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Rhod Smart
Bob Cossey BA (Hons)
John Crow

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Reunion 9th - 11th March 2012. The Falcon Hotel. Stratford Upon Avon



New member and first time reunion attendee Tony Barber who was a Tiger at Horsham St Faith 1951-1953.

Our numbers may have been fewer but the Reunion went off as well as ever. In fact there seemed to be just as many in the Dining Room as there normally is - I don't know why but perhaps it was because it was full of the usual larger than life characters that make up the Association! We were very pleased to welcome some new attendees - Tony Barber (Meteor era at Horsham St Faith) and his partner Joy: Peter Osborn (Tengah Tiger) and his wife Linda: Mark Oliver (Phantom era, Wattisham) and his wife Lisa: and AVM Clive Bairsto (also of the Phantom era) and his wife Clare. Clive was

our speaker for the evening and, being on secondment to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport as Director Integration and Readiness, he talked about security arrangements for the Olympics. Very topical and very interesting. As we all know the holding of the Olympics is a momentous thing for London and the country at large and wherever you turn you are faced with huge numbers - from the number of participants, administrators and volunteers to the sheer size of the Olympic park itself. All of which adds up to a huge all round security operation.



Also with us for the first time this year was Tengah Tiger Peter Osborn, seen here with his wife Linda.

The Falcon Hotel is back on track after the refurbishment of a few years ago and the problems we encountered in its wake. We were looked after very well. As you will see from the minutes of the AGM there was some discussion about the future of the reunion given the significant reduction in numbers but there was unanimous agreement that we should carry on as we are so we will reconvene at Stratford next year from **Friday 8th to Sunday 10th March.**

There is an additional event this year for Lightning air and ground crew with a special 74 Squadron themed afternoon and evening at Bruntingthorpe on Saturday June 16th. Many of you have already signed up for this but it still isn't too late to get your names down if you haven't already done so. Give me a call or drop me an e-mail if you wish to do so. This is something we may consider in the future - another event in addition to the reunion each year. Coningsby for example where the BBMF have a Spitfire marked up in 74's codes for 1945. Or Duxford where there are several of 74's aircraft and indeed where our President operates from.



Chris Laidlaw-Bell flew from Florida to be with us at the Reunion. Chris was a Phantom Tiger and whenever he is able to he makes the pilgrimage to be with his 74 Squadron colleagues. He was last with us six years ago and there is no doubt his visits are always eagerly anticipated!

Marianne and Ray Jones are ever present at reunions. Ray is very good at persuading his former colleagues at Tengah to join the Association and attend reunions. Thanks Ray.



Minutes of Annual General Meeting Saturday 10th March 2012

1. Chairman Dick Northcote welcomed all attending the AGM and reunion weekend
2. The Treasurer's report was presented by Rhod Smart. The accounts show that the Treasurer's Account holds £512.08 and the Museum Fund stands at £7,477.15. We hold sales stock to the value of £1,767 which will realise £3,285 at sale prices. Full details are available on application to Rhod.
3. Tiger Squadron Museum. The situation at Norwich is the same as last year - uncertainty over whether the museum will have to move in the light of the proposed, but very slow in materialising, Northern Distributor Road to the north of Norwich. To remind members, our initial plan revolved around raising funds for the building of a hangar at the City of Norwich Aviation Museum to house their Hunter which is in 74's colours, a building which would also house other artefacts currently in store at RAF Stafford (and in Bob's loft!). However, Wattisham Airfield (now an Army base from which Apache helicopters operate) has a developing museum - known as Wattisham Station Heritage - in one of 74's old HASs and they have recently acquired a Phantom from RAF Brampton. It is suggested that some of the money we have raised could be devoted to helping them specifically develop 74's F-4 Phantom story within their museum. Rhod Smart proposed that the committee explore the possibilities of doing this. Seconded by Tony Ellender the meeting endorsed the idea. The original plan as regards Norwich and the story of the squadron being told there will continue as well.
4. The committee offered themselves for re-election and will continue as currently.
5. Numbers at this year's reunion are significantly lower than previously - 64 as opposed to the customary 90 to 100. In the light of this apparent decline the committee asked members for their views on the format of future reunions. One issue is that The Falcon imposed a minimum number of 60 for this year. Whilst that was exceeded it may become a problem in the future although Bob thought he could probably renegotiate that number downwards. Alternative options to the annual reunion that we have hitherto had would be to alternate it with a day's gathering elsewhere (Duxford for example, or the BBMF at Coningsby). However the meeting overwhelmingly voted to keep with the present arrangement for the moment at least. Additional events during the year (such as Bruntingthorpe in June this year) could be considered in the future too.
6. Webmaster John Crow outlined progress with the development of the website, some planned and some forced upon him, such as the demise of the current guest book and the need to find an alternative. This he has done and has also been able to save all the messages from the defunct guestbook as well. John reminded members that he was still developing the photo archive and would welcome any additional material from them in that respect. He thanked everyone at the meeting for their support both as regards the website and as regards his coping with his medical problems. In return members thanked John for his work with the website.
7. The Association took a sales stand to RAF Fairford last year for the two days of the Royal International Air Tattoo where 50 years of Tiger Meets was being celebrated. A considerable amount of additional stock was purchased in anticipation of buoyant sales, but unfortunately the weather was poor and the expected sales didn't materialise with the result that we are holding more stock than we would wish. The committee asked for a

