

No 74 (F) Tiger Squadron Association

Tiger News No 23

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A Message from our President, Air Vice Marshal Boz Robinson

A couple of days after our sad disbandment ceremony at RAF Valley in September I chanced to meet my old friend and colleague Sir Peter Squire who is the current Chief of Air Staff I mentioned to him the 74 Squadron disbandment and our hopes for its revival, pointing out that the Royal Air Force is worse off without its Tiger Squadron. He replied to me as follows:

With the number of squadrons within the Royal Air Force reducing it is regrettably impossible to retain all the numberplates and some, irrespective of their distinguished histories, will have to be disbanded. You might find it helpful to have an indication of the background to the disbandment of No 74 Squadron and my thoughts on the future.

Rationalisation of the flying training squadrons at RAF Valley meant that only a single squadron would be retained for ab initio tactics and weapons students. Both Nos 19 and 74 Squadron fought during the Battle of Britain: however, as No 74 Squadron is the more junior of the two (No 19 is 28 years more senior) it was decided that No 74 would be disbanded. In taking the decision it was recognised that the forthcoming allocation of numberplates for new aircraft entering service might see reactivation of the Squadron. Therefore it was agreed that the Squadron's standard should not be laid up but transferred to the Rotunda at RAFC Cranwell. In addition, the Squadron's silver has been secured into storage rather than dispersed.

Clearly I cannot prejudice the final selection that will be made for the allocation of numberplates to the squadrons that will be reformed over the next decade. However I can assure you that No 74 will be amongst those considered for retention. Finally, you

commented that with the passing of No 74 Squadron the Royal Air Force would no longer be represented at Tiger Meets. However, in deference to No 230 Squadron, I must point out that they do of course maintain that long standing tradition.

This seems to be a useful pointer for what might possibly come about. However, I think we could do our case a great deal of good by capitalising on CAS` s opening. I would like every member of this Association to write to the Air Force Board seeking favourable consideration of the reformation of 74 Squadron as a Typhoon squadron when the time comes. Members could point out the Squadron's highly important part in both World Wars and especially the Battle of Britain. The Squadron's unique importance as THE Tiger Squadron far outweighs any consideration of seniority. Why have a high number squadron at future Tiger Meets when as illustrious a unit as 74 could be there - and right properly too since it was 74 that originated Tiger Meets. I know because I was there at the very first one in 1957! I know that members will be able to put their own personal and cogent reasons why we need 74 back in business - you don't need me to tell you what to write!

The address to which you should pen your plea is

Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Squire KCB AFC DFC ADC FRAeS RAF
Chief of the Air Staff
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall
London SW1A

17 and 29 Squadrons

As we go to press it has just been announced that the first two Eurofighter units will take up the number plates of 17 Squadron - which will form the Operational Evaluation Unit - and 29 Squadron - which will form the Operational Conversion Unit. RAF Coningsby will be the main training base for Eurofighter with pilots moving on from the OCU to front line squadrons.

230 Tiger Squadron

To complete the picture as regards the RAF's 'other' Tiger Squadron, 230 was formed in August 1918 from two flights of Felixstowe 2A flying boats and one of Sopwith Camels used for escort duties. Post war it remained as the sole flying boat squadron in the UK until April 1st 1923 when it disbanded. 230 reformed at Pembroke Dock with Short Singapore Mk. LIIs in December 1934 and then set off on its journeys to Aboukir, Singapore, Ceylon (by now flying Sunderlands), Egypt (from where it participated in the Greek and Cretan campaigns of World War II), Tanganyika, back to Ceylon and thence to Singapore again where it served for the remainder of the war. In April 1946 it returned to the UK and joined 201 Squadron to form the final flying boat Wing in Coastal Command. 230 disbanded in 1957. The following year it became a short range transport

unit on Pioneers when it reformed at Dishforth. In 1960 Twin Pioneers arrived and in 1962 the first helicopters, Whirlwinds, arrived. Tours of duty in Germany and Indonesia followed before a return to Odiham and re-equipment with the Puma helicopter which it still flies. The squadron's badge shows a full sized tiger.

