

AIR VICE-MARSHAL J.E. "JOHNNIE" JOHNSON

CB, CBE, DSO**, DFC*, DL

TOP SCORING RAF PILOT OF WORLD WAR 2



In August 1939, after gaining his "wings", he was first posted to 19 Squadron which at the time was too heavily involved in the Battle of Britain to absorb a 'rookie' pilot: he was transferred, therefore, to 616 Squadron, Auxiliary Air Force, which was not in the thick of air fighting at the time. There his previously broken collar bone began to plague him afresh and he found flying extremely painful and difficult. Opting to have an operation to correct the condition, he returned too late to participate in battle but was to gain valuable experience in 1941 when 616 flew on fighter sweeps over France as part of Douglas Bader's "Big Wing". He frequently flew No 2 to the wing leader and was with him in the dogfight that led to Bader being shot down over France and taken prisoner.

He opened his account on June 26th 1941 when he shot down his first Messerschmitt Bf 109 and by September, his score had risen to six; he also had been made a flight commander and awarded the DFC. By this time, however, the Spitfire was encountering stern opposition from the new Focke-Wolfe Fw 190, which could out-maneuvre it and possessed formidable armament; it was not until the Dieppe raid of August 19th 1942, by which time he had been given command of 610 Squadron, that he had his first Fw 190 kill.

Early in 1943 he was appointed leader of the Canadian wing at Kenley and over the next four months the wing took a severe toll of occupied France's fighter defences, with him adding over a dozen more kills to his own tally in that time. In September 1943, by which time he had brought his score to 25, he was rested from operations and given a staff appointment at Headquarters, 11 Group.

Returning to operations in command of another Canadian wing in March 1944, he was involved in the intensive air attacks on the occupied Continent which preceded D-Day and he continued to add to his tally of combat victories. At the D-Day landings he led the wing four times over the Normandy beaches and, after the landings themselves, he led his wing to Normandy where it became the first Allied fighter unit to operate from French soil since the fall of France four years earlier.

In Normandy his wing supported the advancing allied armies by taking on the enemy's fighters and he was flying over Berlin when he first encountered the Russian planes which were besieging the city. His last combat victory came on September 27th 1944 in the skies over the battle for the Falaise Gap. He shot down an Fw 190 that day, but— for the first time during the entire war during which he had flown over 700 combat missions — his own aircraft sustained damage when it was struck by a single cannon shell.



His wartime tally of 38 made him the top RAF Pilot of WW2, a tally which was exceeded by only South African "Pat" Pattle who was credited with 41 kills on the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean fronts.

After the end of the war he was offered permanent commission and stayed in the RAF. In 1950 he was attached to the USAF and flew with them in the Korean War. Among his later appointments was the command of RAF Wildenrath in the 2nd Tactical Air Force in Germany, 1952-1954, and he was commander of the V Bomber base at RAF Cottesmore from 1957 to 1960. His last appointment was as AOC Air Forces Middle East from where he retired in 1966. In June 1960 he was made a CBE and in 1965 was promoted Air Vice- Marshal and appointed a Companion of the Order of the Bath.

NO. 1 FIGHTER PILOT of the WAR IS—?



'Johnny'

A great new killer has arisen since the Battle of Britain



'Sailor'

LULL
A fish begins to rot from the head (Russian proverb)
by COL. J. R. KENNEDY

by **BASIL CARDEW**

THE R.A.F. has a new Spitfire killer whose brilliance in the air rivals the great deeds of men like "Sailor" Malan, Paddy Finucane, Victor Beamish, Roland Tuck, Douglas Bader, and Mungo-Park. He is an Englishman from Melton Mowbray—Wing-Commander James Edgar Johnson, D.S.O. and bar, D.F.C. and bar. In private life a civil engineer, he is 28, nearly two years married, stockily built, tough and curly haired. On Tuesday, in a sweep across Eastern France, he shot down his 26th and 27th German aircraft. That ranks him second highest scoring pilot still in home

