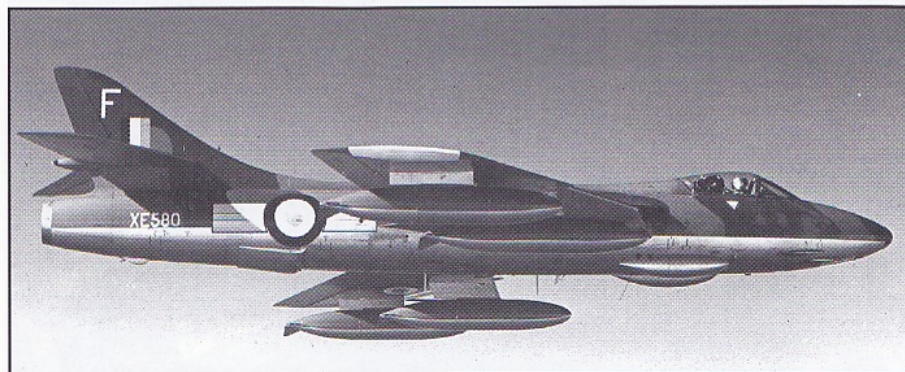


Meteors over the Pyramids. Taken in 1955, at the time of the presentation of the Squadron Standard, these aircraft have quite different finishes. The nearest machine is camouflaged in grey/green and all carry the now-familiar blue and yellow squadron identification bars on either side of the fuselage roundels. Soon, the Squadron would be moving to Malta.

later, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Geoffrey Bromet presented No. 208 Squadron with its Squadron Standard at Abu-Sueir on 18th November 1955. The Standard Bearer that day was a young Flying Officer named Laurie Jones, who rose to the rank of Air Marshal and followed in Sir Geoffrey Bromet's footsteps by being appointed Governor of the Isle of Man.

January 1956 saw the Squadron end its 36-year association with Egypt, as Colonel Nasser invited the British to leave the infant Republic of Egypt, having overthrown King Farouk a few years earlier, so 208 was transferred to Malta, where it spent the next two years between Luqa and Hal Far, with a flight almost permanently detached to Khormaksar in Aden. Then came re-

Some say this was the most elegant fighting aeroplane ever built - and there's certainly much to recommend the view in this shot of a Hunter 6 taken in 1958 when the Meteor was phased out and the Hunter brought into 208 service at RAF Nicosia in Cyprus.



equipment time again, as a new 208 was being created at Tangmere with Hunter F6s, though the old Meteor Squadron remained on station in Malta until the new unit was ready, under the command of Sqn Ldr JH Granville-White, to take up its new location at Nicosia in Cyprus. Within a month, the new CO's shiny new Hunter had a hole blown in its nose by an EOKA terrorist's pipe bomb!

Barely had 208 arrived at Nicosia when the US Sixth Fleet was called in to bolster the government of Lebanon, which resulted in a series of combined training with the US Navy, as well as a detachment to Akrotiri. Shortly after returning to Nicosia, one Flight of Hunters was detached to Amman, in support of BRITFORJOR (British Forces

Jordan), to uphold the government and Monarchy against a threat from Iraq (what's new?). As the flight returned to Nicosia at the end of October, the Squadron entered a quiet phase, then came the news that it was to be disbanded and re-formed in Kenya out of No. 142 Squadron, which also sported a Sphinx as its Squadron Badge, though in profile, rather than head-on.

Flying Venoms for a year before re-equipping with Hunter 6s, then FGA9s, the Squadron operated out of Eastleigh in a more peaceful mode than for a long time. As the Hunters arrived, so mobility was extended and aircraft were detached to Khormaksar, Sharjah. Bahrain and then to Kuwait, as the Iraqis fancied it belonged to them! The last British unit to leave Kuwait was 208



