

# 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 41

*Compiled by Bob Cossey*

**Association President**

AVM B L Robinson FRAeS FCMI RAF Ret`d

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Belated congratulations to Tigress Julie Gibson and her partner Tony Gardner on the birth of baby James on 28<sup>th</sup> July last year. Tiger James weighed in at 5lbs 12 oz and is growing well! And congratulations too to Denise and Vinny Brown who on 16th January became proud parents of Lucas Charles. Lucas weighed in at 7lb 13oz!

**Reunion 2006 Photo Gallery** – photos courtesy of John Crow and Doug Tidy.



*Dick Northcote*



*John and Margie Crow*



*Far Left – Mike and Judy Shaw*



*Left - Doug Tidy, David Ketcher, John Freeborn and Carl Hicks.*

## Tiger Spitfire!

Unfortunately illness meant that our President, Air Marshal Cliff Spink and his wife Caroline were unable to join us this year. Cliff was going to tell those present about his Spitfire (pictured below). It is a Mk XVI with a clear view canopy. It was built in 1944 and is very much original, still with the same wings for example. It is powered by a Rolls Royce/Packard Merlin of 1600hp. The aircraft didn't see active service but did serve on several RAF squadrons including the RAuxAF. It is painted in the scheme of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Air Force which was worn between D Day and the advanced into Germany. 74 Squadron flew exactly this type and the scheme is taken from a Tiger's aircraft. See the Tiger on the engine cowling! The code for 74 at the time was 4D but Cliff's partner insisted that as senior officer Cliff put his initials on it with his pennant which as he says has `all been a bit embarrassing and has caused him to buy much beer for his chums`! Another aircraft that Cliff flies is the F86 Sabre. It is believed to be the oldest jet fighter flying in the world and is certainly the only A model of the Sabre. It was built in 1948, just 4 years after the Spitfire.



## Reunion News

The Reunion at Stratford upon Avon on March 3<sup>rd</sup> was once again a great success and our thanks go to everyone who came, in particular those who joined us for the first time. A well attended AGM (minutes enclosed) preceded a dinner for 96 Tigers and their wives and partners. Our guest of honour was once again Wg Cdr John Freeborn DFC who delighted us all by speaking of his experiences of flying the Spitfire during the Battle of Britain and later in Italy.

A special thank you also goes also to Sqn Ldr Ian `Hagar` Hargreaves who brought us up to date with the RAF`s new combat aircraft, Typhoon. Hagar was OC A Flight of 29 Squadron at Coningsby and in fact is just one of a number of ex-Tigers who have piloted or flown in this impressive aeroplane - Russ Allchorne, Stan Ralph, Iain Walsh and Kev Wooff are amongst others. I think we all share the same sense of disappointment that 74 will not be reactivated as a Typhoon squadron and can only reflect on what might have been.



*Hagar at Coningsby with a line up of predominantly two seat Typhoons behind him.*

During the war when 74 Squadron were serving in the Near East they were sent to the recently taken island of Kos. On October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1943 German forces retook the island and air and ground crew of 74 were either taken prisoner, made dramatic escapes or sadly were posted missing. I have been helping Philip Anderson reconstruct events leading up to his brother Harold's disappearance by putting him in touch with Association members who served on Kos and he has been pleased with the information they have been able to pass on. As it happened, Harold didn't actually make it as far as the island for he developed engine trouble en route and was forced to ditch. We were very pleased to welcome Philip and his wife to join us for the evening and I know that he and Doug Tidy in particular spent considerable time in conversation for Doug is, as always, a mine of information on these matters.

Doug also had long conversations with member Ted Mansfield who, at the sprightly age of 85, attended his first reunion with his son. Ted's story is told below.

But first, a reminder that 2007 marks the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of 74 Squadron and that we will be holding a special celebration to mark the event. 74 was activated under the title of 74 Training Depot Squadron on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1917 under the command of Major O`Hara Wood at Northolt. After six months it lost its training status and began its preparations for an impending move to France -and the rest, as they say, is history. **So make sure the weekend of Friday March 9<sup>th</sup> to Sunday March 11<sup>th</sup> 2007 is in your diary now, with the dinner itself on Saturday, March 10<sup>th</sup>.** Full details will appear later in the year. Please note that this is the **second weekend in March** not the first. Unfortunately the hotel's calendar was not in tune with ours when Reunion dates were pre-booked and our usual weekend has been allocated elsewhere.

