

No 74 (F) Tiger Squadron Association

www.74squadron.org.uk

Honorary Vice President

Air Marshal Cliff Spink CB, CBE, FCMI, FRAeS, RAF

Tiger News No 40

Compiled by Bob Cossey

Association President

AVM B L Robinson FRAeS FCMI RAF Ret`d

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Membership Matters.

New member **Peter Williams** was an SAC with the Squadron between September 1984 and May 1987 at Wattisham. Peter has fond memories of his time as a Tiger, doing what he describes as `a great job with great people. `.

Another new member is **Neil Glen**. Neil was a Junior Tech then Corporal with the squadron from 1963 to 1969. He writes: `they were a superb bunch of guys at Leuchars and Tengah. Ken Goodwin was no doubt the best Boss I worked with in my time with the Lightning. Wonderful aircraft but a love – hate relationship when it came to working on them. Mainly love I guess! `

Nigel Holder was a first tour pilot on the Lightning F.6 at Tengah, memorable because of three detachments to RAAF Butterworth, one to RAAF Darwin and one to RAAF Adelaide. He also participated in Exercise Bersatu Padu and flew the penultimate Lightning from Tengah to Cyprus via Gan when 74 disbanded in 1971.

We welcome **George McKenzie** as a new member. George was with 74 for four months in 1952 and 1953 as a National Serviceman. He afterwards served with 607 (Aux) Squadron which was then based at Ouston near Newcastle before returning to Civvy Street to complete his apprenticeship as an electrician.

Obituaries – Farewell to another of the Few

Association member **Clive Hilken**, who died on June 30th aged 85, was shot down three times during the course of the war. He had joined 74 in August 1940 at Kirton in Lindsey when the

squadron had been pulled back from the heat of the battle for some R&R. When they returned to Biggin Hill Clive was shot down during his first dogfight over Tonbridge in Kent. He crashed into an orchard where he was confronted by a farmer armed with a shotgun who thought he was a German. He returned to 74 in 1941 having spent time in hospital recovering from shrapnel wounds. He was again shot down over Maidstone by an Me 109 whilst on patrol but this time he was not seriously injured and was soon back flying. However, having then completed six sorties over mainland Europe, he was shot down for a third time (in Spitfire V W3254) whilst on a fighter sweep over St Omer, a sortie on which the Tigers also lost their CO John Mungo Park (see the article elsewhere in this *Tiger News*) and the New Zealander, PI Off Sandeman. Clive was badly wounded again. He bailed out and came down in a field where imminent rescue by French villagers was thwarted by the sudden arrival of enemy soldiers. He and Sandeman spent the remainder of the war as POWs. Mungo Park was killed.

Clive later described what happened.

Having twice survived being shot down....I swore that no enemy would get on my tail again without my knowledge. This resolution held good until June 27th 1941 when I flew to France as top cover, escorting a bombing sortie to the Lille district. The chap who should have been behind me had not taken off because of engine trouble, leaving me as the back man of my section. At 2,500 feet over France our squadron became separated on a weaving turn from the other squadrons of the Wing. Our CO applied full throttle in an attempt to regain his place in the formation but in the process the rest of us found ourselves spread over the sky up to two miles behind the main formation. Now, to weave and watch your tail meant losing the formation. The only way to catch up was to do what our CO had done – go full bore. We did this – then cannon shells whipped into my Spitfire. No warning. Nothing seen. Wireless dead, glycol streaming out behind. Elevator stuck and a piece of metal in my ankle which was bleeding at full speed. I bailed out only to find my parachute pack waving about by my side. I pulled it in and undid the snap fasteners, letting the chute out a yard or two before the wind caught it and it opened to let me down, cursing my fate yet again, to France, hospital and a POW camp.

After the war Clive returned to teaching. He ultimately became head teacher of the school at RAF Geilenkirchen and then the junior school at Catterick Garrison.

Our thoughts and condolences go to Clive's wife Nesta and daughters Vanessa and Deborah.

With thanks to Jim Twitty who forwarded an obituary printed in The Northern Echo on which this tribute is based.

