

Tiger News No 56

Compiled by Bob Cossey

Association President
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Air Marshal Cliff Spink CB, CBE, FCMI, FRAeS
Air Vice Marshal Boz Robinson FRAeS FCMI
Gp Capt Dick Northcote OBE BA
Rhod Smart
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One of the many painted helmets worn by the Phantom crews at Wattisham. This one belonged to 'Spikey' Whitmore.

Membership Matters

New member **Brian Jackson** served at RAF Horsham St Faith with the squadron from October 1954 to April 1958. He held the rank of SAC as an armament mechanic. 74 was the only squadron with which Brian served. He recalls that whilst at St Faith he played trumpet in the band and thus attended many parades in Norwich and the surrounding area. He also followed his civvy trade of carpenter with a Sgt Halford who let Brian use a workshop on the station. Brian now lives in Australia.

And new member **Anthony Barber** was an LAC (engine mechanic) on the squadron from May 1951-April 1953 on National Service. He was trained at Innsworth then posted to Bovingdon for three weeks before moving to Horsham St Faith where he stayed for the rest of his time.

Cliff and the 74th Entry



There is a story behind this photograph! Tony Merry of the 74th Entry Association explains. 'During the Sunset Ceremony at the Triennial Reunion of the RAF Halton Apprentices Association in September 2010, a magnificent flying display was given by a Spitfire piloted by Cliff Spink. After the parade some of my Entry colleagues enjoyed a drink in the RAFA Club by the gate of RAF Halton airfield. The drinks were quaffed and we were waiting outside for the minibus to take us back to the hotel when the Air Marshal in flying kit strolled up. A 'quick chaps' and 'excuse me sir' and the result was the photograph, a copy of which I sent to Cliff. He returned it with the inscription - which set bells ringing in my head! What a coincidence that we, ex-Brats of the 74th Entry had unknowingly buttonholed a former CO of No 74 Squadron, also an ex-Brat of the 104th Entry, to pose with us! I therefore sent Cliff a certificate of honorary membership of our Association.'

Sailor's Clothes Brush

It's quite remarkable how the most abstract of things relating to No. 74 Squadron crop up unexpectedly from time to time, and this was certainly one of those times. Tony Law from Australia got in touch to tell me that he had bought this silver backed clothes brush in an auction in Sydney. The detail on it intrigued him. Coming from Sandwich in Kent and having a brother who served in the RAF, Tony has always had an interest in the Battle of Britain and



when he saw the brush has the initials 'AGM' and '74 SQN RAF June 1940' engraved on it he immediately thought of Sailor Malan - Adolph Gysbert Malan. No other pilot on the squadron had AGM as initials in June 1940 so it's odds on that this was indeed Sailor's clothes brush (as it is unlikely to have belonged to a groundcrew Tiger).

Phantom XT914 - going home to Wattisham.



Phantom FGR.2 XT914 was one of the last of the type to be based at Wattisham before the station was handed over to the Army in 1993. For the past twenty years it has been the gate guardian initially at RAF Leeming and latterly at RAF Brampton, but with Brampton now due to close it has been acquired by Wattisham Station Heritage. It will be partially dismantled so it can be transported by road and once back at Wattisham it will be

reassembled, cleaned up and restored for display. The aircraft, when marked up in both 74's and 56's colours (as shown in the photo taken at RAF Chivenor on the previous page) was the aircraft flown by Tigers Archie Liggat and Mark Manwaring during the Phantom's final display season in 1992.



(Left) Guests gather at the handover ceremony. (Right) Official documents are signed off, including the Form 700, the original of which will go to the Wattisham museum.



Flt Lt Tony Boxall, ex-Tiger Wg Cdr Mark Manwaring and Air Marshall Sir John Allison were all at the hand-over ceremony.

With thanks to Maggie Aggiss, Chairman/Curator at Wattisham Station Heritage

John Bennett

We learned in Tiger News 54 that John Bennett, who served with 74 from January 1945 to July 1946, died on February 18th 2011. This article gives an interesting insight into John's RAF career overall and the photos are from John's own collection. By Dave O'Malley and with thanks to the Vintage Wings of Canada website.

Laid across John Bennett's dining room table, like memories strewn across the decades, are dozens of yellowed photographs. The faces of the young men smile and shine forth like the specks of starlight from distant suns long ago extinguished by time, yet whose light still streams down to us. Amidst the numerous snapshots and formal photographs, I notice something - that John was never alone during these dark days of European cataclysm. According to the photographs arrayed before me, John was always a member of a course, a class, a flight, a squadron or even a team. There are no pictures of the man as a single person - at least none that he has included in the group of photos laid out on the table. I am immediately reminded of what the retired physician had said to me on my first visit to his Ottawa home - "I am uncomfortable talking about myself, but I don't mind talking about my squadrons." It is clear to me, looking at these images that he has cared for all these years, that those days are a powerful time in his memory, not because they are concurrent with gigantic moments in history, but because he shared them with groups of men like himself - groups that cared for him, that gave him cause to push through the constant fear and stress, that gave him solace in their presence and their shared hardships. At my first visit, after drawing out of him a few stories, I had offered that I didn't think I had the courage to face a war like that. He scoffed at that saying "of course you would have. We were all young and invincible at the beginning. We were able to do these things mostly because we didn't want to be seen to falter by our friends and in the end we fought for each other, determined not to let each other down. Everyone is the same."