## Evacuation!

### By Ted Mansfield

*Because we focus largely on the time our members were Tigers it is sometimes easy to forget that there is much of interest they could tell us of their time when they were not with 74. And sometimes they are hair raising and very traumatic times too. Such as Ted Mansfield's experiences in 1940 when he was evacuated from Saint Nazaire on HMT Lancastria. This is his story.*



*Ted Mansfield at Stratford. Ted is now 85 and this was his first reunion. He and Doug Tidy discovered that they had last met in 1943!*

I joined the RAF on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1937 as a boy entrant armourer, aged 16½ years and was sent to RAF Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey for a year's training. I was on No 7 Entry and was to learn all about every type of gun and bomb including gunsights, bombsights and anything else to do with armaments. We were paid £2.13s.0d a week but were stopped £1 which was to be saved for when we went on leave and 3d for two stamps so that we could write home. The rest was ours to buy soap, polish etc. Whilst at Eastchurch a band of drums and trumpets was formed. I was a trumpeter and enjoyed the perks that went with it, namely Thursday evenings at Officers` Dining In nights when we went up to their Mess and sounded the quarter to eight dinner call - then the eight o'clock. After that it was round to the back of the Mess to the kitchen for lemonade and doughnuts.

At the end of my training at Eastchurch on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1938 I was posted to RAF Feltwell near Thetford on Station Armoury which was a little disappointing as I had hoped to go to a squadron and work on aircraft. When war was declared on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939 me and two other armourers had to work all weekend making up gas masks which comprised a face piece, a breathing tube and a canister, packing them into a haversack along with the cleaning materials for the face piece. I think we did about five hundred a day!

On 28<sup>th</sup> October 1939 I was posted to RAF Bassingbourne near Royston and 215 Squadron which flew Wellingtons. At last my wish to work on aircraft had come true. Another armourer and I had to do inspections on the Wellingtons after they were flown in from Jurby on the Isle of Man where the Squadron were on Practice Camp doing air firing and bombing in readiness for operations. At the end of the inspection we had to get a parachute and go up on a test flight which was a bit hairy as the pilot would throw the aircraft all over the place - but I enjoyed it.

Volunteers were called for to join the BEF in France. I volunteered and on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1940 went by ship and train to Reims. There I boarded a coach for the twenty five mile journey to Tours. It was a terrible winter with snow and icy roads. The coach slipped and slid all over the place to the extent that everyone had to get out and push the coach about twenty of the twenty five miles! We arrived at Tours and were allocated to different units. I was to go to Ecury near Chalons and join 150 Squadron which was equipped with the Fairey Battle. They were underpowered having only one engine and with a crew of three and a load of four 250 pound bombs they could only lumber across the grass airfield to stagger into the air.

In April 1940 I went on leave and on my return I was posted again and off I went by train southwards to Coulommiers near Paris to join HQ BAFF on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1940. Here I was told not to unpack because the unit was moving to a village just north of Orleans. We didn't know what was happening - so much so that when we heard about Dunkirk we actually thought we were winning the war. But these thoughts were soon dashed as we were told to load the lorries and get ready to move out in two or three day's time. First though I had to fit two 30cwt lorries out with tripods and Lewis guns. As we moved off there was the sound of an aircraft coming from the rear of the convoy so I swung the gun round in that direction (causing all the airmen in the vicinity to duck!). It turned out to be a very low flying French twin engined bomber.

We made our way towards Nantes, unloaded the lorries and went to a petrol dump, loaded up with as many four gallon cans of petrol as we could, took them to the local airfield, unloaded and took the lorries back to Nantes. We loaded up our kit and headed off towards St Nazaire. This was about June 14<sup>th</sup>. We were not attacked but could see dog fights overhead. On June 16<sup>th</sup> we were told to move down to the docks and that night we slept under the eaves of warehouses. All night long shrapnel rattled on the roof making quite a noise but we were all so tired it didn't bother us at all.

