

Tiger News No 52

Compiled by Bob Cossey

Association President	Air Marshal Cliff Spink CB, CBE, FCMI, FRAeS
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Membership Matters

Welcome to **Robert Wiseman** who was a Tiger from March 1986 to November 1992, serving as a Navigation Instrumentation Technician. Currently holding the rank of Chief Tech Bob is a Crew Chief on AWACS at Waddington.

Farewells

Hugh Alderton from Gidea Park died last November. Hugh was a Tiger on National Service between 1954 and 1956 at Horsham St Faith. He was very good at family trees and indeed helped with a little research into mine - or at least gave me some very useful pointers as to how to proceed! Our condolences go to his wife and family.



John Gill, who lived in Hornchurch, died on May 11th after a brave fight against illness. He was 89. John, a rigger on B Flight with a particular responsibility for Flight Commander Paddy Treacy's aircraft, was a Tiger between August 1939 and March 1940 having joined the RAF in 1938. He had a prodigious memory and recalled his time on 74 very clearly, so much so that he was a great source of information for *Tigers*. He remembered John Freeborn very well and I recall that at Biggin Hill for a book signing (*A Tiger's Tale*) the two Johns spent considerable time reminiscing about those early days of the war on the squadron. As always our thoughts are with John's family.

The Association and the Squadron lost a great champion with the death of **Doug Tidy** on April 14th, just four days short of his 87th birthday. The funeral was held at Torquay Crematorium on April 24th. Jim Jolly, Matt Ford, John Yeo and Debbie Parker represented the Association. John and Debbie, who were close friends of Doug, organised the funeral which Jim tells me was a very moving affair.



There are two reasons for calling Doug a champion of 74 Squadron. Firstly, because of his well-known book *I Fear No Man* which charted the squadron history to the end of the Lightning era and which was a successor to Ira Jones *Tiger Squadron* which dealt primarily with the Tigers in World War One. Doug's book was an inspiration for my *Tigers* and he freely gave of his help and advice when that was in preparation. Secondly, because he was one of the main instigators, along with 74 Squadron Commanding Officer 'Brookie' Brookes (who led the Tigers in the inter-war years) in the commissioning and presentation of the Malan Memorial Sword which was used thereafter as the ceremonial sword of 74 Squadron.



Doug's career - indeed his life - was a remarkable one of great variety and a few years ago he committed its details to paper and gave it to me amongst others for use at times such as this. This is the life of Doug as told by him, a life of great variety as you will see.



**The Tidy Years - by Doug Tidy (in his own words)
Part One**

Born in London in 1923 I was blessed with the most wonderful parents who understood my fears and worries. I was petrified by trumpet noises and was carried screaming from a

concert when I was about three years old. I also had constant dreams of being burned in an aircraft. Was I perhaps living a past life in what was known then as 'The Great War'?

My first dame school [an early form of a private elementary school usually run by women and often located in the home of the teacher] was run by a fearsome creature in a dark grey ankle-length dress and my parents saw my distress because she was pinching the backs of my hands and beating me across the knuckles with a steel-sided ruler. They removed me to another dame school where I was blissfully happy. They showed similar kindness and understanding when I went on to a well-known Roman Catholic school where, as a Protestant, I suffered unmerciful bullying and had my sweets and pocket money stolen by a black boy who later became the Chief Justice of his West African country. I said jokingly many years later that he was one of the reasons I became a South African citizen and joined the South African Air Force during the Angolan War. My parents allowed me to transfer to an excellent school where I won a prize and did well at cricket. I can never thank them enough.

In 1934 we moved from Tufnell Park (where I had lived since 1923 having, as a babe in arms, left 1 Whitehall Park, Highgate where I was born) to Kingsbury in Middlesex. I attended the local junior school there for a year and passed the examination for the local grammar school but did not go there as my father changed his job and went to Cornwall to run what was then the only 5-star hotel in the country at Carlyon Bay. He also ran the smaller hotel opposite (*The Bayfordbury*, now named *The Cliff Head*) and the *Cornish Riviera Club*. By virtue of my qualification for grammar school I entered St Austell County School in 1935. I had never been so happy as I had wonderful masters and played sport with some success. I joined the local Boy Scout troop, became a Patrol Leader and went in 1937 to the jamboree at Plymouth where I saw the founder, Lord Baden Powell, in person. When the school formed a troop I transferred to that and became Troop Leader. I enjoyed the camping and trekking in the then gorgeous unspoiled Cornish countryside and found my experience as a Scout very useful in later life.