volunteer/volunteers to try to move some of it via e-bay and Bob Archer responded. Our thanks go to him.

Membership Matters

Malcolm Davies has joined us as an Associate Member. He is the nephew of Betty Longman, wife of Tiger Bill Longman who died in 2009. Sadly Betty has now died too at the age of 91 but Malcolm would like to maintain a link with the squadron with which his uncle served. The family incidentally has had three generations involved with the RFC and RAF and through Malcolm continues to take an interest in all military aviation matters.

New member **David Poole** is another Tengah Tiger who served on the squadron from January 1969 to October 1971 as a J/T Engine Fitter. He writes: "Despite the loss of aircraft and sad fatalities of aircrew (I witnessed Frank Whitehouse's fatal rotation display) the camaraderie between aircrew and groundcrew was excellent, with many happy memories of the squadron parties and Xmas Bar competitions. Also the funny things like the late afternoon when a returning aircraft picked up a 14 foot python while taxiing (not far from the Officers' Mess) back to the line. We found this huge snake wrapped around the nose undercarriage which would not let go until we gave it a good dose of cold CO₂ (fire extinguisher). Also the detachments to RAF Butterworth aboard a NZAF Bristol Freighter, one of which resulted in a couple of us being left behind to despatch one of our aircraft after all the others had returned to Tengah. After it had gone we were left behind with no money and no change of clothes in the middle of a very wet season to wait for the next available aircraft to Singapore. We spent all those days hanging around the Australian NAAFI and surviving on poached egg on toast (the cheapest meal available).

"Also, being slim (then) I was one of the very few who could slip into the intake to service starters and inspect engine intakes. Engine and jet pipe removals were numerous and hard work but I think we held a record for speed of engine changes. Happy Days!"

In total David served 9 years in the RAF - on Vulcans at Finningley prior to 74, then Gnats at Valley, 74's Lightnings which were passed on to 56 Squadron at Akrotiri (and Canberras whilst there too) and ultimately Hunters and Gnats back at Valley again.

Farewells.

Group Captain Billy Drake was a very good friend of our own late Doug Tidy and was an Honorary Member of the Association. He died on 28th August last year aged 94. During the Second World War he shot down twenty enemy aircraft confirmed destroyed with six probables and nine damaged in addition. RIP Billy.

Phantom Flight Suits

Mike Davey was interested to see the photograph of the Tiger-styled helmet in the last Tiger News. He says: 'it is a US Navy pattern bone dome and was specific to the F-4Js early in 74 Squadron's usage until British seats were fitted and more conventional UK flight gear could be worn.

Not sure the oxygen mask is correct though. I would have thought the later MBU-5P was used? Can anyone confirm that?

He goes on to say: 'I wonder if you may ask of any of the ex-74J-bird pilots whether they would be prepared to part with a US-style helmet to display alongside my F-4J(UK) cockpit? I have a flight suit and name patch and have the rest of the flight gear which would go with it - just need a helmet to complete the set.'

Mike by the way is the owner of ex-74 Squadron F-4J(UK) cockpit ZE352, FGR-2 cockpit XV490 and the ex-Leuchars Phantom simulator cockpit.

William Armstrong. Coincidences.

I recently made contact with Bill Fletcher, son of William Armstrong who flew with 74 during the Battle of Britain. This came about after I was told of a rare World War One diary that was up for auction. The diary belonged to 74's Engineering Officer, 'Splitpins' Mansfield, in 1918 and is expected to reach a four figure sum when sold. I managed to contact the seller who has scanned the diary and once the sale is made he has said the scans will be presented to us for the squadron archive.

