

Naval 8 - 208 News

The Annual Newsletter of the Naval 8/208 Squadron Association



2026 Issue

Naval 8 – 208 News - 2026



NAVAL EIGHT 208

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On the Cover:

Not the Red Arrows:
a 208 Sqn 9-ship formation
at Valley in 2006.



Naval 8 - 208 Rumblings

The President's Foreword

For most of us the world is looking as unstable as it has ever been. Google the question of how many wars are currently underway in our New World Order and you will be shocked. For those of us who served throughout the Cold War we can reflect on a period where a well-founded confidence that we had the wherewithal to hold our own was supported by a credible capability and an effective deterrent.

The conflicts in both Ukraine and the Middle East have given all of us pause for thought - although the art of warfare has changed dramatically with the advent of drones and autonomous platforms, the need for manned platforms, integrated across the whole battle space, still has a critical role in future technical developments. The UK Strategic Defence Review in 2025 highlighted that whilst the quality of RAF capability is unquestionable, its lean size does not reflect the needs of today's UK defence. The SDR also noted that: "*with the return of state-on-state conflict in Europe, the RAF must improve its productivity, agility, and adaptability to build greater readiness and resilience.*" To that I would add sustainability.

Recently the Prime Minister announced the intent to procure 12 F-35As in the overland strike role. This will sound very familiar territory for ex-208 Buccaneer Boys but before we get our hopes too high, there are still a multitude of caveats before this becomes a reality - funding being the primary obstacle - followed by the need for weapon development. But the Defence Investment Plan is already being trailed as unaffordable. Nonetheless, it is important to monitor the political developments between the Treasury and the MOD before putting a case for a resurrection of 208. I am keeping a close watch on this and will put our case to the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS) if the project looks like moving forward.

Back to today's world. Ever since Covid, the Association Committee has held our meetings via Microsoft Teams, so it was a great pleasure to meet up with most of the Committee in person at the RAF Club on 10 April. We agreed to continue to review options to hold future informal gatherings of members on a regional basis, but we are aware that travel, even within a UK region, can be difficult especially taking into account drink/driving limitations. At the Committee meeting I commended the excellent work carried out by the whole team, and especially the importance of the annual newsletter and website for keeping all the membership informed and providing a continuity platform for all our members to stay in touch.

I wish you all the best. Remain Vigilant!

Rob Wright
President

Chairman's Chunter

After the Association Committee was awarded the Sir Geoffrey Bromet Trophy by the President at the last Association Reunion Dinner in 2024, the Trophy has been appropriately engraved and resides in the safe custody of the RAF Club. Should the Squadron ever reform the Trophy will be returned to the Squadron for future generations to admire.

I know that Association members appreciate the sterling work done by all Association Committee members in keeping the memories of 208 Squadron alive. This work is greatly enhanced by the anecdotes from members about their time on 208, especially in the 'Keeping in Touch' section of the Newsletter. These greetings and anecdotes from members are most welcome and enjoyable to read. MORE PLEASE! The stories are the life blood of the Newsletter and the Website. Both the editor of the Newsletter (Malcolm Ward) and the Association Webmaster (Neil Meadows) are always on the lookout for new material. I must admit that I am scraping the barrel with my own anecdotes from two tours on 208 Squadron, so any contribution from other members is most welcome. With such a large collection of material (over 1250 pages) on the website (<http://www.naval8-208-association.com>) the webmaster is frequently approached by individuals looking for relevant information about family members to fill in gaps in their information. The photographs and the stories of life on 208 Squadron bring memories to life for so many. Also, academic researchers find the website a fantastic source of material on 208 Squadron operations, personnel and aircraft that provide details of derring-do of aircrew and groundcrew alike.

The Association Committee has been exploring opportunities for some informal lunch get-togethers, possibly in the South-West of England as a first thought. We will provide details as soon as we have more information.

David Trembaczowski-Ryder
Chairman

The Squadron Forms in 1916

It is 110 years since our famous squadron formed on the Western Front, the beginning of a unique chapter in the history of the RAF.

The summer of 1916 witnessed some of the most devastating losses in human life seen on any battlefield. Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in France, opened his great offensive on the Western Front on 1 July 1916. The 'Battle of the Somme' was to rage for the next five months. Crucial to any success was the support of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in France, commanded by Major General H.M. Trenchard.

Until the middle of July, the RFC had enjoyed considerable dominance in the air when powerful enemy air reinforcements arrived at the front to challenge this British air superiority. This was, in part, due to a re-organisation in the German High Command and a major revision of policy. New pursuit squadrons, the Jagdstaffeln, (often abbreviated to Jastas) with more capable aircraft such as the Halberstadt and Albatros types, were created and there was a greater concentration of fighters on the Somme front. The RFC continued with its policy of attacking targets, including airfields, behind enemy lines but Trenchard realised the significance of the change in enemy air policy and capability, and he recognised that without additional fighting squadrons, the RFC's ascendancy would be seriously threatened. With RFC casualties mounting because of the new drive of the German Air Service, Trenchard alerted the War Office on 29 September that there was a need to "*increase the numbers and efficiency of the fighting aeroplanes at my disposal.*" When the War Committee met on 17 October, it was agreed that the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) should provide a squadron to support the RFC on the Somme. The Admiralty recognised the urgent need and gave instructions for a squadron of eighteen fighting aeroplanes from the Dunkirk Command to be sent on temporary duty with the British Expeditionary Force. Matters moved very quickly after this policy decision and within a week No. 8 Naval Squadron was formed.