I see a formal photograph of more than fifty young men - all part of his Initial Training course at Stratford-upon-Avon and wonder how many made it through flight training, how many had been lost on ops, how many in careless accidents and in the end how many lived to be, like Flight Lieutenant John Bennett, alive tonight. Their faces are as scrubbed and shining as their boots - the world is about to come apart around them and they will need the strength of groups in the days ahead. John beams out beneath his cap in the back row - unaware of the future that lies before him. Another photograph catches my eye - a group of 26 relaxed looking men and one dog, both seated and standing, in front of a Harvard. "Was this when you were doing your flying training?" I ask. John explains that it was much later when he had left regular flying status with the RAF and was studying at St. Mary's Hospital, University of London. Most major universities had RAF auxiliary squadrons where former military pilots could maintain flying status and younger students could learn to fly. It was a photo taken on a summer camp. In between Stratford and the UAS came John's service with 611 and 74 Squadrons as the photos show.



This is John Bennett's class picture from B Flight, No.1 Squadron, No.9 Initial Training Wing at Stratford-upon-Avon. The class was billeted at the hotel which serves as a backdrop to the photo. A corporal at the time, John is third from the left in the back row.



John trained in America. He is seen here on the right with three other members of his training squadron and a civilian flying instructor (in the centre) at No. 5 British Flying Training School, Riddle Field, Clewiston, Florida. John trained on the Boeing Stearman PT-17 Kaydet and then the North American AT-6 Texan as shown.

This threesome of USAAF AT-6 Texans from Clewiston are on a formation training mission over Florida at the time John Bennett was training



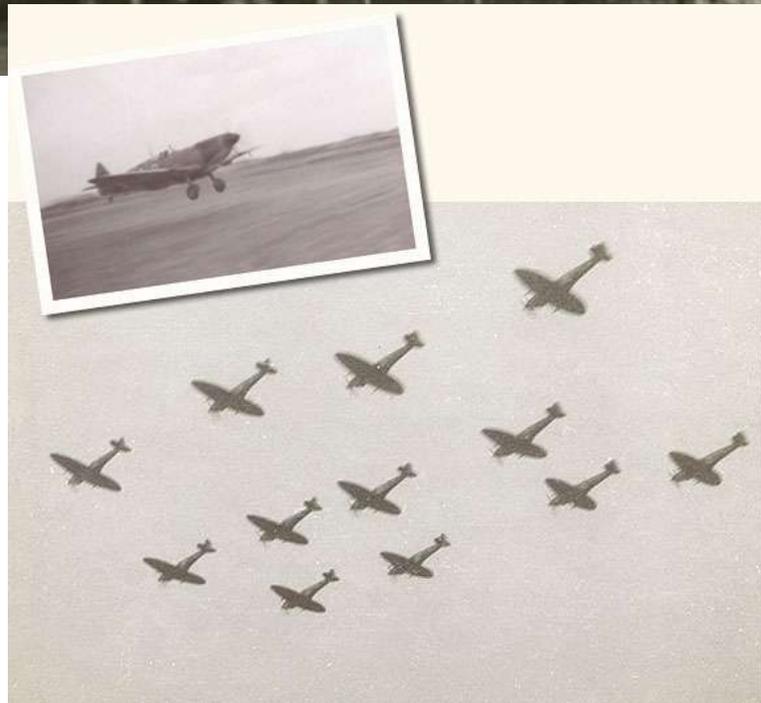


A more experienced Flight Lieutenant John Bennett (fifth from the right in the front row) with pilots and ground crew of B Flight, 611 Squadron at RAF Sumburgh on the Shetland Islands.



Later in the war John was with 74 Squadron flying in support of Allied troops as they advanced through France and Belgium. The Tigers were credited by the Canadian 4th Armoured Brigade as providing the 'closest air support to date"! Here squadron pilots pose at an airfield in Antwerp, Belgium. John stands third from the right in the back row.

Twelve of 74's aircraft depart for a sortie in 1944 after forming up over the field. The inset shows John landing in his Spitfire at Schijndel in Holland.





John Bennett (left) with a flying boot full of maps poses with left to right Geoff Lambert, Allan Griffin, Hugh Murland and Laurie Turner prior to a sortie. The Spitfire can be seen with a 250-pound bomb under each wing and a 500-pound bomb on the centreline. 74 Squadron operated many close support and interdiction missions in this configuration.

As the war pushed on into Germany, 74 was close to the front. Here John and three fellow pilots are inspecting a destroyed bridge across the Weser River in Bremen. While posing for this photo, sniper bullets started ricocheting from the bridge work.