It was a Brian Carter who told me of the diary and he is a friend of Bill Fletcher, and that is how contact was made. Almost at the same time I was approached by Mandrill Television to ask whether we knew of any living relatives of William Armstrong as they were making a film of the excavation of William's Spitfire - he was shot down near Sandwich in Kent. At that stage I was unaware of Bill Fletcher's whereabouts but Mandrill made their own enquiries and found him. By the time they told me I had heard from Brian Carter!

And now, quite unconnectedly, I have heard from Nick Armstrong who is Vice Chairman of the Armstrong Clan Association and as such takes a keen interest in all things Armstrong. Nick is researching an article on William Armstrong and asked whether we had any information about him (which we do and is reproduced below) and whether we knew where Bill Fletcher is - which I now did! Nick had recently visited William's grave in Algiers and took the photo you see here.



One question I had was why William Armstrong's son was called Fletcher. William married Bertha Elizabeth Snaith in 1941 and the birth of a William Armstrong is recorded in Harwarden to a mother with the surname Snaith. Then there is a record of Bertha Elizabeth Armstrong marrying an Eric Fletcher in 1949 and there is no subsequent record of a son being born to them called William. So it is apparent that Bill Fletcher took the name of Bertha's second husband.

As for William Armstrong this is the story of his short RAF career as researched by Associate Member **Craig Brandon**.

It is thought that at the age of eighteen William (known to all as Bill) joined the RAF on a Short Service Commission and began flying as a pupil pilot in January 1939, being appointed Acting Pilot Officer on 1st April 1939 and Pilot Officer on 23rd October of the same year. He was posted to No. 4 Ferry Pilots Pool, a unit originally formed at Cardiff which subsequently moved to RAF Kemble. It is believed that he then joined No 54 squadron at Rochford at the beginning of the war before going to 7 OTU at Hawarden on 3rd September 1940. On 28th October 1940, by now a Flying Officer, he joined the Tigers at the Squadron's base at Biggin Hill. He and New Zealander Bob Spurdle became good friends, Bob describing Bill Armstrong as 'one of my special cobbbers.' Bill's training flights with 74 are not recorded but by the morning of Tuesday 5th November he was considered ready for his first patrol and at 0920 took off in Spitfire P7367 in squadron formation with nine other pilots for a patrol which lasted until 11.00. There is no report of contact with the enemy. A period of particularly poor weather followed, restricting flying for both the RAF and Luftwaffe but on 14th November 1940, with the CO Sailor Malan on leave and Mungo Park leading the squadron, the Tigers in company with their Biggin Hill neighbours No 66 squadron, met the Luftwaffe's final large-scale attack with Stuka dive-bombers. Bill was shot down off Dover after



destroying two Ju. 87's but it is not known for certain whether he was the victim of friendly anti-aircraft fire or a Bf 109. He managed to bail out safely before his blazing Spitfire P7386 (less than a month old) crashed on the Dover Road in Sandwich (it is this aircraft which was the subject of the recent Mandrill TV documentary shown on the Discovery History channel). It is likely that Bill was jumped by 109s flown by the very experienced men of JG26. Ira Jones describes the events in his book 'Tiger Squadron.'

It fell to the lot of Pilot Officer Armstrong to receive the greatest share of the day's excitement. To begin with, before he was called upon to fire a shot a Ju 87 had closed in to attack, jettisoning its bombs and then the enemy rear-gunner opened fire without effect. Armstrong silenced him with a four second burst at 300 yards while a further 3 second burst from 100 yards tore pieces from the bomber which flicked over and went into the Channel. A second 87 followed suit in short order. Attempting to rejoin the squadron,

Armstrong's Spitfire was unlucky enough to be hit by a cannon shell and later an explosion in the engine caused flames to pour out of the exhaust manifold. Armstrong had no choice but to take to his parachute.

Armstrong's own combat report describes the incident and is inconclusive about his assailant:

I was Red 2 of No. 74 Squadron ordered to patrol Maidstone at 15,000 feet with "Beauty" (66) Squadron leading. Knockout leader (F/L Mungo-Park) attacked one of a formation of three Ju87s and chased him down whilst I attacked the other two. I closed in on the rear one who immediately jettisoned his bombs. The enemy aircraft's rear gunner opened fire on me but his bullets fell well below my aircraft. I closed to 200 yards and opened fire with a 3 - 4 second burst and silenced the rear gunner. I gave him a further three seconds burst at about 100 yards. I observed pieces of

cowling etc, breaking off my target. The enemy aircraft flicked over suddenly and fell vertically towards the sea.