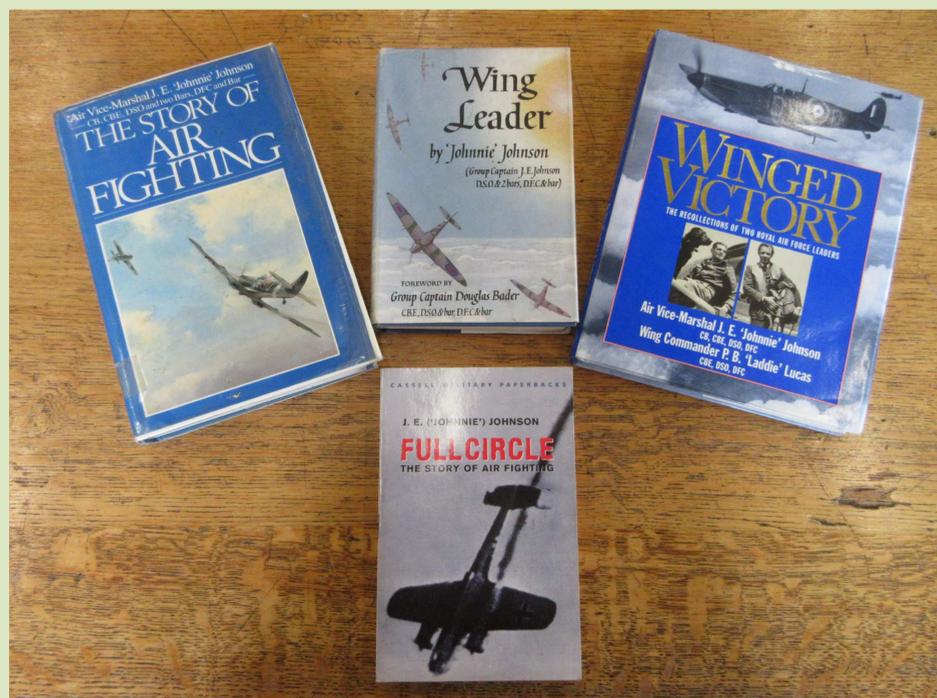
A Spitfire pilot who often flies with him said to me the other day: "We reckon Johnny is the find of the post-Battle of Britain days. He is tremendous in leading and in single combat. He doesn't talk a lot, but smiles a good deal, showing a grand row of teeth." "We rate him high because he always gives a thought to the rawest youngster in the wing. On the ground he gives them confidence; in the air he guards them. Most of us believe he will finish the war with a phenomenal bag of victories." Like Malan, Johnson fights unselfishly, nursing his men, giving them a chance to destroy planes while he is in a hotly contested area. Johnson's victories have come despite himself. He is in no race to gather victims any more than other brilliant comparative

his calling as engineer. "Sailor" the South African, who holds a ship's certificate, joined the R.A.F. some years before the war. It is true. But that was because he wanted the money to marry on. Strange that both were 28 years old before they reached stardom, when the fabled age for fighter pilots is under 25. I know that each has the greatest liking for the other—and



In the 1960s his Spitfire was immortalised by Airfix's 1/72nd scale model which carried on the fuselage a maple leaf motif and the letters 'JE-J'; indeed, most models and pictures of Spitfires feature his plane with his initials.

He published both in his own account and jointly a number of books.



In 1969 he founded the "Johnnie" Johnson Housing Trust – conscripting Sir Douglas Bader to give him support – a charitable housing association for people in need which is still going strong today. He died on January 30th 2001 and his life was celebrated in a Service of Thanksgiving at St Clement Danes Church in the Strand.

Later that year his medals fetched a world record sum of £241,500 and in 2017 his wartime diary of 1942 was sold for £16,000.



Sale of fighter pilot's unique wartime archive

By John Shaw

MEDALS awarded to Air Vice-Marshal Johnnie Johnson, the top-scoring British RAF fighter pilot of the Second World War, are being auctioned for about £50,000. The 19 British, American and European decorations will be sold with his flying log-books and a host of other memorabilia at Spinks in London today.

The collection includes a unique five-volume photographic archive of wartime pictures, many unpublished, tracing his career from 1939 to his retirement in 1966.

David Erskine-Hill, who is in charge of the sale, described the collection as "a magnificent archive of the highest rarity

and importance. It has obvious museum interest," he said. "He was one of the great wing leaders of the war who led by example. His Canadian pilots were a hugely tough fighting force and he led them through D-Day and across North West Europe. They helped to bring the Germans to their knees in aerial combat. He had 38 confirmed kills to his credit, but his real importance was as an inspirational leader."

Johnnie Johnson, a policeman's son, was educated at Loughborough School and Nottingham University. He paid for his own flying lessons before the war but was turned down twice by the Auxiliary Air Force before finally joining the RAF in 1939.

