

# No 74 (F) Tiger Squadron Association

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## Tiger News No 42

Compiled by Bob Cossey

Association President	AVM B L Robinson FRAeS FCMI
Honorary Vice President	Air Marshal Cliff Spink CB, CBE, FCMI, FRAeS
Association Chairman	Gp Capt Dick Northcote OBE BA
Association Treasurer	Rhod Smart
Association Secretary	Bob Cossey BA (Hons)

**Apologies.** I currently have enough material for *Tiger News* to produce a book sized edition!! My apologies to those who have submitted photos and articles for inclusion and who were expecting to see their copy in this edition. Rest assured it will be included ASAP. I am as always very grateful to you all for having the interest to send in material.

**This is a Special Edition of *Tiger News* marking the commemoration of 74 Squadron's Squadron Leader John Colin Mungo Park in Adinkerke, Belgium, on May 22<sup>nd</sup> and also of Flt Lt Michael Croker of 295 Squadron who was commemorated with other members of the crew of a Halifax which came down in France in 1943. Michael Croker was Association member Nadine Jackson-Croker's father.**

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### Sqn Ldr John Colin Mungo Park DFC\*

Bob Cossey reports.



On the grey, blustery Monday of May 22<sup>nd</sup> members of the 74 Squadron Association, of Sqn Ldr Mungo Park's family and of the local Belgian community of Adinkerke and De Panne remembered the sacrifice of this 23 year old RAF officer who gave his life for his country on June 27<sup>th</sup> 1941. It was a moving and emotional moment for all present and I know that those attending made new and lasting friendships on the day and over the weekend preceding it.

The story as to how it all came about is a combination of serendipity, good fortune, hard work and dedication. To start with the serendipity, Sqn Ldr Doug Tidy relates how.....

*....about three years ago the Association's Deborah Parker, my friend and carer, saw a car outside the cottage where I live and noticed an air force sticker on the back. A cottage opposite to mine has been visited by Belgian Johny Recour every year for the last 11 years – something I found out when I asked him if he had air force connections. On learning that he did, I gave him a copy of my squadron history I Fear No Man. There Johny read of Sqn Ldr Mungo Park being shot down in June 1941. To his surprise he then found in his father Joseph's possession a photograph of Mungo's wrecked Spitfire, with his body beside it. The photo had been taken by the Germans and through Joseph's Resistance connections had found its way into the Recour photograph collection together with several other snaps of the event. Directly from this came the event at Adinkerke.*

Johny Recour's idea was that a small remembrance ceremony should be held at Mungo's graveside with any members of the Association who wanted to attend. He then realised that a very appropriate time to do this would be during British Week which is held in the seaside town of De Panne every year and to which Dunkirk Veterans come to honour their own comrades who were part of the evacuation during Operation Dynamo in 1940. He talked to the De Panne authorities and they agreed to include the commemoration in the programme. From that point on organisation gathered pace and for the few months preceding May e-mails between the UK and Belgium became an almost daily occurrence!

If we were to be honouring Sqn Ldr Mungo Park I knew that we couldn't do so without trying to trace members of his family who may have wanted to share the moment with us. Fortunately in the Association we have a family historian (Hugh Alderton) and a Battle of Britain researcher (Craig Brandon) who, after I approached them for assistance, helped trace one of the squadron leader's nephews, Christopher Faux. Chris was immediately interested in what we proposed and I travelled up to Preston to see him and his wife Patti. What I found there is a historian's dream – memorabilia from Mungo's schooldays through to his RAF service and the quest by his mother, Mamie, to find out exactly what had happened to her son after he failed to return from that mission in 1941. What was even more interesting was the fact that Chris and his family had conducted their own researches and had been in touch with various authorities both in the UK and Belgium in a bid to complete the story of their Uncle John. A large archive of Mungo's papers and photos have also been deposited with the RAF Museum at Hendon. Geoffrey Faux, Chris's brother and Mungo's godson, has his medals.

Furthermore they all wished very much to attend the commemoration at the grave at Adinkerke which Chris and Patti had first visited some years ago.