I attacked the second Ju87 opening fire at 200 yards, closing right in; I saw my fire going into the e/a which also dived towards the sea. I started to follow down but found myself in the heavy A.A. barrage from the coast, so I broke away and flew out of it. When at 3,000 feet I was taking evasive action to rejoin the squadron who were now a little ahead of me towards the French coast, there was a terrific bang on my port side and I saw a cannon shell had blown a hole in the underside of my port aileron. I flicked downwards and then saw five Me 109s coming out of the cloud at me. I shook them off getting down to sea level and made for the base. I had to keep full starboard rudder on to keep the aircraft straight.

Near Worth there was an explosion from my engine and flames came from my exhaust manifold and I could feel the heat from the engine in my cockpit. I gave full throttle and climbed to 2,000 feet when my engine petered out completely. I switched off petrol just before getting to 2,000 feet, rolled the aircraft onto its back and baled out.

During the second attack I was hit by three bullets but these were not from the e/a I was attacking. I believe they were strays from a Spitfire which was attacking an 87 to the right of me. Two or three seconds after I had baled out, according to an eye witness, something in the aircraft blew up, and he states he observed pieces flying off it.

Armstrong's wrecked aircraft, P7386, which had only arrived from the builders on 24th October, crashed to the ground and was written off but Bill landed safely by parachute and was able to get



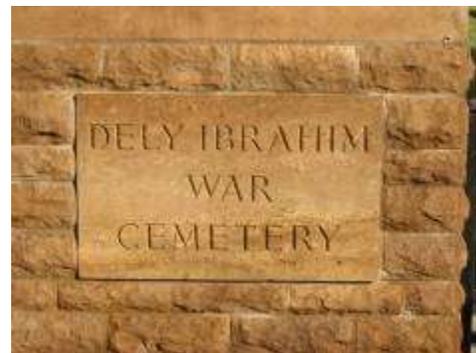
back to Biggin Hill that same evening. As was customary in those days he was not given time to dwell on his narrow escape. He did not fly on the 15th, the whole squadron was grounded on 16th but he was on patrol again at noon on Sunday 17th November and took part in several more patrols during the remainder of November. Bill saw action again on the 23rd when the whole squadron of twelve aircraft, led by Malan took off at 1245, formed up with their Biggin Hill neighbours No 66 Squadron and climbed steadily to patrol Maidstone at 25,000 feet. They were vectored to the Dover area to intercept approaching enemy formations. The intruders were Me 109s but although the Germans held the height advantage they seemed reluctant to come down and fight and despite the Spitfires' efforts turned for home. Malan was the only man to catch up with the Messerschmitts and sent one in flames into the Channel. All twelve aircraft landed back safely at Biggin Hill but were back in the air within the hour although this patrol passed over without enemy contact.

During the mid-afternoon of Wednesday 27th Bill was in the patrol which encountered two 109s of JG 51 over the Isle of Sheppey and shot them both down. His aircraft may have suffered problems as he decided to land away from Biggin Hill at Manston where he stayed overnight, but any damage to his aircraft was minimal as he flew the same Spitfire back to base early the next morning. The weather closed in on Biggin Hill once more and Bill was not in the air again until 2nd December when he took part in a patrol in the afternoon but missed the Tigers' fighting which took place in the morning. December's weather continued to be very bad and the squadron were only able to fly very infrequently. Bill next took to the air on the 30th, the squadron's final sortie of 1940. Then in the early afternoon of 5th February 1941 Armstrong was flying Red 2 to Sailor Malan's Red 1, two Sections having been scrambled from Biggin Hill to intercept an enemy aircraft approaching the Channel coast at about 4,000 feet. Diving through cloud, the Tigers emerged to find the Dornier 17 just below them and turning south off Dover. Malan attacked first, opening fire at about 150 yards, despite being hit several times by the German gunner. Bill next turned to the attack in P7353, opening fire at 300 yards and again at 250 yards. He too suffered damage from the German but despite this he succeeded in causing the bomber's port engine to blow up. Armstrong's forward vision had been cut off by a cloud of oil from the damaged Dornier but this cleared sufficiently for him to once more join in attacking the stricken aircraft. Malan and Armstrong were now joined by Peter Chesters (Yellow 3), and John Freeborn (Yellow 2) and the four Tigers soon sent the Dornier, which had taken huge punishment, into the sea. The victory, the last enjoyed by Malan as CO, was shared. The Dornier's ordeal can be judged by the amount of ammunition expended by the Spitfires including Chesters' 1,725 rounds, Malan's 2,256 and Armstrong's own 1,360.

