

# No 74 (F) Tiger Squadron Association

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## Tiger News No 43

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)

### Goodbye to Old Tigers

Sadly we have to record the death of **Denzl Beard** on September 12th. He was 83 and was laid to rest at Torquay Crematorium. Denzl was with the Tigers at the time of their transition from Spitfires to Meteors and we published a few of his stories about experiences with the new jet fighter in previous editions of *Tiger News*. Those of you who were at Duxford last September at the RAF ACE event will have had the privilege of meeting Denzl who was there with his son Robert. .

We also say goodbye to **Jack Thornton** who died in February aged 91. Jack was a Tiger between July 1941 (when they were at Acklington) and April 1946 and was a Fitter IIE (Repair and Inspection.) This was Jack's only posting and when he was demobbed in 1946 he had attained the rank of Corporal.

And to **Sqn Ldr Peter Pressley AFC** who was with 74 from September 1951 to October 1953 at RAF Horsham St Faith, serving as Flying Officer and then Flight Lieutenant on the squadron.

Our collective thoughts are with the families of Denzl, Jack and Peter.

### Churchill's Cortege.

You may recall from previous *Tiger News*' that Canadian Associate Member Colin Musson has been trying to trace the names of The Few chosen to accompany Churchill's coffin at his funeral. The Battle of Britain Society has now discovered those names. They were Leonard Bartlett, John Ellacombe, Ronald Berry, Geoffrey Brunner, Ernest Wooten, Peter Brothers, Alan Deere, Richard Haine, Roy Dutton, Desmond Sheen, Robert Oxspring, Eric Wright, Alec Ingle and George Westlake. There were two CBEs, eight DSOs, three OBEs, eighteen DFCs, five AFCs and a DFM amongst them! The RAF, as the junior service, headed the procession followed by the Army and Navy contingents, the band - and then the coffin.

**Epitaph for the Few** - Michael Kendrick has published his first anthology of poems dedicated to Battle of Britain pilots, entitled *Epitaph for the Few*. The book is prefaced by Dame Vera Lynn, is dedicated to 'Bunny' Currant and contains six of his poems which were written during World War Two as well as fifty of Michael's. Included are poems dedicated to our own Wing Commander John Freeborn DFC\* and the late Arthur Smith. The price is £14 plus £2 p&p. With the sale of each book a donation is made to the maintenance fund for the Monument to the Few on the Embankment in London. If you would like a copy or more details, contact Michael Kendrick at **Holly Croft, 266 Forest Road, Old Woodhouse, Near Loughborough, Leics, LE12 8UA. Tel No 01509 890905.**

## The RAF Chapel Biggin Hill



For those of you who haven't had the opportunity to visit St George's Chapel at Biggin Hill, the Custodian Laurie Chester has sent this photograph of the beautiful stained glass window there which is dedicated to 74 (F) Squadron and which was donated by Lloyds. The Chapel is open every day from 11.00am to 4.00pm.

### Updating the Records.

#### 1. Biggin Hill Personnel Record.

Biggin Hill's **Laurie Chester** is compiling a photographic record of all personnel who served at Biggin Hill up to the end of the war. If anyone can assist with photographs or information - all photos will be returned after copying - he would be very pleased to hear from you. Please call him on **01959 574757** after 6.00pm.

#### 2. Spitfire Personnel Record

On a larger scale, author **Dilip Sarkar MBE** has launched an audit to establish how many Second World War Spitfire pilots and ground crew are still alive and well in this 70th Anniversary year of the first flight of the aircraft. Ultimately the audit will provide a database of veterans for researchers and educational establishments to access, a new book and a DVD featuring Spitfire veterans' memories. If you would like to participate in Dilip's initiative you can contact him at **16 Kingfisher Close, St Peter's, Worcester, WR5 3RY. Or e-mail WW2researcher@aol.com.**

## More Assistance Required!

Member **Craig Brandon** has a long term project underway whereby he is compiling detailed profiles of 74's Battle of Britain pilots and those who flew during the early months of the war - some of which we have previously featured in *Tiger News*. Information in some cases has proved to be elusive which is where you may come in! If you can help with any information on those listed below, either from personal knowledge or from your own research, Craig would be very pleased to hear from you. Background and anecdotes is primarily what he is after for he is trying to build an overall personal picture of each individual rather than concentrate exclusively on flying details. The pilots in question are:

Pilot Officer Bill Armstrong from Darlington County Durham. Bill was killed in action in 1943 after leaving 74.

Pilot Officer Roger Boulding who became a POW in 1941 and died in 1993.

Sgt Fred Percy Burnard who joined the Tigers in October 1940 and was with them for just a month. He left the RAF in 1947 having reached the rank of Squadron Leader.

Pilot officer Bryan Vincent `Paddy` Byrne who joined 74 with Sailor Malan and Paddy Treacy. Was shot down and taken prisoner in May 1940.

Sgt Frederick William `Tiger Tim` Eley who was shot down and killed (Folkestone Harbour) on 31st July 1940. He is buried at Wrenbury, Cheshire.

Pilot Officer John `Polly` Flinders who left 74 for 32 Squadron in April 1940. He retired to Canada where he died in 1998.