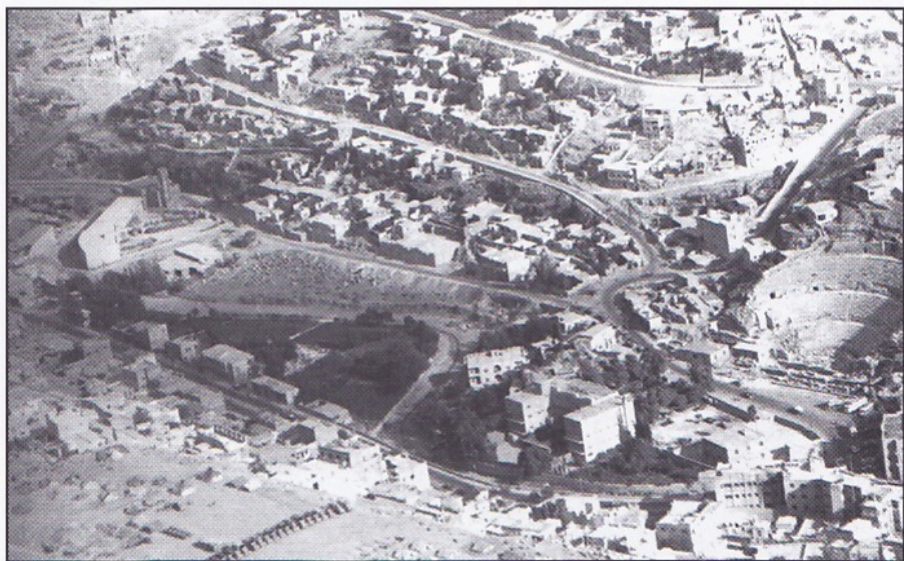
208 hadn't been at Nicosia very long when the call came for a detachment to Amman in Jordan. Here, we see the 208 dispersal with a Beverley on the taxiway, bringing in stores to support the British presence in Jordan.

Conference time. At one point, it was thought that, whilst 208 had flown in to Amman, it was just possible the Squadron might have to march out if the Iraqis had put their eighteen Hunters to use. The Iraqi Hunters were used in anger, but in the Basra area, not over Jordan. In the centre of this picture is Wg Cdr "Jock" Dalgliesh, who taught King Hussein to fly, and on the right, standing, is Sqn Ldr John Granville-White, 208's CO.



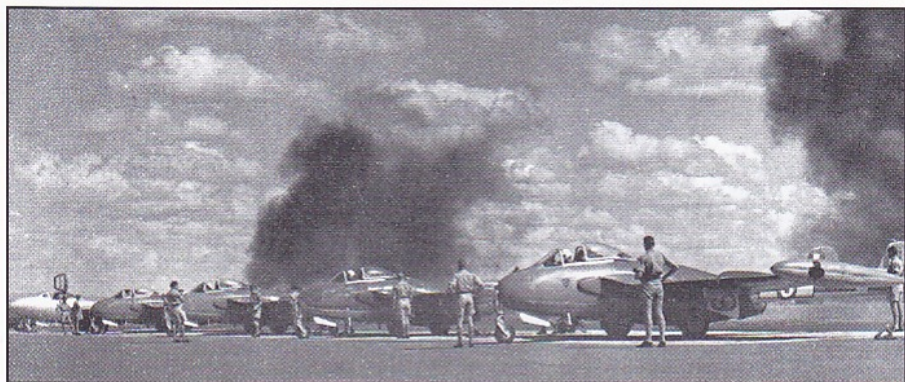


Whilst in Amman, the Squadron had a visit from HM King Hussein of Jordan. Here, he is talking with the aircrew, whilst Sqn Ldr John Granville-White, the "boss", marches off to the right to check that all is ready for the Hunter firepower demonstration which was arranged for later that morning.



The photo above of Amman was taken by the author on the return from a picture sortie over Nablus, near the Syrian border, where tanks had been reported gathering. The Roman Amphitheatre is to the lower right and in the centre left foreground is Amman's railway station. Right: Back home after the Amman detachment, the Squadron's Hunters took a lot of cleaning up.





With the Venoms, at Eastleigh, in Kenya, came the return of the playing card symbols for flight identification, as can be seen on the wingtip tank of the nearest aircraft above. On the left is a fine low-level study of the Venom in flight.



