



Jim Jewell

Peter Jewell – pictured left handling a rock python whilst on a survival course at Tengah – was always known as Jim, after the actor and comedian of the 20s to the 50s. He was born in Hong Kong in 1933 and was captured there when the Japanese invaded at Christmas 1941. His father, who was serving in the Royal Navy, was killed in the invasion and the child and his mother were then interned by the Japanese until liberation in 1945. Jim remembered the period as dreadful, with beatings being common for ‘failure to bow’ or ‘failure to salute’; meals were scant and generally foul, with small amounts of rice and weevils. Although the camp also housed J G Ballard, the author of the book ‘Empire of the Sun’ and, incidentally Anthony Fraser, who later joined the RAF, flew Buccaneers and became Commandant of The RAF Central Flying School, the conditions were nothing like that portrayed in the film of that name.

Jim and his mother returned to the UK and after leaving school he joined the Service and trained as a pilot in Canada, being commissioned in 1954. Jim converted to the Lightning in March 1962 at RAF Middleton St George, then commanded by Ken Goodwin, and later flew with 56 Squadron before joining 74 in 1966, just as the squadron was taking delivery of the Lightning F.6. Following the fighter tradition of ‘naming’ their aircraft, Jim was allocated XR770, with the tail letter of ‘Charlie’, but BAC Warton ‘borrowed’ it for the summer and painted it in full Royal Saudi Air Force colours to represent a Mk53, displaying it at the SBAC flying display at Farnborough that year, as the contract to sell the type to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had just been agreed. Jim, who had just taken over as the squadron diarist from Heinz Frick, inserted a picture from the display into the diary and claimed that all 74 Squadron pilots were now qualified on the Mk53!

Mention of the diary is very appropriate, as Jim turned this large scrapbook into a work of art, with every page chronicling events of note, both serious and humorous. A detachment to RAF Valley to fire missiles (a Missile Practice Camp) early in 1967 resulted in a two-page cartoon describing the highs and lows of the fortnight, and in mid-1967 the move of the entire squadron from Leuchars to Tengah was similarly recorded. When Tony Doidge had the arrester hook on his aircraft drop one night (the Lightning hook was a one-shot affair and could not be retracted in flight) and tried to land beyond the approach end cable (he landed a foot short and found himself stationary in the published 1200 feet!), Jim’s highly detailed drawing of a Lightning ripped in half with the lower half stopped in the cable and the upper half, with Tony’s feet protruding below the cockpit and still travelling ahead down the runway, recorded the event. Likewise, when Rick Lea, learning how to take on fuel from a Victor tanker, hit the drogue too hard and left the head of the probe broken off in the ‘basket’, the diary showed a medieval knight in full armour and brandishing a lance, with the caption ‘a

little too enthusiastic'. Incidentally, the tanker squadron, 214 from Marham, presented the probe head back to 74, mounted on a wooden plinth and sporting a plaque saying *Tiger, Tiger, burning bright, did you blunt your end last night?* Jim would take a minimum of 2 hours per page of the diary as Dave Roome, who would take on this responsibility when Jim left, would testify, having learnt at the feet of the master.

Jim was quite a reserved character who did not agree with the high-spirited activities so beloved of Ken Goodwin, preferring instead to do such productive things as the design he produced at Tengah for a hi-fi unit. These drawings were converted in Singapore into a thing of beauty, a three-piece wooden cabinet upon a similar wooden base. The three identically shaped units for a record deck, a tuner/amplifier and a reel-to-reel tape deck, were built and were so popular that very many others followed from the carpentry works downtown.

There were many social events during the squadron's time in Singapore and one very popular trip was for a group of families to go over the causeway into Malaya and drive up the east coast to such beaches as Jason's Bay, camping out on the beach for a long weekend. However, on one of these trips, Jim wandered off from the group and returned a short time later carrying a rubber sandal in which was a (real) lower leg. He deposited it in front of Ken Goodwin, saying 'what do you want to do with this Boss?' The foot was taken to the local police station and handed over to a policeman who simply put it under the counter and said 'thank you, goodbye'. The following week, the newspaper *The Malay Mail* simply reported that the leg was from a body of a Malay which had been found having been tied hand and foot to a railway line. The body also showed signs of having been shot in the back. The article ended with the comment from the Chief of Police for Johor State - 'foul play has not yet been ruled out!'

Jim left 74 to return to the OCU staff at Coltishall in mid-1969, where he also flew the Spitfire and Hurricane with the Battle of Britain Flight, later going on to Brize Norton to fly the VC10. After leaving the Service he flew the B-17 *Sally B* on the display circuit (seen right at Norwich in 1987). One amusing story which came out at his funeral and memorial service in February concerned Jim's early days on the VC10, when his new boss asked him what the last aircraft was that he had flown before coming to Brize. Jim answered truthfully that his last flight at Coltishall had been in a Spitfire, at which the Wing Commander said 'I hope you don't find the speed of the VC10 too much for you!'



With thanks to Dave Roome for writing this obituary.