

And Then...

(Accounts of Life after Halton 1963-2013)



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FOREWORD & DEDICATION

This book is produced as part of the 96th Entry's celebration of 50 years since Graduation

Our motto is "*Quam Celerrime (With Greatest Speed)*" and our logo is that very epitome of speed, the Cheetah, hence the 'Spotty Moggy' on the front page.

The book is dedicated to all those who joined the 96th Entry in 1960 and who subsequently went on to serve the Country in many different ways.

INTRODUCTION

On the 31st July 1963 the 96th Entry marched off Henderson Parade Ground marking the conclusion of 3 years hard graft, interspersed with a few laughs. It also marked the start of our Entry into the big, bold world that was the Royal Air Force at that time.

And the world of the RAF in those days certainly was wide, with postings in Germany, the Near East, Middle East and the Far East. After the 1967 Defence Review, with the withdrawal from bases east of Suez, the choice of postings to exotic climes reduced and eventually even those in Germany diminished.

The Cold War had almost reached boiling point with the Cuba missile crisis of 1962 and so the 96th were about to play their part in maintaining a safe temperature.

In the meantime there were many armed conflicts that involved British forces – Aden and Borneo were just two of the areas where risk and rigour were major features of a tour of duty in the sun, and after 1969, Northern Ireland presented a different combat scenario.

The *Falklands Conflict* of 1982 would also involve the 96th, and given that some may not have left the RAF until about 2000, the first *Gulf War* is also one of the 96th Battle Honours.

The period between 1963 and 2000 saw the RAF equipped with arguably its widest range of aircraft types. The nuclear deterrent was deliverable via the *V-bombers* (Valiant, Victor and Vulcan), and air defences secured by Lightning, Hunter and Javelin aircraft. Canberras served in both bomber and photo reconnaissance roles.

In later years, with a changed combat requirement, multi-role aircraft were introduced – Harriers, Jaguars, Tornados and Phantoms. A wide range of transport aircraft provided essential support – Beverley, Hercules, VC10, Britannia, Belfast and Andover amongst them.

But it was not just fixed wing aircraft that the 96th maintained – and flew – because many of the erstwhile Brats went on to become aircrew. Whirlwind, Wessex, Puma and Chinook helicopters provided additional challenges. The

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list on page 6 is extensive, although it is possible that there are some omissions. We trained on Hunters, Canberras and several other aircraft that had reached the end of their flying careers, including a Comet and an early Vulcan. It was said that the number of aircraft available for training purposes at Halton exceeded that in many air forces around the world.

In 2008 we held our Reunion at Duxford where many of the aircraft types that we had worked on were now displayed as museum pieces¹. I guess that not a few of us felt that we were becoming those ourselves.

Aircraft engineering was not the only skill set that existed within the Entry. Armourers were required to maintain weapons other than those onboard aircraft and the Dental Technicians ensured that when the RAF smiled, the world was dazzled by well-maintained dentures.

And not only did the number of aircraft types reduce in the 50 years that followed Graduation. Already denuded of virtually all of its overseas bases, those in the UK also suffered the ignominy of becoming Army/Marine bases, open prisons or housing estates. Even the Princess Mary's RAF Hospital that adjoined Halton Camp is now a housing estate.

Halton itself continues to perform several functions, including Recruit training, but even that has changed as some of the recruits are airmen of the feminine gender (see the picture below).

As we prepare to celebrate our 50th Anniversary since Graduation, the Met Office informs us that March 2013 was the coldest March for 50 years, and we all know just how cold that one was!

¹ There was a Victor, formerly a B1a but now in airborne fuel bowser mode, which was being refurbished prior to going on display. This was serial XH649 and was one of the first aircraft that I worked on - Editor

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This photo was taken by Brian Shackleton at the 2010 Triennial Reunion. Notice that the denims that we wore as our first uniforms have been replaced by 'camo' gear.

At the 2010 Triennial some of the Entry visited one of the Barrack Blocks in what we knew as 2(A)Wing, where one of the rooms was available for 'inspection'. Gone was the highly polished 'centre deck', but now a carpeted floor. Each bed-space was partitioned off with what looked like IKEA cupboard units. There was a washing machine in the ablutions area and a launderette just across the road.

So, fifty years on from Graduation, what happened to those individuals who comprised the 96th Entry? Sadly some have succumbed to those illnesses that affect the human race – all called to their final postings far too early. Two were killed while engaged on flying duties.

The articles that follow are the accounts of several individuals, from that day in 1963, through their lives in the RAF, and up to the present day, and are written in their own styles. In some cases the memory of one individual may differ from that of another – always the case when events half a century ago are recalled. The articles illustrate a range of achievements across a wide range of professions, proof of the ability of the Halton Apprentice to adapt to changing circumstances and to meet any challenge.

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LIST OF AIRCRAFT TYPES

Andover	Anson	Argosy	Bae146
Basset	Belfast	Belvedere	Beverley
Britannia	Buccaneer	Bulldog	Canberra
Chinook	Chipmunk	Comet	Dakota
Devon	Dominie	Dove	Gazelle
Gnat	Harrier	Hastings	Hawk
Hercules	Hunter	Jaguar	Javelin
Jetstream	Lightning	Merlin	Nimrod
Pembroke	Phantom	Pioneer	Provost
Puma	Sea King	Sentry	Shackleton
Sioux	Skeeter	Sycamore	Tiger Moth
Tornado	Tristar	Tucano	Typhoon
Valetta	Valiant	Varsity	VC10
Victor	Vulcan	Wessex	Whirlwind

Editor's Note: Apologies to anyone whose 'aircraft' are missing from the list.

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And Then...

John Baldwin

*Brief history after graduating as J/T from Halton in July 1963 with the 96th Entry.*²

Hullavington (Wiltshire). No 1 School of Navigation Training. Valettas and Varsities.

My first experience in the real Air Force and my first boss was a WRAF Sergeant, who was in charge of the Instrument Bay. I got into her bad books one day, when I, and the WRAF J/T who worked with me, had to go for a compass swing on a tail-dragging Valetta. We had to go to a remote part of the airfield, of course, so it usually took quite a time to do.

The NCO pilot (yes we still had some then), wanted to go on an air test straight away after the swing, so we asked him if we could go too. No problem to him, so away we went for a flight. We got back to the Section to find the WRAF Sergeant 'doing her nut'! She gave us both a right blasting for going without asking her permission, especially the WRAF. Apparently she had been trying to get herself a flight for some time and hadn't been able to, so was just plain jealous. She was also talking one day about putting oil in her car and how difficult it was putting the oil into it, – through the small hole! Who's a 'dip-stick'?

Whilst there, I met up with Jack West, 93rd Inst Fitter who was now a Cpl, and a soon to be Sgt on Line Servicing. I also bumped into an ex roommate of mine, on joining up, Paddy Gallagher, 93rd Inst Fitter, now a Flying Officer U/T Aircrew Navigator.

Hullavington to Tengah (Singapore) 1965.

In Instrument Bay in support of: – 20 Sqn Hunters, 60 & 64 Sqns Javelins, 45 & 81 Sqns Canberras and V bomber detachments. Played soccer and rugby for Tengah Second teams and the Electronics team.

Took one leave up in Penang, after travelling up from Singapore on an overnight steam train to Kuala Lumpur and then from there to Penang. It was quite the trip, seeing as there were no sleeping cars, (if there were any we couldn't afford them anyway) and I don't recall there being much padding on the seats. The *Makan* (food) kitchen was served with an open fired charcoal stove in one of the carriages.

I remember spending a lot of time just sitting between the open ends of the carriages on the steps, watching the rubber and palm plantations, as well as the jungle, pass by.

Another leave was taken going by ship, the SS Vietnam (Messagerie Maritime Line, en route from Marseilles, France to Japan), up to Hong Kong, via Bangkok and Manila. My pal, Nigel Henly (ex 38th St Athan), and myself had a great time. We were in the '*Economy*' class right up at the 'sharp end', isolated from the other two classes by a sick bay in between. It wasn't long

² John wrote an interesting ode to commemorate the 50th Anniversary since enlistment in 2010. It can be found on page 246 - Editor

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before we figured out the way to sneak through the sick bay and enjoy the 2nd class bar and the swimming pool on the 1st class deck. We had a great time and must have behaved, because the Captain, who had seen us in 1st class, never put a stop to our presence there. We never paid cash in any of the bars, but our bills always magically turned up for us to pay our bartender 'up front' the next day.

We were fooling about on the deck one afternoon and Nigel was either pushing me, or pulling me, on a 'raffia' mat near the loading hold and a huge splinter went into one cheek of my backside. Well that was bad enough, but all the French sickbay staff, including the doctor, were gay. (Remember the year and us being relatively young lads). He had to extricate the splinter, which was half the width of a finger and just as long, from my posterior. He did this successfully and then one of his staff had to administer anti tetanus serum into my stomach. (They didn't use pills, at that time, for some reason best known to themselves). They gave me the serum in three doses, with a half hour interval in between each jab, and each time they would check me over for signs of something, or other.

All seemed to be OK and I carried on my merry way seeing Bangkok, Manila and Hong Kong, – floating restaurants in Aberdeen, Kowloon Ferry, and neon lit Nathan Rd, trying to drink in every bar along its length. We failed that one! After 5 days money was getting very low so we paid a few dollars of what remained to hitch a ride back to Singapore on a 48 Sqdn Hastings, which used to do a run up to Kai Tak each week. The night of our return I found out why the French medical guys had been so worried about the serum, because I suddenly started to swell up everywhere. A quick trip to Sick Quarters gave me the answer when the MO asked if I was having difficulty breathing. I didn't, at that point, and he suggested staying close by, just in case. I said that I would rather stay there and he agreed and said that they would administer anti-histamine to bring the swelling down. He also explained that the serum method was not used by the British, because of the after effects that I had demonstrated so convincingly. I could have suffocated to death.

Promoted Corporal and posted to Changi to Instrument Bay. Didn't like it so got an exchange posting to 48 Sqn Hastings, until they were all scrapped after a disastrous crash in the UK (caused by tail fatigue), killing a whole load of paratroopers. Whilst with them I had a couple of good detachments, one with Hastings and one with 205 Sqdn Shackletons.

The Hastings one was up at RAAF Butterworth, Penang and involved doing supply drops to police posts up in the jungle, near the Thai border. It was quite exciting, and a wee bit 'hairy', flying. The back doors were off and the cargo, mainly barrels, had to be dragged to the door by the Army Dispatchers, to be shoved out by hand or boot, when the time came. The dropping zone was nestled right in beside a very craggy mountainous treed escarpment. We flew up a valley to the right of the escarpment and then turned to port 90 degrees and, as soon as we had cleared the ridge, we dropped downwards. The Flight Engineer's hand was held over the stall warning horn to deaden the noise. The red/green dispatch light went green and some barrels

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disappeared out of the door. Now it was full power and stick back to get the beast out of there. I have a picture somewhere of a view out of the front of the cockpit looking up at the trees. It was then up and out, regroup, deep breath and go again with the next made-ready barrels. Very exciting stuff for someone who doesn't do that much flying.

Changi

Transferred to Target Towing Flight, Meteors Mk8 and Mk14, for the rest of my Far East tour until 1967.

Great Flight of about 10-15 guys, with just a Flt Lt for boss. He was cashiered after I had left Singapore for embezzling the Changi Yacht Club funds. We also had two old Polish Master Pilots. Not surprising, I suppose, because the aircraft would sometimes come back peppered with marks on them from over enthusiastic naval gunners.

I used to go back over to Tengah now and then, to visit my old buddies. On one of these occasions a 48 Sqdn friend of mine, who was very short, and who for some reason was called Titch, came with me to see another old friend off on his return home. This farewell bash was during the day at the Malcolm Club, and after his departure it was going to be resumed down in the Tengah Bar, in Tengah village. This involved a reasonably short walk, (stagger) along the road, abutted on either side by very deep monsoon ditches. The rest, to me, is now 'hearsay'. One of us staggered a little too much and I was heading in when I grabbed hold of Titch, who also started his descent. I landed first, on my head, and he landed on top of me. He then had to climb on my shoulders to go and get help for me. I was now spilling blood from a head wound, into the monsoon drain. He came back with a Flt Sgt policeman, who drove me to the Sick Quarters where they cleaned me up and put me to bed for the night. I got the '*Changi Flyer*' hospital bus next morning, just for the transportation, unlike some of the other guys on board who had other reasons to be on it.

A couple of days later, walking around the Meteor Flight with a big dressing on my head and no beret on, my boss stopped to talk to me and to ask if I was the one who had fallen in the monsoon drain. I admitted that I was and he said that since the Flt Sgt policeman had said that I had been very co-operative and the MO had said that I was p----d as a rat, there wouldn't be any further action taken, due to their conflicting statements! God bless him.

1967

Posted to 30 MU Sealand into Instrument Appraisals Department (desk job!). The Flt Sgt in charge was Nobby Clark, who was the Flt Sgt in charge of Instrument training at Halton. Ch Tech Chalkly, also from the same Section at Halton, was there too. (He had the fame, at that time, of being a Cpl Tech qualified Snr Tech and Ch Tech). Anyway I was not too happy at working at a desk job and got another exchange posting to Fairford, Gloucestershire (Line Servicing) Hercules. Shift boss was F/O David Mawdsley 96th (now Wing Commander retired)³.

³ And whose article appears on page 161 - Editor

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1968 RAF Fairford as a station, was to close within the next 2 years, but was to witness the arrival of Concorde from Filton, on its first landing away from there. It was in the next hangar to us and their offices were across the road i.e. Brian Trubshawe and Co.

We unfortunately lost a Hercules one afternoon when it was doing a training take-off. It nose dived straight into the ground, all four propellers leaving screw marks in the soil. No one survived.

I had a few trips and detachments whilst working on the 'HerCs'. Bardufoss, Norway, springs to mind as does Tehran, Libya, Nairobi and my first association with Canada.

1970 Fairford closed and we all moved to Lyneham, Wiltshire. I actually had to use it as a last posting option, because the RAF in its wisdom wanted to post me to Cosford, of Boy Entrant training fame. I guess that having taken 4 years to get through my Apprenticeship, (broken leg twice), I knew all the ropes to teach others. I never wanted to know whether this was their thinking, or not, I wanted to stick with servicing aircraft).

Lyneham saw me receive an AOC's Commendation and also get promoted to Sergeant, at which rank I departed the RAF on my 30th birthday 20 November 1972.

As a Corporal I had applied to sign-on, but there was no quota. My shift boss, Flt Lt Woods, asked me, when I was promoted, if I was going to apply again, to which I replied, – "If the RAF didn't want me as a Cpl then they are not going to get me as a Sgt." He smiled sardonically and walked away.

D0685641 Sergeant John Baldwin L Fitt Nav Inst. Departed RAF 20 November 1972 from Lyneham, 13¼ years after having signed on the dotted line at RAF Halton in September 1959 (93rd, 95th and 96th).

My association with aircraft did not end there but continued with British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) in 1972, when they offered me a job. It was on the condition that I went to work for 1 year on Lightnings in Saudi Arabia seconded to Airworks, on the North Yemen border at Khamis Mushayt.

I first had to take an enlightening Lightning course at Wharton. This didn't start for another month, so they sent me to work on Lightnings at Coltishall, which wasn't too far from some of my relatives in Sudbury, Suffolk, so I lodged with them for the duration.

I was on my way to Saudi Arabia by the end of the year following the course. I spent 2¼ years there, leaving as the Instrument Bay Section Leader. It was during this time that BAC formed, at the request of British and Saudi governments, a Saudi Support Division, so that the Saudis could deal directly with the British government and not through sub contractors e.g. Airworks, etc. Because I opted to stay in Saudi for longer than 1 year BAC transferred me to the newly formed division.

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During this period of time I witnessed, and was also almost an unfortunate recipient of, 'Saudi Logic'. The fellow who was my predecessor as Section Leader had the name of Heron. He was suddenly called to the Base Manager's office one day and told he was going home in two days.

"Why?" – was the question.

"I can't tell you." was the reply. **"But it's at the request of our hosts, who have made you Persona Non Grata."** It took him a long time to find out on his return home that he had the same name as an Irish gun runner, who had been caught dealing with Libya. Logic therefore made him a relative and an accomplice, so he was gone.

My own case was a little different. I was out with some of my pals and associates in the surrounding area of Khamis Mushayt on our Friday day off in a BAC vehicle, sight-seeing and taking photographs. We were also, inadvertently, not far from Jebel Sahan, which is a radar station. We were heading back to the Base when some birds (herons, – how ironic.) flew over us and we stopped whilst I got a picture of them. We were just about to drive off when the only car we had seen that day drew up to a halt by us, and a Saudi in civilian clothing got out and asked us if we worked for BAC. We affirmed this, the vehicle had a BAC logo on it anyway, and we carried on.

Our suspicions that he was something to do with security were confirmed the next day when the Base Manager, Gus, called me.

Gus: - "John, were you out in the company vehicle yesterday, taking photographs?"

Me:- "Yes I was."

Gus: - "I think we have a problem! The fellow who stopped you was 'Security' and the Saudis are accusing you of taking photographs of their radar site. I'm not quite sure how we can handle this, but is the film still in the camera?"

Me:- "Yes it is. I'll get it out of the camera and give it to you."

Gus:- "No, don't do that. I don't like doing this, but would you mind me bringing the security fellow down to your room and then we can unload it in front of him, so then he can see for himself that we are not cheating them!"

Me:- "OK. I'm on my way now to my room and will see you both there."

They arrived and I produced my camera and my 250mm telephoto lens, and commenced to unload the film, whilst the security man was closely examining my telephoto lens and muttering radar, radar. He finally asked Gus what the lens did and he explained that it was for making the birds appear closer. More radar mutterings and then he disappeared with the film.

A week later Gus again called me and asked, "John, was the film black and white or colour?"

Me:- "Uh, it was colour, why?"

Gus: - "Well, I think they tried to develop it as black and white, so hopefully, we won't hear anymore about it."

Fortunately we didn't and so I remained in Saudi for the duration, otherwise I would have been made Persona Non Grata too!

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One of the Saudi pilots did a fast run over the Base one day, and inadvertently, I think, went through the 'sound barrier'. All the suspended lights in the Instrument Bay came down and it was said that one of the Engine Fitters, working up the jet pipe of an aircraft in the hangar, actually turned around inside and came out frontwards with shock.

Another incident, again involving one of their pilots, resulted in him going into a stall, which in a Lightning is supposedly a non-recoverable situation, but he survived and landed it. The four foot long pitot head on the nose was wrapped back along the left hand side of the fuselage pointing backwards towards the cockpit. How he managed to land it without his instruments was always a mystery to us. Allah was certainly on his side that day.

There were one or two stories of fact, or fiction, doing the rounds out there during my tour in Saudi, to which anyone who has lived there can possibly relate. One involved a fellow who had been caught drinking and who ended up on a prison 'chain gang' in Dhahran, on the other side of the country to where I was. Apparently the company, as well as the diplomats, had tried to get him released, but to no avail. I'm not sure who took him food to survive on, or whether he was eventually released.

Another event also occurred in Dhahran where they used to have a curfew, sometime in the evening until dawn. Apparently, one of the fellows living on the Base had been to visit the married persons' compound and was rather late getting back to the Base. The gate was closed and there was no sign of a guard, so he decided to just sleep in his car until the gate was opened in the morning. He woke up quite quickly when the guards came and dragged him out of his car. He was going to be charged for the deaths of some policemen, killed in a car accident somewhere else in town.

Apparently the guards had seen him in the car asleep, and assumed that he was dead, so they called the military and civilian police. They, being in different areas of the town, drove like mad to get there as quick as possible, when they happened to get to a road junction – at the same time. Result was a big pile-up and some of them killed. The fellow in the car was now charged with their deaths, because if he hadn't been asleep in his car, then the guards would not have called the police and it wouldn't have happened. He was lucky the Company got him out of the country that day, before it went any further.

Bedouins roam freely in Saudi, so it was no surprise to find them wandering on one of the firing ranges used by the Lightning pilots. I'm not sure where this range was, but the Bedouins were on it and refused to move off. One of the pilots went off in an aircraft in an effort to scare them off and came back with blood on his tip tank. I believe that he was very wealthy and it cost him a lot of money to appease the family of the woman he killed, when doing his low level pass.

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On my last Christmas leave from Saudi, I travelled all the way to Canada, (a woman had something to do with that), and had an interview in Montreal with CAE Electronics, of Flight Simulator fame. I was offered a job by them, and assisted passage. The proviso for this was that if I left them before a year was up, then I would have to pay them back the fare. I first had to go back to Saudi, hand in my 3 months notice, and then get through the emigration process in the UK. It must have been some sort of record, because I left BAC in mid-March 1975 and was on the plane to Canada 23 April 1975.

23 April 1975 – September 1975

I worked at CAE and commuted to Ottawa every weekend from Montreal, until moving to Ottawa permanently. I had an interview at Ottawa airport with Survair Ltd, who, prior to my joining them, had been an airborne survey company. They were now operating aircraft in northern Quebec (Fort Chimo, Great Whale River, Pond Inlet) and Baffin Island (Frobisher Bay, now Iqaluit). They operated Douglas DC-3's, de Havilland Twin Otters, PBY 6 Super Cansos (Catalinas), Aero Commanders, and also serviced other aircraft such as Beech King Air 90 and a flying school's fleet of Cessna 182's.

This was when I made my transition from being an Instrument Fitter to becoming an Electrician, the hard way. My boss was the Radio/Radar specialist, who had an apprentice working with him. I had to handle all the other parts of the aircraft that used electrical power and wires, including their batteries, generating systems and the instrumentation, some of which was suction driven. Lots of different aircraft, never a dull moment and a lot of rush, rush, rush. No Unions there.

If the manager wanted you to 'Go Up North' that night, you didn't argue, but just rushed home to get your overnight kit and your own tools, (no handouts here), and away you went, either by the aircraft on the ramp heading that way, or by scheduled airline, if they had got you a ticket by then.

I've been sent to Great Whale River/Place De la Baleine, which is located on James Bay/Hudson Bay. It now has the Inuit name of Kuujjuarapik and is Nunavik's southernmost village. It is also unique as it is a bi-cultural community of Inuit and Cree. The Cree community is called Whapmagootsui, meaning 'where there are whales' in the Cree language. This village is also officially designated Poste-de-la-Baleine, making it one of the few places in Canada with three official names.

An altimeter change was to be done on a DC-3 fitted with skis, which involved accessing the rear of the instrument panel via the nose that I had to open upwards, balancing on an aluminium step ladder, in the wind and cold at 01:00. Then I gave the mechanic a hand to defreeze the elevator trim on a late arriving DC-3 so that the plane could go down to La Grande, a hydro electric station LG2 at 0730.

Whilst I was working on the altimeter, Earl, the mechanic, went back to our hut, to check on his pork roast that he had left on the table to cool, after he had cooked it earlier. He came back to the aircraft 'fit to be tied'. As he walked

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into the hut the Husky, owned by the '*Ramp Rat*' helper, jumped down from the table licking its chops. I thought he was going to kill both the '*Ramp Rat*' and the dog.

This was not the end of this saga, because the aircraft had also lost the use of an electric fuel pump, so Earl was talked by the pilot into spraying fuel into the carburettor from a small pressurised container, whilst he (the pilot) cranked the engine over until it fired and the fuel supply was then maintained by the engine driven pump. He wanted Earl to go with them, so that he could shut-down in Le Grande whilst they loaded/unloaded. This was not to be, so the pilot went anyway and had to do the load work with the engine idling. Fortunately it was the #2 right electrical fuel pump which was at fault, so all the 'prop-wash' on the ground was away from the loading doors.

Once we were clear of the La Grande bound aircraft, I went on board the DC-3, with the skis fitted, to an Inuit village, probably on the Belcher Islands on Hudson Bay. When we landed on the hard packed snow and the instrument panel became just a blur with all the vibration, I wondered what I had actually achieved by changing the altimeter. I guess that it now had a new life of 24 months to meet Air Regulations so we were legal, at least, for the time being.

For those of you rolling your eyes this was over 35 years ago. The rules have tightened up considerably since then.

Another trip to Frobisher Bay, where a DC-3 was experiencing serious compass problems and overflew one base by 75 miles, which involved doing some quick pre-trip preparation. The Ottawa maintenance manager decided that the C4 compass system should be changed completely, so he sent '*Joe Muggins*' here out across the ramp outside the hangar, to a DC-3 we had there, to measure up the cable/wiring runs to do the job and then gave me a couple of days (Saturday and Sunday), to make up new harnesses. This I did and I was on my way with this lot tucked under my arm. On arriving in Frobisher Bay the aircraft was brought into the only hangar available and the work started.

The couple of our mechanics based there assisted where they could, but it was mainly 'one man only' work, and I worked through solidly for 36 hours, stopping only for a small bite to eat now and then, and completed the job. We did a compass swing at 3 o'clock in the morning (Land of the Midnight Sun) and the aircraft flew with only one very minor problem. Whew!

I went with it on a trip to Devon Island and also to Pangnirtung situated on a coastal plain of Pangnirtung Fjord, which eventually merges with Cumberland Sound. (I believe a Pierce Brosnan '*James Bond*' movie was made in Pangnirtung). I was able to get a few Arctic char (a fish much like salmon) to bring back to Ottawa with me. To land there we had to fly up one side of the fjord, cross it and land on the other side on an uphill runway running parallel with the rocks to the left.

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Frobisher Bay beckoned me – involuntarily, (after all I am an ex Brat), again on another rushed job. A sheet-metal man (ex Fleet Air Arm), myself, and our hangar manager, Rick Cusson, went up to install a complete heating system in a DC-3. The aircraft had just been refurbished in Ottawa, but for some reason it had to be in place 'Up North', before we had time to address the heater situation. It probably was summer in Ottawa when it was dispatched, but it never gets that warm in the Arctic at the best of times. Whatever the reasoning behind the decision, we were there in the bitter cold, minus 20 something or other degrees C, and had to get on with it. Not many drawings available to us so it was put in by trial and error.

Fitting the ram-air scoops to the side of the fuselage got a bit tricky. I now know that DC-3 propellers create a vacuum area at the skin, in-board of the engines, so no dynamic air flows into even a quite large inlet scoop. I think we then tried mounting it on the top of the aircraft, just behind the cockpit. Great – until you changed the pitch attitude of the nose during take-off and landing. It soon gets cold in the aircraft when the heater stops, or just fluctuates on/off intermittently. Anyway we located a satisfactory spot and the job was eventually done and we went home. Alas, within a couple of months, the aircraft hit 'white-out' conditions on an approach into a small strip and crashed upside, down killing both pilots. Fortunately the rest of the people on board survived.

The co-pilot had previously survived one DC-3 crash, when the aircraft he was in hit a 'vacuum' situation, during a landing into Asbestos Hill (Northern Quebec). The crew said later that, despite applying full engine power, the aircraft just 'pancaked' onto the ground. The left propeller passed through the side of the aircraft behind the crews' seats and exited out of the other side. They climbed out of the aircraft and telephoned the asbestos company, who weren't even aware that a crash had occurred, to come and get them.

Rick Cusson, post Survair, was killed when the de Havilland Caribou aircraft which he was in, on a ferrying flight from Guyana, south America to Fort Chimo, Quebec, was last heard of 30 miles south of Barbados with one engine failed and the other overheating. All that was found was an oil slick.

Fort Chimo (Quebec) saw me grace their aircraft ramp one day in 'the mozzy (mosquito) season'. Compass problems on a Twin Otter, which needed attending to, brought me there one afternoon via Montreal and a Nordair flight, which managed to lose my bag. It arrived two days later in time for my flight out, which meant me getting on board the same aircraft. I worked on the Twin Otter and got it going and also did some work on a PBY 6 Canso.

These were used for lake landings with fishermen aboard. One of these particular aircraft nearly came to grief when a co-pilot was doing a tail wind approach, to land on a lake. With the shore rapidly approaching they chose to abort and pulled back as hard as they could on the stick. They left 9 feet of aileron behind when they struck a hut at the top of the hill and grazed the rear tail-boom on the actual hill top. They did, however, stay in the air and managed

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to get back to Fort Chimo by holding the aileron control yoke hard over in one position and they landed OK. The irate American passengers, immediately on landing, demanded when they were going to be able to get going again on their fishing trip. I don't think that they got a very civil reply from the two pilots.

I actually went on a test flight on a PBY 6, during its maintenance stay in Ottawa, after its purchase from bankrupt St Felicien Airways (Quebec). To get one of these aircraft into the small Survair hangar we had to lower the tyre pressures on all the wheels, and remove the rotating beacon from the top of the tail, so that it would miss the top of the door and the beams. We took off from the airport on wheels, did the test flight and then we went down to Constance Bay on the Outaouais (Ottawa) river to try a landing on the water. All went well as we settled on the water, but the small hatch on the top of the nose had not been sealed properly for this unforeseen landing, so water started to come into the aircraft from the bow wave. The pilots didn't hesitate for long and we took off before too much water came in.

We returned to the airport OK. The 'get me home' repair kit for a damaged hull on one of these aircraft, is a bag of cement. The hull is relatively accessible and the stringers are compartmentalised, so you just empty the whole bag in and then let it set. I've never actually heard of anyone resorting to this form of repair myself, so cannot vouch for this method.

1978 saw the demise of Survair as they opened bankruptcy proceedings, and we packed up all the bits and pieces that were being sold, as well as our own tool kits, and we all left to try elsewhere. I walked across the tarmac to a Survair rival's hangar, Laurentian Air Services, which also housed a small subsidiary of Montreal based Aircom Electronics.

At Cdn \$4000.00 a year less, I was now still employed and starting more and more into the radio installation side of things, plus trouble shooting and repair work. Some of these experiences not only took place on the Ottawa airfield, but also on the Ottawa River. Some of the aircraft were very old although, like the old DC-3's, still going strong.

One such aircraft was a Noorduyn Norseman, which had been in production since 1935. Another was a de Havilland Beaver (DHC-2), which was on floats in a dock at Fort Coulonge on the Ottawa River. I had to install an HF radio in it, which involved running the cable loom/harness from the instrument panel along the belly to the rear compartment located in the tail. Surprisingly enough, I achieved it without losing any tools in the water, or taking an unforeseen dip myself. (Perhaps I was 'The Dip' for doing it?).

It was just as well that I had to work behind their instrument panel, because I was able to warn them that all their rubberised instrument hoses were about to give up the ghost, especially their oil pressure ones. They were quite grateful for the 'heads up' and hopefully got them changed before the next flight, or their next accident.

And Then...

During my fairly brief stay with Aircom Electronics I struck up a working relationship with a local geophysical survey outfit, Geoterrex, for whom I did some 'moon-lighting', after work and at the weekends, re-wiring the generator systems on one of their DC-3's and one of their PBY-6 Super Cansos.

The reason for the re-wiring was that for survey work there has to be a common DC positive and also a common DC negative bus system. A random DC negative system is usual on an aircraft, but the second one is not and is created so that there are no skin eddy currents generated throughout the aircraft when the survey magnetometers are in use. These magnetometers pulse down power to detect anomalies in the earth's structure, where mineral bearing 'faults' might be. The return signals are very small, hence the need to remove the onboard skin eddy currents, so that an accurate survey is only made from the resulting return signals from the ground.

To further ensure that the return signals are only from a ground source a '*bird*', shaped a bit like a torpedo, is trailed behind on a fixed wing aircraft, or suspended below on a rotary winged one, with the detector circuitry in it. These signals are then fed back into the aircraft and the onboard computer system for analysis. I was later employed full time by Geoterrex, after having terminated my employment with Aircom Electronics and only working for a month with Computing Devices, overhauling Horizontal Situation Indicators on a repetitive basis for the Canadian military.

1979 – 1983 Geoterrex Airborne Surveys.

Although Ottawa based, they had an association with CGG a French company, but which had operations worldwide there being offices in Australia and South Africa. Aircraft consisted of a DC-3, some PBY-5's or 6's, a DHC-3 Single Otter, a Lockheed Lodestar, an Aero Commander, a Casa C-212 Aviocar 200, and, as required, leased helicopters.

I had occasion to be working in Toronto on one of the Cansos, which involved a test flight for the job I'd done and also an 'initial flight' for a new electronics guy, who was to be the computer/data operator and maintainer out 'in-the-field'. This young fellow had been doing electronics for a medical company up to this time, so was not familiar with anything to do with flying. These aircraft carry an 'S (special) operating certificate' so are pretty much 'bare bones' inside.

He was given a brief run down by the mechanic as to how things worked and had explained to him how to deploy the '*bird*' using the winch, i.e. apply the brake and then select 'down' to run the cable out – controlling its rate using the brake. Don't release and then try to brake, the '*bird*' will have gone by the time you do. Everything seemed to be understood and we took off to fly out of the Malton end of Toronto airport to go down to fly over Lake Ontario and then to follow the coastline. I think that I had to adjust one of the landing gear indication switches so was watching, through a small port hole for viewing, the gear swing up.

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Some minutes later I was aware of a very white face by my side, and the young fellow was clutching the ragged remains of the right coat sleeve of his winter parka.

"It's gone!" he said.

"What has?" says I.

"The bird" said he.

I'd guessed what had happened and told the mechanic, who told the two pilots that it had gone. Luckily we were out from the shore, so it probably didn't hit anything when it plunged into the water. Apparently, on a different occasion, an aircraft had lost one and it ended up burying itself into a golf course bunker. (Fore!). I can't remember whether they kept the young guy, or not. I don't think that he would ever make that mistake again. Fortunately he didn't get hurt as the cable lashed out when it departed from the winch drum. His thick sleeved coat saved him.

The '*birds*' were always an issue when the Canso aircraft were away on a job, because it meant aircraft 'downtime' when they either disappeared, or hit the ground. Yes some did do this, when the aircraft were 'contouring', i.e. they were following the slopes of a range of hills, or mountains, where they flew up and back varying their track a little each time, so that they got full coverage of the ground below with the magnetometer to get a full map when processed.

Another little quirk of the '*birds*', was that being only made of fibreglass they tended to want to fly. The trouble was, initially, that they would fly up and then wrap their cable around the tail-plane. Not a good idea obviously, so one of my many and varied jobs was to go to the nearest gun shop and purchase large amounts of lead shot and then mix a certain weight of it in fibreglass resin and then pour it into the lower half of the nose to weigh it down, so that the '*bird*' always flew nose-down to prevent this from happening.

I know that management weren't too happy with the two pilots who used 5 '*birds*' on one job, when in Europe. We usually had a stock of two or three, but we almost needed an assembly line to get them ready in Ottawa so that they could be shipped to keep these guys in the air and I had to allow 24 hours for the resin to harden before this could happen.

I had a few trips out from Ottawa to work on the aircraft in the field, prior to them going on a job. Fort Lauderdale found me installing a Bendix Doppler Radar system in their Lodestar ready to do some off coast surveying off the South American coastline. Being a 'tail-dragger' it was a bit of a chore having to keep working on a slope, especially when putting in the belly mounted antenna and its wave guides. For some reason on the windy test flight following the installation, I had cause to be face down at floor level looking into the antenna cavity, whilst the aircraft was careening about the sky. Well, that meant a quick grab for the good old plastic bag, didn't it?

Another trip took me to Johannesburg's Rand airport to rewire the generator system of the PBY Canso and to create a negative bus junction box for it. As far as I know this aircraft, when it finished with surveying, ended

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being flown up to the Duxford Air Museum in England. The one on display there refers only to it originating from a Canadian Ottawa company which, I feel pretty sure, is Geoterrex. They, like Survair, have, since my departure many years ago gone the way of the Dodo.

30 May 1983 – 30 May 2008. Transport Canada, Aircraft Services Directorate.

Employed solely in an aircraft electrical role, which was to change later, on a very varied fleet of over 80 aircraft countrywide. We carried out all the maintenance and support for a number of different government departments and activities i.e. Transport Canada's Flight Inspection Regulatory Branch, Prime Minister's Office, Airport Flight Calibration, Canadian Coast Guard Seaway Patrol, and Canadian Coastguard Helicopters.

Many of the aircraft, although making up a certain fleet, were bought from different sources and at different manufacturing dates, so their equipment was not necessarily in the same location on each one. Lots of hours were spent finding what you were looking for in order to do even just a simple job, especially if it involved removing floor panels etc. The fleet aircraft types at that time were:-

Fixed Wing:- Beech Kingair A90, Beech Kingair B90, Beech Queenair, Beech Kingair 100, Douglas DC-3, Lockheed Jetstar, de Havilland Otter, de Havilland Beaver DHC-2, de Havilland Twin Otter DHC-6, de Havilland Dash-8, Dash-7 (Arctic Ice Patrol sub leased to Bradley Air Services, later re-adopted by ASD) Cessna 182, Cessna 206, Canadair (Bombardier) Challenger CL-600. CL-215 (Water Bombers on dry lease to Provinces)

Rotary Wing: - Bell 206, Bell 212, MBB 105S, Sikorsky S61.

One of our Canadian Coast Guard helicopter pilots was Bob Jones, who was based in British Columbia and was an ex Halton Apprentice. I never met up with him in all the years we supported them. Another ex Halton Apprentice here in Ottawa, Ken Crockett, was, I believe, 38th Entry and he was a licensed helicopter maintenance engineer. He was a great guy to know but unfortunately, around about the time he was considering retirement from here, he succumbed to cancer.

The ministerial aircraft then consisted of 4 Jetstars, which had four engines in the tail (similar to VC10, but not quite). Each aircraft, of course, was different inside having been acquired from different sources. One, C-FETN, was once owned by the Eaton Company (a big retail store here, hence the ETN) and on the fleet disbandment it made a one landing flight (à la Halton arrivals) over to our National Air Museum at Rockcliffe airport. The other three were dispersed to the US where somebody hoped to convert them to two engines.

The ministerial flights were now undertaken by the Department of National Defence (DND) 412 Squadron's small (5) fleet of CL600 and CL601 aircraft. They much later acquired two CL604's. (Canadair, later Bombardier, Challenger Support representative was ex Halton Brat, Howard Dransfield (100 and something). Their squadron office was at the end of the Aircraft Services

And Then...

hangar, here in Ottawa. We carried out all their maintenance and provided flight engineers for all their flights away from Base, whether they be for the Governor General, Ministers, or their own Military VIP's. During their nearly twenty year association with Aircraft Services they have only had one major incident and that was attributed to co-pilot error.

On flying an approach into Greenwood, Nova Scotia, he thumped the right landing gear down so hard that the oleo partially broke. They managed to keep flying and flew over Halifax harbour, on another circuit, where the wheel departed and just missed a ferry as it splashed into the sea. They crash-landed safely and the crew, assisted by our Flight Engineer, evacuated the aircraft. His jacket was just starting to get singed by a small fire as he climbed out through the cabin exit. I later went down to Greenwood with one of the DND Engineering Officers and we recovered what avionics equipment we could out of the cockpit.

One of the squadron members who passed through our doors and who was only a Captain (Flt Lt) at that time was the, now infamous, double murderer and mass rapist ex-Colonel (Group Captain) Russell Williams, Base Commander of Canadian Forces Base Trenton, Ontario. He left here when he was promoted to Major (Squadron Leader) and was obviously one of those destined for higher up things in the military. He sure had us/me fooled! He was one of the guys who took more of an interest into what was going on, on the hangar floor, than any of the other military guys ever did. You never know, do you? Fortunately, whilst he was still in Ottawa, he never accosted any of the stewardesses who flew with him. They maintained that he was always the perfect gentleman whenever they had occasion to fly on his aircraft.

At one stage of the game we used to calibrate the major airports' navigation systems using the Beech 100's, but they were superseded by two Dash-8's and two Challenger CL-600's. The latter were subsequently moved from our care to Nav Canada, a non profit organization.

One of the most interesting aircraft jobs that we had was looking after the old Coast Guard Seaway Patrol aircraft, which was a DC-3. Carrying out the pollution and ice patrol for the shipping lanes, it had thousands and thousands of hours, as did its Pilot. Every day they would take off out of Ottawa, head due south to the St Lawrence River (30 miles) and then they would follow the seaway route along the river to Lake Ontario, across to the Welland Canal, and then up to Windsor.

Here they would take a break before continuing up the Detroit River, through Lake Erie and onto Lake Superior, where they terminated in Thunder Bay. Usually they would stay overnight, before retracing their route. In the summer they carried out their pollution duties and in winter the ice patrol. The latter was interesting, because on board they carried on 'observer', who sat between the Pilot and Co-pilot, just slightly to the rear of the centre console. His job was to physically look out of the cockpit windows and plot the thickness of the ice en-route.

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These guys, there were only a couple of them, had been trained to do this by judging the thickness of the ice visually, by virtue of the changing colours of the ice as it thickened or thinned. The map they plotted was then Xeroxed down to the Coast Guard shipping control centre, which then forwarded it to Great Lakes bound ships, or used it to determine whether or not to close the canal to shipping all together for the rest of the winter.

I had reason to go with them on an in-flight trouble-seeking mission and found it a very fascinating experience, especially as we left Windsor and flew up the Detroit River, looking up to the smoke stacks on the banks as we flew by them. Coming off the ice at low level to cross a bit of the headland was also a bit 'hairy', since it got very rough. Anyway, I survived and saw the old DC-3 eventually retired and also its Captain.

The pollution patrols on both coasts are now being done with the two Dash-8's, one now being in Moncton, New Brunswick and the other in Vancouver. One of these aircraft actually went down to assist BP Petroleum in the Gulf of Mexico during the massive oil spillage that occurred there not too long ago (2010).

Over the years all of the fleets were altered in some way or another, the aircraft being either scrapped, replaced, or quite substantially modified especially when it came to their avionics installations. We had an engineering section, which was continually coming up with modification programmes to satisfy the operational side (read aircrew) in their continual 'wants and need to have' of the latest 'bells and whistles'! Many of these were to provide them with 'backside covering' measures, after one of their kin had already dropped a boo-boo! We would provide extra light, or sound, warnings to attract their attention instead of putting a hammer above their heads. Some of the warnings that they already had as part of the basic aircraft systems didn't seem to help some of them. We had some real winners at times.

We have an airport just across the river from us in Gatineau, and an instructor (co-pilot's seat) and lady pilot were doing a simulated engine failure approach and landing in C-FDOU, a Beech A100. Everything was fine until wang, wang, wang. What's that noise? Oh s--t, it's the props. Throttles immediately 'balls-to-the-wall' somehow lift off and return flight to us over the city. Logbook snag: – "severe vibration both engines". Observation by us. "All blades on both propellers bent back to 90 degrees about 6 inches from the tip." No mention as to the type of damage caused i.e. two engines and props.

The aircraft was subsequently phased out and sold after repair. PiC (Pilot-in-Charge) worked over at our training school and retired at a much later date with no smear on his copy book. I'm not sure what happened to her.

1983 – 1988 Aircraft Electrician PSAC General Labour and Trades Group.

1987 Obtained Aircraft Maintenance Engineer Category E Licence (Avionics), when licence first introduced in Canada.

And Then...

1988 All members of aircraft electrical trade reclassified to the Electronics Group.

Note: This reclassification was done through my sole efforts in rewriting 3 levels of job description, in my own time, and handling all the negotiations with TC Classification Branch. All Electrical Technicians and supervisors here in Ottawa, and in the Regions across were successfully reclassified.

1991 – 2008 Supervisory roles in Avionics Line Maintenance in 'unique' one only position.

30 May 2008. Retired, – having completed 48½ year career in the aviation industry.

The fixed-wing aircraft fleet changed somewhat when a new fleet of Cessna Citation 550's was purchased. Of course, these weren't your off-the-line production models. Our lot had to have a 'glass-cockpit' format on the captain's side and conventional instrument in the co-pilot's side. In later years we ended up re-modifying them back to conventional aircraft, at great cost of course.

Another fixed-wing fiasco was the purchase of a fleet of Beech Kingair C90A aircraft to replace the A90 and B90's. The 'new' aircraft came from different sources, with half of them coming from Japanese Air Lines. Along with these they offered us a flight simulator at a relatively low cost, but *'the bean counters'* downtown in Ottawa decided against this. Sure enough, within a couple of years of having the aircraft the need for a simulator was again emphasised, discussed and approved, but it had to be Canadian.

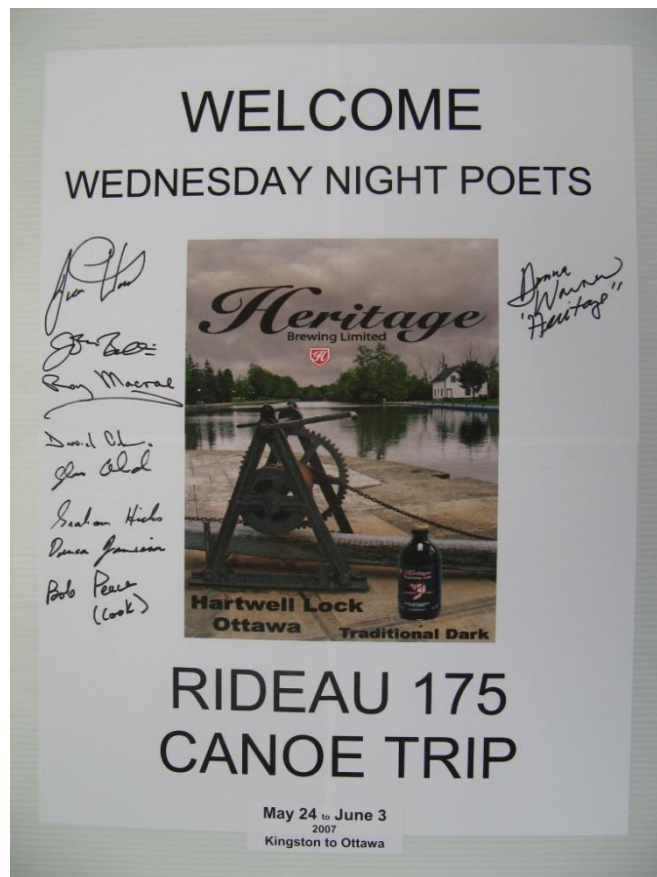
The result of this was one of our aircraft being seconded to the National Research Council's Aviation Division along with one of our Aircraft Maintenance Engineers (AME), who was to help them gather any flight data characteristics that they required. This data was then to be used by a software company to develop a flight simulator. The sub-contracted software company was, strangely enough from the USA and again, strangely enough, had never done such a project before! After a couple of years they admitted that they couldn't do the job and today, after over one million dollars having been spent Aircraft Services still doesn't have a flight simulator. Nothing changes where the government is concerned, whatever country you are in, does it?

As well as the fixed-wing side of the aviation world we also looked after quite a few helicopters, Bell 206, Bell 212, Sikorsky S61, and MBB 105S. Most of these were owned by the Canadian Coastguard who used them on our coasts, lakes and waterways, either to monitor shipping or as 'workhorses' to keep various isolated stations and the odd remaining light house supplied with food, building materials etc. Some were based on the Coast Guard 'ice breaker' ships, where they were housed in small hangars and carried an AME with them, as well as the pilots.

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All of their major overhaul work was carried out here in Ottawa, the aircraft being either ferried in, or transported by road on a special vehicle for the job. This method was used for the aircraft that had to travel right across the country (3000 miles). It's a lot cheaper to drive a truck than it is an aircraft across such distances. Many of the aircraft that came in from the coast spent many weeks in the sheet metal shop being torn down to the bare bones and then rebuilt to get rid of all the salt corrosion

During the years that I have worked in Ottawa I have struck up many friendships, particularly with a group of fellows who I have been meeting up with every Wednesday for the last twenty years. We jokingly referred to ourselves as *The Wednesday Night Poets*, which has stuck with us now for all those years.



We meet at one of the few actual pub-like 'watering holes', '*The Swan-on-the-Rideau*' between Manotick and Kemptville by the side of the Rideau River/Canal system, south of Ottawa. There is always a representative member of our group there every week, no matter what. We number about 10-12 of us from a various number of professions. Aviation accounts for one who is an ex V-Bomber pilot cum retired Canadian Armed Forces Captain, still currently working on the latest helicopter acquisition that DND have bought. He is an avid rock climber, walker, skier and expeditionist.

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He went with a British expedition who wanted to prove that the early Egyptians came across the Atlantic in reed boats and travelled down the Amazon. They tried going down the river in one and it ended up in disaster. It started to disintegrate on the rocks and they were being swept away to their deaths. Our friend got the credit for rescuing them from this fate when he rescued them using a motor boat. He was duty rescuer that day and got credit in the local Ottawa press for his heroic action. One who is retired as Bell Helicopter's International sales manager here in Ottawa, who used to have his own small flying company of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft.

Myself, retired avionics maintenance engineer. Another, a retired Brigadier General, commanding officer of an army helicopter squadron, amongst many other things. He was our most senior member whose military funeral we attended 16 May 2011. We have a Chartered Accountant, a retired Science Teacher avid canoeist and guitarist, a retired director from Transport Canada, who is also a World Class Senior Curler who went to Russia last year to compete. He also plays the guitar and is an avid canoeist. Another is a retired Director General from Foreign Affairs who is an avid golfer. He refuses to go canoeing with us.

Another is a retired manager from an international government non-profit organisation. Our one member, who takes part from afar, is a pilot with Cathay Pacific based in Hong Kong. When we first met him and took him into our group, he was a co-pilot with a local company, Bradley First Air, flying a Boeing 727-100C from Ottawa up to Iqaluit (Frobisher Bay) on a mixed flight passenger/cargo scheduled run.

Yet another is a multi degree-d fellow who carried out nutritional research for Health Canada. He is an avid scouter, camper, canoeist, and an all round philanthropist. He takes blind guys skiing, Dragon Boat racing and camping. He is also a very good cook, but don't expect him to do the washing up.

Our newest member is, you've guessed it, an ex-Brat from 105th, Dave Habberjam, who I have known for many years, but not from my RAF days. He was Airframes in those days, but has done very well for himself since his forces career ended. He is semi-retired but still consults for Bombardier Rail Division, for whom he was a project manager in Taiwan. He now lives about a mile from here in the countryside near Kemptonville. Yet another with aviation connections was a flight traffic controller, who worked with another non-profit organisation Nav Canada.

Every year we endeavour to go off for at least a week on a camping, canoeing or boat trip together. We have had some fun and tales to tell when we have returned from a lot of these jaunts into the wilds. Back in 2007, 8 of us and 4 boats set out to canoe from Kingston to Ottawa, which is 120 miles, for charity and to celebrate the canal systems 175th anniversary. We took our time and did it in 10 days. (Refer to map and 'Heritage' plaque below).

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We were lucky on this trip and got through all the locks for free, and were able to set up our tents where we stopped. We were allowed to use the bathroom (toilet) facilities as well, pure luxury. A couple of nights we used the Provincial parks, where the mosquitoes were more concentrated and hungrier, so that wasn't so much fun, especially when you had to use the 'one holer'. (Still, another luxury when compared to other trips).

At Murphy's Point, about half way through the trip, one of us decided that he would go off and look for the main park buildings and possibly get himself a shower. Now we all know he isn't that good a canoeist and asked if he was going to be able to manage it by himself.

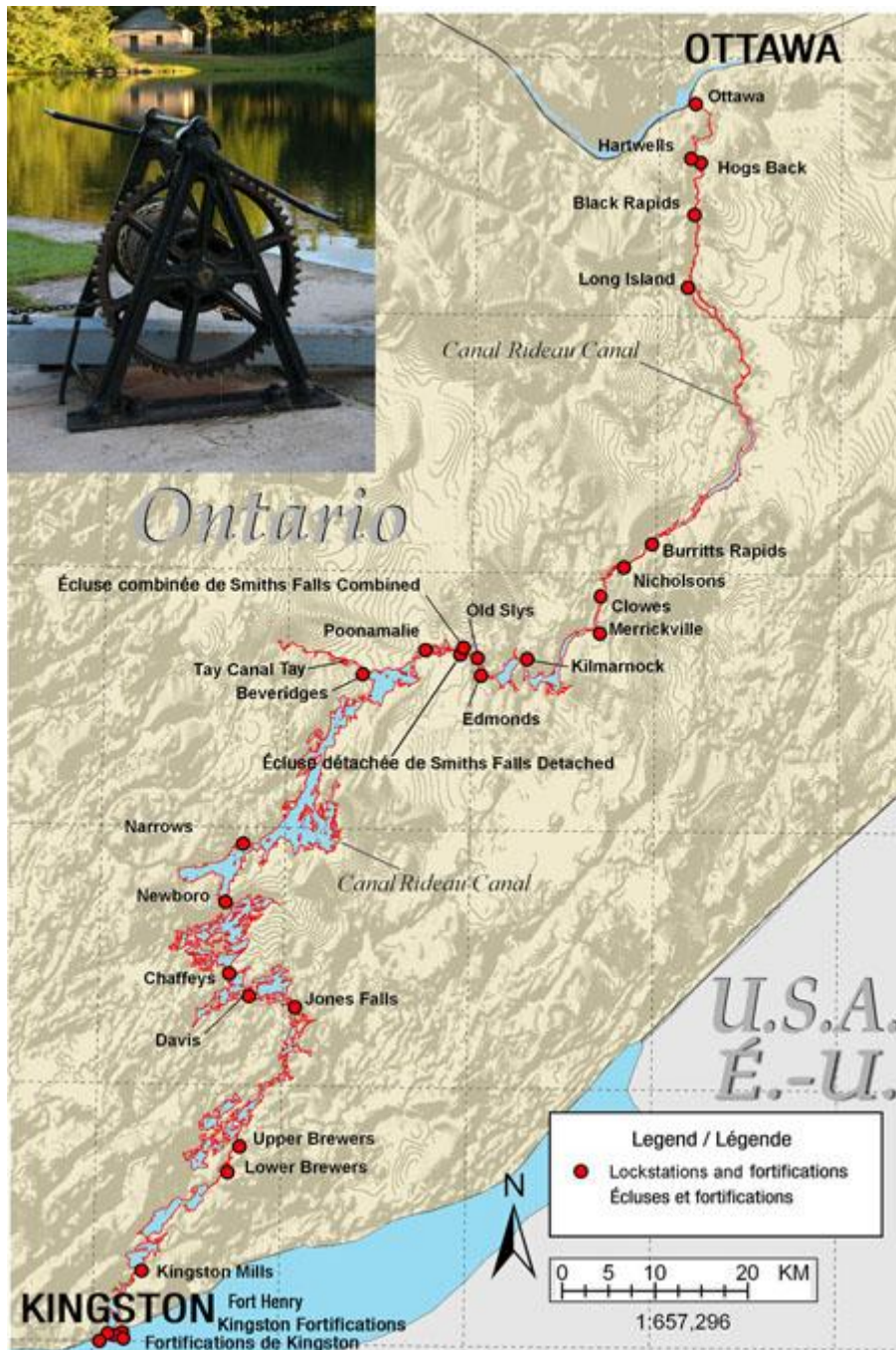
"Huh, of course I can," he says and away he goes.