The Naval Aeroplane Unit at Dunkirk consisted of three separate wings. Each of these was tasked to provide one Flight of fighting aeroplanes to form a composite squadron. The three Wings operated different types of aircraft so Naval 8 was born with three Flights, one each of Sopwith Pups, six Nieuport 17 Scouts and six two-seat Sopwith 1½ Strutters. Appointed to command this new squadron was Squadron Commander G.R. Bromet who had overseen the air station at Dover. On 25 October, Squadron Commander Bromet crossed the English Channel to Dunkirk where the following day he met Lieutenant J. D'Albiac RMA, who was to be the squadron records officer. They drove to Vert Galand near Amiens where they were met by Flight Commander B.L. Huskisson (the second in command) and Second Lieutenant V.P. Spurway RFC, the equipment officer, and a small advance party of men. The aircraft set off in various formations, but it was late in the day, and the weather was poor and they became scattered with several pilots landing at various airfields and some in fields. It was to be three days before all eighteen arrived at Vert Galand. Thus, within a week of receiving the Admiralty's orders, the squadron had been formed and was becoming established on its aerodrome. It was attached to the 22nd Wing of the 5th Brigade RFC. Naval 8 Squadron thus had the distinction of being the first complete squadron of the RNAS to work with the Army on the Western Front.



Above: Nieuport Scout.

By 29 October virtually all the aircraft had arrived and settled into the three flights:

- 'A' Flight with six Nieuport 17s - Flight Lieutenant C.R. Mackenzie
- 'B' Flight with six Sopwith Pups - Flight Lieutenant S.J. Goble
- 'C' Flight with six Sopwith 1½ Strutters - Flight Lieutenant J.C.P. Wood

In addition to an armament officer, a stores officer and a ground officer, 120 chief petty officers, petty officers and men made up the full complement of the squadron. It was said that all the initial members of the squadron were volunteers.

The first week spent at Vert Galand stood out in the memory of those who survived the war as some of the most uncomfortable days they had to endure throughout the war. The weather was appalling with sleet and rain, the airfield was covered in mud, and the accommodation was extremely basic. In the first few days after the squadron's arrival, gun firing and formation flying was practiced, and pilots flew observation flights to become familiar with the local area and the front line. On 3 November, Mackenzie led the squadron's first operational sortie, a formation of four Nieuports on a line patrol but without encountering any Huns (as the German Air Service was known by all on the front line). Poor weather intervened over the next few days, and on the 9th the squadron had its first full day of operations. It was a fine morning when Mackenzie and Flight Sub-Lieutenant the Hon. A.C. Corbett took off at 0615 hours to fly a line patrol. Mackenzie got on the tail of a LVG two-seat reconnaissance aircraft, but his guns jammed and he was denied the squadron's first success. One of the pilots in action was the teenager Flight Sub-Lieutenant R.J.O. Compston who would become one of the squadron's greatest pilots. He attacked a white Aviatik C at 13,000 feet when flying over Bapaume, but he was forced to break off the engagement when his guns jammed. He followed the two-seat aircraft down until it entered cloud. Another pilot to see action on this first day was Canadian Flight Sub-Lieutenant Galbraith,

who had already achieved success with 2 Naval Squadron, in his Sopwith Pup. At 17,000 feet near Albert, he saw two enemy aircraft and dived on a blue two-seater biplane. He fired at the rear gunner to eliminate this threat before he attacked the second. Again, he fired at the gunner, but his engine started to misfire, and he was forced to head for a friendly aerodrome.



Above: Sopwith Pup.

from a range of twenty yards, fired about twenty shots, which sent the reconnaissance aircraft down in a spin east of Cambrai. The following day Flight Sub-Lieutenant S.V.H. Trapp forced a hostile aircraft down before five enemy scouts set upon him and he escaped by climbing away. The Australian Flight Sub-Lieutenant R.A. Little forced an enemy aircraft to land. The flight commander, Goble went one better and shot down a hostile aircraft in flames.

On 18 November, the army launched the last of the desperately costly attacks on the Somme, but the bad weather returned and prevented flying for another week. With spartan living conditions, rain, sleet and snow and intense cold at the heights the aircraft were flying, the pilots were operating under extreme conditions. Some had special fur flying coats and trousers made and frostbitten faces were not uncommon. Most of them had to be helped from their machines after landing. The squadron was back in action on the 23rd when 'A' and 'B' Flights were particularly busy. The squadron encountered an unusual number of German two-seaters. Little saw two enemy reconnaissance aircraft and scored what is considered the first confirmed victory of many achieved later when he attacked one of the LVGs at 7,000 feet and sent it down in flames. Unfortunately, there was a price to pay when the Argentinian-born Flight Sub-Lieutenant W.H. Hope failed to return. He came down behind the German lines and died the next day. Leutnant Franz Ray of Jasta 1 claimed Naval Eight's first loss. After lunch the following day, 'B' Flight took off for Cambrai and, once again, Galbraith broke away from his flight when he saw six large two-seaters, which he thought were LVGs. He attacked a straggler, unaware that five enemy scouts were above. He fired fifty rounds into the enemy aircraft and watched as the wing folded back by which time the enemy scouts were on his tail, and he had great difficulty in escaping. Many on the squadron had felt for some time that Galbraith was suffering great strain and after this encounter he had a breakdown and left the squadron a few days later. Bromet's sympathetic handling of this unfortunate situation attracted considerable praise from his men. Galbraith was unpopular with his fellow pilots, and some avoided his company, but the squadron commander paid him a handsome tribute.

On 27 November, Goble led his flight as they escorted a small force of FE2b's on a raid. The combat report he filed after the sortie is worth quoting in full. It gives a vivid impression of the almost primitive way of aerial fighting and the physical ordeal experienced by the early fighter pilots, not to mention their great courage flying without oxygen or parachutes:

"Escorted FE2b's on raid. Several machines of various types followed FEs around, quite a distance in the rear, but did not make any attempt to attack.

