



Air Marshal Clifford Spink CB CBE FCMI FRAeS

Cliff started his flying career on the Jet Provost at Cranwell followed by advanced flying training on the Gnat. A period of tactics/weapons training on the Hunter preceded his Operational Conversion Training on the Lightning at RAF Coltishall. He then served with 111(F) Sqn at RAF Wattisham flying the Mk3/5 Lightning (weekends were spent as CFI of the local Gliding Club). Following a weapons instructor course he was reposted to 'Treble One' before moving to 56(F) Sqn in Cyprus on the Mk 6 Lightning. It was during this period that the Turks invaded the island and 56 Sqn were heavily involved in the subsequent air operations. The squadron returned to Wattisham in 1975 and Cliff finally left the Lightning Force the following year, having amassed 1,300 hours on the 'most exhilarating rocket ship any young man could wish to fly'.

A ground tour followed and during this period (playing truant from his desk) he reacquainted himself with the Chipmunk to stay sane. In 1979 a refresher on JP5 followed by some Hunter FGA 9 weapons training preceded his introduction to the Phantom FGR2 at Coningsby. After a short course it was back to 111(F) Sqn now flying a mix of FGR2/FG1 Phantom at RAF Leuchars. Cliff was to be associated on and off with the F4 for the next 10 years and this included 2 ½ years as the Squadron Commander of 74(F) Sqn, 'The Tigers', flying the F4J (UK), and a year in the Falklands as Station Commander of Mount Pleasant Airfield. Aside from flying the F4M in the South Atlantic, he also flew the Hercules and the Sea King helicopter. Returning to the UK, he converted to the Tornado F3, before taking command of RAF Coningsby. A couple of weeks later he went to Saudi Arabia as the Tornado Detachment Commander at Dhahran for the duration of the Gulf War. Back at Coningsby in April 91, he had his first trip in a BBMF Hurricane and in the next two years he also flew the Spitfire II, V, XIX in addition to the Tornado. The end of 1992 was to see a drop in Cliff's front line fighter flying, although he stayed qualified on Tornado, Hawk and Nimrod until he finished as a Group Commander in 1998.

Importantly however, Cliff continued to fly the Warbirds following his introduction to them on the BBMF. The majority of this flying has been done at Duxford and he regards himself as one of the 'luckiest and most privileged pilots' to have flown a variety of famous and historic aircraft. These include: Spitfire II, V, IX, XI, XIV, XVI, XIX; Hurricane II, X; Bf109G; Buchon; Mustang; Sea Fury; Corsair; Thunderbolt; Kittyhawk; Wildcat; Polikarpov I-153; T-28 Trojan; Vampire, T33 Silver Star, F86A Sabre and Hunter.