

**Tiger News No 53**

Compiled by Bob Cossey

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**Tiger Take Off**



Those of you who were at the Reunion in March will remember that at the AGM we talked about a limited edition Lightning print being available for sale later in the year with the proceeds being shared between the Association and the artist, Simon Mumford. I am delighted to say that that print, Tiger Take Off, is now available.

Signed by AVM George Black, Gp Capt. Ed Durham, AVM John Howe and Air Cdr Robert Lightfoot, it depicts one of 74's Lightning F.1s - XM143/A. There are 100 numbered prints in total and they measure 23x16.5 inches. The medium is lithograph on 250 gsm acid free paper. The price is **£25 each plus £2.80 p&p in the UK**. Please get in touch with Simon for delivery charges outside the UK. **To order please contact the artist direct by telephoning 01372 844586, sending an e-mail to [simon@simonmumford.co.uk](mailto:simon@simonmumford.co.uk) or sending a cheque made payable to Simon Mumford to 19 Halcyon Close, Oxshott, Surrey, KT22 OHA. Simon's website address is [www.simonmumford.co.uk](http://www.simonmumford.co.uk).**

With very special thanks to Simon for helping the Association Museum Fund by donating half the sales proceeds. And to Rob Jeeves who came up with the idea in the first place. We are very grateful to you both.

## NATO Tiger Association 50th Anniversary

### Tigers!

Don Verhees of the NATO Tiger Association has asked for an indication of how many members might be attending the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations at Cambrai over the weekend of May 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> next year: and the Tiger Meet at the Royal International Air Tattoo at Fairford over the weekend of July 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>.

Such an indication would be useful to the Association too as it will give us a good idea of how to best arrange visits to both events - whether to organise a coach/coaches or to leave those attending to make their own way.

I have already contacted those of you on e-mail who served post-1960 - thanks for your responses. For those post-1960 members not on e-mail and for all our other members, that is those who served before the Tiger Meet era, please let me know as soon as you can whether you wish to attend one or both events.

And if you know of any Tigers who are not Association members who would be interested please let them know so that we can encourage them to become members then join us for these weekends.

### Farewells.

It has been a sad few months for the Association.



**Wing Commander John Connell Freeborn DFC\*** died on August 28th. John was 74 Squadron's last surviving Battle of Britain pilot and with his passing we come to the end of an era. A regular attendee at reunions, 74 Squadron was always to John his 'beloved' 74 Squadron and although his career in the RAF subsequently was a highly successful one he never really stopped being a Tiger. We always treated John as our guest of honour at reunions. Which of course he was. And year by year we asked him to say a few words. Which he did - to a hushed room as he recalled a particular combat or experience. And at the end of which everyone stood and applauded long and loud as they demonstrated their love and respect for a man to whom we all owe so much.

Along with John's good friend and organiser of 118 Squadron reunions, Wilf Crutchley, I was asked to speak at the funeral in Southport on September 7th (writes Bob Cossey).

Appropriately this was the 70th Anniversary of the beginning of the London Blitz during which the RAF fought against the Luftwaffe so heroically to try and prevent them getting through, although 70 years ago on September 7th 1940 74 Squadron was actually far from the fighting, temporarily finding themselves at Kirton in Lindsey in Lincolnshire. Three weeks earlier they had been pulled from the front line to rest and recuperate. They had flown intensively since the Battle of Britain began on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940. On the 11<sup>th</sup> August for example they flew into battle no less than four times between dawn and two o'clock in the afternoon, during which time they claimed twenty three enemy aircraft destroyed, one probable and fourteen damaged. Of this total John shot down four and damaged one. Little wonder that they were exhausted and desperately needed to rest although at Wittering and Kirton and indeed at Coltishall to where they would move on the 9<sup>th</sup> September they still flew plenty of training sorties. Sailor Malan saw to it that they would not lose their edge while they were away from the battle and in truth, whilst 74 appreciated the chance to recuperate, they were also eager to get back into the fray although it would be some weeks before they returned south to Biggin Hill to do just that. John however had already returned south himself on September 3<sup>rd</sup> for a very different reason. He went to Buckingham Palace to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross to which would later be added a Bar.

John was an ace in every sense of the word. He flew and fought in the vicious skies over the beaches of Dunkirk, in defence of the country in the Battle of Britain (during which he accumulated more hours than any other pilot of any other squadron) and from the end of 1940 on sweeps over France as the RAF took the fight to the enemy. By the time John left 74 he had shot down thirteen enemy aircraft. It had all started so tragically though when John and Paddy Byrne shot down two 56 Squadron Hurricanes just three days after war was declared when the aircraft were misidentified. One pilot was killed, the other survived. Both Tigers were exonerated and acquitted at the subsequent court martial but the memory of it all never left John and he said that never a day went by without his thinking of Pilot Officer Montague Hulton-Harrop, the man who died.