Perhaps I should briefly explain that Royal Air Force and squadron records always show Mungo Park, or sometimes Mungo-Park, as the surname. In fact Park was the surname as shown on the birth certificate together with John Colin as Christian names. There is no mention of Mungo other than as one of John's father's Christian names. So just when and why John adopted Mungo is not known although we can speculate it was in his father's memory. Throughout his RAF career John Colin Park was known as Mungo to all his colleagues. Interestingly his mother started to sign her surname as Mungo Park after her husband Colin's death just a few days prior to the end of the First World War – ironically he is buried at Velenciennes a few miles from Adinkerke.

From initially expecting a few members of the Association to be attending with his own family Johny was to suddenly find that his expertise as a booking agent was to be tested! Fortunately there is a very good hotel in the centre of De Panne – the Mon Bijou – who were extremely accommodating in all senses of the word and didn't seem at all worried by the flow of demands and requests directed at them by Johny as

the list of attendees grew ever larger. At the same time he was arranging with the CO at the Belgian Air Force base at nearby Koksijde for a visit to the Sea King Search and Rescue facility there after lunch in the Officer's Mess on the final day of our visit. I was talking to the Reverend Canon Ray Jones, Chaplain of St George's Memorial Church at Ypres, about the form the service of remembrance would take and to the Rev Phil Hiscock who would be leading the Dunkirk Veterans memorial service on the sea front on the Sunday in which we would also share. Johnny was looking for a bugler to play the Last Post and Reveille at Adinkerke - not so easy as they were in great demand over the weekend with the Veterans' ceremonies up and down the coast.



*John Colin Mungo Park's nephew Chris Faux (right) with Joseph Recour who as a teenager saw the Squadron Leader's aircraft crash at Adinkerke and who subsequently obtained photographs of the crash scene.*

To honour the memory of one of his forbears on 74 Squadron as Commanding Officer and also to honour the soldiers on the Dunkirk beaches above whom the RAF had flown in 1940, Air Marshal Cliff Spink was intent on bringing his Spitfire across to perform a fly past. Sadly this was not to be, for Cliff was thwarted at every turn by abominable weather which prevented him from getting off the ground at Duxford on the Sunday and also when he tried again on the Monday firstly to overfly the ceremony at Adinkerke and later to land at Koksijde so those attending could be shown the aircraft.

This disappointment apart, the weekend was a memorable one which the weather couldn't begin to spoil however hard it tried. We shared time with the old soldiers both at their sea front ceremony and also at a reception hosted by the De Panne authorities in the Town Hall. We held our own mini Tiger Meet over luncheon on the Sunday which our President AVM Boz Robinson hosted. Boz also spoke movingly at the remembrance itself on the Monday and at the conclusion of the weekend at Koksijde. He presented Johnny Recour and his father Joseph with Association ties and welcomed them as Honorary Members. We owe

them both an enormous debt for their commitment and work in making the weekend possible. We also owe a tremendous debt to Mungo`s family, three generations of whom joined us. Apart from Chris and Patti Faux there was their son James, a major in the British army, together with his wife Wendy (for whom we have to thank for many of the photographs taken over the weekend and which you see here) and their children Freddie (who carries on the family tradition by having Mungo as a second Christian name), Georgia, Jessica and Madeline. Chris's brother Geoffrey was joined by his son Andrew and grandson Martin.



*New photographs have come to light since the commemoration – one is reproduced here. Johnny spoke to a now 80 year old inhabitant of Adinkerke who had written a letter after reading articles in the local newspaper to say that he too had seen the crash. He was fourteen at the time and his mother worked in a children`s home which was occupied by German infantry and which is presumably where the photos came from.*



*From left to right Johnny Recour, Doug Tidy, Joseph Recour and Bobby Laumans.*

Association members who attended were Boz and his wife Ann: Derek Morris and John Loosemore who were both groundcrew on the squadron when Mungo was there. Derek laid a wreath on behalf of the Association: Belgian Bobby Laumans who was a Tiger in late 1941 - 1942 before joining the Belgian piloted 350 Squadron at Atcham prior to 74 sailing for the Middle East. We'll be telling Bobby's story in a future issue of *Tiger News*: Doug Tidy and Debbie Parker: David Ketcher - thanks to him also for taking a great selection of photographs: Angie and I; and Deborah Aconley and her husband Barrie. Deborah was pleased to have the chance to talk with those who had known her father Clive Hilken who had taken off on the same sortie as that on which Mungo was lost and on which he too was shot down. Clive was made a prisoner of war.