Not long after this, the only other boat we had seen all day appears out of the drizzle and in it some clown with an outboard motor passes our camp site at quite a lick. We laugh and joke amongst ourselves that he'll probably tip poor old Doug over and we continue what we are doing. Not 5 minutes later a fishing boat with a man and his wife paddling came around the corner towing an upturned canoe, with Doug clinging to the back of it. Well, did we ever have a good laugh about that, but poor old Doug was not amused as he tried to dry all his clothes over a smoky fire. He accused us of ignoring his whistle that apparently he was blowing like mad. We told him that it wasn't supposed to work under water.



I am in the middle.

And Then...



Note: - When you refer to the scaling, some of those little blue bits en route are, in fact, quite big lake areas, which can, and do, get very rough very quickly. We had to put to shore on one, because of taking on bow water. Not funny in a fully loaded canoe.

Davis locks is actually a rise of three.

Ottawa down to the Ottawa (Outaouais) River is an eight lock drop. (One of the biggest in the world).

Another of our camping trips involved us being the victims in the sinking of a houseboat, 'The Loon', on Lake Temagami. (Lake Temagami, formerly spelt as Lake Timagami, is a lake in Nipissing District in north eastern

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Ontario, Canada, situated approximately 80 km north of North Bay). The lake's name comes from *Te-mee-ay-gaming*, which means 'deep water by the shore' in the Ojibwa language in northern Ontario. It extends almost 50 km from north to south and about 35 km from east to west).

We'd arrived at noon in the late May sunshine, after a six hour drive to the dock to pick up the 9hp engine powered flat bottomed houseboat, but by the time we had got loaded the weather was deteriorating. We left the dock as the rain started and the wind increased, and as we looked back saw to our horror that the small outboard motor boat that the son of one of the guys had supposedly tied on, was drifting away from us.

With much manoeuvring and cursing that sluggish boat '*The Loon*' was turned around and we set off in pursuit. We caught up with it back at the dock where it had, fortunately, managed to get without damaging it or any other boat. Once more safely secured we set off again into what was becoming quite a gloomy afternoon. Plugging along at full-bore, we slowly made our way to somewhere not too far away to spend the night. One of our group was not arriving until the next day, so the small boat was to be used to go back and pick him up at the dock.

We tied '*The Loon*' up for the night with her blunt nose up against the rocky shore, and, using ropes, secured her to sturdy trees from either side. Some of us elected to camp on shore for the night, and the others opted for being onboard. We cooked a meal, had a few drinks and then retired for the night. Rain squalls were coming in from the west and it was still pretty windy. During the night I awoke with a pain in my neck and found that my head was hard against the wall. I cursed my sleeping bag, re-adjusted it and tried to get back to sleep. A short time later one of the others got up to go for a p--- and declared that the boat was sinking. Getting no response he went back to bed. Later the same guy got back up and this time really got some attention when he declared loudly that the engine had disappeared. He was right!

The water was lapping up to the rear cabin door and the boat was sitting stern downwards with a definite list to one side. We thought at first that the ropes might have slipped and the boat had ridden along the shore, but this wasn't the case. We were definitely sinking. We decided then and there that we should abandon ship and we started to get our gear off. To do this we needed to solicit the help of the tent dwellers who, of course, didn't appreciate being woken at 5 o'clock in the morning with a 'cock and bull' story about the boat sinking.

After continual badgering by us boat dwellers they looked out and could see the reason for our concern. We all duly retrieved our gear and were about to unload the substantial beer supply from the front of the boat, when I suggested we'd better leave it there because it was counterbalancing the rear corner of the boat that was furthest under water. We tried to raise the Outfitting station, whose boat it was, to come and rescue us. Eventually we got through to them and they said that they would be on their way to fix what they thought was a flooded pontoon. We got a stove going to have some breakfast,

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whilst we waited for them. By now the rain squalls were intermingled with sleet and ice pellets.

Our rescuers arrived and one in a wet suit endeavoured to put a very spindly looking jack under the boat onto the slippery rocks with his bare hands. We waited for the accident to happen, but it didn't and after an hour of trying in vain they decided it was too rough to carry on. They would have to have a go at it sometime later when the weather subsided. OK, but what about us and did they have another boat for us? Yes they did but it would take them over an hour to prepare it once they had got back to their base, which was a half hour away. About 4 hours later we saw their boat coming up through the islands, tow assisting our replacement boat, '*The Hummingbird*'.

The weather was still not too great as we started to transfer our gear from the shore and '*The Loon*' to '*The Hummingbird*' and two of us went back to the dock to pick up the late arrival. Once we had finished loading we set off to a predetermined rendezvous point where we were going to wait for the small boat. The weather was still quite a bit unpredictable, with clear periods and then rain, when the small boat appeared around a point and heading towards us with the late comer sitting in the front looking very grim lipped. For some reason, best known to himself, he was sitting facing forwards into the full onslaught of the wind and rain.

We watched them approach from the relative warmth of the boat's cabin watching this spectacle. Very diplomatically we said nothing as he got out of the boat shivering from the cold with that defiant look in his eyes that said – "Don't you dare say a thing or it will be your last!" He was able to laugh about it later, once he had warmed up again. Surprisingly within a very short time the weather cleared and it was great for the rest of the trip. We were able to camp, fish, drink and sing around a campfire every night from then on.

As I completed this missive our group was preparing for our annual canoe trip, in the first week of June, when we paddle for a week from a friend's cottage on Balsam Lake to some other Lakes and rivers on the Trent system. This will be about 185 kilometres over five days and nights and is in the area north west of Peterborough, Ontario. Some of it takes us through locks, once again, with the possibility of some portaging' of our gear and canoes. A little more strenuous than being on a houseboat, but then a change is as good as a rest isn't it?

I retired May 31st 2008 and live with my wife, Joëlle in the village of Kemptville, Ontario (35 kms south of Ottawa). Any members of the 96th Entry who would like to visit are welcome any time. (You might even get a ride in my MGB).

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Tony Benstead – A career less ordinary?

1963 – 1964 RAF Abingdon

My first thought on arriving at RAF Abingdon was, “what the hell am I doing here?” I had never really wanted to be an Aircraft Electrician, but had been persuaded by a very glib Group Captain at pre-selection at OASC Hornchurch that it would be a very good move, as I was too young at that stage to apply for a Commission. This, he said, would give me a good grounding in RAF life and that I should apply for a Commission in my final year – a gullible 16 yr old or what? My eventual ‘O’ Level results were more than good enough to return to the Sixth Form but I chose not to (but that’s another story). I had enjoyed Physics and thought Electrical Fitter training may be interesting.

The RAF saved me the bother of applying for a Commission as, along with a number of my colleagues, I was recommended and duly attended the Halton selection process in order to progress to Biggin Hill. Unusually for a large summer Entry, only six of us made it through to Biggin Hill and in the end only two were offered Cadetships.

So here I was, on my first tour, wondering what was in store. I was posted to the Electrical Bay and swiftly became very bored indeed; stripping, cleaning, servicing then reassembling and testing became the daily routine; however, I soon realised that there was life outside the Electrical Bay and that the two Beverley Squadrons had much to offer.

Numbers 47 and 53 Squadrons operated the Blackburn Beverley which, whilst in no way a glamorous aircraft, offered the chance of some variety and travel. At that time the CO of 47 Sqn was a keen draught Guinness drinker and the majority of both aircrew and groundcrew were also keen. This was fostered by the CO who asked all newly posted personnel whether they drank Guinness; if the answer was no, they were placed on an unofficial transfer list and internal postings were quietly arranged to swap them. I managed to get on to the ‘waiting’ list and was soon a member of 47 Sqn.

Life changed sharply after the transfer, with a variety of tasks to keep boredom at bay and with the added attraction of detachments both around the UK and overseas. An advantage of the Beverley, other than its huge payload ability, was its fairly short range which necessitated refuelling stops, often involving overnight stays. I recall my first overseas stop en-route to Malta at Orange in southern France, wine on the table in the Mess at lunch was a real surprise. The Sqn was also ‘adopted’ by Guinness Brewery whilst I was there, with a ceremonial presentation of a framed Ordnance Survey map with all the draught Guinness pubs clearly marked and a great deal of Guinness to imbibe.

A further memory of this time was that the return from overseas detachments often meant a call to the Tower requesting ‘long low finals,’ which involved a waiting ground party and the parachute dropping of cases of spirits and wine together with other items on the approach, usually having arranged to return in the dark!

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Two friends and I also volunteered to go on the Parachute AMO Course, held at the Parachute Training Centre based at Abingdon. The course involved two weeks training, culminating in two balloon jumps and two aircraft jumps; unfortunately my friends both chickened out at the last minute whilst I completed the course, following which I joined the Free-Fall Club often trading servicing for jumps.

Detachments around the UK, Europe, Middle East and Africa followed before the RAF decided it was time for me to move.

1964 – 1966 RAF Khormaksar, Aden

Aden had not been what I had expected when told I was being posted overseas – there was a world out there that did not involve sand and terrorists, but here I was. Initially I was posted to the SAR Flt on first line servicing of the Whirlwind helicopter, despite there being a Beverley Sqn at Khormaksar. The work was again varied and enabled the opportunity for much crewman work as well as servicing, although ferrying a heavily pregnant Arab woman to hospital, who didn't quite make it, involved the removal and burning of the coconut matting covering the floor!

The main downside at Khormaksar was the local security situation, the result of which was guard duties and a curfew at midnight. Being shot at was a new experience, and one not to be recommended, as was having someone roll a grenade down the street behind you.

Several instances stick in the memory from my time in Aden. Col. *'Mad Mitch'* marching in to Sheik Othman with the ensuing Arab slaughter; AVM *'Johnny'* Johnson departing in semi disgrace having misused the Beverley to ship decent soil from Kenya to his garden in Steamer Point; Smith declaring UDI in Rhodesia and the subsequent resignation of two Rhodesian Officers serving on the base, together with the desertion of a number of groundcrew who sympathised and went to join the Rhodesian Air Force. One Cpl I knew eventually returned and worked as a Ground Crew Chief at Dublin Airport and is still technically a deserter.

The infamous Khormaksar riot also took place whilst I was there and was caused by an over officious RAF Regt Pilot Officer. He decided that despite the norm being the closing of bars at the designated time and then drinking quietly until you had finished, he would order everyone from the bar whether they had finished or not and locked the gate. After he left everyone climbed back over the wall to finish their beers. Unfortunately he decided to return later and promptly instructed the Orderly Sgt to pour the contents of all remaining glasses onto the sand.

People returned to their three-storey Barrack Blocks in a real rage and began to throw mattresses and furniture over the balcony. Needless to say this attracted the attention of the Orderly Sgt, who then called the same Orderly Officer. At some stage during the ensuing arguments the pile of mattresses and broken furniture was set on fire and a fire engine arrived.

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By this time the situation was so out of control that attempts were made to overturn the fire engine, at which point the officer, who had called out the guard, ordered a volley to be fired. The Station Commander arrived in very short order and everything quietened down. The Regt Officer departed Aden two days later!

The most memorable events in Aden for me, however, were my meeting with an Italian, Marco Ronci, and the subsequent meeting with Angela who would later become my wife. Marco ran a small company exporting turtle produce, both dried and frozen, to the UK and Germany and we not only became fast friends but I ended up working for him in my considerable spare time.

This work was varied, from travelling up the coast to the beach Arab villages and buying turtles, to boarding ships in the harbour with bills of lading and checking the stowage and correct storage of the exported goods. I was often required to board ships at night and Marco obtained an Italian Consulate pass to enable me to get through security check points after the curfew; in addition, the use of a flat in Ma'alla meant I did not need to worry about getting back into Base after midnight.

I soon became reasonably proficient in both Arabic and Italian and life was good. Marco was paying me £200 a month, plus use of the flat, and he would also often pick up my tab at a local restaurant I used. At the time the RAF was paying me about £60 after deductions and I decided that I had had enough, and applied to leave. The RAF had other ideas, telling me that I had not amortised my training costs and that there was no question of my leaving. I subsequently had a somewhat stormy interview with the Station Commander.

Soldiering on with my dual existence, I began to pay others to do my guard duty so that I was always free to carry out my other activities. At the same time the SAR Flt was disbanded and I was transferred to the Engine Bay, removing, servicing, replacing and testing the electrical harnesses of the engines that came in. Back to extreme boredom at work.

My income enabled me to spend evenings at '*The Rock*' and '*The Al Casino*', usually in a white DJ, and often until the early hours with my then girlfriend, the daughter of the Italian Consul. It was on one such evening, without girlfriend, that I met Angela who at the time was working for the Federal Government, and so began a courtship that would eventually end in marriage. Motor boating, water skiing and scuba diving, together with joining the odd Army stick for parachute jumps, all helped to pass the time.

1966 – 1968 RAF Abingdon

Late 1966 saw me return to Abingdon, but by this time the Beverley had gone and it was to 46 Sqn that I was posted and to the new Andover with the unique 'kneeling' undercarriage. The following year Angela and I were married and eventually moved into a very smart hiring in Wantage, where I was to become the youngest committee member of the local Conservative Association and was very privileged to know Airey Neave. DSO, OBE, MC, MP.

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Work life revolved around first line servicing and many enjoyable detachments to places new. Family life changed with the birth of our daughter; however, the RAF decided that my skills were again needed elsewhere and I found myself posted again.

1968 – 1969 RAF Sharjah, Persian Gulf

They say that if you can't take a joke you shouldn't have joined, but two postings to the desert was past a joke, and a year unaccompanied away from a daughter who was not yet old enough to know me was certainly no joke. The compensations were a lot of very enjoyable and extremely interesting detachments, from up and down the Gulf Stations to Persia, India and the Far East.

At RAF Masirah we enjoyed superb crayfish tails only to hear the guys there complain, "Oh no, not bloody crayfish tails again." Water skiing, sailing, photography and amateur dramatics also filled the time. The next time I was in Dubai it bore almost no resemblance to my memories.

1969 – 1971 RAF Lyneham/RAF Brize Norton

This time my return to the UK meant a posting to RAF Lyneham and Britannia Major servicing, it also meant a return to boredom. During this time, to relieve the boredom and to earn extra money, a number of us would make up a team and go to Luton on leave and service aircraft for Britannia Airways.

As it was planned that the Britannia would move to Brize Norton I was offered the chance to move early to brand new quarters and travel daily, which we readily accepted. During this time I also completed the conversion course that included Gen Inst, changing from Electrical Fitter (Air) to Aircraft Fitter Elect. It was about this time that I began to realise I needed to make a decision regarding our future. If I was to stay in the RAF I needed to get out of the rut and do something I would be happier with.

After some discussion with a very good Flight Commander it was agreed that although I had very good professional assessments, my sometimes slightly rebellious conduct in other areas would make it difficult to apply for a Commission, and my age would soon turn against me. The solution was to apply for NCO Aircrew.

I again found myself at OASC Biggin Hill, and once again called for re-view after the first round. Determined to get through, I argued my case and proceeded through to the next stage of selection.

1971 – 1972 RAF Topcliffe

Aircrew Training re-invigorated my original enthusiasm for the RAF and I threw myself in to all aspects of the training. On an early flying exercise we suffered an electrical fault and, as the Varsity used the P3 electrical circuit, which was the first system we had learned at Halton, I offered the Captain the chance that I could fix it, to which he readily agreed rather than abort the flight. I was able to fix the fault and the flight continued with all training completed.

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I was subsequently called in front of OC Eng to be told in no uncertain terms that I was no longer an Electrical Fitter and was not under any circumstances to do that again. For once discretion made me hold my tongue! My enthusiasm and hard work saw me graduate with the Ground Studies Prize, the Air Merit Award, the Leadership Trophy and a Pass with Distinction.

1972 – 1973 RAF St Mawgan

Arrival at St Mawgan for holding prior to the Nimrod OCU meant a Married Quarter at RAF St Eval which was situated on a very windy cliff north of St Mawgan; however, my graduation results enabled me to jump some of the holding queue and enter the OCU early. Following successful completion of the OCU I was posted to Kinloss.

1973 – 1977 RAF Kinloss

Life took on a totally different meaning on 201 (Guernsey) Sqn. The task was interesting and varied, as was the training, and the personnel on the Sqn both worked hard and played hard. I quickly settled into Sqn life and again joined the Theatre Club. We also bought our first house and finally dispensed with Married Quarters.

Working as a constituted crew we quickly became very proficient and eventually won the National Anti Submarine Warfare Competition. As the National winner we represented the RAF at the subsequent International (Fincastle Competition) held in Canada, which we also won; one immediate reward was a weekend stop in Bermuda on our way home. This success led to us being invited to compete in an American exercise (Sea Fox) at Cubi Point NAS in the Philippines. The Royal Navy had sent the Nuclear Attack Submarine 'Warspite' to take part and the crew boasted at the Exercise launch party that this would be the last we saw or heard from them until the final party. We took great delight in arriving at the final beach party wearing T shirts with a cartoon of a broken back submarine bearing *Warspite's* number on the conning tower, having 'killed' them twice.

In 1976 the crew was selected to attend *The International Aerospace Show* in Tokyo which proved to be all we had hoped for. After two weeks in Tokyo we left Japan via two nights in Kyoto, followed by two weeks at RAAF Butterworth in Penang and two months at RAF Tengah, Singapore. It was during the period in Singapore that I had one of my most gratifying professional sorties.

We were scrambled on a search and rescue mission out into the Indian Ocean to look for a yacht that was missing following a very weak MAYDAY call. We searched all day, finally landing at RAF Gan for food and sleep and depriving a VC10 crew of their air-conditioned accommodations on operational grounds, much to their fury. The following day, after a first light take-off we finally found the yacht.

During this time the Theatre Club won a number of competitions, including the Strike Command Drama competition, productions where I was either a member of the cast or a producer.

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Following accelerated promotion to Flt Sgt, I again began to consider my options as to whether I should remain in the RAF as I would soon be approaching a discharge point. I seriously considered leaving and going to University as a mature student to do a Law Degree. To this end I was invited to lunch with the Dean of the Law Faculty at Aberdeen University, following which he said that he would be delighted to welcome me as a student when I reached my break point should that be my decision.

On discussing this with the Stn Cdr, Group Capt John Pack, he suggested that it was about time I applied for a Commission and, following some discussions with Angela, this was what was finally decided, with the proviso that should I be unsuccessful, I would leave and go to Aberdeen University.

Once again I found myself at OASC Biggin Hill, and once more I was called for review after the first phase; as last time, I argued my case and won, eventually being given the news by a delighted John Pack that I had been successful.

1977 – 1977 RAF Henlow

OCTU training was again intense, interesting and varied and I used my previous service experience to help the direct entrant members of my Flight find their feet and cope with some of the inevitable 'bullshit.' As Flight Project leader I led the discussions as to what we should do and we eventually agreed that we would attempt an ambitious task of recovering engine parts from two crashed wartime aircraft on an island off the west coast of Scotland, a task that would involve a branch of Reservist SBS Marines from London and an RAF helicopter. I was to later receive a ticking off, as a package arrived for me from Kinloss containing aerial photographs of the island that I had asked John Pack if he could get an aircraft returning over that area to take for us.

In the end the difficulties proved too much to resolve within the timescale and we undertook the renovation of a WW1 aircraft at the Shuttleworth Trust Collection. The Scottish project did not die however, and I travelled to the Air Historic Branch to look for other crash sites that had not been thoroughly examined due to a remote location. We chose two sites and I subsequently organised an expedition that would commence the morning after Graduation.

Graduation was on my birthday, 2 Jun 1977, and I was awarded the British Aircraft Corporation Trophy for best overall performance, taking pride in commanding the Graduating Sqn at the Graduation Parade. Only a few members of the Flight volunteered to go on the expedition but in the event a Puma arrived and took us, somewhat bleary eyed, to Scotland where we uncovered and retrieved a number of engine parts in good condition from a Hurricane and a Spitfire that were passed to the Battle of Britain Flight for future use

1977 – 1982 RAF Waddington

Although posted to 44 (Rhodesia) Sqn at RAF Waddington I was first to spend time commuting to the Vulcan OCU at RAF Scampton, where I was introduced to the other crew members with whom I would make up a constituted 44(R)

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Sqn crew. We were eventually to become the longest established crew in the Force, apart from the odd change of co-pilot, or change of odd co-pilot! So began one of the most enjoyable periods of my time in the RAF

This strong sense of teamwork and camaraderie enabled us to quickly establish a good record in all aspects of the task, eventually winning the 'in-Sqn' and 'inter Sqn' competitions for a place on the *Giant Voice Bombing Competition* at Barksdale AFB in Louisiana. This was two months of very hard work and a lot of fun as we were able to set our own training programme which often involved three practice bombing sorties on Tue, Wed, Thu and then often a three or four day weekend exploring places as diverse as New Orleans and Dallas/Fort Worth.

The competition itself involved several nations and Vulcan B2, B52, F111 aircraft, the final results showing without question that the Vulcan could more than hold its own against the modern F111 and the old, but extremely well equipped B52. I managed to get trips in both models during the two months.

During this period I was again a member of the Theatre Club, both acting and directing, and we were fortunate enough to again win the Strike Command Drama Festival Competition.

1982 – 1986 RAF College Cranwell

Towards the end of 1981 it was obvious that the Vulcan's days were numbered and desk officers were starting to talk about postings. Unbeknown to me, my Sqn Cdr had recommended me for a Flt Cdr tour at the RAF College Cranwell, which was subsequently the basis of a discussion with my desk officer. I had apparently been earmarked for the Nimrod AEW which was then well behind schedule. The then Director of DIOT⁴ (Gp Capt Bobby Robson) had been a Vulcan Sqn Cdr and, given his previous experience, had reservations about an Air Electronics Officer as a Flt Cdr, so I was duly despatched to Cranwell for an interview, following which I was accepted and, after the Personnel Selection Officer's Course at Biggin Hill, and several others, I arrived in Feb 1982.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Cranwell, slipping easily into the role of DIOT Flt Cdr. The work was varied and interesting, as were most of the students, and I used to tell them that I had served under and alongside too many poor officers to wish to add to their number! Project weekends were again a feature and I would always say that they could organise almost anything, other than try to get me down a hole in the ground.

Matrix meetings at the various stages of the course were interesting, with some staff making comments such as, "he is only going to be a Supplier or such-and such, so we can let him through," as we were under pressure from MoD to graduate people. Gp Capt Bobby Robson would have none of it and went so far as to insist Selection Officers came up from Biggin Hill to look at the performance of some of those they were sending us.

⁴ Department of Initial Officer Training – Editor

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One particular, very attractive female student who was put up for failure for lack of OQs, and had our recommendation ratified by the Director's Board, was subsequently reprieved by the RAFC Commandant. Following initial posting she was later discharged under 1021 action having started an affair with a married Sqn Ldr. I eventually moved up to the Sqn Adj post.

The Station Commander with whom I had had the run-in at Khormaksar was now Sir Michael Beetham, and he arrived as the Reviewing Officer for the Queen's Graduation Parade for my DIOT Squadron. Imagine my surprise when Sir Michael approached me during the subsequent reception, having recognised me, to congratulate me on "getting my head right" as he put it. I also learned that Sir Michael had been a member of 44(R) Sqn during the war.

Once again the desk officer was on the phone telling me that the Nimrod AEW was still well behind schedule and that he was unsure as to where to post me. In a subsequent conversation with Gp Capt Bobby Robson he asked if I would be willing to accept a re-tour at Cranwell as OC Specialist Entrant & Re-Entrant (SERE) to totally rewrite their course syllabus and bring it more into line with the main course. He promised that if I accepted the offer he would ensure I had a posting to enjoy afterwards.

After re-writing the course syllabus and taking over as OC Specialist Entrant & Re-Entrant (SERE) (the first GD officer to do so), I had insisted that we no longer employed the SERE 'old boy network' as the Flt Cdrs, and was given a Nav and a female Admin Sec. The word soon got around that the course was no longer just a 'knife, fork and spoon course'. The first time I recommended a nursing sister for a re-course I was obliged to go down to see the Director of Medical Services and justify the recommendation, which he approved; however, when I recommended that she be failed at the end of her second course, it took strong backing from both the Director and the Commandant to have her discharged.

It was during my time at Cranwell that the 44(R) Sqn disbandment ceremony took place. The 44(R) Sqn CO rang the Director and asked if I could be the College Colour Party standard bearer as he wanted the Colour to be handed to an ex Sqn member. This was agreed by the Director, and the College WO and I was very proud to receive the Colour at the Waddington ceremony, to be laid up in College Hall.

1986 – 1989 HQ 1 (BR) Corps Bielefeld, Germany

The best laid plans etc. As the end of my tour as OC SERE approached the AEW Nimrod was still very conspicuous by its absence. I received a very strange call from my desk officer telling me that he was struggling to find me a posting, as he had received a letter from (by then Air Commodore) Bobby Robson telling him I was to be given a posting I would enjoy. It became clear that a flying tour would be difficult but he did offer me the chance of a posting to Germany, but he knew little about it.

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Even more unusually, he offered me the opportunity to fly over and look at the job and speak with the present incumbent before deciding, which I accepted. The job was certainly to be different but this appealed to my 'anything but boredom' approach. The posting was to G3(Air) at HQ 1st British Corps, Bielefeld, with RAF Gutersloh, a little way south, as my RAF parent unit. Corps G3(Air) was responsible for organising all fixed wing and helicopter support for the Corps, coordinating all the RAF Brigade Air Liaison Officers and training the Forward Air Controllers, I was also to be the Corps Eifel representative.

Eifel was the latest NATO secure air tasking computer system and as a result I attended monthly meetings in the Eifel Region of southern Germany. The majority of delegates were Lt Col level and obviously enjoyed the social element of the meetings. At an early meeting I asked a colleague if the meetings were always here, to which he replied yes, so I was somewhat surprised at a subsequent meeting to hear the Chairman say, "I think the next meeting must be at Erding." Turning to my friend I said, "I thought you said that the meetings were always here," he replied, "Ja always here except when we have it at Erding for the Oktoberfest!"

For the next three years I found myself in a private box at the Oktoberfest in one of the huge beer marquees being hosted extravagantly by Siemens, the manufacturer of the Eifel system. Monthly meetings were also held in Maastricht, Holland for the 2ATAF Air Allocation Conference. I got to know and enjoy Maastricht very well as, like the Eifel conferences, it involved overnight stays.

The day to day work proved to be interesting and varied; it was particularly interesting to learn a great deal about how the Army operated, particularly in the field. The Army seemed to think that if you threw a cam net over something it was invisible – try telling a Harrier pilot that when you are in a field of wheat with a temperate cam net over your gun emplacement. I also tasked a Harrier to do a photo recce run over the Corps HQ deployed in the field at a disused factory, showing the resulting pictures at the morning briefing and demonstrating the poor cam techniques.

The Army do 'social' very well and I was invited to many Regimental dinners whilst there. I also became Wines Member for the Corps Mess and remained so for my whole tour as each time I was due for replacement the various Corps Commanders expressed the desire that I stay. On arrival I had found the wine cellar to be very poorly stocked with mainly German wines and had undertaken the task of totally reorganising and improving the cellar, a task that took time as I had to gauge reaction to any new wine before putting it onto the regular list. Although the Army did not pay for my excursions to vineyards, I was very happy to do so; in addition, various wine merchants would drop bottles in to the cellar man for me to taste.

I had one or two encounters with the Corps Sgt Major, who went apoplectic when having stopped me for wearing sun glasses in uniform, was told that they were issue sunglasses. A later encounter involved me carrying an

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umbrella in pouring rain and my informing him that RAF Regulations permitted the carrying of a plain black umbrella in inclement weather.

The Army taught me to ski whilst I was in Germany. Most Regiments had ski huts in Bavaria and 'Ex Snowqueen' each winter involved two weeks of skiing (on duty), complete with food, accommodation, lift passes and instruction. Skiing was available in winter about an hour south of Bielefeld, but I would often arrive at the office on a Fri morning in civilian clothes with the car packed and skis on the roof. Having ensured that everything was up to date I would hit the Autobahn down to Bavaria or Austria, to be back in the office on Mon after lunch.

1989 – 1990 RAF Port Stanley, Falkland Islands

All good things come to an end and I was eventually told that it was G3(Air) who was to supply an Ops Officer at Port Stanley for a four month tour. Guess who? Surprisingly the Falklands proved to be very enjoyable, probably because I went during their summer and the wildlife was spectacular. The task involved shift work but was undemanding and I spent countless hours walking and observing/photographing/filming seals, different penguin species, albatross etc. The overriding memory is of the smell of a penguin colony!

1990 – 1990 RAF Finningley

Having been promised a flying tour I was very angry on arrival at Finningley to discover I was posted as a Ground Instructor on the AEOP School. Whilst this would involve some check/training flights I was very disappointed. Fortunately I did not have to endure this situation for very long as one day not long after arrival I bumped into Al Cleaver (my Wg Cdr at Bielefeld, now a Gp Capt) who was now at PMC Barnwood and on an official visit. Over lunch and on discovering what had become of his posting recommendation, as I needed a current flying assessment for promotion, he promised to address the situation on his return to Barnwood. No sooner said than done, a posting came through in very short order to 360 Sqn at RAF Wyton.

1990 – 1992 RAF Wyton

In the event Wyton proved to be not the happiest of times, partially, I suspect, due to the fact that Angela and I chose not to move; however, she was by now running the IT training for Head Teachers and School Secretaries for all the Lincolnshire schools and was reluctant to leave. I bought a small diesel Peugeot and commuted the 84 miles each way. I again enjoyed some very good detachments, mainly in Europe and Scandinavia, but the commute became a bit onerous – the situation was particularly hard on a double header. Leaving home in order to arrive for planning at 07:00, for a subsequent take-off and EW sortie against RAF Leuchars aircraft; landing for an aircraft turn around; face to face debrief and lunch followed by a further sortie in the afternoon and a telephone debrief after landing back at Wyton and the drive home was beginning to become a chore. We were also missing out on the Sqn/Station social life.

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During this time I became Membership Secretary of the RAF Winter Sports Association, organising the RAF Wyton participation, introducing the first membership database and qualifying as a Race Official. Three weeks of duty skiing/organising became the norm each year. As often in the past I became bored with the work routine and began to look around for a way to escape both the boredom and the commute.

At that time Arms Control was becoming 'the next big thing' so I began to look at what that entailed and where the new Unit would be based. The Joint Arms Control Implementation Group (JACIG) was being set up at Scampton; the job could involve a lot of interesting travel and the opportunity to learn Russian; what was more they were asking for volunteers, particularly those with proven language skills. I had good German by now. After some discussion with Angela it was agreed that I would apply.

1992 – 1995 RAF Scampton

JACIG was an independent Tri-Service unit based at, and administered by, RAF Scampton. It was commanded in the first instance by an Army Colonel. Prior to arrival I once again attended several courses. In the end I decided not to do the Russian course as it was very long and run at Beaconsfield; however it became apparent that my German would be very useful and I brushed up on this in my spare time.

The Conventional Forces Europe Treaty (CFE) had not yet been fully signed and ratified but we started to train not only ourselves but engaged in joint training exercises both at home and abroad with NATO allies and 'now friendly' formerly Eastern Bloc countries, such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Ukraine.

I was initially posted as an inspection team member and carried out a number of training inspections before the Treaty came into force; once ratified the inspections started for real into former very hostile countries. I remember standing on an airfield in Belarus that had been a target which I had studied religiously in a vault at Waddington, thinking that if push had come to shove I would have been trying to drop a bucket of sunshine here.

After a relatively short period I took over the operations role of organising all the outbound inspections and their air transport. Although my task was outbound ops, I was tasked with visiting all the UK Points of Entry (POE) to negotiate and agree all the procedures for an incoming foreign inspection team; the main reason I was tasked was that apart from Dover, all the POEs were RAF or civilian airfields, and my inbound ops partner was Army. Once all the POEs had been visited I wrote a full POE procedure operation order for each one, to be used for all future inbound inspections.

Meetings again became a regular feature of life at the Foreign Office, MOD, NATO HQ Brussels and occasionally Geneva; in addition, I made a number of liaison visits to other Treaty organisations like JACIG, both NATO and former Warsaw Pact.

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During my time at JACIG I continued as RAF Winter Sports Membership Secretary and the RAF Ski Championships featured each winter.

Once again my desk officer called to discuss a posting – in essence he wanted to post me to Arms Control at MoD. I had already successfully turned down postings to the MoD before, and I still had no wish to join the commuters at Grantham Station every morning. The prospect of a flat in London was even more appalling than commuting. He said that the only real alternative was to stay at JACIG, however I felt there were no challenges left for me there and that life could therefore become boring.

At the time there was much talk of *'The Peace Dividend'* and probable redundancies. I asked if I was liable to be made redundant, to which he replied no. I then asked whether I would be likely to get redundancy if I asked for it? He said that he was not allowed to answer questions like that, but if I was interested I should apply!

My application was successful and I was informed of this in Nov 1994. With an Army Col again the Commandant, with an Army view of such things, he told me that I could go on gardening leave until discharge at the end of March after a handover that would see me escorting my replacement to all the places I normally visited and introducing him to everyone.

After various Resettlement Courses I found myself a civilian again for the first time since 1960.

1995 – 2005 Independent Training Consultant

I started work as an independent training consultant, specialising in management development, recruitment, leadership and teamwork; sometimes on my own and sometimes with other independent consultants formerly staff members at Cranwell. I worked for many companies such as BMW, Barclays Bank, British Airways, the Fire Service and a number of smaller companies.

The two largest long term contracts were with The National Air Traffic Service and Standard Chartered Bank, both of which lasted around ten years. The Standard Chartered work involved both training and recruitment and I led a team which wrote a two day recruitment module to standardise graduate recruitment in all thirty four countries in which they had staff. We later wrote a similar package for middle management for their African countries.

Not only did these recruitment packages involve travelling to many countries to train their HR personnel in how to use them effectively, it also involved periodic visits to ensure they were all being used to the same standard. African visits were particularly welcome as I had struck up a very good rapport with the head of HR for Africa. He was based in London but would usually come out when I was training or monitoring and afterwards he would usually arrange something. In Zimbabwe we would go up to Victoria Falls for a few days, in Botswana we would go out to the Okavango Delta to see the wild life.

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A memory that I am very proud of was a two-day event for a very large multinational company. I had organised it to be held in Barcelona at the Olympic Stadium and its surrounds, with all the delegates staying at the 5-star *Hotel Arts* on the Olympic Marina. The whole four days were a great success and truly memorable for all concerned. I have since been back several times and Barcelona is a really fun city.

During this period I became Regional Organiser for the Lincolnshire and Humberside branch of *The Porsche Club*, Great Britain, a post I was to enjoy for seven years. I had bought my first Porsche duty free in Germany and by now had three. I would organise many activities and trips, the most memorable being a weekend in Reims, being hosted by Veuve Clicquot. The five-course lunch they provided was outstanding and accompanied by different vintage champagnes with each course. When we left, the convoy of Porsches carried more champagne than I would have believed possible. The event cost us nothing, other than travel and accommodation, as I had met a Director of Veuve Clicquot at one of our National events and he was a very enthusiastic Porsche 365 owner.

2003 – To date – France

One day after returning from a stay with German friends in Neustadt we sat down and reviewed our situation. We had been becoming increasingly dissatisfied with what Blair and his cronies were doing to the UK which, coupled with Angela's frustration at now being prevented from doing her job professionally, made us agree that we should just 'bugger off and have an adventure'. Two weeks later we bought our current house which, although needing a lot of renovation, gave us a very warm feeling. Renovation of house and garden followed and, to an extent, continues; we have developed around an acre of garden and have a project for a similar amount again. Over nine years on and we have no regrets.

Some six years ago I read an article about Cancer Support France (CSF), which at the time consisted of two associations in Charente and Deux Sevres. I made enquiries about the charity and later started an association locally becoming its founding President, a position I hold to this day. Since that small beginning CSF has grown to a network of sixteen associations (more are in the pipeline) with a coordinating National Committee on which I also sit as a member. Last year the network supported more than four hundred English speaking people who were affected by cancer.

Life here is so peaceful and relaxed and, although in the Dordogne, we are sufficiently far from the main tourist areas that they don't bother us. Very pleasingly, after over nine years we are still the only English in our commune. French neighbours are mostly farmers with a heavy reliance on strawberries for which the area is famous and they have all, without exception, been very welcoming, and have made us feel very much at home, which of course it is.

And Then...

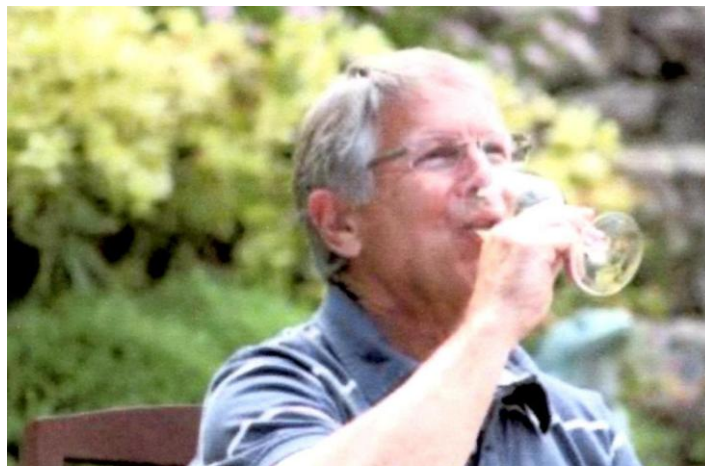
Things may not have turned out the way I expected back in 1960 but, after fifty years and sixty eight countries, I can say I have had an enormous amount of FUN, and long may it continue. Life is never boring unless you allow it!



2003



2011



Cheers!

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And Then...

Life After Brats by Peter Brown

I remember I remember.

1963 (August) Lyneham

After Halton I, along with several other ex 96th Apprentices, was posted to Lyneham. Working on Brown Team on Britannia Second Line maintenance.

1966 (31 Dec 1965 – 30 Nov 1967) Khormaksar, Aden

131 MU Beaver CWP Mods.

1966 promoted to Cpl.

Detached Bahrain Twin Pin Main Spar Repair Team.

Last 6 weeks detached to Sharjah.

1968 Lyneham

C130 Hercules.

i/c Role Equipment shift.

Britannia White Team.

Britannia Second Line maintenance.

1970 Brize Norton

A Flt Brit Line.

Promoted Sgt.

1973 KFAA Riyadh Saudi Arabia

Airframe Fitter & OJT.

Strikemaster 2nd line maintenance & new aircraft post-delivery inspections.

i/c Tyre Bay & Hydraulic Bay.

Flight Line operations – Strikemaster.

1976 Airline Engineering Luton

Airframe Fitter.

Ex-RAF Britannia conversion to civil operating standard & other a/c as required.

1977 Fairey Hydraulics

Product Support Dept. – Sales & Service Engineer.

Flight controls for Jaguar, Harrier, Trident.

1979 Millipore UK Ltd

Water Systems Division – Service Engineer.

Installation & maintenance of reverse osmosis equipment for laboratories and hospital dialysis units.

Conversion of U.S. equipment to UK standards.

1981 Fairey Hydraulics

Project Engineer – Tornado Support Equipment.

Procurement, acceptance testing, installation & commissioning.

Redundancy.

And Then...

1984 Industrial Acoustics

Quality Engineer.

Re-writing quality manuals.

Inspection of printing press sound enclosures and a/c noise abductors.

Commissioning noise abductor for RAF engines in Germany.

1985 Martin-Baker Aircraft

Design Support Department – LSA Engineer.

US Navy (Mk14) ejection seats for F-18, F-14 & Goshawk.

Associated support equipment.

Mk16 Eurofighter (Typhoon).

USAF T-38.

2008 Retirement!

**Editor's Note: Peter is the Deputy Membership Secretary for the RAF Halton
Apprentices' Association – Old Haltonians**

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And Then...

Life After Halton by Graham Castle

August 1963 – December 1966 RAF Lyneham.

I was posted on to Central Maintenance Unit and 24 hour shift work, which was a bit of a shock to the system. The work was mainly defect rectification on Brits, Comet 2's and 4's. During this time I went to Warton, I think with Pete Evans, for my Corporal's board. This was successful and I made Corporal in July 1965. I was posted on to Brit Majors sometime early in 1966. I got married to a girl back home in September 66 just as my posting to Muharraq came through.

December 1966 – December 1967 RAF Muharraq Bahrain.

Here I was posted on to a role equipment section as a Corporal i/c a shift of 3 or 4 men. We only had 2 shifts to cover early and lates. The main work involved changing the roles of the station Beverleys including heavy drop (Land Rovers, guns, etc.), Para drop, Pax and carriage of general motorised equipment. We also got involved in visiting aircraft mainly Argosies for Para drop exercises. The year past fairly quickly with a 3 week home leave $\frac{2}{3}$ rds of the way through.

December 1967 – April 1974 RAF Brize Norton.

I was again posted on to the Central Maintenance Unit which was responsible for all 1st line maintenance and defect rectification of VC10 and Belfast. I remained here until my discharge in 1974 and the following are some of the highlights.

When I first arrived at Brize my wife and I rented a caravan as there was no married accommodation. Also, the aircraft were operating out of RAF Fairford because of the work going on at Brize.

I was one of the lucky ones to complete a VC10 Airframe course at the BOAC Training Centre at Heathrow, which also gave me a bit of an insight in to civilian maintenance life.

Still no accommodation so we bought our first property, a 2 bed bungalow in Carterton. During our time there our family grew, with the addition of 3 daughters, all born at the RAF Hospital at Wroughton. With the family growing we had to move, and bought a new 3 bed house, still in Carterton and about 100yds from our first bungalow.

I got my 3rd stripe in 1969 which came with the privilege of use of the Sergeant's Mess and an improvement in our social life. It also meant taking my turn at running the line for A/F, B/F and Turnarounds which was always a pain.

Our shift patterns were changed after a lot of complaints and we moved on to 12 hour shifts of 3 days and 3 nights with 6 days off and this was a big improvement. This led to a bit of moonlighting, along with many others, working for about 3 days at a time as contractors at Luton Airport for Monarch or Britannia.

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I did 2 memorable trips in my time; one as servicing crew for a VIP VC10 taking the AOC to the USA to visit Scott AFB where the Vietnam casualties were brought back; and Lockheed's base at Marietta in Georgia to see the new Cargomaster aircraft. One of the party on that trip was a very nice, interesting Wing Co doctor who came back and chatted to us. He had been on the Comet crash investigation and explained a lot of the findings. Then on the way home he explained some of the presentations they had had about the growth of air freight and he said in a few years we will be eating strawberries all the year round.

The other one was with the AOC again when one of the Belfasts was circling Manston with its nose u/c stuck up. Myself, and another Sergeant were told to get ready as the AOC was coming in to pick us up. The AOC's Dove arrived and when we got in the AOC apologised as there were no seats and that we could sit on the floor and guard the coffee urn.

When we arrived the foam carpet had already been laid so we landed on the taxi way. The Belfast did one last pass so that the cameraman could take some pictures and we could have a look. You could see that the wheels were not straight in the bay so the pilot decided to retract the u/c and try again. This time they came down and the a/c returned to Brize. We then had another ride back on the floor.

I did a day release course at Witney Tech over 3 years, which the RAF supported, and gained a City and Guilds Full Tech Cert in Aeronautical Engineering. I also took and passed the CAA AEC 2 Airframes Certificate. These proved useful qualifications, along with the Halton Apprenticeship, in later years.

I am not sure why I decided to leave the RAF at the end of my 12 years as I had enjoyed my time. I suppose I had spent most of my time working on civil aircraft types and had some insights into life on the outside and decided to give it a go.

April 1974 – June 1977 Hawker Siddeley Hatfield.

I was leaving the RAF just at the time the airline industry was going through a particular bad time and companies such as Court Line went bust.

The manufacturers were still OK and I was offered a job in the Product Support Department at Hatfield in a section dealing with the maintainability and reliability of the HS146. This project was cancelled some 6 to 9 months after I joined, but my boss, myself and 3 others were moved on to doing similar work on the HS125, which was still selling well. At that time the manufacturers were still totally responsible for the Maintenance Schedule and some of the operators were complaining about the amount of work and the high frequency of checks.

I continued this work for the rest of my time at Hatfield and learnt a lot about scheduled maintenance and reliability including first-hand experience from some of the HS125 operators, Chief Engineers and Inspectors. We also

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included some visits to other operators and the HS125 manufacturing and overhaul facility at Broughton near Chester.

We managed to sell the house in Carterton and bought a small 3 bedroom semi in Hatfield, which needed a lot of work done on it, but we could afford the mortgage. Life was OK, with the children growing up and starting school, and we could afford camping holidays. But I was starting to get a bit frustrated with the way Hatfield operated and it was now nationalised and part of BAe (British Aerospace). Things moved very slowly and the whole manufacturing process and general outlook at Hatfield was very outdated.

At this point I saw an advert for fitters at British Airways, applied and was successful, and so a new chapter started.

June 1977 – May 2006 British Airways Overseas Division Heathrow

On joining, because, I had been a Halton Apprentice and had my AEC 2, I was assigned to the American aircraft fleet, working Boeing 747 in the central area and at the maintenance base, and did not have to start in the workshops. During my 2+ years working 747's I became the fittest I had been since leaving Halton as whatever you did on a B747, required climbing steps or lifting heavy items. Even a simple wheel change required climbing to the second storey to put the brakes on and off. I did, however, find it the best a/c I had worked on. When I first started, I travelled from Hatfield to Heathrow and we then moved to a house in Ickenham near Uxbridge.

After a couple of tries for a development engineer's job, I was successful in landing a job in a department called Maintenance Programmes. This was partly due to the work I had done at Hawker Siddeley on the HS125. The department was responsible for the data gathering and reliability monitoring, the maintenance schedules and associated activity for all BA aircraft from the HS748 to B747 and Concorde.

BA was unique at the time in that it was allowed to make changes to the aircraft maintenance schedules without direct approval from the CAA or the manufacturers and the department was responsible for the process and ensuring that all changes were fully justified. The department was also responsible for granting one off extensions to maintenance checks and all negotiations with the CAA relating to the maintenance programme, including check escalations, maintenance over-runs and mandatory maintenance tasks. I enjoyed working in this department as we had dealings with all the other engineering departments including the specialist engineers, production, planning, and tech records. I enjoyed it so much that I stayed in the department with several promotions until a complete reorganization of engineering 16 years later when the department was disbanded.

During this time I had a few memorable tasks including being responsible for the project of escalating Concorde Inter ('C') Checks; transferring the Dan-Air Boeing 737 aircraft on to the BA programme when they were taken over; representing BA on the 747-400 programme at Boeing as a member of one of the MRB working groups and later the Industry Steering

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Committee (ISC); then putting together, with the specialist engineers, the initial maintenance schedule for the 747-400 and obtaining approval from the CAA; two trips on Concorde to New York to discuss 747 maintenance programmes with a cargo airline based there. This was when BA Engineering embarked on an ill-fated initiative to sell services and maintenance to other airlines.

On a personal level I got divorced, which was reasonably amicable and I still saw my children regularly and made use of my staff travel with them a few times. A year or so later I had met Jill who had 2 children, and we were married in 1987. I had also moved house a couple of times.

I took up aero-modelling again and elevated to radio control when I first separated, and have maintained the hobby ever since.

After the reorganization the number of engineering office staff was reduced, with senior managers cut by more than half. Most of us that were left became Fleet Tech Engineers and organised in a/c fleets. I became part of the 747-400 team as a systems specialist engineer and our duties consisted of fault diagnoses for repetitive defects, production engineering including job card writing, assessment of all incoming manufacturers data and actioning as necessary, A small amount of development work was also undertaken but only if there was nothing available from the manufacturers and large savings could be proved.

This kept the team very busy with a fleet of 57 a/c. We were also responsible for any baggage from our previous jobs so for me that included the 747-400 maintenance programme and assisting with the B777 program. The ex-development engineers were responsible for any design issues etc.

The teams worked very well and everyone helped each other, including the avionics and structures guys. With fewer managers we were only given broad direction and left to get on as a team. With more reliance on the manufacturers the maintenance schedules of all aircraft were moved to align with the manufacturer's documents (MRB, MPD) but as always with BA if what was on offer didn't suit, it worked to influence changes. If BA was to use the Boeing 747-400 MRB/MPD it needed some check escalations and task changes in order to fit all the aircraft into the maintenance lines. As I was the BA representative on the 747-400 ISC I was tasked with the job, after the Engineering Director had persuaded Boeing it was a good idea.

The ISC would normally meet at Boeing's facilities in Seattle about once every 12 to 18 months, but for this to work the other major airlines had to be brought on board, so an escalation of the flying hours for the 'A' and 'C' checks was proposed, with meetings about every 6 months. About 6 months into the project the ISC chairman resigned as he was moving to another airline and I was asked to take over the chairmanship, as BA was the main driver. We now had to persuade the FAA it was a good idea and what they wanted was data, which BA had plenty of with 57 aircraft. Other airlines including KLM, Lufthansa, Qantas, and Virgin were all involved and supplying data. The FAA were very cautious because there were no major operators of the 747-400 in

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the US, only one cargo operator, and they were being asked to approve major changes to the MRB based on findings and Engineers outside the US. It took about 2 years but most of the changes were agreed.

With most of the aircraft cut over to the new programme and added to the new SAP computer system, I decided it was time to retire. I had already worked out that at age 62 in 2006 we could live comfortably on my BA pension, and I retired in the May.

Since retiring Jill and I have moved from Langley (Slough) to Thatcham near Newbury. I have spent a lot of time building and flying model aircraft. We do quite a lot of walking and taking holidays. Also, with 5 children and 8 grandchildren between us, there is a lot of visiting to be done, especially as they are spread from Brighton to Northampton and one living in Switzerland.

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Could there be a life after Halton? by John Crawford

“The postings are up,” came the cry. “Where the hell is Marham?” I ask. So it is off to the bleaker aspects of the Norfolk countryside I go on my first posting – to 49 Squadron and Valiants. So I soon set into the general routine of squadron life with the occasional 24 hrs rest on QRA, learning how to change the engine starter fuses on a live 96 volt DC system in the bomb bay, with an American GI clutching a fully loaded machine gun just in case I ran amok and start attacking the dustbins hanging up behind me.

We very occasionally had the excitement of an ‘exercise’ to disperse the aircraft around England. These always happened at about 4am on a Monday⁵, just after I had arrived back in camp after a long drive up from Ramsgate. On these trips I always seemed to end up at the end of a runway, staying in a caravan, and being the target for Lightning pilots to practice their vertical climb on full reheat. So much for catching up on lost sleep!

The excitement of this life was destroyed by the Valiant’s main spar problems, so again a new posting was announced, “Where the hell is Aden?” I ask.

As I disembarked from the rear door of the British Eagle Britannia on a fine June day, I was sure that it was heat from the engines that was making me break in a sweat. Wrong again. So I started to settle into the routine of 131MU. We worked from 7am to 1pm, six days a week. I was very concerned that I would fall into a routine of breakfast, work, lunch, bar, bed, bar, bed and back to work again that I could see was all too common.

On day I was going past the Marine Craft Unit at Khormaksar on a bus and watched a fleet of small yachts going around in what looked like complete chaos, but looked like fun. So I hopped off the bus and went to see what it was all about. This was the Khormaksar Sailing Club. I was immediately welcomed and asked if I wanted to join the crew of the safety boat so off we went and I was given an explanation of what was really going on in the chaos I had originally seen.