Immediately after the war, 74 Squadron converted to the jet age and the Gloster Meteor Mk 3. Here John Bennett (leaning casually at left) and his fellow Tiger pilots pose like true veterans at RAF Colerne. John recalls post war missions along the south coast of Wales, helping coastal defences calibrate their guns for the new speeds of the jet age. He also remembers breaking right at the end of the last run and heading for his home town forty miles inland where he would make his presence known so many times that the Mayor lodged a formal complaint with the RAF!

Towards the end of his RAF career John was selected to lead the RAF component of the parade in London in honour of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Each of the six men in the front row (with Wilkinson swords) represented a different command of the Royal Air Force - Fighter Command, Bomber Command, Coastal Command etc. As John was now at St. Mary's Hospital, University of London Air Squadron, he was chosen to represent Training Command.



The picture below of the University of London Air Squadron Summer Camp is perhaps the last image John had of his flying days, possibly taken as late as 1955. Normally the squadron operated Tiger Moths and Chipmunks from RAF Fair Oaks west of London (later moving to RAF Booker near High Wycombe, northwest of London), but when on two week summer camps at places like Hawkinge or Shoreham, they made use of RAF Harwards like the one they are posing with.



Bulleid Battle of Britain Class Pacific 4-6-2 No 34080 '74 SQUADRON'

West Country and Battle of Britain class steam locomotives, collectively known as Light Pacifics, were designed for the Southern Railway by its Chief Mechanical Engineer Oliver Bulleid. They were equally at home hauling passenger or freight trains. A total of 110 locomotives were built between 1945 and 1950 and were named [i] after West Country resorts or [ii] Royal Air Force stations and subjects associated with the Battle of Britain. No 34080 '74 SQUADRON' carried nameplates which were later seen above 74's offices and crew room at Tengah. Beneath the nameplates was the squadron crest. Both nameplates and crest are now in private collections and as reported previously in Tiger News are worth an enormous amount of money to collectors. Thanks to rail enthusiast **Tony Drake** we now have some photographs of 'our' engine, some of which are shown below.



Jon Mosen - Aircraft Mad.

Association member Jon is our resident artist - the Christmas cards he has designed for us and the magnificent painting of Hunter T.7 XL568 (see Tiger News 45) are testimony to his talents. The Hunter has always been one of his very favourite aircraft and when he joined 74 on National Service in 1957 he was overjoyed to find the squadron was equipped with them. Here he tells his story of his eventful time as a Tiger.

Aircraft Mad. That is probably the best description of me. Boyhood hobbies such as modelling and collecting plane's registrations led to acceptance in 1951 for an apprenticeship with de Havilland. Unfortunately I couldn't afford to learn to fly with the de Havilland school at Panshangar but I did get very involved with aeroplanes and the main event each year was the Farnborough Air Show. One of the planes I followed through its development stages was the Hawker Hunter designed by Sidney Camm and test flown by Neville Duke.

In August 1957, when I had completed my five years as an apprentice, I was told to report to Acton for a medical prior to National Service - one of the unhappiest days of my life. Having acquired all the skills to earn a decent wage I was going to be on 7/6d a week for painting kerbstones and being shouted at. I passed my medical and then went to Cardington for kitting out and Bridgnorth for square bashing and was then instructed to report to RAF Horsham St Faith 'where your trade will be that of a Servicing Recorder.' I didn't know where Horsham St Faith was and didn't know what a Servicing Recorder was other than it must be a boring admin job. I was a jet engine designer, not a pen pusher. This must be the second most miserable day of my life.

Come the day I turned up at the main gate and from the scream of engines realised that this was a fighter airfield. I was directed into a hangar where I met the Squadron Adjutant. What squadron I wondered? Through the hangar door I went and there in front of me I was nose to nose with a Hawker Hunter F.4. I couldn't believe my eyes. The hangar was full of them. Things were looking up. The gloom within me lifted away. I was back in aviation. Here I was with 74 (Trinidad) Fighter Squadron, the Tiger Squadron of the RAF operating with Hunter F.4 and F.6 aircraft. It was beyond all my expectations.

Everyone was very friendly and welcoming. I was introduced to Squadron Leader Curtiss, the boss of 74, and to some of his fellow pilots before being taken to a servicing area and shown what was expected of me. A Flight Sergeant looked me over and led me to a hangar office overlooking the airfield where he introduced me to the person I would be working with, Cy Lightfoot. By now I knew what a Servicing Recorder's duties were and although an admin job it kept me in directly in contact with the aircraft, its servicing personnel and the aircrew. It involved overseeing the operation of every aircraft on the squadron, keeping checks on flying hours and maintenance schedules and making sure the correct servicing was carried out at the correct times. We also had to ensure that the Form 700s were kept up to date.



Profiles of Hunter F.6 XK142 which carried Sailor Malan's signature on the nose.

These contained the servicing and flying records for each aircraft. The pilot signs for the aircraft on the F700 before walking out to check it over prior to taking off. He also signs the F700 when the flight is complete, entering the flying times and any problems he encountered. The ground crews enter the servicing that they have completed on the aircraft and sign the F700 themselves as well.