Johny was there with his wife Daisy and father Joseph - who himself has many a story to tell about his time as a member of the Resistance - as well as two former Belgian military colleagues of Johny's, Dirk de Prol (an army driver) and Xavier Doom (a tank commander). Johny himself was a reserve officer in the Logistics Corps but because of living so close to Koksijde air base has always had a great interest in military aviation. Johny's son in law Stefann to de Prol, a policeman, was also present. From Koksijde, Regimental Sergeant Major Paesbrugge attended the ceremony and Koksijde's CO Colonel Rudy Theys hosted the lunch.



*John Loosemore (left) and Derek Morris, both groundcrew members of 74 Squadron at the time Mungo was a Tiger.*

There is much more that I could tell you - such as the new photographs which have turned up since the ceremony, the stories that Johny has been hearing from local people about the day of the crash and how the local people responded by placing flowers on the grave (for which some were imprisoned) - and so on, but which unfortunately space stops me from including here. I am in the process of preparing with Craig

Brandon's help a commemoration booklet which I will let you have details of when completed and which will be a full account of Mungo's time with 74 as well as the extremely interesting Park family history. To conclude here though I would like to reprint Boz Robinson's address at the graveside at Adinkerke which summed up so well all our feelings on that memorable day in May.

*"This is an important moment in all our lives and one which we shall always remember. As a 9 year old in 1945, I, like many of you, can remember World War 2. And as I learned a few weeks ago in Liege and during the course of this weekend meeting Joseph Recour, many living Belgians have vivid and terrible recollections of that war. So it is with humble respect that we come here to Belgium today to pay tribute and to honour Sqn Ldr John Colin Mungo Park who gave his life that freedom should prevail over tyranny. Freedom is something we take for granted but we must ensure that our children and our children's children learn about and never forget those years of war and realise that maintaining freedom needs their effort and their vigilance to prevent creeping erosion of what Sqn Ldr Mungo Park and his fellow warriors fought and died for.*

*It is very heartening for us in the 74 Sqn Association to see so many members of Sqn Ldr Mungo Park's family here today, especially the very young. Your heroic forebear was an archetypal fighter pilot of his time - dashing, young and brilliant in his profession. He was also very modest and shunned publicity, preferring to get on with the task that God had given him to defend his country and what it stood for.*

*John Colin Mungo Park was born in March 1918 not long before his father was to be killed and buried not many miles from here. He joined the RAF in June 1937. Before the war broke out he served time with the RNAS but joined 74 Squadron at the outbreak. With 74 Sqn he was heavily engaged in operations in France and Belgium in 1940 and in the Battle of Britain. In September 1940 he became a Flight Lieutenant and often led the squadron into battle from Coltishall and from Duxford whence we were hoping for a Spitfire to overfly us today to honour his memory but which the bad weather has prevented. From October 1940 until his death Mungo Park and 74 Sqn flew from RAF Biggin Hill. By June 1941 this remarkable pilot had shot down over 12 enemy aircraft and had received the DFC and a bar to the DFC and reached the rank of Acting Squadron Leader at the age of 22. We give thanks to God for his bravery, his devotion to duty and for his short life. Amen."*



## Post Script

**Sqn Ldr Mike Willson White** has visited the small cemetery at Adinkerke and gives directions as to how to find it. If you are in the area please do try and pay your respects.

I was quite moved to read in *Tiger News* 40 the article/pictures concerning John Mungo Park and whilst I was not able to attend the ceremony on the 22nd May, I made it my business to visit his grave in Adinkerke during one of my recent European trips. The cemetery can be difficult to find since there are, sadly, a good number of military cemeteries in this area. So I thought it may help anyone who may also like to visit the grave if I gave some directions.