After bombing completed escorted FEs on Offensive Patrol S and SE of Bapaume. At somewhere about 10:30 am observed 3 H.A. at 12,500 feet trying to get behind FEs. I dived and two turned E. and I chased the other right down to the FEs firing about 30-40 rounds. The FEs then attacked it and it appeared to go down out of control. I climbed back to 13,000 feet and attacked 3 Halberstadts. Got under tail of one and fired about 100 rounds whilst circling round on steep bank. This machine dived towards Bertincourt in a very erratic manner and the other two machines turned E. One of the latter's observers was firing at me whilst I fired at the first one and several tracers went very close to me. A few minutes afterwards at 14,000 feet I was dived at by several machines. I hoiked and found two in front of me and some in rear. Got about 30 rounds at one and 40 at another when a machine appeared close to me and alongside. After some manoeuvring, I got behind this machine and fired a few rounds at it and it dived very steeply in an easterly direction. I circled around and got a few more shots in at machines, which were probably some, previously mentioned when I got a jamb in Vickers gun in 3rd position. Whilst trying to clear this jamb 3 Halberstadts dived at me. I hoiked again but one kept above me and chased me round trying to get an attacking position. I spiralled steeply right trying to clear jamb and we passed within 20 yards of each other several times when my machine spun 3,000 ft. and I then dived towards our lines, where I cleared the jamb.

I climbed back to 14,000 feet and met two H.A.s and both turned E. I followed and fired my remaining ammunition at one of them, which dived towards Bertincourt.

I found it extremely difficult to keep in close touch with the FEs after they dropped their bombs as their formation was not good due probably to the very heavy A.A. fire they experienced."

This graphic account is typical of many of the combats of Naval Eight pilots and highlights many of their qualities, not least perseverance.

Snow and bleak winds again interfered with flying until 4 December when squadron pilots claimed four enemy aircraft on a day described by Bromet as 'busy'. During the morning Goble and Little escorted a bombing force of eight FEs on a bombing raid to Bahagnies aerodrome. Little spotted an enemy scout approaching and turned to meet the German and fired one round before his gun jammed. He was then attacked as he tried to clear the gun and was chased across the lines. The engine of his Pup started to run rough, and a determined enemy forced him to land in a field. He cleared his gun and took off again and, after thirty minutes, found the FEs in a fight. He fired a red flare for the FEs to follow him, which they did, and the enemy aircraft (EA) dived east. Over Albert he saw a fight and went to the assistance of a British machine. He hit one EA with a burst from fifty yards sending it down vertically into ground mist. This action was typical of Little who was rapidly establishing himself as one of the squadron's most determined and aggressive pilots, qualities he was to display in abundance over the following months.

The successes of 4 December were marred with the loss during the afternoon patrol of the eighteen-year-old Corbett. He was seen in a fight with two enemy machines and sent one down before he was killed. His Nieuport came down 600 yards inside the lines and, the following day, a party of volunteers under the command of Compston recovered the body. On 6 December Bromet, who described Corbett as "a fine youngster with the heart of a lion", led a party at the burial service at Heilla Cemetery. The squadron lost another young pilot on 10 December. The Canadian Trapp had started to establish himself as a fine pilot with two successes already to his name when he took up his Sopwith for a test flight. As he pulled out of a steep dive over the aerodrome, the wings folded and he was killed instantly. He was buried at Beauval the following day. Later that day, Goble gained his fifth and final success since joining the squadron when he sent a two-seater down out of control. The constant rain, sleet and snow prevented any flying for a week, but it relented for just one day on the 20th when Little claimed a two-seater, but it was the pilots of 'C' Flight that had the most success. Since receiving Pups as replacements for their 1½ Strutters they had enjoyed little success. However, on a patrol led by Flight Lieutenant C.E. Hervey they accounted for three EAs. Hervey sent down a white biplane out of control and Flight Sub-Lieutenants R.R. Soar and A.S. Todd each were credited with a success.

The dreadful weather of December persisted but was welcomed over Christmas. The men entertained the officers with carols on Christmas Eve before a day of full activity to celebrate Christmas. Squadron Commander Bromet records:

"I remember going to church in the morning, having an enormous meal in the middle of the day, preceded by rounds of the mess decks, playing soccer in the afternoon and taking part in a smoking concert in the transport hangar at night."

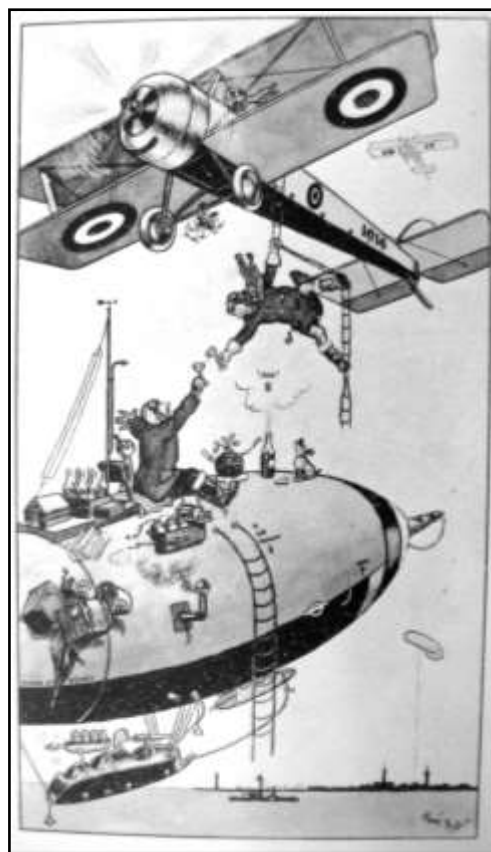
The events over Christmas demonstrated the marvellous spirit that existed between the officers and the men and how quickly the squadron commander and his senior staff had moulded the squadron together. Bromet had quickly established himself as a caring and considerate squadron commander who shared all the hardships experienced by his men prompting one of the officers to express just how much respect there was for him when he said:

"Tribute has already been given to our Commanding Officer, Squadron Commander G.R. Bromet and our First Lieutenant, Squadron-Leader (sic), B. Huskisson and I should like to add mine by saying that had it not been for the fact that they were men in every sense of the word, expecting nothing from the lowest to the highest rank under their command which they themselves would not give, life under the dreadful conditions of the 1916 winter would have become unbearable to us. Their cheery smiles and encouraging words made us one large family, which brought out the best that was in us."