After a couple of weeks with the squadron I realised that here was a dedicated team of people all trusting and relying on each other's abilities whether they be working on the aircraft, engines, armament, instruments or whatever. It was all teamwork and 74 was more of a family than anything else.

Three out of four weekends I was allowed to go home and I bought myself a Lambretta motor scooter to enable me to do so cheaply. The fourth weekend I had to stay on camp when the squadron was on standby. Exercise Fabulous involved a skeleton crew with one aircraft manned and armed and ready for immediate take off and another ready to go. These were the Cold War days when the Russians used to fly down the North Sea. The idea was to scramble the Hunters who would go and fly alongside the Russian aircraft, give them a wave and politely escort them back in the direction from whence they came! It was during these weekends that there occasionally came a chance to get a trip up and I enjoyed my flights in the now old Meteor T.7.

During 1958 more of the Hunter F.4s were being replaced with the newer F.6. These had Rolls Royce Avon 200 series engines with automatic fuel systems and AVPIN starters (so there would be no more smelly cartridges starts), all-flying tails and extended outer chord wing panels along with downward deflectors on the 30mm cannon.

During the summer of 1958 news started coming through that the squadron might be getting involved in the troubles in the Lebanon. We were informed of the possibility of going to the Iraq desert and being stationed at Habbaniyah. My immediate thought was that this was not good news for Avon engines as sand and jet turbines are not a good combination. Sand will get into the engines during take offs and landings and that can lead to many severe problems. Finally leave was stopped and desert KD clothing issued so we knew it was no longer a rumour. Sqn Ldr Curtiss called us into the hangar and told us 'this is it chaps, we're off' and then went on to explain that all the squadron's Hunters and a full complement of men would not be going to Habbaniyah at all - but Cyprus. Nicosia airport in fact, slap bang in the centre of the Cypriot fighting factions and anti-British terrorism. This was not good.

Work became feverish with extra spares and equipment arriving and there was an all-out maintenance effort getting the complete squadron into tip-top flying condition. The rare sight of a Beverley landing indicated that the forward party were about to leave and a day or two later the first Hunters took off. Once they had all gone Horsham St Faith suddenly became a very quiet place. There was no chatter coming from the hangars, no ground crew running up engines. There were just a few of us left together with loads of boxed spares and equipment. 9th September was my departure day. Another Beverley did a circuit of the airfield and slowly touched down. While all the crates were being loaded I changed into my

KD uniform and gathered my bits together. Then we boarded the Beverley. Bursts of exhaust shot out from the engines as they started to turn. When all were running everything in this 'far from first class' flight was vibrating and rattling. Brakes off and then that familiar squeak of the wheels turning as we made our way to the take off position. Full throttle and we were away down the runway with a noise like having your head in a steel bucket full of rattling nuts. This was followed by a reasonable level of calm as the wheels finally left the runway.

After a while though I saw one of the props strobing and slowing down and there was a 'phut phut' and flames shot out of the back of the engine and the prop stopped completely. We diverted into Lyneham where the aircraft was found to have a fairly serious problem which would be worked on through the night. We took off again the next morning but as we flew over France a crew member emerged from the cockpit to shout that there were now hydraulic problems with the aircraft and we would be putting down at the French Air Force base at Orange sixty miles north of Marseilles, home to heavily guarded Mirage fighters. We finally made it to Luqa (Malta) as darkness was falling. The following morning however we were to learn that the Beverley was still suffering from several hydraulic problems but 'should be OK for a late a.m. take off.' This happened - despite one of the crew then telling us he wasn't too happy with some of the navigation instruments but we were going anyway! Later in the flight we were rather surprised to find ourselves flying over land rather than sea - and then suddenly we were being buzzed by Turkish jets. We lurched to starboard and within a couple of minutes of flying over the sea again the fighters disappeared. The Bev obviously did have navigation problems!

Finally safely landed at Nicosia and reunited with the squadron, we were hustled into a three tonner and whisked off to our living accommodation which turned out to be a tented site (**below**) in a barbed wire compound. A corrugated tin hut with part open sides, benches with tin sinks and an associated range of pipes was our washroom. But the loo! Affectionately known as the Thunder Bucket this enclosed hut built with stone walls and curved tin roof housed a long plank with spaced out holes below which was a very deep trench which housed a multitude of cockroaches. The squadron operations area consisted of more tatty tents, barrels of oil and most important, a decent Coca Cola freezer which always seemed to be full up no matter how much we drank.



Sand used to fly all over the place when the jets started up and taxied and trying to keep paper records became a big problem. The squadron was busy with plenty of sorties every day, one of the main tasks being the provision of air cover for troop transport. Five Hunters flew on detachment to El Adem but returned after a few days. There

were the usual mishaps and one very lucky escape for a pilot who flew into a high-tension electricity cable which cut horizontally through the aircraft's nose and pulled and stretched back over the wing leading edge on one side and cut 2-3 inches into the drop tank pylon on the other. Fortunately the cable had snapped under tension just in front of the cockpit bulkhead.