Travelling East on the E40 Motorway from Calais to Ostend, take the first exit after entering Belgium (Exit 1) following directions to Adinkerke/De Panne. Head north along the quarter mile link road to the N39. At the roundabout take the third exit (remembering that you're driving on the right) heading back towards Dunkirk. Drive about 500 yards and take the first turning on the left. It's an unmarked side road with "Royal Tobacco Shop Parking" prominently painted on the side of the first building. Drive down this road a few hundred yards until you reach the Cemetery on the left.

The Cemetery is predictably very well tended by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and contains the graves of not only British Casualties suffered at the beginning of WW2 and WW1 but also two Czech and (a single) Egyptian casualties. Unusually there are also about 40 German WW1 casualties buried here, their headstones facing away from the Allied graves. John Mungo Park's grave is easy to find using the directory in the entrance document cupboard. It seems that he took the name "Mungo" from his father which, perhaps, was an un-hyphenated family name in a similar way to mine.

My abiding memory of the visit was that here was peacefully buried the Commanding Officer of an RAF Fighter Squadron with a DFC and bar - all at the age of 23.

## Remembering Flt Lt Michael Croker

Nadine Jackson-Croker writes:

On the 8th May I was invited to take part in a ceremony that happens every year in France to mark the liberation of France and thus for them the end of the 1939-45 war. This year was to be a special ceremony however as they were honouring the crew of two aircraft shot down on 19th February 1943.

The aircraft, a Halifax and a Whitley, were from 295 Squadron stationed at Netheravon. Their target was an electrical installation at Distre near Saumur in the Loire Valley. Fourteen aircraft took off, one couldn't find the target, one returned with engine trouble and two were shot down. I don't know too much about what happened to the Whitley other than it came down in woodland and that all but one on board were killed outright. The survivor walked away from the crash unhurt but was captured by the Germans and made a prisoner of war.

The Halifax meanwhile came in low on the target but met with heavy flak as the Germans had installed new ack-ack guns only the day before. The Halifax managed to let go one bomb but was damaged by ground fire. However, instead of making for home they decided to make a second run at the target. It is

not certain what actually happened next but according to eye witness reports the aircraft blew up and came down in a vineyard killing all on board instantly. The bodies of the airmen were left on the side of the road by the Germans for three days until a French hearse went to collect them for burial. The Germans acknowledged the men's bravery by giving them full military honours. One of the airmen was Flt Lt Michael Croker and he was on the crew of the Halifax instead of a friend whose wife was unwell. Despite having finished his tour of duty he went as a favour to his friend. Michael Croker was my Dad.

The people of Distre are still extremely grateful for what Les Anglais did for them in the war. They honoured my Dad and the others on board the Halifax and made myself and two other family members of the crew Honorary Citizens of the region and presented us with a certificate and a medal. It really was an amazing day. I met a man who at the age of twelve took the first picture of the graves overflowing with flowers and sent the negative via the resistance to the BBC in London. There was another man who had found the cap of Sqn Ldr Crighton-Miller and was able to give it to his nephew all these years later.



*These two pictures were taken shortly after the burial. The first (on the left) was taken by a boy of 12 who sent the negative via the Resistance to the BBC in London. It was spoken of on the BBC News. The Germans were upset because the French were covering the British graves with flowers so they ordered the gardeners at the cemetery to put flowers on the German graves as well. They did as they were told and planted one daisy on each German grave. The second picture was taken about three months later and you can see how well they were being looked after. The French people really did care then and they still do.*

There was an elderly lady who saw the aircraft come down and who rushed to help but could do nothing. She turned out to be the Mayor's mother-in-law. We were interviewed by a local historian as well as the local press, treated like royalty and told that we would all be very welcome in that part of France anytime we wanted to go. I came away very conscious of the honour given to us and extremely proud of my Dad and the others who gave their lives on that night so long ago.