Winston Churchill.

Member Colin Musson has been tracking down a video copy of Winston Churchill's funeral and he recommends the ITV version as being by far the best one (as opposed to the BBC).

If you are interested in a copy contact Sally Brown, Havengore Trust, PO Box 167, Gillingham, Kent, ME7 4RD – Tel No 01634 813057 or log on to www.havengore.com.

Lady Anne Seymour.

You will recall that in *Tiger News 39* we recorded the untimely death of Anne, partner of Sir James Brook. Sir James wrote the following shortly afterwards and it sums up very well the feelings of all those who lose loved ones suddenly and unexpectedly.

In Memory of Lady Anne Seymour

Oh Anne my love. Why did you go?
For you know I loved you so.
We had good times throughout the years,
Lots of laughs, not many tears.
You loved the Roller, a twinkle in your eye,
Waving to the serfs as we glided by.
Now I am left to sit and grieve,
My lonely life now to weave.
I have lots of friends, family too
But it's not the same without you.
I know you are here, your spirit says so
Oh Anne my love, why did you go?

Pilots get prison terms for deadly air show crash.

With thanks to David Ketcher

Two pilots involved in the world's worst air show crash, which killed 77 people in Western Ukraine three years ago, have been sentenced to prison. Vladimir Toponar was sentenced to 14 years and his co-pilot Yuri Yegorov was sentenced to 8 years. Their Sukhoi Su-27 jet fighter clipped the ground, cart wheeled into the crowd and exploded after the pilots failed to pull out of a difficult rolling dive manoeuvre. They ejected shortly before the crash which took place at the Sknyliv airfield outside L'vov on July 27 2002, about 550 kilometres from the capital, Kiev.

An investigating commission blamed the pilots for trying to pull off the stunt at too low an altitude. The commission also cited the pilots' commanders and show organizers for poor preparations and for failing to ensure safety during the show. Toponar, who had earlier blamed technical problems and a faulty flight plan for the accident, was also fined \$1.42 million US to help pay compensation to victims. Yegorov must pay \$500,000 US. The court also sentenced the commanders of the pilots' unit to six years in prison and the unit's head of flight security to four years. The crew's main flight trainer was acquitted for lack of evidence.

Small Gland BIG Problem

John Crow has been leading us through the various scenarios relevant to prostate cancer in the light of his own experience and at the conclusion of his series of articles in the last *Tiger News* he wrote:

“In total I have had over 120 hospital appointments over the past 3 years but I must say I am in good shape. But who knows what is in store for any of us? The moral of the story is `get on with life, enjoy and respect every day`. When I asked my Oncologist `how long do I have left?` his response was `between 5 minutes and 15 years dependent upon whether you are run over by a bus when you leave here`.”

John now writes:

“Since originally writing this article things have taken a turn for the worse and my PSA has started to rise at an alarming rate. In an effort to try and stabilise my condition, I have been taking part in a clinical trial. Unfortunately I have not responded as I would have liked. I am exploring other options which I will am discussing with my Oncologist.

Please let me stress again just how important it is to observe the early symptoms and take action. Very early diagnosis can effect a potential cure but leave it too late at your peril.

All I can do now is fight on as only a true *Tiger* can.”

And all we Tigers are with you in your fight John.

Taffy Jones’s Grave



You will possibly remember that in 2003 at the AGM I agreed, as your President and having once had the pleasure of meeting Group Captain “Taffy” Ira Jones, to take up the invitation from the Ira Jones Memorial Trust to become a Trustee (writes **Boz Robinson**). The aim of the Trust is to raise funds to ensure the proper restoration and care of the famous World War 1 ace’s gravestone in South Wales, there being no known close relatives to carry out the task. Thus in May this year I drove to Carmarthenshire to meet the other two Trustees, Lynn Hughes and a Carmarthen RAFA official, Des Arundel.

Information about the life and times of Ira Jones is available in his excellent book *Tiger Squadron* which was first published many years ago and prior to Bob Cossey’s *Tigers*.

