



Number II(AC) Squadron Newsletter



May 2020 – April 2021



OC II(AC) Sqn Introduction

The last 12 months since our last update to you have been extraordinary for the global population and I extend my sympathy to all who have lost loved ones through this pandemic.

Whilst the country locked down, Shiny Two swung into action, adapting to the new ways of working: wearing masks, maintaining spacing and sanitising hands and equipment constantly. We all knew it was absolutely critical to maintain the defence of the UK through Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) 24/7. The Squadron also deployed to Op SHADER from May to Oct 2020, maintaining a constant air presence in Iraq and Syria. Whilst deployed we were tasked to concurrently pivot daily between the Levant and the Black Sea region, an extraordinary challenge that required a full weapons and software reload between missions, as well as careful planning and engagement with multiple coalition and UK forces for coordination.

Since our return to the UK we have welcomed several new pilots and have been training hard in preparation for holding high readiness in 2021, whilst also supporting the UK government in delivering Covid testing and vaccination programmes with some of our key personnel. I hope you enjoy reading Uncle Bill's excellent account of what Shiny Two have been up to since we were last in touch. Finally, I trust 2021 will be a year of vaccinations and renewed freedom for you all and a chance to meet again in 2022.

OC II(AC) Sqn

Setting the Scene

The Sqn's focus in the first 3 months of 2020 was the RAF's first NATO CAPEVAL for 15 years, which we passed with flying colours, awarded a rare 'Excellent' by the evaluators. The Sqn recovered at the end of March just as the first Covid lockdown commenced, with the focus on sustaining QRA at Lossiemouth and preparing for the Sqn's imminent deployment to Cyprus in late May in support of Op SHADER.

Apr 20 – Mar 21

With the UK locked down, the nature of Typhoon operations meant almost all personnel had to work on site to deliver outputs. The raft of COVID mitigation measures which included moving all meetings and briefs on to Skype, physically separating shifts, sanitising everyone and everything, wearing of masks and social distancing, made delivery of outputs more challenging than usual. The development of RAF Lossiemouth was also well underway with both runways alternately closed for resurfacing, and the installation of major new P-8 infrastructure progressing rapidly. This required careful planning for the Wing.

Despite restrictions imposed by COVID and construction work, the Sqn successfully completed a week of live

weaponry training at Cape Wrath and Tain Air Weapons Ranges. This was followed by a couple of weeks of Close Air Support training by day and night with Joint Terminal Attack Controllers operating across North Scotland, generating complex moving and multiple target scenarios to challenge the pilots.



A Typhoon loaded with a single Paveway IV Laser-Guided Bomb a Laser Designator Pod overflying the tower at Garvie.

In mid-May the Sqn held a "socially distanced" Medal Ceremony to allow the presentation of Operational Service Medals and Clasps to most of the Sqn in recognition of their contribution on the Sqn's last deployment to Op SHADER in Spring 2019. One pilot was awarded a NATO Medal for Op AZOTIZE, the UK's ongoing contribution to Baltic Air Policing. A number of pilots were also awarded their Combat Ready patches, an NCO received a Flight Safety Award for spotting a very small loose article in a cockpit, while another who had recently graduated from technical training at Cosford was awarded the prize for being best apprentice in his trade in 2019.



II(AC) Sqn – still very shiny, and also socially distanced.

With presentations made and training complete, attention turned to deploying to Cyprus for Op SHADER where everyone would have to quarantine. Personnel would usually deploy on a gruelling 13hr overnight bus journey to Brize Norton then fly out to Cyprus on Voyager. Thankfully this was not the case for the Advance Party which was flown in style from Kinloss to Brize in a BAE 146 and then on to Cyprus, and was much reduced for the Main Party of 90 who only had endure a 5-hour road trip to Prestwick to catch their Voyager flight direct to Akrotiri.

The Advance Party quarantined for 2 weeks in a block at Akrotiri while the Main Party were billeted at Camp Radio

Sonde at Episkopi. All accommodation was austere, but Shiny Two had planned meticulously and deployed with lacons full of sports kit, board games, films and rations.



Need to pass time in quarantine? Build a sundial!

Wifi was excellent, and the Army team provided opportunities for a BBQ, with a beer delivery from Akrotiri for Saturday evenings. In-boxes were cleared, fitness peaked, and plenty of entertainment was generated with quizzes and even a school sports day event complete with prizes. Following a busy few months, the rest was welcome and a day on the beach post 'release' was much appreciated.



Radio Sonde Egg and Spoon Race. Never have so many concentrated so hard on so many things so small.....