Sgt Laurence Freese, an ex-Scout from Ilford who joined 74 in October 1940 and was killed in January 1941 when his Spitfire crashed out of fuel at Detling.

Pilot Officer Harold Raymond Gunn from Hertfordshire who joined in early July 1940 but was shot down into the Channel on July 28th and was killed.

Pilot Officer John Howard from Orpington who became a Tiger in October 1940 and was killed in action in a sweep over the Channel in May 1941.

Craig can be contacted on **0191 2578378** or at **6 Millfield Grove, Tynemouth, Tyne and Wear, NE30 2PY**.

## Schijndel 1945.

In *Tiger News* 42 on page 10 we published a photograph of the New Zealanders who were with 74 in early 1945 but were unable to name all those in the photo. With thanks to John Bennett, Ray Racy and Chris Horn who got in touch to put matters right, those photographed were (l to r) Cam Davies, Johnny Johnstone, Bill Warwick, Pat Peet, Shan Shanahan, Luke Barnes and John (Strop) Church. Also in the last *Tiger News* I included a piece about the above mentioned John Bennett and suggested he was a Canadian. Visits from a lynching party from the Haverfordwest branch of the Aircrew Association have convinced me otherwise - John is a Brit! He was born in the small village of Johnston which lies between Haverfordwest and Milford Haven where he lived until he joined the RAF in late September 1939. Post war he attended the University of London after a year at the London School of Economics and qualified in medicine, subsequently emigrating to Newfoundland and then moving on to Kelowna British Columbia where he practiced, as he did in Ottawa to where he moved in 1970. John has never taken Canadian citizenship.

## Airman's Cross

*It's always good to get reaction to items that have been included in Tiger News. The Airman's Cross article in Tiger News 39 prompted a letter or two including this from Sqn Ldr Chris Horn who wrote:*

`I hope it's not too late to tell you that your correspondent Edgar Walsh whose fanciful research into the so called Airman's Cross took up so much of your recent *Tiger News* 39 left me somewhat gob smacked. He seemed still to be making an unholy fuss after all the good advice he had already received about something I'd never have thought was at all `phenomenal`. During my pilot training with the USAAC in Alabama during World War II I quite often spotted the remote shadow of my aircraft encircled by the rainbow colours on cloud down-sun below and never had much doubt what it was. The rather vague more or less cuneiform shadow spoke for itself. The encircling `rainbow`, I presumed, being able in those days to recall a little of my schooling, was caused by the sun's rays being bent inwards by diffraction as they passed over the edges of the airframe and then being refracted chromatically as they were reflected from the cloud. I remember these sightings particularly clearly because at one stage we pupils were required to do instrument flying practice in pairs. I had to do quite a bit of it with a clown who on a couple of trips when it was his turn to be the captain-lookout in front, grabbed the controls from me and dived straight for the ring shouting `Bull's Eye first time!` as we plunged into cloud. It proved a waste of breath trying to explain to him afterwards that he couldn't possibly have missed his own shadow!

I'm afraid I'm not much into either poetry or religion so regrettably can't help with some of the other stuff that Mr Walsh threw in for good measure. `

## XL568

The RAF Museum at Cosford have just restored Hunter T7 XL568 in full Tiger markings as you can see from the photo below - and doesn't she look absolutely splendid! The Tigers also had T7 XL620 on strength.



## **Serving With The Tigers.**

*New member Albert `Bart` Bartholomew recalls his arrival on 74 and his subsequent travels with them.*

At the time of my posting to 74 Squadron in June 1944 I had just spent two and a half years with a Mosquito night fighter squadron. When I arrived 74 were engaged in sweeps across the continent from various locations including Tangmere on the Sussex coast. After a few weeks of this we were operationally tired so we were given a rest period for a couple of weeks at Fairwood Common. To me it seemed harder than any other two week period I had previously worked! It was then considered that we should go across the ditch to get closer to the action. I was probably part of the advance party because after being confined in a holding camp on Salisbury Plain I was embarked on an LCT at Gosport. We lay offshore for much of the night until the escort was ready to sail with us. We landed on Gold Beach where the beach marshals ensured that our Bedford three-tonners kept between the white tapes across the sand. We finished up in an apple orchard just outside Caen where we made camp and I was able to distribute a fourteen man ration pack which had been entrusted to me on the LCT. The kites and main body arrived shortly after and we went to our first strip on French soil just outside the village of Bernay where we formed part of 145 Wing, 84 Group, 2nd TAF.

A few weeks afterwards we travelled to our next base, a place in Belgium called Wevelgem, where the Germans had fashioned a `drome on the edge of town camouflaged to look like buildings close by. The hangars looked like houses and even had flower pots on the windowsills, all done in fine wire mesh. A couple of months later we were heading for Antwerp and owing to the terrible winter of 1944 we were unable to use our tents so we made ourselves at home in the bombed out buildings just outside the pre-war aerodrome located at the harbour's edge. We put up with lots of doodlebugs and V2 rockets that were a particular nuisance when we were having a quiet drink in the local cafe during the evening. Unfortunately we did sustain two casualties killed by a V2.