He went on to fly nearly 700 combat missions, but a career as a fighter only began in earnest under Douglas Bader in 1941. Bader led the Tangmere Wing in Kent in the first cross-channel fighter sweeps of the war but was shot down over northern France in August that year.

Johnson was among close friends who initially went looking for him and then painted his Spitfire defiantly afterwards: "Bader's bus company, still running."

The following year he received a squadron command and led the Canadian wing at Kenley. Later he led 144, another Canadian wing, which became the first RAF unit to operate from France after D-Day in June 1944.

He went on to serve in the Korean War and afterwards piloted one of the last operational Spitfires to Biggin Hill, Kent, to found the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight.

After retirement Air Vice-Marshal Johnson founded a housing trust which provided homes for the elderly and disabled, activities which kept him busy until his recent death.

The medals are now being sold by his son and include the Insignia of a Companion of the Order of the Bath, military division, the OBE, a "triple" DSO and a "double" DFC. His American awards include the Legion of Merit, the DFC and the Air Medal together with other decorations from France and Belgium.

RAF ace's tales of triumph, disaster ... and drinking

The private thoughts of one of the most successful RAF fighter pilots of the Second World War have been revealed in a new book, *Johnnie Johnson: The Story of Air Fighting*, by Johnnie Johnson. The book, which is published by Spinks, is a collection of his wartime diary entries, including tales of triumph, disaster and drinking.

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A real hero

The Prime Minister had moving things to say about Linda McCartney, whom he had never met, when she died in 1988. When Frank Sinatra died, Mr Blair took the trouble to interrupt a G8 summit to pay tribute to the old crooner. How odd is he has not thought fit to say anything this week about the death of Air Vice-Marshal J.E. Johnson, the top-scoring Spitfire ace of the Second World War.

The omission is all the odder since Mr Blair belongs to that first post-war generation, to whom "Johnnie" Johnson was a supreme hero. His was an uncomplicated, distinctively British brand of heroism. Between the fall of France in 1940 and the entry into the war of Russia and America in 1941, all hope of freedom in Europe depended upon men like Johnson shooting down Hitler's aircraft. He bagged at least 38, attributing his success to his love of field sports. "The principles of deflection shooting against wildfowl and aeroplanes were exactly the same," he said, adding drily, "except that aeroplanes could sometimes return your fire."

Lovers of freedom owe more to Johnnie Johnson and his like than to almost any other heroes of the past century. More, dare we say it, than we owe even to Linda McCartney or Frank Sinatra.

In memoriam

Air Vice-Marshal J.E. "Johnnie" Johnson was represented by Air Vice-Marshal H.G. Marshall, DFC and Commandant, RAF College Cranwell, at a service of Thanksgiving for the life of Air Vice-Marshal J.E. "Johnnie" Johnson held yesterday at St Clement Danes, Strand, WC2.

The Rev David Mackenzie officiated. Mr Michael Johnson (son) read the lesson and Col Kenneth W. Cordery, USAF, read Empty Gospel. Sgt Ldr Danforth Brown, RCAF, and Mr Jim Lunney, Chief Executive, "Johnnie" Johnson Housing Trust gave addresses.

The Air Force Board was represented by Air Vice-Marshal Peter Liddell. Among other present were: Mrs Janet Partridge, Mr and Mrs Colin Chaffers, Miss Emma Partridge, Mr Ross Johnson, Mrs Michael Johnson, Mrs Julia Johnson, Mrs Rachel Johnson, Mrs Tim Johnson, Mrs Nicola Johnson, Mrs and Mrs Duncan Johnson, Dr and Mrs Michael Conroy, Mr and Mrs Richard Long, Mr and Mrs Barry Hill, Mr and Mrs F. Harrison.

The Hon Lady Dundas, Marshal of the RAF, Sir Michael Becham, Gair Sir Charles Harrington, Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard John, Comdant and Governor of Windsor Castle, Air Chief Marshal Sir Christopher Foster, Norris, Chairman, Battle of Britain Fighter Association, and Lady Foster, Norris, with Mr Malcolm Smith, Secretary, and other members of the Association, Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Gwynne, Air Chief Marshal Sir Thomas Kennedy, Sir Ian and Lady South, Sir Lawrence and Lady Byfield, Lady Bader.