So I now started to learn a new way of life, with general sailing every day and racing three times a week. I was fortunate in that I had a very good syndicate leader who taught me so much of what I needed to know. We became good friends, which lasted right up to the beginning of this year, and we even shared a yacht in later years. He not only helped me get my dinghy certificates but was a great help in obtaining my offshore certificate, which meant that I could take out the 27 foot Folkboat that the R.A.F. had in Aden.

My one memory of life in Aden is of being on the families bus guard and standing under a tall street light in the early hours of the morning with my trusty Lee Enfield at my side and my ten rounds of ammunition safely stowed away in pouches on my belt, waiting for the shift workers to board, and thinking, “who is tonight’s prime target”?

⁵ I remember these well - Editor

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But back to sailing in Aden. The Khormaksar Sailing Club was situated at the top of Aden harbour, and the Harbour Master would send any visiting yacht to the club area for security and to keep them out of the way of commercial shipping. It was as I was getting near to the end of my two year tour that an American was sent up to our end of the harbour. His yacht was a 55 foot, three-masted schooner, built entirely from teak in Malaya. He was intending to sail the boat back to the USA via the UK and had started out with two RAF Officers, but owing to delays they had run out of time and flown back to Aden. The American managed to find an Australian with his wife and two children, Tony 5 and Timothy (Bah) who was 3, to continue the trip but was still short of a third person to manage the boat. It was on a Saturday night – we had had a very good day's racing and we were all in the club bar when the American came in and asked if any of us would consider joining him on the trip back to the UK. Well I thought about it for one or maybe two seconds before saying yes please.

I tried to get some expedition training allowance, but as there was such a short time before leaving I was told that it would not be possible. But word got round and the occasional Land Rover or truck would turn up at the Yacht Club with sufficient tinned and dry food to feed an Army or an Air Force, let alone six people for a planned six week trip.

We spent the first week of the trip in the dhow harbour at Ma'ala up to our waists re-caulking the hull before setting off, allegedly for a sea test as the Skipper told the Harbour Master, and that we would be back to pay the dues that were owed. I am not too sure he was believed, as one of the Harbour tugs tried to cut us off as we motored down to the sea. To avoid the tug we slipped behind a floating pontoon and a fisherman in a canoe. The fisherman must have been a friendly sort of a guy as he started to wave us goodbye, so being friendly, we waved back. He then started to follow us, which was quite clever, as we were doing about 15 knots and he was just lying back in the canoe. After a very short while he gave up following us, but was still waving farewell.

So we have an eventful start to our trip, and we decided to overnight at a natural harbour on Birim Island at the bottom of the Red Sea. It was dark when we arrived and I was on the bow of the yacht with a torch to see that we did not hit anything. We were milling around trying to find a good place to anchor when I spotted a rope floating on the surface. I called to the Skipper to cut the drive and hooked the rope on board and tied it fast, as it appeared to be connected to something at the other end. We then took sightings of land to see that we were on a good anchorage, but it was obvious that we were drifting. So we cast off the line and set the anchor, which proved to hold a lot better.

In the morning, I was on deck and I noticed the rope again, and this time I was able to see that it was fastened to the stern of the yacht somewhere. So it was over the side to see what was up. I soon found that it was wrapped around the prop shaft, so we set to work to free it. Now it all became clear what had happened. When we left the harbour that friendly fisherman was not waving us goodbye but was trying to tell us that he was tied up to the floating pontoon

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some 100 feet away. It also accounted for the surprising speed of his canoe as his mooring rope had caught on our keel and we were towing him along. No doubt he would have still been with us, had not the line been cut by our propeller. But such are the joys of messing about in boats.

We were just about to up anchor and set off when two French minesweepers entered the harbour. They were based at Djibouti and I had met them on a couple of occasions on trips with the Folkboat. So we were delayed a day whilst we had a very enjoyable social evening with the French.

Our next stop was at the Kamaran Islands a short way up the Red Sea. The main reason for the stop was that owing to our abrupt departure from Aden, the other occupants did not have exit visas for Aden. In those days the Kamaran Islands were one of a diminishing number of pink spots on the globe. What we did not know was that we were visiting an outpost of Victorian Colonialism. The Island was run by an Assistant Commissioner who was the grandson or great grandson of the first Assistant Commissioner, and he would be the last, as the Island was due to be returned to the Yemen very shortly.

The family were put up in a bungalow whilst the Skipper and I stayed on the yacht. At a quarter to six there was a knock on the hull and a call of, "come on, John, time for the news". So off I went. We sat down in his office whilst a fairly new radio played the BBC overseas news. "Whisky?" he asked as the last notes of '*Lilly Bolero*' faded away. I was not too sorry to leave the Kamarans, as I could not keep up with his whisky drinking whilst having gin with meals.

We now headed up the Red Sea and were in a gale for a week, or so my memory tells me, but it may have been less. For the lads it was just a simple 2 on and 4 off shift system, but my thoughts were for the two young lads and their mother who were battened down for the duration of the gale.

At long last we reached the Gulf of Suez and finally entered the Canal. As we were a yacht we had to join at the back of the convoy going through the Canal. We also had to employ a 'Pilot', who did nothing more than consume anything he could get his hands on. Being held up at the back of the convoy we had to overnight at Ismailia and anchored up outside of the Yacht Club. Almost immediately a launch came over from the Club and we were invited to join them for dinner. PANIC! What to wear? For the last month I had been in shorts and cheap Aden shirts that were getting worn out by the method used for washing them. (Tie a rope around it and throw it over board for an hour or two). I managed to find some casual clothing in a suitcase, but they had the woolly bugs. But with a pair of best blue trousers and a shirt quickly washed properly and air ironed (tied to the top of the mast) I was almost presentable.

Off we all went in the Club launch and started the evening with an aperitif session and then we went through to start the dinner. Just as the starters arrived so did a policeman! It appeared that the yacht had been broken into, but they had been spotted and were being chased across the bay into Ismailia town. I was asked to go back to the yacht to see what had been taken.

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I had a look around but they had only got into the main cabin – my sleeping quarters. And all I could find missing were a pair of baseball boots. So we locked up as best we could and, leaving a policeman on board, returned to the Club and dinner.

Before we had finished the meal the Chief of Police arrived with two youngsters and my baseball boots, minus the laces! I hate to think what happened to the two lads, but I don't think that they got off with a caution.

Plan A was to go to Cyprus, but time was moving on so after leaving Port Said, as it was then, we headed west towards Crete. One of my duties was to take the noon sun sighting so that we could work out where we were. No GPS in those days. It was when we were off Crete that I made my only mistake, well the only that was discovered. I had taken the noon sighting and worked out that we were half way along the southern coast of Crete. But what we could see of the coast did not match the chart for the position I thought that we were at. So spotting a town with a port, we cautiously entered and found a mooring alongside the harbour. Now we all headed to the nearest bar and tried to find out the name of the town. Only one problem – we did not speak any Greek!

After much hand gesturing we came up with a name that sounded like Ballyokera! But I could not find anything with a name like that anywhere along the coast of Crete. Eventually one of the fishermen grabs hold of the chart and points at a town called Palaiochora almost at the western end of Crete and some 50+ miles away from my position. We do a deal on a very poor exchange rate for some of my swiftly diminishing pounds and buy a round of drinks, which we are told also includes our mooring charges. Smiles all round.

Time for me has run out and the others need to get back to the UK as well, so we head for Majorca where we leave the yacht. We now have to catch a ferry to Valencia, where a car is hired and we drive up to Paris. I now have to leave the others and get back to being in the RAF.

It is on a Bank Holiday Monday that I arrive at Lyneham, my next posting, albeit a couple of weeks late. Remembering what we had been told during training, that if you are late getting to camp, book in at the Guard Room making sure that the correct time and date is noted. I was certain that I was going to be done for being absent without leave. All I got when I requested that my arrival should be logged was a blank look and told not to muck about.

I have been working for about two or three weeks, without any comment or questions regarding my absence, when I get a call to go to the Pay Accounts Section. As I walked in I spotted an old chum from Marham, and I asked him "what's up?" "Well," he says, "it appears that you were not paid for a couple weeks." So I bite the bullet and tell him all. "OK," he says, "leave it with me and I will see what can be done." To cut the story short, not only am I not charged, I get the back pay, plus expedition training allowance. Result. We have a good party to celebrate.

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So we are now back to the old routine, only the shape and size of the aircraft has changed, and I am still in the back of nowhere Wiltshire as opposed to Norfolk. Having completed my Britannia training I find that I have a marketable skill, and on making enquiries at British Caledonian I find there will be a job should I manage to leave the RAF. So now I have to start the process of buying myself out – not too easy after only 4 years from leaving Halton. But we manage it, only to find that a certain Freddy Laker is now in charge of Caledonian and all recruiting is put on hold. So after a trip around Heathrow, I get a job with British Eagle thanks to the Halton Apprenticeship. First day and a big shock – I have to provide my own tools. So it's off to Halfords. Thank God I was an electrician and not an engine fitter as the tools required are cheaper.

A year later, and things are not looking too good for British Eagle, when I get a letter from BOAC asking if I am still interested in working for them. So I join the Boeing 707 fleet, doing the various inspections minor and major, on a two shift pattern earlies and lates. This gives us a bit of time to do outside jobs to boost our incomes. I walk in one day to find that Gordon Sherratt has joined our shift.

In 1972 I get married and change jobs to work in the component servicing, now 8 to 4, which is better for a married life. BOAC start flying the Boeing 747 and we get a lot of extra work, and I find a new source of income from the BOAC suggestion scheme with improvements to the 747 equipment, which leads on to an offer to move into the development group. This sounds great, but unfortunately it is quashed by the unions who insist that Fred, who has been in the corner since the war, is the next to move. The development job disappears!

So I start looking around and I see that a company called IBM is looking for engineers, so I apply and again I am sure that it is because of the Halton Apprenticeship that I get called up for interview. As I am going into their office I check to see what the initials IBM stand for – just as well as it is a pass or fail question during the day's interviews. I get the job on the condition that I am willing to move down to the south coast. What a result, and within a year we have a share in a 32 foot yacht that is being completed by my friend from Aden. Can things get better?

Well, some 33 years later I eventually get the early retirement and redundancy package I have been after, followed six months later by Pat, my wife, getting a similar offer from BAE systems.

A year later we lose Pat's father and with nothing to keep us in the UK we move out to France where we have had a holiday home for a few years, and set up as another pair of expat Brits abroad.

Well to answer my own question "Could there be a life after Halton?" Yes there definitely was but for me not within the RAF. But it would not have been the same life had I not had the advantage of being able to name drop "Halton" when necessary. [[Return to Contents](#)]

And Then...

Life after Graduation by ex Brat J0686535 S/App Jim Duff

Posted to RAF Kinloss (1963 – March 1965) – many tasks carried out but had a great time working with the Met. Department, testing/assembling/launching Skua Met rockets from RAF Benbecula and RAF Aberporth.

Married 29 Aug 64

Posted to RAF Nicosia 3/65 till 9/66 – armoury/bomb dump .Son born 9/65

RAF Akrotiri 9/66 till 3/68 served on 29 Squadron (Javelins) & 56 Squadron Lightnings

On returning to UK (Kinloss) – short stay, as I commenced aircrew training as Quartermaster, now better known as Loadmaster, interesting time during this period.

Posted to 53 Squadron (Belfast CMk1) initially based at Abingdon but soon transferred to RAF Brize Norton where I remained until the '*Belf*' was disbanded. The adventures of travelling worldwide (over 50 countries) with this aircraft could fill a scrap book in itself. Suffice to say this was the happiest time in my career.

Regrettably, after Brize I went to RAF Odiham to train as a crewman on the Wessex but during the flying phase it was discovered I had a hearing deficiency.

Back to Brize and 10 Squadron – VC10. Nine months later, after failing a CME medical, I was invalided out. Options were available but none to my liking, so I retired as MALM Duff Sept 1977. Have been back there several times, reunions, funerals etc.

I immediately took a post with Dan Air at Aberdeen 1977-1987.⁶

Moved to Texaco as logistics co-ordinator, retiring 1997 due wife's ill health (MS – she died 2008).

For the past 8 years I have been a '*Lollipop Man*'.

Interests – Golf/Shooting/Backgammon and Lions International.

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⁶ Where he met Ian Nelson – see Ian's story on page 178 - Editor

And Then...

Roger Garford

I was initially posted to RAF Leeming (advanced Jet Provost Pilot Training), as a Jnr Tech, substantive Cpl in two yrs. Based in the Armament Bay, servicing ejector seats and making good friends with the Safety Equipment guys, who were in the same building. Learning to stand in front of the Armament WO, having gotten his bottle of curdled sour milk for his early morning drink and 'belch'. He also played as back in the hockey team and would regularly use his rotund stomach to knock or bounce the opposition to the ground. The guys played 5 card Brag in the break times. Surviving the cheating and wars of alienation caused me never to play cards again.

I applied for NCO aircrew, unsuccessfully, at this time and was a frequent passenger in the Jet Provost with 'brake bedding-in checks'. I played hockey for the station and mainly against Army teams across Yorkshire and beyond, often way out in the 'Bondoo', with no showers. If there were, they were cold, for building fitness.

One Wednesday afternoon, at half time, I was called to the sideline (September 64) to report to General Office after tea. This I dutifully did and was told to go to the photographic centre (part of the Armoury) for a passport photograph. I was told to catch the 08:30 train the following morning, with a few others, to RAF Innsworth, to be detached to Borneo (where the hell was that?). At RAF Innsworth I soon found out. There we met up with other 96th Entry Armourers, destined for the same place. My 1946 Morris 8 e type, left at Leeming, was later picked up and transported in Hotpoint wagon back to home during my absence.

At Innsworth we were kitted out with khaki uniforms, deep sea bag and cooking utensils and flown out to Singapore in a Britannia via Cyprus, El Adem (where I spent the whole time in the loos), Indian Ocean to RAF Changi, Singapore. Here I had permission to go to Married Quarters where I called on my auntie, who said, "Does your mum know you are here?" She advised me to put my civvy clothes in a sealed bag as they would go mouldy in a short while.

Within 24 hrs we were sent to various parts of Borneo. I ended up on a rattling Hastings where, on the tarmac, part of the prop dropped off, so we were transferred to the next one on standby. We flew to RAF Labuan, a small island off the Borneo coast, about 8 x 12 miles in size with a mixture of around 1000 troops, Army and RAF. Some of the 96th Entry Armourers also followed, like Johnny Irish, Chas Marshall and Andy Hanks. We were a supply base for lads in the jungle. We also had two Javelins on Quick Release Alert Standby (QRA) all the time.

We built a bomb dump and when the monsoon rains came, the first layer of bombs was buried, which then had to be dug out and the traverses shored up with sand bags. Majority of guys were then sent to RAF Seletar, leaving just the three of us to maintain the dump. We also serviced the Ack Ack guns which were either side of the runway and at either end. We also guarded the QRA aircraft with No4 rifle and 10 rounds of live ammunition and the regular challenge of 'Halt or I fire', 3 times. Scary at night and early hours of morning

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in the pi****g rain. One November morning the Engineering Officer came down to congratulate me on promotion to Cpl and versed, "Hitler started out as a Cpl and look where it got him." Thanks boss.

My two mates were National Service and were keen to get back home. We were offered to stay but decided to come back with them to '*Blighty*' and we were home for Christmas Day.

Was back at RAF Leeming until I was posted to RAF Gatow, Berlin in May 1965. This was 0.7 of a man posting and each time for leave I had a guy come up from West Germany RAF HQ to take over whilst away. In Berlin I ran the Armoury and helped the servicing crews with the troopers (BAC 111) that came in with personnel. Also any visiting officials. I trained the Special Branch RAF Police on the range for pistol accuracy, as for the Queen's visit. I flew as back seat in the Chipmunk, with Gp Capt Oxspring, ex Battle of Britain pilot, over Berlin a few times.

Easter 1966, when my parents were visiting, a Russian aircraft (Firebar Yak 28) crashed into Lake Havel, in the British sector of Berlin. I was just about leaving my room on the Base and putting trousers on, when there was a knock on the door. It was the Engineering Officer, Flt Lt Pharoh, who said, "You can take those off and come with me! We have this crashed aircraft and need to make the ejection seats safe."

As I said to him, I have no training on Russian eject seats so will do best I can. We were taken down to the lakeside, aircraft tail sticking out of the water and blue lights flashing. No access tonight, so back the following morning when we waited for specialists of each trade to fly in from UK. Sunday morning and onto Army pontoon based near the aircraft, in the water and lifting equipment on standby. Russian contingent on the bank side with a searchlight for later.

As darkness descended, the aircraft was lifted out and onto the pontoon with dead pilot and co pilot in tandem, in cockpit. One seat had partially detonated and risen up the rail a little but the other had not gone off at all. The Stn MO said, "Well, off you go and get them out." "What me?" "Yes." First using nails and tools from pontoon I was able to make both seats as safe as possible and take cartridges out. Both seats were based on American style eject seats with arm handle ejection. The pilots had no '*Bone Domes*' but leather headpieces.

It took about 5 hours to cut the bodies out. We were in thick rubber suits and with the Russian search light on us, steaming from sweat. It was a ghoulish scene. Two of the groundcrew offered their help to get the co pilot out which was more difficult, as the bodies, being in the water, were swollen in size. The co pilot was reasonably easily cut out. The pilot was more of a problem and heavier. It took us nearly 3 hrs to cut him out and his head had gone into the console in the cockpit. It took about 5 hrs to complete the operation.

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Our job done for now we went with the bodies, draped with the Russian flag, to the river bank where the bodies were handed over to the Russians, with a lone piper playing. The aircraft was new and on delivery to an airfield and was eventually handed over a month later. Much was learnt during that month that further assisted in enhancing our defence systems. Received a C in C's Commendation for my work.

I played hockey for the station and with two others joined the Spandau German Indoor Hockey Club. The rest of the team followed and we went on to win the RAF Germany hockey cup, the same year as England won the World football cup. We celebrated in the city to the early hours of the morning. Berlin was a city of intrigue and full of night life to be enjoyed. Daytime was sometimes spent digging up buried Nazi equipment, even bodies and sometimes getting explosive technicians in to sort out.

November 67 saw me posted to RAF Coningsby, re-equipping with Phantom aircraft. TSR2 had been cancelled by the Labour government and we were working with the Americans to jointly build the Phantom. I was on first Phantom training course, but no aircraft. Early 1968 October 68 promoted to Sgt and sent on the Phantom evaluation team to Naval Air Test Center, Patuxent River. We were the poor cousins, having to borrow tools and equipment. And for me, as independent checker on the ejection seats, people as well. We evaluated and wrote the reports.

I grabbed the chance to hitch-hike around a little and at one time to a mining family in Stotsbury in the Appalachians. Tried my moonshine here! Flew as back seat in the aircraft a few times and at one time TWICE the speed of sound, receiving a certificate when back home.

During this time I also met and made friends with a Norwegian Air Force team evaluating the Orion, which they were buying. They also had a large amount of liquor allowance and many early mornings were spent in their company. I travelled in the back seat low over the country to deliver the aircraft back to the factory in St Louis.

April 1969 saw me back at Coningsby and two first deliveries of F4Ks for the Navy arrived June 69. These stayed with us for around a month when our F4Ms arrived. They both had arrester gear so the stations were equipped to take the aircraft. The OCU received the first aircraft.

During 1970 we detached to RAF Akrotiri for a month for Armament practice camp, and to RAF Tengah for two months for Missile Practice camp. On the way out to Tengah we beat the nonstop flight time to Singapore doing it in 24 hrs – with tanker support as well. Some of us stopped with support aircraft at RAF Masirah.

RAF Coningsby: July 1970 to November 1970, general flying.

RAF Laarbruch: No2 Squadron November 1970 to May 1973.

And Then...

Formed No2 Squadron (Reconnaissance) .We detached to Norway for a competition which we won against the American ex Vietnam Squadron, which did not go down well at all. Here we eventually flew in bacon and eggs as the fresh fish breakfasts were not much appreciated, and some crates of beer as alcoholic drinks in Norway were so expensive. We auctioned off the remaining beer for the Squadron funds.

At Laarbruch we helped to run the private flying club on the Base but left soon after when my flying instructor, (ace of the base in Canberra aircraft), was killed in front of us trying to do a wheel-over in a Dornier aircraft which belonged to the club. This was an open weekend for the airfield.

RAF Coningsby: May 1973 to July 1974. Promoted to Chief Technician and joined 54 Squadron (Fighter Attack) and in charge of shift Armourers.

RAF Coningsby: July 1974 assist information of 111 Squadron as shift armament controller.

RAF Leuchars: November 1975 111 Squadron moved in total to be based at Leuchars. I travelled ahead with my Sergeant to set up and run the Flight Line, one shift. We had QRA to look after and at one time had 8 armed aircraft, with Tanker support, in the air at once. Armed with 8 missiles and the Vulcan Gun each in the Russian spring exercise. We had a visit from Miss GB, at the time, to launch the Squadron T shirt. We kidnapped 43 Squadron's '*Fighting Cocks*', which were suitably accommodated and well fed, being housed on the side of the Tay. There was much controversy and a hand over ceremony quickly convened.

Here I married in September of 1977, still living in the Crofter's cottage on the side of the Tay near Dundee.

RAF Wildenrath: May 1978 till May 1982 posted to the Armament Bay in charge of Trade Training and Operational Turn Round Team Training. We also introduced cross training with the Americans at Ramstein Air Base and others, including the German Air Force. I detached twice on operational sorties to Akrotiri for Armament practice camps and support in Gun Bay.

Both sons born at RAF Wegberg September 1978 and June 1980. Took up Sub Aqua training.

May 1982 posted to RAF Binbrook – Lightnings (No5 Squadron) as Armament shift NCO. Regular QRA and working weekends as the aircraft leaked like a sieve after a sortie. I also applied for a Commission, on the advice of my Wing Commander and I had been for my interviews and assessment. All seemed favourable and awaiting confirmation, as my Wing Commander had said.

And Then...

In May 1983 I was detached to RAF Coningsby training QRA teams of all trades for the South Atlantic back up for the Falklands.

Here, life changed dramatically. March 28 1983 I was summoned to the Guard Room. I duly went, where I was interrogated for homosexuality (good cop, bad cop) for the whole day, by which time I was on my knees and ready to admit to anything. I was able to resist some of the coercion but in the end admitted to some of them. Three more interviews were carried out throughout the year. When it came to it later, they could not find one of these interviews and the copies sent to my solicitor were unreadable, so they typed in what should have been there (?). They told me to forget my commission.

I challenged up to the Chief of the Defence Staff, and my MP with, of course, no success.

My immediate commanders supported me; however I had an administrative discharge on the 23rd December 1983 – effective Feb 1984, approximately 170 days before pension. I loved the RAF and the comradeship, indeed everything about it. I still have the names of the interviewers imprinted in my memory. I lost so much, wife and family at the time, job, and more on a personal issue.

No support, and then I joined '*Rank Outsiders*' in 1990. There were five of us; these were other discharged military men and women. We became a national movement to challenge the MoD and to get the ban lifted for serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people. All in all around 130 of us. Some had had horrific interviews – one girl was raped by her Sergeant to prove she was not a lesbian (and had to abort a baby).

However we went after our dues through the courts. We worked back door with MPs to try to get the ban lifted and ended up in the European courts, with the backing of '*Stonewall*', in October 1998. The court criticised the homosexual policy assessment team reports used by the MoD. The case was won and the ban was lifted on 12th Jan 2000. I was present in the House of Commons to hear Geoff Hoon, Secretary of State for Defence, lift the ban.

We had to fight for another 10 years to get some sort of recompense, i.e. pension, resettlement allowances, courses etc. But at the most, people of whatever gender orientation can now serve in the Armed Forces.

In 1984 I was unemployed, until joining British Aerospace in the April and working in Taif, Saudi Arabia in the explosive storage area, on American explosives and equipment. I continued here until returning to the UK in December 1986.

Again unemployed until April of 1987 when I joined a company in Bury St Edmunds as a forklift truck Instructor and Examiner, Health and Safety trainer and consultant. Then, in 1990 I became self employed, using the skills gained in the previous company and working until 2010 in this area.

And Then...

The year 1990 also saw me as a volunteer in the HIV and AIDS field, locally. I have remained in this area, becoming a part time employed client support and sexual health worker until now.

In 1990 I met my partner, Alan, who has supported me throughout the fight to get the ban lifted from the military and remains with me now. It was with some trepidation that I attended the first Reunion where, after the first few drinks, I was asked where he was. Realising that I was back in that 'team of brothers' I so missed, we now attend regularly. Thank you all.

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And Then...

(A brief glimpse of) the life and times of Dennis Greenwell

My entry into the Air Force proper took place at RAF Topcliffe in the then North-Riding of Yorkshire, on the Varsity Rectification/Aircraft Servicing Flight. Oh happy days – an easy-ish aircraft to service, sports afternoons every Wednesday (Rally Practice drive to Leeds Bowl), occasional 8 hour trips to Malta, Gib and Germany as ground crew for Air Signaller training flights (I can still taste the coffee at 10,000ft from those large black flasks) and the '*airman's bible*' (a small publication entitled '*101 Inns of Repute in the North Riding*').

Towards the end of this tour a large number of the guys were being posted on emergency draft to the depths of the Middle East, so you can imagine the reaction when I walked out of the office (having had a short phone conversation with the General Office) and asking, "Does anyone know where AAFCE Fontainebleau is?"

So to France – I can still remember the Movement Order. Given a rail warrant to London I was to meet a man wearing civilian clothes and a white armband at 9am under the clock outside the '*Golden Arrow*' bar at Waterloo Station. He proceeded to give me a ticket and similar directions to meet another man at the Gare du Nord in Paris, who told me to cross Paris and get a train from Gare de Lyon to Fontainebleau where transport would be waiting. And it worked!

The following morning I reported in to the RAF Unit General Office, was given the ubiquitous blue card plus a much larger 'International Arrival' document and promptly told to forget the arrivals procedure and report to the Flight Office forthwith. Within the hour I was in a J2 van (remember them?) complete with overnight bag, on the way to Le Bourget Airport (military side). In the end it was 4 days before we returned to Fontainebleau.

So I had a 2-hour handover from my predecessor before being left as not just the only electrician on the Flight (total manpower 2 x C/T + 2 x Cpls) but also the only Nav Inst, Gen Inst and Ground Electrician! And with two aircraft I hadn't seen before – a Pembroke and a Devon both kitted out in VIP fit. Get the books out – a quick pre-flight and off went the Pembroke, then it was off to lunch in the French Air Force NCO's mess. Steak anyone? – Neighhh!!!

Amazing how quickly schoolboy French comes back when, to refuel, you have to pick up a dial-less phone, ask a French military operator to be connected to Shell-BP, then request a tanker of 100/130 octane to be sent forthwith! (That is, supposing the French base operator hasn't connected you to some other part of the base for a laugh!)

But the highlight of this tour had to be the flight to Germany as 'Crew Chief' on a VIP flight carrying our Air Chief Marshal and his German Air Force equivalent + their ADCs. The date was 30 July 1966 and once settled en-route the navigator tuned the radio compass to the BBC for that now famous football commentary, – "They think it's all over...well it is now!" Sitting at the Nav's table in the cabin with a headset on and passing the scores as they happened,

And Then...

I think this was the only time I saw ACM H*****e smile! Those were the days – when England could actually get the ball into the back of the net!

After 18 months this amazing tour was cut short when France opted out of NATO and the whole AFCENT organisation moved to Holland and Belgium – except for us in Comms Flt, who moved to Wildenrath to join the Germany Comms Sqn and discover the joys of Minivals and Tacevals. All good things come to an end and I was eventually posted back home – to 18 Sqn at Acklington.

On arrival at Acklington I was interviewed by the Sqn Eng O who opened the conversation with, “Welcome, Cpl Greenwell, how would you like to go to Germany next week for a month?” So off I went to discover the joys of Wessex II helicopters, German forests, convoys and military camping.

From the outset, rumour control was working well at Acklington, predicting airfield closure and a move to Odiham. Eventually the Sqn Cdr had had enough and assembled the whole Sqn in the hangar to quash the rumours and to detail the many reasons why Acklington would not close – only to have to repeat the gathering a couple of weeks later to announce our move and the ultimate airfield closure!

On arrival at Odiham, rumour control immediately predicted that the Sqn was to move to Germany (we had an on-going commitment to provide a detachment of 3 Wessex H/C based at Gutersloh to support the Army units in Germany). Not being a man to learn from his mistakes, the Sqn Cdr promptly assembled everyone to announce that we were not moving and that he would see the roses he had just planted bloom the following year. Within days he was presented with a copy of the Daily Telegraph which announced on the front page that 6 Brigade (Army) was to move to Germany, where they would be supported by No 18 Sqn RAF! Well it makes a change to get your posting notice from the Press!

There were too many memorable events both at Base and on trips into the wilds (and not so wilds) of Germany to list, but one stands out in my memory. One of our aircraft was working in the far south of Germany as a public relations exercise, lifting sections of a new bridge into place, when it went u/s. Two of us were sent by air and car to fix and recover it. On arrival we were told that accommodation for the night had been fixed up, although it was ‘out of season’ and the hotels had not yet opened. Once we had sorted the fault we were taken to a hotel by the owner, who laid on a spread of food, allocated rooms, then handed over the hotel keys and asked us to lock up in the morning and come to the butcher’s down the road for breakfast.

But of course the real highlight of the whole tour was meeting Lynne. Soon we were married in the church situated in the attic of SHQ, with the reception held in the attic bar of the Sgt’s Mess just next door. As I am writing this we have just celebrated our Ruby wedding anniversary.

And Then...

Coming towards the end of my 12 year stint I did try to sign on but hit the rank/trade exit year blockage, so eventually left 18 Sqn and moved back to the UK on my final posting to Ternhill, where I spent my time preparing the Electrical Bay for the introduction of the Gazelle and, more importantly, becoming a Daddy.

Then out into the big wide world – but not too far out, since I joined the MoD Procurement Executive at A&AEE Boscombe Down. The change to civilian life was made immediately apparent when the first thing I was instructed on was how to complete a travel expenses form and then how to apply for courses and Further Education. So it was off to Salisbury College for a C&G Full Tech Certificate. I was now in a completely new world of work, thrown headfirst into the Navigation Electronics Bay where the only immediately recognisable thing was an AVO⁷. Still, the basic training and books worked again and soon I was deep into supporting some 40 aircraft types, many with one-off modification or instrumentation fits. The highlights of this period were:

- a. To fly in the Comet (remember the one at Halton?) to fault-find an intermittent problem with the Air Data Computer and;
- b. Becoming a Daddy again!

Then followed a move to the in-house Apprentice Training Centre (poached from the Bay by the chap I had replaced). After qualifying as a trainer I taught basic electronic theory and practice to a bunch of very switched-on kids for a few years. This was the early days of personal computers and to give the kids some experience we bought a computer kit which we assembled and used to practice programming in BASIC. The kit came with 4k of memory chips, expandable to 8k, with a cassette recorder to provide long-term storage and an old television as the display unit! How things have changed – 8k of RAM wouldn't even start this Word programme now.

Eventually the wanderlust (and desire for change and promotion) bit again and I moved to 14MU RAF Carlisle to a desk job managing the production of the base workshops, which in turn led to a move to HQRAFSC at Brampton – managing the production of all of the RAF Maintenance Units' E&I repair workshops.

At this point I picked up on the Further Education budget again to start an OU degree course. It really is amazing how much maths/science/oceanography etc. you can learn whilst eating breakfast. But promotion loomed again and I took a career change to become H&S/EP Officer for RAF Brampton. I graduated from the OU with a BSc (Hons) after some 6 years, having studied mainly environmental subjects to complement my new career. With the MoD re-brigading and units in the area coming under the unitary control of RAF Brampton, I eventually led a team of H&S and EP officers covering RAF Brampton, Wyton and Henlow until I retired at 60 to a life of leisure (or so I thought).

⁷ Oh yes, how well I remember the AVO meter. Like the Slide Rule, old technology but very reliable in the hands of those initiated into the Black Art - Editor

And Then...

So we eventually sold up and moved north back to my roots. Bought a bungalow just a mile or so from the sea and spent a couple of years doing it up. For the past couple of years I've been working 2 days per week as a volunteer for Teesside Hospice and these days I really can't see where I found time to work full time before I retired. Two dogs, walks on the beach, a bit of DIY, a couple of days volunteering, a bit of wood-turning and there goes another week.

Doesn't time fly as you get older!

What happened to those Stations?	
Topcliffe	Army base & home to Air Ambulance
Fontainebleau	Handed back to French
Wildenrath	Mostly closed down/Army barracks
Acklington	Prison
Odiham	Still open!
Gutersloh	Army base
Ternhill	Outpost of Shawbury/Army barracks

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And Then...

Dayman (Olly) Grewcock

It was mid 1971, after getting married and getting 'my third' it seemed a good idea to try and 'sign on' for 22 years! So off I goes to have a look at the 'big list'.

Time-ex year: 1984, Trade: Aircraft Electrician – no quota!!

So that was it! July 1974 – Civvy Street here I come.

So before demob, finish off the ONC and get an HNC.

Early 1974, right in the middle of the '*Three day week*', Olly starts to look for a job.

After quite a few interviews, some with and some without, offers. I get a decent offer from a computer company: Sperry Univac, to work maintaining mainframe computers in Leicester (my original home town). I was told at a later date that I had achieved 100% in my logic tests, never been done previously. (So the HNC in digital logic had done some good).

I spent about 4 years working for Univac in the Leicester area, then I saw an advert to do the exact same job as I was doing, for double the salary, in Milton Keynes.

I duly went for the interview and got the job. It was looking after Univac mainframes at an IT bureau, for a small 'Third Party Maintenance' (TPM) Company.

We moved to a small village in the northern tip of Buckinghamshire for a few years. Then our MD had a severe aneurism and the contract was taken over by another TPM, DPCE, who were originally Australia-based and who looked after Qantas' computers. They were so impressed, they told British European Airways (BEA) about DPCE who contracted them for the IBM mainframes at Heathrow. DPCE were branching out in the UK and Scicon (the bureau in Milton Keynes) was a fairly easy target. I was experienced in some of the odd kit at Scicon, so DPCE offered me a job.

Eventually, due to new computers arriving, DPCE lost the Scicon contract, but were getting their nose into British Leyland (as it was at the time). My boss got the Manager's job and invited me to go as a Senior Site Engineer. I didn't fancy that, so I said I would go as 'Tech Support'. He agreed and so it was a move to Birmingham, initially to work at Longbridge, a terrible place to work, but later I moved to Land Rover in Solihull, where we had moved to.

We eventually got the contract to look after the Istel site (formerly BL systems) which was wall to wall DEC VAX mini's and IBM 360 mainframes. I did support for the VAX's.

And Then...

By this time DPCE central support had been established and the area support guys were moved to a central support role, then to European support. I didn't like that much, as I was still living in Solihull, and head office was in Bracknell. Often the phone would ring at 2am, "Can you get to Gatwick for the 6:15 flight to 'so and so'?" Yet another early start!

One morning we found out that we had been bought out in a 'Dawn Raid' by, of all companies, Granada, the TV Company. Our main TPM competitors, CFM, had also been 'Dawn Raided'. Granada spent the next few years attempting to make a viable Third Party Maintenance company out of DPCE and CFM combined, but it never really worked. They went through the Management and made loads of guys redundant, then it was support's turn, and I was one of the casualties.

At this time mainframes and minis were starting to be replaced by PC's and maintenance jobs were in decline. I spent a year looking, but nothing, then I tried system management and got a job looking after the Management Database systems of an FE College. It was initially running on a DEC VAX, which I knew all about, but Oracle databases were totally new to me. After a couple of years I managed to move back to more of a maintenance role, looking after PC's and servers.

After a total of ten years at the College, they decided to move from Microsoft-based PC's and servers to Linux-based kit, and assumed that we incumbents couldn't maintain them, so we were all made redundant.

After another year looking for a job, I went to work for a printing company in Birmingham and Redditch Spent three years there, maintaining servers and PC's, but eventually upset somebody fairly senior and was 'asked to leave'. Now, knocking on for 60, I thought it may be early retirement for me But then I saw an advert for a PC maintenance job, 3 days a week, term time only, in Coventry.

Looked ideal, went for the interview and got it. Did around 3 years there and then upset one of the head teachers, who 'threw the book' at me. I wasn't willing to go through loads of 'Human Remains' hassle, at 64³/₄ years of age, so I resigned, and retired, three months early.

I am now knocking on towards 69, am still fixing PC's and laptops, so I have been fixing computers for over 39 years, on and off.

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And Then...

C.C.H.Harvey – (aka – Kangers Roo) – 96th e-book – 2013

So; there I was, sitting in this zoo, surrounded by a lot of other animals, some of which appeared to be human. I suppose it depends which side of the 'bars' you're on, but I suspect that's open for debate in many cases. I remember that it was about the middle of the day; which meant it was feeding time!

I was here for a purpose, maybe to be seen by visitors from afar as they peered through the bars of the cages, or, searched faces in the bars that were serving '*Quilmes*'? Either way, I was here with V and we were about to meet her sister, Gracia, as in Graciella. It had been many years since I had visited a zoo and it was already a hot sweltering day, another one, that seem endless in this part of the world. A few days before I had arrived in the centre of South America, at Asuncion, the capital city of Paraguay, which is a totally landlocked country, and from where it's almost a thousand miles in any direction before you get to see an ocean, or a sea.

Yesterday we had undertaken a 23½ hour bus journey from Asuncion, via Encarnacion and Posada, which are the frontier towns to exit Paraguay and enter Argentina; and today, here we were, in Buenos Aires (B.A.), on the Estuary of the River Plate; 200 miles SSW of Montevideo in Uruguay. V had worked here in Buenos Aires for about 25 years, from the age of 16; after she had fled from her home in the jungle in her native Paraguay. She came to B.A. to find work to enable her to send money home to help her father to feed her younger brothers and sisters. Her mother had died when she was 12 years old, and V, being the 3rd or 4th oldest of 11 siblings, knew what she had to do to help her Dad, (he's called Geronimo – as in – '*Last of the Guarani*', as opposed to '*Last of the Mohicans*').

So V helped to raise her younger brothers and sisters by being the breadwinner. Anyways – here we were, at the zoo in Buenos Aires, to meet up with V's sister 'Gracia'. V's other brothers and sisters had expressed concern about Graciella, as she had become somewhat of a recluse. She had not been in touch with her family for some time and was apparently suffering from depression. V had been living and working in Spain for several years which is where I had first met her 4 years previously. Now, here we were, in South America, on a sweltering day in early December, to try and reform Graciella's dilemma; meanwhile, I was sweating my socks off, in a temperature of 36°C, together with extreme humidity, to boot. I wondered how all these other 'animals' around me were feeling. Hot! I guess!

Suddenly, V threw her hands in the air and stormed off through all the other 'animals', as she had caught sight of Graciella. I struggled through the melee to where they were, embraced, and was formally introduced; I think she said that I was this English bloke who had been following her around the last few years, and had caught the same plane(s) that she had and that I was still tailing her, all the way to Asuncion and now in Argentina. I must learn more Spanish: 300 words are just not enough to know what they are talking about most of the time. I can just about order a beer in a bar, which I suppose is something. Then there's the sorting out of these Euro things to pay for it! Now; in South America, I've got 'Guarani' in one pocket, which is the Paraguayan

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currency, Argentinian Pesos in another and Brazilian Reals in a third; no wonder I don't know if I'm coming or going!

Later that day, after a few hours in the zoo, where I had begun to feel like a 'particle', in a 'zoo' of particles, because these days I use my spare time to keep abreast of all the latest developments and theories in the realms of '*Quantum Theory*' and '*Cosmology*'. Finally, after much chatting, or maybe chattering, either in, or 'behind', 'bars'; while we were at the zoo; where I had managed to consume a few bottles of '*Quilmes*', which is an Argentinian beer, (which I highly recommend if you ever get to that neck of the woods), whose 'Name' I found hilarious, as the indigenous population pronounce it to sound just the same as 'Kill Me', sounds in English! What a way to go!

Anyway; after a few – 'Kill Me's' – I had managed to replace a good deal of my (lost) body fluid, which had leaked away through the heat of the day due to perspiration and eventually we headed off downtown to meet up with more of V's brothers who worked in a parking lot. There're three of them working there and they operate a vehicle elevator to shunt cars into their allotted parking spaces on various levels in this multi-storey parking lot that provides garaging for the surrounding apartment blocks. Here I met up with John Lennon's 'Latino double', who was already 'borasic', (that's 'drunk'; [in Spanish]).

It was his day off; but he had arranged to be there as it was in the 'dead centre' of the city; (pun intended); I kid you not, because Buenos Aires ancient burial grounds; (a very old cemetery); are immediately over the high wall at the end of the street. It is full; (pun intended), of spectacular tombs; which are so ornate, that it is on the sight-seeing tour for visitors to B.A. There are a lot of good bars in B.A., which makes it a lot like Marbella, so I had a few beers, ('Kill-Me's'), with 'John Lennon', who thought I was 'Paul McCartney': I tried to explain that he could call me Roo but like always the whole attempt was thwarted by most of it being 'Lost in Translation'. (Beam me up Scotty).

It was an amusing couple of hours, and an opportunity to sink a few more 'Kill Me's', strictly to replace essential body fluids you understand! We were two blocks, (or by that time, two blokes – who were both 'borasic'), from the British Embassy and B.A's, '*Hard Rock Cafe*', so I felt strangely safe in this niche of a far off land! A few days later, having said goodbye to 'John' and the rest of V's family, (nephews, nieces, sisters, sisters in law and ex sisters in law, who work and reside in B.A), we were back in the 'campo', (countryside), in Paraguay, on a Finca owned by another of V's sisters.

What a welcome change, to be free of the zoo in B.A and the fumes of the traffic and the pavements designed to trip you up every 2nd or 3rd step, plus we were rid of the obvious squalor, and the dirty streets that are hidden for the most part behind huge, new, plush apartment skyscrapers that surround and overlook the extensive parks that B.A has to offer as a left over from the days when Evita ruled the roost. But now we were ensconced in this tranquil and beautiful setting occupied by the farm known as Cabana Tabai, in the province of Misiones in Southern Paraguay; which is about a 3 hour bus ride north of the border with Argentina. It was if I had entered another world to say

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the least. It is one of those places where you can really relax, forget about the rest of the world and soak up the exquisite panoramic views of gorgeous countryside.

It's somewhere that I would be content in my rocking chair, to see out the rest of my days. It's set in rolling countryside and many a spring of fresh water bubbles up from the ground in the meadow just a few metres across from the comfortable, colonial bungalow that graces this beautiful spot, and makes for an incredibly enchanting South American hacienda: It takes a good five minutes in a 4x4 Toyota to drive across tracks on the Finca to reach the dirt road that takes you into Santa Maria. From the gate onto the Finca to the village of Santa Maria is maybe another 6 miles along winding dirt roads and the full journey takes a good 25 minutes.

A few other members of V's family live in Santa Maria and we were to attend the 91st birthday party of one of them. But wait on a minute; because the day before the 91st cumpleaños, (91st birthday party), a couple of V's brothers in law, came over to Cabana Tabai to help in the slaughter and butchery of one of their prize pigs. Well, it was for V's sister's husband's father, so I guess they pushed the boat out: He, (the 91 year old), is still whizzing around with the aid of a Zimmer frame, so I suppose I may have something like that to look forward to should I survive to the ripe old age of 96!

Anyway; let's get back to the question of the 'pork', as supplied by this certain Prize Pig. It was to be the main dish, (barbequed), at the birthday shindig. I will not go into the 'performance' of the slaughter, etc. as it would take too long and not meet with too much enthusiasm from my readers, but instead I'll whittle on a bit more about this fab Finca. The setting of Cabana Tabai is absolutely perfect, one sits out under a massive tree, beneath which is a superb patio, while above, green parrots, occasionally alight, and 'squark', 'squark', 'squark'.

About 50 metres to the left, just beyond the corral, is a belt of primordial jungle, where 'Howler' monkeys can sometimes be heard, if not seen; as they are still living in the wild here, right on one's doorstep. At night, sitting out under the stars, with the temperature still in the low thirties, we sit and sip a cool drink or two and watch the fireflies gliding along through the meadow a few feet away as they fly along the hedgerows, switching their luminescence off and on, probably advertising themselves for a mate.

This was but one of many fascinating experiences, plus all the other goings on in this neck of the woods, or perhaps I should say, neck of the 'Jungle'. They have over 30 head of cattle on the 35 hectares of the Finca. Three or four of the cows have young calves which are still suckling their mother's milk. These cows are the milkers for the family, while they are being suckled by their young'uns. The farmyard is full of ducks, chickens and geese, plus the odd peahen and several cockerels, who are not too well acquainted with the 'extra hour' in summertime; as they wake me at around 4am, but that's when V's sister gets up to prepare for the first jobs of the day around the farm, among which, is the chore of milking the cows!

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There is a fine looking horse, a stallion, called 'Sidney', or 'Charlie', but for some strange reason, I always want to call him 'Samson'. I think that for me; something seems to relate him to Orwell's '*Animal Farm*'; maybe it's all 'tied up' with the close proximity of the pigs? Anyway; the pigs down here don't get their own way; as they are fattened up for the table! And, if you want to eat pork; first you have to catch your pig; then, tie it up, or maybe that should read, tie it down, before you can start the rest of the process. I wandered over to the other livestock and reassured the lambs and sheep that they could relax as they were not on the menu this week. Talk about 'Squealing like a Pig'; you'd better believe it; well; I'm not too surprised, as I would too, if it had been me – for the chop! (Pun intended). To add to the fracas, one of the other pigs is up on its hind legs with its front feet on the corral fence, and it too, is 'squealing' as if to say: "What you doin' with my mate"? To which the answer has to be; "Wait and see, 'Matey peepes'; as this is your lucky day"; "In a couple of week's time you may not be so lucky, as you could be next – for the 'Chops'; isn't it Peeps; Squeals & Squeaks!

After a week or so on the farm we were off again to Argentina where we witnessed a wedding and spent Christmas with more of V's family who live close to the world famous 'Foz de Iguazu', which I was fortunate enough to see, as V and I took a short two day excursion to see this spectacular wonder of nature. It made our hectic schedule of visits here and there to various enclaves of her family even more hectic. The '*Iguazu – Water Falls*', are absolutely stupendous. They are twice as high as the Niagara Falls, and when Eleanor Roosevelt visited them she is reputed to have exclaimed, "Niagara takes second place to Iguazu". When they are in full flood in the rainy season they can have a flow rate of 12,000 cubic metres, per second! Whereas the maximum recorded for Niagara is 4,000 cubic metres/sec.

My trip to South America for the whole month of December, in 2012, was pretty special, as holidays go: The warmth of the people, their generosity, and the heat and humidity of the sub-tropical ecosystem that exists in these climes, is something that I'm not going to forget in a hurry. One day on the farm I took my current reading matter and sat under the huge tree to relax in the shade. After I had scanned a couple of paragraphs of my book, I snapped it shut, and tossed it on the table. How can one read a treatise on '*Chaos Theory*' when surrounded by such tranquillity and beautiful countryside; it's impossible!

The next time I opened the pages of said book was on the twelve hour flight from Sao Paulo to Amsterdam while I was in mid Atlantic over the Equator at 36,000 feet, on the 1st of Jan, 2013, which is just about where I had been 34 days earlier, although I was facing the other way at the time; since which, I had been bathed in a whole new cultural melting pot which was another learning experience. In fact; I was so taken with S.Am that I'm looking forward to my next visit there. There was a book written by an ex Brit 'Rocker' who is now retired and living in Spain entitled, '*Driving Over Lemons*'; which are abundant in Spain, and millions fall off the trees and are left to rot. In Paraguay it's mangoes! You'd better believe it! I saw this phenomenon with my own eyes and still find it hard to accept. The trees in the parks and the gardens of the houses

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in all the suburbs around Asuncion are dripping with mangoes', and the ground beneath them is swamped with the fallen fruit. It seemed such a waste.

On the one hand, rotting lemons are understandable, as you can only use so many on your paella's, salads, Dover sole, scampi, prawns and pancakes; and sliced of course, in your Gin & Tonic; but mangoes; which are a really useable fruit in comparison, should not be allowed to go un-harvested and left to rot. They make an exotic and healthy fruit juice, are fab as a dessert or snack on their own, or in a fruit salad. Why do we overproduce so much, and leave it to rot? It could be fed to the pigs for a start.

If there's a next time, that allows me to revisit South America, I'd like to try and make it a round the world trip. To take in my old stomping grounds in Australia; perhaps see a bit of the South Sea Islands, which has always ticked all my boxes, like Fiji, or Tonga. Then, with any luck, stop off in Thailand, to visit Phuket and see how Colin '*Lofty*' Low is making out in his dotage. Maybe India too; to see the '*Taj Mahal*', which is another 'pearl', (pun intended), and another box ticking destination on my 'wish list', and another enticement, that keep me ticking over.

Talking about dotage – I'm currently writing my autobiography, which is a whole different ballgame to this short story. Fact is, with all my 'near misses' over the last 70 years it's a wonder I'm here at all, let alone being able to recount this short tale. With that said, I hope to see you all again in the future, by which time, I may be a real author! Watch this space. Where's that rocking chair and my Zimmer frame? Ah! And, a nice cool glass of 'Kill Me' wouldn't go amiss.

Before I lay down my trusty laptop, there's a few more snippets to bring everything up to date – V's Dad, who is now 84, is called Geronimo! What a gem he is: He still lives in a shack in the 'Jungle', and his son 'Jeronimo', lives in another shack a little way off, with his four children, who age from 6 to 14. Jeronimo is bringing them up on his own, as his wife died giving birth to his youngest. So V is still sending her hard-earned money out to Paraguay to help support her brother Jeronimo's children; what a life. She's been a real brick for her whole family over the years, and now I find myself chipping in too.

We have bought them four cows, so her niece and nephews have plenty of fresh milk to drink, plus, there are always clothes parcels en-route for the kids, as they grow so fast. On top of that we have sent a few things over there for our own dotage as no doubt it's where I will finally go to live, when and if, I finally retire. Meanwhile, I'm still cleaning villas, plus gardening jobs and a bit of maintenance, etc. There's also plenty of washing and ironing to do, for those who have holiday homes down here on the Costa del Sol. Learning how to iron clothes and the like, which came with the territory while in the RAF, has stood me in good stead on this occasion; as for the 'Instrument Bashing'; well, I can still wield a screwdriver, so that's another useful plus, when it comes to the maintenance jobs.

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So, even though life's not all fun and games, I am lucky enough to now live in a nice warm climate. Danny Veltman retired to live in Cyprus a few years back. I hope that he hasn't been 'robbed' by their 'tax' on foreign resident's bank accounts. His email address seems to be defunct now so I've lost touch with him. They say that the same might happen here in Spain, which will be a real bummer for a lot of retired northern Europeans who are now resident here. It wouldn't affect me fortunately, as I never have enough in the bank to worry about, which is some relief I suppose and one less thing to worry about; that is – if you're the worrying kind, which fortunately, for me; I'm not.

Life's too short to worry about what might happen, or, what has already been and gone; receded into one's past. As for the unemployment problems down here with 26%, (that's over 6 million), registered as unemployed, in Spain. Well; the financial crisis is certainly tipping the scales on the Costa del Sol, and all the other Spanish Costas too. Could this 'crisis' be the thin end of the wedge, in what some economists, social engineers and political pundits are predicting as the possible start of the breakdown of our current civilisation? All I can suggest is that we just do the best we can and keep on smiling, as, if it's already happened, there's very little we can do about it, so make the most of it while it lasts! Meanwhile, *Social Entropy* could well be one of life's little surprises, as many of us dismiss such thoughts as not being on our visual horizon and therefore an insignificant topic. But there's no stopping it, once it's rolling, even though it might appear to move slowly; it's inescapable, whether you are a planet, a star, a galaxy, a universe or just an animal who happens to be sentient and has formed a civilisation, (which didn't take us all that long as time goes).

That said, it can fall apart just as quickly if we do not look after it. Our future generations will be dependent on what decisions are taken now by the current political systems and impotent oligarchies that control our world. Beware; one and all, the future of our planet and our civilisation lies in your hands. Of course our downfall as a species is greed and avarice. We all know it, but are reluctant to be tied up with our daily struggle for survival to consider changing the system for a better one. The writing is on the wall and has been there for quite some time. It's not yet written in stone; as yet; so there's still time.

Back in the early 1960's, while we were a motley crew at Halton, Stephen Hawking was a Physics undergraduate at Oxford. Then in '64 Peter Higgs and a few others postulated that there may well be another 'particle' to add to the 'particle zoo' in order to explain why the weak nuclear force messenger particles have mass; namely the W and Z bosons. A lot has taken place over the last 50 years, the Costa del Sol, once the haunt of British villains, has now become home to the Russian Mafia and others, while the Brits are being rounded up by the Guardia Seville and returned to the UK to stand trial. Is nothing sacred! What happened to the '*Cold War*'?