On 8th May 1941 six Spitfires were scrambled in the late afternoon to intercept a formation of enemy aircraft. Bill was leading Red Section of A Flight as the Spitfires climbed steadily over Biggin Hill and headed off towards Dungeness. At 30,000 feet just north-east of Dungeness they sighted a group of eight 109s. The vectoring had been good as the enemy fighters were about 8,000 feet below. Armstrong sounded the Tally-Ho and the Tigers swooped down on their quarry.

As I dived they dived away towards Gris Nez and I was unable to come to close range. I chased one Me 109 who pulled up out of his dive about 500 yards in front of me. I fired a sighting burst and then pulling up the nose over him gave him a long range full deflection burst. I did not see him myself after that but chased two more 109s and fired at them ineffectively. Red Number Two (Pilot Officer Parkes) saw the first Me 109 diving vertically to the sea with black smoke pouring from his engine and it was also confirmed from the shore.

Bill was promoted to Flight Lieutenant on 23rd October 1941. He didn't survive the war, being killed in the Middle East on Thursday 18th February 1943, and still only 21 years old, when serving with the Gibraltar Ferry Pilots' Pool. Tragically, after three years of operational flying, he was killed in a road accident while on duty at Maison Blanche, Gibraltar. He was buried in Dely Ibrahim Cemetery six miles south-west of Algiers.



RAF Coltishall

The **East Anglian Film Archive** has released over 200 films on line covering all aspects of East Anglian life. Included amongst these are some interesting films about Coltishall in the late 50s/early 60s and which feature 74 Squadron. One shows the squadron's Hunters and includes short interviews with Peter Carr, then the squadron CO, and Ken Goodwin when he was with the AFDS. In another we see a very young Vaughan Radford. And a third features some great opening shots of Lightnings in formation. Just type RAF Coltishall in the search box of www.eafa.org.uk and it will take you to them. Enjoy!

Maurice Bartlett



We have been able to help Nick Bartlett who has been looking for some information about his father Maurice (right) who served with 74 during the war in the Middle East and in Europe post D-Day. Maurice joined 74's A Flight as a Sergeant Pilot on 1st August 1943 and, after commissioning, left at the



end of February 1945 as a Flight Lieutenant. We had a couple of photos in the archive which Nick was very pleased to have copies of and he was able to let us have a copy of a drawing of a 'Fighting Tiger' from Maurice's logbook in return.

The Takoradi Route

After the fall of France at the beginning of the Second World War it became too hazardous to use the Mediterranean route to ferry aircraft out by ship to supply the Desert and Far East Air Forces and it was too far to go via the Cape of Good Hope. So the Takoradi route was instituted and Association Member **Harold Dyball**, who flew the route before joining the Tigers, here gives a brief résumé of how it worked.

Takoradi is situated on the Gold Coast - now Ghana - and I arrived there on HMS Furious after an eventful voyage from England on 10th January 1941. On board we had crated Hurricanes and these would be assembled and prepared for ferry flights across Africa by specialist crews accompanied by Bristol Blenheims and Bisleys which, with a navigator and wireless operator on board, would act as lead planes and support to half a dozen of the single engined fighters. There was no radio communication between the lead aircraft and the aircraft in its `convoy` or indeed between the

aircraft that made up the `convoy`. Later when the USA entered the war Mohawks, Tomahawks and Kittyhawks were the aircraft that were ferried and Bostons, Baltimores and Marylands the lead aircraft. Regular crews were supplied with ID cards signed by Air Marshal Tedder which gave us return priority over all others. We were not to be detained for any operational reasons. These cards became known as `yellow perils`. The base at Takoradi had been set up by working parties under Gp Capt H K Thorold, the first group of officers and men arriving on 14th July 1940. By August 24th a Maintenance Unit had been created by the provision of such essentials as roads, hangars, runways, workshops, storehouses and living accommodation. Here crated aircraft, mainly Hurricanes, would be re-assembled without guns to save weight but with two long-range fuel tanks each of 44 gallons capacity. Later Mark 2 Hurricanes were equipped with 90-gallon tanks. Working parties also set up staging posts along the flight route which had been pioneered by BOAC before the war. The first was 378 miles from Takoradi down the coast to Lagos in the southeast corner of Nigeria with a possible halt at Accra on the way. The next leg was 525 miles over hills and jungle to an airfield of red dust at Kano in north western Nigeria. Then came 325 miles of scrub, broken by occasional groups of mud houses, to Maiduguri in the northeast of the same country. 650 miles of sand and rock lay ahead, finishing in a landing at El Geneina in the west of the then Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. This was the halfway stage. Refreshed with the knowledge that we had covered half the journey to Cairo we would contemplate with more equanimity the 200 miles of mountain and burning sky that lay between us and El Fasher, a brief refuelling stop with giant cacti providing a pleasing variety in the vegetation before a further 560 miles to Khartoum where we weary airmen might brave the disapproving glances of immaculate figures in khaki as we took advantage of the comforts of that city. With a halt next at Wadi Halfa on the Nile where orange trees and gardens contrasted strangely with the desert, a house built by Gordon and used by Kitchener would shelter we passing travellers. Now we had only to fly down the river another 1,000 miles to Abu Soueir and the end of our journey. HQ ADU (Aircraft Delivery Unit) then routed the supplied aircraft forward to the Desert Air Force or via India to Burma.