Boxing Day provided a rare day of good flying weather, and all the flights were in action. During the morning, 'B' Flight was escorting FE2b's of 18 Squadron when seven Albatros D IIIs attacked them. Compston dived on the rear aircraft and fired a short burst from thirty yards until the enemy aircraft slipped down out of control. Hopelessly outnumbered, Compston was driven down by the remaining enemy aircraft and had to break away. This was the first of his many confirmed successes over the next few months.

Huskisson also sent an EA down out of control, his first success on the squadron, but Hervey had a more unnerving experience, which highlights another aspect of the dangers associated with combat flying during World War One. He was over Delville Wood when his engine 'petered out' during a scrap with enemy aircraft but he was able to make a successful landing just behind the British lines. The area was covered with shell holes, craters, barbed wire and other leftover material. Volunteers were called for to attempt to salvage his Pup.

So, 1916 came to an end. After just two months several of the squadron's pilots had begun to establish themselves as exceptional, none more so than the Australian Little and nineteen-year-old Compston, and Naval 8 had started to establish the great reputation that would endure until the end of the war and in the decades that followed.



Above: Flanders Christmas 1916.



Graham Pitchfork

Naval Eight/208 Sqn Association Historian

Exercise Bold Game 19 - 24 April 1989

David Trembaczowski-Ryder reflects on a NATO exercise that pitted Buccaneers against fast patrol boats.

On 1 November 1988, Jim Babbington and I flew in Hunter XL591 to Vaerloose, Denmark for the Exercise Bold Game 1989 Planning Conference. Exercise Bold Game was a joint Norwegian, Danish and German Fast Patrol Boat exercise held in the Skagerrak between Denmark and Norway. The UK, in the form of 208 Squadron and RN Lynx helicopters, were to provide the 'enemy' forces. The Lynx helicopters provided Tactical Direction (TACDI) for 208 Squadron. The conference included a briefing on the capabilities of the various FPBs. In particular the Danish Willemoes-class missile boat (originally called a Flex 2000) could achieve a maximum speed in excess of 40 knots. Their weapons consisted of one 76 mm (3 in) OTO Melara gun and a combination of RGM-84 Harpoon missiles and torpedo tubes. Alternatively, it could carry a payload of naval mines. The manoeuvrability and speed of the FPBs meant that they would be

Above: Typical Nordic Coastline.



challenging targets for simulated LGB attacks.



Above: OC 208, 'Boots' Mahaffey in the Ops Room.

OC 208 Squadron, Brian 'Boots' Mahaffey, nominated me to be DetCo for the deployment, which meant briefing the troops on the exercise. In particular, it was important to brief both aircrew and groundcrew that they were under no circumstances to sell their duty-free alcohol to the Norwegians! I suspect this order was ignored by one or two! The Squadron deployed on 19 April 1989 to Stavanger/Solo airfield where we set up our ops room and support facilities on the military (east) side of the airfield. The approach to Runway 36 was a curved approach as there were rather high mountains to the south of the airfield. This made a radar approach rather handy in poor visibility.

On arrival the crews were invited on board a Norwegian FPB for a cockers-P – there was not much elbow room, but we managed to down a few Norwegian (expensive) beers in preparation for an evening downtown!

The exercise called for aircraft (and crews) to be on stand-by from very early morning (05:00-ish), with no specific pre-arranged flying programme. This meant that crews were uncertain if they would fly on the very early first wave or not - this could have the disastrous effect of limiting drinking time (and quantity) during the previous evening. Mike Scarffe (Scarffy) suggested we nominate 4 crews for the early shift and the rest could 'relax' in the evening! Great idea! A sticky note was placed on each hotel bedroom door for those on the early shift. An amicable solution all round.

Earlier in 1989, the aircraft had been fitted with Inertial Navigation Systems (INS) in replacement of the old GPIs – a great improvement, but the INS needed aligning before each sortie. This had not been a problem at Lossiemouth as the aircraft had invariably shut-down in the same HAS from where they had started.



Above: On task - with or without INS!

On 19 April the boss and I were tasked to lead a 4-ship to attack the FPBs in the Skagerrak. We started up the engines but the INS would not align! After some 15-20 minutes of waiting, we were nowhere near having an aligned INS and we were in danger of not making our TOT, so we decided that we would fly the sortie on the magnetic compass only – the magnetic variation at Sola was only 1-2 degrees. We completed the sortie successfully all on the magnetic compass, including a PD to Lista. On landing we realised that the groundcrew had put the aircraft to bed the previous night in a hangar, but on dragging them out the next morning the wind direction had changed by about 20 degrees. The groundcrew parked the aircraft into wind as per SOPs, but we discovered that we should have slewed the INS around to be very close to the new actual heading on engine start – lesson learned!

Overall, a very successful exercise with great flying and challenging fast-moving targets.

David Trembaczowski-Ryder

208 Sqn 1981-1984 & 1988-1990



208 in Pictures



Above Left: 208 Sqn Bristol Fighter, Egypt c. 1925



Above Right: On manoeuvres in Egypt.



Above Left: Lysanders over the Suez Canal.



Above: Out of Africa: A Zulu chief tries out the Hunter cockpit for size.



Below Left: Refuelling a Vampire T11 in Kenya during the Venom Period.
Photo courtesy of Peter McLeland

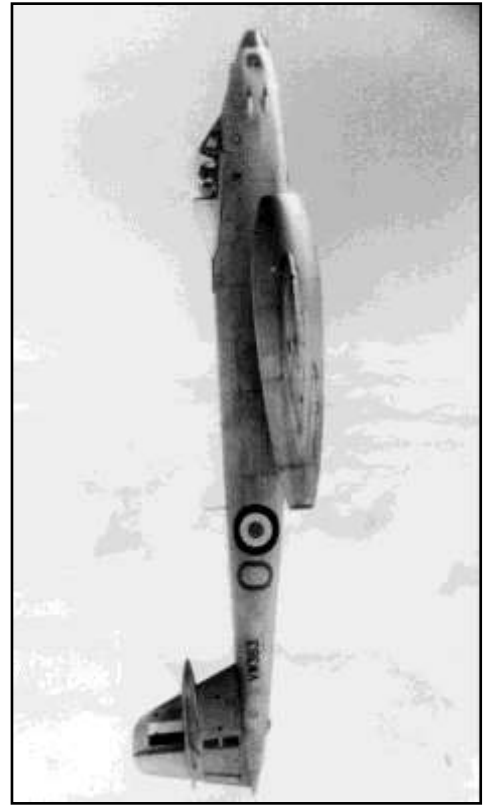


Below Right: Hunter armament.
Photo courtesy of Doug Marr.