I personally got to know John when he returned from living in Spain. I had been trying to discover his whereabouts for some years as I had been writing the squadron history and I very much wanted his input. Just too late I found him. Too late because *Tigers* had just been published! I first met him at Stratford on Avon when he came to his first reunion. And I vividly recall that meeting when it became very apparent to me that, notwithstanding the rest of his distinguished wartime career, there was always a special place in his heart for 74 Squadron which he had joined straight from training in October 1938 and didn't leave until May 1941. And after that first meeting I realised that here was another book that needed to be written. And it was - *A Tiger's Tale* - John's story from his birth on December 1st 1920 to his leaving the RAF in 1946 and a few pages to conclude about his life in Civvy

Street. (Recently Chris Yeoman has written *Tiger Cub* which deals more or less exclusively with John's time on 74.)



John often told me how much he thought of 74. This was the squadron where he learned his trade. And how well he learned it. This was the squadron in which he made so many good friends. This was the squadron in which he always recognised and respected the professional abilities of his colleagues. This was the squadron where he didn't always see eye to eye with those in command. This was the squadron where he disliked the gulf

between commissioned and non commissioned officers. This was the squadron with which he fought so bravely and with whom he played so hard when time permitted - some of the pranks he and his colleagues got up to from time to time are legendary. He was certainly no saint!

But his integrity as a pilot was never in question. His allegiance to the squadron was absolute. He may not have always liked or agreed with some of his colleagues - often senior colleagues - but he always acknowledged their abilities as pilots. And he always recognised that whatever the discord or disagreement on the ground, when 74 was in the air all that was put aside and the squadron became a superb fighting team which made it one of the very best in Fighter Command. But this was the time in which he often told me he lost his youth. 'I shouldn't have been thrust into that situation,' he said. 'But I was there and couldn't do anything about it. I had a job to do alongside everybody else and I did it to the best of my ability.'

He was certainly not the man to avoid danger. Neither was he a man to shun controversy. He was always a straight talking, straight acting person and remained so throughout his life. I suppose you could say John was never politically correct.

In his private life John could be a generous man. My wife Angie and I are very involved with a charity in Norwich that helps young adults with learning difficulties. One of the programmes we run is an allotment project where grow your own skills are promoted. John got to hear of this and showed a keen interest. Thereafter a cheque would arrive in the post from time to time to award as a prize for those who grew the most potatoes or the biggest cauliflower or the tallest sunflower or whatever. And then a substantial cheque for tools for the allotment came. We would also receive in the post packets of seeds that John had bought, or found somewhere or had been given. He was very fond of flowers and many of the seeds he sent were indeed flowers which have added colour through several summers to the allotments. When they bloom in subsequent years we will always think of John.

And his support of the Tiger Squadron Museum fund has been similarly generous with regular donations, often in the form of fees from the book and print signings he attended: or from individuals where he stipulated that a donation to the fund was what he required.



I last saw John at the end of July, just before he was admitted to hospital for the last time. I drove up to spend an afternoon with him in his flat. And we did what we always did - talked about his time as a Tiger and his other postings in the RAF although the conversation always came back to 74 Squadron. And we talked about John's other interests, particularly steam trains and his stories of the footplate rides he managed to get when he was a youngster. And even a very short career as a tram driver in Leeds when he was at home on leave one time and volunteered to help as there was a shortage. But driving a tram wasn't as easy as flying a Spitfire and his help lasted around 300 yards before the Company decided this wasn't for John!

Words alone are not enough to convey the great debt that all of us owe to John Freeborn and his colleagues of the Battle of Britain. It has been one of the great privileges of my life to have known him and I will never forget him. Nor will any of us in the Association. He was one of the last of The Few. And he was truly a great old Tiger.



Rest in peace John. We'll miss you.