The next morning we watched troops making their way to the dockside and boarding all sorts of boats to be ferried to a liner anchored in the Bay. The liner was the HMT *Lancastria* which had already been evacuating troops from Norway. We joined the queuing troops and when it was my turn I was ferried out in a small boat with some other men. We climbed aboard the *Lancastria* at around 1400 hours. I went below decks, collected a blanket, lay down and was soon fast asleep. At 1530 there was a loud explosion and everybody jumped up - but we were told it was nothing and so I lay down and dozed again. Twenty

minutes later there was another explosion and this time we knew the ship had been hit. There was a dash for the stairs. The *Lancastria* had taken a heavy list to port. There were about six of us left below decks in our part of the ship when we heard a cry for help. With the list of the ship we couldn't make it to the stairs so we all linked hands and formed a human chain which reached the other survivor and so we were able to pull him out and take him with us. When I got up on deck it was crowded with everyone trying to get off the ship at once as it settled and began to sink bow first. I forced my way through to the starboard side and, jumping up, grabbed the railings and got onto the side of the ship. The sight before me was one of thick black oil and hundreds of men fighting for their lives in it. I sat on the hull plates for a few seconds wondering how best to get off when German bombers roared in, machine gunning men in the water. When they had gone I walked down the ship's side, passing portholes through which I could see trapped men with no means of escape. I could do nothing for them and felt so desperately helpless. When I reached the water some soldiers in lifejackets called out for help. Getting them to hold on to each other I towed them to a capsized lifeboat to which they could cling. I climbed on to it and looked around, seeing a launch from the *Lancastria* drifting out to sea. It was some distance away but I was a strong swimmer. When I reached it I hauled myself on board and went to start the engine. Somebody shouted 'hang on!' and I turned to see a lifeboat with a sailor and two soldiers rowing towards me. They tied their boat to the rear of the launch, the sailor took the controls, started the engine and we went round picking up survivors from the oily sea and took them out to HMS *Highlander*, a destroyer sent as an escort and which was helping with the evacuation. Once on board *Highlander* a sailor cut off my shirt which was all I had on having taken off the rest of my clothes to make it easier to swim. I was rubbed down with cotton waste to get the worst of the oil off me and I was given a duffle coat to cover myself before drinking a big mug of hot tea. Back came more German bombers, yet again machine gunning men in the water. They made three attacks before flying off allowing the rescue of the men in the water to continue. Many small boats put out from St Nazaire, crewed by brave French men and women. The wounded were taken back ashore and treated in the local hospital run by nuns.

When I looked back the *Lancastria* had disappeared and we heard later it taken only twenty minutes to sink. There had been around 9,000 on board, 4,000 of whom lost their lives. They are buried in graveyards along the coast. The French people had taken the bodies from the beaches and from the sea, burying them as quickly as they could so that the Germans couldn't find out how successful their attacks had been. There had been civilians on board too, mainly Fairey Aviation staff with their wives and children including two babies. Thankfully they were all saved.

The SS *Oronsay* had been attacked before the *Lancastria* and had had its bridge destroyed. Many on it were wounded. Despite this, as things quietened down she came alongside *Highlander*, which was very overloaded with survivors, and took some off. Two planks were put between the two ships and all those



Picture taken from the destroyer HMS *Highlander*, showing hundreds of men clinging to the sinking *Lancastria*.

who could walk were told to cross. This was going to be a precarious business but it would be the only way to lighten ship so cross we did. Some didn't make it, falling between the two hulls and being crushed as the *Highlander* and *Oronsay* came together in the swell. My turn came to shouts of 'Come on now - run!' which I did, like a bat out of hell. I made it. Troops already on *Oronsay* saw the state we were in, covered from top to toe in thick black oil and with no clothes and they began offering a pair of socks or a shirt or anything they thought they could manage without. I finished up with an army shirt, a pair of cook's check trousers, a pair of black socks and my duffle coat from the sailor on *Highlander*. I was given another mug of tea and a bully beef sandwich and then settled down to sleep again as the ship sailed for England.