The crews on this punishing oft repeated flight recuperated on a houseboat at Gezira Island until called to return to Takoradi, sometimes flying with an Imperial Airways flying boat via the Nile and the rivers of the Belgian Congo. More often our return was by a multiplicity of aeroplanes such as Lockheed Lodestars, Bombays, Ensigns and DC3s of Pan Am or even Ju52s of Sabena. The round trip could be anything between 7,000 and 10,000 miles. Radio stations along the route were operated by the civilian personnel of BOAC.

A typical ferry flight lasted 24 airborne hours and a remarkable 5,000 aircraft were delivered in this way. It was an often hazardous business. In case of a forced landing most aircraft had a tray of survival materials which included a water bottle, Horlicks tablets, Bensedrine tablets and a rubber bottle with tablets for converting urine to drinkable water. Parachute harness backs had useful items such as fishing lines and hooks, compass buttons and a knife incorporated in them. Individual aircrew themselves usually took additional items `just in case` although how much was restricted by a lack of stowage space. Personal belongings likewise had to be kept to a minimum. The clothes we wore could only be roughly described as a uniform. A pair of shorts and bush jacket could be worn anywhere but long trousers and long sleeved shirts were necessary in many countries after sundown for protection against mosquitoes and lice in furniture. Good comfortable footwear was essential instead of the issued flying boots. A pair of pyjamas, shaving kit and two pairs of underpants, socks and towel completed the necessities.

By the time I left the Takoradi operation its tempo was increasing significantly. The route itself and an extension across southern Arabia became the main American link with India and China whilst the Allies were building up their forces for the attack on Rommel at El Alamein. By October 1943 the route had become the main supplier of operational aircraft for 96 squadrons and their reserves in the Near East and was starting to fulfil the same purpose for the Far East. Its existence had become essential to the Allies` survival and ultimately their victory.

Where There's a Will There's a Beer Keg!



A little known fact from World War Two is that Spitfires were used in an unorthodox role after D Day - bringing beer to the men in Normandy after the Heneger and Constable brewery had donated it to the troops. Supplying the invasion troops in Normandy with vital supplies was already a challenge and there was no room in the logistics chain for such



luxuries as beer or other types of refreshments but RAF Spitfire pilots came up with the solution as to how get it there. The Spitfire Mk IX had pylons under the wings for bombs or tanks and it was found that these could be modified to carry the kegs. Whether they could be jettisoned in case of emergency is unknown and there was very little ground clearance with the larger beer kegs. If the Spitfire flew high enough, the cold air at altitude would refresh the beer, making it ready for consumption upon arrival!

Long range fuel tanks could also be modified to carry beer instead of fuel. The mod. even received the official designation Mod. XXX. Propaganda services were quick to pick up on this which probably explains the official designation. Typically, the British Ministry of Revenue and Excise stepped in, notifying the brewery that they were in violation of the law by exporting beer without paying the relevant taxes. It seems that Mod. XXX was terminated then, but various squadrons found different ways to refurbish their stocks. Most often this was done with the unofficial approval of senior offices.

In his book *Dancing in the Skies* Tony Jonsson, the only Icelandic pilot in the RAF, recalled beer runs while he was flying with 65 Squadron. Every week a pilot was sent back to the UK to fill some cleaned-up drop tanks with beer and return to the squadron. Jonsson hated the beer runs as every man on the squadron would be watching you upon arrival. Anyone who made a rough landing and dropped the tanks would be the most hated man on the squadron for an entire week.



And in his book *Typhoon Pilot* Desmond Scott also recalls Typhoon drop tanks filled with beer but regretted that it acquired a metallic taste.

Less imaginative techniques involved stashing bottles wherever space could be found on the aircraft, including ammunition boxes, luggage compartment or even in parts of the wing, with varying results. Champagne bottles in particular did not react well to the vibrations they were submitted to during such bootlegging trips!

Another View of Sailor

74's Sailor Malan certainly made an impression on everybody who worked with, for or under him. Association member **Arthur Westerhof** recalls his time as a Tiger when Sailor was around.