Our next move was to Schijndel in Holland when on January 1st 1945 Jerry had a final fling with the Luftwaffe. We were attacked by a squadron of Focke Wulfs with one being shot down by groundfire. Fortunately our kites had taken off on a dawn sweep so no planes were caught on the ground. Our boys did mix it returning to base however and subsequently got very short of fuel. The first one landed and immediately its engine stopped so it couldn't leave the runway. Consequently the following six aircraft pranged as they collided with the stationary Spit and with each other. Chiefy Peel was standing next to me, watching the carnage. I remember his words as he watched his beloved Tiger Spits turning to scrap. `It's pitiful. Pitiful! ` Schijndel was a comfortable billet after Antwerp, being ex-German barracks with bunk beds. It had been captured by the American 101st Airborne Division - the Screaming Eagles - and handed over to us.

Following that sojourn it was up sticks again and across the Rhine, which we had to do travelling about 60 mph over a pontoon bridge. We had been warned that Jerry had a nasty habit of floating things down the river that went off pop when they struck you. We finished up at a place called Lingen just outside Osnabruk. It was getting dark one particular evening and I was in my tent thinking about hunkering down when I heard someone say `where's that bastard Bart!` Into the tent came a Flight Lieutenant carrying a load of bottles. `Where's your mug? ` He filled my pint mug with cherry brandy. We erks didn't know that that our sector was one of the first to cease firing so that night we all got absolutely legless.

On reflection I had mixed feelings thinking about the future and the loss of the easy going life and comradeship we had all built up from the CO to the lowliest AC plonk. I was due for BLA leave and after handing in my Sten and ammo I was adequately sprayed with DDT and sent on my way to a transit camp at Calais. I arrived home on April 13th smack in the middle of a street party outside my house where all the neighbours were celebrating VE Day.

In the meantime the squadron had returned home, to Colerne in fact, and I had to rejoin them there. We were due to convert to Meteors with a possible journey to the Far East being rumoured. Because the jets used kerosene the ground crew were issued with a rubberised boiler suit which was soon christened `zoot suit` - lovely in the winter but hot in the summer. VJ Day arrived however and my RAF career was on the wane. In May 1946 I found myself on my way to Uxbridge and a double breasted pin stripe suit plus a trilby. On arriving home I gave the hat to my uncle.

I have some wonderful memories of my service - some happy, some traumatic - but looking back I'm glad it all happened and I will never again share such a wonderfully comradely experience as gained by becoming a Tiger.

*Bart's daughter, Beverly Booth, is General Manager of the Winston Churchill Britain at War Museum Charitable Trust and she is generously offering discounted entry to the museum for Association members. Details can be found on the enclosed voucher which please present at the Museum when you visit. And thanks to Beverly for her kindness.*

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

The feature in *Tiger News* 42 on the special commemoration weekend in May for Mungo Park provoked much very favourable reaction. Thank you for all your comments and your interest. **Ted Mansfield**, for instance, wrote:

"The story of Tiger CO Sqn Ldr Park brought back memories of that day in 1941 when he took off from RAF Gravesend on what proved to be his last mission. It was always the thing that we, the ground crew, counted them out and counted them back, so we were always immediately aware when one didn't return. To realise that more than one hadn't returned hit us hard. Before we lost the Squadron Leader we, the ground crew, had been pestered by the RAF police for not wearing our forage caps when working on aircraft. We then had Mark V Spits which had two 20mm canon which were fed by a drum which held sixty rounds. They were very heavy so when carrying them you were likely to lose your cap and not have your hands free to retrieve it. The answer was not to wear it in the first place. The police attitude got to the ears of the CO who went to the guardroom and told them that trades found it hard to keep their headgear on when working and to keep away from the flight line or they would find themselves in the cells with which we had been threatened. He really was a very good CO and well liked by all.

On reading the feature in *Tiger News* 42 I was surprised to see that the Squadron Leader had been shot down only a few miles from Koksijde because after I left 74 I was posted to 605 Squadron (Mossies) and in March 1945 we moved to Belgium, landing at Ostende and then going on to Koksijde from where we operated doing bomb runs into Germany before moving up into Holland prior to VE Day. To think that I was so near to Sqn Ldr Mungo Park's last resting place."

## My Last Combat

by Captain R J L `Bobby` Laumans.

*Belgian Bobby Laumans was a Tiger in 1941/1942, having arrived in England after the Germans invaded the Low Countries. Then when 74 were preparing to leave for the Middle East Bobby was posted to the newly formed 350 Squadron, one of the Belgian squadrons formed of Belgian personnel. Here in his own words is the story of his final flight with 350.*

I have 48 operations against the enemy flying with the RAFVR, first with 74 (Tiger) Squadron then 350 Belgian Squadron. The reason why I am posted is that 74 Squadron are going to the Middle East and the Belgian government in London wants to keep Belgian pilots already in the UK at hand in view of a possible liberation of Belgium. There are two of us in 74 - Steve Winterbeek and myself. With 350 Squadron we first go to Warmwell and from there to Debden in Essex. Arriving there we find two other squadrons which have done well during the Battle of Britain - Squadron 111 (Treble One) and Squadron 71, the famous Eagle squadron composed of American pilots flying with the RAF....