And whatever became of my '*Shreddies*'? Now there's a deterrent if ever there was one! Now the Higgs Boson has been 'seen' at CERN and we have to enter a whole new ballgame in the world of '*Particle Physics*' with that one

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small observation, which opens a lot more doors in our quest to understand the nature of our universe.

I took a short course in 1967 at the '*National Audio Visual Aids Laboratory*' where I joined others who were there to be instructed in techniques to operate a closed circuit television studio for use as a new teaching technique. We took turns over the 3 day course to operate video cameras, cues, acting a part on stage, video recorders (which in those days took two people to carry one), mixing console techniques, stills camera, etc. And writing a script which you would then direct with the other members of the course engaged in the various positions listed above.

My offering was probably a bit ahead of its time as it was a portrayal of; '*How Something, can be made out of Nothing*', which was my attempt to portray the '*Big Bang*' being manifest from '*Nothing*'. The other members of the course were Company Directors, responsible for advertising and the like, University and College Lecturers, School Teachers and a few others. Oh! And I, a mere Cpl who provided all the technical back up at the RAF School of Education. They could not get their heads around my plot or give any credence to its concept. I was amazed that these learned members of our new modern technological society were so unimaginative and disbelieving with the concept of the '*Big Bang*'; perhaps they were all supporters of Fred Hoyle's '*Steady State Theory*'? Who knows?

I came away from that course a bit disappointed with my fellow students, but now I often smile to myself about that little stint in the presence of those who should have had more open minds. Science has come a long way in the last 50 years and I have learnt a few more things since I left Halton. I'll mention a few, well maybe 'my top ten', just to get you all going;

1. We have banished Dandruff! Yes! Head and Shoulders actually does what it claims it can do!

2. Life's too short.

3. Infinity, and its opposite number, the infinitesimal, are one and the same; see my book when it comes out for a full explanation.

4. It's a long way to Tipperary and even further to Timbuktu!

5. All that we can detect with our senses, and that we are made from, comes from only 4% of the constituents that make up our universe. The other 96% is made up from Dark Matter and Dark Energy which for the moment remain unknown forms of matter and energy and exactly what they are will probably not be resolved in my lifetime, more's the pity. Suggestions ... on a postcard please – as below.

6. Life is much too short! Is there something we can do about that? Answers on a postcard please to: – K.Roo. The Jungle, Paraguay, South America.

7. Does anyone know what happened to my '*Shreddies*'? Answers on a postcard as above.

8. Gerry will have edited this missive heavily⁸, as I fear that it probably goes against the grain; but then I always was a bit that way inclined, so what else can you expect? Answers on a postcard ... as above.

⁸ I would "roo" the day that I should apply the heavy hand of editorship - Editor

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9. Where's Timbuktu? Answers on a postcard ... as above.

10. What a hotchpotch of teenagers we were – thrown together by Fate, or maybe luck, at that point in TIME. TIME, the prime mover, the infinitesimal made manifest.

And what has TIME done to those of us who have already departed this world, this Universe? A handful of whom went that way after only a few short years, life's just not fair sometimes, or is it that; '*only the good die young*'? To what infinitesimal destination might we be destined? Where, I wonder, are they now? If they are anywhere, at all? And what becomes of the 'broken hearted'? I wish I knew! I'm still searching for as many appropriate answers that may provide some solace to these thoughts. Bob Marley said – '*We All Have The Answer*'; it's just a matter of finding the ones that suit each individual's taste. We are after all – '*All Creatures of Habit*', or should that read '*Hobbit*'? Anyone fancy a '*Kill Me*' or a Higgs Boson?

As I have found that my succession of computers seems to have had minds of their own on occasion, like when they blue screen on me, etc. I sometimes wonder; '*If Robots Dream of Electric Sheep*'? Answers ... as above....Adios!... – Ciao! ... PS See you in September! Or, In South America, or should that read Amersham? Or maybe, Timbuktu? Answers ... !!!
'Hasta la Vista!' – K.Roo ... Costa del Sol, Espana – May, 2013.

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The Book – Mk2 by Rob Honnor

T0686605 A/A Honnor graduates much higher up the list of merit than he expected and is promoted to Jnr Tech with the bonus of one year accelerated promotion to Cpl Tech.

Prior to Graduation I had bought my first car, a 1936 Singer Bantam, ready for the run home. It had been refurbished and was in lovely condition, but despite my technical skills I couldn't get the engine to run, so I traded it for a 1947 Sunbeam Talbot 10. It was with this fine 16 year old motorcar that I trailed a plume of oily blue smoke all the way back to the north east from whence I had come on the train 3 years earlier. Not having driven much since passing my test the previous February, this trip home took some time as I re-acquainted myself with the skill. I had room-mate Geoff Wood as my navigator, dropping him off at home in Middlesbrough.

My requested posting was Acklington, but I ended up at Leeming along with 7 others from the Entry – Mick Grogan, Paul Wilcox, Dave Brenkley (RIP)⁹, Brian Chapman, Allan Bell, Alistair Mackie and Roger Garford (according to the list in the Haltonian), although I can't remember them all being there. Leeming was in Training Command so I was working on Jet Provost Mk3s & 4s.

Initially I was set to work in ASF (under close supervision) on a Primary/Minor Team until I had proven that I could be trusted to work alone, i.e. to wire lock things not anti-lock them, and not, according to my Sgt, to make a general pig's-ear of everything I touched. A bit of a knock for the brimming confidence of a recent ex-Senior Entry Halton Apprentice.

Eventually the training kicked in and it seems I became pretty good at what I did, so much so that I wangled a job on the small but highly coveted night shift Modification Team. This team worked 4pm until 2.30 am Monday-Thursday, which was ideal for me as I was keen to get off home to Co Durham early each weekend. This journey was not the 20 minute blast up the motorway it is now, but a good hour's drive in an old banger via Darlington and all points north on a mostly single carriageway, as the A1 was then.

One day, when reporting for shift, I was called into the office and informed I was on PWR for overseas and that my posting as a 'singly' would be unaccompanied to Aden. I went to the General Office and protested that I was due to get married later in the year. It was suggested by a friendly Chief Clerk that if I got married quicker I could probably get my posting changed.

This duly happened and Jude and I ended up doing an accompanied tour at Akrotiri in Cyprus from '65 to '68 instead. I was again working in ASF, but this time on Canberras and the odd Javelin.

⁹ Sadly succumbed to cancer in 1993 - Editor

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We lived in a hiring down-town in Limassol as I didn't have enough points for a Married Quarter at either Akrotiri or Berengaria Camp. Limassol town then was a very different place to the sprawling metropolis we live on the outskirts of now.

Our first two kids were born at Akrotiri in Princess Mary's Hospital, which has recently closed.

Tourex late in '68 I was posted to Cranwell, again working in ASF, but this time on the new Jet Provost Mk5.

Part of our tasking in ASF was to carry out servicing of RAF gliders, which flew from the North Airfield. Cranwell is fairly unique in having two airfields, North and South, separated by the main road running through camp, as well as controlling a satellite airfield – Barkston Heath, which was used to take some of the heavy flying programme traffic away from the main airfield.

After a while I was moved across the airfield to the Air Nav Trg School, a great place to work. We only had about 25 blokes to handle four Varsity TMk1s. Roger McNally (96th) was our 'sooty' Sgt.

The section was fondly known as Rauceby Airways, after the adjacent hamlet that now hosts a small aviation museum. Rauceby Church was used as 'our fly – no fly' weather indicator – i.e. – if you could see the Church through the Lincolnshire fog we usually flew, but if you couldn't we usually didn't, then quickly packed the kites up and sloped off.

It was idyllic being just far enough away from the bull-spit that was ever present on the RAF College side of the airfield, in a close knit group of blokes and with a fairly easy work load.

We sometimes got to fly as supernumerary crew on 'fish runs' to Scotland or Northern Ireland with the odd overseas land away or night stop. I got as far as Gatow, Berlin one weekend. A long way in a Varsity, down the strict air corridor maintained by the Soviets. We had to land at Wildenrath on the way out to top up fuel, oil, air and oxygen, etc as there was nothing at Gatow in the way of services.



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Occasionally Strike Command would call a *Mickey Finn*¹⁰ and as Cranwell was a nominated dispersal site for the *V-Force*, our old aircraft had to be moved fairly smartly to make way for dispersal of the bombers, and our buildings given up to their ground and flight crews, including the dreaded Crew Chiefs, who weren't to be messed with.

We then had to fend for ourselves working as best we could from any spare places about the airfield. These disturbances mostly happened at night or weekends and we took badly to these 'sharp-end' Sqdn rapid deployments, especially as their troops usually left our tea-bar and crew-room in a tip.

As a Cpl with a couple of kids and a few years service in, we had enough points for a Married Quarter at Cranwell.

From here I managed to fit in a brief detachment to RAF Hospital, Nocton Hall to have my appendix removed.

Soon I was promoted to Sgt and introduced to the hallowed Sgts' Mess. The promotion also meant that Rauceby Airways became top heavy in Sgt riggers so I was sent to help run the JP Flight Line.

We were controlled by an ageing Sqn Ldr who ran the aircrew liaison desk and I was one of two Sgts running the Flight Line along with a couple of Cpls and their crowd of '*Lineys*'. This section was always hectic, especially so when we were night flying and it came down to one Sgt on earlies and days and the other on lates and nights. Every night the JPs had to be serviced then tightly packed into the hangars at cease flying and every morning dragged out again ready for another hectic day.

My next posting was self inflicted. I was coming up to last tour before my 12 year exit point with little hope of signing on due to the manning climate at the time, so I applied for Special Duties – Recruiting. This was well outside my comfort zone as no spanners were involved and there was public speaking and interviews to do, which I had never done before, but hopefully it would put me in a good position to line up a job at demob time.

Having passed the initial selection interview in London it was down to Stanmore on the recruiting course, living in digs on Rate-1s for a month, then eventually getting my posting of choice at Newcastle Careers Information Office (CIO).

Again we qualified for a Married Quarter, this time at Longbenton, a former WWII barrage balloon site. At the time we were there it was used by the University of Newcastle as sports fields, with various Depts of Agriculture/Animal Welfare/etc, and the local Driving Test Centre resident on site, as well as 5 Married Quarters.

¹⁰ Often at 2am on Mondays as I recall from my days at Honington - Editor

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Our parent station was Boulmer, some 40 miles away and, being a radar station, of little help to a couple of Sgt riggers in our office trying to pass their Chief's exams.

Regardless, my mate and I somehow qualified to Chief and thanks to a persistent Flt Cmdr I even got signed on to the 22 year point, which of course would then pay out an index-linked pension. So much for the plan of easing into Civvy Street from the CIO job.

Recruiting was different to say the least, but I gained many skills that were to come in handy later on in life. On my first school visit I was scheduled to speak to a select group of sixth formers about commissioned officer opportunities, but it ended up with me presenting broad brush to the whole school – a tad daunting.

Our area covered the whole of Northumberland and Co Durham, as far north as Berwick on Tweed, as far south as Middlesbrough and across to Hexham.



Here's me 'mobile'recruiting' in our Morris J-van as caught by the local paper.

We shared a mobile recruiting caravan with Carlisle CIO. This 22 ft 4-wheeled monster weighed in around 4 tons loaded and was towed by a gutless, long wheel-base petrol Land Rover, which was almost certainly overweight as well when filled with all the stuff we had to tote around from show-ground to show-ground. This dodgy outfit was justifiably limited to

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30mph, but on motorways it was allowed up to 40 mph before inevitably starting to snake out of control.

Oddly, when Carlisle CIO came to pick it up it was from the local Territorial Army depot and when we went to pick it up it was from a wet sloping hillside and/or far along a twisting narrow lane with unforgiving dry stone walls.

Having signed on again I was now re-eligible for posting and in '73 ended up at 60MU Leconfield, which carried out Major servicing and repairs on Phantoms and Lightnings.

My arrival interview with WingCo Eng went a bit like this:

WingCo: "Where have you come from?"

Me: "Newcastle sir."

WingCo: "I mean, which RAF station?"

Me: "Newcastle CIO. I was on recruiting."

WingCo: "I see. What and when was the last aircraft type you worked on."

Me: "JP and Varsity – 3 years ago, but the last 6-months was running the line not 'spannering'."

WingCo: "Well I'm not letting you loose on my jets! They can find something for you to do in the Chipmunk Refurbishment Flight."

Me: "Er – thank you sir."

So I end up on a team taking Chipmunks completely to bits and refurbishing them for another 10 years life. Then as a Chief I went on to run the Chipmunk Wings and Flying Control Surfaces Bay. The Chipmunk had fabric covered wings and control surfaces and this was all stripped off at refurb, the structure inspected and modified/repared as necessary before new 'cloth bags' were skilfully sewn back in place by Safety Equipment Workers, then doped and painted, ready for the teams to reassemble back into aeroplanes.

Leconfield was a lovely little place, very compact with nowhere on camp further away than a short walk. I was living in the Mess and commuting at weekends back to the north east, as I had recently climbed on the house buying ladder whilst at Newcastle, due mainly to the newly introduced Military Salary handing me enough money to live on at last.

After a while the Chipmunk contract was drawing to a close so I again apply for Special Duties – this time I fancied NDT. My interview at Swanton Morley apparently doesn't go well as to my dismay I am rejected.

Back at Leconfield, Sqn Ldr Eng explains that not all is what it seems, as the paperwork shows I had already been earmarked for Crew chieftain duties, hence the rejection for NDT. In fact it appears they should never have let me go for interview.

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My heart dropped as these Crew Chief bods are of legend, working 24/7/365, sleeping under the wing of their aircraft as they defend the Nation against the '*Cold War*' threat. I didn't want to be one, especially as they had to fly with their fickle charges.

I had never really enjoyed the little bit of flying that I had done so far, some at Halton – mostly in open cockpit gliders, once in a Chipmunk and once in an Anson. There was also a low level trip out of Odiham in a helicopter as part of an away day from Halton, a few trips in the Varsity at Cranwell; else it was RAF Transport Command to/from overseas posting. Nevertheless I find there is no escape and I am slated to become an Aircraft Servicing Chief (ASC) on Victor K Mk2 tankers and in late '74 I embark on a 9 month course with 5 other souls, none of whom were volunteers either.

The course starts off with a month at St Athan to learn about engines, in particular the Victor's Conway. St Athan doesn't have a Conway handy, so we learn about the Olympus from the Vulcan instead, with a few Conway fuel system bits thrown in. Hardly realistic.

Joining instructions for the course require the six of us to take our PT kit, but we opt out saying it doesn't apply to old Chiefs, only young trainees and is obviously a typo or a standard letter. It wasn't, but we drag our feet finding our kit and get away with it this time.

Dave Goodchild (C Flt Room 6, next bed-space to me) was staffing at Saints when I bump into him during the course and he is amused about me being caught for Crew chiefting. I meet him many moons later, whilst on an overseas trip. He has just arrived strapped into a Vulcan bomber. My turn to smile.

Next it's back to Halton for 3 months to learn electrics and electronics and have a bit of a schools refresher. This is altogether a totally different experience from the last time I was there, although crossing Main Point still had our mostly ex-Apprentice rabble looking over our shoulders for the SWO.

PT is again on the schedule, but again we opt out and choose to go swimming instead in the old workshops pool, only to be collared after a few sessions by the '*muscle mechanics*' for not having a lifeguard on duty. We are told to find our PT kit and after a free interview with P Ed O made to suffer circuit training and cross country as a penance, before being allowed to go swimming again under supervision for the remaining duration.

Our (tor)mentor is a Flt Sgt PTI, almost 55 years old, still flexible enough to put the palms of his hands on the floor in front of his toes without creaking and he chain smokes industrial strength Woodbines. He leaves us standing on the cross country and when we catch up with him he is having another smoke.

I never was a very good swimmer, but with some one-to-one instruction from the PTI's I gain in skill and can now stay on top of the water when necessary. This was to come in handy later on in the course for dinghy drill.

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At Kermode Hall we learn electronics theory from scratch and carry out circuit building using a kind of 'Lego' set with electronic components attached, do some Maths refreshing, gain some useful proper electrics knowledge (handy for house wiring later) and generally start to settle down as pseudo-skilled multi-trade persons.

We even get cocky and rewire Halton's Victor Electric System Training Aid so that the bank of 'fault' switches at the back introduce some problem other than is labelled upon them – great fun, until we are sussed by a po-faced instructor and made to put it all back to square one again in our own time.

Next is the long haul at Marham's Victor Training School to learn the KMk2 inside out. At least they have a few aircraft we can look at and all the bits we are shown belong to the right type of aircraft. We are trained on all the aircraft systems (all trades) and as we are expected to be able to diagnose and fix snags using bits out of the fly-away spares pack we always carry whilst down route, a scary future lies ahead.

Part of the course was engine runs, carried out in the simulator. This was a Victor cockpit with no back in it, erected inside the school buildings. As the simulated engine noise put out over speakers was upsetting other classes we had to learn to do engine runs in silence, again hardly realistic.

Months later, the first time I have to do hi-power engine runs for real, at least I have some idea of what to do. Being a tad nervous the first time I have to do a run up I mix up my transmit switch with my intercom and end up giving ATC a running commentary of the engine run until I'm politely told by them it's not required.

We were also trained to be 'plumbers', so as to be able to keep the pilots' ejection seats and rear crew assisted escape seats in proper fettle. Often at places like Goose Bay it gets so cold in winter, even in the hangar, that the safety equipment had to be removed from the seats and stored in a warm room, to be reinstalled before flight, then all the necessary vital and independent checks were carried out by the Crew Chief and the aircraft Captain.

Then we went swimming again, this time in Marham's pool to learn dinghy drills. Toggled up in full flying gear and parachute harness, we are dragged backwards by ropes into the pool and then have to escape the harness straps, deploy our dinghy and climb in. The shortness of the pool makes this somewhat of a nonsense as you soon bottom out in the shallow end – (do I hear a cry of hardly realistic again?). We do it again later, but in a very much more realistic and extremely cold Plymouth Sound out of Mount Batten.

We also have a day out at North Luffenham, where we are introduced to the odd effects altitude can have on the human body and where hypoxia, explosive decompression and pressure breathing of oxygen are on the schedule. We all survive, but one of us drops out of the course with dodgy

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ears that hadn't been spotted at his pre-course medical. We are now medically re-categorised as A1-G1-Z1, i.e. fit to fly and to serve anywhere on or above the known world.

Back at Marham we are almost done, apart from learning the F700 again, then we are posted to the only Sqn with Victor K2s – No 55, which incorporates 232 OCU. They have more Crew Chiefs than aircraft so the pace is slow, very slow, with the senior Crew Chief organising frequent days off and/or early stacks due to over-manning. This legendary Crew Chief thing is turning out to be better than expected. As we get more aircraft I join 57 Sqn for the rest of my time at Marham.

We have been kitted out with everything we will need for both our ground and flight duties and are shadowed by old hands until it is felt we are safe to be left on our own. Very soon I have to go flying and my first trip is to Malta.

Luqa, before it closed, was used as the half way point for tanking fighters to Cyprus. I am not overly happy in these strange new cockpit surroundings and in trepidation I hold my breath and grip my seat tightly getting almost as far as the Alps before I start to relax a bit. I arrive in one piece but realise that I still have to get home again. Note is duly taken of my concerns and all future courses have a local air experience flight built in before any fly-away trips are authorised.

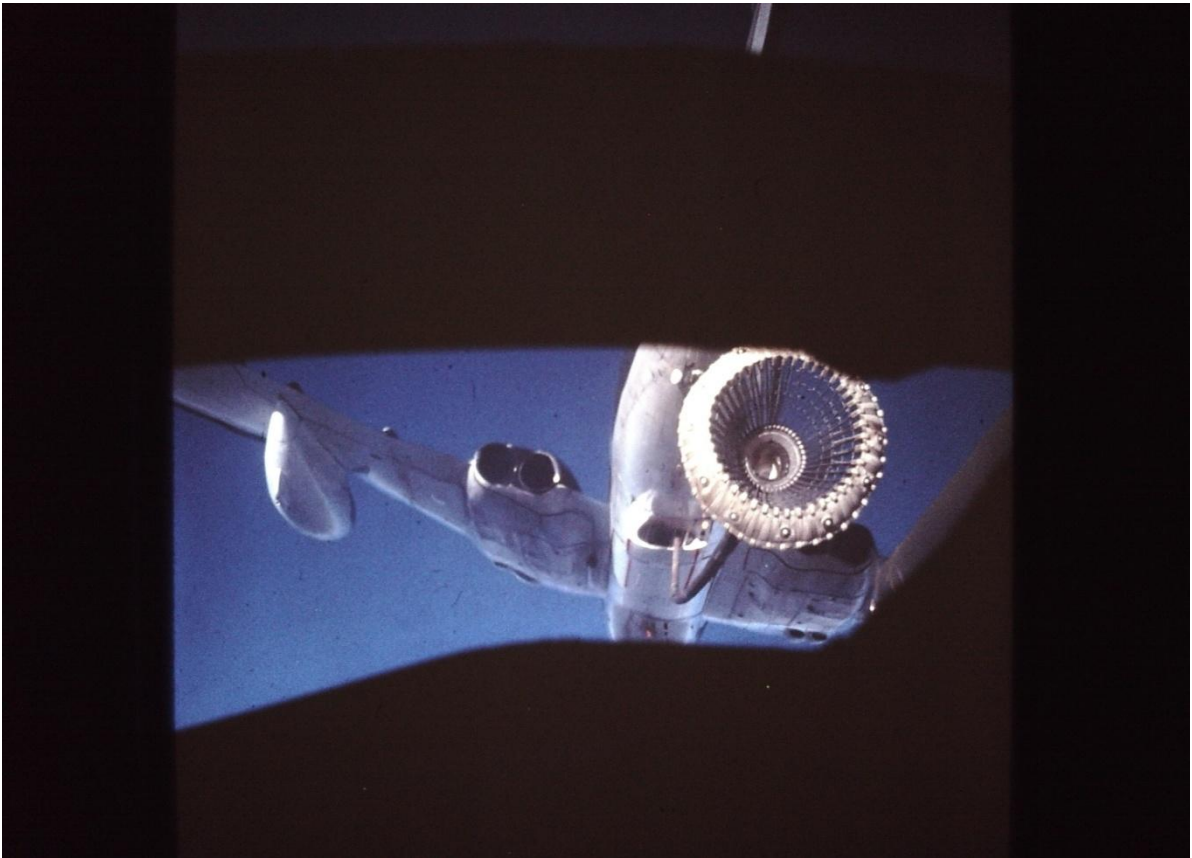
My next trip is to March AFB in California for an air show as part of a tanking exercise through Goose Bay and Offutt AFB in Nebraska. This time I fly OK, although 10 hours 40 mins nonstop, trussed up in a tiny cockpit without a proper lavatory is no fun.

Neither was Mount Batten in February much fun, as we are on a short dinghy drill course. Plymouth Sound is obviously much more realistic than doing it in the bath at Marham. The procedure was for you to be harnessed up and attached to the pinnacle by a long cable. The pinnacle moves off and your dinghy pack is thrown into the sea thus dragging you overboard like it or not, whereupon you had to establish a stable tow to avoid drowning, then escape your harness, deploy the dinghy and climb into it before you froze to death.

The sea temperature that day was 42°F, two degrees warmer than the air above it. Fortunately we have all the kit on – thermals, fleece inner suit, outer immersion suit, etc. Being yanked out of the sea by a helicopter and dumped back onto the pinnacle was a novel experience, to be rewarded with a hot rum toddy to drive the cold out.

Five years of crew-chiefting literally flies by with countless trips to Malta, Scotland, Italy, Scotland, Sicily, Scotland, Cyprus, Scotland, France, Scotland, Canada, Scotland and America, but that's as far as I get. There are no round-the-world trips or Far East Rangers any more. There are too many tales to tell than can be listed here, but overall it is an interesting job.

And Then...



Here's a Crew Chief's view of one Victor tanking from another:

I fly as many hours in C130 Hercules as ground party on detachment as I do in the Victors. I prefer the much smoother, quieter and faster Victor to the RAF's flying truck.

And Then...



Here's me and my transport at Akrotiri:

Duty Crew Chief was a necessary pest, as you were on 60-minutes alert call for a week with a small team of troops, to launch a tanker in support of air defence fighters flying out of Scotland against Russian 'intruders'.

All too soon it is time for my last tour and as we are settled in East Anglia, Swanton Morley is the place to go. In '81 I end up in Schedules Flight, Aircraft Projects Wing (APW) writing servicing schedules for Army/RAF helicopters and various small aircraft. Dudley Denham¹¹ (96th) is our WingCo. My Flt Cmdr in Schedules Flight becomes my boss again many years later at Marshalls.

Then the VC10 tankers are introduced to service, so being an ex-tanker man I am fingered for the job of writing them up. Field trips are made to BAe Filton, Bristol where the aircraft are being converted. I even get to look round a live Concorde.

I hardly get my feet under the table at Swanton when the Falklands War breaks out and it's a recall back to Marham for 6 months crew-chieving as UK reinforcement for the tanker detachment to Ascension. Two of us Crew Chiefs are left to hold the fort while the rest are down route.

¹¹ One of the 3 from the Entry to be awarded a Cadetship at Graduation - Editor

And Then...

After the *Black Buck* missions the RAF realises it needs bigger tankers/transporters and opts for the ex-BA/PanAm L1011-500 Tristars. Once again I end up the job and find myself in California, this time attached for a few months to the Project Team to write the Tristar servicing schedule based on Lockheed's in-house data.

Upon return to UK I stay with the Tristar Project Team at Cambridge where Marshall is designing and installing the refuelling/freighter conversion. As a result I meet up with my old Schedules Flight WO and get the promise of a job in their Tech Pubs Dept. Transition to Civvy Street in '84 is accomplished with very little turbulence.

After a year or so as a Tech Author I am offered a job as a Tristar Post Design Services Engineer (still at Marshalls) in support of the UK MoD. I jump at the chance as well as the associated pay rise.

Years pass in PDS, then in '92 I am given the job (and more money) of looking after the various civil and miscellaneous military projects Marshall has. This task (described to me as 'non-onerous') initially involves project managing the conversion of an Avro RJ/BAe-146 to V-VIP spec for the President of Indonesia; upgrade of the RAF Dominie Navigation Trainer, as well as looking after PDS for RAF Bulldog Avionic Upgrade; support for Heavylift's ex-RAF Belfast fleet; Airworthiness of DERA's Llanbedr based Meteor drone and Martin Baker's live ejection seat testing Meteors; PDS support for Marshall designed and built overload fuel tanks for Boeing airliners, as well as any other miscellaneous design office support tasks that came up. In time this whittled down to steady PDS in-service support for Dominie and Meteor plus various gash jobs.

Around '99 the guy in the office next to mine, who never seemed very busy, said he was retiring soon. Knowing that our Company was forward thinking I asked who had been ear marked for his job and he unsurprisingly said no one. I quizzed him what it was about and then swiftly tackled my boss (an ex-Flt Sgt electrician now Head of Product Support). He spoke to the Engineering Director and overnight the job was mine. I was tasked to shadow the job and pick up when the guy left.

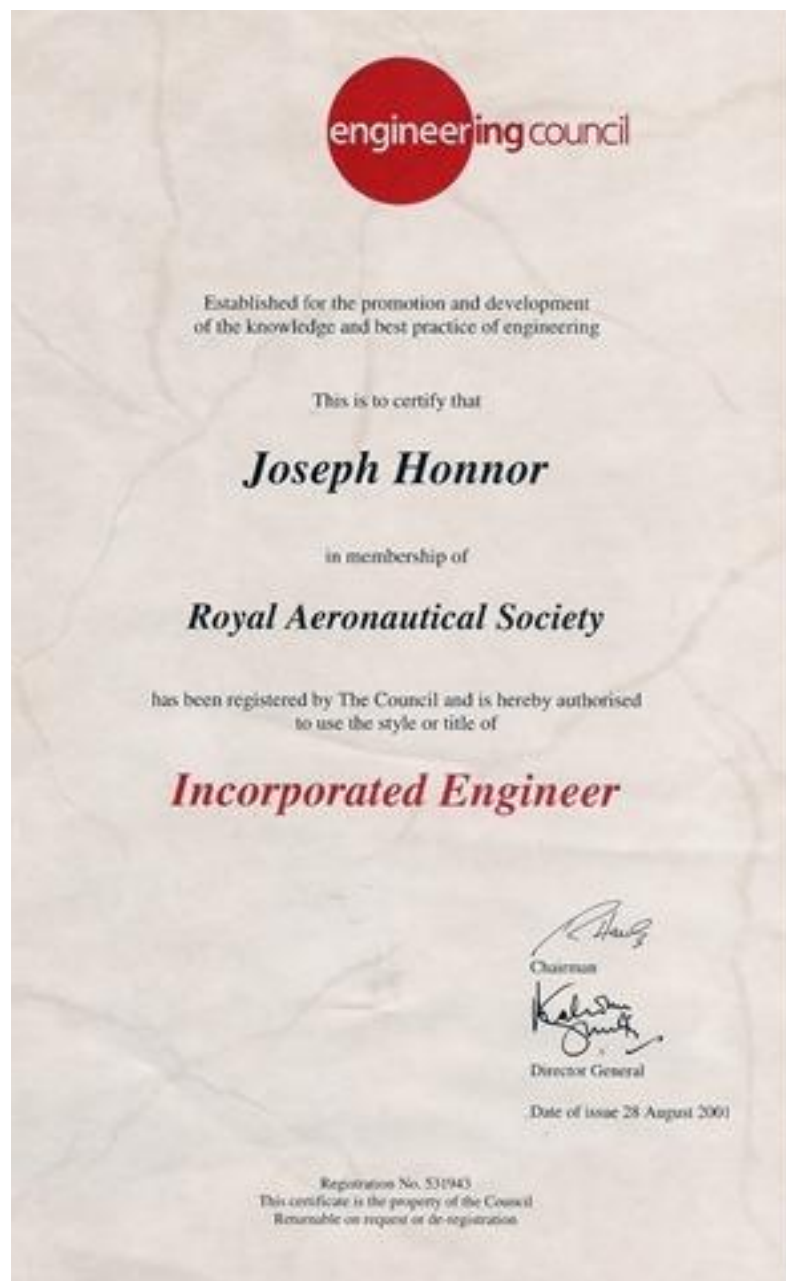
The job was the UK MoD Delegated Design Authority for Airfield Fixed and Mobile Arresting Systems, a really interesting one-man-band job, that liaised closely with the MoD, Royal Engineers and 3rd-Line at 16MU Stafford, as well as every arrestor system equipped airfield in UK and overseas, Defence Estates and various civilian agencies. This in addition to my existing PDS work – yes I got some more money.

I was working with the MoD, outside contractors, liaising with people at all levels within and outwith the Company and this often meant standing up in front of a crowd, giving presentations, arguing a case for this or that, and generally being the only person present who genuinely knew anything much about the project, such was the scope of this digital post.

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It was now that my earlier recruiting/public speaking skills came to the fore, along with all the confidence that Halton had instilled in me and I realised the benefits from those times when I was dragged out of my comfort zone to do jobs I didn't really want to do.

Despite having gained no further academic qualifications or licences since leaving Halton, I was encouraged by the firm '...to obtain professional status to help establish my authority to external agencies...' Their way of saying customers like aircraft and equipment OEMs, MoD and the many other agencies I was dealing with, preferred nowadays to see their Contractor's representatives paper qualifications, especially as I was delegated design authority for much of their kit. To this end I gained Incorporated Engineer and Associate Membership of the Royal Aeronautical Society using the Mature Candidate Route.



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This involved writing and presenting a lengthy paper based on one of my projects – the complete teardown inspection (to the very last rivet) of an RAF C-130 Hercules aircraft. I compiled the detailed results of the inspection and analysis of these findings onto an interactive CD-ROM, for which I had to have MoD permission to present to RAeS. I am extremely proud of this achievement, which I consider to be the final tick in the box to a good career.

I retired from Marshall's mid 2009, shortly after my old boss from Schedules Flight took over Product Support at Cambridge.

Previously – in early 2004 – Merv Kelly rings up out of the blue and talks me and Jude into going to one of his 96th Entry Reunions. We had been to one in the early '90s at Aylesbury, but not since.

It was at this Reunion I got volunteered with the job of sorting out a website for the Entry, not that I had a clue how to do such a task of course, but being ex-Halton you know you can do anything if you try.

Following on from that I was involved in sorting out our stained glass window for St George's Church, as well as Jude and me supporting the organisation of several Reunions, until I retired and we moved overseas.

Having been to Cyprus many times on detachment and holiday, as well as serving a full tour there, meant we quite liked the place and so, as our retirement Plan A, we decided to sell up in UK, buy a house in Cyprus and live there full time.

With hindsight we would do the same again, but we would have rented rather than buy to simplify the escape route if and when necessary due to age or infirmity.

You should always have a Plan B, so when we get fed up with the eternal sunshine and cheap income tax, and before we are too old, we aim to sell up in Cyprus and return to UK, buy a motor-home and go touring again as previously we were ardent caravanners.

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And Then...

My Life After Halton by Merv Kelly

So...I have completed my three years training at Halton. I have graduated as a Junior Technician and am now qualified to service aircraft which actually fly. How difficult can that be? I received training on single-engined Provosts and jet-powered Hunters and have been taught to marshal taxiing aircraft. I am now ready for the real RAF!

My initial posting was to 42 Sqn at RAF St. Mawgan. Looking back over the posting list, I was the only person to be sent to that part of the country, so it was a complete goodbye to the 96th. I don't remember much about my arrival on the squadron, apart from the fact that the W/O was God and the Airframe Ch/Tech was his main disciple. My basic training had been on single-engined trainers and now I was expected to work on four-engined bombers akin to the Lancaster; i.e. the Shackleton.

SAC Airframe mechanics obviously ran the flight line and knew exactly what was required to get a Shackleton airborne. Despite having received three years' training, I effectively knew very little! However, over the next few months I learnt how to carry out Before Flight, After Flight and Turnaround inspections. This information, coupled with 'charging pneumatic systems', 'filling hydraulic systems' and changing 5 foot diameter wheels, really brought me into the RAF.

I spent two happy years at St Mawgan on 42 Sqn before being posted to RAF Geilenkirchen in December 1965. There I was employed on Canberra B8's until Geilenkirchen closed in late 1967 and then I spent a final year on 3 Sqn at RAF Laarbruch.

After Germany, a posting to RAF Ballykelly on Shackletons followed. Not everyone's choice of posting, but over the next two years I really saw the world. Norway (twice), Madagascar (twice), up and down the Mediterranean more times than I can remember, the length of Africa, and then...a Westabout (basically testing the western route to the Far East). The whole trip took 17 days, and with an accompanying Wg Cmdr with a severe case of press-on-itis we were never going to be late home!

Having recently Googled 'RAF Ballykelly', that trip still figures in Wikipedia. Obviously it was not a flight that was made very often! The aircraft contingent comprised two Mark 2 Shackletons and an accompanying Britannia carrying spares.

If my memory serves me correctly, the itinerary comprised Gander, South Carolina, Texas, Sacramento (two nights with a trip into San Francisco), Hawaii (two nights), Wake, Guam, Singapore (three nights), Akrotiri, Malta, Gibraltar, and Ballykelly.

RAF Ballykelly closed in early 1971, so that meant postings for all. I can't remember where I applied for, but it was certainly not Marham! After my two years of gadding about, '*El Adem with grass*' was not even on my radar! To crown it all my posting was not even to a squadron, but to the Flight Refuelling Bay – could life get any worse? To cap it all the Flt. Sgt. i/c said “most people serve five years in here.” However, someone at Innsworth must have liked me,

And Then...

because eleven months later I was on my way to Akrotiri for a three year tour – yippee!!

On arrival at 70 Squadron (Hercules + 2 Argosy) as the last of six Airframe Sgts to be posted in, I was told in no uncertain terms that I would be going to the Role Equipment Bay – no arguments! Strangely, over the next three years, each of those five Sgts approached me with a view to doing a swap. Very thoughtful of them! However, the chance to work every morning (7 – 1) and water-ski every afternoon, was just too appealing to me!

For two years this was the best posting ever, until one day in July 1974 the Turks invaded the Island. Things changed almost overnight, with the families living in the local towns soon being moved onto the SBA (Sovereign Base Area). From a personal perspective, living in a hiring in the Turkish part of Limassol, was not a happy outcome. My then wife and I had our house looted (twice), and lost practically everything we owned. Financial compensation was eventually forthcoming, but could not make up for the loss of personal possessions. Within a few weeks most of the families were back in the UK, after living conditions on the SBA became intolerable. So as the words of a popular song at the time went – “for the rest of our tour we'll be singlies again.” I 'suffered' the remainder of my tour alone until February 1975, having chosen to remain living in my tent near the water-ski club. Well, it saved the overcrowded Mess having to find me a room!

On returning to the UK, a posting to RAF Brawdy beckoned, and I was not unhappy to be employed in Minor Servicing on Hunter F6s and T7s. I had my own team of blokes, and at the end of a service it was gratifying to return an aircraft back to the Line after only one air test – not something all team leaders achieved, but then they probably weren't all Halton Apprentices, were they?

Two fairly happy years followed until the breakup of my marriage. Having been recently re-engaged to age 55, I was entitled to apply for a posting, so decided a new start all round was called for. Why I applied for Lyneham and Brize Norton I do not know, because I had come to prefer smaller aircraft. However, Brize Norton it was to be. After a few months in the Skydrol (Hydraulic) Bay, I managed to wangle a move to VC10 Role Equipment, working shifts. After a few months, promotion to Ch Tech appeared, so a further move was called for, this time onto VC10 Line Servicing. After six very unsatisfactory months as a Line Chief, and a subsequent disagreement with the shift Flt Sgt about the menial job I was doing, I was moved sideways to another shift as Airframe Trade Manager. At last – a proper job!

Five years down the line in that very satisfying job, working twelve day shifts (3 days, 3 nights, 6 days off) I decided that civilian life and normality beckoned, so applied for premature voluntary release. What happens to a Ch Tech at Brize Norton who has PVR'd? – he gets posted to Base Hangar for his last year! A swansong you might think – oh no!

And Then...

Anyone working on VC10's in 1983 might remember the saga of the broken flying control cable (aileron I believe). The entire fleet was grounded for a short time, until the decision was made to replace every cable (including engine control cables) on all aircraft. There were only 13 VC10's at Brize at the time, so why did yours truly get lumbered with overseeing three of them? Oh well, it made the last year pass much more quickly.

And so ended 23 years of faithful service to Her Majesty.

Do I regret becoming a Halton Apprentice? At the time, yes, but in hindsight, not for one moment.

Editor's Note: For the last few years, Merv and his wife, Pat, have organised our Entry Reunions. Many thanks for that.

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And Then...

686610 L/A/A Glenn Knight, Airframe Fitter U/T

Not being the quickest thinker in the world, it took me about five years to realise I wasn't going to set the world on fire as a Fitter and another year before the RAF realised it was no keener on me than I was on it, so we parted company – on reasonable good terms, unlike my first divorce!

A brief spell at Heathrow working on British Eagle Britannias, worse than the mob, so a quick move into the Drawing Office, white coat instead of overalls. Draughting was the most insecure job you could get at the time – much of it was short term contracts, but I've drawn razor blades, bits of machines I didn't understand, fire engine trailers (only the senior draughtsmen drew the real thing) and sprinkler systems.

Would still be there but it was spring time, when a young man's fancy turns ... to getting a mortgage and in the late sixties that was virtually impossible for contract workers. Local government workers, however, could borrow three times the top of their salary scale so I became an admin/professional grade 1-3 staffer at the Greater London Council on a thousand a year, the top of the scale was £1500 and a little semi in Hayes Middx, £4900.

And that was the beginning of my downfall. While watching some painters (supervising would be too strong a word) working on tower blocks in Paddington, I found the chargehand in an empty flat with a telescope watching, ... Now I was very naive, but even I could work out why he was looking down from the 22nd floor into the window of one of the flats in the block next door. I know I shouldn't have but stupidly I accepted his offer of having a look. I must have knocked the telescope as when I looked through it, I saw an immaculate canal boat chugging along the Grand Union heading towards west London.

I was hooked and from 1968 until 2000 I had canal boats, starting with a 16 footer, a floating hike tent, then a 24 footer cabin cruiser; even had a double bed, and then what I thought at the time was the ultimate, 72 foot by 7 foot of town class unconverted narrow boat. And if you can see the sense in pushing seventy-two foot of boat around with a cabin that was about 6 foot by 7 foot (and licensed at Uxbridge as suitable living accommodation for a family of 4) and about 56 foot of empty hold... And finally I bought a 40 foot iron icebreaker, built about 1830 as an experiment to see if iron hulls were better than wood. It's still around; as are 4 others from the fleet of six built in Birmingham. They had to revert to wooden boats when the railways were built and the canals found themselves in competition.

I never stayed anywhere too long – I was an ambitious little s.h.1.t. And I wanted to get to the top, so over the next few years I moved through three London Boroughs and a Hospital Board climbing the ladder as fast I could tread on other people's fingers.

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Even that wasn't enough and I saw a job advertised at Heathrow as Operations Manager for an airline. I don't know about you, but I still found aeroplanes addictive in those days, a bit like smoking. Heathrow was a closed union shop at the time and only airlines could do baggage and freight handling, so the medium sized airline I went to had contracts with a number of smaller outfits to handle their baggage, freight, catering, maintenance etc and yours truly was managing the airside bit, excluding passengers.

By this time I had acquired a post graduate management qualification and was collecting enough box tops to get an Open University BA. Add that to being responsible for 101 aircraft movements a day and life was a little stressful. Thank heavens for the canal boat. Whatever the weather, Friday night was off to the boat, moored outside a pub somewhere on the 2000 miles of navigable waterways in the UK, few beers, fish supper, early night and off at day break to find another pub for lunch and then yet another in the evening. Ending up Sunday afternoon, somewhere near a pub and a train station to get back and collect the car. Monday morning and face half a dozen lost bags, freight manifested but not on the pallet, complaints of dirty cabins and the rest of it.

I'd been there about eighteen months when I got made redundant, well more asked to resign, as it was a foreign owned airline and they were closing down a north American route as uneconomic and they had a spare station manager who needed a job. He was one of their nationals. No hard feelings, I got six months pay and even after paying off the mortgage I could still have lasted six months living frugally (on my wife's earnings) but she got fed up with me hanging around the house so I applied for a local job as an office manager, a bit of a comedown but I'd realised I'd grown out of being an ambitious little swine and was planning on going into semi retirement (in my early thirties I think).

The job was nothing like the advert. It was traffic manager for Lew Grade's Film and TV Empire, shipping feature films and TV programmes to customers all over the world. Wonderful industry, in those days it ran on whisky and bacon sandwiches.

I meant to keep my big mouth shut and get on with the job, but I was shipping raw film stock out to a documentary production crew in Africa. Crew may be an overstatement, a director/cameraman and a 'soundy'. Film stock is expensive and I was keeping a running total and it was getting silly. We'd sent enough film stock to make a short feature so I complained to my boss who passed the buck straight back and told me to sort it out. Telex's flew between London and Africa and eventually, without spending too much more money, the cutting copy of a one hour doc landed on my desk, all marked up ready for the neg cutters to work their magic.

And Then...

When the final product came back from the labs I was horrified to see the final credit read;

**Producer
Glenn Knight**

and I'm in the boss's office so fast screaming about look at what some f*****ing idiot's done!

He was stoically unimpressed and explained that a producer's rôle was to get the programme made, as commissioned and on or under budget, which he considered I'd done, so he was the idiot who put my name on it.

I spent 27 years in the film game; you can't really call it an industry, mostly running the technical end, post-production. But I was very good at versioning – making foreign language versions of English programmes where the contract demanded it, but mostly making English versions of foreign language programmes. Without speaking a word of any language, apart from English and Obscene, I made English versions from Japanese, German, Italian, Yiddish and the one I am most proud of, three one hour documentaries translated and re-written from American to English – at least I didn't need to pay a translator for that one.

Lew Grade's Empire was bought by an Australian and quite quickly run into the ground so I moved on to another very British independent TV company, which eventually suffered the same fate – bought by an Australian company who probably only wanted the back catalogue.

About this time I was fifty; re-married; and a father for the very first time, so back to being a freelancer so I could share bringing up daughter with my wife. And that worked pretty well until daughter went off to school and Kate, a nurse, was put into the position of either applying to manage her department, or work for a complete idiot. I managed to get enough work to keep the wolf from the door and have the odd meal out and bottle of wine in.

Then daughter was 6 and a bit, and facing the Sats tests at seven which the school league tables were based on. Despite the fact that she couldn't read they were pushing her do joined-up writing and looking for excuses why she was behind. She had her eyesight tested, her hearing tested and they were talking about dyslexia. Seeing a six year old stressed because she can't do what people are pushing her to isn't a nice sight, so we decided to take six months off and visit my sister-in-law in New Zealand thus missing the lead-up, the exam and incidentally the English winter. We arrived in October put daughter (quite illegally – she didn't have a student visa) into the village school – 4 classrooms, 100 kids aged between 5 and thirteen and four relaxed, mature and very competent teachers. Daughter was reading by Christmas.

We were living the Kiwi dream, a little house on the beach but with two families in it. Sunbathing and fishing gets boring after a couple of months and Kate took off to visit Auckland and find out how her speciality was nursed

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down under. I got a phone call before she returned which went something like this.

“Could I tell Kate she had got the job but she had to go through the formality of an interview, and an application form was being emailed to her? Could she fill it in and bring it to the interview with her?”

Nurses very quickly get work permits; they are overworked and underpaid everywhere. At the time, in the land of the long white cloud and flightless birds, partners automatically got work permits too. So it was back to scouring the job adverts as we'd decided to stay for a whole year as daughter was enjoying school so much. We left sister-in-law and rented a house on the beach, in the next bay and didn't want to use up our savings too quickly.

The job I applied for was tape and equipment librarian for a production company with about ten simultaneous productions going on, all of them formats bought from the UK. The job I was given was to produce the Kiwi version of *'The Weakest Link'*. From there I went on to produce a gardening show, the Kiwi version of *'Changing Rooms'* and another game show. But this was at a price. Reality programmes have to be made at weekends because that is when the victims are available. I worked 42 weekends out of 52 and completely missed my daughter's eighth year and my wife's 40th birthday.

Time for a complete change. I buried my mobile phone behind a retaining wall being built under my house – that was the only contact the TV Company had for me – and started a charitably funded project to rid our little peninsula of possums, an animal pest imported into NZ by early settlers for their fur, that destroys the native forests. Over the next 4 years, working with the farmers, teaching them how to use poison and traps, and bribing the good ones with free bullets and speciality herbicides, we reduced the possum population from about 35/40% to 1.1%. That is you put out 100 traps and see how many animals you catch.

As usual, having completed the task, instead of staying on and maintaining the rapport I had with the landowners, I wanted to move on, so on my 65th birthday I took over the management of a little local charity called Waiuku Family Support, the aim being to support families in difficulty. At the time we had one very part-time counsellor and a handful of volunteers manning a help and advice desk. We now have three counsellors, two social workers, three budget advisors and a manager who hides in a broom cupboard at the back of the building because his speciality isn't battered wives, drug taking kids but fund raising and managing.

It's been a good life. I may regret the two failed marriages, although both lasted over twenty years. I'm proud of a daughter written off at infant school who is currently on the second year of a history degree and I'm proud of the five different careers I've had, which I put down to the excellent training I got at the Number One School of Technical Training, Royal Air Force Halton.

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Oh, and one of the reasons I'm staying down here, apart from the weather, is the way Kiwis love thrashing our neighbours across the ditch, those damned Australians who *munted*¹² two great British Film and TV production companies

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¹² An Australian expression meaning "broken" or "unusable" - Editor

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Gerry (Johnny) Law – My part in winning the Cold War



Following a well-earned spell of leave, I packed my worldly goods and headed for RAF Honington in deepest Suffolk. I booked in at the Guardroom where it was a joy not to have to treat the Snowdrops with the awe and reverence that was the norm at Halton. I settled into the Transit Hut to await the dawn when I could hawk my blue arrival chit around the Station. That done, I reported to the hangar where I was to be

assigned.

My Shift Chief took a long look at me, the single inverted chevron gleaming in his smoke-filled office.

“Just out of Halton, eh. Well, no doubt you will soon learn how to do the job, but I’ve got another task for you. I have to supply an airman for SWO’s working party, preparing for the Station Fête. Rather than lose someone with experience, I’ll send you. Report to the SWO on the playing field right away.”

The figure of the SWO, with his ever-present ‘dog’¹³, stood out like a beacon, even though he was no taller than anyone else. He looked me up and down as I stood in front of him.

“I’ve been sent by my Chief at VSS to work for you, Sir.”

“And you are?”

“J/T Law, Sir”. The sound of the newly-acquired rank sounded good.

“Just out of Halton?”

“Yes, Sir”. It seemed that we ex-Halton lads really stood out from the rest of airmanity.

“Then I have just the job for you! How are you at erecting marquees?”

Now at Halton I had been on a couple of weekend expeditions and those, plus Summer Camp on Dartmoor, had given me experience at putting up tents. But they were 2 man tents, not marquees.

“I’ve never done it, Sir,” I admitted.

“Never mind. I’m sure that with your training you’ll soon get the hang of it. Follow me!”

I followed. He stopped at a large, rolled up canvas on top of which were some timbers the size of telegraph poles. A group of disparate looking Airmen stood around the canvas, barely acknowledging the presence of such an august figure. They hardly acknowledged the presence of the SWO either.

“Here is your working party – I want the marquee erected by lunchtime!”

With that he strode off, his ‘dog’ desperately trying to keep up. I viewed the men who formed my first command. They were an assortment of LAC’s and SAC’s and they were all quite a bit older than I was. One of them, a grizzled old SAC with a row of WWII medal ribbons on his chest, took up a reclined position on the rolled-up marquee and then lit a rolled-up cigarette.

¹³ The pejorative term given to the Corporal who accompanied the SWO everywhere.

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“Right, fellas, anyone know how to put one of these things up?” I asked my men. Half a dozen heads shook in response. Guessing that the WWII veteran was probably the best of them to address, I looked him in the eye and raised a quizzical eyebrow.

“No idea, Staff. We’re just here to do what you tell us to do.”

So I had a dilemma! How does someone with no idea how to erect a marquee get someone with no wish to erect a marquee, erect a marquee? I glanced at my watch. 10:00 hours. Still 2 hours to go before lunch, but only 2 hours to go before the SWO dumped me in the smelly stuff. It was at that point that I had a brainwave. I would appeal to that basic instinct of all Airmen – his desire to eat.

“Tell you what. If we can get this marquee up, we can all get an early lunch. First in the Mess queue and time for a pint in the NAAFI before coming back here to be allocated another task. (I carefully avoided using the term ‘Tank’ for NAAFI as I had already learned that this expression was not in use outside of Halton).

I watched in amazement as the marquee was raised at incredible speed. It seemed that my team needed very little leadership from me and the be-medalled SAC seemed to know what was required. It was 11:15 hours and almost as quickly as the marquee went up, my team disappeared in the direction of the Airmen’s Mess.

“Where’s your working party, Staff?” The voice of the SWO behind me struck terror into my heart.

“Um, I sent them off for an early lunch so that they could start a new task after lunch, Sir. There wasn’t much time to start anything beforehand, and they did a good job erecting the marquee.”

“Good thinking, lad! I had expected you to have some problems, especially with that Barrack Room lawyer with the medal ribbons. Anyway, I shan’t need you or them again, so when they report back, tell them they can have the rest of the day off!”

I felt quite smug with my success and wished that my old Halton NCO’s and Flight Commander could have witnessed the event. Especially my 3 Wing Flight Commander, ‘*Shifty*’ Taylor. I found ‘my men’ where I thought they would be – in the ‘*Pig’s*’ Bar of the NAAFI. I bought them all a beer, or at least a pint of Whitbread Tankard, before informing them that they had the rest of the day to themselves. I then left them to their own devices – after all, was not the first rule of command not to fraternise with your subordinates?

So my first taste of the RAF proper was doing manual tasks under the watchful eye of the SWO, and as any Halton Apprentice can confirm, any activity carried out under the watchful eye of the SWO can be fraught with risks. As it happened, he was quite pleasant!

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Although my posting details had been to 55 Squadron, the servicing of Honington's Victor fleet had been centralised so that, whereas the aircraft and their gallant aviators were still assigned to either 55 or 57 Squadrons, the groundcrew were part of either VLSS (Victor Line Servicing Squadron) where the 1st line servicing was carried out, or VSS (Victor Servicing Squadron) which undertook routine servicing.

I was initially put to work in VSS in order to become acquainted with the aircraft and to assist in this we operated a 'sitting next to Doris' philosophy – I was assigned as bagman to an experienced chap who taught me the short cuts and a few bad habits – the sort of things that Halton never taught. After a few months I was moved to VLSS where we worked an alternate shift pattern of days and nights. Our aircraft were mostly Victor B1a bombers but we also had some B1 variants.