Another part of RAF Nicosia

Several EOKA attacks were made on the camp - we heard for example that some soldiers were seriously injured when a pencil bomb blew up in their washhouse. And I experienced at first hand the horror of the Engineering Officer of one of our sister squadrons being blown up when boarding an aircraft to return home. His batman's family had been threatened by EOKA and given a pencil bomb to put in the officer's shoulder bag.

Our own return home was in a Hastings - a relief after our experiences with the Beverley on the way out. This time it was all very uneventful. But a little while later there were again a few dodgy moments in the air, this time as Cy and I together with the servicing records were being flown up to Acklington by a Warrant Officer in an old Anson. The rest of the squadron was already there for an Armament Practice Camp. It was January and once we took off the cold soon set in. Our course took us out to sea over the Wash and into a big black cloud and soon we were being bombarded with hail. The old Annie rocked all over the place and the noise was loud and worrying. After what seemed hours of being thrown about there was a loud crack followed by a ripping noise and the top section of the roof peeled off leaving us looking up through the longerons. Fortunately we emerged from the hail soon afterwards but we were all shivering and absolutely frozen. At last Acklington appeared, we made a reasonable landing and quickly finding our accommodation we started the warming up process. The APC proceeded normally until towards the end of the week a sudden crashing

sound was followed by a Meteor target tug flying low overhead. He had released his banner a little too early and it had come down to crash through the corrugated roof of an old hut which was thankfully not occupied.

Back at Horsham St Faith, Hunter T.7 XL568 had been delivered to the squadron. This was to become my all time favourite aircraft which I nicknamed 'One Gun Willie', if for no other reason that as a trainer it had just one 30mm cannon fitted. Anyway, the name just seemed to fit the aircraft.

In June 1959 the squadron moved a few miles down the road to Coltishall. I went off to Bushey to be married to Jo on June 13th and came back to an eventful summer. The buzz went round that a VIP was to be visiting the squadron with a Spitfire being flown in for the occasion. It turned out to be Sailor Malan and he watched a superb flying display by the Spit and by Geoff Steggall in one of our Hunters.

1959 was the 50th Anniversary of Bleriot's flight across the Channel and to mark the occasion the Daily Mail was offering a £6,500 prize for the fastest time a team could make between London and Paris on July 22nd. Our Hunter T.7 was to participate. Geoff Steggall piloted the aircraft for the test runs but on the day itself Sqn Ldr Maughan took over (he wasn't a Tiger though). The RAF team won the race, completing the course between Marble Arch and the Arc de Triomphe in 40 minutes 44 seconds by using an RAF motorcycle, a Bristol Sycamore and our Hunter. The prize money was donated to charity.

I was due to be demobbed later in the year. My great pal Cy left in September but I still had a couple of months to go and as there was no replacement for Cy my workload increased. The squadron was due to return to Horsham St Faith while Coltishall's runways were resurfaced as part of the preparations for the Tigers re-equipping with the Lightning. However I would have gone by then. Despite the many good times I had had I was keen to get back to a proper job and married life. On the last day I walked away from the hangar feeling empty and very sad to be leaving such a good crowd of folk and of course my favourite T.7. But other things in life awaited me.

Do You Remember?

WO George Symon died in 1978. He served in South Africa (1940-45) as a Sergeant Pilot, then at RAFs Manby, Negombo (Ceylon), Seletar, Finningley, Kabrit (Egypt), Abu Sueir (Egypt), Akrotiri, Driffield, Horsham St Faith and Coltishall before retiring in Norfolk after thirty two years service. His daughter Monica recalls that with her two younger brothers and sister, they all went out to join their dad in Ceylon in 1949. George had gone out six months earlier on the troopship *SS Dunera* to RAF Negombo but then had to wait for a married quarter to become available before his family could join him. When they did so it was on the *SS Dilwara* which was carrying troops out to the Korean War.

If anyone can remember George from his Horsham St Faith and Coltishall days please contact Monica on wemoway@hotmail.co.uk.

74 Squadron - The Complete Fleet.



Anthony Clay writes: 'while I have no direct link to 74 Squadron, other than knowing of Mark Manwaring from his Air Cadet days some years ago, the Tigers have always held a very strong interest for me. My earliest memory is seeing a picture of an F.6 Lightning based at Tengah in a publication. 74 had been disbanded for

about six years by then if I remember correctly and I think the Tigers head and yellow/black markings captured my attention. At the moment I`m trying to collect one of each aircraft type that 74 flew. I started off with Corgi and Hobbymaster diecast versions but have had to build the rest from various plastic kits. This is where I am at the moment - I have a Lightning T.4 I`m working at the moment and also have a T.5 to start along with a Hurricane Mk.IIb, Spitfire Mk.9 - and Spitfire Mk.14 which is being built for me under commission.



We'll show you the rest of the fleet when Anthony has completed it!

Charles J J Goffin. A Belgian Ace with the USAAF in World War Two.

