

Boggies, Top Hats and Canes

In 1958, as a recently winged sergeant, I was at 75 Squadron, at the time, 78 Wing's Sabre Conversion Unit, under the command of Major Harry Sealy, on exchange from the USAF.

The Wing, was in the throes of 'Sabre Ferry', to relocate to Butterworth, leaving 75 behind, as a squadron in its own right. This status upgrade saw Wing Commander J. I. (Bay) Adams posted in as C.O. with Sealy to be A flight commander, a very successful blend, as the two men were as chalk and cheese. Harry a lovable bear of a man always had a giraffe of martini in his freezer and Bay Adams, a rip shit and bust type, with a total disregard for bullshit in any form. Together, a great pair of people to work for.

Of the squadron pilots, who had come off the OTU course, I was the most recently winged and by the time we'd made it to the 75 squadron crew room, they'd all been commissioned except me and for the best part of that year, I was the only pilot in a Sergeant's Mess that had historically, been knee deep in them. There was a small plaque over the bar, reading, "Raynes, the last of his tribe."

Just a few days after Adam's arrival as I was trying to instil a sense of discipline in these young bograts, he came into the crew room declaring, 'Lads, we need an emblem. Get off your bums, grab a piece of chalk and get to work on the blackboard with your best ideas. This prompted a flurry of activity, a cloud of chalk dust, and a couple of ridiculous and one or two, not so ridiculous contenders on the blackboard.

He came back, the following day, pointed at my hat and cane, said, that's it. Raynes, get down to equipment section, go straight to the SEO, we don't deal with boys, and pick up tins of black and white paint, and a couple of brushes. There's a bird in the back of the hanger doing maintenance and just waiting for a hat and cane. Go to it.

Two hours later, the hat and cane had come alive, on just a white background. The diamond pattern surrounding it came some time later. Not sure what happened to the cane, but the sneaky bastards dropped it sometime later, when I was out of the country. Clearly, my art, exceeded my disciplinary skills.

I still get a warm feeling every time I see, sixty years on, this beautiful aeroplane flying around wearing my colours.