

**Tony Hilton** died peacefully at home on 31st May after a long illness surrounded by his close family. Boz Robinson remembers fondly his long-time friend.



*Tony Hilton stands in front of Tony Dean at Horsham St Faith during 74's Hunter days.*

“Hello, you must be the new guy? Let me help you but first I will show you the bar and buy you a drink”. Those were the first words I heard from Tony Hilton in September 1956, the day I joined 74 Squadron. With his typical Cranwellian good manners, Tony made me feel instantly welcome to my new unit and so began a lifelong friendship. A friendship that sadly ended with Tony’s death from a long illness on 31st May 2020. The only comfort we can draw is that he was at home and surrounded by his close family at the end.

My son Symon when told said “he was such fun” – a perfect epitaph for a true gentleman whom we so nearly lost in the summer of 1957 when Tony was flying as my number 2. He called me to say that he had engine trouble and was returning to Horsham St Faith, our base. We had very recently replaced our Meteors with second-hand Hunter 4s from 111 Squadron, and the Avon 100 series engines were prone to surge under hard turning at altitude. Tony had not been privileged to do a Hunter course and had very few hours in the Hunter. He was misled into thinking that there was a problem with his engine, and when he arrived at Horsham to hear ATC calling out “You’re on fire, get out!” and no identifying call sign, he was misled again and in the subsequent crash landing the cockpit of his aircraft broke off and he was ejected, landing in the bang seat in front of the ambulance containing the Station Medical Officer which was racing to another incident. That may well have saved his life for the doctor got Tony immediately into the Norwich and Norfolk Hospital for treatment.

After a long convalescence Tony returned to Horsham and became the ADC to the Sector Commander. Later he regained his flying category and was able to fly his Boss about in the station hack, an Avro Anson at the same time courting his future wife, a member of the WRAF. He asked me to be best man at his wedding in 1959 to Jenny Butler whose father, a Group Captain, had been killed flying a Wellington early in WW2. Not long after, Tony left the RAF and became a personal pilot to VIPs, among whom was Bernie Ecclestone, then Norman Foster (now Lord Foster whom the BBC always call Sir Norman!). Tony sometimes let me fly in the co-pilot’s seat of Norman’s Citation. That was always a delight, especially when they were based at Cannes, Mandelieu.

In recent years since Jenny and he retired to Swanbourne in Buckinghamshire, Tony became an expert on wines and whiskies and I was once more able to take advantage of the Hiltons’ legendary hospitality. The Association will miss them both at reunions but we all certainly will remember a delightful colleague, friend and host. We wish Jenny, and his daughters and family, happiness and comfort in their bereavement.