We arrived in Portsmouth on 18<sup>th</sup> June. As we were approaching the harbour there was a roar of engines and we thought we were being attacked again but it was three MTBs putting out to sea. Men dashed to the starboard side of the ship to see what was happening. With that *Oronsay* took on a sharp list which looked very dangerous and the ship's officers quickly moved everyone back. When we docked the wounded were taken off first then towards evening we were put ashore. Number, rank, name and unit were recorded and then we were asked if we wanted to go to RAF Mountbatten or Yatesbury. I, with others, chose Yatesbury - which turned out to be a good choice as those who went to Mountbatten were put on another ship and were on their way to the Far East within 48 hours. We were marched through Plymouth to the railway station in our stockinged feet. When passing a pub a sailor staggered out with a bottle of beer in one hand and fish and chips in the other: he gave them to the chap at the head of the column who took a swig of beer and a chip or bit of fish and it was then passed back down the column so we all had a swig of beer and a mouthful of fish!

When our train arrived at Yatesbury we had to jump down onto the clinker track to walk to camp - again in our stockinged feet. One there we were given some money, a bar of soap and a towel (to try and get the oil off our bodies which in the event took two weeks with a hot bath twice a day). A visit to the NAAFI to celebrate our survival led to lots of strange looks from airmen and women. Nobody spoke to us! They must have thought us a strange lot in our assortment of dress. We sang *Roll Out The Barrel* like a hymn (we had been loudly singing it as the *Lancastria* was sinking) - which prompted even more astonished looks on their faces!



*Oil covered survivors on board the Highlander. Amongst them was Ted Mansfield although he was later transferred to the Oronsay.*

After three or four days somebody looked up King's Regulations and found that we were entitled to twenty one days survivors' leave. And not knowing quite what to do with us we were given a uniform, a leave pass, a train ticket and some money - and sent home. Back home my father, who had been a Station WO at RAF Wyton and now kept a pub in Fenstanton near Cambridge, met me with the words 'what happened last Monday?' As I told him he listened quietly, swore under his breath and walked back into his pub. I returned to Yatesbury and three weeks later I was posted to No 2 Recruiting Centre at RAF Cardington where I was made permanent staff in the Station Armoury, training recruits how to fire a rifle. I didn't enjoy it there as I felt I was losing touch with my trade so put in a request for an Operational Unit.

That was how on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1941 I joined 74 Squadron at Biggin Hill on an exchange posting with a corporal. I was put in charge of B Flight armourers - and so started three and a half very enjoyable years working with an aircraft which I grew to love. I ultimately left with regret but with many, many happy memories of my time as a Tiger, of travelling all around the UK, then to the Middle East and returning to England for D Day. On 12<sup>th</sup> July 1944 I was posted to 605 Squadron and Mosquitoes. I missed the old squadron but we had to get on with the war. I saw VE Day in Holland, went next to RAF Gutersloh for two and a half years and then to Lubeck on Bomb Disposal where I remained for only three weeks. I finished my time with the RAF at a bomb dump west of Hamburg. I was a regular but although I had been interviewed and recommended for further service I was told there were no vacancies in the rank and trade. So I left the RAF on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1948 having done one year's training and nine years service.

## Tiger Museum

You will recall from previous briefings in *Tiger News* that the RAF Museum at Stafford have all 74's memorabilia in store and by now should have completed a full inventory. There would be no problem in loaning out items for display to registered and accredited museums. The City of Norwich Aviation Museum (CNAM) is so accredited and is very keen to house a Tiger Museum. Given 74's 13 years at Horsham St Faith and its proximity to Coltishall and Wattisham too, it is very appropriate that a Tiger Museum be located at Horsham although these days it is known as Norwich International Airport. We have already raised some funding to assist in the setting up of the display, thanks largely to John Freeborn who is donating the fees he receives for signing books and prints - and to all those at the reunion who bought raffle tickets.

I will keep you posted on developments which I suspect will be steady rather than rapid!

## De Panne

You will also recall from previous *Tiger News* that there is to be a commemoration service held in De Panne, Belgium, on Monday May 22<sup>nd</sup> for Squadron Leader John Colin Mungo Park who was shot down there in 1941. There may well still be the opportunity for any members wishing to travel across to do so. Travel arrangements are being made individually (Norfolk Line offer a frequent, cheap service between Dover and Dunkirk which is just to the south of De Panne). I'm sure our contact in Belgium, Johnny Recours, will be able to find accommodation at this stage too. The CO of the Belgian Tiger Squadron will join us on the morning of the commemoration and a visit to the SAR unit at Koksijde is also planned. We will be having a mini reunion on the Sunday of course!