To most people Malan was known as Sailor, but to the ground crews he was called Maxi. We couldn't possibly call him by his first name of Adolf!

At Biggin Hill Malan instructed his rigger to remove the squadron letters from his aircraft and replace them with his initials (AG-M). On a sortie the following day these were spotted by one of the German aces who immediately directed the whole of his flight against Malan. The brilliant pilot that he was recognised his mistake and using up all his ammunition headed back to base. He then instructed his rigger to put back the squadron letters of ZP to his aircraft. Again at Biggin Hill we got nuisance raids from German aircraft almost every day. One day a lone raider approached the station and Malan was at his aircraft. The engine was quickly started and Malan didn't worry about wind direction to get airborne. He returned a short time later doing a victory role over the airfield to a great cheer from the boys. This was Malan at his peak and why we admired him so much. A true leader.

During the early months of the Battle of Britain the two armament corporals on 74 were Stone and Cheeseman. One of them was to be awarded the BEM for the brilliant work during those hectic months, but which one? For Malan this was going to be a difficult decision to make so he sent for them both and told them that if there had been two medals he would have given them one each, but unfortunately there was only one. He took a coin out of his pocket, tossed the coin and Cpl Cheeseman had the BEM.

At Coltishall we had the later mark of Spitfire with four Brownings and two 20mm Hispano cannons. Myself and Bernie Stebbings were fitting one of the cannons and couldn't get it to drop past one of the spars on to the mounting. We had tried for several hours without success, so we took a file and with two strokes it dropped in. It was fitted, we fired it off and it returned to the hanger where the two marks were spotted and reported. The mainplane had to be changed. Stebbings and I were put on a technical charge. Malan took the charge and we were marched in. After trying to talk ourselves out of it Malan said 'what you have done could have endangered someone's life, it was entirely wrong. I appreciate the hours you are putting in and I am proud of you and all the squadron. Don't let it happen again or you will be in big trouble.' The charge was dismissed and we were marched out. Left, left, left right left.

At Manston Malan and the pilots bought us a couple of barrels of beer and the squadron had a party. We were billeted in the village primary school and the party was held in a large hut opposite. The tables were lined with cakes, large custard pies, jelly and the likes. Malan, Freeborn, Mungo Park and other pilots attended and the party got off to a good swing. Once a good deal of beer had been consumed the pilots departed. This was to allow the lads to let off a bit of steam and enjoy the rest of the night. After the beer ran out some inebriated airman decided to drop a large custard pie on his mate's head to liven things up. This resulted into a huge bun fight until all the tables were cleared. Steam was let off and a good night was had by one and all. The next day we feared that Malan would have something to say about the sheer waste of food during days of rationing. I believe that word got back to him that the lads had had a great time and enjoyed themselves. They had appreciated the generosity of the pilots and let off steam. Malan would not want to spoil any of that and we were let off the hook,

Finally, at Biggin Hill during the height of the Battle of Britain a scoreboard was kept in the armament section of 74 Squadron. This showed the number of aircraft a pilot had shot down. Another board was kept in the section which showed who had scored the most with the girls in Bromley and surrounding districts. I am sure Maxi Malan would have never objected to that!

Bobby Laumans

Belgian Tiger Bobby Laumans is now a remarkable 92 years of age. I asked him to jot down his recollections of his time as a Tiger during the war and this is what he wrote.

The Tiger Squadron was a fantastic unit and I am proud to have been one of its members. First of all it was my first operational squadron which I joined straight from OTU. I was not alone. Steve Winterbeek, another Belgian, came with me to Acklington. [See Tiger News 57 and Ted Newson's obituary for a story about Steve.] He was a regular Belgian officer. I had been a sergeant in the Belgian Air Force. But in the Spring of 1941 I received a commission in the RAFVR (Pilot Officer). And so we arrived in that nice peacetime Officers' Mess in the north of England. I don't remember meeting the CO Sqn Ldr Meares (although I might have done) but I noticed that he signed my log book for the first month at Acklington.



In my mind the man I admired most was Sqn Ldr Paul Richey. I had read his book *Fighter Pilot*. Another man I became very friendly with was the Adjutant Sandy Powell.

Apart from a few scrambles against the odd Ju88 our operations consisted mostly of convoy patrols. We were equipped with Spitfire IIbs. Then I was part of the squadron formation when we flew from Acklington to Llanbedr in North Wales. The airfield was practically on the beach and the Officers' Mess was on top of the hill nicely situated amongst some trees. Here we had a few more scrambles against the Luftwaffe and we actually lost two pilots, probably due to enemy action, Williams and the Canadian Brown.