You will be familiar with the name of Belgian military historian **Johny Recour**, an associate member of our Association. He and his father Joseph were instrumental in 2006 in organising the commemoration of the death of Sqn Ldr John Colin Mungo Park who was killed when shot down over Belgium in 1941 and who is buried in Adinkerke military cemetery. (See Tiger News 42). Johny writes about many aspects of the war as it affected Belgium and this is one such piece of research he has done.

It is little known that Belgians were involved with the American forces during WW2. When my father, after being liberated as a political prisoner, was transferred from the Russian sector to the American sector across the bridge in Magdeburg in June 1945 he was met by a young guy from Bruges who was liaison officer with the American Army.

There were several Belgians involved with USAAF during WW2. One of them was 'Elgy' - Jacques Edouard Ledure - a WW1 pilot born in Brussels in 1893. He was a well known car racing pilot between 1924 and 1931, participating amongst others in the Le Mans Grand Prix in 1925. He joined the RAF in 1940 but was with the USAAF by 1943 where he ended up as a major by the end of the war. He was killed in a car racing accident in Chimay in 1948.



Another Belgian was André Plisnier born near Liège in 1920. He joined the RAF in 1940 and was transferred to the all Belgian RAF 350 Squadron whose motto was Julius Caesars' famous words *Omnium Gallorum Belgae Fortissimi* (*Of all the Peoples of Gaul the Belgians are the Bravest*). He was the first 350 Squadron pilot to shoot down a Focke Wulf FW 190 on May 23rd 1942. In November 1944 Flt Lt Plisnier was posted to the USAAF's 336 Squadron of the 4th Fighter Group flying North American P-51D Mustangs until early January 1945. Then he returned to the Belgian section of the RAF and became a SABENA pilot after the war.

The focus of this article is Charles Jean Joseph Goffin. He was born in Graide in the province of Namur in 1913. (Namur was always related to Flanders since Count John I of Namur helped the Flemish troops during the Battle of the Golden Spurs on July 11th 1302 against the French.) Goffin joined the Aéronautique Militaire (the Belgian Air Force) as a young lad and became a pilot in 1933. At that time the Belgian Air Force was made up of three regiments, each with groups and each group with squadrons. So we had the 1st Air

Regiment (Air Reconnaissance) with six groups each with one squadron. Then the 2nd Air Regiment (Fighters) with three groups each with two squadrons. And finally the 3rd Air Regiment (Reconnaissance and Bombing) with two groups each with two squadrons. Charles Goffin was posted to 3/II/2 A  Mil - which meant No. 3 Squadron of 2 Group of the 2nd Regiment of the A ronautique Militaire.

Until the beginning of WW2 they flew ageing British Fairey Fireflies. Then in September 1939 a Belgian purchasing mission succeeded at a high price but with secured delivery within months in signing a contract in Italy for 34 Fiat CR.42 fighter planes. The first ones arrived in loose parts with Italian camouflage for assembly in Belgium on March 6th 1940 and before May 1940 3/II/2 A  Mil and 4/II/2 A  Mil were each equipped with 15 CR.42s carrying the emblem of Belgian WW1 fighter ace Willy Coppens de Houthulst, which was a 'Cocotte' (a paper duck), white for 3/II/2 and red for 4/II/2. The Belgian fighter pilots converted from flying Fairey Fireflies to the Italian aircraft within a mere six weeks before Belgium was attacked.

The planes were based at Nivelles (Nijvel) but when all hell broke loose on May 10th 1940 they moved to Brustem. The very same day Charles Goffin of 3/II/2 A  Mil shot down a Messerschmitt Bf 109. During the following days the remaining serviceable aircraft were redeployed to Nieuwerkerke-Waas. On May 15th he shot down another Bf109. On the 18th he flew with the other remaining combat-ready planes to Chartres in France. On June 3rd 1940 he damaged a Dornier Do.17 bomber. On the 12th of June he and his fellow pilots left Chartres for Bordeaux-M rignac and when France signed the armistice on June 22nd 1940 he returned to Belgium. He was arrested and imprisoned in the camp at Beverlo near Leopoldsburg (which has been Belgium's biggest military site since king Leopold I installed it in 1835.)

In October 1940 Goffin managed to escape from the camp and travelled to France in order to get to Gibraltar via Spain and hence to Britain. Unfortunately he was arrested by the Spanish authorities and put behind bars as an illegal foreigner in the ill famed concentration camp of Miranda de Ebro near Burgos. There he spent nearly a year and a half and probably got an eye disease which would keep him nearly blind in one eye. By May 1942 he succeeded in reaching Britain via Gibraltar but was turned down by the RAF as unfit for flying because of his bad eyesight. This was without reckoning on the determination of Charles Goffin to fly again. So he turned to the USAAF, lied about his age (instead of being born in 1913 he claimed to be born in 1919) and managed somehow to pass the physical. On January 8th 1943 he flew again and was posted to the 6th Fighter Group. Later he moved to the 14th Photo Squadron of the 7th Photo Reconnaissance Group of the 8th Air Force, flying Supermarine Vickers Spitfire PRXIs.

