



2 April 2006

Keep It Under Your Hats....

The idea was simple, could we do an April fools trick on anyone in the ATC, would we get away with it. The idea was first hatched in a discussion between the staff from 134 (Bedford) Squadron whilst the cadets were on an exercise back in November 2005. The basic plan was to send out a phoney press release suggesting that 134 Squadron had been involved in some form of uniform trials.

I set to work, I first needed to get the baseball caps, a couple of months later I had managed to buy off Ebay, 12 Navy blue caps - all with "Pepsi Max" embroidered on the front, it was the best I could do. I thought it would be easy to unpick the stitching and put a new badge on the front. How wrong was I, It took 2 days of careful work to do the first cap. But once I attached the beret badge it was worth it although I decided I was only going to do one cap, the rest I would do on the computer after taking the photo.

I took the photo in mid March, our drill team were practising away from the squadron, I nipped over, briefed them of the situation and handed out the caps, making sure the cap with the badge on the front was the closest to the camera. A few minutes later I had taken a dozen or more shots.

I was now ready to write the press release. I didn't want to go over the top, I wanted it to remain fairly subtle, I intentionally didn't refer to "baseball" caps anywhere in the press release, simply calling them caps, I would let the photo do the talking.

Everything was set. I just had to release it, I knew if I emailed it out on April 1st, no one would fall for it. I decided to release it a week or so early, but stamp across the top that it was embargoed at Headquarters Air Cadets request and couldn't be published until 31st March at 23:59. I emailed it out and waited, not for long as it turned out. Sqn Ldr Alan Wiggins, Central and Eastern Region CCO rang me up within 10 minutes, he had instantly cottoned on that it was a wind up, I was a little disappointed but continued to wait.

It was 31st March and I had received no other response on it. Until out of the blue I received an email from a TV production company called "Synthetic Production" wanting to film a piece on the change of uniform. My initial reaction was 'should I own up', until I realised it was a counter wind up on me, It had been sent by Flt Lt Steve Johnson from 2417 (Newmarket) Sqn. I responded to the email, passing comment about the unusual company name and asking for a load of information that would be hard for them to provide. Later that night I received a second phoney email, this time sent by Flt Lt Alan Human, Wing webmaster, claiming to be a company that supplies headwear, he had read my press release and asked if I wanted to buy 30,000 baseball caps. He had even spent the time to mock up a phoney price catalogue.

I knew I had to get it published on the Region or the Wing websites, but even though both had realised it was a wind up, both parties agreed to go along with it and publish it on their sites. It actually went up on the region website slightly early, late on the evening on the 31st of March. I later found that some people had read it before midnight and this unintentionally gave the story more credibility.

The final, and unexpected piece of the puzzle was the internet. Within minutes of the story being released, a few ATC sites started discussing it. Some believed it to be an April fools, others didn't and were less than amused. Suggesting they should start a petition to stop it. One person even threatened to eat the hat if he was ever given one.

To bring this to a conclusion, I can confirm this was entirely fictitious and there is no truth at all in it.... but they would look quite good at Wing parade....