## Brief Résumé of the RAF career of Wing Commander John Freeborn DFC\*

- 17<sup>th</sup> January 1938. Reports to the Elementary Flying Training School at Sywell and learns to fly on Tiger Moths. Then moves to No 8 Flying Training School at Montrose flying the Hawker Hart.
- 29<sup>th</sup> October 1938 Posted to 74 Squadron at Hornchurch. At this time the squadron is flying Gloster Gauntlets.
- 13<sup>th</sup> February 1939. 74 Squadron receives its first Spitfire.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939. War declared.
- 6<sup>th</sup> September 1939. The Battle of Barking Creek. John and Paddy Byrne mistakenly shoot down two 56 Squadron Hurricanes.
- 17<sup>th</sup> October 1939 Court Martial of John Freeborn and Paddy Byrne over the Battle of Barking Creek. Both pilots are exonerated and acquitted.
- 21<sup>st</sup> May 1940 John's first victory of the war - a probable Junkers 88.
- 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1940 Shares a Ju 88 with Sailor Malan and Tony Mould.
- 24<sup>th</sup> May 1940 Claims a probable Messerschmitt 109.
- 26<sup>th</sup> May 1940 Scores a confirmed and a probable Me 109. John appointed as B Flight Commander.
- 10<sup>th</sup> July 1940. Battle of Britain begins. John damages an Me 109 and then in a later sortie shoots one down.
- 28<sup>th</sup> July 1940. Shoots down one Me 109 but his own aircraft is damaged and he crash-lands at Manston.
- 31<sup>st</sup> July 1940. Awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.
- 11<sup>th</sup> August 1940. 74 Squadron destroys 23 enemy aircraft in one day with another 1 probable and 14 damaged. John himself shoots down 4 and damages 1.
- 13<sup>th</sup> August 1940. Adler Tag (Eagle Day). John destroys a Dornier 17.
- 14<sup>th</sup> August 1940. 74 Squadron rested from the Battle. Flies to Wittering, then Kirton-in-Lindsey (21<sup>st</sup> August) and then Coltishall (9<sup>th</sup> September).
- 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1940. To Buckingham Palace to receive his DFC.
- 11<sup>th</sup> September 1940. Destroys a Do 17. 74 flies as part of a Big Wing from Duxford.
- 14<sup>th</sup> September 1940. Damages a Heinkel 111.
- 15<sup>th</sup> October 1940. 74 Squadron moves to Biggin Hill.
- 30<sup>th</sup> October 1940. The Battle of Britain ends. John has flown more hours in the Battle than any other pilot of any other squadron.
- 5<sup>th</sup> November 1940. Destroys two and damages one enemy aircraft.
- 15<sup>th</sup> November 1940. Shares an Me 109 with H M Stephen, his first victory flying the Spitfire II with which 74 are being re-equipped at this time.
- 5<sup>th</sup> December 1940. Shoots down three Me 109s and damages another.
- 5<sup>th</sup> February 1941. Shares a Do 17.
- 17<sup>th</sup> February 1941. Awarded a Bar to his DFC.
- 4<sup>th</sup> March 1941. Shares another Do 17.
- May 1941. Posted to 57 Operational Training Unit at Hawarden.



December 1941. Posted to 145 Squadron at Catterick in a supernumerary capacity for one week before sailing for the USA as a Liaison Officer with Training Command (**left, at Selma, Alabama**). Whilst there he flies the P-47 Thunderbolt, the P-51 Mustang (his favourite aircraft of the war) and the P-38 Lightning as well as the B-17 Flying

Fortress, the A-20 Havoc and B-25 Mitchell. He is in the States for a year during which time he befriends many Hollywood stars of the day including Tyrone Power, with whom he becomes lifelong friends, and Betty Grable, with whom it is said he became 'very close' (and which he never denied. The twinkle in his eye when he told the story said lots!)

Late 1942

Back in the UK is seconded to the Ministry of Supply, John tours the country as part of a team on an information exercise in which he addresses factory workers. He is then posted to RAF Bolt Head in Cornwall as Station Commander.

March 1943.

Posted to RAF Perranporth to join 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron as a Flight Commander flying Spitfires on escort and coastal defence work.

April 14<sup>th</sup> 1943.

602 moves to RAF Lasham then to RAF Fairlop (April 29<sup>th</sup>) to work up to join 2 TAF.

17<sup>th</sup> June 1943.

Posted to command 118 Squadron at RAF Coltishall.

18<sup>th</sup> September 1943.

118 Squadron moves to RAF Peterhead. Provides a permanent detachment at RAF Skeabrae (Orkneys).

October 1943.

118 Squadron moves to RAF Castletown on the north Scottish coast.

2<sup>th</sup> January 1944.

Posted to the Air Ministry on 'special duties'.

30<sup>th</sup> January 1944.

Promoted to Wing Commander and instructed to report to 242 Group HQ at Taranto, Italy. He is detached to 286 Wing at Grottaglie as Wing Commander (Flying). Operations are flown over the Balkans by its constituent squadrons.

May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1944.

John's 'detachment' to 286 Wing belatedly confirmed as a permanent posting. He is the youngest Wing Commander (Flying) of any Wing during the war and has twenty two squadrons under his control.

June 1<sup>st</sup> 1944.

Returns to the UK. Over the next six months he is Chief Flying Instructor at RAFs Tern Hill, Acklington and then Hawarden after which he ceases flying and attends an administration course at RAF Morpeth before returning to Hawarden briefly, this time as Station Administration Officer.

8<sup>th</sup> December 1944.

Posted to RAF Netheravon as Station Administration Officer.

In 1946 John leaves the RAF and enters the Reserve of Air Force Officers with whom he stays until 1954.



Wing Commander John Connell Freeborn DFC\*. 1920-2010

### A Tiger's Tale

Obituaries and tributes to John Freeborn have appeared literally the world over since his death on August 28th and they have all briefly described his time as a Tiger as well his wartime career from the time he left the squadron in 1941.

If you would like to read about his Royal Air Force life in more detail we have twenty five copies of *A Tiger's Tale* by Bob Cossey available at £15 + £2.75 p&p - a saving on the published price of £19.99.

To order please write to Bob at 16 Pine Road, Thorpe, Norwich, Norfolk, NR7 9LE and enclose a cheque made out to the 74(F) Tiger Squadron Association for £17.75.

With grateful thanks to Richard Buckman for making these copies available.