Lynn and I met at Ira Jones’ grave on Friday 20th May. Lynn is an author in his own right and a very pleasant individual (ex-Army National Serviceman) who has done a magnificent job in raising interest and support for Ira Jones’ gravestone. The stone had been weather-beaten to such an extent that the wording had become indecipherable. When we made our way to the top right hand corner of the graveyard to Plot No 1 belonging to Ira, I was surprised to see that the grave now looks as

good as new with the lettering thereon gleaming gold. Thanks to Lynn's efforts the Tiger Squadron's greatest scoring ace (40 kills) now rests in a fitting place where all can see who he was, though unfortunately someone got his rank incorrect in 1960 and he remains a Wing Commander on the inscription.

I found it very heartening that Lynn Hughes, a man quite unconnected with 74 Squadron, should have undertaken this task, but then Ira Jones was quite rightly held in great esteem in that corner of South Wales and still is so held to this day. Lynn took me later to the War Memorial in St Clears where there is a fitting tribute to the heroism and skill of Ira Jones inscribed on a tablet next to the Memorial itself. We also visited the Pendine Museum of Speed for which Lynn is an enthusiastic supporter and took lunch at Hurst House nearby. That meal was probably the low point of the day with practically non-existent service and some questionable cold duck, though my sea bass was good!

The following day we had hoped to meet Des Arundel in the Carmarthen RAF Club but he was unable to be there so Lynn showed me the memorabilia to Ira Jones and the old uniforms that Olive, Ira's wife, had donated to the Club. Ira himself had at one time also donated two beautiful prints of Mannoek and Ball which he had signed. Sadly much other memorabilia had been lost in a fire at the premises started by local jobs.

Although Lynn has succeeded in raising more than enough money to pay the bill for the restoration of the gravestone, he has also initiated the re-publication of *Tiger Squadron* with a Foreword by Cliff Spink which is due shortly. Profits from the book will be made over to the Trust Fund.

In all it was a moving and revealing visit to Ira Jones old home area and we should be grateful to Lynn Hughes for what he has already achieved in perpetuating the reputation of Ira Jones and restoring his neglected grave.



The grave lies between Bancyfelin and Carmarthen on the old A40 at the turn off to Meidrim on the B4298. The old A40 is just to the north of the current dual carriageway A40 so simply follow the B3298 north from the new A40 and you will soon locate the Chapel and the overspill graveyard lying to the NE of the road junction there.

Pictured here is our President by the grave.

Wing Commander John Freeborn DFC* and the Battle of Britain.

Interest in the Battle of Britain is as intense now as ever and this year's 65th Anniversary celebrations at Duxford on September 11th together with the 74 Squadron Association instigated Fighter ACE served to demonstrate that very well indeed. Within the Association we have Wg Cdr John Freeborn DFC as our senior member. The fact that John attends the Reunion at Stratford every year as well as other Battle of Britain connected events in the UK, is testimony to how proud he is to be a Tiger and how pleased he is that there is so much interest in what happened 65 years ago. John was one of The Few in 1940 and is one of The Few today. A couple of years ago he published A Tiger's Tale, written with Bob Cossey and which told the story of his RAF career. And in the USA an article recently appeared in World War II magazine written by Paul Trickett who interviewed John and gained an insight into what it was like in 1940s Britain and more to the point, on the front line with the Royal Air Force. I include a synopsis of John's experiences during the Battle here for those of you not familiar with it. Remember that when John left 74 Squadron in June 1941 he had amassed a tally of 13.5 confirmed victories, 12 probables and 10 damaged.*

John was posted to 74 on October 29th 1938 and was to remain a Tiger for almost three years. Sailor Malan was John's Flight Commander once war was declared and then later the Squadron CO but the friendship which existed between the two of them evaporated after the friendly fire incident known as the Battle of Barking Creek which occurred just three days after war was declared. John and Paddy Byrne were court martialled for shooting down two Hurricanes of 56 Squadron (believing them to be enemy aircraft) in the wake of Malan's call to attack after 74 had been scrambled to investigate a probable incoming formation. The exact circumstances of the incident are unclear – Malan certainly gave the order but maintains he rescinded it immediately he realised the mistake. Other pilots in the formation maintain he didn't. Whatever the truth of the matter, Malan didn't support John or Paddy at the court martial. Thanks to the fact that they had two top class barristers defending them they were cleared of any blame. John's relationship with Malan henceforth would be a purely professional one and he still readily admits that Sailor was a great tactician.