From Debden we fly nearly every day against the enemy, making sweeps in France and Belgium. We are equipped with the Spitfire Vb (two 20mm cannons and four Browning machine guns). Then we lose our first pilots, especially on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1942, in a furious fight in the region of St Omer where Winterbeek is killed and L Peeters bails out. I have a dog fight with a Focke Wulf 190 and I believe I shoot him down. But on viewing the cine film after landing I only get a `FW190 damaged`. On the film one sees many big pieces of aircraft falling off but no witness sees the aircraft crash. The long pursuit of that 190 brings me over Boulogne and I don't have enough fuel left to return to Debden. I land at Tangmere and when I phone 350 the CO tells me that I am already posted missing on the Dispersal Board. I do some more offensive flights in the following days and then comes June 1<sup>st</sup> 1942.

In his book Spitfire Mk V in Action, Peter Caygill says that the RAF wanted to test the real value of the FW190. On June 1<sup>st</sup> they sent up several fighter wings, which included squadrons 65, 71, 111 and 350. Unfortunately the Luftwaffe had the same intention and sent up units from I and III/JG26, a redoubtable force composed of very experienced pilots. To quote Peter Caygill:

*The actions that had been fought in the skies over France had shown the FW190 to be a formidable adversary but the level of dominance that it was capable of achieving was underlined during the operations that were carried out on the first two days of June 1942.*

That day 350 formed into three flights led by the CO, Sqn Ldr D Guillaume. My flight was led by Flt Lt Du Monceau de Bergendal who had Sgt Hansez as No 2, myself as Blue 3 and Sgt Livyns as my No 2. I was a Flying Officer by then. Henry Pickard was also with us. He was later to be shot by the Gestapo in 1944 among the 50 RAF officers shot after the `Great Escape` from Stalag-Luft III.

Squadron 65 was flying at 20,000 feet, 111 was at 22,000 feet, 71 at 23,000 feet and 350 Squadron was top cover at 25,000 feet for eight Hurri bombers attacking a target near Bruges. The op was numbered as Circus 178. Close protection of the Hurricanes was by Spitfire Vbs from Hornchurch and Biggin Hill. The Germans, commanded by Major Gerhard Schopfel, waited until the RAF formation was turning back home and approaching Blankenberg in Belgium. The attack, when it came, was deadly. Several German sections attacked each Spitfire squadron. Being top cover we were the first to be engaged. Rapidly Blue section got separated from the squadron. George Livyns was shot down near Blankenberg, J Hansez a

little later. Seeing an FW190 disengaging after an attack against a Spitfire I followed him but he turned inland. Being higher I closed in. as Mike Donnet tells in his book on page 39:

*P/O Spraghe, an American from 71 Eagle Squadron, confirmed a victory for De Monceau. Laumans, Livyens and Hansez were missing. Laumans was last seen pursuing a FW190 over Ostend.*

That is correct. We were flying eastwards.

For information here is an extract of Du Monceau`s combat report.

*During Circus 178 the squadron was at 25,000 feet and about twenty FW190s attacked from above. Blue Section was heavily engaged and became separated from the rest of the squadron. Blue One came back alone. Blue 3 (Laumans) and Blue 4 (Livyens) were missing....350 engaged in the vicinity of Ostend on 1.6.42 (1252 hours to 1430 hours). Blue Section leader, Flt Lt Monceau, states that returning from the sweep he saw a Spitfire attacked by a FW190. The Spit pilot bailed out and Blue 3 F/O Laumans gave chase to the attacking FW, flying back in the direction of France, and that was the last seen of him. F/O Laumans is presumed lost due to enemy action.*

A letter later addressed by `Duke` de Monceau to Colonel Wauter, Head of Staff at 107 Eaton Square, London, described the toughness of the combat:

*During a sweep over Bruges we lost three pilots, not knowing too much what happened to them, only that they are missing. It was the toughest combat I ever fought, the Germans reacting violently.*

To come back to what happened to me I dived onto that FW190. I fired a burst from astern at the moment when four other 190s joined us. I immediately pulled out by making a 5g turn. That's all you could do without a g-suit at the limit of the grey veil. That was the only manoeuvre where the Spitfire V still had the advantage over the FW.

Suddenly there were only four FW190s in the sky around me. Did I hit the first one which I fired at? I can't say but he had gone. But another FW190 passed in front of me and the opportunity was too good. I get myself in position for a shot but I didn't know if I had any ammunition left. Before I had time to fire my aircraft shuddered under the impact of bullets and cannon shells from the other two Germans following me. It was the tactic of sending a decoy in front. In seconds bullets tore into both my wings and I could hear them hitting the armour plating in my back. A few seconds later a cannon shell entered the fuselage from the left, went through the dashboard destroying the instruments and exploded in the petrol tank located between the cockpit and the engine. As there wasn't much fuel left the air-fuel ratio was very explosive. In no time at all my aircraft was burning. There was little time left to bail out. A few moments earlier I had a glimpse at the altimeter and saw 900 feet set at Debden's QFE. I jettisoned the hood, undid my harness and pulled off my helmet. It was too much bother to disconnect the oxygen and RT. I turned the Spitfire upside down and dropped out. But the aircraft was badly trimmed to fly on its back. I got half out of the cockpit when my parachute got stuck at the back and I couldn't reach the stick any more. So I gave the stick a hefty kick creating a negative g and was projected out of the plane. I pulled the opening handle and fortunately the chute opened normally. No, I was not going to die that day!