**Joe Tombling** died on May 26<sup>th</sup>. Joe joined the squadron in August 1941 with the rank of corporal and was an instrument fitter. He sailed to the Middle East and embarked with his fellow ground crew on the squadron's peripatetic meanderings around Palestine and Iraq whilst the powers that be decided what to do with them. From our point of view one of the positive things that came out of this were some splendid photographs that Joe managed to take. When the Tigers finally settled in North Africa with their new CO (Jim Hayter) and having finally been equipped with Spitfires (theirs had been lost at sea on the way out), everyone was pleased that once again meaningful operations could get underway. These operations included the defence of the island of Cos, a defence which was very short lived. Cos was overrun by the invading Germans and Joe was one of the unfortunate ones who

were captured on October 3<sup>rd</sup> 1943. He spent the rest of the war as a POW and was liberated by the Russians from Stalag IVB on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1945. He returned to the UK and was demobbed in November of that year. A brave Tiger indeed. RIP Joe.

**Derek Roy Barnes**, known to all as Roy, served as an armourer with 74 from July 1951 to August 1952. Roy completed his trade training at RAF Kirkham and his first posting was to Cranwell. He was delighted when he then joined 74 at Horsham St Faith as his home was just outside Norwich, not that he could take advantage of that too much to begin with as the squadron was busily involved in a series of exercises. From his time with the Tigers Roy remembered in particular the NCO in charge of his section, a Sgt Farman, who 'knew what he was doing and more importantly he knew what the rest of us should be doing. Under him we never missed a meal, leave or anything else and, more importantly, when air firing was taking place the stoppage rate went up from 250 rounds to over 9,000.'



After 74, Roy moved to 11 Squadron and their Vampires and Venoms at Wunstorf in Germany.

In the early forties, when Roy was still just a lad, he had the idea of propelling a sledge by forcing air beneath it and drawing it out to escape at the back, lifting and propelling the sledge forward. When Christopher Cockerell patented the hovercraft in 1955 Roy thought 'that's my sledge!' In 1969, remembering his earlier ideas, Roy began making models of hovercraft - some worked and some didn't. In 1970 he built his first single seater ready for the Thames Race. The craft was without a skirt and worked well on grass or water but when hitting the wake of a steamer during the race the bows smashed. Only a couple of craft managed to finish the race. This proved to be the beginning of a quest to design and build a unique light hovercraft. He attended many rallies both in the UK and Europe. Most participants at these rallies had their problems but Roy in particular seemed to have more than his fair share. In recognition of this, in 1974 he was awarded a special 'Gremlin' award for 'persistently overcoming nearly all obstacles!' Nevertheless, despite the setbacks Roy's craft was continually being developed and perfected until in 1991 he received an award for the 'most elegant' craft which then went on to capture the world speed record for light hovercraft.



Very often he would fly his craft (hovercraft are flown as opposed to sailed) in just a pair of shorts. Seen from a distance he would appear as if naked and so his craft then became known as *Streaker*. *Air Lubri-Cat* (the craft's correct name) is currently exhibited in the museum of hovercraft just outside Plymouth.

Roy continued to fly well into his retirement, winning a race at Hunstanton in 2001 against much younger competitors and coming third in 2004, aged 72.

He died on the 9th July. Our thoughts are with his family.

**Nick Walsh**, a Phantom Tiger at Wattisham between July 1989 and January 1992, lost his long fight with cancer on the 12th July. Nick, known to all as NTG (Nick The Greek), spent over 16 years in the RAF flying Phantom FGR.2s with 56 Squadron, the F-4J with the Tigers and the Tornado F.3 with two tours on 29 Squadron and one on 5 Squadron. He also spent three years with 3 Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force between 1994 and 1997 at Williamtown flying F-18s. All Tigers within the Phantom community and all Association members come together to send their condolences to Nick's family.



We have lost another wartime Tiger in **Sqn Ldr Christopher Horn MBE** who died on September 9<sup>th</sup> aged 89. Chris was a wartime pilot who flew Spitfires with 74 as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Air Force in support of the 21<sup>st</sup> Army group as it advanced through Belgium, Holland and into Germany in 1945. The squadron's sorties at the time consisted of ground attack, bomber escort and high cover for army operations. This was made more difficult by the waves of V1 and V2 missiles targeting Antwerp and the squadron's base at Duerne. Heavy flak was another immediate hazard. Although hit twice during

this period, Chris flew continuous missions through to May 1945. One incident occurred at Zutphen whilst investigating a slow moving bus. Having descended to 100 feet he was hit by 30mm fire. Shortly after VE day whilst on home leave he met a German POW who was helping his parents in the garden. The German had been captured near Zutphen where he was an anti-aircraft gunner on the decoy bus!

Some hazards were not expected. Returning home one day, short of fuel and having to observe strict radio silence, Chris found himself under attack by a Mustang pilot who, perhaps because of the Spitfire's clipped wing configuration, had failed to recognise his type and markings. Only on the verge of counter-attack did word get through - the American waved his wings and disappeared.