John's first victory was scored on 21st May 1940 over Dunkirk and after the tribulations of Barking Creek he finally felt he had done something right.

Prior to the evacuation we began flying offensive patrols from eleven different group airfields in England in support of our beleaguered ground forces. On 21st May I was one of six Spitfire pilots led by Malan. We had been alerted to the presence of enemy aircraft by some AA fire and we engaged several Ju88s. Malan attacked first. I followed close behind. I thumbed my firing button but Malan's bullets struck home and his victim fell away so I searched for my own target which I attacked from below, raking it from nose to tail. I watched it plunge to earth with no parachutes to indicate survivors.

John joined his groundcrew and then the rest of the squadron pilots in celebration, the station commander breaking open a bottle of champagne. The following day he shared the destruction of a Ju88 with Sailor and Tony Mould.

The German flew down to sea level and kept applying his air brakes so we kept overshooting. Their gunner put up a brave fight but eventually we filled the bomber full of holes and it went down, skimming the surface of the sea like a bouncing stone. The impact snapped the gunner's harness and he was thrown out of his canopy at high speed into the sea. The Junkers crashed and all that remained moments later was an empty dinghy floating on the surface.

But despite these successes John was under no illusions about the odds that were stacked against the RAF. Those odds were pushed to their limit as the Battle of Britain approached and on 10th July, the date historians give as the first day of the Battle, John led a patrol of eight Spitfires from Manston when he saw what looked like a big black cloud coming towards him – it was in fact 100+ enemy aircraft. Initially he was terrified at the odds although 74 was soon reinforced by other squadrons. John managed to damage an Me 109. In the afternoon on another sortie John had a lucky escape:

I led Red and Yellow sections against a Do17 as it shadowed a naval convoy. Try as I might I couldn't get a clean shot at him but succeeded in destroying a Me109 by emptying a four second burst into it at 50 yards range. As I prepared to shake another 109 off my tail my No 2, Tony Mould, fired at my pursuer and instead hit me! It caused severe damage and ruptured a fuel line. Luckily my petrol tank was nearly full. Had it been empty and full of vapour I would have been set ablaze and dying by fire was my greatest fear. As petrol poured into my cockpit I managed to disengage from combat then switched everything off and limped back to Manston.

On July 28th 74 were escorting a Hurricane squadron planning to attack a formation of Luftwaffe fighters and bombers when they were bounced by Major Werner Molders and JG 51. John recalls:

Malan ordered my section to try and buy some valuable time so I turned my section into the attackers. Within moments James Young flying beside me was killed and Tony Mould was wounded and forced to bail out. To confuse my attackers I shadowed an Me109 by flying close underneath him thus preventing his colleagues from opening fire on me for fear of hitting him. When the 109 pilot realised or was told what I was doing he pulled away so I lifted my nose and gave him a three second burst which blew him apart. Several of his colleagues set upon me with relish so I rolled and dived away towards Brighton Pier hoping to escape. But they followed, guns blazing, and bullet after bullet struck my Spitfire, smashing my canopy and gunsight and then my engine blew up. I was at their mercy but my attackers gave up the chase and disappeared either because they thought I was done for or thought that by concentrating on me they themselves would be wide open to attack. I glided back to Manston but my rudder had been badly damaged and locked to the left. So when I landed my Spitfire tipped on its nose.....An hour afterwards, and having been treated for my injuries (hundreds of glass fragments had been embedded in my skin) I was back in the air leading the squadron against a fighter sweep and I shot their leader into the sea off Brighton.