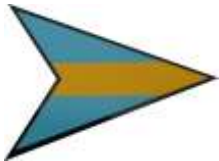




Above Left: 208 Sqn Hunter T7, preserved at Bruntingthorpe.



Above Right: 208 Sqn Meteor in Egypt.



Right: Reflections on the Great War:
208 Sqn Hawk in WWI centenary markings.

Below: The end of an era: the 208 Sqn Standard
is laid up in St Clement Dane's, 2016.



Sumburgh Low Overshoot

The Association Chairman, David Trembaczowski-Ryder recalls a memorable sortie in Scotland.



On 24 February 1989, Jim Babbington and I were flying in XV333 on a singleton sortie to drop some practice bombs at Tain Range, carry out some maritime tactics in the Moray Firth, and low-level flying in LFA 14, to be followed by an airfield attack and subsequent practice diversion at Sumburgh Airfield on the Shetland Islands. Runway 09/27 at Sumburgh is only 4,921 ft long and so there would be no rollers for the PD.

To our great surprise a couple of days after the airfield attack and low overshoot at Sumburgh we received a letter from Malcolm Bradbury, a radar air traffic controller at Sumburgh, which included this photo.

David Trembaczowski-Ryder

208 Sqn 1981-1984 & 1988-1990

Above: Saying hello and goodbye to Sumburgh.



Membership News

The Association welcomes the following new member:

Andy McKee Buccaneer

Member Lost Contact:

D Stratton Meteor

Current Membership:

Full (in contact)	256	Honorary	1
Lost contact	108	Associate	4
Total Full Members	364	Family	8



Nigel Huckins
Membership Secretary

Squadron Snippets

Historical Society Seminar - The RAF and Nuclear Weapons

The RAF Historical Society holds two seminars each year: the spring seminar in 2026 examined the RAF's past and future role with nuclear weapons. The attendees were welcomed by Naval 8/208 Sqn Association Historian and Life Vice-President, Air Cdre Graham Pitchfork, who was deputising for the Chairman of the Historical Society, Air Vice-Marshal Steve Chisnal.

As a former Buccaneer engineer during the 1980s, I was interested to hear how the RAF first learned to handle nuclear weapons in the 1950s. Another fascinating presentation covered the legacy infrastructure of the weapon storage and preparation areas, some of which have now been designated as listed buildings, thanks to the efforts of English Heritage. The lecture was illustrated with some haunting photographs, including one of the now-disused Special Storage Area at Honington. However, the highlight of the day was a short and somewhat guarded lecture by Air Cdre Nick Lowe, Head of Capability for Combat Air, on the RAF's new task, as announced earlier this year: the resumption of the overland strike role, with theatre nuclear weapons. Air Cdre Lowe was at pains to point out that there was much that he could not share with the audience. However, he did indicate that the F-35A aircraft would be "dual-capable", being routinely used by the Conversion Unit (207 Sqn) for training and that the weapons would be US-owned and dual-key controlled. The proceedings of the seminar will be published in the next issue of the RAF Historical Society's Journal, which is due out later in the year and will eventually be available via the RAF Museum's website.



Malcolm Ward

208 Sqn 1981-1983

RAF Museum Cosford - Hunter Conference

HUNTER!
ONE-DAY CONFERENCE
RAF MUSEUM MIDLANDS
JULY 11, 2026

ROYAL AERONAUTICAL SOCIETY
ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM

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CONFERENCE
— THE AIR FORCE
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SUBJECTS & SPEAKERS:
■ Genesis & Early Development Tony Butler
FRAdB ■ The Hunter & Politics Prof Keith
Hayward FRAdS ■ From Interceptor to
Ground-Attacker — The Hunter's Weapons
Chris Gibson ■ Neville Duke & The World
Speed Record, 1953 Pete Daulton (Langstone
Military Aviation Museum) ■ Hunter's
Bach-Daigle: The Hunter Support Story Elise
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BUY TICKETS ON BILLYK MIDLANDS WHAT'S GOING ON HUNTER ONE-DAY CONFERENCE

This summer will see the 75th anniversary of the first flight of the Hawker Hunter. To mark this milestone, the RAF Museum at Cosford is hosting a conference on 11 July 2026 by the Royal Aeronautical Society Aviation Heritage Specialist Group, examining various aspects of this famous aircraft's history including the design, development and operational flying of the Hawker Hunter. The speakers include ex-208 Sqn Hunter pilot Rod Dean, whose presentation will cover operational flying, as well as his later experience as a Hunter display pilot.

Tickets are available from the RAF Museum's website, priced at £25, to include coffee and lunch.



Iain Ross

208 Sqn 1969-1970



In Memoriam



The Association records with regret the passing of the following old comrades:

Richard 'Dick' Petchey* - Spitfire

Ron Anstead - Hunter

Mick Fuller - Hunter

Ian Semple - Hunter

Barry Wakling - Hunter

Denis Briggs - Meteor

Paul Day - Hunter

Richard Handscomb - Hunter

Eric Sharp - Hunter

Norman Browne - Buccaneer

** Dick Petchey passed away in 2020, but the Association has only recently learned of his demise.*

Erratum

Last year's obituary for Desmond Penrose referred to Harald Penrose as his older brother. This was not the case, although they did know each other.

Desmond told me several years ago, how he took great delight in telling Harald, whom he referred to as Hal, that he had just flown a DC-7, which was an aircraft that Harald had not managed to get his hands on. Desmond flew with a DC-7 captain in the right-hand seat and used him to read all of the pre-flight checks, which Desmond then executed in a brisk manner. The DC-7 captain said afterwards that Desmond "*clearly hadn't forgotten much*" about the aircraft. A type that Desmond had never flown before!