I sat the examination for the Oxford School Certificate in June 1939 soon after my 16th birthday in April, but before I got the results the Second World War was declared and I went off to Plymouth to join the Royal Air Force, saying I was 18 (the minimum age for entry) as a Royal Navy Petty Officer had told me the RAF did not ask for birth certificates but the Navy did! In the event I was sent on Deferred Service and was not embodied until 1940. So in the meantime I read law with a solicitor friend of my father with a view to becoming an articled clerk and guarded four miles of Cornish cliff, at first with a pick handle and then an ancient rifle and five rounds. I wore the uniform of the Local Defence Volunteers with an armband denoting that fact and the cap badge I wore was that of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. The LDV later became the Home Guard. When finally I got into RAF uniform I had one of the biggest disappointments of my life as my eyesight was discovered to be deficient and my training was changed from that of pilot to that of wireless operator (W/Op). In retrospect I think the doctors were correct as I would almost certainly have been shot down easily with defective sight and would have endangered those flying with me. Fortunately at the end of my training, after a further High Frequency Direction Finding course I was posted to the Operations Room at a Fighter Command sector

station in 10 Group at Portreath in Cornwall. Here I flew in my first RAF twin-engined aircraft, the Wellington. Although it was a fighter station with Spitfires and Beaufighters at a satellite, Wellingtons were being sent to the Middle East via Portreath and in this way I was able to fly in that aircraft.

In January 1942 I followed the Wellingtons, sailing in His Majesty's Troopship *Mooltan* via Freetown and Durban where we were given a wonderful welcome by the South African families. I determined that I would return one day and I did so 25 years later. From there I went to Port Tewfik in Egypt (in the *New Amsterdam* to give her the Dutch name in English). From there to Kasfareet, then to Helwan, on to Zerka (in Trans-Jordan) attached to the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force for signals duties and then on to Ramat David in Palestine (now Israel) to join 74 Squadron. After a distinguished performance in the Battle of Britain the squadron was without aircraft and the ground staff were servicing the first American B-24 Liberator bombers of the 98th Heavy Bombardment Group (HBG). I was to assist in running the signals. The squadron's pilots had no aircraft of their own (they had been lost at sea en route to the Middle East) and were in the Western Desert flying in a combined 145/74 Squadron with 145's aircraft. We moved from Ramat David to Hadera and then on to Teheran in Persia (now Iran). Hopefully we thought we would get brand new Spitfires - which duly arrived, only to be given to the Russians and we got clapped-out old Hurricanes instead! In April 1943 74 went to Shaibah in Iraq and I was posted to Sharjah in Trucial Oman at the end of the Persian Gulf. Here I managed to fly as often as possible in the Blenheims of 244 Squadron and one, O for Orange, serial BA437, sank U-boat U-533, the only one sunk in that area, at map reference 28.28N, 56.50E. Her call sign was L5BO and I had flown in her the day before. It is ironic that the Ministry of Defence states now that service at Sharjah did not count for the award of the 1939-4 Star as it was not an operational area! Just how one sinks a U-boat without being operational is not clear. We moved to Masirah Island with 'stickleback' Wellington XIIIs, so-called because of the three aerals on the spine. Thence I flew to Aden in a Lockheed Hudson on my 21st birthday on 17th April 1944.

To be continued



Singapore Part 4 - by Sid Simpson.

Concluding Sid's account of life with a young family in the Far East.

We were both thrilled with the news of Leslie's expectancy but it nevertheless caused some concern for her due to the unrelenting heat and humid conditions and she soon was feeling quite depressed. Luckily her doctor noticed and recommended a change of air - a two week holiday in the Cameron Highlands of Malaya. So it was that we boarded an overnight train in Jahor Bahru

heading north up the east coast line of the Malaysian peninsular towards Kuala Lumpur. After a four hour journey we arrived at a small station in the village of Tapa Road which was the pick-up point for our bus up to the Highlands standing 5,000ft above us. We boarded a very old bus to climb the twisting bumpy road which was very steep in some places - but the views were magnificent. One memorable sight was of the the famous Boh Tea estates, row upon row of tea bushes reminiscent of the French vineyards. The spectacular scenery fortunately diverted our attention from the uncomfortable bus and scary road! Two hours later we arrived at our hotel, unscathed but thankful that our ageing driver, a local Malaysian, who had frightened us at the speed he negotiated some of the treacherous bends during the 5,000ft climb nevertheless got us there safely!

For two weeks I walked Simon and Jane as much as possible around this cool retreat high in the forests of Malaysia. On one such walk we came across a building under construction. The craftsmen were Indian who had been flown in especially for this project which was a small temple, the dome of which was covered with small figures in traditional dress, intricate carvings that had an important religious significance. The workmen used delicate tools to finely finish the hordes of figurines before the painting was able to start, The children enjoyed seeing what appeared to them to be hundreds of very small toys and dolls.