19 Squadron

GAS' s statement that 19 Squadron was retained because of its seniority can be borne out by a brief look at its history. It formed in 1915 at Castle Bromwich (74 formed in 1917) on BE2cs and then BE12s which it took to France, later swapping them for SPADs and the then new Sopwith Dolphin - which ever since has been reflected in the dolphin on the Squadron's badge. After the war 19 returned to the UK and disbanded at Ternhill in 1919 (as did 74), reforming again in 1923 (74 lay dormant until 1935) to fly a succession of famous aircraft during the inter war years - Avro 504, Gloster Grebe, AW Siskin, Bristol Bulldog, Gloster Gauntlet and then the Spitfire Mk 1, the first squadron to receive the type (74 was the second). By now 19 was stationed at Duxford (where today a commemorative display can be seen). It flew the Spitfire in various marks until 1944 when the Mustang Mk III was taken on charge although it reverted to Spitfires in March 1946 when the lend lease Mustangs were returned to the USA. It was not long before the de Havilland Hornet arrived which it flew until 1950 when it became a meteor operator. The Hunter FMk.6 came in 1957 and then the Lightning F Mk 2 in 1962, later upgraded to the F Mk2A. It was in 1977 that Lightnings gave way to the Phantom (74 by this time had been disbanded again five years previously). It was the Phantom which 19 gave up for the Hawk at Valley as did 74, which had reformed on the F4J version of the Phantom in 1984.

Walter Derrick Franklin

It is with sadness that we record the death on 25th October of Association member W D Franklin. Waiter hailed from Jamaica and joined the RAF on a Short Service Commission in August 1937 and did his elementary flying training at Prestwick. In October of that year he was posted to 9 FTS at Hellavington and in the following August joined 142 Squadron at Andover. On September 2nd 1939 the squadron flew its Fairey Battles to France but after suffering heavy losses withdrew to England in May 1940. At that point Waiter volunteered for Fighter Command and on 21st August he joined the Tigers at Kirton-in-Lindsay to where they had been moved to rest from their hectic involvement in the Battle of Britain. Once they returned to the fray, Waiter shot down a Ju87 (on November 14th). After his time with 74 he was posted to the CFS at Upavon for an instructor's course. Instructing was what he then did until 1945 when he was posted to the Empire Test Pilots School at Cranfield before his final posting to the RAE at Farnborough.

Walter resigned his commission in 1947 to return to Jamaica to run the family hotel which he did until it was sold in 1967 at which time he returned to the UK and latterly to an address in Sway in Hampshire. His wife Merle has asked to be kept on the mailing list for Tiger News which we are very pleased to do. We send her our condolences and assure

her that Tigers from all eras are always sad to hear of the death of one of their own, a pilot who fought in the Battle of Britain especially so.

Goodbye From - And Welcome To - Our Treasurer

Our Treasurer of the past two years, **Flt Lt Vinny Brown**, has been posted to Canada as part of the NATO Flying Training Canada (NFTC) scheme where he will be flying a much upgraded BAe Hawk 115 across the vast training areas in that country. We must thank Vinny for all that he has done for the Association during his time as Treasurer, most noticeably (for many of you) a review and update of the Direct Debit system! We all wish Vinny and his wife Denise all the very best for their three years in Canada. A thank you too from myself, Dave Roome and Boz Robinson for all Vinny's great support.

In Vinny's place we welcome **Sqn Ldr Iain 'Buster' Walsh**. Iain was with 74 at Wattisham flying the Phantom (and has been an Association member from that time) from where he was posted to Leuchars. Iain acted as the 111 Squadron Association Secretary whilst he was there (although Iain has always been a Tiger at heart!). He is now working on the Typhoon as Requirements Manager at the Defence Procurement Agency, MOD Abbey Wood.