Lt Charles Goffin was decorated with the 8th USAAF Air Medal with 3 Leaves by Lieutenant General Jimmy Doolittle, Commander of the 8th Air Force. He flew 35 Combat missions. Unfortunately he was shot down, presumably by flak, while returning from a mission mapping the Siegfried Line on September 8th 1944 near Reckange-les-Mersch in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, a mere fifty miles from his hometown Graide. He died of his wounds and was buried in the local cemetery of Merschand a few weeks later in the

American Military Cemetery of Hamm/Luxembourg City. Finally his body was removed to his hometown in the coffin offered by the United States of America and laid to rest in the family grave.

Charles Goffin was esteemed within the USAAF not only as a good pilot but also as a person epitomising the friendly, good living Belgian. As Scott Blyth, whose father was a good friend of Charles, wrote - Belgium can be really proud of him.

A Bird of Passage by Ray Racy



I am not a natural pilot. By that I mean I never particularly wanted to fly as some boys in my day wanted to be engine drivers. Moreover, any bodily rotation like spinning round or doing a somersault would make me dizzy. Not a good prognosis for taking to the air.

But when I volunteered to join the RAF in 1939 it was less for patriotic reasons than from outrage at what Hitler was doing to Europe and Britain, my birthplace. I had no inclination to spend days in a stinking trench as a dummy for German target practice. The Royal Navy might have appeared more inviting, but a youthful experience of seasickness ruled that out. So the RAF it was.

Although I suffer from vertigo, my first flight in a Tiger Moth with my instructor, Sgt Oakshott, was remarkably reassuring. Unlike peering over a cliff edge I felt buoyed up by the air, just as one is supported by water when swimming. After occasional bouts of airsickness I had an extensive and largely enjoyable training here and in Canada where I gained my Wings, on Tigers, twin engine Cessnas, Miles Masters and a few hours on Hurricanes. I was finally posted to a couple of OTUs (Operational Training Units) in leafy Shropshire. This period was particularly absorbing. Even on my first take off in a Spitfire Mk IIB I was aware of its quality, its powerful thrust and fingertip control. It was smooth and responsive - an inspiration to fly.

Then on 30th November 1944 I was posted to my first operational unit, No 154 Squadron at Biggin Hill, the airfield famous for its outstanding role in the Battle of Britain. In fact the squadron was not yet operational. It had only just been formed and was made up of brand new Spitfire Mk VIIs, an unusual variant of the type. They had tapered wingtips destined for high altitudes up to 44,000 feet, a pressurised cockpit and a Rolls Royce 60 engine operating with a two stage, two speed, intercooled power plant. The flying characteristics were quite different from the Mk IIs and Vs we had trained on. There was a noticeable delay between moving the control column and the aircraft's response. This slight pause was

due, we were told, to the control rods and cables being encased in rubber to prevent the pressure from escaping. It was no problem in most common manoeuvres, but it required extreme concentration in formation flying, about which more later.

My brief experience at Biggin Hill was marked by four noteworthy events, two of them positive and two negative. The first, after a short familiarisation flight, was to take the aircraft up to 40,000 feet. I had never flown anything approaching that height before except in a Hurricane which climbed to about 30,000 feet where it began to lose lift. The Mk VII reached the prescribed ceiling with no trouble. It was a fine day and my only slight concern was that I might be jumped by an FW190 or other German aircraft. I would not have known how to respond as throughout our long and varied training the tactical advice we never received was on how to counter attack a strike by enemy aircraft. However, this didn't bother me at the time. I was too intent on taking in the experience of flying at such an altitude. The horizon in every direction was enormous and a light haze in the far distance made it hard to distinguish earth from sky. My main sensation was of loneliness in that vast emptiness, almost as if I was out of contact with the earth.

The next interesting event took place a couple of days later. I was taking off from the runway when a cloud of black substance streamed back from the spinner and completely obliterated the windscreen. I could not see a thing. What to do? Carry on and be forced to bail out somewhere, or try to get rid of it and return to the runway? I called the Control Tower and told them I was going to attempt to return to base. How I was going to clear some of that oily substance which covered the screen I had no idea. To this day I cannot recall where it came from, but I found a small piece of rag - not a normal item to be found in a Spitfire cockpit - thrust back the hood, set the controls to fly straight and level, released my straps and stood up in the cockpit. I just managed to reach round with my right hand to wipe off as much of the greasy muck as possible. Having achieved as much visibility as I could I returned to my seat, strapped myself in, completed the circuit and managed to make a tolerable landing. I was met immediately by a mechanic who had run up as I came to a stop. He seemed astonished that I had succeeded in returning at all.