It would be very appropriate if any of Mungo Park's family could join us for the commemoration but we have had no contact at all. I asked one of our members Hugh Alderton, who is greatly interested in family history, whether he could see if he could trace anyone for us. He has spent a considerable number of hours trying to do so and whilst thus far we have still made no contact Hugh feels we are getting closer. He has uncovered some interesting things though. The most interesting is that Mungo Park wasn't christened as such. His birth certificate shows John Colin Park and nowhere, in any record, does Mungo feature. His father was Colin Archibald Mungo Park, Mungo being a Christian name. A thorough check of the deed poll register reveals no change of or addition to John Colin's name. He appears in all RAF records as Mungo Park but the Mungo can only be an unofficially adopted name in deference to his father.

John Colin's father was a private in the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Sussex Regiment. His mother's name was Marion Alexandra. He was born in Wallasey in Cheshire. John started life as a shipping clerk before joining up. He had several brothers and sisters although to date there has been no response to letters or calls to possible addresses for them.

**Boz`s Bucker** - our President Boz Robinson is looking for hangar space for his Bucker Jungmann G-BXBD which is currently at Duxford but for which he needs to find a new home. If anyone can help would they please contact Boz (his details are on the title page).



*Boz's Bucker Bü 131 Jungmann. Does anybody have hangar space for it?*

## Obituaries

It has been a sad time again of late as some of our senior Tigers have passed on.

**Ron Rose** died in January and his funeral was held at Horsham St Faith, Norwich, on February 16<sup>th</sup>. Ron had been an ever-present at recent reunions and had indeed recently joined other Associations too as he re-established links with other squadrons and units with which he served in a long and varied career in the RAF. Big Ron was a quiet man who was happy to sit and listen to those around him talking of their experiences, but he also occasionally delved into his collection of memorabilia and came up with some very interesting items! He was much missed at the reunion this year.

With 74 Ron was an airframe fitter and he served as a Tiger from 1958 until the squadron and its Lightnings moved up to Leuchars. During his 39 years with the RAF he worked on and was associated with many aircraft types including Meteors, Mosquitos, Vampires, Harvards, Devons, Balliols, Hunters, Lightnings, Canberras, Victors, Jaguars, Buccaneers and Tornados.

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**Hugh Murland** was of great help to me when I researched `Tigers`, not least for giving me the opportunity to use photographs from his unique and fascinating collection, taken whilst he served with 74 in 1945 and 1946, firstly on Spitfires and then converting to Meteor F3s.



*Taken at Schijndel in 1945, Hugh is at the front on the right. Next to him is Pat Peet whilst on the back row, left to right are Paddy Dalzell, Dave Davis and Len Preston. Paddy and Len are Association members.*

Hugh's son Jerry composed the following obituary.

*Hugh was one of those individuals that consider themselves privileged to have flown the Spitfire. He once described the aircraft as 'a very demanding and rewarding mistress' and I still remember seeing his eyes light up a few years ago when one of the last remaining Spitfires flew low over the house. Hugh was born in*

Bangalore, India in 1923, and attended Swanborne House Preparatory School and Wellington College before the war interrupted his studies. Volunteering for aircrew in 1941 he was accepted for pilot training and joined the Edinburgh University Air Squadron short course before spending the next 18 months in South Africa, eventually becoming one of the 1,500 or so pilots graduating from the Joint Air Training Plan in January 1943. It is easy to forget that he was only just 19 years old when as a sergeant pilot he was selected to fly fighters and posted to 73 Operational Training Unit at Abusuir in Egypt. His first solo flight in a Spitfire was on Empire Day 1943 and by August he was flying operationally with 81 Squadron in the Western Desert. A month later in Sicily with the invading allied forces he crashed while taking off from a mud bound airfield and fractured his spine. There then followed a lengthy period at Number 1 RAF Hospital at Carthage, a place he described as the 'hottest, dustiest and most ill equipped hospital on earth'. Returning to the UK in November 1943 to a short spell at Hoylake Rehabilitation Centre he once again found himself flying Spitfires with 278 Squadron from Martlesham Heath in Suffolk. In July 1944 he was commissioned. At Martlesham the squadron was involved in search and rescue and providing fighter protection for the Walrus aircraft used in air sea rescue operations.