I misinterpreted the friendly, professional rivalry between Desmond and his namesake as sibling rivalry. However, it seems that Desmond and Harald were brothers-in-arms, though not brothers in the flesh. *Mea culpa.*

Malcolm Ward-

Editor

208 Sqn 1981-1983

Memories of 208 Squadron

Denis Briggs, a 208 Sqn Meteor pilot, spent many hours during the Covid lockdown period, recounting his memories of life on the Sqn to his grandson, Will Davis-Coleman, who recorded them verbatim. Denis passed away in December 2025, but courtesy of his family, a brief excerpt of his recollections is presented here.

Joining the Squadron

I finished at RAF Stradishall and was posted to 208 Sqn at Abu Sueir in Egypt in late 1954. In those days you had to fly via Malta and then one other staging post called El Adem and then Fayed in the Canal Zone. From there, we were put in a Land Rover and driven to Abu Sueir – I was open mouthed by the Egyptians, the canal and the hot sun. We went into Abu Sueir and the sqn was very lively – the beer there was made from the Canal and it was ghastly – behind the bar we had Mousa the barman whom we adopted as our sqn honorary member. There were other people on the station, but we really ruled the roost. There was 13 Sqn who flew Meteor 10s, we were flying Meteor 9s – we had a camera on ours, they didn't. The OC was "Sandy" Tom Neil, ex Battle of Britain pilot; he was tall, blonde, very good looking and a good pilot. I joined "A" Flt, which was led by Flt Lt Jack Friar, who won the sword of honour at Cranwell. I got on very well with him. I can remember he turned to me on the first day and said: "*Get in that aircraft and fly down south to Ain Sokhna and take a photograph of it to prove it and return.*" So I took off, it had a wonderful runway, longest in the middle east 3,000 yards. I looked down and just saw desert – it was absolutely wonderful and you could see for bloody miles. I took the photograph and then went in and joined the sqn – they were a marvellous crowd: the terrible twins Geoff Green and Frank Seton, they were up to all japes and did heaven knows what. There was Snowy McKee, John Newby joined shortly, Laurie Jones another sword of honour and ended up as an Air Marshal and as the head of the Isle of Man. Brian Cross too. Then a close friend of mine Peewee Bush got the name because he came from the Caribbean – his father was in oil. Peewee and I got on the best and John Newby.

Another bloke was Terry Bollans: I became his best man. The Flt Cdr for B Flt was Mike Bradley.



Above: Denis Briggs

Buzzing the Egyptian Air Force

We started flying together and, as Bradley said at a reunion in London, "it was like a glorified flying club"! One instance, I was picked by Friar to be number 4 in the formation which meant that I flew in the box. We used to do some night flying as a four – one night Peewee was leading us, I was number 4 underneath, we used to fly very low in the Suez Canal and head for a ship coming the other way and we would go over their heads by 50 feet – we got a huge complaint about it! Peewee was sent off or asked by the Egyptian Air Force to train their pilots in how to fly air to air. He came back from that, he said to the boss there, if we see you would you be interested if we buzzed you? One day I was airborne with Peewee, he saw some of the Egyptian Air Force and we buzzed them – a faux attack! The station commander was waiting when we returned and had a go at them – Peewee protested: "Sir, we were asked to!" The Egyptian president had been on the line – we had broken them up and caused embarrassment.

The Colour Presentation

The great occasion that happened to me – 208 Sqn was due to have its colour presented. The colour presentation was a grand occasion – started with the actual presentation the man to hold the colour was Laurie Jones and presented by our first Sqn Cdr (Air Marshal Bromet) – we were all on parade like at graduation at Cranwell. The CO couldn't remember all the commands! Luckily Laurie, who had taken the parade at Cranwell was facing the CO – every time he forgot the commands he would whisper it to him! We did the formal parade, which was a great success and then we went into the mess and had drinks and a meal. We were standing in the mess, in front of our new colour and we sang the squadron song!

Then the pièce de résistance: we had the flying display. I was the number four in A Flt's display, we started off with a loop, in came B Flt, then a barrel roll, then we joined together and became one of the first sqns to loop and barrel roll as an eight – I think 111 Sqn did it with 16. Then we came round to land as a four – I was first to touch down and say "four down" and the rest landed after and we taxied in. We then had a big do.



Above: "Eyes Right!" The Sqn Standard is paraded past the saluting dais.

Restocking the Mess Bar

Then we used to do what we called a NAVEX – two people going off to various places, I was very lucky, I had Frank Seton who was taking me to Tripoli – it was also a booze trip! We took off and went to Tripoli and staged through El Adem and then landed in Tripoli at the airfield. There was an officer who had been there when it was liberated by the Allied 8th army and married a local girl. He said to us: "Come for a night out – I will tell you where to go and tell them you're coming." The district was very dangerous and full of girls – we were highly respected as being RAF pilots – and that is where I shall stop that story! We had another NAVEX when I went to Malta with Frank Seton – it was another booze trip. We filled up with whisky, gin etc and put it all in the ammunition tanks to fly back. We took off and Frank couldn't raise his undercarriage because he was too heavy! I was flying off to Egypt and he couldn't come, he had to land very safely and didn't break a bottle of booze and he flew back later!

Life at Abu Sueir

At Abu Sueir, we had a very good station commander. At Christmas he issued this order: "Right we are closing the gates, every unit on the station will build a bar and I will go round and test each of them!" Then they decided to have a rugby match, "Colonials vs Brits" – I was on the colonials team because I was born in India. We were all very drunk but we had a great game. Pete Anstey has a recording of it!

Still at Abu Sueir, we were moving into the cricket season. Another great friend was Brian Westcott who was captain of the cricket team and he played with me at Cranwell. We had a cricket match: officers against the airmen. The airmen went in first and scored about 170. I went in very early for the officers and I managed to bat extremely well, I scored 100! The officers won! And I was congratulated. Then, even more something to be proud of, I was picked to play against the Army and I represented the RAF! Because of that, I have that tie which I am very proud of. I went up to Cairo, they have a wonderful club called Gezira we played against the army and they batted first and I was fielding at gully, it was grass, it was wonderful to play on grass after playing on sand all year! I have a feeling we won, and I didn't have to bat even.