Membership Matters

Our Treasurer, **Flt Lt Vinny Brown** has, as reported above, been posted to Canada. Incidentally, prior to joining 74 you may not know that Vinny flew Tornados with 13 Sqn at Marham before which he was at Lossiemouth with the TWCU (15(R) Sqn) and TOCU at Cottesmore.

We welcome **Flt Lt Nigel 'Buster' Edwards** who was amongst those last Valley Tigers prior to disbandment and is now also about to join the NATO Flying Training Canada programme. Buster holds the rather unenviable record as being the last person to eject from a 74(F) Squadron aircraft. The accident occurred on 30th April 1998 after the flying controls jammed, the cause of which was a loose battery. Buster broke his left arm badly during the course of the ejection and spent 40 minutes floating in the Irish Sea prior to rescue.

Reg Grundy was with 74 for nine years between 1954 and 1963 and worked as an airframe fitter on Meteors, Hunters and Lightnings. Sadly Reg is currently in Caroline House, Colman Hospital, Unthank Road, Norwich but he would of course like to hear from anyone on the Squadron at the same time as he was. It's good to reminisce. Reg was introduced to the Association by member Pat Thurlow.

Air Cdre Bob Lightfoot has returned to the UK from his tour as Commander of HM Royal Flight of the Sultanate of Oman.

Sidney Simpson was a Corporal airframe fitter with the Tigers in Tengah and will be remembered as the man who ran the Squadron football team there. As a footballer he also

represented RAF Tengah itself and the FEAF. He left the service as a Chief Tech in 1981. Sadly Sid suffered a stroke in August 1999. We send our best wishes to him for his continuing recovery and look forward to seeing him at Stratford in a couple of months time.

Matthew Ford has just completed thirteen years of working with BAe in Saudi Arabia and has swapped the sunny desert for England's more equable (?) climate.

Wg Cdr Robin Birtwistle was a Tiger between October 1984 and November 1987 flying the F4J at Wattisham. He was in fact the first *ab initio* navigator to be posted to the reformed 74 Squadron. In 1987 he teamed with Geoff Telford to display the Phantom on the air show circuit that year.

We are also very pleased to welcome **Flt Lt Chris Hadlow** to the Association. Chris was at Valley between March 1997 and April 1999 at which time he was posted to Cazaux on an exchange posting with the French Air Force and currently flies the Alpha Jet.

Wg Cdr John Freeborn and his wife Peta have moved from North Wales down to the hopefully warmer climate of southern England

Sqn Ldr Ian Hargreaves has been on an exchange tour in the States (with the 309th Fighter Squadron flying F16s at Luke AFB) for the past three years but has now been posted back to the UK - to Abbey Wood as a Requirements Manager for Eurofighter and as such will be working alongside Iain Walsh. After the dry conditions of the Arizona desert four weeks of constant rain on return to these shores came as something of a shock!

In Brief

Gp Capt Sammy Hoare comments on the newspaper article which I quoted in the last Tiger News. Speaking of his attendance at the launching of the books *Hornchurch Scramble* and *Richard Hillary*, Sammy continues: "I spoke for some time (at her request) to a young lady reporter from the *Romford Recorder*. She was obviously quite out of her depth and just wanted a story. It seems that all she reported was a few disjointed and slightly incorrect extracts from *Hornchurch Scramble*. Her last paragraph made me wince! At least it's original but it's rubbish. My fellow Tigers may like to know that after sixty years the emotion is beginning to wear off and I am slowly getting back to normal!!"

Incidentally, as a result of reading Tiger News No 22 new member **Colin Hales** phoned Sammy to say hello. They were on the squadron together in B Flight in 1940 and whilst they did not know each other it was good to establish contact.

Matt Ford can recall the piece of music written by Cpl D Wemyss included in the last Tiger News. Cpl Wemyss was a member of the RAF Leuchars Pipe Band and they played this piece of music for the very first time on June 1st 1967 as squadron members,

watched by most of the station, boarded Hastings aircraft of RAF Transport Command to fly to Tengah.