The Pyramids weren't handy at the time this shot was about to be taken - in any case, 208 had always had its picture taken over them, so it was time for a change. Here, the aerobatic 208 flies a formation over Mount Kilimanjaro, the tip of which is just in the picture at the bottom.



One of 208's Hunter T7s (two others during the Squadron's tenure in the Middle East were XL565 and XL602), standing on the apron at Khormaksar, in Aden. The observant will note that the outer stores pylons are fitted with jettison guns (the small blister on the upper surface of the wing gives it away), which was not a common modification on T7s.



Above left: AV-M Sir Geoffrey Bromet inspects the Squadron on Parade at the time of the 50th Birthday celebrations in Bahrain. Flt Lt Ian Tite is the accompanying officer. Above right: the standard was paraded at the Fiftieth and below, on the following day, a group photo was taken of the entire Squadron. In the centre is CO Sqn Ldr Tony Chaplin; on his left is Major Christopher Draper and on his right, Sir Geoffrey Bromet.

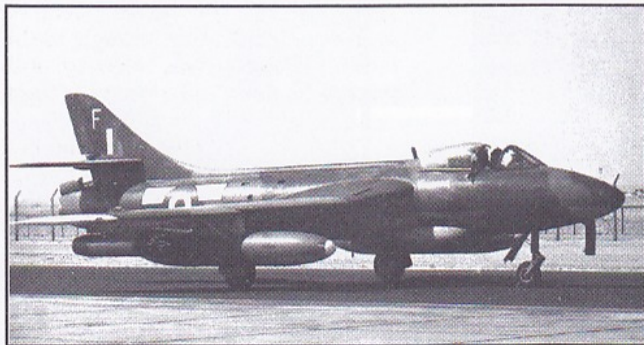


Squadron, which went further down the Arabian Peninsula to make its home at Khormaksar in 1960, alongside No. 43 Squadron, which was providing air support to British troops in the Radfan, as Aden's political issues came to the boil. 208's pilots endeared themselves to the ground forces by carrying out rocket strikes as close as 25 yards from our own ground positions and hitting the right spot!

Relocation to Bahrain as its home base came in 1964, though 208 continued to detach flights to Aden right up to Independence Day. At Muharraq, in October 1966, a profound event in the life of the Squadron took place with the celebrations of 208's 50th birthday, which was attended by Air Vice-Marshal Sir Geoffrey Bromet, by Major Christopher Draper and many other

distinguished names of the Royal Air Force.

Many more detachments and Armament Practice Camps occupied 208's time over the next five years, but there was a certain inevitability about the outcome of all these practices, as the British Government told the world it no longer intended to maintain a presence East of Suez, so the British Forces in the Gulf were to be disbanded in 1971. 208 Squadron was among that number and, in September 1971, it was disbanded at Muharraq. There being no immediate plan to re-form, Sqn Ldr Ian Dick brought home the Standard and laid it up at the RAF College at Cranwell until it was to be required again. Number 208 Squadron had established a record that has not yet been beaten and seems now highly unlikely ever to



From Bahrain, it was only a short hop across to Sharjah on the mainland, where squadrons in the Gulf regularly visited for armament practice camps. Note the "new technology" Matra rocket pack on the outboard pylon. We'd come a long way from the days of "three inch drains".

The end of an era. This disbandment parade brought to an end almost fifty two years of continuous service in the Middle East for 208 Squadron. It is on record as the longest continuous period of Middle East service for any numbered squadron of the Royal Air Force - a record that is unlikely now to meet with a challenge.



be beaten - it served in the Middle East for almost 52 years, longer than any other numbered Squadron of the Royal Air Force.



Breaking the last link with 208's illustrious past in the Middle East, the Squadron Standard was laid up at the RAF College, Cranwell, on 26th October 1971, 55 years to the day since the formation of Naval Eight. Almost three years later, the Squadron would breathe new life as a Buccaneer squadron.