Life consisted of flying in the morning, lunch with a few beers, Pete Anstey and I would play tennis and we had a ball boy called Chico. And then we would play bridge in the mess. We had servants who brought sandwiches and drinks when we wanted. We had mess evenings and so on. We had the Officers' Club, this was very nice indeed, with outside seating.

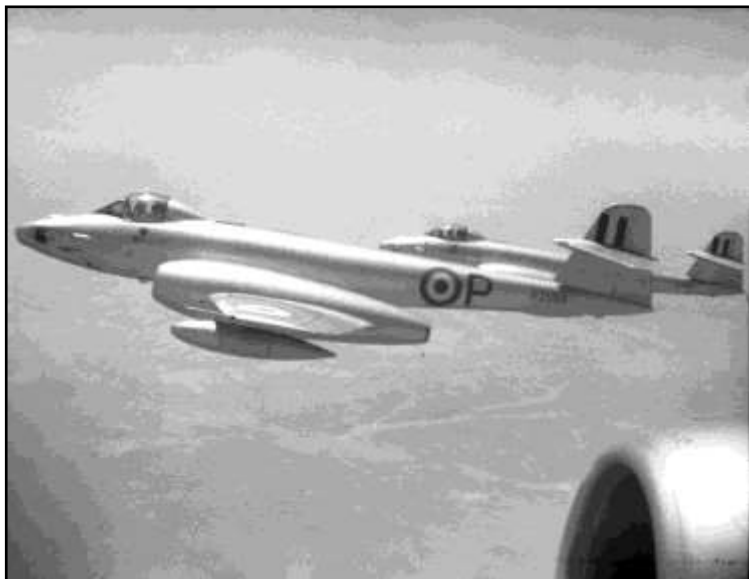
The Guards

Prior to leaving Abu Sueir – the Guards came and saw us and I had a young Lieutenant ask me in the Queen's English: *"I say, how do you fire the guns?"* I pointed out the trigger to him and he then asked: *"I say, don't you have competent NCOs to help you out with that sort of thing?"* We found them quite hilarious, so plummy and belonging to another world. I was the Air Liaison Officer with the Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment, who were going off on a training exercise in the desert – we were flying jets over them. I was given a Land Rover and a Corporal and we drove off right out into the bundu. Eventually, we stopped and they put up tents, including one for me. Up comes the Sergeant Major: *"Sir, 7pm drinks in the mess, Sir please."* I went down to the mess, in the middle of the desert – they had a large table in the middle of the tent, and on the table they had brought their regimental silver!

John Mansfield Killed in Action

The next thing, they were having trouble in the Yemen – they had decided to be a bit nasty about Aden so we were asked to send two aircraft down there to take photographs. I went on the first detachment with Nigel Thorne, the commander. We staged at Akrotiri, weren't allowed to fly over Israel so we had to go over Turkey. We then staged at Diyarbakir in Turkey. From there we flew to Bahrain, then on to Sharjah, down to Masirah Island on the southern tip of the Persian peninsula, then to Salala and on to Khormaksar. It was just the two of us, Nigel and myself. Nigel returned to the sqn and was replaced by John Mansfield – a very junior pilot.

One day the Wg Cdr called me in and told me that the army were asking to be supported on a patrol from the Yemen chasing terrorists: *"They have these terrorists at the village of Thumier in a house. You have to go up there fly over the village and when you see any terrorists – shoot them."* Off John and I went and flew over Thumier – some terrorists came out and we attacked them. The terrorists very sensibly were shooting back at us. Unfortunately for John, one of their shots hit his engine and it fired. I was flying close to him and I told him to eject but he didn't and he was killed. My heart almost stopped: I made a mayday call. The army were fairly close by and they managed to drive up and collect his body. I went back to base and I was debriefed. Then I went back to flights and one of the airmen said: *"Come and look at this."* Under my aircraft we had a ventral tank which was an extra tank of fuel – it fed automatically. It was full of fuel and there was a bullet hole right on the edge which had gone into the fuselage – half an inch to the left and I would have been killed. I didn't know John Mansfield that well, but he was very young. His body came down and we had a funeral and he was buried in an Aden cemetery. I had to look after all his things and tell his parents – it was ghastly. I lived on my own at Khormaksar and waited. They sent down replacements – Pete Anstey and some others.



Above: 208 Sqn Meteor FR9s.

A Pilot's Lament

*We are three little Meteors who have lost our way
We are three little Meteors who have gone astray
Hello Abu Sueir, we are off your track
Give us a homing to get us back
Strength half distorted so blow your lot, jack
And Pan Pan Pan, let's make it Mayday.*



Denis Briggs

208 Sqn 1954-1957

They Think It's All Over....

In this World Cup year, we bring you a report from a thrilling match. Richard 'Dick' Petchey compiled this account of the RAF Fayid Soccer Cup Final on Friday 11 March 1949. Dick passed away in 2020: his match report was recently sent to the Association by his daughter, Annie Kilsby.

The ground was filled long before the start and 208 were well to the front in all manner of regalia. Repair & Salvage (R&S) Wing supporters marched on with the Pipe Band and the scene before the kick-off was very colourful, full of roars, cheers and counter cheers.

A great roar greeted the rival Captains walking out for the toss, R&S won, electing to defend the Tennis Court end. In the first few minutes they were forced to clear a 208 raid, R&S later bursting through to run the ball out. A free kick awarded to 208, saw Mitchell run out Jelly's pass. 208 forced the pace but Jones cleared. R&S gained a corner which came to nothing, Caldwell running in, tried a high lob. 208 took the lead against the run of play when Pierce and Kyle staged a move, the latter leaving Wyborn to drive home in great style. Great enthusiasm greeted this goal!