Sunday 11th August was the most successful day ever for the Tigers when during four engagements they claimed a combined 23 confirmed and probable victories plus fourteen damaged. On the first sortie of the day 8 kills were claimed against the loss of one Tiger (Peter Stevenson) who was rescued from the cold waters of the Channel. Two hours later and during the second sortie John claimed a probable – an Me109 he last saw diving vertically towards the sea. He led the third sortie, this time on convoy protection duty. The squadron was positioned above a thick cloud base at 5,000ft.....

.....which meant we couldn't see what was going on underneath. Reports started to come in of 40 Me110s so we dived down through the cloud. Out of the corner of my eye I saw an explosion which I'm convinced was my friend Don Cobden colliding with a 110 as he emerged from the cloud. It was his 26th birthday. I burst through the bomber's ranks, guns blazing, damaging three. As they began to form a defensive circle I shot two into the Channel by firing three second bursts into them at close range. Back at Manston we claimed nine probables for the loss of two of our own.

The Tigers suffered the sixth highest loss rate in Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. Nine veterans survived from the Dunkirk days. Losses tended to be amongst the new arrivals

The fourth sortie of the day was over the Hawkinge aerodrome area.

We were vectored onto a formation of ten Stukas and twenty Me109s flying top cover. I damaged one 109 then attacked another, blowing fragments off it. I must have damaged something vital because the propeller stopped and he just fell out of the sky. Malan, Mungo Park and Stephen also claimed victories.

The squadron received a personal visit from Winston Churchill in the wake of their successes of 11th August. On October 13th the Squadron moved to Biggin Hill, the most heavily bombed of all Fighter Command airfields, to replace 72 Sqn. As soon as they arrived they were just given time to refuel their aircraft and remove their personal bags before they were ordered into the air again.

The Battle of Britain ended on October 31st – or so the historians would have us believe. After that date the whole thrust of German attacks changed with the Do17s and He111s used for night attacks and the Me110s and Ju88s for daylight raids. Escorts of 109s remained in large numbers.

John's last combat with 74 took place on December 5th 1940 – and it proved to be his most successful.

I was leading 74 and we were flying alongside 92 when we engaged fifteen 109s near Folkestone. I shot their leader into the sea off Dungeness then shared another with a 92 Sqn pilot. I damaged a further 109 which sped off towards France but I caught up with it ten miles from Boulogne and shot it into the sea. On the way back across the Channel I damaged another before I ran out of ammo.

In June 1941 John was posted away from his beloved Tigers with whom he had been for such a long time – but that's another story which you can read up in *A Tiger's Tale!* (If you haven't got a copy contact Bob).

Engine Nameplates

Do you recall the article we ran on Battle of Britain Class locomotive nameplates and the fact that we had located one 74 Squadron plate which is in the hands of a private collector? Angela Cordell has now passed me information about the other which is also in private hands having been bought at auction for £15,000. All we need now is to trace the Squadron crest which would have been carried on the front of the engine. We may not be able to see these little pieces of history but at least we know they are in safe hands.

Squadron Leader John Mungo Park

There will be a ceremony at De Panne in Belgium, just north of Dunkirk, next May to commemorate the death of 74's John Mungo Park who was shot down over enemy territory on June 27th 1941 whilst commanding the Tigers. [Elsewhere in this *Tiger News* I have included an obituary to Clive Hilken who was shot down on the same mission but who survived]. How this came about revolves around a remarkable yet tragic photograph which was sent to Doug Tidy by

Johny Recour from Bruges at the beginning of the year. Johny had been given the photograph by his father twenty five years ago. It had survived the war despite Johny's father being captured and held in Germany awaiting execution for sabotage and armed resistance

Written on the back of it is: *Remembrance of an English flier fallen during the war 1940 – 1941 at Adinkerke in a glorious fight against enemy superior numbers.*

The question was – who was the pilot and what were the circumstances, questions Johny was unable to find an answer to until recently. In January of this year he went to visit his father. Whilst there he was given a copy of the local community magazine. In it there was a request for information about the crash of a bomber in 1944. Johny couldn't help with that but on the off chance he contacted the correspondent to see whether he could help with his own picture – and within days he had a response from a local historian with a particular interest in World War II crashes in Belgium who was able to tell Johny that the picture was of John Mungo Park who was subsequently buried in Adinkerke Military Cemetery.