In January 1945 Hugh was posted to 74 'Tiger' Squadron and flew Spitfires operationally in Belgium, Holland and Germany until May 1945 when the Squadron returned home to convert to the RAF's first jet fighter, the Meteor. By the end of hostilities Hugh had flown 123 operational hours on Spitfires from airfields in seven countries.

He was devastated when he was found unfit for flying, the damaging effects of high tone deafness brought on by jet engine noise had not been fully realised in those early days and he was demobbed in 1947. He spent the next six years as a chartered surveyor before finally rejoining the RAF's Secretarial Branch. In 1970 as a Squadron Leader he took early retirement to make use of his qualification as a chartered surveyor initially with Savills and later as an independent. It was while Hugh was at RAF Cranwell that I learnt to fly with the station flying club. Going solo in a Tiger Moth with my father watching from the clubhouse I was more nervous of his comments than getting the kite round the circuit and back in one piece.

Up until his death Hugh maintained his interest in conservation issues particularly with the Norfolk Society. A keen sailor until his increasingly frail condition forced him to stop getting his feet wet, he maintained sailing was akin to flying. It was only when he found himself unable to get into the boat that he reluctantly stowed the sails for the last time.

**Jerry Murland**

Hugh's funeral was held at Horsham St Faith on March 14<sup>th</sup>.

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Finally we say goodbye to **George Thornley** who was a long serving Tiger between 1941 and 1945. George had a major operation last November and initially made a good recovery but sadly deteriorated and passed away on January 11<sup>th</sup> aged 92. He had been very alert and active until his recent illness and had many fond memories of his RAF days. George was another of our ground crew members who was in the Mediterranean in 1943. He was on the island of Simi with Doc Ferris. The Special Boat Squadron were holding Simi and they quickly embraced the arrival of the Tigers as a welcome addition to a totally inadequate defending force.

## High Flying Tiger

*Tigers did exciting things! Over the years a dozen or so RAF pilots have been attached to the Lockheed U2 programme and all came from fighter backgrounds. Many Tigers will have flown practice intercept missions against the U-2 when the Lightning first came into service in the 1960s so the following notes by a former Tiger will be of interest to those trying to intercept and those trying not to be intercepted.*

*Anonymity has been maintained because all those involved signed the Official Secrets Act fifty years ago.*

One morning in the mid 1960s our Commander Lt Col Miles Doyle called me to his office. He said "Tomorrow, we have the Senate Armed Services Committee and some Royal Air Force VIP visitors arriving at Edwards AFB to be briefed on our operation. I want you to fly a short demo flight demonstrating the high performance of the U-2 and finish with some FCLPs (Field Carrier Landing Practice) touch and go landings."

The aircraft available was a U-2G, a modified U-2C fitted with a slightly beefed up landing gear, a flap setting increased from 35 to 50 degrees and a tail hook. With a standard training fuel load of 400 US gallons the aircraft would weigh a little less than 16,000lbs and have a thrust available of 17,000 pounds at full throttle. However, full throttle cannot be used at take off as it generates far too much oomph for a fragile aircraft and airspeed and 'g' limits can be exceeded in seconds.

For the Senate demonstration a normal 'gated' reduced power take-off was made lifting off at about 90 knots while accelerating quickly. The aircraft was rotated to about an 80 degree climb angle, 'gust control' was selected, full power was slowly added, and fuel dump was activated to produce an air show style twin contrail of fuel vapour from the mid-wing fuel dump points. Airspeed was held at about 170 knots going nearly vertical in a corkscrew climb. In about a minute the aircraft reached 10,000 feet and without the fuel dump vapour trail would have been barely visible to the onlookers at the runway edge.