Kyle was not being allowed much scope but nevertheless his persistence created many openings. After Pascoe-Watson had held and cleared, Fortune made a desperate clearance to stem a menacing R&S attack. Both sides were having spells as attackers; the game being continually cut and thrust all the way. Both sides continued to raid in turn, the game being very even with R&S just the shade on top. Walker and Mahon were going great guns and the 208 defence were very effective in their stoppages. Sedgewick headed wide about now and, as the first half died out, Manton was unlucky to see his drive rebound out from the underside of the bar, a near thing for 208.



Above: AC Harley (Linesman), Cpl Thompson (Trainer), AC Herron (Linesman), Flt Sgt Green (Referee). The Team: Back Row (L-R): Fg Off Wyborn, Fg Off Pascoe-Watson and P2 Walker. Middle Row (L-R): Cpl Stewart, AC Mahon and AC Fortune. Front Row (L-R): LAC Pierce, LAC Kyle, Fg Off Jelly (Captain), Cpl White and AC Mitchell.



scores the first goal

From the restart R&S swung into the attack, but Walker cleared, 208 following with a great run through on the right, Kyle running through to see his shot blocked. Mitchell later narrowly missing a centre. A ball across the centre saw no 208 forward there and generally 208 had staged a great rally penning R&S within their own half, Mitchell going through was hurled bodily over the line, Walker took a free kick which R&S were lucky to scramble away. The Squadron's second came when Kyle intercepted a faulty back-pass to dribble round Young and tap into the net. Great times folks!

The Referee forced the huge crowd back off the line. A great drive by White saw Young push the ball round the post. The resultant corner going for another but

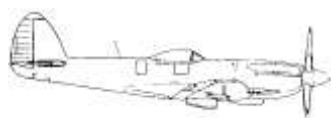
Above: Fg Off Wyborn was cleared by R&S defenders. 208 forced

R&S to conceded two more following this. R&S struck back only to see Jelly and Mahon brush off their attempts. 208 were still on top, R&S being seen on occasions when the Squadron defence was equal. A Kyle centre rolled along the bar and dropped with no one present, later Young made a miraculous save from Mitchell. A downfield run saw Mitchell give Kyle the chance to dribble round the defence and keeper to add a third.

After the final whistle blew Group Captain Mack Nelson presented the Cup to the 208 Squadron Captain (Fg Off Jelly), also medals to the whole team. R&S looking very downhearted, gave a hearty cheer for 208, the Squadron replied to this with gusto. Well done chaps! Jolly good show!



Above: Gp Capt Mack Nelson presents the RAF Fayid Knockout Cup to Fg Off Jelly.



85th Anniversary Celebrations

Neil Meadows recalls the evening of 25th October 2001, when 208 Squadron gathered to celebrate its 85th Anniversary in the form of a ladies' guest night. Members past and present, and their guests joined in commemorating the achievements of a Squadron that had had a remarkably varied and interesting career in the service of its country.

The celebration dinner followed a traditional format with food prepared by the Officers' Mess catering section. Following the Loyal Toast, I addressed the gathering, reminding everyone of the Squadron's proud history and introducing some of the guests.

Attending the dinner was Mr George Fortune, brother of Flying Officer John Fortune, a 208 Squadron pilot who was shot down and killed in North Africa in January 1942. Mr Fortune read notes on the career of his brother who was awarded a posthumous Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions whilst flying Lysanders and ultimately Hurricanes in the reconnaissance role during World War Two. The Squadron was in the thick of things during the North African Campaign, winning Battle Honours for Egypt and Libya, Greece, El Alamein and Italy. Its role of tactical reconnaissance was one of attrition and huge losses. Some 78 awards and distinctions were conferred on Squadron personnel during this time. During an early morning reconnaissance on 14 January 1941 in the Bi res Suera area, Flying Officer John Fortune, who had been with 208 Squadron since November 1940, failed to return. Initially, he was posted as missing, but in May 1941 he was reported to be a prisoner of war. Sadly, this proved not to be the case and he is commemorated in the Alamein Memorial. Before his death was confirmed, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross on 14 January 1942, exactly one year after he failed to return. You could have heard a pin drop as the Squadron's trainee pilots listened intently to the stories of the wartime actions and bravery of a young man very similar in age to themselves. At the conclusion of Mr Fortune's speech, the whole Squadron rose in a spontaneous, heartfelt and lengthy standing ovation.



Above: Mr George Fortune.

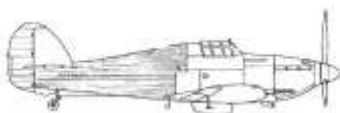
Another former Squadron member remembered that evening was Flight Lieutenant Henry Botterell who had downed a German observation balloon over France in 1918. Henry, aged 104 and living in Canada, was believed to be the oldest surviving World War One fighter pilot at the time. Three Squadron members had recently met Henry when they travelled to Canada to ask him to sign the original painting of the action which was displayed in the Squadron Headquarters.



Above: OC 208 Sqn addresses the gathering.

From the oldest fighter pilot on the Squadron to the youngest, the celebrations were also used to mark the graduation of the latest intake of trainee pilots. Under the command of Captain Claude Robert for the preceding five months, the trainees had learned to fly a demanding fast jet to a high standard. Following the after-dinner speeches, the pilots graduating from No 60 Course were also 'role disposed' to their next assignment. One was posted to be a qualified flying instructor at the RAF's basic fast jet training unit flying the Tucano trainer and passing on what he had just learned to others. The rest were posted to the Tactical Weapons Unit, again flying the Hawk at Valley, to learn how to use the aircraft as a weapons system, before progressing to their front-line type. Although no longer operational in 2001, the Squadron had perhaps its most important role in its distinguished history, certainly for the RAF and the Navy, training all combat pilots of the future, on whatever squadron they may eventually end up. The celebrations were concluded by quoting the words of 208's first Squadron Commander, Sir Geoffrey Bromet:

"Whenever you, and those who follow after, see this Standard, you as they will recall brave names and great occasions and be resolved by your actions and example always to maintain the old tradition."



Neil Meadows

OC 208 Sqn, 2001 – 2003