208 BECOMES A HOME-BASED SQUADRON

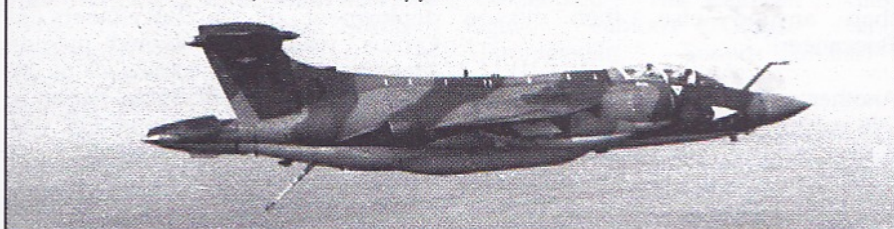
Thankfully, the Squadron Standard was required again, for in 1974, it was

announced that 208 Squadron was to reform with Buccaneer aircraft, as the Royal Navy began to lose its fixed wing aircraft, the Buccaneer being, of course, originally built to a Royal Navy requirement. Their location was to be Honington, in Suffolk, and for the first time in the Squadron's history, its aircrew complement was to include navigators as well as pilots, though observers had been used in the Army Co-Op days.

As a part of 1 Group, Strike Command, 208 was to serve in the overland strike role as part of Britain's NATO commitment. Wing Commander Peter Rogers re-established the 208 reputation for winning by securing the Gilroy Trophy in 1976, as the Squadron built up to the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in October. Again, Sir Geoffrey Bromet was the Reviewing Officer and one of the first-ever aircraft of Naval Light, a Sopwith Pup, N5182, was brought to the Gathering, where it was seen by both the pilots who flew it all those years ago!

In 1977, 208 was selected to be the first British squadron to take part in the US Air Force's Exercise "Red Flag", a permanent exercise scenario covering a thousand square miles of the Nevada desert, centred on Nellis AFB. Such was 208's performance that the Aggressor Squadrons only scored one "kill" in the two weeks of the detachment. One USAF pilot was overheard to say: "If we

The "Bucc" goes fishing! Well, why else would he have the hook down at 100 feet? This aircraft type was to remain with the Squadron for twenty years.





Buccaneers on the ramp at Nellis AFB, in Nevada, at their first "Red Flag" in 1977. The "Buccs" performed outstandingly and took the USAF aggressors completely by surprise.



For a period, as the total Buccaneer fleet underwent structural checks, the Hunter was back in action with 208, here seen at Honington.

can't see 'em, we can't kill 'em and they're flying at fifty feet flat out!". 208 turned in a similar performance a year later in 1978.

Canada held Maple Flag" in 1978, a similar concept to that of "Red Flag", but over the flat frozen wastes of Alberta. It was a huge area and flat as a billiard table, the perfect place to be caught. However, when the Canadians F15 Eagle pilots were asked how they found Buccaneers on their magic state-of-the-art radar, they replied "It's simple, if it flies lower than anyone else and faster than anyone else, then it's a Buccaneer!"

Another peaceful phase followed, as 208 settled down to a programme of routine training, trophy winning and the odd detachment to Gibraltar and Decimommanu. In 1982, 12 Squadron,

208's neighbour at Honington, moved to Lossiemouth to take up the task of Maritime Support. By 1983, it was decided that 208 Squadron would join 12 and make way for Tornado squadrons at Honington. So in July that year, 208 moved up to Scotland to make its new home at Lossiemouth and to become the other Maritime Support squadron.

September saw more strife in Lebanon, where civil war in one form or another had raged for many years. Now, Operation Pulsator called for the deployment of six Buccaneers to Cyprus, where they would provide support for the British contingent of the International Peacekeeping Force in Lebanon. In true 208 tradition, the Squadron made the headlines, as a newspaper reporter sent back this dispatch under the by line:

"...Buccaneers flew the Flag at 50 feet" To the second, the planes, two each time, screamed in from the sea at 500 knots to pass directly over the British base at Hadith before turning on their wing tips to head north for a sweep over the Lebanese capital.