So much for performance. Now the aircraft had to be brought back to the airfield before interest was lost by the onlookers. A quick mandatory stall check was made at 10,000 feet to ensure that both wings stalled symmetrically and that fuel was balanced evenly. Back in gust control with landing gear down and airbrakes out, the U-2 was descended at 220 knots IAS into the circuit and checks made for a FCLP touch and go using the USN deck landing mirror system set up on our runway. On finals at 90 knots with flaps at 50 degrees the meatball was picked up and held as a glide path reference. Speed was slowly reduced to 82 knots approaching the runway threshold. At about 20 feet the LSO (USN Landing Safety Officer) called "Cut one" at which point the throttle was retarded to idle. Moments later the LSO called "Cut two", the pickle switch on the throttle was activated to deploy the spoilers, the yoke was eased back a little further and the U-2 stalled at about a foot above the runway and settled simultaneously onto the twin main gear wheels and the twin small solid rubber tail wheels.

Now the fun started. Wings had to be kept level for the 'touch and go' without the aid of 'pogos' by using deft aileron movements. Spoilers were retracted, flaps raised to the take off position, elevator trim reset and then the throttle opened slowly to take off once more, this time in a sedate fashion to turn downwind for a final FCLP.

The final landing was made from a standard mirror approach with height above runway calls from the LSO in the mobile chase car. Instead of using spoilers this time, the tail parachute was deployed at a foot or so above the runway. The U-2 immediately slowed and settled on to the runway and thanks to a light headwind rolled quickly to a stop with the wings level and both wing tips off the ground. The ground crew refitted the pogo wheels and with one man sitting on each wing to keep the wings bent down slightly to ensure that the pogos made contact with the runway, the U-2 was taxied back to the ramp.



*Taken at the 1991 RAF Alconbury Air Tattoo, this shot of 01081 shows the relationship of wing and fuselage – long and slender both! Looking through my collection for U2 shots brought back many happy memories!*

### **Reflections some 40 years later.....**

Am I glad that I was a young pilot in my 20s at the time these demos were flown! Such sheer power, spectacle and fun is unlikely to be permitted these days. In the climb, feet and eyes are level, the view ahead is non-existent and pitch attitude is obtained from peripheral vision with much time spent looking at the airspeed, rpm and tgt. The controls feel decidedly slack as the U-2 sits on 17,000 lbs of thrust. 10,000 feet approaches in seconds, power is reduced together with pitch and a more comfortable 200 knots is then held in level flight while the descent checks are made. The stall check procedure using the mechanically activated stall strips was introduced after one of our senior pilots was killed doing FCLPs. The U-2 goes up quickly, but comes down slowly as, like a glider, it has little drag. Landings require attention to detail as the undercarriage track is less than a metre and the U-2 requires a two-point 'tail dragger' style attitude at touchdown to avoid porpoising back into the air. Popping the drag chute just above the runway at  $V_{ref}$  sets up a perfect landing attitude!

## **Intercepting the U-2**

*How difficult was the U-2 to intercept?*

Immediately following its move to Binbrook, AFDS was involved in supersonic interception trials against high-flying Lockheed U-2s of the USAF. The object of the trial was to work up a successful technique for intercepting high altitude targets. During the actual interceptions the aim was to get close enough to obtain a positive visual identification of the target. Fairly severe minimum target/fighter separation limits were applied due to possible shock interference effects on the U-2s. During the phase of 8th - 26th October, twenty-eight supersonic flights were flown over land, the Lightnings operating out of Middleton St George. The interceptions were controlled by GCI Buchan and the recovery by GCI Patrington. Twenty-two of the sorties were proving flights to establish the parameters for the interceptions and six were flown against U-2s at 60,000 ft. Of the six sorties against the U-2 two were aborted to avoid the Lightnings approaching too close to Carlisle and four resulted in interceptions. Of these three were completely successful and one was broken off due to the acceleration being started too late, though visual contact was established.

Mr Burns, Senior Flight Test Engineer for English Electric, visited Middleton St George over the two days October 17th-18th to provide performance data for operation of the Lightning against subsonic targets flying at heights of 60,000 ft and above. Prior to the visit, a verbal request had been received from MoA for a clearance to speeds of M1.9 for the purpose of this exercise. However, calculations by the Company concluded that clearance to M1.8 would be adequate. The debriefing report following this series of flights stated that aircraft (which were carrying two Firestreak missiles) and AI23 serviceability had been very good and that the pilots were impressed with the manoeuvrability of the Lightning under these conditions. The high closing speed of the Lightning was however something of an embarrassment in view of the restrictions on separation. Other general points raised at the debriefing included that of sonic bangs - a number of complaints had been made from the area south of Edinburgh evidently arising from 'super bangs' due to focusing of the bang from the push-over between 55,000 and 60,000 ft. The meeting concluded by suggesting that AFDS should make it known to the Operational Requirements Branch - OR 20 - that there was in fact an operational requirement for a Mach number clearance beyond 1.7 for the purpose of intercepting targets above 65,000 ft. Hitherto it had been felt that clearance beyond M1.7 for the Lightnings Mk.1 and 2 had little or no operational value.