Going down towards the relatively calm sea I saw the Focke Wulf, presumably the one that shot me down, making a stall turn and diving towards me. Seeing that great radial engine getting bigger and bigger I thought - here we go, he's going to open fire. But suddenly the pilot pushed the rudder because I saw the plane slide sideways, just missing me, and the pilot turning his head towards me, saluting in the military way. I suppose it was his way of acknowledging the loyalty of the combat and that I had been an adversary hard to shoot down. Now I know with certainty that the pilot was one of the two seen on the photograph. Indeed, thanks to Jean-Louis Roba, a lawyer living in Charleroi, I received the picture of Hauptman P Priller and Lt J Aistleitner. Mr Roba, who has access to German archives, sent me extracts of those two pilots' combat reports. One claims two Spitfires of 350 Squadron shot down and the other, one. Now, 350 in that operation lost three pilots. Times and place correspond on that date. So my opponent was either Priller or Aistleitner. The Austrian died in air combat in 1944 Whilst Priller died of natural causes many years later.



**Hauptman P Priller and Lt J Aistleitner, one of whom shot Bobby Laumans down.**

Instants later he was gone and I had now to ditch the best I could. In the squadron we had talked of pilots drowning when the parachute fell over them. I didn't want that to happen to me. There wasn't much time left as I bailed out at 900 feet. So approaching the water I held onto the strings with one hand while unbuckling the harness with the other. When the harness fell off I held on with both hands and when I estimated being twenty or thirty feet from the water I let go. As expected the parachute, not having to support any weight, drifted away in the wind and I was free-falling for a few seconds. I went down quite deeply in the water before I could activate my life jacket. My Mae West brought me to the surface. I was glad to have a good life jacket because with flying boots full of sea water and clothes fully wet it was difficult to swim. But the adventure was not finished and it was necessary to unfold the

dinghy. Nothing was automatic. Previously we never had training in parachute jumping but at least we'd had a demonstration in how to unfold a dinghy. All the same, with water up to the neck and waves breaking over my head it wasn't easy. But I managed it fine and fortunately we had a bottle to blow the dinghy up. And I was very pleased indeed to see it lift slowly out of the water and fill with gas. Climbing aboard was hard work as it was jumping about from one wave to the next. Finally though I was aboard my `cruiser` in one piece.

At first I wasn't too worried. I could see the cliffs of Dover, very white in the sunshine. And I was thinking of Vera Lynn - *There'll be blue birds over the white cliffs of Dover* - we all knew that lovely song of hope. And I thought it's just a matter of time before the air-sea rescue comes and picks me up. I had neither food nor drink on board. Soon time seemed long with nothing happening. In the evening I heard the sound of Merlins and I thought some Spitfires were approaching but the noise remained in the distance. It must have been a rescue launch as they were also equipped with Merlin engines. But the boat didn't come close enough to be seen and so came my first night at sea. What a cruise!

On the morning of the second day the white cliffs had gone and I could have been in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. I could turn my head 360 degrees and all I saw was water. I wasn't too thirsty. The second day was endless. I was trailing my block of fluorecine at the end of a string, leaving a greenish trail behind me. And it was evident I was drifting east. Then came the second night and with it a depression, strong winds and waves getting higher and higher. During the night the dinghy was turned over three times. The first time it wasn't too difficult to turn it the right way up and climb back on board. The second time it was harder and the third time, with waves two to three metres high, I managed to turn it the right way up but didn't have the strength anymore to climb on board. I remained in the water clutching the side of the dinghy for hours until the sea had calmed down. Having regained some strength I managed to get back inside the dinghy. By now I was hungry and thirsty but that couldn't be helped. During the third day I saw several seals swim by and slowly, looking east, I began to see the coast. It was Belgium and France. I could see Dunkirk's cranes and to the left a pier. It must have been Nieuport. During the day I drifted closer to the coast and I could see the Coxyde (Koksijde) and De Panne villas. In those days there were no tall buildings like there are now. Then towards evening a small boat from the Kriegsmarine came out to me. At this stage I couldn't care less about the nationality of the rescue boat. All I wanted was drink. The sailors pulled me up on board and once on deck I just collapsed. One of the sailors gave me some water to drink and the small ship took me into Nieuport's harbour. I was taken to the house used by the German naval officer commanding the town. He spoke to me in English not German which surprised me. On his sleeve was the rank of Lt/Cdr. During the war we didn't wear a flying suit and we flew dressed in the RAF's battle dress. He told me that the Luftwaffe in Coxyde had been notified and it was not his place to interrogate me and would I like a meal? Yes please was my answer. So he had some food brought in. As I was eating he kept asking me if I knew London and Southampton and Liverpool. So each time I gave him my name rank and number as by the Geneva Convention. But he kept asking me if I knew such and such a hotel or pub. After a while I said - permit me to ask you a question. He was taken aback by this but allowed me to speak. I asked him why he was asking all the questions about hotels and pubs and was flabbergasted by his answer. `Because I spent five years in the British Merchant Navy as a deck officer and those were the places we used to visit when we were ashore. Furthermore it pleases me so much to speak English again.`

Then the Luftwaffe people arrived to take me to Coxyde airfield. It was breathtaking on the main road passing the Villa Copelia that my parents used to rent in the 30s where I spent my August holidays. The villa is still there now!