My next experience was less successful. We were detailed to do some close formation flying. Normally I had always found this enjoyable although requiring intense concentration. However, I was flying a different aircraft on this occasion and even before we formed up I found it was handling in a slightly peculiar way, even allowing for the delayed response. It just did not seem to settle down and acted in what I can only describe as a wavering reaction which required constant trimming with the controls. Not a reassuring prospect for formation flying. As it was I found it extremely difficult to keep a close and steady station and found myself bobbing up and down however I tried to control it with incessant tiny movements of the control column. I became uneasily aware that I was not putting up a good show with my fellow pilots. As soon as we landed I reported the curious behaviour of the aircraft to the engineers but I could not help believing that my erratic performance would have been attributed to poor airmanship by my fellow airmen.

My next exercise was even more inglorious. It was to practice dogfighting and steep turns with a pilot in another aircraft. I discovered that he was a Flight Lieutenant who had been

one of my instructors at my previous OTU. If I thought this was to be my good fortune I was quickly disabused. We flew to about 20,000 feet and started with steep turns to both left and right. At first they were gentle but gradually became steeper and steeper. I had some misguided idea that if I slackened my speed I might be able to do even tighter turns than my instructor who was following. The truth was exactly the opposite. I ought to have been opening the throttle and pulling hard back on the stick to tighten the turn to the point where any further pressure might cause the aircraft to flick out of control and go into a spin. My thinking was quite wrong but I was made aware of that only when my instructor barked at me that I had just lost 4,000 feet. It was a very crestfallen ego that crept out of the cockpit after landing and met the full fury and indignation of my leader. I knew I had put up a real black on this occasion.

It so happened that after less than a fortnight of actual flying at Biggin Hill I found myself in sick quarters with an attack of flu. This took place directly over the Christmas period. Apart from the unpleasant symptoms themselves, I cannot pretend it was not an unexpectedly pleasant interlude with the friendly attention of the WAAF nurses, especially on Christmas Day itself. However, when I returned to duty I discovered I had been posted. This was to 84 GSU (Ground Support Unit) at Lasham in Hampshire. As opposed to the high-level activities of 154 Squadron, these were specifically directed to low-level attack and dive bombing. The aircraft in use were mainly Mk IXs and Mk XVIIs with clipped wings for low-level manoeuvrability. I was never sure if my posting was due to my two poor performances with 154 or whether there was an urgent need for more low-level pressure on the retreating German forces in Europe. I suspect it was a combination of both.

After about two months of practice dive bombing and air to ground firing I was finally posted to the fully operational 74 Squadron based at Schjindel in Holland. After an interesting and eventful three or four weeks with them I suffered an engine failure over occupied Holland and was subsequently taken prisoner. As I have recounted elsewhere, our group of RAF and American Air Force prisoners were treated with remarkable restraint and even kindness and we were released a few days before the war officially ended.

Looking back at the vagaries of my experience, apart from having survived I am glad to have had the opportunity to sample three distinct types of Spitfire as well as to have operated, however briefly, from such a prestigious airbase as Biggin Hill and with such a distinguished squadron as No 74 Tiger Squadron.



Ray with Dick Northcote at the 90th Anniversary Reunion in 2008.

Cambrai May 2011 - postscript.



In the last issue, we featured a photo gallery of all the operational jets that participated in the 50th Anniversary Tiger Meet at Cambrai. On the middle weekend of the Meet an air show was held at the nearby Cambrai Niergnies Airport which featured a flypast of the painted jets as well as many other aircraft. Our President (left) took the F-86A Sabre which he flies from Duxford (it is the oldest flying military jet in the world) to participate. The

aircraft was given a splendid special scheme of its own for the occasion as these photographs show.



Farewells

Sadly we have to report the death of **Ted Newson** on 14th December last year at the age of 90. Ted served as a Tiger in 1941 and 1942. He was one of a select few who flew 'on' a Spitfire (albeit briefly!) as he recounted several years ago. The Tigers were based at Llanbedr at the time where Spits were dispersed around the perimeter and readiness was undertaken on alternate days by A and B Flights. The procedure was that a single aircraft would be at the runway's end with engine warmed and parachute draped over the wing leading edge and with pilot and groundcrew in attendance. The scramble signal was given by a single Very pistol shot from the control tower. As one aircraft took off it was replaced by another. On the day he tells the story of, he was on readiness with B Flight.

I was waiting with the pilot Steve Winterbeek and my groundcrew colleague Ray Durrant. The Very pistol was fired from the tower and the first aircraft took off. We accordingly moved up one position and became second to go and within a minute were at the runway's end and were next to go. Ground crew didn't want to walk alongside their aircraft as it taxied and it became the procedure to duck under the aerial wires extending from the fuselage sides to the extremities of the tail and sit on the tailplane. Winterbeek accelerated along the peri track with Roy and I safely aboard and turned on to the runway. As he did so the Very pistol was fired and without hesitation he opened up the throttle! We thundered down the runway with Roy and me hanging grimly on to the rudder, fighting against the slipstream and hot exhaust gases. Our pilot was slowly coming to realise that something was wrong as he tried to coax the Spit into the air. He did manage to get it six feet off the ground before he saw us in his rear view mirror. He immediately throttled back and we landed with a bump and came to rest a few feet from the runway's end.

A good story now - but frightening at the time!

Our thoughts are with Ted's family.