One of the delights of serving on Bomber Command during the Cold War was the frequent spells on QRA (Quick Reaction Aircraft). This involved loading up an aircraft (sometimes 2) with a full bomb load and to park it on a special dispersal. At any given time the Aircrew were on 15 minutes standby. The Groundcrew were housed for an entire week (including the weekend) in a hut adjacent to the QRA dispersal, and they only left the hut to carry out routine pre-flight checks on the aircraft or to take their meals in the Airmen's Mess.

On average there were three alerts per week – we could usually reckon on one during the day, one at night and a third at the weekend. Trying to second guess their timing was probably the most futile effort devised by Man, although with little else to occupy us we tried it. At the same time that the Klaxon sounded the alert, a Tannoy broadcast the level of alert. The Aircrew arrived from Operations in a staff car, or crew bus, at the same time that the Groundcrew ran across to the dispersal to remove the engine intake/jet pipe covers, etc in preparation for the anticipated engine start.

Once ensconced in the cockpit of the Victor, the crew were in direct contact R/T contact with the Crew Chief on the dispersal and by telescrumble link to HQ Bomber Command. Everyone waited on tenterhooks for the next stage to be announced. This could be 'stand down' when we reverted to standby; engine start, then stand down; taxi, when the aircraft would taxi to the end of the runway. This was the time to get really nervous – if the aircraft lifted off the runway then it was heading for a pre-selected target in the USSR. The fact that I am still here and able to write this, and that you are reading it, means that we never took off.

On my first (of many) stints on QRA I was assigned to the task of removing the Crew Chief's intercom cable and the telescrumble lead from the front of the aircraft. The signal from the Crew Chief was when he grabbed the plug on his headset in an exaggerated manner. Now the Crew Chief on that particular occasion was known for his tendency to panic – he was known as 'Jumping' Jack P****r and right through the week he had repeated our tasks so

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much that we were in danger of becoming neurotic. He may have been 'Jumping' – we were all jumpy.

It was dusk and in the gathering gloom we could just make out the Crew Chief's signal that engines were being started. Suddenly his hands went to his throat, He was either choking or this was the sign for me to remove the cables. Immediately the engines whined to a standstill and the aircrew emerged into the twilight.

"We lost radio contact, Chief. What happened?" asked the pilot.

"Don't know, Sir," was the reply. "I'll look into it".

Back at the hut he went totally berserk. What he threatened me with by way of punishment violated every clause in every civil rights legislation. Most of them were also medically impossible! I explained that in the half light I had seen his fiddling with his headset as the signal to disconnect, whereas he asserted that he was merely ensuring that the connection to his head set was secure.

The other members of the crew agreed that they had also interpreted his movements as the signal and so he had no option but to put the event down to an unfortunate incident. If we had been defeated by the powers of the USSR that day, it may well have been that my actions had a part in our failure to win the Cold War. The only comment I can make is Привет Товарищ!

It was during 1963 that events in the Far East took a turn for the worse when Indonesia questioned the legitimacy of the newly-formed Malaysia. In short order we had to prepare 4 aircraft for imminent deployment to Tengah, Singapore. We also sent an appropriate number of groundcrew. The plan was that the Squadrons would take turn and turn about for periods of 2 months and that is how things began. My turn 'in the barrel' came in the summer of 1964 when I was part of 55 Squadron Detachment.

Singapore was interesting, and visits to Bugis Street were always entertaining. Our duties were not very onerous – we performed a programme of training flights and some of them involved bombing runs over China Rock, but basically we were enjoying our stay in the tropics. Until the Indonesians decided to escalate hostilities with an invasion of Singapore and the Malayan mainland.

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Tiger Balm Gardens (Haw Par Villa) – 1966

An immediate ban on all but essential duty runs off Base kept us confined for several days, a decision rendered wise when a series of race riots broke out. We had to remove all glass from the windows of our accommodation so as to minimise the risk of glass shards in the event of enemy attacks. Our aircraft were deemed to be too much of a target to allow them to remain in line on the dispersal, so each of the 4 was dispersed to strategically selected areas of the airfield. Each was loaded with a full load of conventional bombs should we need to take drastic action.

Under the guidance of the Rockapes we built sandbag blast walls around the aircraft – having first filled the sandbags ourselves! We now played a waiting game – apart from carrying out daily checks on the aircraft, we had no work. But not to worry. Our Detachment Commander felt that as we were now experienced fillers of sandbags, we could render the same service elsewhere, so we were ‘attached’ to the Rocks for some serious sandbagging (I believe that they were from 63 LAA Squadron).

One late afternoon, a group of us were leaning over the balcony of our Block watching some local workers as they picked up their tools after a day’s work clearing monsoon drains. Suddenly they burst into loud excited exchanges in Chinese. Their words were accompanied by wild gesticulations. One of them swung his shovel and brought it down with a tremendous force. He proudly raised the shovel to show us the long snake that he had killed. We were impressed and gave him a round of applause, to which he grinned and waved the trophy.

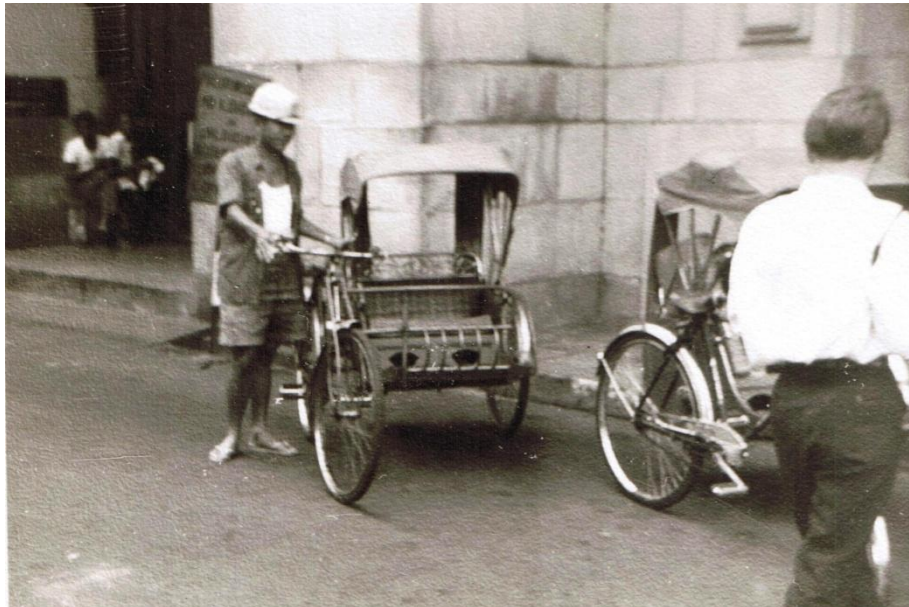
One of our number, an Armourer of course – who else would think of it, suggested that we retrieve the snake and take photos of it. As dusk was falling, it was felt that better pictures would be made by bringing it indoors. I’m not sure why my bed space was chosen, but the snake was carefully coiled on the floor with the side of its head that was damaged tucked out of sight. There was speculation that as the reptile had been killed in the monsoon drain, it was

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probably a sea snake, generally considered to be the most lethal of the many that lived in the South China Sea. My exact recollections of this particular specimen are hazy. Through the mists of time I recall that it was mostly silver in colour with a red stripe down the length of its body. I also recall that it was long – perhaps 6 feet, but I doubt that my recollection is accurate.

Anyway, my comrades were clicking away and one of them suggested that I put a foot on its body to give an idea of its size, so I placed a flip-flopped foot on to the coiled corpse and gave my best impression of Great White Hunter. Suddenly, the tail swished! Now I knew that it was common for reptiles to exhibit some nervous reaction even though they were technically brain dead. After all, 3 years at Halton had proved the point with some of our DI's. But such logic evaded me at the time. With an agility that I had never shown during our PT sessions, or since, I leapt on to my bed and was reaching for the fan. My colleagues were no less surprised and they dispersed to all corners of the room. But that single, solitary tail swish was also its last.

One day, shortly after we were put on to the emergency standby footing, we were addressed by our Detachment Commander. The crux of his address was that owing to the insecure state that prevailed, our 2 month detachment was now indefinite. It was possible, if conditions did not improve, that the rest of the Squadron would join us from UK and that we would be on a full tour of duty. He stressed that he had no idea of when we might be returning to UK.



The ubiquitous Trishaw (note the Elf n'Save Me hard hat)

At least the curfew had been lifted and we were allowed to once more savour the fleshpots of Singapore. A group of us spent the evening commiserating at the Tengah Bar in the nearby village. We met up with the local tailor, a little Indian chap who seemed to know everything and everyone. We explained our predicament and he assured us that we would leave for UK on 17th October. Now this was clearly untrue. October 17th 1964 was a Saturday and our detachments never changed over at a weekend. We even mentioned this to the Boss who was adamant that he knew nothing, and we

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considered him to be a truthful and honest leader. Our RAF Britannia took off from Changi at 11:00 on 17th October! We had completed 4½ months.

My Line Chief at Honington had moved on to greener pastures, or it might have been to a desert location, while I was away. His replacement loomed large across the fug-filled crewroom on my first day back.

“Which one of you is J/T Law?” he asked.

Now having been away from Honington through the summer it was unlikely that I was being held to account for some local misdemeanour, and I had been the paragon of virtue (well almost) whilst on detachment, so I was at a loss to think of a reason why I should have attracted his attention.

“Here, Chief,” I replied.

“Ah, right lad. Looks like you’ve hit the jackpot. You’re on PWR so get yourself down to SHQ to do the paperwork”.

In due course my posting was confirmed – 60 Squadron, Forward Element, Labuan. I knew that 60 Squadron flew Javelins and was based at Tengah. Shortly before I was due to depart England’s green and pleasant shore I was notified that my posting had been changed. I was now going to 66 Squadron, Forward Element, Kuching. This Squadron flew Belvederes and was based at Seletar. And that was when one of those odd ironies of Fate happened. My older brother was stationed at Innsworth (a shiny but I still talk to him), so imagine my surprise when I noticed that my draft documents were in his handwriting.

One morning in early winter 1964 we awoke to find a significant layer of snow across the airfield. For those who have never been to Honington, I can inform you that the countryside is extremely flat, so much so that anything higher than a molehill was considered to be a hill in its own right. So when the icy winds blew westwards from the Russian steppes and across the North Sea, there was nothing to stop them from scything their way across East Anglia.

We slithered our way around the Perimeter Track to get to the Squadron dispersal. One of our Victors was to participate in an exercise that involved a rendezvous with Lightnings from Coltishall (I think), whereupon they would simulate an escorted flight into European airspace. To our dismay the aircraft that was to be used was snowed into its Pan. Similarly, the approach taxiway from the Pan to the Peri Track was covered in snow. On the runway the MRD’s (Motorised Runway De-icers) were attempting to clear it, and they were also keeping up a continuous parade around the Peri Track. But clearing the aircraft and its dispersal was a task assigned to us – and using shovels.

One team was set to applying de-icer fluid to the fuselage. This was a glycol-based substance that had a not unpleasant taste when it landed on the lips, although even a small quantity ingested would be more harmful than any quantity of ‘*Whitbread Tankard*’ or ‘*Watney’s Red Barrel*’!

The remainder of the Shift were issued with bass brooms and shovels and thus began the task of clearing the taxiway. One of our number, an SAC Engine Mechanic (let’s call him Dave), was a seasoned weather watcher and he

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surveyed the sky with his practiced eye. The snow clouds of the night before had cleared to leave a bright blue sky.

“It’ll snow within the hour,” was his sagacious warning.

“Nonsense!” responded the Crew Chief. “The Met Office has confirmed that there is no more snow today.”

Dave shook his head.

“Sorry, Chief, but they’re wrong.”

“Just get on and clear this snow!” snapped the Chief.

We set to with a will, more to keep warm than from a desire to actually clear the snow. It was a long and hard job and nobody noticed the dark clouds that were gathering in the east (and I do not mean the clouds of war). After an hour the dispersal was clear of snow and the Victor was ready to go. We had just enough time to grab a coffee before returning once more to the dispersal to see the aircraft off. As we shouldered brooms the first, solitary snowflake fell gently to the ground from the mass of snow clouds that had taken up position right over Honington. It was followed moments later by some of its mates.

By the time that we got back to the Crewroom we were struggling against an intense blizzard! Looking back whence we had come, we could not see whence we had come – the Victor had disappeared behind a thick curtain of snow. As we gripped our hot coffee cups to transfer its heat to our chilled hands, the Shift Chief emerged in the doorway.

“The Exercise has been cancelled, lads,” he announced. “Seems that heavy snow at Coltishall has grounded the Lightnings!”

Every Squadron had its joker – ours was Dave. On one occasion he gathered a selection of small light bulbs (or lamps, filament to give them their correct nomenclature) from Stores. These were mostly the lamps that fitted into navigation lights or panel indicators. He ‘planted’ them in the flowerbed in front of the Squadron dispersal. It was while he was watering them with a watering can that the Squadron Commander pulled up in his Land Rover.

“I know I shall regret asking, but what are you doing?”

“I’ve planted some bulbs here so that we can have some colour when they grow, Sir!”

“And you think that will happen?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Well, if they don’t grow, you are in trouble.”

The following day all of the lamps, filament had been removed – to be replaced by larger varieties such as those used in landing lamps. The Boss sought out Dave and yielded to his sense of humour.

Some time later, Honington was experiencing a period of intense hot weather. The flowers in the flowerbed, which had replaced Dave’s lamps, filament, were wilting under the strain of drought. Now every Squadron had a character, generally a Sergeant, who was of the General Duties Trade Group (known not so affectionately as “Shinies” on account that all that sitting around in offices all day made the seat of their trousers, shiny). These

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Sergeants were known as Discip (short for Discipline) Sergeants, or Admin (short for Administration) Sergeants and their whole raison d'être was to arrange shift rosters, process leave applications and generally to get in everyone's way.

Our Discip Sgt was not renowned for his wit or for his sharpness of brain. Every morning he walked past the flowerbed on his way to his office and the sight of the wilting plants accentuated the need for them to receive water. However, by the time that he had sharpened his pencil and made a cup of tea, he had forgotten the plants. Until a few days had gone by. He was standing at the office window watching the rain bucket down over the airfield.

"That reminds me," he said to himself. "The plants need some water."

The first person he encountered on entering the Crewroom was Dave.

"You, Airman. Get a watering can from Stores and water the flowerbed."

"But, Sarge, it's raining!"

"Then put on your bl***y raincoat."

"But, Sarge. If it's raining, the flowers do not need not watering."

"Don't argue with me," shouted the now irate sergeant. "These are not tide marks you know."

He tapped the chevrons on his sleeve.

The sight of the Squadron joker clad in an oilskin coat and sou-wester style hat was not what the Squadron Commander wanted to see as he glanced out of his office window, which he opened the better to converse with Dave.

"Ok! We had the joke with the light bulbs earlier in the year. What's the joke this time?"

"No joke, Sir. Sgt ***** ordered me to water the flowers."

"Did he know it was raining?"

"I told him, but he just said to wear a raincoat."

"Alright, leave it with me and get back in the dry."

Later that year the same Sergeant ordered me to refill the fire buckets with fresh water. Now it was very cold and ice had started to form on the water in the buckets. I broke the ice and began to fill the buckets with hot water.

"What the hell are you doing, Airman?"

"Filling the fire buckets, Sergeant."

"With hot water?" His tone was incredulous. "You technical types think you're so clever but you don't know that you can't put out fires with hot water."

I tried explaining that using hot water would delay the freezing process and that it would in no way diminish its fire extinguishing properties. He repeated his opinion of technical types before issuing a direct order for me to use cold water. I wonder what Charles Darwin would have made of this specimen of evolution of the species.

One of the less enjoyable features of life on Bomber Command was the occasional '*Exercise Mickey Finn*' which involved getting all the aircraft on to a war footing in readiness for bombing '*the enemy*'. I recall one of these. It

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started when the sirens wailed across the plains of Honington at 02:00 on a Monday. Everyone had to report to their place of duty. Those aircraft that were not fully serviceable but designated as fit to fly for the current mission were 'red-lined' in the F700. Four of our Victors were duly sent to do their stuff, which meant an 8 hour sortie.

In order to replicate wartime conditions, it was then assumed that Honington had been bombed into oblivion by the dreaded forces of Communism and this necessitated our aircraft diverting to our designated diversion airfield –Gaydon. So several of us climbed aboard RAF buses and took the high road to Warwickshire.

Our valiant Victors, having delivered their lethal ordinance (in theory at least), were refuelled and sent on their way back to Honington. We were not permitted to leave until the last of the aircraft had landed safely back at base. We eventually arrived back just in time to see the NAAFI bar close! It was a long day.

On August 13th 1965, less than 12 months since my return to UK, I was heading back to Singapore. This time I flew on a Lloyd International Airlines Britannia charter from Gatwick. We arrived at Paya Lebar Airport and were directed to a desk at which sat several RAF Movements guys. As each passenger showed their papers they were directed – “out of the Airport, turn left and board the coach marked C for Changi”, or “out of the Airport, turn right and board the coach marked S for Seletar”. I guessed that I would be heading for Changi for onward transport to Kuching, or perhaps I would join the Squadron at Seletar and then travel on from there.

“Out of the Airport and you’ll find a staff car marked T for Tengah.” Imagine my surprise to find that whilst flying over the Indian sub-continent my posting had been changed yet again. I was now to join 20 Squadron, Forward Element, Kuching. Except that 20 Squadron (Hunter FGA9's) currently had no Forward Element at Kuching so I was to join the Squadron at Tengah. At least I would have the chance to revisit the familiar haunts from the previous year, and possibly even to reclaim the laundry bundle that I had left behind.

I started my tour working in the hangar where we carried out routine servicing of the Hunters. The work was not particularly onerous and the hours were regular. Interestingly, one of my comrades was the brother of John (Paddy) Walsh¹⁴ who had been in my Flight at Halton. Paddy Walsh Senior had been in the 92nd Entry.

But then events escalated. Intelligence indicated that the Indonesians were planning something dramatic in the north west of Malaysia and so our Forward Element of 4 aircraft at Labuan was boosted by sending another 2.

¹⁴ Paddy sadly died at the end of 2011

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I and two colleagues (an engine and an airframe bod) were sent to lend extra support. We left from Changi early one morning in an Argosy. Our seats were the rope paratrooper type alongside each cabin wall – the centre of the cabin contained several large wooden crates. We were the only 'blue jobs' onboard, the other passengers being Ghurkhas.

We flew virtually continuous sorties of pairs of aircraft at a time, so our work was mostly 1st line servicing. We were kept pretty busy preparing the aircraft for their missions but after 2 weeks the danger had receded, or had never been likely, and so the three of us who had been sent up as reinforcements were sent back. It was then that another of those strange coincidences of fate occurred. During this brief stay at Labuan, I bumped into the 96th's Alfie Burton, who had graduated Substantive Corporal and top of the Order of Merit.

We were sat in the Transit Lounge at Labuan when the crew of a Shackleton walked through. One of the crew looked across at me and gave a sign of recognition. He was a Sgt Signaller who had been in my class at school, and whereas I had left school to go to Halton he had stayed on to get some GCE's and then went in to the RAF as NCO aircrew. We had a brief chat and agreed to meet up in a particular pub when we were both back in UK. This we duly did.

On arrival back at Tengah I was transferred to the Squadron first line, across the other side of the airfield. This was much more hectic but we had the bonus of being able to watch the antics of the golfers on the nearby course. Around this time 20 Squadron reached the grand old age of 50 and every aircraft, aircrew and groundcrew were lined up for a photograph. It was published in the Air Pictorial but sad to say I have since lost my copy. The day was rounded off by a flypast over the base by every one of the aircraft (except for D Delta, which had been cannibalised to provide spares while it was awaiting a spare fuel tank from UK).

One Sunday morning I was lying on my pit in Learoyd Block reading a book. I had showered (even though there was no reason for celebration), and the weather was hot and clammy – about par for the course. The dark clouds that were amassing overhead threatened the imminent arrival of another tropical thunderstorm. I was naked except for a strategically positioned towel.

There were a few rumbles of thunder as the storm got closer, and the rain began to fall. The next sequence of events all happened simultaneously. I was aware of all my bodily hairs standing on end as a huge ball of fire ran the length of my bed from toe to head. I felt its heat! At the same time there was an ear shattering clap of thunder (nothing to do with the clap that was treated at Changi).

The lightning had struck a tree at the side of the road and the bark down one side was steaming as the rain quenched it. The effect of the strike was to pressure the drain over which the tree's roots had grown, causing a manhole

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cover a few feet away to lift several feet into the air, returning to terra firma with sufficient force to crack it into two.

There was another casualty! Every Block had an ancient Chinese woman who spent all day sitting on the bottom floor veranda. For a very modest sum she carried out all of those sewing repair jobs that were needed. These ladies were invariably known as 'Sew Sew'. The rapidly evolving events of the previous few moments reduced her to a gibbering wreck. And given that she was gibbering in Chinese did not make it any easier to placate her. I offered her a cigarette and she gradually calmed down. For both of us it was an experience not to be forgotten.

It was now October 1965 and I was summoned to the Adjutant's Office. I was being posted to Kuching with effect from the end of the month. No explanation was given and my Chief was not happy as he was going to be left short-handed. FEAF HQ was adamant – I was to go!

My new unit was WASF (Whirlwind Aircraft Servicing Flight), which was the centralised servicing flight for 110 and 225 Squadrons. In less than 3 months I had gone from working on 4 engine V-bombers to single engine fighters to helicopters.

It turned out that the reason for my posting were tragic. One of the Whirlwind HAR10's had recently crashed into the side of a hill in deep jungle. All 5 onboard were killed – 2 pilots and 3 airmen. One of the casualties was an Aircraft Electrician, hence my selection as his replacement – truly 'dead man's shoes'. WASF was desperately short of leckies – the establishment was for an NCO and 2 men working in the hangar and for an NCO and 1 man on each of the 2 first line shifts (working 12 on, 12 off).

But the establishment figures did not take into account the commitment to provide a chopper and groundcrew at the forward Army positions. There were 3 of these that came under the auspices of my unit, at Lundu, Simanggang and Balai Ringin. The last of these was close to the border area and was a Company HQ for the Green Jackets. All 3 were used to ferry supplies and ammunition to the forward posts on the border, most of which had, at some time or another, been attacked by insurgents. In fact, Balai Ringin itself had previously been a police post and had suffered casualties in a fierce fire fight. Hence its 'upgrade'.

The Balai Ringin detachment consisted of one chopper and pilot with a Sgt Engine Fitter, an LAC Airframe Mechanic and an SAC Instrument Mechanic who also took care of the radio and electrics. The working day was from dawn to dusk every day, 7 days per week. The helipad was the local school playing field and the fuel was brought in by 'the road' (the only one there at that time) in 45 gallon drums, which were pumped in by hand.

One day in late December I was summoned into my Flight Commander's Office. It transpired that the Instrument man at Balai Ringin had been having some problems with his eyes and a specialist appointment had been arranged

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at Changi. I was to fly down the next day on the replacement chopper and spend a couple of days familiarising myself before the Instrument chap was flown out. The Boss made it clear that the move was temporary – as soon as the Instrument Basher returned, I would be recalled.

So I took on the role of Lecky, Fairy and Instrument Basher for a short period. I was there for Christmas Day 1965. I was still there for New Year 1966 when the Green Jackets, newly ennobled as the Royal Green Jackets, were withdrawn from the theatre and returned to UK. They were replaced by the DLI (Durham Light Infantry). The changeover was effected in a single day and to this end I was deposited in a clearing with several drums of fuel, a rifle and a hay box containing lukewarm 'cold' drinks to provide an interim refuelling and embarking/disembarking area. All day I refuelled Whirlwinds and Belvederes as they shuttled between the various forward areas. By nightfall the changeover had been completed. It was often said at Halton that we were being equipped for a command role and I had achieved it, albeit in command of myself and several square yards of jungle clearing.

We had a very generous concession on Christmas Day, 1965 – we were only to fly missions from dawn until midday when the rest of the day was ours to celebrate in whatever manner we fancied. Now given that there was little to do, and nowhere to go, our fancies were somewhat limited. However, the young son of a local Chinese-Malay family used to hang around the heli-pad most days and he was happy to run the odd errand or two, for which we gave him a little cash.

His father was aware of the significance of the Day and, using his son as interpreter, invited us to share lunch with the family. It was a modest repast, but enjoyable for all that. This poor family was generous enough to share their meagre supplies with us. We notified our Boss back at Kuching and the very next day a chopper arrived with a large bag of goodies – some for the head of the household, and appropriate gifts for the various members of his family. It was a rather surreal event – attending a Christmas 'do' carrying a loaded rifle (and an SLR not the standard issue Lee Enfield .303).

I settled into the routine, even learning Geordie so that I could understand (well almost) what the Pongoes were saying. Our main communication with Kuching was via a field telephone and one day, shortly after the start of the New Year, I got a call from my Flight Commander. The crux of his words was that the Instrument chap had seen the specialist who had diagnosed a serious infection in his eyes. Further exposure to the jungle environment could render him totally blind and therefore he had been medevacced back to UK on the first available aircraft. I was still to be relieved as a matter of urgency but until then I was to continue.

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Start of Chopper Missions for the day

It was about 3 months later that it was deemed that the risks around the Balai Ringin quadrant had eased sufficiently to allow the detachment to be closed down. I was coming up for my compulsory 2 weeks R&R anyway and so I returned to Kuching.

What a shock! Virtually everyone who I had known before my detachment had gone home tourex. Their replacements viewed me with some amazement. Was I the Wild Man of Borneo fresh from the dense jungle? No matter. Soon I was heading out for my R&R – once more unto the fleshpots, once more. And another chance to find my lost laundry bundle.

I returned from Singapore refreshed but still short of my laundry bundle. I hadn't been back long when my Line Chief bought me a coffee. Such a strange event that I knew that I was being set up for something. He explained that he was aware that I knew my way around operations at Balai Ringin. The RNZIR (Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment) had moved in since my spell there and the detachment had been suspended. It was now deemed necessary to reopen the detachment but to do so would require someone (me) to accompany the equipment by road and to set up the detachment prior to the chopper being despatched. I explained that I was rapidly heading for 'gozome' time and he reassured me that I would return in time to catch the boat.

Although we were groundcrew, it was also accepted that, rather than allocate a winchman full time when his services were rarely needed we would carry out routine crewman duties. These were generally limited to the more mundane tasks but there were two missions that stand out.

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Take-off from Balai Ringin

In addition to our operations in support of the Army, we also undertook to help out the local civilian population – a part of the *'hearts and minds'* approach to keeping them on our side. The first of these missions involved flying into a remote Kampong where a young lad had kicked over a can of paraffin on to a burning stove. The resulting flashback had caused severe burns over his entire body. I flew in the cabin with an Army medical orderly and helped to guide the pilot in landing in what was less than ideal terrain. The child was in a very bad way. The Medic treated him as best he could and we flew to Kuching Hospital. It was clear as we were landing in the hospital grounds that the chances of survival were very poor, and when we took off to return to base the Medic confirmed that he had scarcely handed the child over to the hospital staff before the child expired.

The other mission involved a young woman who had slipped when crossing a stream using stepping stones. She had received severe wounds to her head. Getting into the clearing was hazardous in the extreme and I was required to travel in the co-pilot's seat and lean out of the window. The pilot slowly lowered the chopper on my instructions – literally – down a bit, left a bit, right a bit. We had a Medic onboard and quickly got the young lady to hospital but she too succumbed to her injuries.

We were paid supplementary flying pay every time we flew - \$1.00 (Malayan) (2s 4d). This rate applied to whether we flew a single mission or all day – just \$1 per flying day. Just before I left theatre this was increased to \$1.50.

The Kiwi pongoes were a friendly bunch and we got on well. We were invited to join in the regimental activities. Looking back, I suppose there was a real risk of my turning 'brown job'.

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“Jungle” Gerry

The Chief was good to his word and I returned to Kuching to see out the remainder of my tour. Some of our choppers were rigged for fitting Nord Atlas SS20 wire guided missiles. These rockets were released on 3000 m of thin copper wire and signals sent down the wire allowed the missile to be aimed at the target. The bombardier sat in the Co-pilot’s seat and used a small joystick similar to those now used in computer games. If only today’s youngsters realised that there is little that is new in their technology.

We had never fired any missiles in anger and the Chief Tech. who had been trained in their maintenance had long since been repatriated. It had apparently not occurred to anyone to get his knowledge ‘downloaded’ before he left. I was given 2 weeks to get ‘genned up’ using the manuals that he had left behind, so that we could allow 2 pilots new to the theatre to experience a missile shoot. The targets were large parachutes spread out on a hillside and I am pleased to say that everything was ready on the day. My reward was to fly as an observer in the cabin of the lead aircraft, which not only allowed me to see the result of my endeavours, but also earned me an additional \$1.50.

Soon after that I was heading out from Paya Lebar to take up my new posting – Marham. What joy! And on the day that I flew out the Indonesians officially called an end to Konfrontasi – clearly I had proved too much for them.

Not for nothing was Marham called El Adem with grass! It may not have been the most isolated Station in the UK, it just felt like it. The aircraft based there were the same Victors that I had worked on at Honington except that during my sojourn in the jungle they had been converted to tankers. Most of

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the guys there had moved across with the flying bowsers so in a way settling in was made easier. But I still didn't like Marham!

It was now 3 years since my Graduation from Halton and so I had completed the requisite time for promotion. Only one thing stood in my way – I had not sat the necessary Trade Tests. Mind you, there was precious little opportunity in my environment in the Far East. With so little to distract me I should have buckled down to things at Marham but I have to admit that the very fabric of the place knocked all the ambition from me.

I was initially assigned to work on the Master Diversion Unit (MDU), which promised to be interesting. We actually slept in the hangar and were on permanent standby to receive any aircraft diverted to Marham because of bad weather, etc. We also had custody of the Station Anson. Perhaps things might not be so bad after all. WRONG! Within a few weeks of my arrival we had lost the Anson and the MDU was disbanded, its personnel dispersed to different parts of the Station.

I was assigned to working in the hangars on the Mechanical Engineering (Aircraft) Squadron (MEAS), where I performed 2nd line servicing. I only stayed there for a few months, but long enough to be attached to 214 Squadron for a 2 week detachment to Akrotiri. It was there that I bumped into a fellow 96er – Harry Apps – who was performing guard duty around our Victor tankers. Shortly after my return I was posted to the E&I (Electrical & Instrument) Flight where I serviced airborne electrical equipment.

It was 1967 – The Summer of Love. Flower Power was the rage and the smell of incense and pot pervaded everywhere – except for where I was. It has often been said that if you can remember those days, you weren't really there, and I remember those days. Mind you, we tried to join the throng. After all, Free Love is much better than the sort you have to pay for. Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister in the early 60's, declared that, "You have never had it so good!" I've got news for you, Supermac, I never had it. In the final analysis I guess that at a time when the men wore their hair shoulder length, sandals on their feet and flowers in their hair, a group of men with military haircuts were just a wee bit out of place.

Not being part of the 'in crowd' meant that we did not get to try any of the drugs that were supposedly freely available to those enjoying the '*Swinging Sixties*'. However, one of our number hit on a cheaper substitute. There was a high rate of people reporting sick with depression – so much so that it was almost a given that just by attending Sick Parade virtually guaranteed a prescription for Librium. Every prescription carried a warning not to drink alcohol or to partake of cheese.

My colleague met me in the NAAFI bar and explained that he had begun his course of pills. He then ordered a pint of beer and a cheese sandwich. His plan was to let the combination get him as high a kite for just the price of a pint of beer and a NAAFI sandwich. As he tilted his head backwards to drain the glass, his entire body keeled over and he ended up flat on the floor. There

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appeared to be no serious harm so we bundled him off to his bed so that he could sleep it off.

The following day he showed no ill effects but declared an end to the experiment – his hangover after just a single pint was the worst he'd ever had. Three months later he was given a medical discharge as 'mentally unsuitable for further service'. To this day I am unsure whether his decision to defy the ban on alcohol and cheese whilst on medication was a pre-planned method of 'working his ticket'.

With the benefit of hindsight I should have knuckled down to qualifying for promotion but I had got out of the habit. It would be easy to blame my lack of ambition on those words of Flt Lt 'Shifty' Taylor back in 1961 when I was the only one of his command not to be given an appraisal interview. He dismissed my enquiry with, "I think you know your shortcomings as well as I do!" Clearly he had already marked my card as somewhat lacking but how much my future lack of progression was self-fulfilling prophecy and how much was inherent weakness, I shall never know.

I have to admit that I only just scraped a pass at Halton and the records show that at one point I was annotated (with a few others) as 'at risk of failing to achieve J/T'. That I did so is a testament to my comrades, who helped me along the rocky path to Graduation, and an enlightened system that recognised that some lads found the going tough and allowed a certain degree of latitude in the form of re-sits and assessments.

Instead I met up regularly with some of my old buddies from the Honington days and we decided to enjoy ourselves. One of these was SAC Wilfred (Chalky) Whiteside who hailed from Lancashire, looked very much like Eric Morecombe and who could do an extremely proficient impersonation of that gentleman. He was one of my regular drinking pals.

One cold and wet Saturday evening I met him in the NAAFI bar. I was again on Duty Fitter and so was not supposed to drink. I had a pint when someone suggested that we all drive to Kings Lynn. Being on standby meant that I was forced to remain on Camp, otherwise I might have been a passenger in the Austin Healey sports car that one of the guys drove. I nearly took the risk but in the end erred on the side of safety. My colleagues had not had much to drink – a pint or two at most, and the Austin Healey driver had not had any. Chalky took my place in the sports car and they all set off for the teeming Metropolis that was Kings Lynn. I returned to my room with a good book.

The following morning I went to the NAAFI to get my first injection of caffeine. There was an air of doom and I quickly found out that the Austin Healey had left the road, cleared a hedge and ended up inverted in a field. The driver climbed out unhurt but Chalky was very badly injured – he was to succumb to those injuries. At the subsequent inquest the police gave evidence that the driver was in no way to blame. The most likely cause was that the car had hit a small spot of ice when negotiating a bend. The accident left us all feeling very sombre and I for one took it badly.

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Late one Friday afternoon in the summer of 1968 we were looking forward to our weekend when we were informed that no-one was to leave the workplace until allowed to do so. We were allocated a guard detail and dispersed to all parts of the airfield. I ended up at the fuel dump!

It transpired that military intelligence (now there's an oxymoron) had learned that the local students, as part of their Rag Week, were planning to invade the base to daub the side of an aircraft with graffiti. Now, some of the aircraft were due to take off on a very important refuelling mission 'somewhere in the Middle East' in the early hours of Saturday morning and the last thing that was wanted was for the aircraft to carry any embarrassing messages on their fuselages, even if they were grammatically and spelling-correct as befitted the higher education establishment from whence came the protestors.

We were, as was usually the case, unarmed. Not even a pickaxe handle between us and no walkie-talkies. We were instructed that if we suspected any attempt at infiltration we were to shout loudly!

At 02:00 hours, those of us who were managing to snatch 40 winks in the improvised Guard Hut were awakened by loud shouting from the area near to the perimeter fence. Suddenly the air was filled with flashing lights, Land Rover headlights and excited chatter. I had never before seen so many Snowdrops gathered in one place – a gardener's dream.

The airman who had been patrolling that area had seen something moving in the bushes beyond the fence. Now he had, like all of us, done a full day's work before starting the guard duty, and, like all of us he was feeling tired, hungry and cheesed off.

It turned out that what appeared to have been someone moving was actually a white post in the adjacent field, the branches of a bush gently wafting in the early morning air giving the impression of the post moving like a human, or at least, a student. In fact no attempt was made at infiltrating the Camp. After all, it was the last weekend of Rag Week so I guessed that all the students were stoned out of their minds on drink, drugs, rock n'roll and a surfeit of Free Love. Just a few weeks before I left Marham I met up with Mick Knights and Dave Woodrow, both of the 96th Entry but there was scarcely time to renew the old acquaintances beyond beer or two, with Mick.

When news of my appearance on PWR was announced, I was relieved to be able to escape from Marham. In August 1968 I flew from Brize Norton to Muharraq in the Persian Gulf to take up my new duties – still a J/T and with little ambition to progress.

My new squadron was unique. It was called COMSAR and consisted of 3 Flights; A Flight was the Gulf Communications Flight (hence the COM part of the title), responsible for flying VIP's around the Gulf using 3 Pembroke aircraft and an Andover on 'permanent' loan from 84 Squadron based at Sharjah; B Flight operated 2 Wessex helicopters in the Search and Rescue role (hence SAR). Both of these Flights were housed at RAF Muharraq. C Flight

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operated marine craft out of the harbour at Manama, thus completing the SAR operations. So in one small unit we combined piston engine aircraft, turboprop aircraft, rotary wing aircraft and boats!

I was assigned to A Flight, and found the work interesting and varied. We also had several opportunities for 'jollies'. On one occasion we were to take some high ranking military types to Tehran for a Defence Conference. This was in the days when the Shah ruled Iran. It was to be an overnight stop and so a groundcrew was required to accompany the Brass. Of course, we did not occupy the posh seating but we did share the rations – very tasty.

We stopped over at Kuwait to refuel and perform a turn round servicing. We had an SAC Engine Mechanic, an LAC Airframe Mechanic and me (looking after all the other bits). As the nearest thing to an NCO amongst the groundcrew I was given an 'oversigning chit' to allow me to sign off as supervisor for the others. Suddenly I realised that my destiny lay with stripes on my sleeves, but more of that later.

We arrived at Tehran International Airport where we were met by the local BOAC representative who acted as the agent for any UK military flights. We each had our own suite in a very luxurious hotel where we freshened up, before being led on the town by the BOAC chap. Now in those days Iran was nothing like the strict Islamic nation of today. There were plenty of places to get drink – normally. However, we had arrived on '*Martyr's Day*', the one day in the year when everything was closed.

The single exception was the American Club, which was set up to cater for the needs of the large number of American 'civilian advisers' who helped the Iranians with their Phantom aircraft. Theoretically they were all employees of McDonnell Douglas. Oh yeah! Tell that to the Marines! The trip was interesting and I'm glad I had the chance to visit Iran, although a longer stay would have given the opportunity for some sightseeing.

On another trip we were taking some Top Brass to Masirah. They were planning to stay for a few days to engage in important talks with the local Arab chieftains. The aircraft was met by several top of the range Land Rovers loaded to the maximum with gentlemen in the brightly coloured robes and head dress of the Arabs. They were also bristling with all manner of weaponry. In the midst of this bodyguard was a black limousine from which emerged an Arab in garb much more splendid than the others. They all carried the curved dagger, known as a '*Khanjar*', at their waists.

We returned via Sharjah where we were to embody a minor modification on the Andover under the watchful eyes of 'experts' from 84 Squadron. The hangar where we did the work was a large tin structure which made it very hot inside, so by the time we had finished for the day we had worked up quite a sweat, not to mention a thirst. We walked across to our temporary accommodation in the Transit Hut in the teeth of a ferocious sandstorm. By the time we got to the hut our skin was like sandpaper – in fact, it was

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sandpaper, with real sand. A nice hot shower would soon wash away the sand and leave us feeling fresh.

Wrong! The plumbing system was such that only the first few into the ablutions at the end of the day could expect to enjoy hot water. Thereafter the temperature decreased until it reached tepid. It was gone 20:00 hours when we got there. Mind you, with the ambient temperature well into the 90's, the water was never going to be cold.

It was while I was at Muharraq that I got interested in Amateur Dramatics and so I joined the local AmDram Club. This enabled me to mix with a wide range of people, not all of whom were in the military. We also assisted the British Council with some of their presentations on British culture. It all meant that I was able to enjoy a social life beyond the usual confines of the NAAFI and Malcolm Club. I suppose that it was while I was on this tour that I renewed the ambition that had deserted me at Marham, because I resolved that upon my return to UK I would knuckle down to get a promotion.

New Year 1969 saw an interesting event. Every Squadron had built its own Billet Bar and prizes were awarded for the most innovative. Our Adjutant hit upon a novel way to see in the New Year. He calculated when 1969 would start at several places around the world, He worked out a plan for visiting as many Billet Bars as possible ensuring that he arrived at each one just in time to celebrate the event. To achieve maximum mobility he planned to ride between each bar on his Honda moped. I had previously flown across the Empty Quarter as supernumerary crew on his Pembroke and we had got on pretty well, so he invited me along.

We announced our arrival at each bar with the cry "*in x minutes it will be New Year in #####*". A swift pint would follow before we set off for the next stop. The idea was to arrive at our own bar in time for New Year 'proper'. I can't remember how many bars we visited but we had a great time – apparently.

So in September 1969 I arrived at Brize Norton, which I was certain would have the facilities to allow me to 'pull my finger out' and fulfil some at least of the potential that must have been there back in 1960. Shortly after my arrival I bumped into John (Paddy) Walsh, who was attending a VC10 Ground Engineering Course. Sadly, we learned of John's passing at Christmas 2011. I also briefly met up with Dave Sinclair.

By now I had met, and got engaged to Carol and I realised more than ever that although the hedonistic pleasures of Service life were there for the taking, they were not going to advance my career one bit. So I enrolled for some Trade Training prior to sitting the promotion exam. I then married Carol in 1970 and settled to a life of domestic bliss when allocated a Married Quarter in early 1971. My promotion came through in the same year – 5 years later than it should have done and with insufficient time remaining to get my 3rd stripe. So instead of embarking on what would have been a fruitless exercise to qualify for Sergeant, I instead enrolled on Day Release at Witney Technical

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College and got an ONC in Electrical Engineering with 2 passes with distinction and 2 first class passes.

The next 3 years passed without incident – I carried out my duties and prepared myself for rejoining Civvy Street in 1974. It was early in 1974 that I learned that Redifon Simulation Ltd were holding an Open Day one weekend, at which they hoped to recruit extra staff. As luck would have it, I was on duty that weekend and there was no way of swapping with another Corporal. I wrote to the Company explaining the situation and they sent me an application form.

Now I have always preferred to write with a fountain pen, and always to print any forms, and that is what I did this time. I had expected to be invited to attend an interview for a job as a Fitter/Wireman, however, my standard of printing, and my newly acquired ONC, led Redifon to believe that I would be best suited to working in their Design Office where I would prepare wiring diagrams for their Flight Simulators.

The interview was successful, although they were unable to match my Corporal's salary – their offer was £500 pa less than what I was getting at the time – not a problem. I would start at the bottom of the pile, of course, as a Drawing Office Assistant. After 14 years (12 Regular and 2 'Boy's Service') I left the RAF with a small gratuity and no pension. Ironically, just 6 months later the Armed Forces Pension Scheme was introduced, which ensured a pension for everyone serving on 1st April 1975 almost without time qualification. Had I served just 6 months more I would have now been in receipt of a pension based on all 12 years of Regular service. Such is life! (Heavy sigh and the sound of violins).

And so on a September day in 1974 we packed up all of our worldly goods, including the Basset Hound that we had acquired as a puppy, and headed West – West Sussex that is. To the land of '*Gatport Airwick*'. I was now a civilian and had new mountains to conquer.

The new job was interesting and required learning new skills. I worked on the Company's Visual Systems, which were large, scale models of cities, runways and terrain, mounted on massive A-frames. A camera was mounted on a carriage which was mounted on a tower, which was mounted on a trolley which moved along a set of rail tracks. The whole lot was connected to the Simulator computer where operation of the flight controls resulted in corresponding movements of the camera across the model. The images were projected onto a screen to give the Flight Deck crew a very realistic image of the terrain over which they flew. Remember too, that this was years before *Google Earth* did something similar.

I must have done something right because by 1979 I had been promoted to Senior Draughtsman. The Company then decided to introduce Computer Aided Design and I was selected as one of the team tasked with learning the techniques involved, and to prepare the procedures and protocols for the rest of the Department to follow.

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More advancement followed and I was responsible for evaluating and introducing new software versions. I wrote the Training Manuals that were still in use more than 10 years later. The Company went through several changes of owner during this time, and I survived several redundancy programmes.

In 1982 my Annual Appraisal raised a problem. My performance warranted a pay rise but I was already at the top end of the pay scale for my Grade, and an upgrade would take me out of the paid overtime bracket. What to do? I considered my options and offered my Boss a solution. In lieu of a pay rise he would pay for me to attend the local College to study for an HNC. I would forgo all pay rises until I passed the Course, or failed in the attempt. He agreed.

When I attended the enrolment session, the Course Administrators were sceptical. My ONC was in Electrical Engineering and I wanted my HNC to be in Electronic Engineering, and of course, a few years had elapsed. They wanted me to take an introductory course for a year before joining the HNC stream proper. I didn't relish the idea of taking an extra year so I made them an offer.

Enrol me on to the next HNC Course and if my Course work and assessments did not place me in the top 5 in each subject by the end of the first term, then I would stand down. Much to their surprise, and delight, I achieved this, a feat made even more satisfactory when I considered that my peers were aged around 25 years and had been in more or less permanent education for 20 years. I was 38 and had been in intermittent education for 10 years.

In 1983 I was awarded my HNC with the following results:-

1 Pass with distinction; 8 Passes with Merit; 4 Passes.

It is interesting to compare my ONC and HNC results with those achieved at Halton and it would be easy to consider 'what if' I had applied myself in such a way during my Halton days. But I think that I was one of those late developers – in my case very late developer – who needed to vent their system of youthful apathy.

By 1988 I was a Manager with 22 staff and 2 sub-contract bureaux reporting to me. In 1994 the Company was listed as second in the world rating of Flight Simulator manufacturing firms. In third place was a French company, Thomson, based at Lancing just a few miles down the road from our Crawley base. They had earlier declared their intention to become Number 2 and they decided the best way to achieve that was to buy out my Company.

One of their first actions was to close the Lancing factory and relocate its staff to Crawley, which meant that they had, effectively, twice as many staff on site as they needed to operate in a cost-effective manner. So, after 20 years, and almost at my 50th birthday, I was invited to seek alternative employment. Now it was not a good year for conducting a job search, and my age was certainly not to my advantage.

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The only job offer I had received by the time my notice was finished, was working for a Life Assurance company as a Sales Consultant. The post was essentially on a commission-only basis – they paid an agreed ‘salary’ for the first 6 months to allow me to build up a customer base after which I would go ‘solo’.

It soon became clear that I was not cut out for the work, added to which the plethora of rules and regulations made it very difficult for newcomers to the industry to achieve the sorts of level of business enjoyed by more experienced consultants. One of my fellow ‘newbies’ had joined 6 months before me from a sales background and he still hadn’t built a client list sufficient to pay his petrol costs into the office. He had, however, seen his fairly generous redundancy payment dwindle rapidly almost to nothing.

The major catch with the job was that I was, effectively, self-employed and so if I left I would not qualify for any redundancy payout. Furthermore, they were proud of the fact that they never sacked anyone, so it was difficult to apply for ‘dole’ as I would have been deemed to have left voluntarily. Luckily I was offered a job in a manufacturing company and so I made a strategic withdrawal from the world of insurance sales (or in my case, insurance non-sales).

I signed on at the Job Centre and was informed that a local security company was holding a recruitment session the following day. Working on the theory that any work (well, almost any) was better than no work, I turned up for an interview. The reaction from the chap doing the interviewing was amazing.

“You’re the first person I’ve seen today who fits the first requirement – age. This job requires a minimum of 20 years checkable work history and the 18 year old lads that I’ve seen so far come nowhere near.”

When he found out that I had a military background, the job was mine. The pay was not good. One of my ‘patches’ was the local Leisure Centre and on one occasion I was performing my duties during a concert of 60’s/70’s pop music. I was able to exchange a few words with the likes of Freddie Garrity of Freddie and the Dreamers fame. However, I could not see my future as a Security Guard being the ideal way to spend the remaining 15 years of my working life, so when a new job in engineering came my way, I moved on.

The new job showed much potential and I soon settled in. We had a full order book and everything looked rosy. Except that 5 months into the job, the orders suddenly dried up and there were redundancies. I registered with a contract agency which was soon able to find me a contract position in a Simulation company. Once again I quickly adjusted to the new tasks. Shortly after I started there, one of the permanent staff resigned to take up a more lucrative job elsewhere. I applied for his job and was successful. After all, I had learned the job already. It was April 1996.

There was no reason to suppose that this job would not see me through to retirement in 2009. And so it seemed until mid 1998 when the US parent company decided that it would no longer support what it considered a loss-

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making division. I walked away with a small redundancy cheque and a sense of foreboding.

Again I was fortunate in finding another post, although it was not an ideal match to my talents and experience. We swiftly entered 1999 and it looked as if the new millennium would at last see some stability in my prospects. The Company's products relied very much on computer technology and the widely publicised risk of the Millennium Bug created a rush of orders as customers sought to replace their vulnerable old equipment.

We all know of the old maxim – 'what goes up, must come down'. That is exactly what happened to the contents of our order book as we entered 2000. Anticipating the worst, after all I had become an expert in reading the runes of impending redundancy, I placed my name with another agent.

On the day that I was given my marching orders, I was phoned by the agent. He had a contract post at Thomson and the Manager who was seeking a temporary replacement for a long-term sick staff member thought he recognised my name from my CV. I recognised him at the interview and I started the new job the following week. Ironically, I was working on designs that bore my name from as far back as 20 years before.

The Company changed its name to Thales (pronounced Tarlis), which I survived. At the end of 2000 the long-term sick staff member was 'struck off charge' and my position was made permanent. And this time there was every chance that permanent meant exactly that. I had experienced being made redundant 5 times within 6 years and so felt that I deserved a bit of job security. I was then promoted to Principal Designer. My career in Civvy Street had not turned a complete circle, but it wasn't far off!

The department that I worked in was the Military Post Design Section, incorporating aircraft modification on to simulators, and also upgrading those simulators with the latest technology. It was not only aircraft that we simulated, but also nuclear submarines and my duties included visiting sites to evaluate the requirements. In the 9 years that I worked there I visited the following: RN Dockyards at Faslane & Devonport; RNAS Culdrose & Yeovilton; RAF Cosford, St Mawgan, Wittering and Coningsby. Ironically, I never got to visit any of the stations where I had served!

I had just over 9 years left before I could retire but my experience told me that there was still time for me to be made redundant several times. So I qualified as a Proof-reader and set up my own freelance business to run alongside the 'day job'. I never gained enough work to keep me in the manner to which I was accustomed, but I was able to pay for a couple of holidays on the proceeds. Fortunately, I was not called upon to rely on my literary talents as I survived a couple of bouts of redundancy at Thales.

November 11th 2009 is the date when all of the hassle over job security came to an end as I reached the magic age of 65. Since retiring, I have been busier than ever before, except that the effort I put in now is for me. I can also

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get up every morning, take a leisurely breakfast and walk the dogs for as long as I like and never once feel the cold breath of the *Redundancy Spectre* on my neck.



The cartoon was drawn by a colleague and reflects aspects of my life and Service background.

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And Then...

Dr Karol (Charlie) Lee MPhil, PhD, FETC, RDT

Career Path

Born in Glasgow. Joined the Royal Air Force in the name of Karol Sekula and subsequently changed my surname to Lee in December 1965.

1960 – 1963

Royal Air Force Apprenticeship (Dental Technician)

Training included RAF Education Parts 1&2 (Dental Technician) leading to the City and Guilds qualification and the study of Physics, Chemistry, Metallurgy, English and Mathematics

1963

City & Guilds of London Institute Final Examination (Dental Technician).

1963 – 1976

Royal Air Force – Dental Branch

Ranks: Junior Technician, Corporal and Sergeant

Stationed at: RAF Uxbridge, RAF Wegberg, RAF Uxbridge, RAF Halton Hospital.

During this time I obtained Royal Air Force Specialist Qualifications in Cobalt Chrome dentures, Crown & Bridge dental restorations, Orthodontic appliances and Maxillofacial technology involving the technical aspects of jaw fractures, facial and ocular prostheses and obturators¹⁵.

1976 – 1988 Stoke Mandeville Hospital

Senior Technician, Chief Technician, Senior Chief Maxillofacial Technician, Dental Laboratory Manager.

Progressed through the technical grades until becoming Dental Laboratory Manager responsible for 2 other Technicians. Technical duties included removable denture work, making Orthodontic appliances for the re-positioning of teeth in children and adults, appliances to repair cleft palates in babies and children and Maxillofacial splints for jaw fractures, re-positioning upper/lower jaws, facial and ocular prostheses and obturators. There was also an on-call element for accidents and emergencies.

1987

City & Guilds of London Institute Further and Adult Teachers Certificate

1988 – 1995

¹⁵ A prosthetic device used for the treatment of conditions affecting the palate

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Glasgow Dental Hospital and School
Dental Laboratory Manager

Responsible for the overall management of 12 Technicians in the Restorative Laboratory which provided removable dentures in acrylic and cobalt chromium and dental implant dentures.

1995 – 2004

Charles Clifford Dental Hospital, Sheffield
Operational and Technical Services Manager

Responsible for the overall management of the Laboratory which comprised of a Prosthetic, Crown and Bridge and Orthodontic Section. There were a total of 28 Technicians.