Refreshments arrive at Camp Radio Sonde

With freedom regained, the Sqn quickly got into its stride and formally took over the Op SHADER task from 3(F) Sqn on 19 Jun.



Op SHADER Night Flight See-Off – Akrotiri

Back at Lossiemouth our German Exchange Officer deployed with 6 Sqn to Lithuania on Op AZOTIZE for 2 months. Meanwhile, the Sqn Rear Party proved invaluable in generating 11 serviceable aircraft in just 2 months. Three were roulemented to Op SHADER; the remainder were delivered across the Wing ready for the Bolthole deployment of QRA to RAF Leuchars and flying to RAF Kinloss as the Main Runway intersection was resurfaced. Flying training activities were led by 1(F) Sqn at Kinloss, while IX(B) Sqn led the QRA operation at Leuchars with II(AC) and 6 Sqn engineers and pilots supporting both efforts throughout the summer and early autumn.

Meanwhile, back in Cyprus the op tempo and engineering workload was extremely high. From day one two major avionics upgrades had to be delivered across the fleet on a tight two-week timeline, and three engines were also due a change. This work required aircraft to be "clean", so the workload for all trades was extremely high. Simultaneously, several live weapon drops were made and the number of aircraft deployed was increased by one to provide COVID resilience. Despite the exceptionally high workload, the Sqn never dropped the ball and an extraordinary 100% sortie rate was maintained throughout the deployment.

In the meantime, at Lossiemouth the Uncle and Holding Officer conducted some research for the Sqn Historian, Hans Onderwater. To cut a very long story short, in Feb 1945 the Sqn was operating Spitfire XIVs from Gilze-Rijen, Holland in support of Op VERITABLE, the Allied crossing of the Rhine. The second pair airborne on 8 February 45 was Flt Lt Kemp RAF and Flt Lt Malcolmson RNZAF. Their task was to reconnoitre the Reichswald Forest which covers the Dutch German Border. The weather was poor and Malcolmson's aircraft developed a problem which led to him attempting a forced landing just behind the Allied line. Sadly, he crashed on his final approach and was killed. Malcolmson's body was recovered by Canadian forces and he was laid to rest in the Canadian War Cemetery at Bergen-op-Zoom. Earlier this year the crash site was re-

discovered but there was confusion over what airframe was involved.



Flt Lt Malcolmson (left) with Fg Off Blain (both RNZAF), taken at Gilze-Rijen on 6 Feb 45, 2 days before Malcolmson was killed.

A few days of research on the Sqn and with the Air Historical Branch confirmed that the airframe was the one recorded in the F540 – RM805.

As we moved into Jul, the paucity of civilian flights between Cyprus and Scotland and COVID quarantine restrictions made rotation of pilots through Lossiemouth for simulator sorties and mid-deployment swaps for engineers somewhat challenging. However, OC Mission Support Flight (MSF), excelled in his secondary role as Sqn Travel Agent and most moves were made without incident.

All was running remarkably smoothly until the night sortie on 8 Jul 20 when the lead of a pair of Typhoons suffered compound electrical failures. The pilot did exceptionally well in diverting his crippled aircraft into Al Assad Air Base in Iraq, where he was met by US Forces. The drama was not over at this point when the failures also resulted in his canopy remaining firmly locked. With ambient temperatures over 40°C this was a very dangerous situation. Remaining calm, and through the wonders of modern technology, the auth in Cyprus was able to talk to him in cockpit, the decision was eventually made to use a fireman's angle grinder to cut him out. He was later awarded a Green Endorsement in his logbook for his superb handling of the emergency.

The Sqn quickly sent a recovery party to assess the damage and remove the aircraft's weapons. It was apparent that a team and equipment from the UK would be required to return the aircraft to a flyable state. A herculean effort saw spares and manpower assembled in the UK, transported to Cyprus where personnel had to quarantine, and then on to Iraq. Al Assad finally bid farewell to their visitor on 10 Aug and everyone eventually made their way back to the UK.

Despite the challenges and complexities of mid-deployment roulements, the aircraft recovery from Iraq, aircraft modifications and another planned jet swap from the UK, the Sqn maintained the 100% sortie rate throughout July and August. Back at Lossiemouth Bolthole commenced and the rear party teamed up with their counterparts from the other sqns to deliver flying at Kinloss and QRA at Leuchars,

and to recover a few hangar queens at Lossiemouth for distribution across the Wing once the airfield reopened.