Christopher Horn was born in Ashington, Northumberland on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1921 and was educated at Morpeth Grammar School. He trained as a pilot in the USA as part of the Arnold scheme and received his wings in Selma, Alabama in February 1943. Returning to the UK he was posted to 57 Spitfire OTU (in one of whose Spitfires he is pictured above) and thence to 74 Squadron. Leaving the RAF in 1946 he studied civil engineering at the University of Durham, but flying was everything to him and he rejoined the RAF in 1949 to become an instructor at Central Flying School. Life at CFS was not without incident either - on one occasion in 1953, having climbed through dense cloud to 27,000 feet in a Vampire T.11, the accompanying student accidentally turned off the fuel supply which turned the Vampire into a heavy, unstable glider. Ejection was not an option with the villages of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire underneath into which the abandoned aircraft could have crashed. Although the cockpit iced over Chris, flying solely on instruments, force landed the

aircraft at Brize Norton. Both occupants walked away unharmed and calmly bade the welcome party 'good afternoon'!

In 1956 Chris Horn created the persona of Wing Commander Spry which many of you will remember. The idea was that Wg Co Spry would help, with humour, to concentrate the minds of pilots flying ever more complex jets on safety issues. The needs for strict discipline and effective instrument training were a constant factor in Spry's tips and clues.

In February 1964 Christopher Horn was made MBE. Then, no longer able to fly and instruct, he left the RAF in 1968 and worked independently to support RAF staff with their insurance needs. In this capacity he made many more long standing friendships with RAF personnel all over the country. The last years of his working life were spent with Austin Reed, the retail chain, based in Thirsk, North Yorkshire. Though notably independent and individual, Christopher Horn particularly enjoyed involvement in his local community, Dishforth, where he lived for 42 years.

*With thanks to Christopher Horn's son Michael.*

## **Membership Matters**

Welcome to **Derek 'Ted' Edwards** as a new member. Ted was a Tiger between August 1952 and January 1956 as a Corporal Tech engine fitter. After training at St Athan he was posted to 74 at Horsham St Faith and included in that posting were annual six week deployments to RAF Acklington for air firing. In 1956 the Hunter arrived to replace the ageing and outdated Meteor and much of Ted's time was taken up with the ongoing modifications to the type. Ted left the RAF in January 1956 but stayed in the aviation industry, being employed by Airwork Services at RAF Worksop before spending ten months in Sudan with the fledgling Sudanese Air Force before returning to Ouston in Northumberland in June 1958 followed by a year helping to establish the Sultan of Muscat's Air Force.

**Michael McCreadie**, known to all as Mic, joined 74 in March 1966 at Leuchars and stayed with them until July 1969. He had previously been in the Hydraulics Bay and with 228 OCU at Leuchars. With the Tigers he was a JT Airframe Fitter. He first became involved with the squadron when he was attached as a wheel and brake mechanic on postings to RAF Akrotiri. 'I became very keen to be part of the squadron,' Mic says, 'and when I applied I was delighted to be accepted. I was in one of the teams at RAF Masirah involved in staging the aircraft out to Singapore. At Tengah I was mostly involved with second line servicing where major maintenance and repairs were carried out. I loved the BBQs and fun that flowed from those. I was 'volunteered' to assist Cpl Sid Simpson in the building of the Christmas bars - African Village and Alpine Hut.'

Welcome to **Carol Wood** as an Associate Member. Carol's father was the late Maurice Williams, Lightning pilot. She is particularly keen that Maurice's grandchildren know and appreciate what their grandfather did and to that end would appreciate contact with any of

his former Tiger colleagues. Contact Bob for Carol's address if you would like to speak with her about her father.

**Ian and Heather Cadwallader** lost their Christchurch home in the recent New Zealand earthquake. Thankfully, despite the unimaginably frightening experience, they and their family escaped injury. They have been able to find a rented property for six months whilst they sort the situation out. All of us in the Association wish the Cadwalladers all the very best as they strive to return their lives to normality.

We extend a very warm welcome to **Alexander Peace** (known to all as Charlie) who served with the squadron from 29th September - 31st October 1940 at Coltishall and Biggin Hill. Charlie writes:

"On the 29th September 1940 I was posted to 74 Squadron at Coltishall as a Pilot Officer after doing one week at 7 OTU Hawarden with an exciting first solo on a Spitfire with a two-pitch prop and right hand pump undercarriage. Take off in fine pitch, a short climb and a change into coarse was like going from bottom gear straight into top in a car. By the time I arrived on 74 I had amassed ten hours on type but had had no combat training.

On the squadron I was more nervous about the very experienced 'old' hands than the Germans I had never seen. On one occasion I was No.3 in a line astern formation when No.2 cut the tail off No. 1 and I think they were both killed. (*Sadly they were - Douglas Hastings and Frank Buckland - Ed.*) I then had to face the inquiry by very understanding flight commanders and Sqn Ldr Malan.