Duties also included establishing training programmes for all student and qualified dental technical staff and participating in the teaching, advising and examining of BDS Dental Undergraduate Students in areas of dental technology and dental laboratory administrative procedures.

Also responsible for managing the Estates and Portering Services within the Dental Hospital. The Estates duties involved overall control of the building and equipment maintenance and the development of the Hospital Asset Register, Inventory of Equipment and associated reports.

February 1998

Higher Research Degree – Master of Philosophy, University of Sheffield

July 2000

Higher Research Degree – Doctor of Philosophy, University of Sheffield

Both degrees were concerned with strategic management within the NHS and particularly Dental Laboratories.

October 2004

Early retirement

Now living in Sheffield and continuing in part time work with: General Dental Council and the University of Sheffield as a Chief Invigilator overseeing University Student examinations.

February 2006

Book published from research carried out during my PhD. Book title – *“Understanding Strategic Change, (A Guide for Dental Laboratory Managers)”*.

1997 – 2012

Carried out various strategic management consultations in a number of Dental Laboratories in Dental Hospitals and Schools throughout the UK and Ireland.

And Then...

Sporting Achievements

Represented RAF Halton Apprentices, RAF Wegberg, RAF Germany, RAF Halton, RAF Training Command and the Royal Air Force at rugby.

Aylesbury RFC – 1st XV Captain, and then 1st XV and Club Coach

Played for Buckinghamshire County Rugby XV and was then County Coach and Coaching Administrator for Buckinghamshire County Rugby.

Also represented RAF Uxbridge at golf.

Comments:

The Apprenticeship, together with the technical training and organisational/management skills obtained during my time in the Royal Air Force, proved a tremendous asset in furthering my career after I left the service.

Finally, I owe a lot to Warrant Officer John McClurg (now deceased) who was a Dental Technician Instructor at RAF Halton and whom I later worked under at RAF Uxbridge, RAF Wegberg, RAF Halton Hospital and Stoke Mandeville Hospital. He encouraged me to pursue a management and teaching career pathway.

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T0686676 A/A Lee C.D. My Career after Halton

Towards the end of our Apprenticeship we were given the opportunity to apply for a choice of posting after Graduation. My choices were all in Coastal Command, and in common with most of the Entry, I was given somewhere completely different to those I had applied for. In my case it was to RAF Honington in Suffolk, where I was allocated to the Armament Electrical Section responsible for the servicing of the Handley-Page Victor weapon delivery systems.

It was a small friendly section with just six Junior Techs, a couple of NCO's and a Warrant Officer in charge. Most of our work involved either routine maintenance checks on the systems when required by base maintenance, or assisting the Armourers with loading the nuclear weapons. On one occasion I met the famous defence reporter, Chapman Pincher, from the *Daily Express* when he came to see one of our aircraft being loaded with an 'H' bomb. It was quite amusing to read his report some days later as he described his feelings as he watched the awesome bomb being loaded into the V bomber. If only he had known it was actually just three tons of concrete disguised as a bomb!

Whilst I was at Honington, 55 and 57 Victor Squadrons were required to send detachments out to Singapore to provide heavy strike capability to the Far East Air Force as a deterrent to the Indonesians, who were trying to destabilize the recently formed state of Malaysia. I was lucky enough to be sent there twice during the two years I spent at Honington, for six months in 1964, and for three months in early 1965.

I didn't get to see as much of Singapore as I would have liked the first time, as it was a period of great unrest in the city that involved some serious rioting. Consequently we spent several weeks confined to camp at RAF Tengah whilst the worst of the riots were taking place. When we did get out and about though, it was a wonderful experience for a young man like myself whose only foreign experience prior to this was a couple of weeks spent in France on a school exchange visit.

We did, however, realise that the rioters were not our most immediate danger when we were told to put tape on all windows in the barracks and line offices to minimise damage from flying glass in the event of an air raid. On the Line we also had to construct air raid shelters out of sand bags, wooden beams and corrugated iron sheet, the only problem with them was that they made use of the large monsoon drain that ran along the edge of the apron. We had to hope that the Indons wouldn't attack just after a heavy rain storm.¹⁶

During the second detachment in 1965 the runway at RAF Tengah required resurfacing, so we packed up everything and flew up to RAF Butterworth in Penang where we remained until the end of the tour. Although nominally an RAF station, Butterworth was the base for several Royal Australian Air Force squadrons operating Mirage fighters and Hercules transports. We were housed in newly built wooden barrack blocks just over the road from the camp

¹⁶ I remember this well – I was at Tengah at the same time - Editor

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swimming pool, and just a short walk away from the beach; we could hardly believe our luck!

Penang Island was just a short ferry ride away, and to top it all it was a peaceful place, unlike Singapore with all the political unrest going on at that time. Along with my mates I visited most of the tourist sights around the island, followed by leisurely hours eating and drinking in the many bars and restaurants along Penang Road during our time off. During a visit to Penang Hill, towards the end of the tour, I met a lovely young lady who would eventually become my wife.



On Penang Hill, May 1965

As the day of our return to Honington approached we heard rumours that the Vickers Valiant tanker fleet had been grounded. It meant that our Victor B1a's would have to be modified as tankers and transferred to Marham, which was the main in-flight refuelling tanker base at the time. A posting was to be expected by everyone.

WO Wiberley was not very receptive to my choice of posting when I got back to base, especially when I told him the reason that I wanted to return to the Far East. Sure enough it wasn't long before I received the news that I was to report to the Bomber Command Armament School (BCAS) at RAF Wittering. I couldn't believe it – not working with Plumbers again! I wanted to work on aircraft, that's what I joined the RAF for. I wasn't the only one from Honington who had a posting to BCAS though; I soon found out that Gordon Sherratt from the 96th was going there too.

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BCAS was situated at the furthest end of the airfield away from the main camp at Wittering, mostly to do with the fact that it was located in the bomb and weapon storage facility, and a shuttle bus service was provided to take personnel to and from the main camp. BCAS consisted of a motley collection of buildings clustered just inside the entrance of the weapons site. On our arrival we were directed to the workshop, which was located in a large, single storey wooden hut. In charge of the workshop was Flight Sergeant Oakley, a veteran of WWII with a good collection of campaign medal ribbons on his tunic, who briefed us about what we would be doing there for the next few years.

Basically the task of the workshop was to construct and maintain fixed base training simulators that were used for training aircrew and technicians on the various nuclear weapon arming and delivery systems. It was pretty interesting work, much like those practice jobs that we did in the Halton workshops except on a very much larger scale! Carpenters built the basic frameworks of the rigs, then we electricians built the instrument panels and wired them up. Once completed the simulators would be checked out and then delivered to wherever they were required.

Whenever a new rig was delivered one or two of us who had been responsible for building them would be sent along to ensure they were working properly before they were handed over to the end users. During my time there I went on a couple of deliveries to bases in Germany, as well as to Ballykelly and St. Mawgan. Yes, even the old Shackleton was nuclear capable! It could carry a particularly nasty nuclear depth-charge that would be sure to spoil the day of any submariner within 20 miles of where it was ever dropped. The Shackleton would have been hard pressed to get away from the resulting explosion too!

Shortly after arriving at Wittering my promotion to Corporal came through, and a few months later I was sent to attend an Instructional Techniques course at RAF Brampton, so that I could begin instructing duties at BCAS. On my return, clutching the freshly signed certificate, I was sent to L building to work with Chief Tech Keith Potter, assisting him to teach the Shackleton weapons systems courses. Teaching RAF personnel was fairly straightforward, but we had two very unusual courses that we had to give to US Navy personnel, just why we never found out. They were unusual in that whenever we asked a question to any of the students, he would look to the senior officer for permission to answer. It was then that I learnt that the Americans have a very different sense of humour from ourselves, as they never seemed to laugh at our jokes, or maybe it was the way we told them?

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Ever since leaving Penang I had kept up writing to my girlfriend there, and after a year or so it had developed to the stage where we had decided to get married. In those days we had to request permission from the officer in charge, especially as I was in a security vetted post. When I first approached Flight Sergeant Oakley he advised me to drop the idea.

“It will never last,” he remarked after hearing that she was my pen friend and that I had only met her a few times over the space of a week.

To cut a long story short, after several other interviews including one by a senior officer from the SIB (Special Investigation Branch), I was eventually granted official permission to marry. Melinda arrived at Heathrow in mid February 1967 and we were married the following month. We rented a cottage a few miles from the airfield for the hefty sum of 5 guineas per week, quite a large lump out of my pay at the time, but we seemed to manage alright.

Life continued on as usual at BCAS, and I was beginning to think that I would be there for many years. One Chief Tech had actually been there for a full 12 years, and several others were approaching that tally. My dreams of a Far East posting were disappearing fast, and an announcement by the government that all the Far East bases were going to be closed in a matter of a few years put paid to them completely.

In 1969 however, out of the blue came the news that I had been placed on PWR for an overseas posting. After a week or two I was notified that my posting would be to Akrotiri in Cyprus. Not to a squadron however, it was to

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the radiation monitoring instrument servicing bay, located in the special weapons storage facility! I just couldn't escape the clutches of those blasted Plumbers! More courses followed to make me an expert on nuclear radiation and the methods of detecting it.

We travelled out to Cyprus on a RAF Britannia from Lyneham the same time that the Apollo astronauts were heading out to the moon in July 1969. It may not have been as good as a posting to Singapore but we were looking forward to it nonetheless. Shortly after arriving there my promotion to Sergeant came through, though my job didn't change at all.

Cyprus lived up to all our expectations in every respect, lovely climate, good food and wine, and the Mediterranean Sea just a few minutes' drive away. Work was a different matter though. There were just three of us Elect.Fitt. (A) in the radiation monitoring instrument workshop, and we came under the Armament Section for administration purposes. The W/O in charge, who shall remain nameless, was the biggest b*****d you could ever hope not to meet. I won't go into details but he tried to make everyone's life a misery there. Try as he might though even he couldn't spoil Cyprus for us!

One great advantage to being at Akrotiri was that it was one of the staging posts on the route to the Far East, so Melinda and I were able to take advantage of taking an indulgence flight out to Singapore at the beginning of 1970 to visit her family in Penang. Arriving at Changi in the middle of the night brought memories of the first time I arrived there five years earlier flooding back. We travelled up to Penang by train and spent three weeks enjoying the delicious food as well as the sights and sounds of that lovely island with her family.

During our time in Cyprus we toured the island extensively and towards the end of 1970 our first daughter was born. Work can be described as not the most interesting I have done, however the three years of the tour passed very quickly and it wasn't long before I received notification of my next posting. It was to Lyneham, and at last I seemed to have broken the attachment to Armourers. I was very fortunate in winning a draw to allow me to transport a car back to the UK by air on one of the transport flights passing through Akrotiri, so my VW Beetle was duly flown out to Brize Norton a couple of weeks before we flew out on one of 'shiny 10 Squadron' VC10's ourselves.

After a spell of leave I reported to RAF Lyneham where I was hoping to spend my final two years in the RAF working on aircraft at last. The RAF had other ideas though, and I found out to my dismay that I was to be working in the '*Gin Palace*'. I put in an immediate request through the CO to be transferred to aircraft maintenance on account that I needed to gain aircraft experience ready for my move to Civvy Street. Whilst waiting for a response, I spent the next few weeks in charge of a production line overhauling Comet and Hercules generators. Finally the Gods smiled on me and I was transferred to B Line at the far side of the airfield to work on Hercules line maintenance.

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I thoroughly enjoyed my time there working out on the line, working on aircraft at long last. There were a few anxious moments, like the time we heard that one of our aircraft had crashed at Hullavington, especially as our shift had been the last to work on it. The ensuing inquiry found that it had been caused by mishandling during a practice approach using asymmetric power.

On another occasion I left a fuel quantity test set on board an aircraft, meaning to collect it after finishing work on another aircraft a short distance away. I was most disconcerted to find the first aircraft missing when I went to collect the test set, even more so when I found out it had been sent on a long haul flight! Our Officer i/c was not amused, and told me that I would be billed for the cost of a replacement if it didn't return. Yours truly was there to meet the plane when it returned a few days later, and breathed a great sigh of relief to find that it was still on board. I almost ran back to stores with it!

While I was at Lyneham I took the opportunity to retake the ONC course that I had struggled with during my time at Halton. This time I had a Maths teacher at Chippenham Technical College who really knew how to teach Calculus, which made it so much easier the second time around.

All too soon the time for me to leave the RAF arrived and I began looking for a job in Civvy Street. I went for an interview with BAC at Filton for a position as an engineer in the Service Systems Department. It was convenient to our home near Bristol and I accepted their offer when it came. When I approached the B Line i/c for my leaving docs to be completed he asked me to write my own references and sure enough when I was handed the completed forms it was all there exactly as I had written them.

British Aircraft Corporation at Filton

On my first day of work at BAC I was surprised and pleased to be greeted by Robbie Martin from our Entry, who had started in the same department when he left the RAF some months earlier. The work of the department involved providing technical assistance to BAC 1-11 operators, writing Service News Letters and Service Bulletins, as well as preparing to provide the same service for future Concorde operators.

I had a place on the very first Concorde Avionics course, which turned out to be a bit of a strain for most of the students, as well as the instructors. It was at the time when engineers were expected to know the intimate workings of the various systems black boxes. However on the Concorde the contents were so complex that it was virtually impossible for anyone to memorise them to the extent needed to take a closed book type of exam at the end of each phase. Fortunately the CAA had one of their senior avionics surveyors on the course, none other than the famous Mr Pallett, and agreement was eventually reached that aircraft maintenance engineers would no longer be expected to know exactly how highly complex electronic control boxes worked their magic.

I remained at BAC for almost two years, but inside I was itching to do hands-on work on aircraft again. One day my job took me to Cardiff (Rhoose) airport to assist British Airways with a mandatory inspection on the fuel

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pumps of their BAC 1-11's. It seemed to be just the place I was looking for, and I enquired whether they had any vacancies there. Sam Biggs, who was the Electrical Superintendent, said that they did, but being as I didn't have a CAA engineers licence I would have to start at the very bottom as a mechanic. The pay wouldn't be very attractive either, at least until I gained some relevant qualifications. Having an HNC didn't count for much there!

Leaving my details with them I returned home to Bristol and told Melinda about what I had seen. We talked it over and she supported my resolve to make a move if I had an offer of a job with BA at Rhoose. The first letter that arrived thanked me for showing an interest, but sorry to inform me that they didn't have any vacancies for the foreseeable future. The very same week another letter arrived saying that I could start work as soon as possible! I called Sam Biggs and he agreed to keep the vacancy open for me to complete my one month's notice with BAC, and I handed in my notice there the following day.

My colleagues at BAC were shocked to hear that I was actually considering returning to work 'on the tools', especially taking a drop in pay to boot. I was looking to the future though.

British Airways at Cardiff (Rhoose) airport.

Rhoose was a lovely place to work, situated on the coast to the west of Barry. It was a small regional airport where British Airways had a maintenance base for the BAC 1-11 and Vickers Viscount aircraft operating on the regional network. There was a Line operation too, with BA services primarily to Jersey and Paris.

I was working in Base Maintenance on the Viscounts and 1-11 major checks during the day, and A checks when rostered on night shift. Initially I had to start at the very bottom rung of the tradesman ladder which meant doing some of the dirtiest jobs such as cleaning the electrical panels located in the Viscount main wheel wells ready for inspection. Gradually I progressed by taking the various BA tradesman tests, following which I was given greater responsibilities, all the while during every spare moment I was studying hard in preparation for sitting for the CAA licensed aircraft engineer's examinations.

The CAA written examinations, comprising several essay type questions and multi-choice papers, were carried out about four times per year at specific locations in the UK. Once these were successfully passed, candidates would then be invited to take an oral type examination with one or two CAA surveyors. It could be a fairly daunting experience involving a lot of self study, and I knew a number of very competent ex-RAF fitters who gave up after one or two failed attempts.

After passing the Cat X Electrical exams and getting a type licence covering the Viscount and 1-11, I was promoted to be a supervisor at Rhoose on a much better pay scale. I then went on to sit for the various instrument, autopilots and compass system licence exams until I was fully licensed on both air-

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craft types. It was a long haul, taking me about three years in all, but it gave me a great feeling of satisfaction to have made it.

Our second daughter was born whilst we were at Rhoose, and our eldest one went to the village school there. We had a house in the village making commuting a piece of cake, just a ten minute walk in fact. We made good friends at work and in the community, and even better, we were able to take advantage of the British Airways staff travel scheme to take our holidays in Penang. Life was good!

Good times tend to come to an end however, and things changed when British Airways, under strong pressure from the trades unions at Heathrow, decided that the Rhoose base would have to close at the end of 1980. Suddenly our future, that had looked so good, was now in doubt. Although the company made vague promises of finding work at other locations for those who were willing to move, I began looking at the adverts in the back pages of the Flight magazine. Two in particular took my attention, one was for LAE's to work for Malaysian Airlines in Kuala Lumpur, and the other was for a similar position in Brunei with Royal Brunei Airlines. I sent off my CV to both and awaited replies.

I heard from MAS with a request to attend an interview in London. The interview was straightforward – I had the licences they required except for the aircraft type licences, and I felt fairly confident that I would get the job. Several weeks passed however without any reply from MAS, and so far there had been nothing from Brunei. I was beginning to feel dejected, but then BA asked me to go for an interview for a Line Maintenance Engineer's position at Birmingham. We decided to take the opportunity to visit my family up in Derbyshire to coincide with the interview.

The night before we were leaving the telephone rang, and a Mr Ken Money introduced himself as the Engineering Manager from Royal Brunei. We had a short talk and he went briefly through the terms and conditions of employment and then offered me a three year contract on the spot! I was surprised, to put it mildly, but managed to keep my enthusiasm under control by requesting a few days to think it over. He agreed and gave me a number to call him back, saying that he would be in the UK for a few more days.

The interview in Birmingham went well, and I was offered a position as a shift manager on Line Maintenance. Now I seemed to have two jobs to decide from. My wife and I had a good talk about it – the choice was between a long term career with British Airways with a good pension when I retired, and a three year contract in a place we had never seen before and knew precious little about except that it was in the Far East. We decided to be adventurous and go to Brunei!

When I called Mr Money to let him know our decision he asked me to put in my month's notice to BA so that I would be able to attend the first available Boeing 737 course prior to travelling out to Brunei. He assured me that RBA

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would be paying me from the beginning of the month regardless. It almost sounded too good to be true!

I actually spent a month on full pay from RBA before the course started at Stansted airport at the beginning of September 1980. In the meantime, when I told my colleagues at Rhoose where I was going, one of them, Paul Sellars, asked me if there were any more vacancies as he fancied the idea of going there too. Ken Money had mentioned that he was looking for three avionic engineers, so I gave Paul his contact number.

Paul and I met the third engineer, Frank Bowron, when we started the course at Stansted. All three of us were ex-BA staff, as well as being ex-Brats. The course was run by instructors from Malaysian Airlines, and we found out that the instruments and autopilot sections of the course would be run in Kuala Lumpur the following month. Wonderful!

The following weeks were hectic as we made arrangements to rent out our home whilst we were away, packed everything we thought we would need to take with us ready for shipping to Brunei, and generally saying goodbye to friends and family. My parents seemed to take the news quite well; I suppose being one of five children made it easier. We spent the last week at home in Derbyshire with them, and travelled by train down to London from Derby. At Heathrow we met up again with the Bowron and the Sellars families, and flew out to Kuala Lumpur by British Airways in early October.

Melinda and our daughters spent the next five weeks with her family in Penang whilst I was completing the B737 course, only coming to join me in the Jayapuri hotel the day before we were due to fly to Brunei via Singapore.

Brunei and Royal Brunei Airlines

Brunei was very much smaller than we expected. The capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, is situated a few miles from the mouth of the Brunei River, surrounded by jungle clad hills, and can be walked around comfortably in two or three hours at a strolling pace. When we walked into the city centre from our hotel on the first morning, Melinda asked me where the capital was, and was astonished when I said that we were standing right in the centre of it.

The airline had only been in operation since 1975 and there were just two B737's in operation at the time I joined, flying on a handful of routes around the region, namely to Singapore, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kota Kinabalu, and Kuching. There were only four avionic engineers and five engine/airframe engineers manning a three shift system on line maintenance, assisted by locally recruited mechanics. Twelve pilots made up the technical crews, and there were about thirty cabin crew members. It didn't take long to get to know everyone in the company.

A condition of employment was that we had to gain the B737 multi-category X type rating on our engineer's licences within three months of arriving. This meant continual study at every spare moment, but by the time the CAA surveyor arrived from Kuala Lumpur during our third month the three of

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us were ready to face him with confidence. Once that was over we could begin to relax and enjoy our surroundings.

For the first year or two life was very relaxed with only three or four flights per day, but gradually more destinations were added to the route network and the workload increased to the extent that a third B737, that had been leased out when we arrived in 1980, returned to the airline. Several of the destinations, including Darwin and Bangkok, involved the aircraft and crew staying over for a night stop, and an engineer was sent along to perform the daily checks, refuelling etc. This additional duty made an enjoyable diversion from the normal shift routine. Usually it meant flying on the cockpit jump seat, providing even more interest to the job.

At the time we joined RBA, engineering only had one licensed radio engineer so in 1983 Paul, Frank and myself were sent to London to take courses to enable us to extend our licences to include category R, radio and radar systems. Of the three of us I was the only one to manage to pass all the CAA examinations and extend my licence to include the radio/radar categories. According to the examiner there were no more than a dozen engineers holding all the avionic categories on UK CAA licences at that time.

Over the following years the company changed quite radically – a new hangar was constructed, more engineers were recruited and we began carrying out heavy maintenance on the aircraft. The fleet also expanded, commencing with the purchase of three brand new B757 aircraft in 1986 to begin services to destinations further afield. Most of the engineers, including myself, were sent to the Boeing training centre in Seattle to take the B757 type training course. This was followed by a month's detachment to British Airways at Heathrow to gain some practical service experience before returning to Brunei.

With the additional aircraft life became more hectic at work, and it soon became the norm for the late shift, which should have gone home at 2am, to still be working when the morning shift came in at 7am. Things obviously couldn't go on like that for too long, and additional engineers were recruited to increase the size of the shifts.

With the new B757 in service, it was often required for VIP flights to Europe. The Brunei royalty were renowned for their generosity, and no-one ever declined the chance to travel with them as a 'flying spanner'. I only managed to go on one such flight, but was delighted to be woken by one of the cabin crew during the sector to Dubai to be handed a nice fat envelope 'from the princess'. It contained a thousand pounds in brand new twenties, and I didn't get much sleep after that!

After Independence in 1984, Brunei began a huge development programme – new palaces, shopping malls, schools, housing projects and government office complexes were built, as well as new roads and highways. The transformation was amazing for those who had been privileged to have seen the sleepy old pre-independence Brunei.

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There was still plenty of jungle left though and one of the most popular activities was to go 'hashing'. One evening each week, starting at about 5pm a large group of mostly expat men would go chasing after a couple of 'hares' laying an intermittent paper trail through the most difficult terrain they could find. A runner, called the '*Hash Horn*' carrying a battered old bugle, would sound blasts from it every time new paper was found to call up the stragglers.

It was generally great fun, even when the trail took us through great expanses of bog, or even on one occasion across the town's main reservoir (thank goodness they treated the water before it went through the taps!). The great incentive to finish the run as quickly as possible was a great big ice box full of lovely cold beer waiting at the finish, though in their anxiety to get to the beer first some runners (better known as SCB's) resorted to taking short cuts.

In 1988 the new Quality Manager decided to re-organise the QA department and increase the number of Quality Assurance Engineer auditors, probably because of pressure from the Brunei DCA, and I successfully applied for one of the vacancies when it was advertised. It was a new start in my career, and I had to learn all about audit processes etc. from basics. We had auditor courses eventually but in the early days it was DIY.

Shortly after joining Quality Assurance I was sent for a three month detachment to Kathmandu where RBA had a contract to provide technical support to Royal Nepal Airlines. That was a real eye opener. We had heard all about the CAA desert during the times we were taking our CAA licences when surveyors would put you into imaginary circumstances and ask you how you would deal with technical problems on an aircraft far away from base.

Kathmandu was that desert. There were numerous problems that taxed our experience on a daily basis. On one occasion a small team of RBA engineers had come to Kathmandu to carry out service checks on the two B757 aircraft. During the morning the RNAC Quality Manager came up to me and said in all seriousness that he did not think our engineers were as good as the Nepalese engineers. When I asked him how he came to that conclusion he told me that he had been observing our engineers carrying out the system checks on the aircraft, and he was shocked to see that they needed to refer to the maintenance manuals in order to complete the checks!

"A good engineer should be able to do the checks without a book!" he declared.

I thought at first it was some sort of Nepalese joke, but when I realised he was really serious I told him in no uncertain terms that in RBA we expected our engineers to use the maintenance manual at all times when working on aircraft. He looked quite surprised at that, but came to the conclusion that it must be some strange European practice. I realised then that we would be there for a long time.

It didn't take long to discover that virtually none of the Nepalese technicians had anything resembling an adequate tool kit. When I mentioned it to one of the supervisors he showed me a room in the stores that contained a

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pile of brand new fully stocked aircraft technician tool boxes supplied under an aid programme from Germany. He explained with a shake of his head that the management would not allow them to be issued to the technicians because 'they would only steal the tools and sell them.'

Nepal was a really interesting place to visit and I saw many fascinating places during the time that I was there. The people in the airline were extremely friendly and cooperative to work with and we made considerable progress there over the years, but I always had the feeling that once we finished the contract things would revert back to the previous state.

Time to leave Brunei (the first time)...

The international school in Brunei only had classes up to age 11, so eventually our youngest daughter had to go to a local secondary school as she had always refused to go to boarding school in the UK like her sister. We soon found that the standard of education there was not very good apart from Maths and Science subjects, so we decided that it would be best if we returned to the UK. We had enjoyed ten good years with RBA, much more than we originally thought possible, and now it was time to return to normality.

The Flight magazine came to the rescue once again when I saw an advert for a Quality Assurance Engineer position with British Midland Airline based at East Midlands airport close to where I came from. After attending an interview during my annual leave I was offered the job to start at the beginning of January 1991.

Once again it was time to pack everything up and move. Luckily in 1989 we had purchased a house in the East Midlands close to where my parents lived, so we had somewhere to go to. It was part of our contract that we were able to convert air freight allowance into sea freight, so we were able to send a large container back with all our belongings plus a fairly new car that we had bought shortly before we had decided to move.

A short interlude at BMA

My stay at British Midlands was rather short lived – the month after I started work the company had to start making staff redundant, and I felt distinctly uneasy, being a new member of staff. Despite promises that my job was safe, a pay rise that had been agreed when I was employed did not happen 'due to the current financial climate.'

Although I enjoyed working at BMA, and the staff were really easy to get on with, Melinda and I decided that life in Brunei was much better, so I picked up the phone one night and called the Engineering Director of RBA. He was quite surprised to hear from me, and asked how things were going, I told him that we were OK but would really like to return to RBA if there was a position available.

"How about your old job", he asked, "one of your old colleagues has just left so we have a vacancy, when can you start?"

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I told him that I had to give three months notice, so I could start around mid July. We agreed all the terms over the phone and he told me that I would be hearing from the Personnel Manager within a week or so.

After I handed in my resignation letter the engineering management at BMA tried to encourage me to stay with the company by offering other jobs that paid more money. As the time approached for me to leave I began feeling some twinges of regret as some of the jobs I had been offered were rather tempting, but it was too late as I had signed another contract with RBA, and everything was in motion for my return to Brunei.

...Back to Brunei

Boarding the RBA B767 at Heathrow terminal 3 brought back many memories, even more so when the CSO welcomed me aboard saying,

“Hello Mr. Lee, have you been home on leave?”

I laughed and replied that, “Yes, it had been a sort of leave.”

In a way it was like I had never left the place. I was back in the same office, looking at the same old faces. I had a different house to stay in and a new car, but otherwise everything was the same as before.

Brunei was an excellent place for sport – we had a thriving sports club with badminton, squash, tennis courts, swimming pool, plus a golf driving range and golf course. The facilities were first class, and we made full use of them, especially badminton and golf. Other activities included going for jungle walks and the beach was only a short drive away. Life was good there.

Soon after returning to RBA I was given the task of preparing the company to achieve JAR (Joint Airworthiness Requirements) 145 Standards with the intention of eventually gaining full Approval from the European Authorities. Apart from changing the procedures and processes used within the company, it was also necessary to have an endorsement from a European operator stating that they intended to use RBA Engineering services if we held the 145 approval. This part took some time but eventually we managed to get a commitment from Britannia Airways and we were finally able to make the application to the UK CAA. Our approval was finally granted by the UK CAA in 1998. It was an important event for the company as it meant that we could tender for more third party maintenance contracts.

Some of the more interesting jobs I was involved with included taking delivery of new and second hand aircraft for the airline. This involved several trips to Boeing in Seattle for new B767 aircraft, as well as a lengthy stay with Swissair in Zurich and Geneva when we bought two of their Fokker 100 aircraft to serve our regional routes.

The contract with Royal Nepal Airlines continued throughout my time with RBA. In addition we performed several C checks for Britannia Airlines. New contracts with operators from Mauritius, Vietnam and Fiji meant more overseas trips – it was an exciting time to be with RBA.

And Then...

During the time we were providing on-site maintenance support for Vietnam Airlines the Vietnamese CAA showed an interest in adopting the JAR 145 requirements in place of their own outdated system. They asked RBA if we could assist them, so naturally the job fell to the QA department. We spent several months teaching Vietnamese officials about the JAR and the various requirements, as well as showing them how the requirements worked in a practical environment, during their attachment with our airline.

Over the last fifteen years I spent with RBA, I progressed from being a Quality Assurance Engineer, to spend six years as the Quality Superintendent, and the final four years as the Quality Manager. It was an enjoyable and most interesting career that finally came to an end when I was 62 in 2006 due to Brunei government retirement age rules.

It was quite a sad time for Melinda and I when the time came to finally leave Brunei for good. We had made many good friends there and it was almost like emigrating to a new country when we returned to the UK.



A last game at Pantai Mentiri Golf Club before we left Brunei

As we were finishing a final game of golf at the Pantai Mentiri Golf Club with a couple of old friends I received a call on my mobile phone which suddenly changed the future for me. It was a call from one of my old colleagues who was working in Kazakhstan for Air Astana, and he had an interesting proposition to make to me. They needed a Quality Manager for the airline there, and he asked if I would be interested in taking on the job, as he had heard that I was retiring from RBA. I told him that I was interested and would contact them when I returned to the UK.

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Kazakhstan

It was proposed that I should visit Almaty for a few days for an interview and to generally see the place before deciding on the move, so I obtained a single entry visa from the Embassy in London before flying out to Almaty in early September 2006. While there I was taken to see the various sights, and to meet some of the senior management. I was surprised to find that the Engineering Vice President was someone I had worked with at Rhoose back in the 70's – such a small world! At the end of the visit I had an interview with the Company President and we discussed the terms of employment I would be offered. The terms were very tempting and Almaty had turned out to be much different from what I had imagined – retirement would have to wait!

I was employed as the Senior Quality Manager, and joined the company at the beginning of November 2006, my brief being to establish a fully integrated QA system throughout the company, and to prepare for the IOSA audit by IATA that was planned for the following year.

It was interesting working with the Russian and Kazakh staff. I found them really enthusiastic to learn Western methods and to follow European regulations, though at the same time we still had to comply with the outdated Kazakh Civil Aviation rules. At times it was frustrating to watch as an aircraft and its crew were grounded pending an investigation by the Kazakh CAC for simply returning to stand to have a defect rectified. We tried many times to persuade the Authority that their hard line approach was actually detrimental to flight safety, but our arguments fell on deaf ears.

The local people were great to work with – they loved to celebrate birthdays in the office, and no-one was left out. Money would be collected from everyone, with the boss expected to contribute the most of course! The ladies would prepare a lovely buffet with cold cuts, (horse meat a speciality!), a large gateau would be ordered and the celebrations began as soon as work finished at 5pm. It was traditional for each person to make a little speech in appreciation of the person celebrating the birthday, and a toast would be drunk, neat vodka naturally! Something I found fascinating and rather touching was the fact that everyone would make their speech in English just because there were two of us expats present.

Several of the older engineers working for the airline had served in the old Soviet air force as young men, and we used to compare notes about those days of the so-called '*Cold War*', when we in the RAF were preparing '*V*' bombers carrying nuclear weapons standing by on QRA ready to take off and bomb Russia, whilst they were doing exactly the same sort of thing on the other side of the '*Iron Curtain*', ready to bomb us! Thank goodness that peace prevailed because they were just regular guys like us, fun loving and enjoying life. Our real enemies were the politicians on both sides!

Winters were very severe in Central Asia. Temperatures could plummet to minus 25C in Almaty and even colder in the capital Astana and the northern cities. I arrived in Almaty just in time to experience my first winter for 15 years and it didn't disappoint me. The first snow fell about a week after I arrived and

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it remained on the ground for the next four months¹⁷. Pavements were covered with a solid layer of ice about two inches thick and were treacherous to walk on. The city authorities did keep the roads clear of snow though – small armies of workers would be out with snow ploughs and shovels to make sure that the traffic would keep moving.

Summers in the region were hot and dry, though Almaty had a constant supply of water from the snow covered Altai mountain range that ran the length of the country from the Caspian Sea to the Chinese frontier, and which dominated the scenery of Almaty. Water flowed continually down small water courses that ran along the sides of the streets, and there were numerous fountains playing in the city parks during the hottest months from May to September. Almaty is a beautiful city during those months.

The first IOSA audit in September 2007 lasted for a week and looked at every feature of the airline from flight crew through to security. Thanks to our extensive preparation over the previous months we managed to pass the audit with only a few findings that were fairly straight forward to rectify. A satisfactory result from the audit was necessary to allow continued membership of IATA, therefore the result was greeted with great satisfaction by the airline board. Shortly afterwards I was promoted to the post of Director of Quality Assurance reporting directly to the President.



Visiting Astana in 2008

The only down side of the job in Kazakhstan was the short vacation time – five weeks holiday per year was the company allowance, and for someone who had been used to having nine weeks per year in Brunei it began to feel restrictive. By the middle of 2008, my family and I decided that it was time for me to return to the UK and retire, in order to be able to spend much more time

¹⁷ Very similar to the winter of 1962/63 at Halton then, but a touch colder? - Editor

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with our children and grandchildren. When our home was burgled later that year it made the decision even easier.

The Company President was very understanding, though he tried his best to get me to change my mind about leaving the company. Eventually, during my final week, he came up with the idea of giving me a contract to provide quality assurance support for the airline on an 'as required' basis following my return to the UK. I accepted his kind offer and carried out a number of audits over the next eighteen months, as well as doing some preparatory work towards achieving compliance with the forthcoming Carbon Emission Rules for airlines operating to airports within the EU.

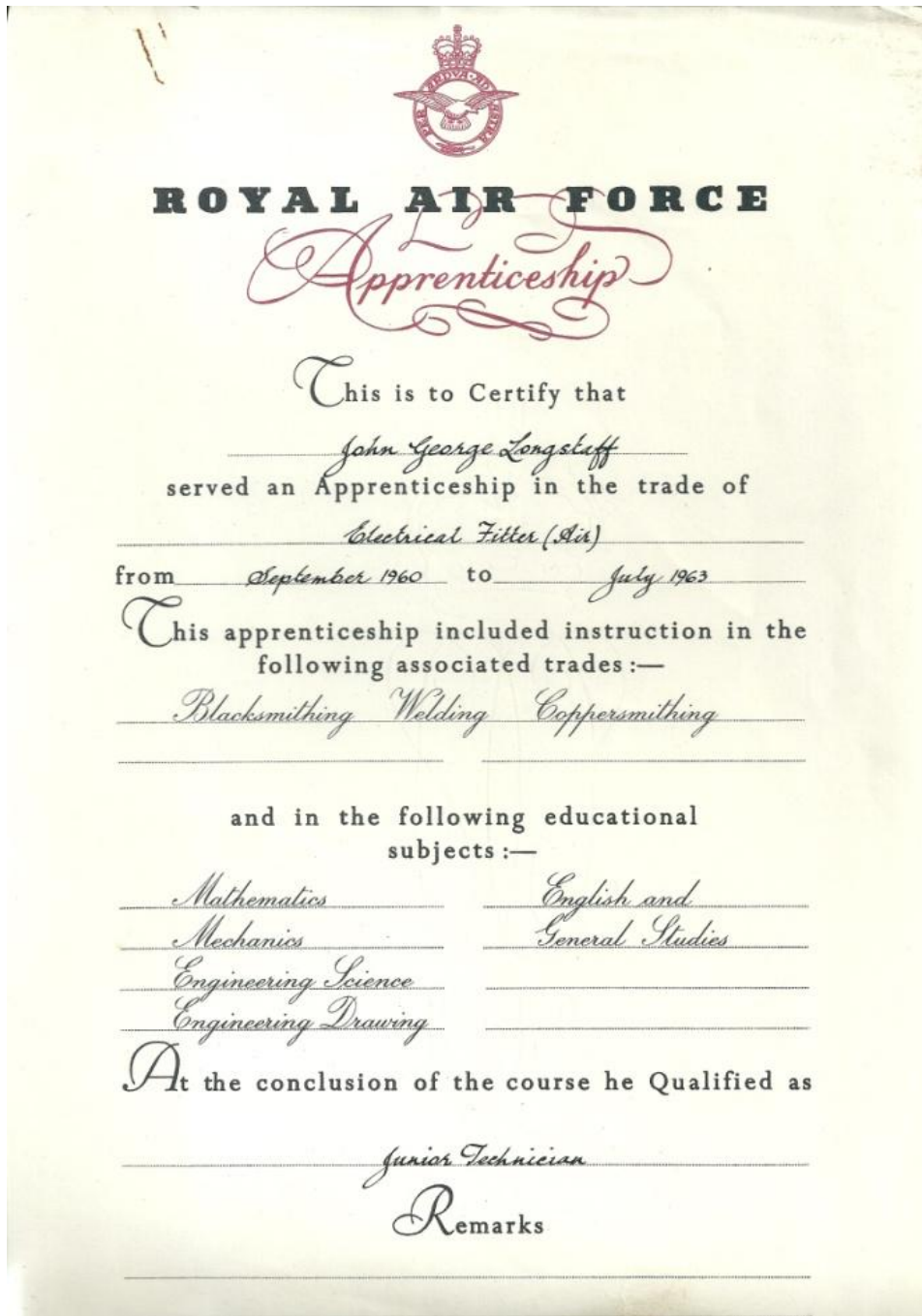
I finally retired completely at the end of March 2010, having achieved an unbroken career within aviation spanning a total of almost fifty years since leaving school at sixteen to join the Royal Air Force as a 96th Entry Halton Apprentice.

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And Then...

John Longstaff

I had my certificate (see below) and then the great day came. I could not wait to get home to sew that one stripe on my uniform and then to get ready to go to my first posting at RAF Colerne. I agreed to pick up Kevin Ledlie for the journey and when we arrived in Wiltshire we promptly lost our way and had to ask for directions. That was difficult as our pronunciation was all wrong. I commenced work in ASF on Hastings Mk1 and Mk2 aircraft.



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One of my first memories was a call to go and see the SWO who explained that he needed a bearer party for a funeral. I think it was because he knew that we all had a new best blue on Graduation. Much mundane work in ASF working Monday to Friday, but the highlight of each week was when we met other Electrical and Instrument friends who had been posted to Lyneham and Hullavington. Played darts for teams in pubs in Bath and was a part time employee in the projection room at the Astra Cinema. I have found a picture which I think is from Christmas 1963 at RAF Colerne.¹⁸

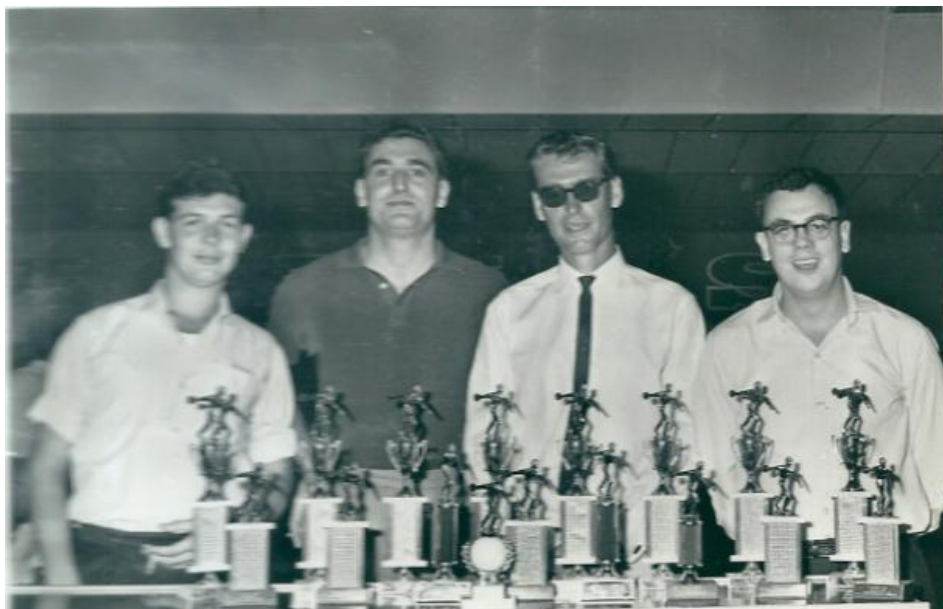


In July of 1964 I was moved to work on 36 Squadron, same aircraft but now you felt you were actually in the RAF. I spent my 21st birthday on a Caribbean trainer, which was my first ever flight in a Hastings aircraft. I also went to Norway, Germany, Malta, Cyprus, Libya and Ballykelly. Quite strange but I cannot remember meeting many ex Brats from our Entry. In 1965 I was part of the team that went to meet the Queen at Thorney Island when we celebrated the 21st Anniversary of Transport Command.

The call then came for me to go to Singapore and in June of 1965 I found myself at RAF Tengah. For the next 16 months I worked in the Electrical Bay. Not really a place for a single man but it did give me plenty of time to enjoy the Darts Club and play Tenpin Bowling at the Orchard Bowl, just off Orchard Road in the City.

¹⁸ The chap on the furthest right of the centre row is John Lewis who was killed in the Red Arrows mid-air collision in 1970 - Editor

And Then...



I enjoyed a holiday at Sandycroft leave centre in Penang and was there at the same time as Sandy Potter who was actually on 64 Squadron.



Another call then came for me to be loaned to 60 Squadron and work on Javelin FAW Mk 9. Disturbing to think that these were only a little newer than Hastings; where were the modern aircraft? However, a chat with the Squadron Warrant Officer when I had just been promoted to Corporal turned this loan

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into a permanent move. I think he needed some single people as the married ones did not like to go on detachments. I had two weeks at RAAF Butterworth and then it was off to Hong Kong via Labuan and the Philippines.



We met many Americans who were on R and R from Vietnam and enjoyed trips to the San Miguel Brewery and the New Territories. We did actually do some work as you can see.



Home again in December 1967 and off to RAF Lyneham in January 1968. The first appointment was to see the SWO and not having much uniform to fit me he was not impressed. However Centralised Serving had arrived and so I went to work on Britannia and Comet aircraft which were only slightly more modern than my previous aircraft.

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Shift work suited me and I did see, and work, with many ex-Brats. Two things then happened; first I tried to sign on but I soon found out the word 'quota' and it meant for 1983 there was no chance. Next, in 1969, I applied for Air Engineer and went to Biggin Hill. I achieved all the tasks there and was offered training as an AEOp. Then, before I could accept, my Flight Commander, who was of course an Engineering Officer, got involved and delayed thing until it was too late. Also in 1969 I met my wife to be Joan and we were married in 1970 just before the Britannias were moved to Brize Norton.



So 1970 at Brize Norton saw me promoted to Sergeant but it was still shift work on the same old Britannia. I had the opportunity to spend more time in the Far East, moving between Singapore, Hong Kong, Darwin and Fiji as the Britannia was often out off route as they say. The first time I did this we actually came back west-about so I completed a trip around the world. I also had another six weeks in Hong Kong in 1973 and got the opportunity to go to Kathmandu.

Then the trade structure changed and EFittA disappeared to be replaced by AFittE when the Electrical and General Instruments became as one. I did not have the years left to enable me to do the conversion course so I signed on for another three years in the hope that after completion I would get to sign on. However by the time I was offered the course I realised that there was no chance of staying so in 1974 purchased my discharge and left with nothing.

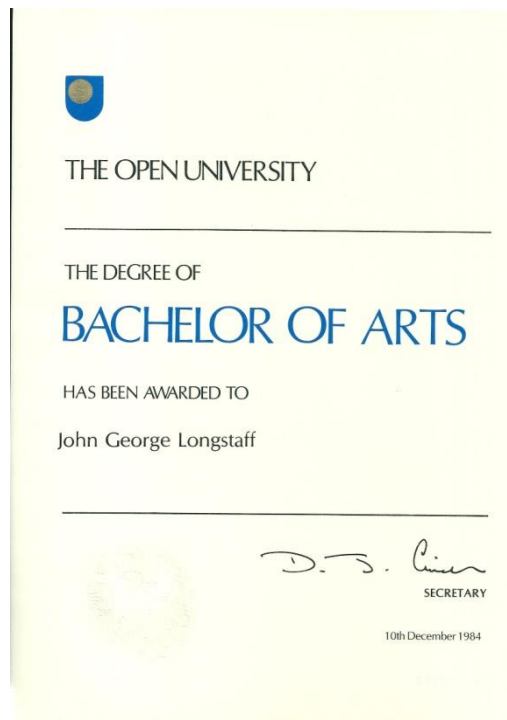
I then moved north – Joan was from Cockermouth in the Lake District – and I commenced work at British Aircraft Corporation as it was then called. Working in industry was all new to me as my only other experience was some part time work for Dan Air at Lasham Airfield when I was at Lyneham. I was doing all types of work from electrical installations and systems testing on the

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Tornado but it was not long before I moved to Project Management, but still working on the Tornado. This time we were commencing the production phase. I was asked to take on Change Management and soon found myself making regular visits to Munich and Turin to discuss implementation plans.

A few years went by and after another promotion I found myself in charge of the production planning of all Tornado modifications. Time came calling and it was time to get involved with Eurofighter, later to be known as Typhoon. Another change then, and another promotion, saw me at the Samlesbury site and controlling the manufacture of the rear fuselage for the T45. This was a derivative of the Hawk aircraft which was to be the training aircraft for the US Marines. After a while I was called back to Warton to set up the Final Assembly line for the Hawk 100 and 200 series which were mainly for export. With this came a company car and several other perks which included a visit to Korea.

During my time at BAe I studied for a degree with the Open University which culminated in 1985.



In 1983 I became involved with local politics and was elected as a Councillor to Fylde Borough Council. I held several senior positions and in 2003 it was my time to be the Mayor of the Borough. I was lucky enough to meet Princess Anne and Prince Edward when they made visits to the area. There were also visits to Catterick Barracks and Werne in Germany which is our twin town.

And Then...



Returning to BAe and in 1990 my doctor decided I should visit our local hospital in Blackpool because of my ongoing indigestion problems. It only took them four days to find out that I had some heart problems and a total of four weeks in hospital while I had by-pass surgery. It appears I may have had angina for 23 years, as all my pains disappeared following the surgery. I was then forced to take a five month break from work and at the end a three week family holiday in Florida over Xmas and New Year.

The return to work was a shock as the works doctor told me I could only return on a part time basis which was not good for the travelling I used to do. I soon found out that I could drive to Brough and stay overnight and this was not a problem to the doctor. All the talk was then of cutting down the workforce and some of us guessed what was to come. Seventeen years of employment, heart surgery and at the age of 48, I was suddenly out of work. Our son, Chris, was just about to start at University and daughter, Gill, had just completed her GCSE exams. I was still paid for the next three months and I had the company car for a little longer as they could not be bothered to come and get it.

I did not rush things so it was April in 1992 when I went to work for HM Customs and Excise. It was more like being in the military and I felt I had found something good, although VAT officers were not well thought of. I started my training and at the age of 48 I was learning double entry bookkeeping. The only downside was that I was working in Uxbridge and Watford and I did not know how long I may be there. As it happened it only lasted two years and I found myself in Preston and Lytham St Annes.

In 1995 changes were being made and I was not ready to start driving 30 miles to the new office each day so I accepted a job with the DSS working for the Child Support Agency. A lot to learn, as we were dealing with all the appeals against the assessments that had been made. During all this time my wife, Joan, had been a District Nursing Sister and we were honoured to attend

And Then...

a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in 1999 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the NHS. We went again in 2003 when I was the Mayor.



*The Lord Chamberlain is
commanded by Her Majesty to invite*

Councillor and Mrs. J. G. Longstaff
to a Garden Party
at Buckingham Palace
on Tuesday, 15th July 2003 from 4 to 6 pm

The year 2000 my heart problems came back to haunt me and after a year away from work I was medically retired. My pension was made up to age 65 so I did not do too badly out of it. I still had my Council work to keep me busy and Joan did not retire until 2002. I was also drawing a pension from BAe so I was not destitute. Strange things happen when you are not working; it gives you plenty of time to do other thing. I 2005 I was made President of the Rotary Club of St Annes on the Sea and in 2006 I was Captain of St Annes Old Links Golf Club.



And Then...



Since 1990 holidays have been a big part of our lives and we are lucky to have seen most of the world. Our Silver Wedding Anniversary was celebrated with a cruise and from then on we were hooked, and had at least one cruise each year. We have never really been loyal to one cruise line as we enjoyed going to some exciting destinations at the time of year we wanted to go.



And Then...

Things changed in 2011. Joan and I went to Rome for a few days and the day before we came home Joan felt unwell.



We decided that we should get home the next day rather than be stuck in Italy. It was two months later that Joan was diagnosed with Uterine Cancer, which is incurable. It took a year to get referred to *The Christie Hospital* in Manchester and she has now had several treatments of Chemotherapy as a palliative care, but no one can tell us how long she has.

It has been over two years now and she is still here but her condition is such that she will not be able to make the reunion in September 2013. Life changes so fast and of course we are at an age when these things are more likely to occur.

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We are really grateful that we have come as far as we have, with two children and four grandchildren to see whenever we want to.



There are many other tales too numerous to write about but hopefully we will explore more at our next Reunion in September by which time I will be 70.

Happy reading to all

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And Then...

Alistair Mackie – Brief Service Biography.

On leaving Halton in 1963, served as a J/T at 3FTS, Leeming. (Remember the inverted lance corporal stripe in those days!). Was also a member of the Leeming Mountain Rescue Team. Two most notable rescues:

- 1) Searching for 2 Scouts who succumbed in severe snow and ice near Snake Pass in the Derbyshire Peak District. One scout turned out to be the brother of one of our own 96th – Tony Withers?
- 2) Spending about 10 days in the Scottish mountains in the biggest land search seen in the UK, looking for a USAF Voodoo aircraft that had disappeared in the vicinity of Fort William, whose main car park was cleared to become the home for at least 3 helicopters. That was the only time I attended a ‘Pay Parade’ in a hotel! (I remember the first one at Halton: “Mackie.” “Sir, 681.” “Shillings, Ten”!

In Feb 65, started training as an Air Signaller, on Varsity aircraft, just down the road at Topcliffe, gained my ‘Siggy’ brevet on 4 Feb 66 and got married the day after. (Well, someone had to sew on the new brevet!). Posted to Transport Command and flew Hastings aircraft on the OCU at Thorney Island and both 24 & 36 Sqns at Colerne). Sadly the C130 Herc which didn’t carry ‘Siggies’; entered service too soon for me; so was posted to Coastal Command in ’67.

Off to the MOTU at St Mawgan for yet more training and flying on MkT4 Shacks, then to 210 & 204 Sqns at Ballykelly on Mk2 Shacks. In ’69 converted to AEOp (a change of brevet and a pay increase of 2/9d a day!). Highlights, apart from the great social life on both sides of the Irish border, were the long trips locating and photographing ‘Ivan the Ruskie’s’ ever increasing fleet of submarines and warships. Flying around them at about 200 ft, it was a bit unnerving to see their guns and missiles following us! Still, we got to see a lot of Bodo in Norway and of course the northern Atlantic, Norwegian and Arctic seas (should have joined the Navy, but did later, – spend a week on HMS Ark Royal in the Med).

Much better were the 10 week detachments to Sharjah (doing much the same as the present day ops in the Persian Gulf) and the 14 week stints in Majunga, Madagascar flying the Beira Patrol oil embargo against Rhodesia when PM Harold Wilson threw his teddy out of the cot with PM Ian Smith’s declaration of UDI. Anybody remember Madame’s bar/nightclub?

When Ballykelly closed in Apr 71, the Shacks moved to Honington for a few months with 204 before converting to Nimrod MR1 at 236 OCU, St Mawgan. (It was akin to swapping an old banger for a Rolls Royce!).