By the start of September in Cyprus, the Sqn had settled into a steady routine and were starting to think about handover to XI(F) Sqn in a month. However, they were then tasked at short notice to deliver the new Op SOLIDARITY: the UK's contribution to increasing Allied presence in the Black Sea Region. The mission sets and locations were varied and required meticulous planning, from Pathfinder missions to Escort, Close Air Support, and Air Maritime Integration with multiple nations. This planning was achieved despite minimal manning and long daily missions on Op SHADER across day and night shifts.

From an engineering perspective, Op SOLIDARITY and Op SHADER missions required a complete avionics reload and a full weapons suite re-role - a full shift of work per pair of aircraft. With a switch between theatres conducted daily, this was a leviathan task. Once again, the Shiny Two engineering team excelled, with an unexpected 100% sortie rate maintained in both theatres. This was an outstanding effort which would be formally recognised in March 2021.



An inquisitive Flanker somewhere over the Black Sea.

Shiny Two handed over to XI(F) Sqn on 2 October and returned to Lossiemouth via Prestwick for 2 weeks of well-earned leave. Meanwhile, the Lossiemouth team continued to support Bolthole and, as on-line courses replaced face-face learning, started to reduce the backlog of generic and specialist training.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic halted many fund-raising activities, it did not stop one of our Chief Techs. During the deployment Akrotiri, despite punishing heat and humidity, he ran 10 kms every day for 50 days, raising £2500 for his chosen charities of Frimley Park and Beatson cancer treatment centres. He completed the challenge with a lap around the Akrotiri running track, joined by many members of the Sqn, and cheered in by many others.

In early October we were informed that the Sqn's planned Ex WESTERN ZEPHYR deployment to Mountain Home AFB, Idaho in February 21 was cancelled due to the ongoing Covid pandemic, which was surging across the States. Instead a new trilateral deployment to France, Ex ATLANTIC TRIDENT, was tabled for May 2021.

Whilst the Sqn returned in time for the second lockdown to be administered across Scotland, there was also good news.

Thanks to excellent contractor support, the Bolthole main runway resurfacing would be completed before the Sqn returned to work. There was also cause for celebration when 2 of our Flt Cdrs received AOC 1Gp Commendations in the Queen's Birthday Honours. One for his implementation of comprehensive counter-Covid measures on the Sqn and the for his strong leadership at Lossiemouth and on operations.

With the main runway open and everyone back at work, the Sqn pressed ahead with work-up training in advance of its next stint as the UK's High Readiness Sqn in Summer 21. As is the norm in this phase of the readiness cycle, several experienced personnel were posted with many being most deservedly promoted en-route. We thank them all for their efforts on Shiny Two and wish them all the best in their new endeavours. As experienced personnel departed, those remaining advanced up the supervisory ladders in the air and ground environments and were replaced by others who arrived from the School of Technical Training at RAF Cosford and Typhoon Operational Conversion Unit at RAF Coningsby.

With Covid cases continuing to surge in the UK, Sqn personnel were deployed on Op RESCRIPT - the military support to the NHS roll out of testing and vaccination centres. In mid-Dec the Sqn Operations Officer (OpsO) was deployed on this Op to RAF Leeming. She quickly found herself running a testing centre in Huddersfield at the height of the second wave but, despite wearing PPE and meticulously following standards some of the team succumbed to the virus. Without the opportunity to celebrate Christmas as usual, the Sqn still delivered the annual awards for Pilot, SNCO and Airman of the Year to three very worthy recipients.

With pilots current to cover QRA over the festive period, we took time out to celebrate a quiet Christmas and New Year in isolation that was like no other. There was much cause for celebration in the New Years Honours List however, when a Flt Cdr and NCO were awarded AOC 1 Gp Commendations for their outstanding efforts on CAPEVAL and QRA respectively.

On return to work after the break OC MSF was activated for Op RESCRIPT and was tasked with coordinating the military response to the NHS's request for support in Dumfries and Galloway for 3 months. With OC MSF and the OpsO concurrently deployed, the Intelligence Officer had her work cut out covering the 3 roles, as well as being Project Officer for Ex ATLANTIC TRIDENT. Concurrently, the Sqn bade a fond farewell to our superb trio of Admin personnel as the military begins to centralise Human Resource Management into regional centres. The loss of this hugely supportive team will be felt by the Sqn in the months to come, both at home and when deployed.