"Then, as we waited on the rooftop for the aircraft to complete their steep turns and come back over the hills in contour-hugging formation, the desultory shelling in the hills above the British position was joined by bursts of machine gun fire. After their second run, the planes passed no more than 50 feet above a pylon in front of the British base, then dipped down to fly out to sea at minimum altitude. The two did a great deal for the morale of the British troops". At the end of their detachment to old haunts, all the 208 aircraft and their crews returned safely to Lossiemouth in March 1984.

Now, the Squadron could settle down to some peaceable flying for a while, though another event of major note was to take place in 1984, when Air Marshal Sir Humphrey Edwards Jones presented Wing Commander Ben Laite, then the Squadron's CO, with the new 208 Standard to replace that presented by Air Vice Marshal Sir Geoffrey Bromet nearly thirty years before.

During 1985, 208 took possession of its new HAS's or Hardened Aircraft Shelters, and continued training with all sorts of things, including the Sea Eagle missile. It is said that 208 is now familiar with every oil rig in the North Sea! One thing is certain: the Northern Approaches are certainly secure. As history now tells us, the Naval Eight/208 Reunion Dinner of 1990 was a notable one, for its Guest of Honour was Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine, who happened also to be Commander-in-Chief of British Forces in the Gulf whilst

Saddam Hussein was staking yet another of Iraq's claims to possession of Kuwait. A few comments were made about the Gulf, over which there was much natural curiosity, but little more.

THE SQUADRON'S 75TH YEAR

On a not-so-sunny day in January 1991, there was 208 Squadron, minding its own business on exercise out of St. Mawgan with the Navy, when the Western Coalition went to war over Kuwait, part of 208's old stamping ground. Everybody was glued to television sets and then, on 23rd January, the Squadron was called back to i ossiemouth and ordered to deploy to Muharraq, where it spent its last days as a part of Air Forces Gulf just twenty years before. Now, the task was to support Operation "Granby", an element of "Desert Storm". This, after a press statement issued only the day before, saying: "I can tell you it is extremely unlikely that the Buccaneers will be sent to the Gulf!"

The Royal Air Force moved with a speed of decision and action not witnessed since World War II, as two "Desert Pink" Buccaneers flew out to Muharraq on 26th January, followed by two more the next day and another two on the 28th. Finally, twelve aircraft and eighteen crews were located in Bahrain. They flew with such aircraft names as "Glenfiddich", "The Macallan", "Glen Elgin", "Famous Grouse" and "Tamnavoulin". Sounds familiar? I wonder why?

During February, 107 sorties were flown without a single mechanical mis-hap. Initially, the Buccaneers laser targetted, for the Tornados, bridges and fuel/oil

depots, then airfields, hardened aircraft shelter siloes and storage bunkers were added to the "shopping" list. Interestingly, the Buccaneer flew higher, faster and farther than its counterpart and ultimate successor, the Tornado GR1. The laser designation of targets worked perfectly and not one sortie was lost. Then 208 came into its own, carrying its own laser guided bombs as well as the laser designator, so it was taking out its own targets, including Iraqi aircraft* left out in the open. In a press conference, before the Buccaneers arrived in the Gulf, it was asked of Tom King (Defence Minister): "Why are we sending a thirty-year-old aeroplane to a hi-tech war?" The answer came back: "To increase the accuracy of the precision bombing"! And that's exactly what it did. But the best quote of all was Wing Commander Bill Cope's: "I compare the Buccaneer with my grandmother: old but formidable!".

As the ceasefire was declared, so activities closed down and the Squadron prepared to head for home. On 17th March, a tanker connection was organised across the return route and all twelve "Buccs" were flown home safely. After a total of 33 years of service, seventeen with 208, the Buccaneer had well and truly proved its worth. To quote the Squadron's own notes "Now, with a couple of years left to run, the old lady of Brough will be able to retire content".