Air Vice-Marshal B.L. Newton, Honorary Inspector General, RANAF, and Mrs Newton, Air Vice-Marshal D.G. Bailey, RAFA, Air Cdre P.W. Radford, representing RCAF, and Group Capt D. Walker, Officer, Operation Training Sqn, USAF, read the lesson. The Rev David Mackenzie, Lt Col D. Black, Officer Commanding, 403 Squadron, USAF, read the lesson. The Rev David Mackenzie, Lt Col D. Black, Officer Commanding, 403 Squadron, USAF, read the lesson.

Mr Graham Pritchard, 616 Squadron Association, Mr Mel Hill, Chairman, "Johnnie" Johnson Housing Trust, with other members and staff of the Trust, Mr Stephen Gray, The Fighter Collection, Chairman of Governors, Loughborough Grammar School, Air Vice-Marshal and Mrs J. Stacey, Air Cdre and Mrs Peter Frost, Mrs Kenneth Cordery, Mrs P.B. Lucas and Mr and Mrs H. Chapman Fischer, together with many other friends and former colleagues.

A SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING

for the Life and Work of AIR-VICE MARSHAL JAMES EDGAR "JOHNNIE" JOHNSON CB, CBE, DSO*, DFC*, DL 1915-2001



ST CLEMENT DANES CHURCH STRAND

Wednesday, 25th April, 2001 11.00 am

OBITUARIES

Air Vice-Marshal Johnnie Johnson

Johnnie Johnson, with 38 confirmed kills, was the top-scoring British Spitfire ace of the Second World War. He was a decorated pilot and a successful businessman. He died on January 30th 2001.

Johnnie Johnson was born in 1915 in North West London. He joined the RAF in 1939 and served in the Battle of Britain. He was shot down in 1941 but was rescued and returned to service. He was awarded the Victoria Cross in 1942 for his actions in the Battle of France. He was also awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Distinguished Service Order.

After the war, Johnson continued to fly for the RAF and later for the Canadian Air Force. He was a member of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight and the Tangmere Wing. He was also a member of the Johnnie Johnson Housing Trust, which he founded in 1969. He died on January 30th 2001 at the age of 85.

He is survived by his wife and three children. His ashes were scattered at St Clement Danes Church in the Strand.

Obituaries

Second world war fighter ace credited with more enemy 'kills' than any other British pilot

Johnnie Johnson



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AIR VICE-MARSHAL JOHNNIE JOHNSON

Air ace who followed the principle of withdrawing to air combat and finished up the record score of RAF combat victories in North West Europe

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In recent years his story has been fully recorded in three books by the aviation historian, Dilip Sarkar, and also, in novel form, by Graham Wilding.



MICHAEL STEPHENS / PA

JAMES EDGAR JOHNSON

LOUGHBOROUGH GRAMMAR SCHOOL 1924-1932



James Edgar Johnson was born on 9th March 1915 in Barrow-upon-Soar, son of Alfred Edgar and Beatrice May Johnson. Alfred was an officer in the Leicestershire Constabulary and, on his appointment to Sergeant in Loughborough, the family moved to 147 Meadow Lane and 'Jim' joined Cobden Street School from where he entered Loughborough Grammar School in September 1924 at the age of 9.

His fees were paid for by his mother's brother, Uncle Charlie, who had been awarded a Military Cross in the Great War and was now managing a rubber plantation in Malaysia. A bachelor, he saw the potential in "Johnnie", as he was now known, and on his return visits to the UK, used to excite Johnnie and his younger brother, Ross, with stories of his military experience and travel.

Johnnie soon settled to academic work and for a year and a half made good progress but increasingly found the pace hard to maintain; by the end of his second year and throughout his third year he was consistently bottom of the form with no great desire to learn. Moved from the 'A' stream to the 'B' stream, however, Johnnie found the academic pace more to his liking and was consistently in the top third of the form. With his academic problems seemingly behind him, his father's promotion to Inspector in Melton Mowbray – and thus the family's subsequent move to 53 Welby Lane in Melton – meant that a difficult decision had to be made regarding Johnnie's education and it was Uncle Charlie who first suggested – and then paid for – his boarding at the school.

Illness resulted in Johnnie missing the whole of the second half of the Spring term of 1929 and he never really recovered from this, failing his School Certificate the following year: this meant he had to repeat the year but he finally gained his Oxford School Certificate in July 1931. Throughout this period he was a typical adolescent boy, always in trouble and always up to something and had several 'painful' visits to see Mr Pullinger, the Headmaster.