We decided as a family to go on a trip organised by the hotel to visit the Boh Tea plantations. We were picked up at the hotel and travelled back down the mountain road to the spectacular hills full of tea bushes with lots of local workers picking leaves off bushes and filling baskets to take back to the main buildings. Our guide led us into these large sheds where the baskets of leaves were brought in for sorting and drying. Dozens of workers were picking the best leaves from the tables on which they had been spread before putting them onto trays ready for the drying process. This we were told would take a long time and was under strictly controlled conditions.

The walls of our hotel were dotted with framed exhibits of butterflies showing some wonderful colours. On our journey up we had noticed several small stalls selling these beautiful species to passing motorists and tourists. We asked the duty staff if they could help us regarding a butterfly trail outing and were told 'tomorrow there is a trek in the forest in search of butterflies with guides and all the equipment supplied. All you need is a decent pair of shoes, shorts, a hat and some insect cream if the children are to go with you'. The kids looked so pleased when we told them about this! The guide, a local Malaysian, gave our group of ten a short talk on what to expect and what we must observe. We were given brown paper envelopes, a cloth shoulder bag and a fine net on a long bamboo pole. After being dropped off by the bus at the edge of the forest on a steep incline we followed the guide down an opening between the trees. Soon we were aware of the darker and cooler terrain. The noise was deafening, cricket's twitching and lots of buzzing from the mass of insects flying about looking for food. I could see now why the creams were recommended for us all! The guide stopped us near a shallow stream and explained what we could do next as this area of the forest was renowned for butterfly hunters. Lesley and the kids watched as I ventured into the stream wearing my shorts and swinging my net trying to catch the evasive creatures. The butterflies spent most of the day sunning themselves high up in the

tree tops then they would swoop down to the coolness of the water and the shade of the inner forest.

A species of butterfly rarely found anywhere else was the Rajah Brooke, a magnificent birdwing with huge wings spanning between five to seven inches. The male had black wings with luminous electric green triangles and the female had pale brown wings and distinctive white wing tips. When one of these was seen out came the catch nets and the hunters were soon seen dashing towards the sighting. It was our lucky day as a Rajah Brooke had been seen not far from our group so I was soon on the scene which was over an area of water and caught a beautiful male. Now it was in the net what next? The guide came to my rescue. 'Fold its wings together,' he said, 'and put it in one of the envelopes I gave you then put the envelope into the shoulder bag.'

Everyone was excited on the bus back to the hotel, all telling stories of their catches and mishaps. Several Rajah Brook's had been caught. These beautiful butterflies are of course a protected species today.

The following day we were shown the next stage of the preservation of our precious butterflies. Small softboards, a very sharp craft knife, some small pins and a roll of clear greaseproof paper was all that was required. 'Firstly cut a quarter of an inch slot in the board of about three inches long,' said the guide. 'Take a butterfly out of an envelope and lay it open on the board with its body in one of the slots.' He then proceeded to inject each butterfly with a very small dose of insulin. This he assured us was a safe and painless method to kill the creature before rigor mortis set in. The final act was to pierce its body with a long pin. This meant the butterfly was now ready for mounting onto a board before framing and glazing was carried out. Sometimes if the catch was a rare one it would be framed as a single showpiece. If not, it would be used in a display with other species in a larger frame

After two weeks of good pure air and lots of rest we prepared for our trip home. Our train was an early morning departure, which suited us fine as we saw the countryside this time as opposed to the night journey when coming north. The journey down the west coast side of Malaya was stunning, Back in Singapore the city was buzzing with hundreds of people doing their business and the roads full of noisy traffic Singapore is renowned for crazy driving and on this day its reputation. was confirmed on our taxi ride home! This was really Singapore at its most colourful and dangerous best!

Back on the squadron I was given the good news that our return to UK was mid July although this caused some concern as it would be soon after Lesley was due to give birth. And newborn babies were not allowed to fly until six weeks after birth.....

And that was as far as Sid got with his story before his death. Thanks Sid for such a colourful account with which I suspect all your Tengah colleagues have been able to identify.