And retire content she did, but not for another three years yet, as the Buccaneer Wing at Lossiemouth was to continue in operation until April 1994, when its squadrons would be replaced with Tornados. There was a period of deep apprehension as the news came out that 208 was unlikely to be converted to Tornado, disbandment being the more likely fate of one of the



Finally, the Standard is laid up and 208 (Buccaneer) Squadron is no more. The traditions and spirit of the Squadron are now handed over to Sqn Ldr Gary Brough and his team (some of whom just happen to be ex-208 "Bucc-jocks") to take the name, the Number and the reputation of 208 Squadron forward.



Farewell Buccaneer, welcome Hawk. As the Buccaneer departs 208, so the Hawk picks up the tradition and keeps the Squadron flying. On the right is a grey Hawk, behind which are examples of the later all-black finish now in use.



RAF's longest serving squadrons with a substantial history, a fine record in battle and a deep tradition.

Gloom and doom was finally lifted however, as it was announced that the RAF's fast jet training system was to be revised and the numbers of several distinguished squadrons were to be allocated to Hawk units, which would now be Reserve squadrons, having a full battle role in the event of any major emergency. They would be known as XXX(R) Squadron, rather than just "shadow" squadrons, as had been the practice in many operational conversion units previously. Each squadron would

have its own aircraft and its own commanding officer, carrying on the traditions of the former units. So it was that Number 208 Squadron RAF became 208 (R) Squadron and was established with Hawk trainers at RAF Valley, in Anglesey.

Today, 208 continues its traditions and has built up a proud record in its short existence as a Reserve training squadron. As we celebrate the Eightieth Birthday of Naval Eight, we can look back on a highly creditable past and look forward to young men taking to the skies and saying with pride: "I was with 208 - Up the Eights".



Hawks - the present and the future of 208 Squadron.



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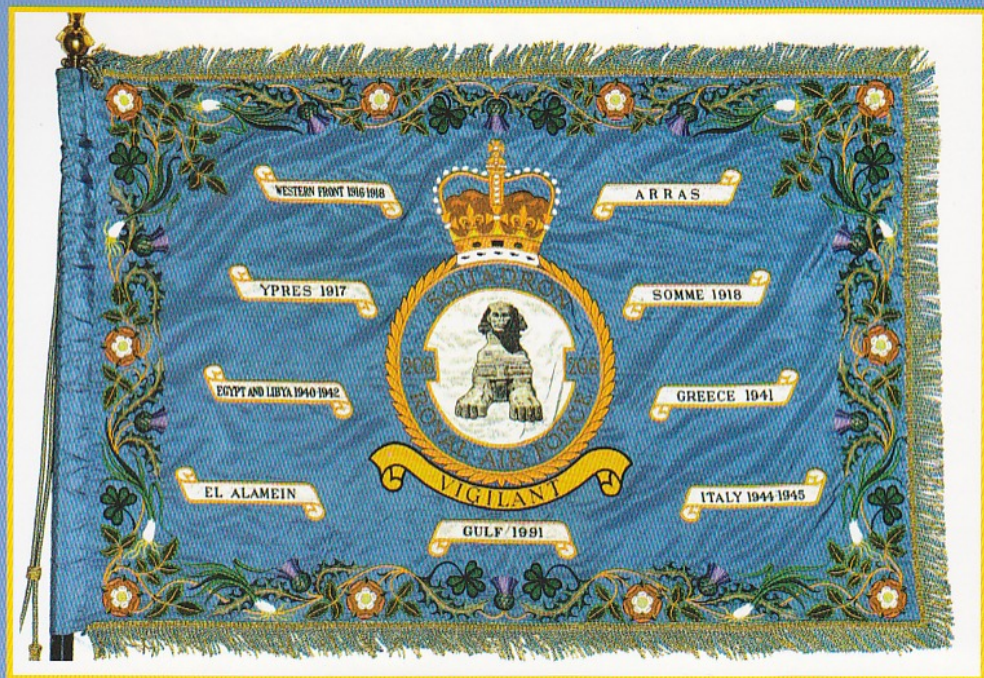
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