Sqn Ldr Bader was on camp and I remember seeing him playing tennis, falling down and refusing the offered help to get up. Bader was into the Big Wing idea and we had several rehearsals with other squadrons linked up. My first experience of big formations.

I enjoyed one day being told to find the service ceiling of the Mk 1 Spitfire and managed about 33 000 feet without going through the gate.

After a couple of weeks or so the order came to move to Biggin Hill. Pilots were allotted aircraft for the ferry flight and I was asked if I would drive John Freeborn's Talbot saloon down with another pilot passenger. I had only driven an Austin Seven car before but I was at Rolls Royce in Derby when I joined the VR, training to be an engineer, but RR on my docs got me the job. It was filled up with 100 octane and I had a wonderful drive and John said it was like a different car. What did he mean?

Don't remember much of Biggin, mainly waiting in the sunshine on readiness but action never came for me. I went into London at night a few times when the Blitz was on and found the city ignoring the war where possible and insisting on having fun.

In the pub one night I asked Sqn Ldr Malan for his advice for combat and he said 'get in close lad' but he didn't give me the chance. About a month later I and another sprog were posted to 12 Group to get some time in."

Charlie had joined the RAF on 12th July 1939 and his movements prior to joining 74 included the ITW at Hastings, IFTS at Marshall's Cambridge, FTS at Sealand (on Masters) and then Hawarden. After his spell with the Tigers he moved to 616 Squadron at Kirton in Lindsey but was then injured which kept him off flying. He moved to 53 OTU at Heston where he came across Taffy Jones, the Tigers WW1 CO. Spells at RAFs Llandow and St Athan were interrupted by visits to hospital for bone grafts on his wrist until mid 1942 when he finally got back to flying. On 17th July 1942 he was attached to Rolls Royce at Derby (his peace time employer) where he instructed on the Pilot's Engine Handling Course part of which was to investigate means of increasing a fighter aircraft's range by changing tactics. This allowed Charlie to keep up his flying time by using Rolls Royce's Communications Flight Spitfire. He liaised with RR's test pilots and at weekends would fly from Hucknall to RAF stations around the country to talk about Merlin engine management.

In April 1943 Charlie accepted a posting to the Middle East to set up a badly needed handling course. (The troopship he sailed on was transporting the Highland Brigade and when their OC Troops died on board Charlie, as the only GD officer available, got the job which included dealing with 'violent and armed Navy deserter prisoners.') He set up the course at RAF Heliopolis (No 1 Engine Handling Demonstration Unit). There were no Spits here but he did manage the occasional Harvard trip down the lakes and up to Jerusalem. Charlie stayed in the Middle East until December 1946 when he returned to the UK (via Marseilles). In July 1947 he joined the RAFVR at Burnaston (Derby airport) and found himself flying Tiger Moths again. He relinquished his commission on 17th May 1952 as a Flight Lieutenant.

We also welcome **Peter Arnold** who was with 74 at Coltishall from 1962 - 1964 as a Junior Technician. During his time with the Tigers he was detached to the Missile Servicing Section. Spending a total of 12 years in the RAF Peter also served with 65 Squadron at Duxford, 88 Squadron at Wildenrath and the Kuching Whirlwind Flight.

## **The Tidy Years - by the late Doug Tidy.**

## **Part Two.**

In January 1945 I returned to England in HMT *The Duchess of Richmond* (known to the troops as 'the drunken duchess' because she rolled so much), arriving in February 1945 and being posted to RAF Haverfordwest in West Wales with hundreds of redundant aircrew. I was engaged on HF/DF duties mainly doing QGH (letdown through cloud) exercises. I had married in March 1945 and my first son, Peter Craig Douglas, was born on February 8th 1946 after I had been posted in August 1945 to Mount Batten near Plymouth for HF/DF duty with the Sunderlands of 10 (RAAF) Squadron. They had already sunk six U-boats and their flying boats were wonderful aircraft. I was back with Mosquitoes again at RAF Chivenor on detachment for a while and then back to Mount Batten. Demobilised in the old Wembley Stadium on May 23rd 1946 (my mother's birthday) the problem of what to do next arose. I felt lost in light civilian clothes and the rationing of clothes, petrol and food made life dreary. I was unqualified, having left school at 16, and had a wife and child to support. I got a job as a gardener, then another as a hotel porter (in the *Sefton Hotel*, Babbacombe where RAF trainees had been billeted during the war). The owner offered me a

job as manager but I was determined to get more academic qualifications with a view to becoming an Education Officer in the Royal Marines which was what had been done by a retired major I came across.

With the help of a kind lady in RAFA I got the job of games master teaching junior History and English at a minor public school (Rendcomb College in Gloucestershire). The head said I could sit my Cambridge Higher School Certificate with the senior boys taking the examination but that he expected me to get the best marks! This I did, having had a lot of time to swot as I broke my leg playing football with the boys early in my stay at the college. This confined me to my room after teaching and I got down to the books with the help of two of the masters. Made House Tutor after a year (my salary increased from £400 a year to £450), I duly got the better marks and the certificate, sat Responsions at Oxford University [the first of the three examinations once required for an academic degree at the university], matriculated in 1948 and entered St Edmund Hall as an undergraduate. There were many returning ex-service men with me: in fact I only came across two who had come direct from school. I played several games for the college, was captain of college hockey (I played for the University but not against Cambridge) and was elected to the elite sports club, Vincents. My tutor said he was surprised that I found time to get a Second Class Honours degree in English Language and Literature as I appeared to have done much less work than those who got Thirds!