At the airfield the duty officer who took charge of me noticed that I wasn't well at all and called for the squadron doctor. He found that my body temperature was 39 degrees Celsius and sent me to the sick bay where I remained three days and quickly saw me fit again. I was then taken by car to the railway station at Furnes and there we took a train to Brussels. Two soldiers with guns and a Feldwebel armed with a pistol warned me (in German) that they would use their weapons at any suspicious move. In Brussels I was taken in a military vehicle from the south station to the north station (as it then was) to take a train for Frankfurt. It was tough driving thorough my old city with no possibility of escaping.

In Frankfurt my destination was Dulag-Luft, a selection and interrogation camp. Each prisoner was in solitary confinement in a cell of about six feet by ten feet. There was a cot, a small table, two chairs and in a corner what looked like an old radiator. I was put in such a cell for several hours without food until I had the visit of an officer of the Abwehr. He was speaking in excellent English. First he wanted me to fill in papers which after name and rank also asked to which squadron I belonged and what aircraft I was flying. He said it was for the Red Cross to enable them to quickly warn my family of my whereabouts. Of course I only wrote down my rank and number. Straight away he told me I was Belgian and flew with 350 Squadron which I denied. But it is hard not to show anything on one's face. After an hour or so during which he kept asking me the same questions he left me - still without food or drink.

After a while I noticed that the `old` radiator was getting very hot. Soon the temperature in that small cell was so high I started taking off some clothes. When I was down to my vest the radiator changed to a refrigerator and the temperature rapidly decreased. In fact it was a powerful air conditioner. So I started to dress up again and this went on hours on end until the return of the same Hauptman when the temperature was comfortable. Still the same questions. He asked me if the Major Guillaume was well. Not squadron leader but major which was Guillaume`s rank in the Belgian Air Force where we use the same ranks as in the army. In the squadron we used to call him major rather than squadron leader. How did that German know that? And to ask news of `Duke` du Monceau and Captain Boussa the other flight commander. I always replied that I didn't know any of these people and that he was making a mistake as in the RAF there were no majors. After he left there were new temperature changes during the whole night and I didn't sleep much. The morning of the second day I was in a poor state physically and from me still came the same answer: Flying Officer Laumans 67088.....and still the same incredulous smile on his face. I must say that he never shouted or hit me during that time. I was thinking of my pals who had been shot down before me and who were dead. Mainly I thought of Louis Peters who was a good friend and had been shot down on 23<sup>rd</sup> May and whom I believed killed.

On the evening of the second day of my interrogation the Hauptman told me that he was certain I was Belgian and a pilot of 350 Squadron although I refused to admit it. `We know that at 350 you fly on old equipment, that you have no military secret to tell, so we are going to send you to Silesia to Stalag-luft III, the RAF camp where you'll meet your friend Peters.` In the poor physical state I was in it just flew out of my mouth, unable to restrain myself - `what is he

alive?`. He just looked at me with his crooked smile like a poker player. `Mr Laumans. You've just finally told me the truth. Off you go....`

And so back onto a train with 30 or 40 other prisoners waiting to be shipped. We left for Stalag-luft III in Sagan. Among those POWs was another Belgian, a pre 1940 pilot. His name was Muller. In Sagan began another adventure because for us RAF officers the war wasn't over. We had to fight a different way. There a great number of us worked together on a big scheme that culminated in the Great Escape. I was part of it. But to know all the facts about that you had better read Paul Brickhill`s book. As you may know or not know Paul was on 74 Squadron at the same time as I flew with that great unit! Long live the Tigers.....

### Photo Gallery



Above - Bathtime (with thanks to Martin Routledge)



Left - APC Cyprus 1990. Graham Clarke (standing before his air and ground crew) was CO.

## **Air Force Base Makhado Tiger Meet.**

*Hunter warbird operator Ron Wheeldon reports from South Africa where private fast jet flying is still very possible - Lightnings and MiGs included!*

In the context of Tiger Meets, a few years ago South Africans Ralf Dominic and Martin van Straaten obtained permission from the NATO Tiger Association to use its badge and paint their L29s up as replicas of the Czech Tiger Squadron. This has since matured into the very professional "Sasol" Tiger Aerobatic Display team which regularly thrills audiences around the country but which is currently recovering from the tragic loss of an aircraft and two of its members earlier this year.

South African aviation is not unfamiliar with the rivalries and even jealousies that foster the development of warring tribes which strains relationships in aviation circles, which in turn spoils the sort of co-operative spirit that general aviation certainly needs to have if it is to beat off the various attacks on its very existence. High on the bureaucratic target list are warbird operators and it is in this area that Ralf and Martin's enthusiasm and the ability of Ralf in particular to build bridges and foster a spirit of co-operation that has epitomised the spirit of the European Tiger meetings.