Johnnie pictured on the left

Outside the classroom, however, he excelled. He played the lead as 'Lush', the aged butler, in the School's production of "Ambrose Applejohn's Adventure" in 1931 but it was in sport that he was to make his name.

PUPIL'S RECORD.		LOUGHBOROUGH GRAMMAR SCHOOL.	
NAME	Johnson	PARENT'S NAME	Alfred Ed. Johnson
DATE ENTERED	19.9.24	ADDRESS	147 Meadow Lane, Loughborough
AGE	9	PARENT'S OCCUPATION	Sergeant of Police
FORM	I	REMARKS	Good progress
DATE	April	POSITION	3rd
DATE	July	POSITION	4th
DATE	Dec.	POSITION	11th
DATE	April	POSITION	15th
DATE	July	POSITION	15th

DATE	FORM	POSITION	REMARKS
Dec.	IIIc	29	Fair: in disposition to learn but does not best
April	—	31	Below average by 8 months
July	—	31	V. W. a bare brained trifler
Dec.	—	32	unsatisfactory work
April	IVd	33	Good progress. Good class. Very hard to follow
July	—	33	Good
Dec.	—	33	A good boy
April	LVB	33	A good boy, sometimes careless & scatter brained
July	LVB	n.p.	Long absence (half-term)
July	LVB	n.p.	Has achieved fair standard in view of absence
LEFT	AGE	NO. YEARS IN SCHOOL	July 1931, Oxf. Sch. Cert. e. h. w. p.

PUPIL'S RECORD.		LOUGHBOROUGH GRAMMAR SCHOOL.	
NAME	Johnson	ADDRESS	53 Welby Lane, Melton Mowbray
DATE ENTERED	18.9.24	PARENT'S INITIALS	Alf. Ed. Johnson
AGE	9	PARENT'S OCCUPATION	Chief Constable
FORM	Boarder	REMARKS	Am. C. 125
DATE	Dec.	POSITION	17/10
DATE	April	POSITION	14/17
DATE	July	POSITION	12/15
DATE	Dec.	POSITION	4VA
DATE	April	POSITION	5/19
DATE	July	POSITION	5/19

DATE	FORM	POSITION	REMARKS	GAMES, ETC.
Dec.	LVI B	5/10	Has done creditable work this term	
April	LVc		Developing well	P. President
July				
Dec.				
April				
July				
S.C. failed 1930			Left 23.3.32	CAREER
Gained Oxf. 1931			Age 17.0	articled to a
e. h. w. p.			YEARS IN SCHOOL	7.2
				at the Manthorpe 485, 550/6

The Third Act reverted to the normal, despite occasional lapses on the part of Ambrose—but Act II seemed to have performed its work in giving to Act III an air of suspense and excitement which was lacking in Act I. At one time it seemed as if all was up with Ambrose, but of course a happy ending was inevitable. Mason P. acted exceedingly well both as Poppy Fair, Ambrose's old fashioned cousin and the ship's boy aboard the pirate ship. Johnson as Lush, the aged butler; Sooby, P., as Jason; Bregazzi as Dennit, the crook; Bavister as Aunt Agatha and Bowles as the maid interpreted their parts very well. "Aces, all aces," was a suitable ending to a performance which had been so successful.

CAST.

Lush	...	...	...	J. E. Johnson
Poppy Faire	...	...	...	P. E. Mason
Agatha Whatcombe	...	...	...	R. Bavister
Ambrose Applejohn	...	...	...	J. L. Manning
Anna Valeska	...	...	...	J. Sutton
Pengard	...	...	...	K. M. Jagger
Mrs. Pengard	...	...	...	J. A. Cave
Ivan Borolsky	...	...	...	J. Sooby
Marie	...	...	...	F. Bowles
Dennit	...	...	...	D. A. Bregazzi
Johnney Jason	...	...	...	P. Sooby
Pirate Crew	...	H. G. North, J. E. Johnson, R. Marvin,	...	D. A. Bregazzi, F. Brown, F. Bowles, P. Sooby

He played right half for two years in the School's successful 1st football team, where he was well known for his 'heading' skills, winning his colours for the season 1930-31.

JOHNSON (right half)—A hard working half back who uses his head well. His positional play could be improved and he must learn to control the ball better.

***JOHNSON, J. E. (right half)**.—His ball control has improved very much and he distributes the ball well. Uses his head well and is a very hard worker. Shows good combination, but is rather inclined to be too far up the field.



