

## Squadron Leader Neil Davidson



**Neil Davidson**, who was a Tiger at Tengah, died on 25<sup>th</sup> October. Neil Davidson joined 74 from 5 Squadron at Binbrook in the middle of 1967 as Deputy OC A Flight, just before the move from Leuchars to Tengah. Sir John Allison was a first tourist on 5 with Neil before Neil came to 74 and said that both he and his wife were sad to hear the news as Neil was well-liked. Sir John also said that when they were both on 5 Squadron 'most of the pilots were first tourists and the example set by the experienced pilots was particularly important. Neil was kind, sensible and approachable and a very good and reliable pilot himself. His steady presence was an important part of the glue that made it a good squadron for young pilots to be on - or for anyone for that matter.'

Sir John did however offer one small snippet about Neil to balance the picture a little,

with a photo of 5 Squadron pilots (below) on a 1966 Missile Practice Camp (then still the 'Fighter Command Missile Practice Camp') at RAF Valley. To Neil's right is the 5 Squadron JEngO, John Blakely, who himself sent the picture to John Allison and mentioned that, although an engineer, he flew as often as possible. At the end of the MPC he remembers returning to Binbrook in the right hand seat of the Lightning T.5 with Neil in poor weather, with Neil nursing a stonking hangover.



**Left. 5 Squadron MPC at Valley, April 1966. L to R: John Blakely, Neil Davidson, Brian Allchin, 'Bunny' St Aubyn, Bill Gambold, Pete Ginger, Gerry Barr USAF**

Prior to the Lightning, Neil had flown, amongst other types, the Supermarine Attacker and the Scimitar while on a



tour with the Royal Navy and he used to joke that his selection for that tour must have come about when they saw his name, for his initials were R.N. Neil's son Steve remembers that this was on Ark Royal (right) and that the only time his dad felt safe was

when he was flying as life on board was decidedly 'difficult'. Neil was very much older than most of the pilots on 74 (he was 33 when he arrived) but he had a great sense of humour and together with his wife Judy (who sadly died in 2011) they were great social hosts in their married quarter off the Bukit Timah Road. Clive Mitchell remembers him as:

'a very agreeable colleague and an experienced, skilful and utterly reliable pilot' and Ian McBride mentioned that 'on the deployment of the squadron to Tengah, Neil led the first - and only - 3-ship formation into Tengah, escorted by Javelins of 64 Squadron on Day 6.'

Dave Roome has a particular memory of a flight alongside Neil, and mentions it in his book 'Dancing the Skies':

The periodic detachments to the Far East by the Victor tankers continued throughout our time there and we always did some tanking by night during their stay. There had been little enhancement made to the external markings and lighting as they turned the Victor B.1 (Bomber) into the K.1 tanker other than the painting of reference lines on the wing under surface and so on, but improved lighting was not high on the agenda and the drogues themselves had only small 'beta' lights around the basket rim. After a few enthusiastic 'prods' by fighters most of these would have failed, so there was certainly a degree of luck involved in making contact at night. On one particularly dark night Neil Davidson and I were each side of a tanker in contact in cloud and all I had as reference was the underside of the tanker wing. Then suddenly the formation came out of the cloud and as the top surface of the cloud layer slowly fell away beneath us I had the strong feeling that the Victor had pulled up into a very steep climb, almost into the vertical as my 'ground' fell away out of sight below. Although I was sure this had not happened the disorientation was immensely strong and persisted until the tanker gave us permission to break contact and back off, when the night sky and my instruments could confirm that no night aerobatics had been attempted. When we got back on the ground Neil confirmed that he had experienced exactly the same feeling - not at all pleasant!

The squadron diaries are often a source for anecdotes and photographs. Neil seldom figured in these but Dave Roome who holds the diaries, has scanned those pages in which Neil features and a selection is shown below.

**Right. Neil, leading Trevor MacDonald Bennett and Pete Freize into Tengah, escorted by 64 Squadron Javelins - June 1967**



**Left. Neil and Trevor MacDonald Bennett at RAF Gan in the Maldives en route to Singapore - June 1967**

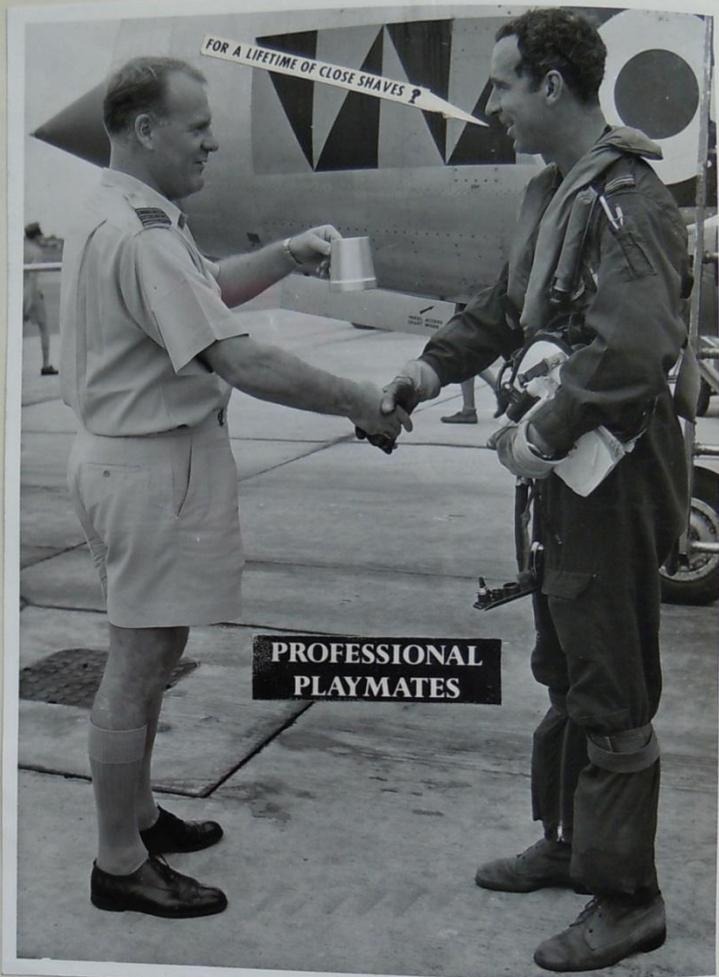


Left. On 11<sup>th</sup> April 1969 the new Tengah Station Commander, Group Captain Peter Latham visited 74 and flew with Neil.

During the last few weeks there has almost a "book" being run in the squadron on the chances of **Neil Davidson** reaching his **1000 hours** on Lightnings before "Tourex". Well, he cut it pretty fine — the photograph was taken at the end of his last trip on the squadron! Loud popping noises were heard and since everyone got a sip from the tankard on its second refill it was also the end of useful work for the day!

That was a Friday and **Neil** and **Judy** left on the following Wednesday for UK and a tour with 5 Sqn at Binbrook, from whence he came to 74 in mid '67.

They very nearly didn't get away on their flight though, as Singapore was under attack from the skies — nothing that we could deal with however. Conservative reports put the amount of rain at 12 inches in 12 hours, and it went on for two days! When the floods fell below 3 feet on the Bukit Timah Road they were taken to the airport by 3 ton truck! Binbrook's weather will be nothing in comparison! Our best wishes go with them both.



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