Fighter Pilots' Forum

Any member living in the Bedfordshire area may be interested in an event being hosted in June by the Milton Keynes Aviation Society - a Fighter Pilots' Forum in the Lecture Theatre of Cranfield University on the evening of the 12th. The aim is to bring together a panel of fighter pilots from the RAF, FAA and USAF to recount experiences, compare tactics and participate in an open forum with the audience. Thus far it has been confirmed that a Burma campaign Hurricane pilot, Western Desert Kittyhawk pilot, a Meteor/Javelin pilot, possibly a Lightning pilot (whom you may know!) and two senior currently serving RAF officers whose experience covers Hunter, Phantom and Tornado will attend. A current Harrier pilot is also a probability. So - quite a line up to make for a most interesting evening. Tickets are available from (former Chief Tech) Steve Bond, 28 Badgers Oak, Kents Hill, Milton Keynes, MK7 6HS and cost £3.00 each. Please enclose an s.a.e. and make cheques payable to the Milton Keynes Aviation Society. .

Pictures of 74

I would imagine that some of our members are collectors of aviation art. Over the years 74 has been well served in this respect, not only with some fine paintings but prints too. A couple of new works by two of the most respected aviation artists have appeared this year in the wake of the 60th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain . The first is by Robert Taylor and is entitled Height of the Battle. It depicts two Spitfires of 74 Squadron, coded ZP-A (Malan) and ZP-S, with Hurricanes of 17 and 56 Squadrons attacking incoming Heinkels over London on 11th September. The other, First Flap of the Day, is by Nicolas Trudigan and shows H M Stephen bringing down two Me109s in quick succession over Dover early on 11th August 1940. This was the occasion when H M also shot down a Messerschmitt off Mungo Park's tail. He then found himself behind two more and before either could take evasive action he destroyed them both as shown in Trudigan`s painting. Later on H M Stephen shot down two more German aircraft giving him a total of five for the day.

Tiger Tim Eley

Jonathan Eeles of the Battle of Britain Association is seeking further information about 74 Squadron pilot Sgt `Tiger Tim` Eley who was in action on 31st July 1940 as part of B Flight, led on the day by Piers Kelly, when they encountered 15 Me109s just off the English coast. Sadly Sgt Eley was hit during the first pass and he crashed into the sea just outside Folkestone Harbour. His body was recovered and he was buried in the family grave in Renbury churchyard near Chester. Strangely the date on the headstone incorrectly states his death as being in July 1941.

Jonathan is seeking any further information about Sgt Eley. If any of our members from that era remember him perhaps they could contact Jonathan on 01606 556680 or write to

him at 4 Chartwell Drove, Darnhill, Winsford, Cheshire, CW7 4EP. He would be very pleased to hear from you.

Wings

Hilary Howarth of the Valley Aviation Society and our resident poetess explores how it feels to be a student on a training squadron

So you wanted to be an ace in a fast jet.
To reach this goal you had to learn many things,
Mental and practical skills you will never forget.
But the hardest mission was to obtain your Wings;

It was hard work. You had set backs and competition.
Some high fliers fell below expectation.
There was theory, air law, tactics and navigation:
Many a battle was won with constant repetition.

The hurdles were many but fell one by one.
More problems when you thought you had won.
Practice, exams and another assessment.
Duty pilot, night flying and little excitement.

You had potential. Some things were hard to do,
But your patient instructor had faith in you.
More flying, dog fighting and reassessment:
The steep learning curve made you more confident.

Your aircraft felt right and responded to you.
Briefing and debriefing you were fed information.
Two stone of gear + g force + 100 percent concentration.
You felt drained at the end of each operation.
Your first solo flight was a success - with style-
And that made it all seem worthwhile.

Finally you fly in a nine-ship across the sky
And you no longer have to ask the reason why.
At OCU you'll start again learning new things.
But you' should be very proud -
You have earned your Wings.