My second son, Jeremy Paul, was born on April 5th 1951 and christened in the College Chapel. Once again, what to do? I was chosen by the Colonial Office to do a year on the Colonial Service Course and then to become a Cadet Administrative Officer as an Assistant District Officer (ADO) in Northern Nigeria. The salary was the princely sum of £520 a year as I was granted seniority for my six years war service and my Honours degree. Accordingly I set sail in the MV *Apapa* from Liverpool on 12th July 1951 and duly arrived in Nigeria where I was posted as ADO Gombe Division, Bauchi Province. I went from there as Touring Officer, Tula, in Tangale Waja, a wild pagan area where the women wore but a small bunch of leaves fore and aft and their males were reputed still to be cannibals in parts of the area. I toured on horseback in Gombe but in Tangale Waja there was tsetse fly and I had to tour on foot with some twenty bearers carrying my loads. I had to deal as best I could with an epidemic of spinal meningitis with help from the local nurse. It was a lonely life where I rarely saw another white man but I enjoyed it and my experiences would fill several books!

I returned to Bauchi in the Provincial Office which I found tedious but the Club made up for it and tennis was possible there. Then I was posted to Argungu and later to Misau in Sokoto Province bordering on the Sahara. In 1957 I crashed my Chevrolet kit car whilst on tour (the tie rod to the front wheel had snapped it was discovered later) tumbling off a bridge and after two somersaults landing on the wheels, remembering to switch off the ignition in midair. I had just passed a lorry carrying convicts and they joyfully hauled me out with a broken jaw and took me to Misau where with my usual good fortune I caught the weekly aircraft to hospital in Kano. I had to have a tooth removed to allow a rubber tube to be passed into my mouth to feed and the jaws were wired tightly together. Talking was

difficult and the liquid diet worse. However I was fit enough to do duty as ADO Town Office until I returned to Sokoto Province. Thence in 1956, after having been engaged in a riot when I was slightly injured by a stone, I was posted to Kaduna as an Assistant Secretary to the Minister of Trade and Industry. This was dull for a 'bush' DO like me and only the hockey (I played in the last international against the Gold Coast before that territory became Ghana), cricket and rugby (we won the inter-provincial cup) kept me amused, together with some pretty wild dances at the club, starting at 10 p m and finishing with bacon and eggs at 6 a m. I became unwell and was diagnosed as suffering from anti-malarial drug poisoning and was invalided home to the Tropical Diseases Hospital. In retrospect I wonder if the night life had contributed as much as the drugs but I made it back only for it to recur later in 1959 when again I was sent to the UK and I decided to retire, which I did in 1960.

Again that problem of what to do? I bought a bungalow in Devon for my family and started a job as a programme organiser for the BBC's West and South African programmes which were broadcast from Bush House in the Strand. My daughter Sonia Mary was born on 23rd December 1960. Drinking and partying too much I found the job irksome and did not fit into the team of very left-wing journalists and transferred to the Monitoring Service in Caversham. This was interesting but I decided to return to the RAF in 1962 as an Education Officer on a 16-year-commission. I was given the rank of Flying Officer by virtue of my qualifications and previous RAF service and was promoted to Flight Lieutenant in 1963. I was divorced and remarried, this time to a young Womens' Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) Flying Officer. I was promoted again to Squadron Leader in 1965 but in November came the Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). I did not want to run the risk of being posted there with a Hunter squadron (this had been mooted) so I retired without pension in July 1966 and went to South Africa to work for African Explosives and Chemical Industries as an Education Officer at Modderfontein, near Johannesburg. I later transferred to become a Management Services Officer in the Johannesburg Head Office and then at Sasolburg in the Orange Free State. I saw an advert in the paper for a manager of the Country Club Johannesburg in 1971 having meanwhile passed the Afrikaans language course and becoming a South African citizen. I was appointed to the post and stayed until 1976 when I joined one of the members in a large concern as a Recruitment Officer. I did not like the sales aspect and became a Chief Editor for the National Institute for Metallurgy from May 1966 to February 1979. I had also been editor of the South African Military History Society Journal and Curator of Aviation for some time and was asked to become a Professional Officer at the Museum. I was divorced again in 1979 and was persuaded to become manager of another country club in Bedfordview just outside Johannesburg. I left that appointment in 1980 because I was required to serve on the border as a Major in the South African Air Force Citizen Force in which post I had been commissioned in 1977. The club would not give me leave so I resigned and did the tour of duty with the SAAF. On return I became manager of a country club at Salt Rock in Natal and from there I returned as Chief Editor to the Council for Mineral Technology (as the old National Institute for Metallurgy had been renamed) in Randburg near Johannesburg from 1982 to 1983.