Laurie Hamblin

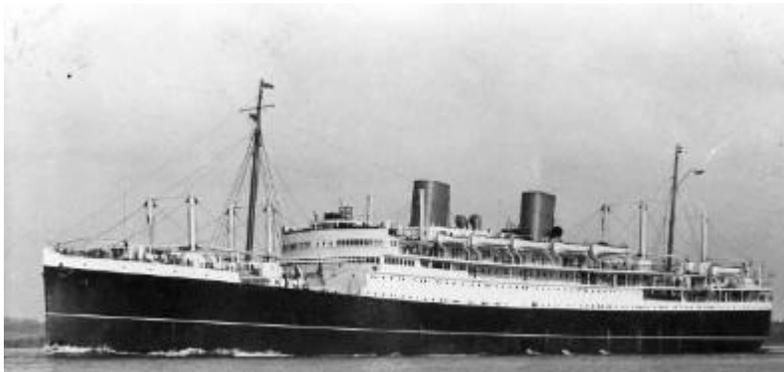
The late Laurence 'Laurie' Hamblin was with 74 Squadron from 1942 - 1946 and his daughter Jill Jones has found some photos relating to his time with the Tigers in the Middle East. Some have been titled but there are others where there is no record of names of people shown. Can anyone help with identification?

Those of you familiar with the squadron's history will know that after leaving England in 1942 and sailing round the Cape of Good Hope to Egypt they spent an eventful time travelling on to Palestine, Persia (as it was then called) and then to the Western Desert and westwards along the coast. They also detached aircraft to Nicosia and Peristerona on Cyprus and Abadan and Shaibah. Their Spitfires had been lost en route so for many months they were a squadron without aircraft until a few war weary Hurricanes were delivered, to be replaced eventually by Spitfire IXs when they reached Idku and Dekheila. Once they had aircraft there was a short diversion for 74 when they participated in a largely ineffectual attack on Crete in July 1943 and another in late September/early October when the squadron was sent to the island of Cos to help in its defence against invading German forces but which resulted in many of the ground crew being taken prisoner and others escaping by boat before eventually rejoining the squadron. Other ground crew found themselves on the island of Simi and similarly taking up arms against the invaders before withdrawing. It was all a close run thing.

The photos here reflect this often peripatetic time for the Tigers as they moved from airfield to airfield, often in convoy, never quite catching up with the action.



Above - Laurie Hamblin



Above - Rangitata. The ship that took 74's men to the Middle East. The aircraft went on a different vessel which was sunk en route.

Right - RAF Habbaniya October 1942. Reputedly the largest aerodrome in terms of area in the world at the time.





74 Squadron Maintenance Flight at RAF Meherabad March 1943.



May 1943. 74 operated detached Flights from Shaibah and Abadan whilst based at Meherabad and this convoy is en route to one of them.

Laurie at El Daba on the north African coast.
74 were there from May to August 1943.





Location and situation unknown. Back row left to right - 'our Indian host', Laurie, Arthur Grange and an unidentified Indian doctor. Middle row Jack Thornton, Jack Ingham and Jock Patterson. Front row 'Jess' Jessup with 3 'native children'.

This photo and the following three were taken in the wake of the escape from Cos and Simi as squadron personnel made their way back by boat to rejoin the squadron at Nicosia.



Castel Rosso



Off the Turkish coast



More next issue.....

Tiger Models

We have a very talented model maker in our midst in Es George. As you saw in the last Tiger News he built a Spitfire for prizewinner Roy Smith in our Tiger Draw. At this year's reunion he brought along two models for us to admire, the first representing what was one of the squadron's finest achievements, bringing the Lightning into squadron service under John Howe: and the second representing what might have been one of the squadron's finest achievements, bringing the Typhoon into squadron service. The latter sadly was not to be, but from Es's model we can see just how good the aircraft would have looked in 74's colours.



Tiger Meets

Next year marks the 50th Anniversary of the NATO Tiger Association of which 74 were of course founder members. During the year this significant anniversary will be celebrated at RAF Fairford during the Royal International Air Tattoo in July. There will also be a Tiger Meet at Cambrai in May (not September as previously reported). We plan to be present at both - details early in 2011. In the meantime a small photographic reminder of what Tiger Meets are all about.



SAC Joe Malloy and Chief Tech Mick Hannam at the 1964 Cambrai Tiger Meet flag raising ceremony.



Tiger transport at RAF Wattisham at the mini Tiger Meet held in September 1992 just prior to the squadron's disbandment and transfer to Valley as a reserve unit.



Over the years some striking tiger schemes have been applied to the aircraft of the NTA at Tiger Meets - here the Portuguese, French and Dutch show how it's done.

74 Squadron FC



Taken at RAF Leuchars sometime between 1964 & 1967. Thanks to Bill Maish for the photo of which he says 'as far as I remember it was a charity football match against the WRAF - or maybe it was 23 Squadron, Comes to nearly the same thing!'

Sartorially elegant it is not!