

Air Vice Marshal Brian 'Boz' Robinson



It is with sadness that we report the death of our Honorary Vice President AVM Boz Robinson on 11th December 2022. Boz moved to Thailand some years ago and his funeral took place at St George's Anglican Church Pattaya in Thailand on 21st December, the country he was deeply attached to and where he had many friends as well as back home in the UK.

Boz became President of the 74(F) Tiger Squadron Association when it reformed in 1992. He remained as such until 2008 when he retired and our current President, Air Marshal Cliff Spink, agreed to take on the role, with Boz becoming Honorary Vice President.

Cliff has written: *The passing of Boz Robinson has I know saddened all in the aviation community, not least those of us in the 74 Squadron Association. Boz was exceedingly proud of his time with the Tigers and as first our President and then as Honorary Vice-President he was always enmeshed in what we did. A distinguished pilot, he simply loved flying and this shone through in his many achievements in the Royal Air Force, rising to the rank of Air Vice-Marshal before he retired. Following his tremendous career in the RAF he still could be found in the cockpit of a variety of aircraft and he became a hugely respected display pilot. His drive and enthusiasm were infectious, and even when he settled in Thailand he kept in regular and meaningful contact with the Association. He will be sorely missed.*

Boz joined the RAF in 1954, was appointed Pilot Officer the following year and training completed, joined the Tigers at RAF Horsham St Faith as a Flying Officer in September 1956. The squadron was flying Meteors but was soon to exchange them for Hunters. Ian Cadwallader was on the squadron at the same time.

Boz and I both joined 74 Squadron on Meteor 8s in 1956. We were both 20 years old and I think by some years the youngest and most inexperienced Meteor pilots in the Air Force. Boz was always very competitive: he owned a new Austin A40 car and my first memory of him was competing against himself, always trying to reduce the time it took to drive from his home at the time (which was I think near Birmingham) back to Horsham, usually on a Sunday night.

We both really enjoyed flying the Meteor, even though most other fighter squadrons had Hunters and they could fly faster and get higher than us, although at low level we could more than compete in dogfights.

After we got Hunters, being based so near to the East Coast we did a lot of our flying over it, so it was not uncommon for crew room discussion to turn to survival. Perhaps the RAF had thought about it too as they asked for volunteers to be dropped into the sea in winter in standard flying clothing from a small Naval vessel, with the equipment a pilot would have after ejection, excluding the parachute. Boz volunteered and he must have written a paper or a report about this experience afterwards which is probably still on file somewhere, but I remember him saying that any information the authorities had published about how long it would take to get into a dinghy in such conditions was complete rubbish! He said the shock when he hit the water was unbelievable, but he did get into the dinghy without really knowing what he was doing. The Navy quickly pulled him out and warmed him up.

While flying Hunters with 74 Boz had an engine failure over Norfolk in the vicinity of Marham. He put out a call to the radar station he was working with and they suggested he could do a flame out landing at Marham where he would have a choice of 2 long runways, both longer than our one runway at Horsham. But Boz had decided he had enough height to get back to Horsham where he knew the controllers and the approach area and so forth. I don't recall the wind direction at the time but he said afterwards that he was a bit high on final and a bit fast. My memory tells me that he crossed the runway threshold doing 200 knots having put down full flap. He landed the Hunter 'firmly' and applied maximum braking: the aircraft stopped at the far end of the runway with literally red-hot brakes and two rubber stripes the length of the runway.

On a personal note, my wife Heather and I stayed with Boz and his wife once in a lovely old house they had in the depths of the Devon countryside. It had a large lawn where Boz introduced us to croquet: he also had the use of a small aircraft and took us both on separate flights around the local countryside.

One of Boz's great achievements was to teach himself Russian and partly because of that he was selected to serve as the UK Military Attaché in Moscow.

I did not have much communication with him when he moved to Thailand, just a Christmas card or two, then I got a letter from very good friends here in New Zealand who told me about the serious medical problem he had and that he was returning to England for a decent beer before he died. Initially of course I was shocked and found it hard to believe, until I got a short note from Boz himself in the UK. It was time to say goodbye to a great friend.

After 74, and by now a Flight Lieutenant, Boz went to the Oxford University Air Squadron as QFI, then in 1962 to 231 OCU to convert to the Canberra before joining 73 Squadron in February 1963. Also in 1962 he was the RAF Rally Champion (which lends credence to Ian Cadwallader's recollection of Boz always trying to beat his own time on long car runs!). In 1966 he moved to the Canberra Trials and Tactical Evaluation Unit. Promoted to Squadron Leader on New Year's Day 1967 he joined the Directorate of Flight Safety. Whilst there he

became editor of the Flight Safety section of *Air Clues*. It was around this time that Boz discovered bobsleighbing and excelled at it. He was the RAF Bobsleigh Champion in 1968, 1971 and 1972.

After his time at the Inspectorate of Flight Safety Boz attended the RAF Staff College and then the Central Flying School. In April 1971 he was appointed OC No 1 Squadron of No 4 FTS at Valley. Dave Roome recalls: *I first met Boz when I arrived at Valley direct from CFS, learning to be a flying instructor. When 74 disbanded in Singapore, four of us were posted to CFS at Little Rissington. Of the four, Nigel Holder chose to instruct in basic flying training on the Jet Provost, while three went on to the Gnat to teach the advanced phase of pilot training. Boz was at the time commanding No 1 Squadron of 4 Flying Training School (FTS) and Mike Rigg was very happy to find himself joining Boz's squadron, while Roger Pope and I joined 2 Squadron 'upstairs', despite Boz's suggestion to the Valley hierarchy that all ex-74 guys should stick together!*

Two years later he was in Germany on the Taceval Team at HQ 2ATAF. In June 1974 and by now a Wing Commander he was on the Directing Staff of the Canadian Forces Command and Staff College and became an Honorary Member of 411 Squadron RCAF which operated the De Havilland Canada Otter from CFB Downsview outside Toronto. From September 1976 Boz was Chief Instructor on 4FTS and the CFS Fast Jet Squadron at Valley, and two years later he was promoted to Group Captain and assumed command of RAF Valley itself having just converted to flying the Blackburn Buccaneer. In July 1980 he moved to NATO HQ where he stayed for over three years before being promoted again (to Air Commodore) and moving to Moscow as Defence and Air Attaché. Returning to the UK on September 1986 Boz became Director of Organisation and Quartering, then from 1988 carried out a RAF Long Term Deployment Study. On 1st January 1989 he was promoted to Air Vice Marshal and headed up the department as AOC responsible for Directly Administered Units at the Air Ministry.

Boz certainly didn't slow down once had had retired from the RAF. From 1991 he became a Senior Partner in Belmont Consultants, advising on aviation matters, particularly in Eastern Europe. From 1992 to 2002 he was a display pilot with Kennet Aviation, the Hunter Flying Club and Thunder City flying the Gnat and Hunter. He was the joint winner of the King Hussein Memorial Sword at RIAT 2001 and his last Hunter display was flown at Stellenbosch in South Africa in 2002. Privately, he flew and displayed his own Bucker Jungmann.

Boz moved to Thailand in 2008 and became very much a part of the English Community there. He set up a company – Boz Asia Co Ltd, selling shoes – of which he was CEO. But he never forgot his close affinity with 74 Squadron, the squadron which had set him on his long, successful RAF career and he would regularly send photos and snippets of information about his life in Thailand. The Association was never very far from his mind.