U-2 flights from Upper Heyford were temporarily suspended at the end of October but from the results achieved to date the CO of AFDS felt that much could be learned by flying against U-2s at altitudes up to 70,000 ft. By mid November the Americans had permanently withdrawn their U-2 detachment but not before a second series of overland supersonic interceptions had been completed. A further fourteen flights were carried out, all of them in daylight. Of these flights, four successful interceptions were carried out at 60,000 ft. and four successful and four abortive at 65,000 ft. These interceptions were proof indeed - if proof were needed - that the Lightning (as an airframe package) was a superlative interceptor. At the time it was the only weapons system in the world with the performance to intercept these high flying U-2s.

From 11th to 17th November Fg Off Pete Ginger flew one of the Squadron's Lightnings, XM191 'H', on a high altitude profile trial out of Middleton-St-George, which followed on from earlier trials conducted by AFDS the previous month. Four flights were carried out by him and on one of them he had the opportunity to carry out a PI against the target aircraft. Pete Ginger's observations on the U-2 trial follow.

"It was highly classified at the time as it was intended to prove that given excellent close (ground) radar control it would be possible to intercept very high flying aircraft. I believe that our American friends considered that achieving a successful intercept against them would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. We flew several sorties each day using varying acceleration points and climb profiles and on every occasion we achieved a missile firing position. Of course, the U-2 is able to fly at altitude at a very low Mach number which resulted in our Lightnings passing the US pilot with a very high overtaking speed following the missile release point! I imagine that the trial resulted in the USAF changing their tactics and defensive equipment. I flew one high level profile on November 12 and two more the following day, these being to perfect the high level profile. These were followed by the successful interception of the U-2 on November 14. In addition, a colleague of mine from AFDS flew different profiles at different times. As the flight profile had to be flown over land, we were given rare permission to accelerate to supersonic speeds. It was therefore anticipated that sonic boom reports would follow. The higher speeds were flown on a north to west heading over the Pennines, with a turn to the east after the intercept. Unfortunately Edinburgh lay immediately beneath the turn! The Scottish papers reported strange bangs

but owing to the nature of the exercise we were not even allowed to apologise. In summary, I felt that it was a very interesting and revealing trial and I hope that it helped our American friends to some degree."

A new book by Chris Pocock has been published. Entitled *Fifty Years of the U-2: The Complete Illustrated History of Lockheed's Legendary Dragon Lady*.

it is published by Schiffer and costs around £55.

## Do You Have.....

.....or do you know anyone who has an old flying suit with a WOP-AG half brevet? Alan Hepworth would be interested if you have or do. He can be contacted on **01481 726712**.

## Phantom from the Cockpit

May I draw your attention to Peter Caygill's new book *Phantom from the Cockpit*. Amongst its contributors are Tigers Group Captain Graham Clarke who flew both the F4J and FGR2 versions with the squadron and Group Captain Mike Shaw who apart from the RAF flew the Phantom with the United States Marine Corps. I was pleased to be able to contribute too on the basis of my flight in a J in 1989. Peter has incidentally also written a companion volume, *Lightning from the Cockpit*, once again with the help of Tigers. Both are available from Pen and Sword at £19.99.

**Photo History** - At next years 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations we plan to display a succession of photographs illustrating the Tiger story from 1917 to date. Whilst we have a good cross section of such photos in the archive, we are always keen to discover new ones. Could you search your collection for anything you think would be of interest and pass them on to Rhod Smart (address on title page) for copying. Very good care will of course be taken of any photos prior to their return to you.

**Don` t Forget!**

**Next year`s reunion is on the weekend of  
Friday March 9<sup>th</sup> to Sunday March 11<sup>th</sup>  
with the dinner itself on Saturday,  
March 10<sup>th</sup>**