A member of the committee of the prestigious Port Elizabeth Club in the Cape Province came to see me with an offer I felt I could not refuse and so I left Johannesburg and took up the post. I married for a third time in 1985 and returned to Johannesburg to manage the Regency Club in 1987. Things were getting difficult for my wife who was of mixed-race parentage. Both parents were deceased, her father had been Chinese and her mother was from St Helena. She was not accepted by the white or black communities and being classified as a mixed-race coloured she had the worst of both worlds. I decided to take her to the USA and let her become an American citizen. Accordingly I joined my sons there in 1990, living first with Peter in New Orleans and then with Jeremy in Virginia, where my daughter Fenella visited me from South Africa. I returned to New Orleans and we sat out Hurricane Andrew (my son John arrived in New Orleans on a visit just before it started). I worked as a bar manager and then as manager of a guest house owned by an ex-RAF chap I knew, but in 1995 was struck down by a heart attack and had a quintuple heart bypass which necessitated a long stay in hospital. I went back to work but in 2000 I then had a melanoma in my head requiring much surgery and the insertion of a titanium-mesh screen in my skull. It did not heal and I returned to England in 2001 and had more surgery which healed the wound but another melanoma developed and more surgery was needed. It was not possible to get all the infection out as it was too near the brain but radiotherapy has kept it at bay. I separated from my wife in the USA but remained on good terms with her as I did with my two former wives.

My friend Debbie looked after me for five years after I returned to England, visiting me in my cottage in Buckfastleigh in Devon daily, dressing my wounds and looking after my every need and transporting me as I could no longer drive a car. I entered the Officers' Association Country Home at Bishopsteignton, still in Devon, overlooking the River Teign estuary. I am truly blessed to have come to this haven of peace in the autumn of my life.

## Spitfire P9306



Go to [www.historyjournal.co.uk](http://www.historyjournal.co.uk) and click on **Aston Down to Chicago** to read an interesting article on Spitfire I P9306 which was on charge to 74 Squadron for a year from July 1940 to July 1941. What makes this Spitfire unique is that in August 1944 it was donated to the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago and is displayed there to this day as shown in the photo. We have featured it before in Tiger News

but this article gives a full account of this particular aircraft's career before and after the Tigers.



## Stan's Charity Cycle Ride

Many of you know that Phantom Tiger Stan Ralph suffered a really nasty motorbike accident over a year ago with the consequent injuries necessitating lots of physiotherapy. That has gone more or less as far as it can now which has sadly left him with significant walking problems although bizarrely (as Stan puts it) he has been able to continue cycling for exercise. He agreed with his physio that the Manchester to Blackpool cycle ride (60 miles) in 2011 would be a good target to aim for. So, Stan being Stan, he immediately opted for the Warton to Coningsby (165 miles) cycle ride in September just gone! It was a three day charity ride in support of the RAFA (Benevolent Fund), ABF (The Soldiers Charity), the Lancashire Air Ambulance and Marie Curie.

Stan completed the ride but could not sit down for two days afterwards and slept for a whole day after he had finished! He had raised a magnificent £1500 by the time we went to press. BAE Systems added another £500 and Stan himself gave a further £250 to a special fund for new physio equipment at Blackpool Victoria Hospital.



Stan has forwarded a few photos to prove he did at least have a bike and that he somehow got to RAF Coningsby! He is third from the right in both group photos. A superb effort Stan. Congratulations from all of us. And if you haven't donated yet and would like to add to the total, it's never too late to do so. If you want Stan's contact details let me know!

## Laurie Hamblin

The late Laurence 'Laurie' Hamblin was with 74 Squadron from 1942 - 1946 and his daughter Jill Jones found 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? We featured some of the photos in the last issue and the remainder are here, a fascinating record of the war for the Tigers in the Western Desert



Left. Idku, Christmas 1943.  
At play!



Right. Idku, Christmas 1943.  
At work!



Left - Ready for Christmas at Idku 1943

Below - Idku January 1944 - always subject to flooding



Left - Location and date unknown - but certainly plenty of sunshine



Above - Dekheila, February 1944. Palm Tree Camp.

Right - Dekheila January 1944. After the dates!



## Photos Reunited

Pete Boswell writes:

I'm an ex-Royal Marine and have recently started a business called Photos Reunited, which is a photo digital scanning service for people who own old photos and would like to create a digital copy for long term preservation and of course so they can share them with friends and old colleagues etc. I know from personal experience that 'old soldiers' such as myself own lots of old 35mm photos and given the opportunity would like to protect them but also like to share and exchange them with my old mates. I would be very happy to offer a considerable discount for any of your members.

Contact Pete on [pete.boswell@photosreunited.com](mailto:pete.boswell@photosreunited.com) if you are interested in this new service.

## Tail Piece



**Former Tiger CO Graham Clarke has a new registration - and a new navigator. Flt Lt Muttley!**