By mid-January both runways were back in operation. Lossiemouth is now capable of handling the A330 Voyager, which should reduce the many hours spent on "Happy

Busses" travelling to and from Prestwick or Brize Norton. Meanwhile Shiny Two completed a lengthy stint as the Duty QRA Sqn and focussed efforts on generating high readiness capabilities ahead of Ex ATLANTIC TRIDENT in May.

Flying ops also got off to a good start but a week of minus 15°C, heavy snow, freezing fog and strong winds meant more simulator time than live hours in February. With our ability to link four missionized simulators together and fully debrief using specialist IT, we were able to compensate and progress our critical training.



Nice new shiny runway covered in snow solidified by a frost of 15.2 deg C – not easy to shift!

We also lost two long serving pilots to the Qualified Weapons Instructors Course at Coningsby with one of the pair being presented with his Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service by the Stn Cdr after his final sortie on Shiny Two.

In March the diverse training regime ranged from QRA and Air-Air to Air-Ground sorties as the Sqn trained up new pilots, created new pairs and fours leaders and refreshed skills in strafe and precision bombing. We also supported Ex COBRA WARRIOR, a series of demanding UK/USAF large-scale flying exercises flown off the East Coast of the UK.

In 2017 Shiny Two was awarded the Dacre Trophy for Operational Efficiency. In February 2021, it was recognised by AOC 1 Gp with the Operational Excellence Award for its outstanding performance in 2020 on Op COLD IGLOO (CAPEVAL), Op SHADER and Op SOLIDARITY (the Citation is on the last page). The presentation of these prestigious awards clearly demonstrates that the Sqn has not rested on its laurels and continues to live up to its motto of "Second to None".

March has focused on Sqn preparedness for deployment to France on Ex ATLANTIC TRIDENT in May, training with 4th and 5th Generation aircraft from the French and US Air Forces in the Bay of Biscay. With Covid a continual challenge, coping with ever-changing quarantine and testing regimes has focused the planning section of the Sqn. With the three other Sqns concurrently deployed on Ops around the globe, II(AC) Sqn also have the lead on ensuring

QRA is maintained without falter during this challenging period utilising the rear parties from all sqns.

Finally, a fun story – “One Little Piggy Goes to Shiny Two.....”. On Thu 11 March the Sqn had 4 jets on the pan engines running and ready to taxi when a piglet appeared and trotted down the line of aircraft, conducting its own inspection! The amiable little porker was soon apprehended and detained in the Hit Team wagon until the aircraft had taxied.

A search of the fence line found a pig-sized hole which has since been repaired. “Porky” was a very lucky pig, we usually have bacon butties on a Fri but he was declared to be too cute to eat and was returned to the farmer!



Porky Pig successfully contained in the Hit Team Bus.

In sum, Shiny Two has had another extremely busy and very successful year in which it has delivered every task asked of it, both at home and overseas, despite the global pandemic.

The Sqn is due to deploy to France in May, hold very high readiness throughout the summer and then enjoy an Ex MAGIC CARPET in Oman in the autumn prior to our next Op SHADER deployment in the New Year. Until next year.....

Uncle Bill, Mar 21

With thanks to all those who contributed photographs.

PS – Deployment to France was cancelled due to Covid.



No. 1 Group Award

Operational Performance

No. II (Army Cooperation) Squadron

During its 2020 operational tour of duty from RAF Akrotiri, II(AC) Sqn achieved 100% launch success across two operational theatres that included delivering on OP SHADER and Op SOLIDARITY, a 'new Op' of a significantly different nature. OP SOLIDARITY required the Sqn to work alongside our EUCOM and NATO partners in the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions against an entirely unique mission set. The Sqn demonstrated outstanding capacity and agility to deliver impeccably against this tasking since SOLIDARITY required multiple role fit changes and software insertions to re-role the aircraft from its Op SHADER setting. SOLIDARITY was planned, managed and executed by the Sqn while in constant contact with the drum beat of missions in support of SHADER.

In addition, the Sqn shouldered the burden of incorporating NDP1b (National Delta Package 1b) and NGIFF (introduce Mode 5) software packages on all 7 deployed ac. This work was an additional 'overhead' delivered from their own resource that optimised the Typhoon Force's contribution to both ops. The Sqn overcame COVID-limited manpower and delicate synchronisation of effort to complete the mods without any impact to their output. II (AC) Sqn demonstrated superb flexibility and op innovation from its personnel who used their skill sets to dynamically blend a counter-insurgency, land-focussed Op (SHADER) with an unfamiliar, information ops-focussed mission. All of this was achieved against the backdrop of COVID 19 applying additional deployment burden and stress on its personnel and the wider families.