Even more amazingly Johny then discovered that his father, who was aged just 16 at the time, had seen the crash. He and his friends were playing tennis when they heard, then saw, an aeroplane in trouble, diving with smoke trailing. They leapt onto their bikes and cycled to where they saw the plane hit the ground only to find the wreckage and the pilot lying dead beside it, being guarded by a German soldier (as can be seen in the photographs). Johny's father didn't take the photo but one of his friends may have done - or it may have been a German soldier or officer who had his pictures developed by a young man in De Panne who always kept extra copies for himself.

The commemoration ceremony will take place as an adjunct to that of the Dunkirk Veterans Association which will be on Sunday 21st May. Sqn Ldr John Mungo Park will be honoured the following morning at 10.00am. Involved will be the Mayor and Aldermen of De Panne, members of the DVA, the Officer Commanding Koksidge Air Base and the OC Belgium's Tiger Squadron.

Any Association member who feels they would like to attend the ceremony would of course be very welcome – please contact me, Bob Cossey, for details. Currently Boz Robinson, Dick Northcote, Doug Tidy, Bobby Laumans and I will be there. It would be good to see others as well.

RAF Fighter Squadron Associations` Combined Event (ACE) Duxford September 11th 2005

The fact that it rained on the day and the flying display had to be abandoned didn't for one minute detract from the enjoyment of the 200 who attended this first jointly arranged Association event - for it was a social occasion as much as anything and perversely the lack of anything to watch in the air enabled more socialising to go on! Feedback from all who attended was very positive and the hope is that this will herald a new era of similar gatherings. The squadrons involved this time round were 74, 19, 25 and 56 and of course for many attendance could be under more than one squadron banner as their careers took them on a round of postings. In the future it is to be hoped that other squadrons such as 11, 23, 43, 111 *et al* will be involved.

It all started a couple of years ago at a Tiger Squadron AGM at Stratford when under Dave Roome's chairmanship the idea was mooted of a joint 19 and 74 reunion. This subsequently expanded to include fighter squadrons that had flown Lightnings and Phantoms and Kevin Wooff volunteered to look into the feasibility of arranging such a thing. This moved forward from a feasibility study to a commitment to arrange such a thing and with Kev as Project Director and a

team including our own Rhod Smart and 56 Squadron's Ian Cameron the process began. Duxford was chosen as the venue and the 65th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain celebrations at their September Airshow the highly appropriate backdrop to the event. That being the case Mick Martin of the 25 Squadron Association and Events Director at Duxford joined the team. Sponsorship was essential if progress was to be made. 74's John Yeo very generously promised £1,000 and it was he who set the sponsorship ball rolling. Bentleigh Care Homes also promised money and then Breitling came on board as the major sponsor with an £8,000 commitment. That made the event viable. All that had to be done then was sell 200 tickets – and that the four involved Associations did!

The format of the day was as follows. Fighter ACE had its own marquee and enclosure with immediate access to the flight line for those who wished to see at close hand the impressive array of Spitfires, Hurricanes and other World War II aircraft on display. Coffee and tea were available and there was, of course, a bar. A buffet lunch was served in two sittings. Our Vice President Air Marshal Cliff Spink made the opening address and welcomed in particular the veterans who had been able to join us – air and ground crew alike. The afternoon should have been spent watching the air display but the weather being as fickle as it is, apart from a very impressive Chinook and a Chipmunk that gamely tried, no flying was possible. So it was a case of back to the bar! The closing address was made by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon, former Chief of the Air Staff, and a response on behalf of our World War II veterans was made by special guest Raymond Baxter.

It is genuinely hoped that the event can be repeated. For that the organising team needs to be enlarged on a multi- Squadron Association basis and so the call will be going out! For now though it is thanks indeed to Kev, Ian, Rhod and Mick for making this year's event happen – and happen so very well.