*Nadine and local dignitaries pay their respects to her Dad and other members of the Halifax and Whitley and all the British, Canadian and New Zealand airmen who lost their lives during the course of the war on raids into German occupied France.*

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## Goodbye to an Old Tiger

Sadly we have to record the death of Association member L `Johnny` Johnston of Kati Kati New Zealand on April 10th. He was 87 and is survived by his wife Freda who remembers him as a gentle man to the end. Johnny was on the squadron in 1944-45, one of seven New Zealanders with 74 at the time. The photograph below shows the seven.



*From left to right Cam Davies, `Johnny` Johnston, ? , Pat Peet, ? , `Mark` Luke and John Church, the seven New Zealanders at Schijndel Holland in 1945. John is a regular correspondent and it was he who told us of Johnny's passing.*

## **John Bennett.**

Dr. John Bennett was a contemporary of those New Zealand Tigers we talked about above and also a great friend of Englishman Hugh Murland whose death we reported in Tiger News 41. John is a Canadian who lives in Ontario and he has been involved in many things over the years alongside his career as a medical practitioner. One thing close to John's heart is conservation and such has been his contributions in this field locally, a recently opened boardwalk has been named after him. The Stony Swamp Conservation area is beautiful but damp, and the new boardwalk takes hikers on the 387 kilometre long Rideau Trail from Ottawa to Kingston through a mixture of deciduous and coniferous forest which in the autumn is noted for its fiery colours.



*Councillor Jan Harder with Tiger John Bennett at the opening of the boardwalk named after him in October last year.*

## **Lessey Carway**

Do any of our senior members remember Lessey Carway who was on 74 from March 10th 1939 to 29th December 1939, possibly as an armourer? Lessey died recently and members of his family are interested in tracing his air force career. If you do recall him let me know and I'll put you in touch

## **Harold Anderson**

In the last newsletter we recalled how pleased Philip Anderson was to join us at Stratford and to have traced some of our members who remembered his brother Harold Anderson, a groundcrew corporal, on the island of Cos in the Mediterranean when the Tigers were sent there in the autumn of 1943. I need,

however, to apologise for a misunderstanding which crept into *Tiger News* 41 when I talked about Andy Anderson, the pilot who lost his life when his engine failed en route to Cos. What I should have said was that Harold was reported missing when he tried to escape the Germans who had occupied Cos by swimming to Turkey.

## Iranian Aviation Monthly

Leon Manoucherians is an Armenian who was born in Iran. From childhood he was fascinated by aviation and at 14 he joined the Imperial Iranian Air Force as a junior assistant editor of the monthly air force magazine. At the same age he spent most of his free time on the balcony of Meherebad airport logging the registrations of the civilian and military aircraft that shared the airfield. His knowledge of aviation paid dividends for he became one of the writers and archivists of the IIAF. He was also appointed by General Kahatami, son in law of the Shah and CinC of the air force, to the post of technical advisor and historian to the Air Force Museum. This opened lots of new doors for Leon as he was granted new levels of security clearance and multitudes of new documents and photos became available to him. It also allowed access to international sources for anything to do with Iranian aviation.

In 1979 the Islamic Revolution abruptly changed everything. Suddenly the past was unimportant to the new regime and Leon, only too well aware of what might happen managed to save and secrete files, folders, reports, operational records, maintenance records and aircraft data books. Furthermore, when it became unsafe for Christians to continue living in Iran, he moved in 1979 to the USA and became a US citizen in 1985.

The idea of writing up the story of aviation in his home country has never left Leon and having continued to follow developments in the aviation industry there and having a personal archive of some 6,000 photos and thousands of pages of the written word to work with he is launching *Iranian Aviation Monthly*. The Association has been able to help to a small degree by providing copies of photographs in the archive of 74` S time in the Middle East during the war. Unfortunately Leon's plans have been put back by a horrific car crash which left him hospitalised for weeks and then redundancy from his job in Glendale California. But plans have only been delayed, not cancelled, and we look forward to the first issue of the magazine, hopefully later in 2006.



*One of the photographs from the Association's collection, taken by member Fred Waters, and sent to Leon, showing two Hurricanes ready to taxi at Meherebad airfield (now Teheran international airport). This is a rare shot of aircraft which the Tigers only flew for a short while as a stop-gap whilst they awaited Spitfires.*