We were not far from Valley where 350 Squadron, the first completely Belgian squadron, was formed (flying and ground personnel) and several times in a Spitfire or with the squadron Magister I flew to Valley to visit several friends, most of whom I had made my escape to

the UK with in 1941.

It was at Llanbedr that Paul Richey left us and 74 Squadron acquired a new CO in the person of Sqn Ldr Peter Matthews DFC. He was also a good leader and a nice man. I liked him very much. And then on the 26th January 1942 the squadron moved to Long Kesh in Northern Ireland. By this time we were equipped with Spitfire Vbs and doing mostly convoy patrols. Rather boring, especially because we never encountered the enemy. How we longed to get back to 11 Group!

On March 25th 1942 the squadron flew to Atcham where I had to leave that great bunch of friends to be posted to 350 (Belgian) Squadron, also based at Atcham. For the last few months I had also become very friendly with Paul Brickhill, the Australian who later wrote such books as *The Dambusters* and *The Great Escape*. On 29th March I left that marvellous unit with my head and my heart full of wonderful souvenirs and I am so proud of having been a pilot in such a fantastic squadron led by such men as Richey and Matthews.

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Bobby Laumans was a pupil at the Flying School of the Belgian Air Force at Wevelghem at the outbreak of the war. He escaped with the Flying School to France and arrived via Marseille and Oran at Oujda, Morocco at the time of French capitulation. He then made his way to Britain, arriving on August 5th 1940. Sent to Tenby, he volunteered for the RAFVR and was transferred to RAF St Athan (on 13th August 1940) and then to the newly formed Franco-Belgian Service Flying School at Odiham (2nd November 1940). After 4 months of instruction he was sent to the SFTS at Ternhill (15th February 1941). He graduated in March 1941 and joined 58 OTU on 2nd June 1941 at Grangemouth. He was posted after training to 74 Squadron on 27th July 1941 at Acklington. As

recounted above his next posting saw his arrival at 350 Squadron on April 3rd 1942. On 1st June the squadron performed target cover for Hurribombers to Bruges and encountered a big formation of FW-190s. During the melee Laumans flying as Blue 3 (Spitfire Mk V - AB173) was shot down near Ostend, but succeeded in baling out before his plane crashed in to the sea. He was in his dinghy for 2 days and 3 nights before being picked up by the Germans and sent as a POW to Stalag Luft III.

Bobby joined SABENA after the War.

Aircraft Mad - Correction!

In Tiger News 46 Jon Mosen told us of his time as a Tiger and especially his affinity with Hunter T.7 XL568. He wrote:

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.

Actually it wasn't Geoff who flew the display. Geoff thinks it was Ted Nance whilst Jon now recalls it was either Ted or Tim Nelson. Jon then wrote:

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.

Geoff comments: There were four RAF race contestants:- Group Captain Ryder (OC RAF Duxford), Squadron Leader Maughan, Flight Lieutenant Williams and Flight Cadet Volkens (a Cranwell cadet). Each contestant made more than one race attempt. I shall confine my remarks to Charles Maughan's attempts. Charles' first trip was on 16th July. On the return trip from France Charles was due to fly with Flt. Lt. R. Jackson (Roly Jackson had been a Tiger in the early '50s) and he had got into Jackson's Hunter 7 which then developed a fault. Charles raced across to my Hunter (XL568) and off we went. On that race attempt Charles' time was 43 minutes 36 seconds. We knew that that time could be beaten as time was wasted while changing aircraft. Charles made two further attempts, the second of which was his winning 'streak' of 40 minutes 44 seconds on 22nd July.

Purely as a matter of interest, Volkens damaged two fingers in the hoist that lifted him from the helicopter landing pad on a Thames mud bank and Ryder had a collision while on the motorbike after leaving The Arc de Triomphe and he sustained a broken leg. To cap it all a Whirlwind helicopter crashed at FAF Villacoublay, our base in Paris.

All the Hunter 7 engines had to be changed. Ah, the 'Good Old Days!'

Tiger Modeller.



In Tiger News 54 we featured member **Ted Edwards** and the balsa wood aircraft that he painstakingly models. We featured a 74 Squadron Hunter and Ted said at the time that 'next on the production line is an Me109'. Here it is!

She's home!

In the last issue we told you of RAF Brampton's Tiger-marked Phantom gate guardian XT914 being returned to Wattisham to take her place with Wattisham Station Heritage. The wings were removed and they and the fuselage were transported by road to her old home and then put together again. There's still work to do on the airframe but it's good to see her in one of the HASs once more.