Sgt Cyril Gower

In previous issues of Tiger News we have detailed the story of Sgt Pilot Cyril Gower whose Spitfire crashed into a school at Grays in Essex on August 30th 1939 following a mid air collision. Cyril had only earned his wings a month earlier. Thanks to further research carried out by Tony Philpot of the Essex Airfields Historical Group into local newspaper reports we can add a little more substance to the story.....

Crashing into the playing field of an intermediate school at Grays Essex yesterday a 23 year old Coventry pilot was killed instantly. He was Sergeant Cyril Douglas Gower, a member of the local centre of the RAF Volunteer Reserve. Gower, who was not identified until some hours after the crash, was piloting a Supermarine Spitfire. just before the crash he was flying in formation with two other Spitfire fighters. One eye witness said that Gower's machine seemed to touch the wingtip of another plane and immediately got out of control. As it dived towards the ground the pilot made desperate efforts to avoid striking a number of houses and he only just succeeded in clearing the roofs by a few feet before crashing into the playing field at the bottom of the gardens of the houses. Gower, who had only just been posted to No 74 (Fighter) Squadron three weeks ago was a popular member of the Coventry centre of the Volunteer Reserve. He joined in July 1937 and was one of a number of local Reservists who are doing six months training with RAF Squadrons. For some years past Gower had been a member of the Coventry Aeroplane Club at Whitley where he first learned to fly.

A Young pilot from Hornchurch aerodrome was killed instantly when his machine crashed into the playing field of the John Henry Burrows Intermediate School Grays on Wednesday. The plane was one of three seen flying at low altitude over the district when one broke away, lost height rapidly and swooped earthwards. With a last courageous effort the pilot was able to avoid the roofs of houses. The plane then crashed nose first into the field only a few feet from the iron railing bordering the north side. Mrs Thomas of Lodge Lane said she heard the roar of the aeroplanes. She ran out into the garden and saw the machine strike the ground. Immediately before or at the time of the impact there was a loud explosion and the plane seemed to go up in pieces. Showers of earth and portions of the machine were sent in all directions. Mr J Tampkins said that he hoped he may be of some assistance but 'the machine was in bits and the cockpit a crumpled wreck and it was easy to see nothing could be done to help the pilot'. Scores of children quickly arrived and had to be kept from the scene by police. When the plane struck the ground it made a deep hole in which part of the Propeller was embedded.

At the inquest on Friday at Grays Flt Lt Wilfred Cressey gave evidence of identification and said Gower was on the Reserve and attached to his Flight. He had had experience of flying before coming to Hornchurch but not very much. He was regarded as a promising flyer. On the day of the accident three aircraft took off from Hornchurch with Flt Lt Cressey leading. When over Grays and travelling at a high speed he lost sight of Gower and immediately returned to Hornchurch. Asked if he had any theory as to the cause of

the accident he said: I believe he was caught in the slip stream of my plane and lost control. A verdict of Accidental Death was returned."

A final tribute is to be paid to a Coventry RAF pilot who died a hero in 1939. Cyril Gower was killed when his Spitfire nose dived into a school playing field. He could have jumped clear but decided to stay with his Stricken aircraft and steer it away from the school full of children. The Essex Airfields Historical Group have now persuaded the school to erect a plaque commemorating his heroism. They also hope to persuade the War Graves Commission to erect a headstone at the pilot's grave in Windmill Lane Cemetery in Coventry where he was buried on September 4th 1939. The crash happened just four days before the Second World War was declared. The 24 year old pilot was On a practice flight when he ran into trouble....

Relatives of RAF pilot Cyril Gower were welcomed to the school last week to see the placing on permanent display of a painting of his aircraft in flight. He was killed instantly as the plane nose dived into the school tennis courts. An investigation later showed that his fuel tap was switched off and it is thought he may have taken this action to prevent fire a few seconds too soon with the result that his engine cut out and he stalled.