Brigadier General Des Barker is well known for his professionalism and, as the commander of South Africa's premier fighter base, AFB Makhado, has been looking for ways to stimulate understanding and co-operation between the various air forces of southern Africa allied to an understanding of defence needs and philosophy in an area with no obvious enemies but which, in an increasingly dangerous world, must maintain the core competencies and infrastructure that would allow rapid growth of forces should a threat develop. He therefore proposed, worked for and then hosted Africa's very first Fighter Meet which took place at AFB Makhado on 7th and 8th October 2005. (He didn't call it a Tiger Meet - that's my own interpretation at the head of this article!) Brig Gen Barker invited various civilian jet operators as well as the military and in doing so extended an invitation to me and my Hunters. Incidentally, not only will the new Hawk Mk 120 Lead-In-Fighter-Trainer be stationed at AFB Makhado but eventually, when the Cheetahs of 2 Squadron begin phasing-out, so too will the SAAB JAS-39 Gripen be co-located there.

I have tenuous links to the NATO Tiger Meet. For one, I have flown with a former RAF Tiger, AVM Boz Robinson who took me through the planning and then execution of a tactical strike on a small guest house in the Klein Karoo. Admittedly the bombs and rockets were entirely imaginary and the attackees, rather improbably, stood in the open waving beer bottles and encouraging further attacks. But still. It was probably my most exciting sortie yet. The second link is that I fly Hawker Hunter aircraft and so did 74 Squadron, admittedly before the first Tiger Meet proper, although Boz once again was on the squadron when they and the Americans first got together at Sculthorpe in 1957 for what was a precursor to the NATO meets.

A third link is that my ex-Swiss Hawker Hunter F 58 could, quite possibly, have been, once upon a time on the strength of 11 Squadron of the Swiss Air Force who have long had a Tiger badge and who, in 1973, painted a Hunter up in a fairly horrible "tiger" scheme. It was in that scheme only for 24 hours because the inebriated repainting of an air force issue aircraft overnight in one of those hidden caverns the Swiss are famous for was not approved of in regulations. The aircraft concerned was J-4053 and mine, J-4059, was only six removed from it on the production line.

Sadly, since a well known cell phone company had rather disappointingly declined to come up with new ways to use the Hunter to promote its services, my little beast was looking more like an E-type banana than having a dignified scheme which a 46 year old war horse would seem to deserve when being taken to meet a mob of younger upstarts such as the SAAF's Cheetahs at Makhado. One of the traditions of the European Tiger Meets (and their echo in the USA) is that at least one aircraft from each participating squadron should feature a special Tiger paint scheme. Another Swiss Hunter squadron, No. 20, had in 1993 (and with a lot more official tolerance than their colleagues had experienced 20 years before) repainted a Hunter as "Klarus" - otherwise known as the Graffiti Hunter. It had a large grinning mouth which worked well and I suggested to airbrush artist Paris Battis that he take some inspiration and get to work. The result was that the only true fighter aircraft not owned by the South African Air Force that attended Africa's first fighter meet was duly painted up as something of a cross between a tiger and a shark. It has a great big grin - as did the Flying Tigers of the AVG - but it is not a pleasant grin!



The Meet itself attracted foreign air force participation in the form of two of Zimbabwe's new Chinese built K8 jet trainers in an attractive and unusual paint scheme. The Zimbabwean delegation was headed by Group Captain Chakashka, Commander of Air Force Base Thornhill and himself a former Hunter pilot. He was interested to contrast my Hunter's cockpit, with its vastly improved Swiss layout and instrumentation, to the cockpit of his beloved FGA9. On the historic side, it was wonderful that the only airworthy Mirage III in the world, Mirage III CZ 805 in its distinctive black and gold paint scheme was flying again and, for many, the sight of the Mirage F1AZ being flown to its absolute limits by "Bakkies"

Joubert was very welcome. For me, the highlight of the display was the opening formation fly past of eight aircraft led by the P707 tanker with three Cheetahs in absolutely rock-steady formation behind it followed by four Impalas. The three Cheetahs went on to indulge enthusiastically in mock air combat manoeuvres which was an exciting change in spectacle from the normal air show fare of individual or formation demonstrations. I am told the finale was also something to see but I was in the throes of preparing the Hunter to ferry back to Cape Town and managed to miss it!

## **Boz`s Bucker goes to Hamm**



*Brits in a German built Bucker forming on Germans in a British built Tiger Moth en-route to Hamm-Lippewiesen.*

You may recall that our President Boz Robinson has been looking for a new home for his Bucker Jungmann after the IWM decided that it was an `unsuitable` exhibit for Duxford. An organisation known as Quax-Flieger at Hamm in Germany subsequently offered to keep the aircraft and what Boz found when he went to check the people and the place out was a highly enthusiastic group of mid-30s guys with lots of elderly engineering advisors. They had been inspired by the Shuttleworth Collection and a visit to a Tiger Meet at Woburn (that's Tiger Moths!) and wanted to create something similar in Germany. Boz and Quax accordingly agreed that they could borrow the Bucker for a year if they agreed to maintain it and insure it- which they did. Hence the move there on 13 June. When Boz arrived he was greeted with a champagne reception and enormous enthusiasm - so much so that he was asked whether he would be willing to be their CFI. Needless to say Boz agreed to that! So Boz has a new home for his aircraft and a new job to boot! Hamm is an ideal venue for a collection of older aircraft and it's easy for Brits to get there to see the collection from Luton by Easyjet. So all in all a very good move! Check it out on [www.quax-flieger.de](http://www.quax-flieger.de).