Johnnie pictured on the bottom left

He was also a member of the 2nd XI Cricket team but it was in running that he was to excel. He remains the only boy ever to win Senior House Cross Country three years in a row, recording victories in 1930, 31 & 32.



Fine weather again favoured the cross-country run this year, although there had been rather heavy rains and the surface of the ploughed land was very slippery. Nevertheless, such adverse conditions did not prevent the junior record from being broken, and Johnson was able to approach within nine seconds of the Senior. There was the usual good entry in the Junior section, and the Senior entry was also greatly improved. Johnson led the Senior field throughout, closely followed by Mant and Snape. Up the small rise leading into Woodhouse Lane Mant drew level, and for some distance the two ran side by side, but Mant had the misfortune to lose a shoe, which threw him considerably behind, and he was unable to make up the lost ground. Snape and Todd maintained their pace throughout and finished second and third respectively.

In the School Sports Day of 1931, two years younger than the other competitors, he won both the mile and half-mile and the 'Loughburian' reports how keenly they anticipated his attempts at the school records in future years.

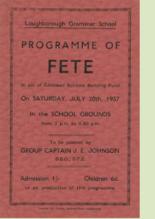
be but a memory. The Mile proved an exciting race, and the first place was well-contested by Johnson and Kewley; the former, however, just managed to get home first. Another race, the Half-Mile Open, fell to Johnson. We hope that next year will see him breaking a few records, for his running this year was really good. The Quarter-mile again fell to Manning, who just missed

Unfortunately, those attempts did not take place as in March 1932, following a further breach of the school rules, he was asked to leave the School and he left to become articled to the Borough Surveyor in Melton before graduating as a civil engineer at University College, Nottingham in 1937.

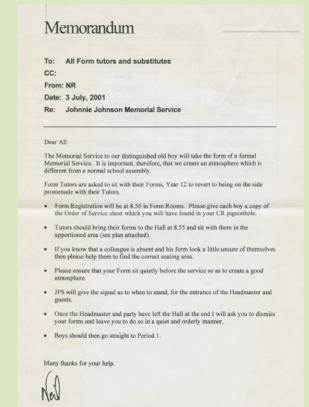
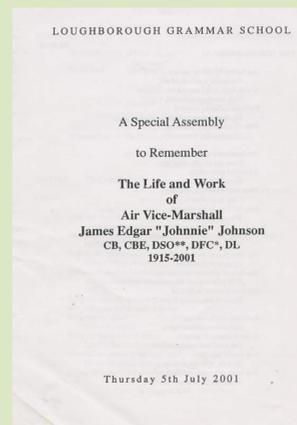
Although the circumstances of him leaving the School may not have been ideal, he never forgot the School which for seven years had provided him with a great source of fun, especially in the boarding house and on the sports field. After the war he was to make a spectacular return, via helicopter, to open the School Fete in 1957.



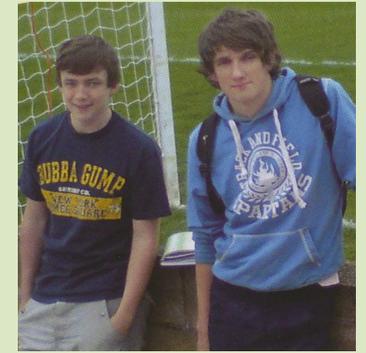
By courtesy of The Loughborough Echo
Group Captain "Johnnie" Johnson arriving to open the Fête



Following his death in 2001 the School held a special assembly to remember his life and work, the only old boy ever to be granted such an occasion.



In his will he left money to the School for a prize to be awarded in his name – the 'Johnnie' Johnson Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service to the Community. He also left money to enable boys in the middle of their A level course to engage in the summer holidays in activities that 'he would have approved of'. Each year a large number of boys submit ideas for such activities, the most imaginative being chosen to be funded, and since 2004, 80 boys have benefited from the awards. Activities undertaken have ranged from working on a crocodile farm in Malawi to learning Kung Fu at the Shaolin Monastery; cycling part of the 'Tour de France' to busking in Italy; and visiting Chernobyl to investigating the 'Heart and Soul' of non-league football by visiting pre-season games in London.



Not surprisingly, his Spitfire features on the recently installed stained glass window in the School, a permanent reminder to the boys of the achievements of a truly great man.