On to 203 Sqn Malta for the period ‘71-’74 but operating out of ‘RAF’ Sigonella, Sicily during “*the Malta Withdrawal*” in ’72. In Jul 74, located, tracked & photographed the Turkish ‘invasion of Cyprus’ fleet (whilst avoiding their F5 fighters!). Over the following couple of weeks, reconnaissance patrols got a trifle challenging, trying to sort out who was who, especially as we had to home inside their gun and missile engagement zones to get a positive ident in the hazy visibility. There were warships from the Royal Navy, Soviet Navy, US Navy’s Sixth Fleet and of course the Greek and Turkish Navies – whose ships

And Then...

and submarines were ex-US Navy! Big problem! Light relief was provided by the occasional trip to Masirah Island, returning with the APU bay full of well frozen crayfish; and best of all, on 21 May 1973, a trip to the idyllic Seychelles not long after they got their first runway.

Moved to Kinloss & 120 Sqn in late '74. In Oct 76, was on the first Nimrod to fly to the North Pole when looking for a 'missing' British nuclear submarine. This made a change to searching for Soviet ones as the Cold War was really hotting up!). Then on to a ground tour in the Maritime Acoustic Analysis Unit, '77-'80 before going back to 236 OCU for refresher flying.

On completion, swapped my posting to 120 for 206 Sqn, so that I could convert ASAP to the Nimrod MR2. Wrong! Survived the fatal crash of XV256 on 17 Nov 80¹⁹! During the next 2 yrs convalescence, moved to the Nimrod Software Team, becoming a software engineer, then the Quality Assurance Manager (don't get many friends in that job) until '92. Joined 236 OCU/Nimrod OCU/42(R) Sqn (yes all those name changes) as the Training Coordinator, when it re-located from St Mawgan to Kinloss. It was a busy time setting up shop, trying to squeeze the proverbial 2 pints (the contents of the modern, custom built, St Mawgan OCU building into the 1 pint pot, motley collection of old WWII huts behind the Sgt's Mess.

Shortly before retiring (the first time) on compulsory redundancy in Oct 94, had an all expenses paid trip to Buck House (somewhere in London) to pick up a gong from HM (!)²⁰. But, glutton for punishment, in Nov 94 the uniform was back on and, as a member of No 2 Maritime Headquarters Unit, (subsequently renamed 603 Sqn) RAuxAF, carried on in Combat Ops at Kinloss, briefing Nimrod crews and crews from Canada, USA, Norway, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Australia and Kiwi Land. This was mainly part-time, becoming more frequently full-time, including 11 months for the first Iraqi war in '03. There are not too many called back to full time active duty in their 60th year! In Nov 2004, after 44 years, all good things (sic!) had to come to an end. The hat was finally hung up and, exit stage left, C0686681 Master Aircrew (Warrant Officer) Alistair Mackie. Here endeth the lesson.

Some Halton Memories

A conversation during the first couple of days when we all met and introduced ourselves for the first time:

"And where do you come from"?

"Uddersfield."

"Eh"?

"Uddersfield!"

"Oh! Where's that"?

¹⁹ Both pilots were killed and the 18 other crew members were injured after a multi-bird strike - Editor

²⁰ The gong was, in fact, the MBE - Editor

And Then...

“Where they make guns fert naivvy, eee, where they make wheeeels fert guns fert naivvy”!

Two of us, the other (I’m pretty certain) was either Alan Howarth or one of my Welsh ‘cousins’ Dai (Dave) Murray or Stan John, marching (as we did) down towards 3 Wing Guardroom, when we espied the approaching blue coloured Austin Westminster.

“Watch out, here’s the Flight Commander,” (Flt Lt Taylor? – a dapper wee man).

Our smart salutes were returned by a big grin from the bushy black-haired camp barber as he swept up past us in his *same make and colour* car! Rats!

Remember the winter’s day, denims on, find a tray, piece of plywood, sheet of plastic etc and trek through the woods up the Chiltern Hills to spend a grand few hours sledging?²¹ Ah, the joy of it, and the DIs were really quite human after all!

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²¹ Remember it well – the bruises took weeks to clear - Editor

And Then...

620 Maggs, Ivor. C Flight. Airframes Post Halton

I look back at my time at Halton with great affection, so different to my actual feelings at the time. So many missed opportunities, but 20/20 vision in hind sight is a wonderful thing to have.

My working life can be summed up in a few words, Vulcan bombers and bmi (British Midland Airways).

I left RAF Halton for my first posting to RAF St Athan (32MU) along with nearly half of C Flight. At least we had someone we knew whilst we found our feet in the real world. It was soon apparent that we had drawn the short straws, for this camp was like an extension of Halton – working parades, inspections each morning and being marched to work.

I worked in the component bays on *V bomber* flying control units. At the time it was Valiant and Vulcan aircraft that were being serviced. A good thing about the bays was that you could move around the various bays – i.e. hydraulic, pneumatic, undercarriage and air-conditioning. Three years working in these bays gave me a good grounding in the major components and systems of the Vulcan.

Life was still similar to the Halton days, living in 16 man rooms and ‘bull’ nights, but at least you could leave camp when not at work. I had my car, which gave me a certain amount of freedom, although not enough money to fuel it. It became like a taxi, I drive, and my passengers supply the fuel. We explored the Welsh valleys, Barry and Cardiff. It was during this period that I met my wife to be.

Out of the blue comes a posting to RAF Khormaksar, Aden, plenty of sun, sand and guard duties. Life out there was quite restricted due to the troubles, so finding things to do on camp to pass the time was critical. Work here was 1st line rectification on Beverley and Argosy aircraft. These were used to transport troops and equipment across southern Saudi Arabia. A lot of time was spent at work, and nearly as much time spent on 24hr and 12hr guards. Writing letters home every day and watching the VC10 come and go, dreamily counting the days to when it was my turn to go home.

Eighteen months later I am posted back to St Athan. This time I worked in the Vulcan strip down hangar, where all the components and equipment are removed and the aircraft skin panels are replaced. Unfortunately this renders it into a large inert block of metal without electrical power or character. Twelve months later I transfer to the rebuild hangar where the major components and systems are replaced and the aircraft comes ‘alive’.

I am now married and live in the seaside resort of Porthcawl.

Working life at St Athan has changed dramatically, very much like a civvy job, Monday to Friday 0800 to 1700hrs, maybe the odd Saturday or Sunday (Open Day and Remembrance Day) each year. No Tacevals or other exercises. Just the occasional Orderly Sgt. The next four years see me happily

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rebuilding and testing the many Vulcans as they passed through our hangar on their major servicing.

At last, a decent overseas posting. A three-year accompanied tour to RAF Akrotiri Cyprus.

This time the work is 2nd line hangar servicing checks on the beloved Vulcan. However, shortly after my arrival, a small team to fix any line aircraft with ongoing defects and cover 'heavy rectification' was required. My friend Bill Gamble and I were tasked with the job, both being SNCO's from St Athan's Major team. We chose our team and were given a separate hangar to use. The time passed quickly as there was no shortage of defects, repairs and investigations to carry out. The working hours were 0700 to 1300hrs so plenty of time for socialising and visiting the many beaches. As was common practice I bought a new tax-free car, we lived in a hiring that we rented in Limassol. Life was good – Kebabs and Kokkinelli.

Then the Turks invaded. Everything changed; all the men were confined to camp while the holiday makers and foreign nationals were evacuated. It was ironic that the fleet of vehicles kept solely for emergency use were not available because it was deemed unsafe to travel.

The families were told over BFBS to make their way to Akrotiri camp, as each of the 2 bedroom Quarters were allotted with up to six families. The men were banned from their own houses and everybody bedded down at work wherever they could. This lasted for almost two weeks when it was decided to return all the families to UK. Nobody had returned to their homes so all left the island with hand luggage. End of nice accompanied tour and back to living in the Sgt's Mess for the remainder of my tour. One good thing that came out of the Turkish invasion, I managed to get my new Opel Manta back to UK on a returning fleet auxiliary ship.

My tour ended four months later and once again I returned to St Athan into the same job that I'd had previously. Life carried on as before except that we now lived in a Quarter on Camp which meant no daily commute to work.

Twelve months later I am selected to become an ASC (Crew Chief), a job that people avoided like the plague. This was because during the early days of crew chiefting he stayed with 'his' aeroplane and signed it over only to the captain to fly, hence his home life was very limited.

After almost a year of training in Vulcan electrics, avionics, engines and armaments I was posted to Waddington, 101 Squadron. I realised that I would now be settled in this area for at least 5years so I went out and bought a bungalow at North Hykeham, three miles from Waddington. We could be a family again.

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Fortunately things had changed on the crew chiefting front – they were set apart from the normal ground crew and organised by their Crew Chief Leader. Whilst you still controlled your Vulcan, and anything that happened to it, when it was on the ground, you had another Crew Chief on the opposite shift, so the aircraft was your concern only when on shift.

I enjoyed my days of crew chiefting. They took me right across America, Canada, Germany, Italy to Hawaii and Singapore and many other places – just 5 aircrew one or two Crew Chiefs, and a pannier full of spares. When 101 Sqdn disbanded I moved to 50 Sqdn who converted their Vulcans to tankers. Then 50 Sqdn disbanded. Just the display flight remained, where we looked after the display aircraft and took it to air shows. Finally, time was up for both me and the Vulcans and we were being phased out. My 22year engagement ended on 1st October 1984, the last eight years as a Vulcan Crew Chief.

During March of my final year, I was part of the crew that delivered Vulcan XM655 to Wellesbourne. This aircraft was purchased with the intention of keeping it flying. I was approached by the new owner to look after the maintenance side of the venture. We had meetings with the CAA as to the requirements needed to be achieved to accomplish this venture, but it was a large undertaking. The months passed towards my demob date and nothing was being achieved. I had taken a licence course for CAA LWT. So I now had a civilian aircraft maintenance licence. In October I thought that I should seek other work.

I decided to phone East Midlands Airport (EMA) where I had been previously to check on their static Vulcan. Not knowing the names of any airlines operating out of EMA, I asked the operator to put me through to engineering. I was put through to British Midland Airways engine workshop. I explained that I was seeking work and was invited for an interview. Four days later I was starting work in the engine workshop. The position was for an engine supervisor.

The engines were Rolls Royce Darts, and Pratt & Whitney JT9 and PT6's none of which I'd ever seen before. I had a steep learning curve to achieve because I had to gain approvals on all these engines before I could sign them off. The guys that were building these engines had been doing this job for twenty years so they taught me.

The person who took my initial phone call was the Workshop Superintendent Ged Bowker. He taught me the ways of a civilian airline, introduced me to each of the heads of departments that interfaced with the workshop and generally guided me until I found my feet. Within five months I had all the approvals that was needed and was established as the workshop supervisor.

I had decided to give the job a year before I move down from North Hykeham, so I had bought a new car to commute each day. This made for a twelve hour day and a hundred mile round trip. The company was quite small at that time and had a family feel about it.

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The main task of the workshop was to build the bare engines into QEC's (quick engine change units) this enabled the line guys to carry out a quick engine change when necessary. Aircraft on ground cost big money, so it was imperative that there was always a built up spare engine. The problem was that QEC kits cost hundreds of thousands of pounds so a small company could not afford QEC's of all variants (LH, RH, fire systems etc.). The answer was to build the QEC to the maximum common state then finish it off when required. This called for a quick reaction team on call around the clock. We moved after a year to within a mile of the airport to Castle Donington.

The company size grew together with the bigger aircraft types and the all jet image and the family feel gave way to the corporate image as British Midland became bmi. Things in the workshop were as busy as ever.

We decided a change was needed after four years, to do something that didn't involve aeroplanes. The idea of a nice little shop where we could work alongside each other each day. I gave in my notice and we moved to Cardiff where I bought a medium size convenience store. Armed with no experience but plenty of enthusiasm, we set up shop. This was our first contact with 'the public', some of whom were really nice, others not so.

Our working day extended, mine to about 16hrs a day my wife's to 15.75hrs. The time just flashed by, never enough hours in the day. We had the shop for nearly two years, learnt a lot about the retail business and put to bed the idea of 'What if'. We sold up and I returned to bmi engine workshop. The same place and same faces same pressures, but it seemed a breeze after the shop.

Things were changing in the airline business, some due to the low-cost airline and rising costs; everything had to be more efficient which meant doing more with less. My mentor retired and I took his place to run the workshop, except that with the new efficiencies I also ran the airframe detail shop, wheel bay, NDT, oven and boilershop and hydraulic bay. I had come full circle from airframe fitter to multi trade to engine supervisor to airframe and engine Controller.

Working life 15yrs to 66yrs. 24years in the RAF and 24years with British Midland Airways.

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David Mawdsley

I felt that I should make an effort to support this great initiative but I'm still very much pursuing my passion for aviation safety and seemingly getting busier by the day as I fast approach my 70th birthday (25 Sep). My family would like me to write a book because they at least think I've had an interesting time both in the RAF (33 years), then subsequently as Head of Corporate Safety at Cathay Pacific Airways in Hong Kong, and finally as Director Safety with IATA, Montreal. I guess what the family is really saying is – I've put them all through a fair amount of turbulence!

I daren't give you a blow by blow account of it all but I ended up as a Wing Commander of 10 years seniority having served as OC Eng Wing at Wattisham, then with the US Naval Air Systems Command in Washington DC; next the Falklands and finally as Engineering Inspector of Flight Safety for the RAF. I was lucky enough to experience 3 tours as a SEngO on Harriers, Phantoms and Jaguars and never lost an aircraft on my wing or squadron.

My career in the RAF stalled somewhat because I wasn't a Chartered Engineer alongside the many Wing Commanders in the Branch who were so endowed. It was not until my time with Cathay Pacific that, as a sort of sideline, I was able to qualify as a CEng through the Mature Candidate Route with a paper on an A330 severe turbulence encounter over Borneo which I investigated, and I am now, rather proudly, a member of the International Society of Air Safety Investigators and a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society.

As a consultant of 6 years experience I have also had quite an adventure ranging from teaching at Cranfield University; advising the Russian Civil Aviation Authority on Safety Management; and running safety workshops for the World Food Programme, which faces particularly challenging moments on the aviation safety front pretty much every day – rather like the RAF! I'm currently signed up with a safety risk management software company owned by Rolls-Royce and I serve on the '*Flight Safety Foundation International Advisory Committee*'.

To help the other Brats connect with this old boy I have included a photograph of myself in the Phantom era. Or perhaps more appropriate is the one of me lifting a wrought iron key as a Corporal on my 21st birthday, which a group of the 96th Entry shared with me at my father's pub called '*The Greyhound*' at Wivenhoe in Essex. It will be good to share my 70th with the 96th when we meet again at the forthcoming Reunion – I'll probably bring the key to see how many can still lift it!

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David holds the key to future success

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Tony Meston

After Halton I first went to St Athan. I suppose there are worse places to be posted, but I have yet to find them. They did Majors on Vulcans, Valiants and subsequently Beverleys. I remember one guy accidentally set off a life raft in the back of the cockpit of a Valiant and he tried to sit on it to stop it inflating. I understand he kind of got a bit squashed.

From there I was posted onto 30 Sqdn in Bahrain, which was infinitely preferable. Did a trip down to Nairobi via Aden and a few other beach resorts which were very enjoyable. I did pick up the nick name of '*Mucky*' during my time on 30. It had something to do with changing an oil cooler. I was inside the nacelle and my friend was on the blue giraffe below to catch it. There was something like 25 gallons of oil which forever changed my name, but having said that I think it suits me. I can't look at an engine without getting mucky.



While I was at Bahrain an RAF Britannia landed and taxied in. It was on the ground for about an hour before taxiing out to continue its journey to the Far East. Except that it taxied back in again. One of the passengers had died of heat exhaustion onboard. He turned out to be one of the 96th's own, Armourer 686538 Aleck (Jack) Frost.²²

From there I went onto second line servicing on Brits at Lyneham. I was very happy there. Then the crunch came! I was selected for Blue Steel. I tried every which way to get off that. I volunteered for the following; the Mobile Team at Lyneham, the British Antarctic Expedition, the Battle of Britain film. The requirement on that one was you had to have worked on piston engines within, I think, three years which I had on Bevs.

²² This happened on 9 August 1965 and 'Jack' was buried in the New Christian Cemetery, Manama
— Editor

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Just before I went onto the Blue Steel course at Wittering one guy had got off because he had done an interview with someone and an article was published in the Daily Mirror naming the hangar there as the hangar of death. Needless to say none of it worked for me. I checked to see if I had any KGB relatives, couldn't find any, so I was posted to Scampton.

The only highlight I can remember with pleasure was one night on QRA when the crew of this one Vulcan decided to do a rapid start on all four engines with four wet starts. You could have been forgiven for thinking the sun had risen. I think awesome would be an appropriate description.

I managed to get off Blue Steel, I suppose after about 2 years, and went onto Lightnings at Leconfield. I really enjoyed Lightnings. I was there for 4 years on Majors on Mk6's so I got to know them intimately which helped me tremendously when I went to Saudi. During the early part of my stay at Leconfield a Strike Master landed and my Boss, Tony Craig [don't be vague ask for Craig], said, "If I can get hold of it would you like to go flying." So I said, "No man." Anyway, he persuaded me and we did a high level up to Scotland and a low level back. By that time I was hooked. It beat the hell out of a Chipmunk upside down over Aylesbury, which was the limit of my air experience at Halton.

I set out to do a private pilot's licence at Hull. To take out a professional pilots licence is hugely expensive. When I left the RAF I went to fix the Saudi Air Force Lightnings at about six times my normal salary. I went to Warton to do an engine course, then they decided I needed an airframe course, so they sent me to Saudi as a crew chief. When I got there they put me on the nose dock which p****d off Nutty Jim who was in charge of the line. This went on for a year until I was made a section leader engines. I did 5 years there.

I tried to balance my life with the fact that I wanted to fly professionally. I needed to have enough funds to carry me through, but still be young enough to get a job as a pilot. So I resigned when I was 35. Then the balancing act started. I needed, I think 800 flying hours, to do the short course at Oxford. I had owned a Cherokee for about four years and had built up about four or five hundred hours. To get the rest I did a flying instructors course at Compton Abbas, then I got a job as a flying instructor at "Biggles"²³ Hill South London. I worked the summer of 1979 and built up the required hours.

We have a bungalow at Bembridge on the IOW and our next door neighbour's son had a pub over at Cowes. I was coming back from there one day in my Lotus Elan when I heard over the radio that they were building a car to take the World Land speed record. I wasn't really interested. Then they said it had a Lightning engine. I felt the familiar kick of reheat going in. I stopped at a pub in Ryde and asked where it was being built. They said, Fishbourne.

²³ Aka Biggin Hill, a famous Battle of Britain fighter base, later the Aircrew Selection Centre - Editor.

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I went there, found the office and said I know everything about Lightning engines.

He said, "Thank goodness. None of us knows anything about them."

I was taken on as responsible for the engine and propulsive systems. While this was going on I left Biggles Hill and went to Oxford. I eventually got the licence but in 1980 there were no jobs. I had an interview with Dan Air and one with Liat, the Caribbean Airline. Liat said, "Come join us man, the livin' is easy." That was 30 years ago. I was flying Dash 8s for them from Georgetown in Guyana up to Santo Domingo in Hispaniola and all the islands in between.

My licence was taken off me when I was 65, which is standard worldwide, and when I worked out my flying hours it came to 2 years, 3 months, 2 weeks and change. Saying that, I still find it difficult to realise I have been in the air as a pilot for all that time. That sounds much better than saying 20,000 hours which isn't bad when you consider I didn't start flying for a job till I was 37.

Then Project Thrust took the World Land speed record at 633 mph on the Black Rock desert in Nevada. We would still have it but Andy Green has to go and break the Sound barrier. They are currently working on a car to crack 1000 mph and if I gave it much thought I would have said we were nuts.

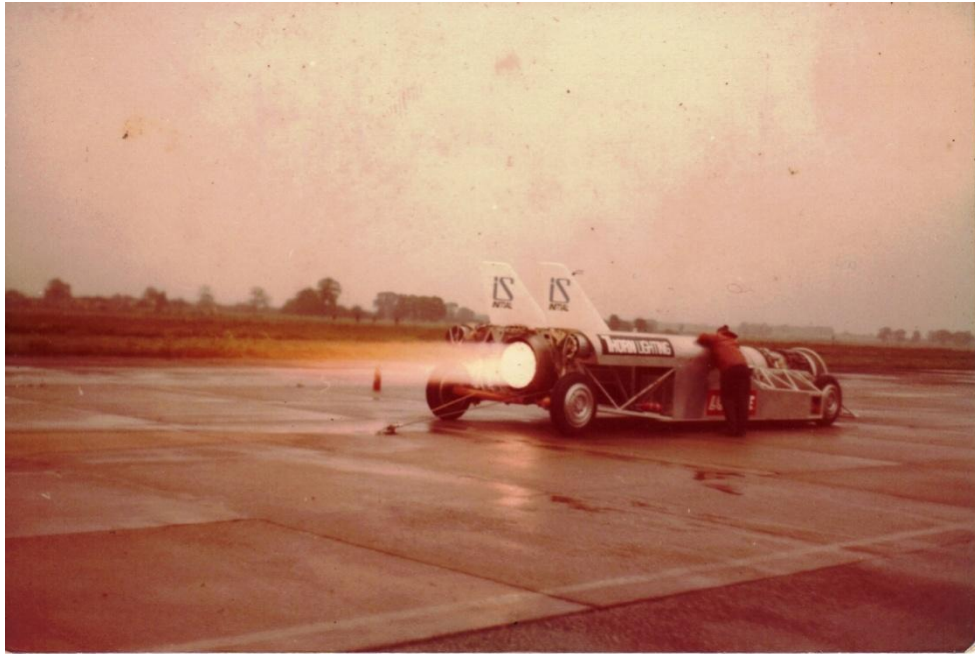


Waiting for the wind to drop

This is on the Bonneville Salt Flats at the start of one of our runs. We are waiting for the wind to drop to below 3 knots, a necessary requirement. I am on the right, with Jen. The pipe on the right is connecting Thrust to a Palouste.²⁴ We have removed the IPN²⁵ starter and replaced it with an air starter from a Sea Vixen — much more user-friendly than IPN.

²⁴ A gas turbine engine designed and developed by the French company, Turbomeca, and built under licence by Blackburn and Rolls Royce. It was used as a starter for the main engines in jet aircraft.

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Setting up the reheat on Thrust

This was the same spot at Leconfield where I had previously checked out Lightnings. That was when Leconfield was an RAF station. At the time this photograph was taken, it was an Army driver training depot.

²⁵ Isopropyl Nitrate – a highly volatile fuel that, once ignited, could burn without oxygen.

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Mort's Mobile

This was loaned, free of charge, to any bona fide World Land Speed record team at Bonneville. It makes the old NAAFI wagon look quite ordinary. The only rules were that you were not allowed to check the oil or water. I have to say that it did catch fire a couple of times, but it was fun!

A few random thoughts

As I allowed my brain free rein to range across the 50 year old memories, I gathered a few random thoughts which I felt I would like to share with my friends.

To my knowledge I have never met any of the *Beatles*. It is difficult in this part of the world to be certain because the 'celebs' generally disguise themselves to avoid the publicity. I think that their strong Liverpoolian accents would have given them away. I must confess to liking a lot of their music – obviously I am a kid of the sixties. Their manager, Brian Epstein, started a recording studio over in Montserrat and a lot of singers and groups came to Antigua from where we flew them to Montserrat to record their hits. I am ashamed to say that I have forgotten most of them!

There was one who I will never forget – Elton John. At the time we were flying Twin Otters with single crew but because of Elton John's insurance we had to provide two pilots. So a friend of mine, Mike (blond hair, blue eyes), who has been flying for KLM for some 30 years came with me. Well, Elton decided that he was going to take the staff from Air Studios to Nevis for Christmas Dinner, with the proviso that Mike was one of the pilots!

Anyway, one day I was operating the Montserrat flights and some clown came out to me and said that he wanted me to take a package to Antigua for onward transportation to London via BA. He finished off by saying that the

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package was worth more than me and the aircraft put together! It was the master copy of '*Nikita*' from Elton. I have never been a particular fan of his but I really like that song, and not just because of my part in its genesis. After all, another of my favourites is '*Snowbird*' by Anne Murray and I've never met her.

One day, getting on for midnight, I did a charter from Antigua to Montserrat to take Elton and a girl (a technician from Air Studios) back to Antigua for a flight back to London. It was an awful night. We were thrown all over the sky in thunder and lightning. Unfortunately for Elton it wasn't Mike flying with me, but Francis from Trinidad (no blue eyes). Shortly after that we found out that Elton had married the girl²⁶. I often wondered that because we got chucked all over the sky that night en route to Antigua, whether he considered his own mortality and that was the reason for the marriage. Just a thought, but I know that the marriage didn't last long!

We used to do flights from Antigua to Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, Barbados, then Mustique, Union Island, Carriacou and finally, Grenada. Well, we used to call up George in Mustique before we got there to find out if he had any passengers for us. On this particular day we were asked to land and the problem turned out to be George and Mick Jagger arguing over how many flights we were making from Mustique to Barbados each day. You see, George was employed by Air Mustique and he tried to put all of our passengers with them. I straightened Mick out!

I have a photograph in my possession of our Lotus Elan parked next to Colin Chapman's Cessna. It was published in the *Club Lotus News* over 33 years ago. At the time I was taking my pilots licence at Oxford and I saw the plane on the ramp. I borrowed a bucket of water from the Fire Station, washed the Elan and parked it next to the plane. I took several pictures of it. I learned more recently that the plane had crashed, although I only know this from third hand sources. It seems that the pilot decided he wanted to loop the plane – perhaps nobody told *Biggles* that you shouldn't try that on a plane like that!

²⁶ Presumably Renate Blauel, a recording engineer – they married in 1984 and divorced in 1988 - Editor

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Anyway, the plane was painted in JPS colours, black and gold, the same as our Elan which has a badge on the starboard side saying 'specially built to celebrate the 50th Grand Prix win for Lotus'. Incidentally, the registration mark of the plane was G-PRIX – Good eh? Colin Chapman was a genius, although perhaps not at picking pilots.

We used to have a Cherokee and we went all over the place. On one occasion we went to the Scilly Isles. That evening we were having a spot of dinner at a restaurant on a pier. I was just knocking off my first pint when I started looking around a bit, you know, when you get the sort of feeling that you are being looked at? I then noticed a table full of hairy heavies, and then I noticed that at the table next to ours sat Harold Wilson with his party.

I nudged Jen under the table and said, "Don't look now, but..."

The following day we went to the Airport to file a flight plan back to the mainland. We were invited in to the Terminal where they were having an occasion to open the new terminal, you know, lots of nibbles and things. It wasn't long before they kicked us out though. We had a blonde Labrador with us, 'Dozy Girl', and because of that they thought we were part of Harold Wilson's party. I'm surprised they took so long to figure it out because you didn't need to be a rocket scientist to see that we were not Harold Wilson material. In any case, we didn't know at the time what was going on – we just thought they were being friendly.

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We had a ski boat, naturally in JPS colours, and I had it In Runaway Bay. I was holding it waiting for Jen, who was fishing some foreign object from the eye of a kid when I got chatting to this guy who had decided to come out and hold the boat with me. We were chatting for maybe up to half an hour before Jen emerged and we set off.

When we were on our way she asked me if I knew who I had been talking to. I had no idea, so when she told me that it was John Alderton I was floored. I really liked him in '*My Wife Next Door*' and '*Please Sir!*' Turns out it was one of his kids that Jen was helping out. It is a bit like that here, but for me not to recognise someone whose programmes I enjoyed, and with whom I could talk to for hours, seems impossible.

Returning to the Mustique/Union Island theme. Normally, if we had someone of importance on board we were told about it. So we left Barbados on this occasion, I called up George in Mustique but he had no one for us, so we overflowed Mustique and landed at Union Island. This meant we were early so I shut down and walked our passengers across the runway to the front of the Anchorage Hotel where a sectioned off part of the sea had about 15 nurse sharks, etc.



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[Approach into Union Island](#)

So from a formal airport like Barbados to walking around a kind of pond with water sloshing over your feet, kind of blew people's minds. One chap was showing a lot of interest in our operation. We had just started allowing people on day tours to join our flights without being on a proper charter. This chap wanted to know how that was affecting us. I thought this was a bit odd, so I asked him what specifically was his interest. He told me that he was the new Prime Minister of Grenada! I had known the previous incumbent quite well, but he had died.

For the last 5 years we have had a luxury 3 bed villa in Antigua which we rent out for self catering holidays. We do the same with our bungalow in the IOW. This is my pension plan and hopefully we can spend a bit more time on our sail boat, '*Dozy Girl*'.

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A Tale of Two Careers by Tony Metcalfe

Upon leaving Halton I was posted to 214 Sqdn at Marham, and my feet had barely touched the ground when I found myself on SWO's work party and detailed to pick up paper on the CO's inspection route – when I was charged by some jumped up Snoop with walking on the grass. What an introduction to Service life. Fortunately the officer who heard the charge could hardly believe it either and dismissed it.

Also at Marham at that time was ex S/A/A Winch²⁷ of the 92nd (he of broken mug fame) whom many of my colleagues will doubtless recall, strangely he seemed almost human outside Halton. Sadly my time at Marham didn't last as the Valiants developed main spar cracks, and were scrapped.

By 1965 I was at Newton on a Firestreak & Red Top course along with Dave Maddock. Having tasted the delights of Nottingham, I spent the next 18 months at Coltishall – a really good posting where I formed a lifelong friendship with Don Smith (ex 89th). I also got married to a Norfolk lass called Diane. This last act triggered Records Office to arrange a posting to Aden as a singly, but to my knowledge there were no Firestreak or Red Top equipped aircraft in Aden. Imagine my surprise when my vociferous complaints were noted & the posting was changed to Tengah in Singapore as an mf.

Singapore was fantastic, and on the way out the VC10 stopped at Gan to be met by a very disconsolate Brian Boulby! During my off-duty time we explored up country Malaya in my old green Vauxhall Wyvern. I have two enduring memories of Singapore (apart from meeting Colin Woodland in the city).

The first was driving a Land Rover across the main runway at Tengah whilst an Indian auxiliary in the back held a live five foot King Cobra in a wire noose, hissing away a few feet behind my neck. The second concerned a detachment to the Asahan range in Malaya (being based at 3X site at Tengah everyone assumed I was a plumber). There I was in a quadrant tent plotting the cannon hits on target of 20 Sqdn Hunter FGA9s, when one pilot mistook the quadrant tent for the target – fortunately his gunnery skills were as bad as his eyesight!

All good things come to an end, and after Singapore I was posted to Wattisham – which definitely wasn't on my wish list. Still, I had the good luck to work with Chalky White at MSS. Dave Perry was also at Wattisham at this time. By the end of 1973 I had done my 12 years and fancied a change, but not before being promoted to Ch Tech – ain't this accelerated promotion wonderful? So there I was wandering around Wattisham collecting discharge signatures. My next port of call was, I think, the Families Officer, who very rudely told me to get out and come in again properly. Even after all these years I can't think why, and I only recall it because it seemed so petty and unnecessary. Maybe he'd had a bad night. Anyway, I did as he asked, but didn't bother to return – with the benefit of hindsight it's just a pity I didn't run

²⁷ Mac Winch who sadly died in February 2009 - Editor

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into the obnoxious little twerp later in life. My final signatory was the Careers Officer who advised me to look in **Yellows Pages!**

I joined Pasta Foods (part of RHM) later that year (thanks to the very generous employment early release scheme) as assistant factory manager. This was a new, capital intensive, fully automated factory in Yarmouth, producing 100 tons of dried pasta and snack pellets every day.

Within 2 years I took charge of the St Albans factory, which was much older and with a mixed Italian, Spanish, and West African workforce who suddenly couldn't speak English at crucial times. Worse, no one had bothered (or been sufficiently brave), to tell the incumbent Italian Factory Manager about me. It certainly wasn't easy and in the early days I had to endure death threats. In fact, I was driving home one night down the A1M when the windscreen shattered. As I instinctively threw myself sideways I remember thinking, Christ, he's firing at me from the overhead bridge.

However that, as they say, is another story, and anyway, these little local difficulties were soon overcome and within 18 months Yarmouth was in trouble and so back there I went – much to the kids' delight.

By '88, much as I liked the job, I was becoming increasingly disillusioned with the company, particularly as promotion seemed to be based on *'dead men's shoes'*, so I applied for a transfer. The year 1989 saw me taking over RHM's largest site as general manager of *'Mr. Kipling'* at Stoke-on-Trent (or more precisely Newcastle-under-Lyme). It was good getting some big operation experience, with a workforce in excess of 1000.

In '92 I went to British Arkady as Operations Director. This was an American owned food additive company in Manchester, with two factories and a soya mill. The office block overlooked the cricket ground, and the main factory was in spitting distance of United's ground. In '96, at the height of the negotiations with Unilever over acquisition, *Ataxia Cerebella* struck.

At that time the medical profession knew very little about the complaint and it took quite some time for a diagnosis. Even today they don't know how or why I was affected. All they can say is that it is not genetic. At first I carried on as normal, but I deteriorated fast until eventually all the cells in the cerebellum were destroyed, leaving me with no balance and confined to a wheelchair. Co-ordination is also poor, and speech is most peculiar. Fortunately the brain is unaffected (I think!).

Clearly there was no option but to retire, with an unplanned return to my beloved Norfolk – much to Diane's delight. I have been relatively stable for the past 15 years (fortunately none of the dire predictions of the medics have materialised) and, apart from a bout of colon cancer (which I managed to beat), I've been in good health. I look back at my time at Halton with affection. As the architect of the purple fountains in Trafalgar Square (despite some pretender claims) there is also a little pride.

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S0686621 AA Meyers, Post Halton Graduation

August 1963 – August 1964

Graduated as Junior Technician to RAF St Athan on the Vulcan Major servicing programme at 32 MU, working on the various skin panels team under Sgt Dad Unsworth

For a period in 1964, between the Mk1a and Mk2 programmes, the squadron was employed on Major servicing of Beverley transports from Abingdon and the Middle East Air Force. I was to meet up with them again on my next tour of duty.

On attaining my corporal stripes after twelve months, I was transferred to the fuel tank team in 75 hangar until April 1965. Most of that time was spent on the night shift which meant four long nights but good weekends, allowing time to get away with my fiancée! Having no car or indeed no driving licence at the time, I relied heavily on Malc Swaisland to get me to Earls Court, London many weekends when he headed for Kent. Return journeys were usually on the overnight milk train from Paddington where I would meet up with several others similarly occupied.

During these first few months in the workplace I was sent to Biggin Hill for OCTU selection but discovered I had an optical defect that might be rectified by surgery and also poor colour perception. The surgery was reasonably successful but I went through the selection medicals again before it was decided that my colour perception was NOT going to improve so I was not Officer material.

February '65 saw me on PWR and dreams of Cyprus, Gan, Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore floated in my head, or even better Germany, as I was due to get married in the summer. The friendly Maltese Sergeant in Admin delighted in telling me I was off to Khormaksar during April and that is where I arrived by BUA charter Britannia after 12¾ hours from Gatwick.

It was 7:15am April 8th and when the aircraft doors were opened the humidity, heat and smells were a totally new experience.

Posted in to Medium Range Transport I was rapidly reintroduced to the workhorse Beverley and the Argosy aircraft and settled in to Role Equipment Flight. This promised to be a boring line of work but in fact we were involved with all sorts of visiting aircraft, civilian and other Naval and Air Forces types. Over the Christmas period of 1965 we all worked flat out for a couple of weeks to convert passenger aircraft to freight or paratroop roles, just in case PM Harold Wilson decided we should invade Rhodesia for declaring unilateral independence. The occasional detachment up into the hills, with the squadron aircraft, also proved to be exciting.

Trips to Maalla and Steamer Point, and regular games of squash, broke the monotony of shift work and 12 or 24 hour guard duties. Nude sunbathing on the Barrack Block roof was good until the wives living in Maalla complained that it was distracting them from their domestic duties. It was at least three

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miles across the bay so they would need very good binoculars to have been distracted!

I came home on LUKfree leave summer '66 and got married before returning to Aden to complete my tour there.

April 1967 I returned to UK just as the Crater riots were taking hold. This time by VC10, journey time cut to 6¾ hours. Some improvement.

After a month's leave I found myself at RAF Oakington just outside Cambridge. My wife, Jacky, had a teaching post at Godmanchester and I was posted to Minor Servicing of the Varsity aircraft used for navigator training. For the year and a half I was there I worked with Sgt Jim Attewell on the undercarriage team under Flt Sgt Taff Jones. During this time I studied for my HNC at Cambridge College of Technology. I got my third stripe in August '68 and was transferred to Eng Wing headquarters, because *'I could spell and talk intelligently on the phone'* whatever that meant.

April '68 saw the start of running down Oakington and I was the first Sgt aircraft technician to be posted out. As I was settled with family living at Upwood 20 miles from Oakington, I plumbed for Wittering, Wyton or Marham. Stone me the self same Maltese Sgt I'd met at St Athan four years earlier told me with a smile on his face "No, you're going back to South Wales. Ha Ha".

I arrived in June, posted to 4 Sqdn Picketston site which was involved in Major servicing on all marks of Canberra aircraft. It was all day shift work so after a lot of thought I applied for a final tour posting and in June '69 was posted to 51 Squadron at RAF Wyton. This unit was equipped with Canberra B16's and Comet IV's, and my time at Wyton was spent at Squadron Records Office liaising with Hawker Siddeley Aviation concerning re-equipping with Nimrods and occasional trips to HSA Chester for hand over inspections, documentation, etc. I completed my HNC Mech Eng studies at Peterborough College; I attained my Ch Tech prop in June 1973 and left the service in December of that year.

Some of the readers may remember that my final year thesis was on pig farming in UK. Well, I was one of the first to take up the new government training opportunities scheme in '73 and spent an academic year updating my farming knowledge. I became Foreman on a 1200 acre arable, beef, poultry and pig farm in north Bucks where we lived for six years; my two children started their schooling and Jacky also had a teaching post.

In 1980, having been unsuccessful in obtaining a County Council Holding in Bucks, Beds, Herts or Cambs we moved to Devon, where our younger son was born, and were involved in pig and dairy farming there for four years before finally settling in west Cornwall. Here I managed a 150 head herd of Guernsey dairy cattle for 16 years, on behalf of Major Simon Bolitho's Trengwainton Estate. Following his death and the difficult times through the BSE crisis, his successor decided to sell the herd and turn the farm over to a tenant rather than farm it 'in hand'.

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This happened in 1999 and I then became self employed in relief milking and sundry other agricultural/horticultural work as well as being my mother in law's prime carer, while Jacky once again had a full time teaching appointment. I also have a large allotment which keeps me out of mischief and since retiring in 2008 we have both been regularly involved in voluntary work in the locality.

We travel about the country too as our elder son lives at Wrexham with his family of four plus a foster child and works as a computer programmer, while our younger son lives at Lancaster where he works for the University as a computer technician. Our daughter lives in Cornwall too with her family, just 15 miles away. Jacky and I feel we have been richly blessed.

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A Brat's Progress
by Ian Nelson

A wistful account of his journey from Graduation to retirement in five stumbling steps.

Could this be the sign of things to come? The fun started the moment I left Halton. With my parents, RAF brother and little Sis, we enjoyed a week or so of local touring before setting off for Aberdeen via family in Manchester. Everything was going well until the slow climb up Shap where we were pulled over by a mob of stony faced policemen.

Seems they were looking for a blue Bedford van in connection with a certain Great Train Robbery. Here we were in a blue Bedford Caravanette, high-tailing it from Bucks. This was the highlight of their day, manna from heaven. Sufficient excuse to completely turn out the van and our possessions, all to be exposed to every passing bus and car on the busy A6. Sorry guys, end of holiday finances meant no lovely lolly stashed away! It wasn't until we finally arrived home that the significance of all this fuss became clear.

Posted to RAF Kinloss on the sun kissed shores of Costa del Moray, my arrival at its diminutive railway station was greeted by a lift from a waiting truck with WRAF driver using very interesting language. Feet now tentatively touching the ground.

I distinctly remember our Halton instructors, when teaching Shackleton equipment, saying, "Don't worry, you will never work on this stuff." Straight to the Maritime Operational Training Unit with Shackleton T4's (modified MR1's) and the start of a long affair with all marks of this venerable beast. The smell of stale food, indescribable Elsan contents, the acrid stink of expended flare and photo cartridges all mixed with aromatic Avgas will stay with me forever.

A good start though, as it involved being part of a busy team and we also covered visiting aircraft, which suited this aviation nut. Early January 64 I was grabbed as a crash guard watching over the smouldering remains of a Shackleton MR3 that had gone in on fire at night near Culloden Moor. Add the smell of burning aircraft, fuel and fire-fighting foam soaked earth to that burgeoning databank of nasty niffs. Amazingly the entire crew walked away from that one.

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A serious servicing accident had killed a J/T in the Torpedo Bay and after scouring the area for brown lumps of unexploded Torpex, I was chosen as his replacement. Hmmm! One of my first jobs was off to Station Workshops with a handful of drill bits for sharpening.

“Over there,” said the LAC, pointing to the grinding wheel.

“No,” I said, “I’ve brought them to be sharpened!”

“You’re the fitter,” was the sneering response as he trudged away.

Well, I tried and felt I wasn’t doing too badly until a hand grabbed the ‘sharpened’ bunch, swore at them, elbowed me out of the way and proceeded to do them properly, all the time muttering, “Fitters – I’ve s**t them!” Down to earth with an embarrassing bump, but an important lesson learned.

Back to the classroom, so down to RAF Melksham in Wiltshire for AC/DC theory and Electronic courses prior to the torpedo courses. Deepest, darkest February, bitterly cold and billeted in wartime Nissen huts with their coke stoves, damp bedding, tired horsehair mattresses and a SWO who believed everyone had to turn out for sports afternoon. Welcome to the 30’s. What a miserable place, a complete contrast to everything that had gone before.

Passed my driving test and became the proud owner of a black 1955 split screen Morris Minor, 803cc and 3 speed box. Freedom! Jim Duff’s home was not too far away in Dufftown so we often enjoyed many a weekend there using his Mum’s pub as a base to visit all the local dances. Jim, with his flash Austin Healey Sprite, and me with the ‘sensible’ Moggie, but at least I had the useful back seat! A whole new world was opening up.

Winston Churchill decided to pop his clogs, so in the company of the Kinloss Guard of Honour, consisting of more than a few ex Brats in the entourage, we decamped for Uxbridge at the turn of the New Year. Endless days of parade ground drilling but it soon became apparent we were much slicker than the resident Rock Ape Colour Squadron. Halton has a lot to answer for! As ‘Tower Hill Keepers’ we formed up inside the Tower of London with the Beefeaters then lining Tower Hill, presenting arms as the great man was carried down to the jetty. Bloody cold and windy but we left with a lasting sense of the occasion.

Overseas posting due so I sold my lovely little Minor for seven £20 notes. Never having had so much cash in hand, I took fright and almost ran to the CO’s office to put it in his safe until I could shift it to the bank. Remember this was the equivalent of 14 weeks pay.

Where do you post your torpedo guys to? The Australian desert of course! About as far from the sea as you could get. First to RAF Hendon and catering that broke a tooth, then British Eagle Britannia to Singapore via Ankara and Bombay. A few days in Singers then three days of dawn to dusk flying by 48 Sqdn Hastings to Oz via the Cocos Keeling Islands, RAAF Pierce (Perth,) where customs confiscated the kids ‘Noddy’ books. It seems the wee

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fella used to share his bed with Big Ears. Onwards to RAAF Edinburgh Field at Adelaide, South Australia and the final leg to RAAF Woomera by Constellation, arriving completely spaced out and deaf in one ear.

The RAAF Air Trials Unit provided the target aircraft for various missile trials and I now spent many happy days working under the tightest security I've ever experienced, servicing Meteors and Canberras, regularly flown manned prior to their inevitable demise. It was always a bit weird watching these same aircraft take off with no one up front, the missile launch and acquisition. The missiles were often meant to pass and be recorded by onboard cameras but the telltale puff and falling leaf would mark the arrival of another lump of scrap metal.

The Canberra couldn't be cleared of explosives before such sorties and yours truly would be deposited at the crash site with a packed lunch, to be left alone except for the company of curious kangaroos, clearing the wreckage of unexploded or unburned explosives ready for the scrap contractors. Trying to remove unfired canopy and hatch squibs with their wires burnt all the way down was a lesson in concentration. No protective gear in those days!

Very much a weekday job, the weekends gave scope to exploring my surroundings and in the company of my RAAF boss and his family, I was introduced to Australia proper. Opal mines, Aboriginal art and the vast desert between us and Alice Springs. The flies. Always the flies! Potable and non potable water. As a scarce resource, water recycling was critical. Just don't get them mixed up!

A group of us drove down to Edinburgh Field for exams. A long, dusty, bum-numbing drive over non metalled roads. The contrast of a 60's Adelaide, half 'Brit' half Italian with a clear step from one to the other. Black swans. Pubs that shut at six pm! This idyll could not continue and an establishment committee decided to downsize the RAF presence at Woomera.

As one of the only singlies it was deemed easier to ship me back to the UK. I appealed to common sense and managed to get the posting changed to RAF Changi, reached by swift flights back to the Equator using an ANA 727 to Perth and Qantas 707 to Paya Lebar, achieved in one day.

July 1965. Imagine a footloose and fancy free twenty year old let loose in duty free Singapore. Heaven! This was the start of a continuing love affair with that truly exotic, Isle of Wight sized, tropical paradise. A return to Shacks, MR2's on 205 Sqdn. Armed, due to the Indonesian Confrontation going on, meant lots of 20mm cannon and ammo work, broken by a fascinating detachment to RAF North Front in Hong Kong.

A duff donkey, as we were about to return, forced an engine change so we had to stay a wee bit longer. Delighted but skint, the entire crew immediately fronted up at the unhappy Accounting Officer's door, begging bowls at the ready for more spending money.

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Now with two stripes up, Changi sussed my torpedo experience so it was over to the Bay and air conditioned luxury. Changi camp was a revelation, the military and civilians living and working in a huge botanical garden. No station duties, food out of this world, duty free Tiger beer, a bearer to look after you and only the bed bugs to fight. My accommodation was on the top floor of the famous Block 151, once the dysentery wing of Changi POW hospital.

On the ground floor the astonishing '*Changi Murals*' had been brought back to life by the original artist, Stanley Warren, following a Daily Mirror appeal. Over the years I revisited these murals but although in the care of the National Heritage Board, by 2008 the Singapore Armed Forces had virtually stopped ageing ex Changi-ites seeking entry. Replicas can be seen at the Changi Prison Museum, well worth a visit if you have time in Singapore.

A curious feature of torpedo work overseas is that the RAF serviced all the Fleet Air Arm's active stock. This ensured we were rarely idle especially when an aircraft carrier's change of tinfish was due. It also involved trips out to HMS Terror at Sembawang, on equipment runs. The Navy never quite understood how to treat RAF guys so they erred on the side of caution and these visits became very enjoyable.

Retaining the nautical theme, we often carried out practice torpedo drops with the Shacks. The deal being you would individually prepare your own Mk30 torpedo. Prep the recording head, service the torp, pack the drogue chute and attach it to the fins. With the target apparatus on board we would set off in a High Speed Launch or Pinnacle, deep into the South China Sea and await the drop. Will it release? Yes. Will the drogue work? Yes. Will it run? (pause) Yes. Thank God! Now to acquire it.

The skipper would anxiously ask, "Where is it?" Mischievously, we would run the fish under the launch, jump up and excitedly cry, "Look, there she goes!" At the sight of a pale monster streaming bubbles under his keel the skipper would go frantic, demanding we get the effing thing effing well away from his effing boat, "You effing bastards!" The amusement didn't last long however, for as soon as the torpedo was recovered, the skipper would endeavour to make us seasick on the way home, a guaranteed result in my case.

My uncle lived at Seletar and through him I was introduced to the cultural side of Singapore, not normally in the remit of a young man about town. This too left an indelible mark on my soul to the point that when I visit Singapore and exit the terminal at Changi, I instantly feel 100% at home.

Laurence Tuffery was at Tengah and during my visits I was introduced to that distinctive resonant howl from the busy Javelins as they taxied around. A noise you just could not escape.

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With three colleagues I set off in a hired Ford Consul to explore Malaysia, using the old military roads and numerous dodgy river crossings. Arriving in Kuala Lumpur we chose a half decent looking hotel for the overnight stay and it wasn't until late in the evening and a visit from the police we realised we were in a brothel. And no, we didn't sample the menu!

Further up country and now deep in the Cameron Highlands we took the increasingly asthmatic Ford through tea plantations and up Gunong Brinchang, six thousand six hundred feet of jungle-covered mountain, the tarmac road leading right to the summit. The view from the east to west coasts of Malaysia was stunning, but the car couldn't quite make it and we walked the last few hundred feet up the now very steep slippery road. The price was dangerously overheated brakes on the way down.

We eventually arrived in Penang, another gorgeous tropical island and often revisited destination. The Forces Leave Centre at Batu Ferringhi was cheap but we were bitten to death by blood sucking bugs lurking in every bed and chair. This trip anchored my love for the Orient and its people even though I was later unceremoniously kicked out of the Sultan's Mosque in Johore for disrespectfully wearing shorts.

Time up and refused an extension, the next stop was RAF Leuchars and 23 Sqn Lightnings. Another far cry from torpedoes. There must have been a rare bunch of comedians at Innsworth²⁸. Never mind, learning curve as vertical as a Lightning's takeoff and in the company of Bill Mobbs, this was another exciting place to be.

Lots of exercises but generally with a five day week and weekends clear it was easy to nip home to Aberdeen. Firestreak missiles with their liquid ammonia coolant bottles, the valves of which would freeze open and try as you may to avoid the strategically placed vent, would give you a head clearing squirt of raw ammonia as the bottle was removed. Watching that same ammonia dripping onto the pan and vaporising the tar between the sections of concrete. God knows what it did to us.

Avpin starters and spectacular nose nipping starts with your huge asbestos glove to beat out the dribbling flames. Ejection seat changes in a ridiculously small cockpit. Overwing tanks and their dreadful attachment. Strapping in young pilots and unstrapping grey old men an hour later. The aircrew would always put a barrel on in the crewroom on Friday afternoon. Welcome but not a good idea before setting off on the 60 mile journey home!

During one of the exercises the CO couldn't release from the seat, his PEC refusing to disconnect. He wouldn't allow us to cut it away so I had to slide in between his legs to check the mechanism under the seat pan. (Bear in mind the pilot takes up all the room). Head pounding and after some time I finally found a 'pea' bulb jammed in the crook of an elbow in the mechanism.

²⁸ I can confirm that – my brother was stationed there - Editor

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(That'll teach him to fly inverted!) It was a very quiet and quite ill CO that finally vacated the aircraft but he thanked us later.

Another exercise and a bitterly cold black frosty evening. During turn-rounds the pilots would crack open the canopy for just enough fresh air before taxiing out. One chap lost his canopy on take-off and couldn't land until the runway had been checked for debris. With no sign of the canopy he eventually landed having flown for about half an hour in sub zero temps with no lid. As he came under the pan lights, here was the canopy embedded in his fin. We had to lift the poor chap out bodily as he was completely unable to move.



At El Adem 1978, Bill Mobbs clowning around, as usual!

From the cold and wet to the heat of a detachment to El Adem in Libya, trying out those overwing tanks. No problems but the tyres would only last one landing on the sandy runway. We managed some local visiting to Tobruk and the many war grave sites but the locals would have nothing to do with us, even in those pre-Gaddafi days. Dusty drives along surprisingly good roads but with sight of the occasional dead donkey pointing stiff legs to the heavens. The desert was still showing wartime detritus and at night you would hear the occasional 'crump' as a camel or other unfortunate beast stood on a WWII mine.

RAF Kinloss put out a call for guys so I jumped ship back to real aeroplanes. Six engined nuclear bombers, four pulling, two pushing. Shackleton MR3 phase 3's, really nothing more than six million loose rivets flying in close formation. By now Kinloss had adopted centralised servicing. Squadrons retained aircrew but aircraft and groundcrew pooled, the service losing the pride that goes with the sense of belonging.

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Busy times, and now in the company of Jack Turnbull, it was back to the routine of anti sub sorties, lots of SAR callouts and a night shift. Sonobouys and their treacherous dye bottles, endless racks of 25lb practice bombs, heavy bulky Lindholme Dinghies, usual photoflash and flare carts. Detachments to Ballykelly (meeting up with Fred Hempsall again,) three months in Sharjah with trips to Gan via Masirah.

At Sharjah, pulling the pins from practice bombs one morning and watching this purple cloud approach, I suddenly received an electric shock off one of the pins. "Odd" I thought. The local bowser driver shouted a warning as he hurriedly disconnected and I ran like hell for cover. Before I reached the hut at the edge of the pan the hailstones hit.

Massive lumps as big as golf balls carried on a sudden freezing storm. Sharjah camp was flooded, roofs torn off, our parked aircraft had their trim tabs damaged and their skins carried the pock marks for long afterwards. All the Wessex's parked out had to have their main rotor blades replaced and a visiting VC10 also suffered some damage. Not even in Scotland did we get storms like this! A later detachment to the Rock of Gibraltar prepared me for my next posting.