**Study in Natural Metal** – Lightning F Mk 6s peeling away from the camera.



### **Reunion 2007: 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> March**

Included with this *Tiger News* you will find a booking form for next year's Reunion - yes it's that time again! - which don't forget will be held over the second weekend of March as opposed to the usual first weekend.

We will be celebrating the squadron's 90th birthday - well one of them at least! 74 came into being on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1917 as 74 Training Depot Squadron at Northolt, so in 2007 we can celebrate 90 years of the 74 number plate. On March 7<sup>th</sup> 1918, having completed all initial training, it became 74 Squadron proper at London Colney. It is the latter date which the squadron has taken as the starting point for its anniversary celebrations over the years so the official 90<sup>th</sup> will be in 2008. So two very special reunions coming up!

To that end we are planning a few additional items and entertainments for both years - and I think you will no doubt agree that if such entertainment can be home grown so much the better! In short, it will be the ideal showcase for the musicians, comedians, karaoke specialists, jugglers, trapeze artistes and magicians amongst you, either individually or collectively (come on you Lightning and Phantom guys!), to show off your talents. If you would like to volunteer yourselves for either or both events perhaps you could drop me an e-mail or give me a call. I'll be waiting!

## The 74(F) Tiger Squadron Association Annual Reunion Friday March 9<sup>th</sup> to Sunday March 11<sup>th</sup> 2007

The Annual Reunion at The Falcon Hotel in Stratford upon Avon will follow the usual format of gathering informally on the Friday, the Reunion Dinner on the Saturday and departing on the Sunday - unless you elect to stay on for a day or two longer.

The options available at The Falcon for the weekend are as follows:

1. For a **one night** stay - Saturday March 10<sup>th</sup> - **£90 per person** which includes your room, the Reunion Dinner and breakfast on the Sunday morning.
2. For a **two night** stay - Friday March 9<sup>th</sup> and Saturday March 10<sup>th</sup> - **£131 per person** which includes your room, the Reunion Dinner and breakfast on the Saturday and Sunday mornings.
3. For a **three night** stay - Friday March 9<sup>th</sup>, Saturday March 10<sup>th</sup> and Sunday March 11<sup>th</sup> - **£171 per person** which includes your room, the Reunion Dinner and breakfast on the Saturday, Sunday and Monday mornings.
4. If you wish to attend the Reunion Dinner only and make your own accommodation arrangements the cost will be **£31.50**. The price includes wine at the table.

As usual the Dinner will be held in the Verona Suite of The Falcon at 8.00pm. We will have exclusive use of the Garden Bar before and after the Dinner. The Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on the Saturday afternoon at 5.00pm.

Please complete the form below and send it **to me**, Bob Cossey, at 16 Pine Road, Thorpe, Norwich, Norfolk, NR7 9LE. Enclose a cheque for **£20 per person** as a deposit made out to **The Falcon Hotel**. If you are attending the Dinner only please enclose a cheque for the full amount of £31.50.

The hotel will send you a confirmation of your booking a few weeks after your application. Please book as early as you are able to - but certainly by 1<sup>st</sup> February 2007 as after that date rooms which they are holding for us will be released. Last year 45 rooms were held and we took them all and a few more! We will no doubt have a similar situation this year.

See you all there!

**The Falcon Hotel. Chapel Street, Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire, CV37 6HA  
Tel No 0870 6096122**

**74(F) Tiger Squadron Reunion  
Friday, Saturday and Sunday 9th, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11th March 2007**

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| 1. Dinner, bed and breakfast for two nights – Friday and Saturday | £131.00 |
| 2. Dinner, bed and breakfast Saturday night only                  | £90.00  |
| 3. Dinner, bed and breakfast – Friday, Saturday and Sunday night  | £171.00 |
| 4. Saturday Reunion Dinner Only                                   | £31.50  |

All these prices are per person sharing a twin/double room and include VAT. There are four single rooms in the hotel and once these have been booked there will be a supplement of £12.00 per night for double rooms for single occupancy. Please book by 1<sup>st</sup> February 2007

Check in Time – bedrooms will be available from 2.30pm. However, should you wish to arrive earlier please do so and we will look after your luggage. A wide range of bar snack lunches are available in our bars and lounges.

**74(F) Tiger Squadron Reunion – BOOKING FORM**

Please use BLOCK capitals.

Name.....

Address.....

Telephone No.....

I will require.....single/twin/double room(s) on Friday 9th March – 2 nights

I will require.....single/twin/double room on Saturday 10th March – 1 night

I will require.....single/twin/double room(s) on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> March – 3 nights

I will require.....places for Dinner only on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> March only. Please enclose a cheque for the full amount.

Special Requests.....

**Please find enclosed my cheque for.....being a deposit of £20.00 for each guest.**



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