

# SANDOWN SUPER SQUADRON SAVES THE DAY AS WEATHER BATTERS BRAVES!!

Despite some gorgeous weather as our Whitelink Ferry sailed into Freshwater on the Isle of Wight around Friday tea-time the forecast for Saturday, when Bader Braves were scheduled to take to the skies, was far from encouraging. At our Friday evening meeting Sandown Airport Manager, Chris James, was trying to be very upbeat and reassuring but even he had to confess to holding a doubt or two regarding the forecast blustery conditions.

However, despite the breezy conditions, the weather as we drove the short distance to the airfield at 08.30 was quite encouraging; broken cloud, good visibility, quite warm and no hint of rain. By the time we had set things up and had cuppa No 1 Chris and his colleagues had prepared their aeroplanes and were already having a briefing meeting regarding flight plans and routings. For those of you familiar with the Isle of Wight



the plan was to take off in a south-westerly direction crossing the coast somewhere around Ventnor before turning right and following the cliffs along towards Blackgang Chine before making another right turn to head inland passing over Carisbrooke Castle and Newport, on towards Cowes and Osborne House before a further right passing over Ryde and Brading before landing back at the airport. This would give a flight of around 20-25 minutes for each Brave.

There was just time for the pilots and helpers to have a quick coffee before the first Brave of the day arrived and after a quick briefing and the usual formalities of form filling, it was straight into the action. It's a fairly long taxi to the far end of the runway and over a slight hump which makes a visual on the actual take-off fairly difficult; by the time the aircraft pass back by our vantage point at the clubhouse, they are already at about 100ft as they climb away on the outward leg. To observers it was clear that the breeze was fairly gusty as, quite apart from being conscious of it on the ground, the outbound aircraft was visibly quite "twitchy" as it disappeared into the distance. Just a few minutes later the second aeroplane piloted by Neil, was on its way closely followed by the remaining two aircraft.



Most of the Braves for morning flights had arrived or were being checked in. Whilst they waited for their turn to arrive there was plenty for them to see and do. A car boot sale, a regular Saturday occurrence organised by the local Rotary Club at the airport, was in full swing and Dan, proprietor of the airfield, was busy giving the Braves a white knuckle ride on his very "sporty" hovercraft. It is a fascinating machine that can achieve amazing speeds along the open spaces of an airfield, certainly not a ride for the faint-hearted but a

real adrenaline rush for those willing to take the challenge. However, as you will appreciate,

a hovercraft rides on a cushion of air and has no direct contact with the ground so when the wind picked up it made the hovercraft very difficult to control and so in the interest of safety Dan decided to curtail operations and his machine was stabled .... sadly (or maybe – fortunately!!) just as I had plucked up the courage to give it a go!!



Once again our Braves event was favoured by the attendance of the local branch of the Jaguar Car Owners Club and a number of super cars were lined up for the Braves to wonder at – I even saw a couple of dads drawling as they were transported back to their youth or fantasised over Morse!!

There was an ample supply of great food available throughout the day

from the restaurant or the magnificent BBQ pit which was a huge construction capable of supplying a range of cooking options, for us it was BBQ. Our event coincided with The Combined Services Day in Sandown and following her official duties at the annual parade we were graced with a visit by Gioia Minghella-Giddens, High Sherriff of The Isle of Wight who spent time talking to the Braves and their parents as well as the pilots and many volunteers before taking her leave.



But by mid-afternoon the weather had worsened considerably; not only had the wind really picked up but visibility was rapidly deteriorating and there was a hint of drizzle in the air, a hint that quickly developed into something more serious. There was no option other than for Chris to make the decision to suspend operations for an hour and give the weather a chance to improve. Alas, not to be and by 4.00pm flying had to be abandoned for the day leaving five or six very sad Bader Braves who had missed out.



Not all was lost though for the pilots of our Sandown Super Squadron were huddled together over cups of tea and steaming tablets as they examined the local met forecast. It wasn't long before Chris approached me with the offer of reconvening the following day. The pilots had very generously volunteered to give up their Sunday from 10.00am and return to the airfield to complete the job if the remaining Braves could get back. Needless to say that

there was a resounding OK and so everything was packed away or hung up to dry and we all left the airport with it looking very grey, sad and in soggy isolation, far from the happy atmosphere of earlier in the day.

Sunday morning dawned and although not quite bikini weather (thank goodness some may say for the thought of Chris in a bikini is really one to be conjured with!!) it was a vast

improvement on how we had left Saturday. By 10.00am three aircraft were standing on the apron in readiness, the other from the day before was off taking a WW2 veteran who had been a Lancaster rear gunner to a reunion in Wolverhampton. Excited Braves arrived and the whole exercise with the exception of the car boot sale, Jaguars and High Sherriff, swung into action just as it had done twenty for hours earlier.

The final sortie landed just after 1.00pm and as the last engine shut down that familiar eerie silence of a dormant airfield was palpable. Final thanks and handshakes for the pilots from the very happy and appreciative Braves and then for those remaining, a hand refuelling and moving the aircraft back to their hangers before a final debrief and farewell.

Without doubt the weather had made it a pretty difficult and tiring weekend for the pilots demanding very high levels of concentration and skill but they made little of it and with the familiar back slapping of male bonding, for there were no lady pilots this time, hand shaking and smiles all agreed that it had been a great Bader Braves Young Aviators event and pledged to be back in 2019.

As always we are indebted to Chris, Dan and their team of pilots and volunteers on the Isle of Wight for without doubt for the Sandown Super Squadron it really was a mission well and truly accomplished ----- thank you one and all!!