Battle of Britain Monument

Prince Charles unveiled the long awaited and indeed long overdue memorial to The Few on September 18th on the Embankment in London. Seventy pilots and delegates from the fourteen countries whose pilots flew alongside the British attended the ceremony. A wreath laying ceremony was also held at Westminster Abbey. The monument was commissioned by the Battle of Britain Historical Society and funded by public subscription and is made up of two bronze friezes set in a granite structure which was originally designed as a smoke outlet for underground trains in the days they were powered by steam engines. The frieze on one side depicts the heroism of the aircrew and that on the reverse pays homage to the men and women who performed the vital ground based tasks from radar operators to those who kept the Spitfires and Hurricanes in the air. A plaque is inscribed with the names of the 2,936 pilots and ground crew from Britain and her allies who served in the Battle. 515 RAF pilots were killed.

There was a flypast by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight and also the newest fighter in the RAF, Typhoon Amongst those from the Association who attended were Wing Commander John Freeborn DFC* who had the opportunity of speaking with Prince Charles. And it was a very gratifying moment too for all those who have tirelessly campaigned for and raised funds for the

monument over the past few years – and amongst those I would particularly mention our own Josephine Smith.

Sqn Ldr W J Johnson DFC

Sqn Ldr W J Johnson – known as Johnny to friends and family - was 74's CO from 30th November 1953 (when he took over from the USAF's George Milholland) to 3rd January 1956 (at which time Keith Haselwood took over) and his time with the Tigers was exemplified by the mid 1950s round of exercises such as Exercise Sunbeam in which a force of 400 attacking USAF B47s, B66s and F100s, Belgian and Dutch F84s, Canadian CF100s and F86s and three RAF Vulcans were ranged against Fighter Command's Hunters, Javelins and Meteors: APCs at an often cold and snowy Acklington: and the realisation that the Meteor F8s which they were flying at that stage were becoming rapidly outclassed. It was also the time when 74 had a series of extrovert Americans on exchange – Hal Berge, Walt Panchesan and Chuck Sewell – and when they finally had Horsham St Faith to themselves with 245 Squadron moving to Stradishall.

Johnny Johnson was born in Brandon, Suffolk and was educated in Northampton. He almost became a professional cricketer but instead joined the Midland Bank as it offered better career prospects. In April 1939 he joined the RAFVR at Sywell and this was the beginning of 20 years of RAF service. He fought in the Battle of Britain with 611 Squadron and then in the Battle of Malta with 126 Squadron where he won the DFC (a bar was later added) and was credited with 5 enemy aircraft destroyed. He was one of the first pilots to be offered a commission at the end of the war and thereafter rose through the ranks until he commanded 74 and led the Tigers aerobatic team. After 74 he was with NATO and the Air Ministry until he left the service in 1959. His log book shows aircraft types flown as Hurricane, Spitfire, Typhoon, Tempest, Vampire, Meteor, Sabre, Hunter and Dove amongst others with a total of 2,800 hours amassed. Bill Johnson died in 1996.

Sqn Ldr Johnson left a record of handwritten notes which his son Alan now has. Extracts from them illuminate a most interesting period of service in the Mediterranean including this combat report in which he gained his fourth and fifth victories flying from Malta with 126 Squadron:

I was leading Dumbbell Yellow section. Just north of Linosa I saw the enemy Macchis approaching. They immediately turned round and made off towards Pantelleria. I gave chase with my No 2 after telling Yellow 3 and 4 to stay with the captured Cant floatplane we were escorting. The enemy made no evasive action until we were almost on top of them and then the Macchis turned left. I attacked the centre one. They were in line astern. Attacked from the port quarter and gave it a burst. I saw the hood come off and the pilot bail out. I saw my No 2 firing at the first Macchi which went straight into the sea. I turned round into the third Macchi and gave it a burst and saw strikes on the wings and fuselage. It turned away streaming oil and climbing so I climbed up right underneath him and gave him a burst and he immediately rolled over and went into the sea. The pilot did not bail out.