Typical Shackleton pose, this time in Gan. I could never get a suntan!

September 1970 and in the company of Lucy Hempsall on her way to join Fred, I arrived in Gibraltar and promotion to Sergeant. Gib was a mixed blessing. Cut off from Spain and with border tensions, locals who oddly didn't seem to like us much but a nice Mediterranean climate, it was however another

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interesting place to be. A mix of left and right hand drive service vehicles, driving on the 'wrong' side of the road, very narrow streets choked with parked cars and negotiating challenging bends up and down the rock.

We covered everything from the Torpedo Bay and its FAA responsibilities, the explosive storage area (right on the border), visiting aircraft and small arms. The .303 rifles were going out along with Sten guns, to be replaced by SLR's and Sterlings, cheap and not so cheerful examples of modern weaponry. Fred and I used GDT range firing as a way of proving these guns after unpacking and degunging. Not too clever though because the damned SLR's were forever breaking open and the Sterling barrels would sweat for days. We both ended up taking the firing practice days for the Rock Apes. Made life easier all round.

It was nice to meet up with Jim Duff and his Belfast transiting through from time to time. This also meant a trip to the dockyard to scrounge some expended large calibre shell cases for Jim to transform into modern day trench art.

Enjoying the huge rock to climb and caves to explore, I almost returned to Halton levels of fitness. Cheap vino plus the lack of fresh veg and milk didn't help but Fred and Lucy regularly entertained me with real food and sane company, keeping me out of the bar! With Fred and a mess colleague we had a bash at the Air Britain aircraft recognition competition in London and won our section, of course.

With fellow mess inmates I helped restore a VW Beetle from the bottom up and we trialled it on a long holiday to Spain and Portugal via Morocco. Staying away from the tourist routes the four of us enjoyed a fascinating journey through ancient rural and Roman Spain, staying in accommodation where the locals couldn't speak any English and providing curiosity value for the local kids. Patiently enduring amiable police checks on these suspicious 'gringos.' We crossed into Portugal via classic Napoleonic War places, down to Lisbon then on via an unspoilt Algarve to Seville and the ferry at Algeciras. Truly great 'singlies' days.

I met my future wife, Liz, in Gibraltar and we were married during my disembarkation leave in April 73 just prior to joining RAF Kinloss for my final tour. We had a choice. Do it now or wait until the back end of the year. Liz's brother-in-law was a vicar, his church had free dates in spring and the pub across the road was ideal for the reception. Perfect! It really was and with everyone mucking in we had a fantastic day. My family and friends arrived from all over the UK and many extended their stay in Co Durham with Liz's extended family, while Liz and I honeymooned in Findhorn on the edge of Kinloss.

This last tour was very low key by comparison, the entire time spent in the Explosive Storage Area, the days lightened by reducing suspect parcels and Officers' unattended briefcases to instant confetti. With the Shackletons now migrating across to Lossiemouth, Kinloss was a major Nimrod station

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entering the modern technological age. I managed to upset the 'Frogs' at Matra by proving their state of the art Sonobouy launcher firing heads were not only faulty but potentially lethal. After a visit from protesting, finger pointing Matra technicians, they departed a lot quieter and somewhat red faced. At a stroke I had temporarily crippled a major part of the Nimrod's capability, not an ideal claim to fame. Our first son Alexander (Sandy) was born in March 74 and life was good.

By a combination of annual leave, terminal leave and resettlement courses I managed to clear Kinloss three months early before being finally struck off charge on Hogmanay '74. Two jobs had been lined up, one with the MOD on Teesside and another with Flymo. Our house contents were stored in Durham. Bit of a no brainer but a trip to Aberdeen opened new options.

Armed with completed application forms, it was a case of turn left for Bristow Helicopters or right for BP. New Year and a new dawn announced the noisy one had won and I started at Bristow in early January. They were desperate for guys (must have been!) and what does a plumber know about whirly things? Not a lot, but they took me in and with much Mickey taking the guys soon brought me up to speed.

Most of the staff was ex Fleet Air Arm and dual trades so the RAF guys had to learn the 'other' discipline. I simply did both and found my Halton training had consciously prepared me for this. Just as well because the days were frantic, the working day filled with noise and movement. North Sea oil and gas exploration was growing almost exponentially and the demand for helicopter transportation was colossal.

Flying a mixture of 'old' and brand new Sikorsky S61N's, older Wessex 60's, Bell 212's and ex German military Sikorsky S58E's, modified by Bristow from piston engine to PT6 Twinpac and S58ET configuration as a stopgap. French AS330J's soon joined the fleet along with Sikorsky S76A's. Quite a mixed bunch to deal with but the ubiquitous 61 was the fleet leader and my favourite.

Not a chance of any help with housing so we took our first step into ownership and bought an ex GNSR/LNER/BR Loco Works Victorian flat in Inverurie. A seemingly perfect start but our life was to be turned upside down when our second boy, Stuart, was born breech thanks to the woefully incompetent maternity hospital in Aberdeen. He should have been fine but fourteen days later Stuart died having suffered from 'complications' during the botched delivery. When invited to meet the consultant responsible we quickly found it was a damage limitation exercise and not a sincere effort to explain what had gone wrong.

To this day I have never been able to trust the NHS, although our own GP did his best for us. I threw myself into work, trying to reconcile this dreadful time, but our Engineering Manager, an irascible pipe smoking ex RN 'old school' type, recognised my problem and gently brought me back into

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civilised society. Guess I had the easy bit. Liz was left trying to explain to Sandy where his brother had gone, while dealing with her own grief.

We continued working out of draughty wartime hangars, unheated, always windy with banging doors, poor lighting and no toilets. Often on your own at night with only the ghosts of previous occupants for company. We had to provide all our own tools, our local Snap On Tools dealer becoming very well off. (He later bought a castle)

We carried out all the aircraft maintenance, refuelling, towing and marshalling. Blade tracking using a handful of crayons and a canvas flag stretched on a pole. Those of you who know this method will know where I'm coming from.²⁹ Post maintenance leak checking, by climbing up the side of the helicopter, opposite engine running and blades whirling at flat pitch, open the transmission door, haul yourself up and crawl along to the back of the Main Gearbox, hunker down and check for leaks. Pure noise and blasting air, holding on for grim death and remembering not to sit up. Forbidden now but we never had an incident.

The Shetland Isles were now increasingly important as a staging post for the more northerly oil installations and Bristow transferred us to Sumburgh, lock stock and barrel. A very different way to live. Long summer days and very dark winters. Healthy but expensive living, trying to keep the house warm and dry. The helicopter movements were as frenetic as ever, dealing with every type in the North Sea. The oilmen were arriving in a variety of chartered aircraft from the Dakota to 748 and Viscount, these same aircraft being good for family flights to the mainland on lightly loaded return trips. Anything to avoid the overnight car ferry to Aberdeen.

Jim Duff was the station manager for Dan Air in Aberdeen at that time, throughout the period when the pressure was at maximum³⁰. Trips to the rigs were fairly frequent, armed with tools and spares, arriving only to be transferred by crane and basket or swinging walkways. This would then be followed by hundreds of steps up the outside of the platform, the foaming sea under your feet, then left to get on with whatever problem had upset the aircrew. Returning to shore on the very machine you have repaired. Never ever bored!

Imagine marshalling returning helicopters down 'guard of honour' lines of parked machines, getting the crew to lift the disc as the gap became barely wide enough, and performing a little zigzag at the same time. Crazy times. Standing at the hangar door one sunny morning, I heard a 'ripple' across the corrugations above my head. Looked around and down to see distorted blocks of main rotor blade tip weights lying at my feet. About two hundred yards away and behind the British Airways Helicopter hangar, they had suffered a multiple blade strike while working in similar confines, the evidence peppering our door.

²⁹ I do indeed. I did some of this on Whirlwinds at Kuching – and I was a Lecky - Editor

³⁰ See Jim Duff's story – page 55 - Editor

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The hangars were doubled in size as the workload doubled, very necessary as the Shetland working conditions could be pretty awful. Serviceability remained high and incidents rare, a condition I put down to our ever present service humour, seeing us through the crap when it seemed impossible to go on.

Late January 1978, snowed in, a ten day power cut and Liz expecting our next child any day now. Cut off from local supplies, all the helicopter companies flew in food from Aberdeen, in some cases flying directly to our houses and dropping supplies into the gardens! Bristow were prepared to fly Liz up to Lerwick if it became necessary but the thaw came in February, along with Sarah. The poor weather continued to affect the health of Liz and wee Sarah to the point our GP advised us to return to the mainland.



Sumburgh on a quiet day in 1979, all that's missing is the noise.

Another one of life's crossroads. We bought a new house in Bishop Auckland close to Liz's parents and I continued to work in Shetland on a two weeks on, one week off routine. Liz however needed regular hospitalisation and this, coupled with all my travel being in my own time, forced another big decision.

Bristow helped by detaching me to Teesside Airport for three months and I used this time to look again at Geordieland. The company offered Aberdeen but having not long bought the house we were reluctant to move again so quickly.

November 1979 I joined a toughened glass manufacturing company in Bishop Auckland as a maintenance fitter. Big mistake! The owners were the directors and managers, all with a Dickensian approach to labour relations. After a Christmas and New Year entirely spent repairing a still hot furnace, replacing firebricks cast by my own fair hand and cementing them in while failing to avoid the back-stabbing temperature probes. Stripped to the waist, soaking wet, bleeding and sore, with the snow falling heavily outside, I finally got the message and planned my escape.

And Then...

Rothmans introduced me to a thoroughly enlightened management ethos that worked in spite of its trade union closed shop environment. Promotion to Technical Group Leader soon followed, running my own department and skilled team of mechanical and electrical fitters. Fascinating job, millions of ciggies being produced to food production standards. (Well, they do go in your mouth!). High speed rotating machinery (sounds familiar) but on a windowless production floor under miles of strip lights. Air conditioned, but for the benefit of the tobacco, not the staff. Opening machine access doors and trying not to breathe in the mounds of snuff that would fill every space. Lots of pleasant trips to Hamburg for technical visits and machine courses. Rothmans management training sessions in posh hotels across northern England. A return to college, gathering those qualifications I missed at Halton and after. All courtesy of a benevolent Rothmans and I got a lot out of it. So what did this ungrateful sod do?

Liz was now one hundred percent and working for the local leisure centre, family happily at school, a bigger house and the job trundling along nicely. At work however, a plateau had been reached and I missed aviation dreadfully. Weekends volunteering at the Sunderland Aircraft Museum wasn't enough and this itch needed scratching.

Bristow had left the door open and the prodigal son returned to Aberdeen in July 1985, ready to start all over again. A newer fleet of Aerospatiale AS332L's and usual S61N's, attended to by much of the same old faces. A bit wiser now, I quickly gained the precious Aircraft Engineers Licence and the £20K increase in salary it brought with it, (Why didn't I do this sooner?) Twelve hour shifts, days and nights, equal time off.

This 'extra' time off encouraged me to join the Aberdeen City Children's Panel, thinking I could make a difference. A real eye opener, I was soon dealing with dysfunctional families, wayward kids, truly evil little thugs, fostering and adoption. Dealing with the fallout from a consistently failing Social Services system, incapable of learning from its mistakes. A frustrating time but it gave me a valuable insight into a different world.

Contracted by Bristow to Shell Aviation in Brunei for seven months brought a return to my favourite part of the world. June 1993 and a reluctant return home to a position on the company Pension Board, keeping an eye on my future interests. That nice little number took me all over the UK and served up some excellent dining in London.

Long detachments to North Denes at Gt Yarmouth and hello to Paul Holmes (Bristow was full of ex Halton Apprentices), Portland, Lee on the Solent, Stornoway and both ends of the Shetland Isles.

1997. Bristow was contracted by an American gent (Victoria's Secrets?) to sell him a nice S61N, refit it with full leather interior and all the trimmings then operate it for him in the UK, usually on business and autumn game bird murdering trips. Ian was given another hat and appointed as his Chief

And Then...

Engineer from conception and I loved every delicious minute spending a generous budget on top quality equipment.

Now registered as G-LAWS³¹, we flew this large black (burnt cherry) gleaming helicopter around the UK without a single delay or unserviceability for the next seven years. From the soaking wet grass of Exmoor and the boggy fields of Scottish castles to the pristine lawn at Blenheim Palace and the tiny heliport at Battersea.

Regularly flying across Heathrow Airport to meet Concorde or waiting in the more usual Biz Jet parks of provincial airports to greet his personal mount, initially a plush executive Boeing 727 then latterly one of the first Boeing BBJ's from the production line. Oh how the other half live! Managed to meet lots of interesting people along the way, some famous, some not so and lots of wannabees. Harrods eventually took over the contract with a change of helicopter to the new Sikorsky S92 and tried to poach me. No thank you.



G-LAWS and crew at Birmingham Airport. Everything gleaming.

Late 1999 presented me with another hat in the shape of the Engine Shop. Here we maintained and repaired all the helicopter turbine engines for the company, worldwide. The latest digital boroscopes with the camera now in the tip of the probe, gave us crystal clear views of the innards of these powerful little turboshaft engines. My shop led the industry for a time, Turbomeca, and sometimes the opposition, coming to us for information and advice. This brought visits and courses to Tamos, Bayonne, situated at the edge of the French Pyrenees. It was a hard life!

³¹ With no connection to this Editor - Editor

And Then...

We were often requested to provide deep non invasive airframe and gearbox inspections, welcome interludes. A book's worth of stories there, during my eight years tenure but now I had passed the normal retirement time.

I tried to let go but they enticed me into heavy maintenance and a return to real hands on engineering. (Not really, most of my time seemed to be spent in front of a computer) The return to a shift routine suddenly released stacks of spare time and brought an unexpected increase in salary. Can't be bad! There is something very satisfying about reducing an aircraft to its most basic form, repairing and rebuilding it from the bottom up, with fresh paint and new trim, then returning it to service. The oilmen grumbling, "Why can't we have one of these new ones?" (Only 20,000+ hours on the clock)

The Lebanese Government wanted to buy three of our now elderly S61N's for casevac and SAR duties. Two were straightforward preparation and paint jobs, having just come off a coastguard SAR contract but the third was a real headache. Not originally one of ours, she had been acquired via a takeover, remaining dry leased to the Irish SAR at Shannon.



EI-CNL facing an uncertain future.

This tired old lady had stood in the open, unloved, for two years suffering everything the weather could throw at her. Not modified to our fleet standard and in archaic condition, this sow's ear was painstakingly transformed into a silk purse.

And Then...



Now G-BDDA. First engaged ground run, paint job not quite completed.

This task was to be my swansong too. As I signed off the beast to its new owners I simultaneously signed off from Bristow and aviation, retiring finally in December 2009, nine months short of the fifty year mark.

Full circle back to Forres in Morayshire, a lovely old town currently reeling from the devastating treachery of the Nimrod scrapping and closure of nearby Kinloss as an RAF base.

House upgrading, decorating and garden landscaping pretty much done and with my N gauge railway layout almost completed, (but never finished), the old itch has returned and although I help out with local charities, I still miss aviation. Coming from an RAF family and with my son now a Licensed Aircraft Engineer with Bristow, I suppose it is hardly surprising.

This life circle has taken on another poignant meaning as I realise my eldest grandson is now the same tender age as I was, that fateful day on the 14th September 1960.

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And Then...

Bruce Owens

Trade; Electrical Fitter Air.

Service terminated October 1966.

Married 15th May 1965; 3 children.

For me, joining the RAF was a *'fait accompli'*, as my Guardians informed me I had to leave school at sixteen and get a job or join the Forces. In Cornwall there were no jobs available, so I sat the test for the RAF Apprenticeship. What was to follow, I was totally unprepared for, having no experience of Cadets or Scouts.

The time spent at Halton was for the most part very daunting, and without the help of roommates, and particularly John Crawford, I don't think I would have made it through to the end.

My first (and last) posting was to RAF Benson, which lasted over three years. The latter years spent on scheduled servicing of the Argosy Transport Aircraft, supporting three service teams, with my fellow Electrician away most of the time on Officer Selection courses. This meant working mainly 7 day weeks.

Soon after I married, this led to several conflicts of interest, resulting in a summary court martial. As a result of this, and with help from my wife's doctor, I was able to get a release from the service. I found more bad points about my stay at Benson than good. The most irritating was having to have sharp creases in your working blues, after a long day in the hangars, if not you had to go and press them and return to the guardroom before you could go and get a meal.

First I took a job at AWRE, because this came with a house.

Then in 1967 I joined BEA at Heathrow until the rapid rise in price of petrol (1972), which made me look to more local jobs in Reading where we lived.

My career now took a change of direction. I started work for an Electrical Contractor, preparing quotations, buyer, and even shop floor rectification. After a short time I was offered a position with one of the customers, ML Aviation. First in the prototype lab, and then later in the Purchasing Office, being responsible for all Technical requisitions. Here my path crossed with Alf Burton then with PYE Connectors.

In 1978 I had the opportunity to join a new hardware team being set up by ICL. This was the company's first move into Point of Sales and small office systems. My role was that of Manager of Component Standards and Engineering Standards. When in 1985 the company was having problems, I took voluntary redundancy.

And Then...

Almost straight away I was recruited to join Siemens Electromechanical Components, responsible for the sales of a broad range of the company's products. I stayed there until it was announced that TYCO had purchased the Division in December 1998.

My final job was as key account manager for Conec Connectors, December 1998 to retirement in April 2009.

Since December 2009, I have been resident in Marsascala, Malta, enjoying life here as well as touring Europe.

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And Then...

F0686630 J/T Rann G

RAF Service 1963 – 1984

Summer 1963 passed out J/T, posted to RAF Honington 55/57 Sqn Victor B1a.

Although I was posted to 55 Sqn I ended up on a second line servicing team. My first job was changing a rudder PFCU on a double giraffe; it did not help that I was scared of heights.

Jan – May 1964 detached to Tengah with 2 Victors; spent part of the time building brake units in the Tyre Bay.

June 1965 RAF detachment, RCAF Goose Bay – Victors & Vulcans

May 1966 RAF Scampton 27/617 Sqn Vulcan B2 (*Blue Steel*) initially on first line; then promoted to Cpl and subsequently moved into the hangar on 2nd line where I remained until being posted shortly after, being promoted to Sgt.

1972 – RAF West Raynham on Canberras – target towing. After spending so long on *V bombers*, working on Canberras was a bit of a culture shock. I started off on second line but then moved to first line on 85 Sqn. This was my first experience of a Sqn as only aircrew operated as separate Sqdns on the 'V's'.

The aircraft towed targets, which looked a bit like tennis nets on the end of a long rope, and which were hooked onto a bomb slip mounted under the rear fuselage, for Lightnings to shoot at.

Two or three ground crew would take a target, in a Land Rover, to the end of the runway and lay the rope out in an S shape, hook it onto the slip and the aircraft would pull it into the air. When the aircraft returned it would fly over a clear area of the airfield and drop the target which would be recovered by the Land Rover. During this time I went on detachment to Cyprus and Malta to take advantage of the better weather.

1974 RAF Little Rissington

Jet Provost & Bulldog flying training – second line servicing.

As I had the ground equipment inventory when the station closed, I was one of the last to leave but then followed the Jet Provosts to Cranwell.

1976 RAF Cranwell – Jet Provost.

During my 8 years at Cranwell I did most jobs including second line servicing, rectification team, Hydraulic and Tyre Bay and running a shift on the flight line.

1984 Feb 4th – demob.

And Then...

Civilian Career 1984 on

Government training course for 6 months (TOPS) on computer maintenance.

Started with Philips Business Systems repairing computer systems and ATMs in building societies around the East Midlands.

2000 made redundant following Millennium bug fiasco.

Worked for several computer firms as an independent contractor, eventually getting a job as a workshop engineer in Nottingham.

Got a part time job as an ICT technician in a school working mornings only in term time, on reaching 65, reduced my hours to one day a week which I still do.

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The Book Pt. 2- The Sequel by Tony Robson

Goodbye, Halton – hello 32MU RAF St Athan and a feeling of déjà vu. Once again I found myself stepping down from a train onto a railway station platform but this time St Athan, south Wales. No young ‘Apps’ with small bags in hand but young mothers with shopping bags and kids in tow. So kit bag in hand with now a black hat band and a single, inverted chevron (to be replaced within 8 months by a four bladed cloth badge) six inches from the shoulder I used my 1963 state of the art ‘Sat Nav’ (brain linked to mouth, – no derogatory remarks please) to locate the P3 Station General Office to start the booking-in process.

Transit Quarters for a couple of days before settling down to Station life doing Vulcan Major overhauls, a 30 day cycle from flying in on day one to flying out on day 30 with the test flight on the way back to its base station. This being during the ‘Cold War’, and assigned to one of the *V-Bombers*, I recall having to complete a multi-page security checks form plus signing the form and the Official Secrets Act.

My first section was the undercarriage team that removed the original and fitted serviced sets as well as all flying control surfaces and powered flying control units. Later I moved onto the fuel tank section removing and replacing these items as well as re-skinning their compartments. In no way could I now get into these compartments having gained some weight over the intervening years³².

One of the Vulcans that I helped to overhaul is now part of the RAF Cosford Museum exhibits. On one occasion one of the Vulcans at St Athan that had completed its Major overhaul was taxiing out under the guidance of marshals when the pilot decided he knew better and ignored ‘this guidance’ and so, placing one main undercarriage on the grass, tried to power the Vulcan out and hence ‘over steered’! Being on the undercarriage team at that time it fell to us late that evening to jack the Vulcan up in a hangar (evenly, one old penny diameter at a time) and do full functional checks. I vividly recall the very impressive sight of this Vulcan in the hangar at night freshly painted in the new camouflage green/brown perched on four jacks. Doing the retraction checks the sight of the Vulcan wheels up as if in flight illuminated by just the hangar lights was quite something.

It was during my time at St Athan, so the tale goes, that a Corporal fitter went to his ‘Chiefy’ telling him that he had found a crack in a Valiant wing main spar so large that he could fit his hand into it! One gathers that the ‘Chiefy’ threatened the fitter with a charge if this was not so! As we all know all Valiants were then grounded and scrapped. Over the following months there were quite a few of these aircraft in various states of demise.

³² A problem familiar with most of us – travel broadens the mind but age broadens the waistline - Editor

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I still take a very close interest whenever a Vulcan is mentioned. If you haven't and wish to have a damn good read get a copy of '*Vulcan 607*' by Rowland White. This covers '*Operation Black Buck*' and the bombing of Port Stanley Airport on the Falkland Islands in 1982. When you read it you see it – very graphic! Equally any ex-Victor tanker type will find it a good read too!

The Vulcans in my hangar morphed into Beverleys arriving from the Middle East. These 'Bevs' had to be slid in sideways, nose up tail down, before levelling off with the tail fins between the hangar rafters. Then, and not for the faint hearted, brakes off freewheeling towards the hangar wall – stop!!

One of those times in your life – where were you when you heard of John F. Kennedy's assassination? I was in the lobby between the TV rooms and the back bar of the Red Dragon Club!

In my contribution to the Book Part 1, I mentioned having a pen pal who became my girlfriend. Well, 3 years later in August 1965 (at 16:12hrs.) saw us wed. Some 47 years have whizzed by with a scattering of arguments but no regrets. As we got married in the late August, I was posted in October to Khormaksar and 43(F) Squadron plus 1417 Photo Reconnaissance Flight who were flying Hunters. Having been single just before this posting I got a 1 year unaccompanied posting. A year apart was made easier by us having two letters on the go so that every 2-3 days there was a letter arriving.

Working a 24 on 24 off shift pattern, noon to noon, allowed a leisurely afternoon after lunch and a shower writing a reply. Evenings were spent at the NAAFI Camel Club or the open air Astra cinema. My tipples at that time were a large brandy and lemonade (1shilling and 6 pence) or '*Tiger Tops*' (Tiger beer with a splash of lemonade). While on 43Squadron we had Section parties every so often at the Camel Club with the Line and Line Support teams taking turns to serve for the other. I recall one such 'do' where I had a tad too much and seem to remember a half pint glass in the mists before me, mostly full of what would have been brandy!

The next day I felt 'evil' to say the least! Of course I had to be on shift by noon the next day where I had to set up the powered flying control units on one of the Hunters. Normally this was not too much of a task, but that day, out on the line in the mid-day sun with a mega hangover unable to even keep water down – not too good. Added to this, as those who may have done this job can confirm, you cannot bend down under the wing nor sit down and reach up; you have to kneel and reach up. You cannot report sick as you would be charged with being unfit for duty through a self inflicted injury! Some of the pleasures of life can be hell!

Some Gloster Javelins were being ferried home from South East Africa via Khormaksar to the UK and stopped to refuel. As I watched them touch down from the 43Squadron dispersal pans I heard the siren go off at the fire section. As one Javelin touched down its port undercarriage collapsed, the plane slewing to its left and vanishing into a cloud of sand. Even before the

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sand had settled, out dashed the two crew legging it for all their worth passing the fire units going in the opposite direction.

Initially I was on Line Rectification doing Minor repairs and engine changes. I seem to remember bumping into Matt Marshall on my first day. Later I moved onto Line Support servicing the Hunters on the dispersal pans. I seem to recall changing many anti-g valves and air conditioning units, working with string attached to my wrists and the small BA spanners down in the mid bowels of Hunters, garnering red wheals from the sun-heated skins around the access apertures. We also had a wheels-up landing by one of the Hunters landing on its drop tanks. I gather they just jacked it up and got the wheels down later!

Every few days we were on guard duty which was a real pain! 24 hours of 2 hours on and 4 off (I think). Very unpopular! On one occasion I was on guard at the North Bomb Dump Gate in the early hours, all on my tod (those of you who went to Khormaksar may well be familiar with this location). This gate was on the far side of the main runway, beyond both the bomb dump and the compass swinging base with nothing beyond but sand, barbed wire, security lights (facing towards you) and impenetrable darkness! With an old Lee Enfield and five rounds, and a telephone for company, the thought that occurred to me was 'What bicycle clips go with regulation RAF khaki shorts?' Equally I had been guarding 20 Arab labourers with the same armament. Not very assuring!

I moved on to 78Squadron (Wessex and Whirlwind) that did internal security patrols, SAR, casevac and similar duties. The casevac was from up country to the RAF Hospital at Steamer Point and occasionally on back to the UK via VC10. I did one trip up country to assist the placing of an electronic tracking pack. While we were there in the Radfan we were protected by the Cameronian Regiment stationed there, plus a couple of Hunters from 43Squadron armed with rockets.

To occupy myself during leave taken out there I signed on as supernumerary aircrew on an Argosy flying over to Djibouti and up the coast to Riyan, Salalah and Masirah. After we touched down at Salalah we had time to stretch our legs. There under the blazing sun stood a man – tall, straight of back with shiny black shoes wearing Sergeant's stripes and an RAF SD cap with its peak 'Guards' style! Who was he? Yes, you're right! It was Barney Meehan, just the same as we had left him in 1963. Those of you from our 'C' Flight may recall Sgt 'Paddy' Watson when we were on 3(A) Wing at Halton. Well I bumped into him in the 1417PR Flight office at Khormaksar.

Eventually 'tourex' came around, requiring booking out from P3 and other places, packing my deep sea box and giving my civvy suit a lot of time in the sun and fresh air, it having been encased in polythene with mothballs for a year! I recall making my way in the dark to the Embarkation Centre at Khormaksar and as I passed the NAAFI Camel Club in civvies plus kit bag, I could hear the usual high voices and laughter from the RAF and Army lads there. From that blend of many voices came – "Days to do, only two!" I could

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not resist calling back – “Hours to do, only two!” There followed various expletives and impossible physical suggestions plus a hail of beef cans.

After Aden I was posted to Ternhill and their Whirlwinds and Wessex. It was some time after arriving at Ternhill, with Sergeant promotion just round the corner, that wider family circumstances came to the fore. My wife, Jan, and I thought it better that we left the RAF life rather than my wife not being able to follow me from posting to posting.

So into civvy life where I quickly got a position working at the Boulton Paul Aircraft Company in Wolverhampton, refurbishing Canberra gun packs. As the contract eventually ended I went into the cold forging trade setting up quality departments at two local factories again in Wolverhampton. From there and for the next 30 years I was in the automotive manufacturing sector at a company manufacturing truck transmissions, clutches and recovery winches for Land Rovers and Tanks.

Over the following years I found my skills obtained at Halton and the wider RAF stood me in good stead technically, practically and personally to cope with the vast majority of things that life threw at me. Within my 30 years in automotive manufacturing I moved from shop floor supervision to Sales, Supplier, Quality Assurance, Quality Manager at the transmission Assembly Plant before moving up to Division Quality at Solihull.

At this point my main responsibility was in bringing 17 manufacturing plants in the UK, France, Germany, Holland and Italy up to ISO9000 Quality System Standard. Due to our successes on first time passes I was also on the BSI Certification and Accreditation Committee at Milton Keynes. Also at this point my original company had, by this time, become part of the US Automotive Component Corporate, the Dana Corporation, based in Toledo, Ohio with many plants worldwide. As some of these plants became suppliers to our Division I audited their Company Quality Systems, which meant trips to the US, Brazil, Mexico and Canada. In supporting our own Division plants I travelled to suppliers in Europe, Turkey and India.

Our Corporate continuous improvement requirements placed upon all Divisions and plants added more travel for annual training in the US, consensus meetings and plant implementation audits. As our Division was a multi-product one, rather than a single product one, we were eventually ‘downsized’ with common product plants made fewer but larger. This led to the plant I had moved to as the Quality Manager being ‘cherry picked’ and closed down. So after some 30 years in this company I was without a job.

After a few weeks I managed to get a ‘fixed contract’ position back at the Transmission Assembly plant that I had been in up to 1990, (now part of Caterpillar Tractors), as their Year 2000 Supplier Conformance Manager. I am sure that you may recall the potential problems that were forecast for date controlled processes, items, etc. Thereafter employment for those of us 55-60 years of age in the West Midlands was very thin on the ground. Reporting to the Job Centre proved a complete waste of time and effort.

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Eventually, having always been very keen on driving and having passed the advanced driving test with the Institute of Advanced Motorists, and being a Member of the British Chauffeurs Guild, I drove as an Executive Chauffeur for a few years. I drove a few politicians, media personalities, etc. My highlight was with a chauffeuring company during the Northern Ireland peace talks at Weston Park, the earl of Bradford's stately pile not too far from RAF Cosford. Our tasks were to collect our assigned passengers from Birmingham Airport and ferry them to and from the talks to their accommodation, eventually taking them back to the Airport. I was driving a Mercedes Benz Vito Executive People Carrier and I ended up with a 'group of well known Irishmen' (yes, those) who tended to speak in Gaelic when in the car. I later went self-employed, driving for a director of an international financial investment company for a couple of years before taking early retirement.

It was then, in 2004, that I decided to go to local computer classes during which it was suggested as part of a local community education scheme for me to write something on a particular time in my life. From this was born most of my contribution to the first part of *'The Book'*. Although I did not realize it at the time I managed to cobble together some 28 pages using various resources.

One day my phone rang.

"Tony Robson?"

"Yes"

"96th Entry?"

"Yes"

"Mervyn Kelly!"

"Hi, Merv!"

No mistaking that voice even after so many years!

My computer class project was completed shortly before our Entry Reunion at Cambridge in September 2008. I had just e-mailed a copy to Merv, just in case he might be interested. Coincidentally some of our lads had been talking about 'will we just eventually fade away and be forgotten?' This was added to by one of our attending wives – 'Why not write a book then?' *'The Book'* was conceived by male and female cooperation at that moment!

Gerry Law misunderstood the question and volunteered to produce *'The Book.'*³³ He 'invited' myself and Dave Murray to assist, with an initial meeting at the Holiday Inn, Aston Clinton in December 2008. Our Entry Reunion 2010 at the Holiday Inn, High Wycombe, saw the publication of this 'tome' with copies both soft back and electronic officially placed into the RAF Halton Apprentices Museum archives. The circle from September 1960 to July 1963 recording our Halton years was complete but with the agreement to go forward with *'The Book - The Sequel'* covering our lives 1963 to 2013 and 50 years since we graduated. We're still the best Entry aren't we, lads?

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³³ I claim immunity as I had imbibed a glass or 2 (or more) of wine over Dinner - Editor

And Then...

Moving On by 686635 A/A Bill Sandiford

Moving on from Halton, my six years of Royal Air Force 'man's service' seemed to pass rapidly. On arriving at my first posting, (32MU, RAF St Athan), I'd begun to form a vague notion of what I wanted to do with my life... and that didn't include airframe fitting.

But what Halton *had* given me was an interest in something which, up until then, had always defeated me... namely mathematics.

My two years at St Athan proved memorable for three reasons: Firstly, I'd been assigned to the *V-Bomber* Undercarriage Servicing Bay, which proved fascinating. Secondly, I was privileged to be among those who lined the route during Sir Winston Churchill's funeral. Thirdly, having graduated from Halton with no useful state qualifications, I managed to collect six 'O' Levels.

My subsequent posting to the RAF Detachment at RCAF Goose Bay (Labrador) was, to say the least, inconvenient. I continued to work on *V-Bombers*, which was a plus, but I was desperate to 'get a firm grip' on the maths-front. Two correspondence courses were the answer, one in Pure Maths and one in Applied Maths. A year later I returned from the wilds of Canada as a Corporal technician posted to RAF Benson, and with a determination to gain a couple of 'A' levels and perhaps take a degree in mathematics. It seemed an impossible target.

One event during my stay at Benson stands out: a moment in time when I was invited to attend on royalty.

I was slogging away in the Argosy 'Mod Bay' when I received a summons to appear before the Squadron Commander. Having just turned 23, and still cursed with a painfully excessive respect for authority, it was with a measure of disquiet that I ascended the stairs to see 'the Boss'.

"Ah...Corporal Sandiford," he smiled. "Do come in...and take a seat."

Take a seat?

I'd learned somewhere that one should always remove one's head-dress before sitting down in the presence of a commissioned officer. I must have read about it in one of those Hornblower books. So off came the beret as I settled into the chair with the kind of flowing elegance which I felt sure would have met with Lord Horatio Hornblower's approval.

Why had I been summoned? Not because I was about to be given the biggest 'dressing down' of my life, admonished for some technical incompetence I hadn't previously been aware of. Nor had one of my nearest and dearest suddenly 'popped their socks'. No, it was simpler than that. For some unfathomable reason, I'd been selected to represent my station, RAF Benson, at a very important celebratory event in London's Lancaster House.

And Then...

The date had been set for 1st April 1968: the 50th Anniversary of the birth of the Royal Air Force.

“Of course,” the Squadron Commander went on, “you’ll be meeting with senior members of the Royal Family. How do you feel about that?”

What could I say? I was totally out of my depth. My response must have seemed utterly naïve.

“But...but...I’m a studying man, Sir, not a high-society man.”

“Yes, yes...I realise that,” he replied.

“Oh...right...I see, Sir. Well then, it would be an honour, Sir...a...a privilege in fact.”

A few days later, I found myself entering a very spacious dressing room just off the foyer of Lancaster House. It was without doubt the largest, most sumptuous, and most crowded ‘loo’ I have ever seen. Commissioned officers of all ranks...and I do mean all ranks...were up at the mirrors gazing intently at themselves, combing hair, adjusting collars and twitching ties. I almost felt tempted to follow suit.

The atmosphere in the main gallery was much less formal. I met with most of the Royal Family, including their Royal Highnesses, the Duke of Edinburgh and Princess Margaret. It was altogether a very pleasant evening.

A few months later, as a Sergeant technician³⁴ at the age of 24, I purchased my discharge from the RAF and sped off to the City of Leicester Polytechnic (now the De Montfort University) to study Mathematics, Computing & Statistics. I was in heaven. No, truly...! I met a young lady. She was studying Speech Therapy, and later she became my wife. After Leicester I took a diploma in Mathematical Statistics at Canterbury, and felt ready to face the world of science and operations analysis.

An aside... You’ll recall those black classrooms, all interconnected by covered walkways, adjacent to the main Halton school...? That’s where we ‘airframe fitters’ were taught Mechanics. My lecturer was Flying Officer John Goodfellow, although I didn’t know his full name at that time.

Remarkably, on taking-up my first civilian job as a Scientific Officer at the Royal Aircraft Establishment (RAE), Farnborough, I came to share an office with that same man... John Goodfellow! He’d retired from the RAF as a Squadron Leader (Education Branch), and was now a Senior Scientist in the RAE’s Systems Assessment Department. It became a standing joke between John and I that whenever our Head of Department, Sir David Perry (who later became Chief of Defence Procurement), came into our office with a technical query, I would always blame John for teaching me all the wrong things back at Halton.

³⁴ The ranks of Corporal Technician and Senior Technician were abolished in 1964 and became Corporal and Sergeant in the Technician ranks. Inverted chevrons were rotated 180° - the J/T chevron was replaced by the 4-bladed propeller badge. Chief Technicians replaced the crown with a smaller version of the J/T’s badge and dropped 1 rank in the pecking order having to wait for ‘dead man’s shoes’ for further promotion to Flight Sergeant - Editor

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Mathematical modelling was the order of the day, including an assessment of gun lethality in the air-to-air combat role, and deriving criteria for predicting aircraft performance in highly manoeuvring (combat) situations.

My five years at RAE Farnborough posed a steep but valuable learning curve. In 1980 I was keen to move on and I became a Senior Lecturer at the Royal Military College of Science (Shrivenham). My two years at Shrivenham helped to sharpen my presentation skills, and served to eliminate any fear I may have felt about facing large audiences. It became a matter of routine to be confronted by around 200 army, navy and air force officers in huge lecture theatres. The Friday afternoon slot was the greatest challenge... operational analysis would have been the last thing on their minds!

Having gained a solid grasp of some very useful operational analysis techniques I moved on to HQ Strike Command (RAF High Wycombe). Just a few weeks later, the Falklands War broke out. Working as a Senior Scientist under the Command Research Officer, I developed a mathematical technique to assist the flight-refuelling operation, and to optimise the logistic supply of the Falklands (via the '*Air Bridge*').

It was here at RAF High Wycombe that I met with another Halton acquaintance, Rick Ledsham³⁵. Rick was now a Squadron Leader, serving as the Strike Command Flight Safety Officer. It seems almost unbelievable that Rick is sadly no longer with us.

Up until that time, my career as a civilian scientist had been closely connected with the MoD, and with the RAF in particular. In 1985, now married with two children, I decided it was time to move on again.

I took a post as an operations analyst with the UK Civil Aviation Authority, based at the CAA's HQ in Kingsway, London. After a couple of years working in London, I was appointed Head of Scientific Group at the Air Traffic Control Evaluation Unit (Hurn Airport), Bournemouth.

At Hurn I found myself leading a multi-disciplinary team, comprising Air Traffic Controllers, operations analysts, software engineers and Human Factors specialists. We worked closely with the National Air Traffic Services (a branch of the CAA) to develop new air traffic control structures, controller interfaces and advanced communications technologies.

Our work included real-time simulation, fast-time simulation, Automatic Dependent Surveillance (via satellite), and the routine evaluation of radar systems to ensure they were fit for purpose. Analysis of aircraft tracks flown by departures and arrivals at major airports was undertaken in support of noise abatement studies. Data provided by pilots who may have experienced serious wake vortex incidents, usually on final approach, enabled air traffic planning staff to maintain adequate separation standards between the many different aircraft types.

³⁵ Rick was one of the three in our Entry who were awarded Cadetships - Editor

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I retired from 'organised work' in year 2000 in order to pursue my other interests. My wife and I now live in SW Scotland, close to where my father served on a Sunderland Flying Boat test-flight squadron.



I enjoy fly-fishing (I won the local 2012 '*Lochenbreck Trophy*' for netting a 12lbs 10oz trout), metal detecting (I have yet to unearth a Celtic hoard), learning to play the 'cello. I find myself unable to completely let go of the mathematics, so I tutor around 20 students (privately) each year.

My junior school teacher lives close-by. She's rather elderly now, but still remembers me running around the school playground with my arms outstretched pretending to be an aeroplane. She will also tell you that I was never any good at maths... always second from the bottom of her class. I suppose it's just that some people can't resist a challenge.

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686692 Gordon (Flash) Sherratt Electrical (Air) Apprentice 96th Entry

After leaving Halton in 1963 I was posted to RAF Honington in Suffolk along with sixteen others from our Entry. Roger Small lived near me in Kent and we went together in my old Hillman Minx. Apart from Chris Lee I can no longer recollect the others being there.³⁶

I was on the Victor bombers for a few weeks before being sent to RAF Gaydon for the Victor electrical course. I do not remember much about the work I did. I do remember being on QRA duty a few times.

Due to the Indonesian crisis in 1963, 3 Victors were sent to RAF Tengah in Singapore and we went on 3 month detachments. I think I went in November 1963. While there I remember being on guard duty on the Victors with 5 live bullets in the rifle. While there we did a 3 week detachment to Darwin. We went by RAF Britannia and stopped for refuelling at the Cocos Islands. I remember having Harold Robbins book '*The Carpetbaggers*' taken from me at Darwin customs.

I went out on another detachment in 1965 .Chris Lee was with us that time. I met Stan John at the Malcolm Club in Singapore. We were transferred from Tengah to RAF Butterworth. We went to Butterworth in a Beverley. Again we had a detachment for 3 weeks to Darwin.

I remember going for my Corporal exam out there and failing it. So back to Honington for a few weeks and was then posted to RAF Wittering and the Bomber Command Armament School, still a J/T. Do not remember too much initially apart from studying for Corporal exam and passing. As a Corporal I was expected to be an instructor on bombs and bomb test equipment. Had to do an Instructional Technique Course at RAF Upton then go to RAF Wyton to learn about nuclear bombs. Then I had to do instructional courses on bombs and test equipment. I remember Tony Cooper on my first course. Was not enjoying myself and screened for 5 years.

Could not get the Instrument course at RAF Newton so would not be able to sign on after 12 years. Used to get the SLAET³⁷ magazine and saw BOAC were advertising for Electricians. Applied and got an interview and passed. Was asked when could I start and when said got to get out of the RAF said they would give me 6 weeks. Got back to Wittering, applied to buy myself out and managed it inside the 6 weeks after paying £250 on 21st August 1968. Started at BOAC on 28th August 1968 at Heathrow.

³⁶ I was one of the others – Editor. The other others were – Jim Howe, Bob Ley, Ian Thompson, Mick Knights, Bill Nicholls, Geoff Rann, Pete Roberts, Tony Martin, Jim Saunders, John(Paddy) Walsh (RIP), Pip Piper, Mick Ashton and Ian Martin

³⁷ Society of Licensed Aircraft & Technologists – absorbed into Royal Aeronautical Society in 1987 - Editor

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Just before leaving, my girl friend's (now my wife) father had a stroke and her parents, with the help of the RAF Benevolent Fund, purchased Pete Wood's (96th Entry) bungalow at Market Deeping when he was posted from Wittering. Have not heard about Pete since.

BOAC was much like the RAF work wise, with many ex RAF people. The only difference was the unions and demarcation. I started on Boeing 707 major checks as an electrician and soon got a type course. It was then a matter of studying to get the CAA type licence that I passed in 1971.

More studying for Instrument and autopilot licences and I was promoted to supervisor in June 1974 when I would have been leaving the RAF. Stayed on major checks with the Boeing 747 until 1982.

In 1982 managed to get transferred to minor maintenance covering the Lockheed Tristar and the B747. During the 80's had 2 week detachments during winters to do LTU's Tristar maintenance in Dusseldorf and 3 weeks to do Tristar maintenance for Gulf Air at GAMCO in Abu Dhabi. Still studying for Radio and Radar licence without type ratings then do radio courses on the Tristar and B747 aircraft.

Being one of the few with triple avionic cover I was nominated as the avionic engineer, assisting the overseas engineer, for the Queen's Tristar to the Commonwealth Games in Auckland in Feb 1990, then to Christchurch. This trip lasted 3 weeks. The aircraft was fitted out with beds etc for the Queen.

In 1990 the B747 was introduced and some of us supervisors went on 3 week detachments to Seattle while BA crew were doing their training. We had to sign the log books after the Boeing engineers did the work.

In 1992 I was the avionic engineer assisting the overseas engineer on John Major's trip on a B747 to the Kyoto earth summit in Rio de Janeiro. This was for a week and we had stops at Andrews Air Force Base, Cartagena, Bogota then Rio.

In 1995 I was again the avionic engineer assisting on John Major's trip to Tel Aviv. This again was for a week with a stop at Amman, Jordan on the way back.

In November 1997 I was selected as a temporary quality engineer for six months, to join the 3 permanent ones at the Boeing factory in Seattle. British Airways were having a lot of aircraft built at this time. It was a matter of doing customer inspections during the build stages of the aircraft, through to paint inspections, going on the customer flight and sometimes the delivery flight. This was for the build of the 747-400, 777, 767 at Everett and the 737 and 757 at Renton. Anne and I had a nice apartment in Bellevue.

On return in 1998 I was made the second planning engineer on the expanding 777 fleet putting together the work packages for the hangars and keeping the fleet in compliance. In late 1999 at the age of 55 I was asked if I

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was interested in accepting early retirement. Once I had studied the offer I agreed and retired from BA at the end of February 2000 after 31½ years.

Two weeks later I started at AFX (Air Freight Express), a one aircraft operation, which had been going a few months with an old B747 freighter operating out of Heathrow. I was recruited as the planning engineer. Most of the licensed engineers were ex BA and flew with the aircraft. Most of the crew were also ex BA. The owner of the operation tried to cut corners everywhere, especially on maintenance, so along with the quality manager we used to have several run-ins with the CAA to keep the operation legal.

I had two maintenance inputs at TAECO in Xiamen, China for three, four weeks. On the second one, in December 2001, we got called to TAECO managers and told,

“We suggest you return to UK as soon as possible or you may spend Christmas in jail”

This was because the owner owed a lot of money. We did leave.

Had other maintenance inputs at Cargolux in Luxembourg and Hahn in Germany. Driving back the last time met Kevin Ledlie at the Calais tunnel duty free.

The owner asked the Tech Engineer, Quality Manager and myself to look at another B747 freighter at the Pinal Air Park in the Arizona desert. We inspected the aircraft, did engine runs and checked the maintenance history and advised the owner not to buy it. Of course, he did. With problems and with the aircraft mostly only one was earning money, and in 2003 he went into administration, so made redundant and owed quite a bit of money.

In July 2003 bought a 1 man gardening maintenance business from a person going to Tenerife. It included a Renault Trafic van and mowers etc and around 30 customers. Soon after starting got angina and had to use the GTN³⁸ spray at times. Got worse and had to go to hospital in October under observation while waiting for an angiogram at Brompton Hospital in London. After 2 weeks a bed available and ended up with a stent and 2 balloons. After 2 weeks rest back, doing the garden maintenance for 5 years ending with 42 customers.

Since 2003 I also did a job as a gardener/handyman at a solicitor's in Maidenhead, as an employee, one day a week. I still do this job and have no intention of stopping for a few more years.

Reunions

I went to the first 96th Entry Reunion, which I believe Pip Piper organised at a Hotel in Aylesbury, not sure what year. I also went to one or maybe two at the Sergeant's Mess at Halton.

³⁸ Glyceral Trinitrate

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Around 1982, while at British Airways, a colleague said he was going to the Halton Triennial Reunion, the first I had heard about it. I contacted the Halton Association which is how I came to be registered as the 96th Secretary. From then on have been to most of the Triennial Reunions.

Around 2001 I had a phone call from Merv Kelly, who had been to his first Triennial, which I did not go to, asking if I would help him organise a 96th Entry Reunion and asking if I had any contact details. I had the list that Pip Piper sent out and from that Merv and his wife, Pat, set about contacting you. Met up with Merv and Pat and said I would sort out the Hotel booking at Holiday Inn at Aston Clinton for a Reunion in November 2003. After co-ordinating with Merv could not attend as was stuck in Wexham Park Hospital with angina. Merv and Pat called to see me in hospital on his way home saying the 96th had to get a stained glass window for St George's church as soon as possible to get a decent position, and that we needed a website.

Robbie and Judith Honnor had helped Merv and Pat at the Reunion and Robbie said he would set up a website. Robbie and Merv then designed the stained glass window and, with help of Min Larkin³⁹, had it manufactured for our Reunion and Dedication in November 2004. As our Reunions have been near me at Maidenhead I have continued looking after the Hotel bookings, apart from the one at Cambridge in 2008, which Robbie did, living near there at the time.

This will in fact be the last Reunion I will be helping to co-ordinate with Merv and Pat.

Family married to Anne for 44 years and we have 3 sons and a daughter, and 4 grandchildren. Our eldest son emigrated to Brisbane 5 years ago and thanks to British Airways staff travel, which I get until I am 85, we can afford to visit each year, usually November/December. Due to my grade on retiring we are entitled to Club seats which we normally get. Last year on the leg from Singapore to Sydney we were upgraded to first class.

Hobbies Still follow motorsport, mainly British Touring cars and go to Brands Hatch, Thruxton, Rockingham and Silverstone and watch on TV.

Keen cyclist both road and mountain bike, mainly get out on Friday on road for 30+miles and Sunday 30+ miles.

Have been involved with the Reading Track Cycling League for 25 odd years as a timekeeper judge and commissaire. For the last 10 years I have been the organiser as well which takes care of Monday nights from mid April until the end of September, and I put on a Sunday meeting in May and another in August. I wrote the website in 2003 and have a host to run it. See www.readingvelodromeracing.co.uk. Next year, when I am 70, will be my last as the organiser.

³⁹ Deputy Chairman of RAFHAA and 63rd Entry - Editor

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Have a big chocolate Labrador that likes 2 hours plus walking each day, go to a dog obedience class and go to the occasional dog obedience show, in the pre-beginners and beginners class.

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Mike Snuggs

Early September in 1960, the steam train from Marylebone gave me that first view of Wendover High Street; a street that would be part of my life for over ten years. I had joined the Royal Air Force to be trained as a Dental Technician to help fight tooth decay all over the world. I was at least 50 miles from home, that first small step in a long, long journey to far flung destinations I knew nothing about.

Three years of intense military training and the achievement of a City and Guilds Final Certificate would set me on my way; J/T Snuggs, with one year's accelerated promotion, passed out 1963, posted to RAF Uxbridge, 23 miles from home. One step forward, one skip back.

Problem with a service career in this period was the withdrawal from the Far East and the closure of service hospitals as the numbers reduced. I did, in truth, have three years in Germany where the exchange rate gradually made us poorer; and three years in Cyprus when EOKA and the Turks decided the family had to go home.

Back to the UK in 1977, just in time for the firemen's strike. Seven weeks in Bedford; posted to RAF Halton, working in Maitland Medical Centre where *Bilko*⁴⁰ lined us up for the tetanus jabs in 1960. Full circle you may say, but it was a spiral of frustration due to the feeling of under achievement and inability to change the system. I had time to serve, 7 years until retirement, and during that period I spent a lot of time working part time in local laboratories with ex RAF technicians who had left due to redundancy etc, and who had set up locally.

Halton was now basically a recruit training centre and indulged in Boy Scout war games, which really pushed all the go buttons. Left quietly in June 1984 and when I turned the corner on to the London Road I imagined hopeful hitch hikers lined up like a taxi queue, getting away for just a day or if lucky the whole weekend. Sadly no more.

The great hope of success in Civvy Street, to be honest, was well planned and with the help of a loan from the Benevolent Fund I had set up, with a partner, a laboratory in Bosham, West Sussex. Unfortunately partnerships, like marriages, end in divorce [sometimes] and new premises had to be found. This is the bit that was missing in service life, the adventure of endeavour and getting your plans and hopes accepted by others, and building on the success. Yes it was hard work and sometimes very stressful but you're in control and can make it work.

⁴⁰ This was the infamous Sgt Medic who took great delight in a sadistic approach to administering jabs to Brats. He bore a startling physical resemblance to Sgt Bilko, a character in a US comedy TV series, played by Phil Silvers. - Editor

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Being a wise man I talked my daughter into the profession and forced her into an arranged marriage with another technician and when they told me to leave, I retired. We still live in Bosham and I now enjoy Vet's golf while the wife walks the dog. Yes it's the same girl I tried to leave in 1960, never quite got far enough away.

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Brian G Spence

I was born in Inverness and educated at Bishop Eden School, and the Inverness Technical High School. I, along with a couple of hundred other young lads, joined the Royal Air Force in 1960 as a Halton Aircraft Apprentice. Those of us who survived the gruelling training regime graduated in 1963; I was now a Navigation Instrument Fitter.

From 1963 until 1969 I served at RAF Upwood and RAF Wyton on *V bomber* 3rd line servicing, and then with No 51Sqn. I was promoted to Sgt in 1968. A posting to RAF Coningsby followed in 1969 and, after training at the Phantom Ground School, I was posted to RAF Bruggen in 1970 where I served with No 14Sqn.

My tour finished, I was posted to RAF Lossiemouth in 1973, where I underwent conversion courses at the Jaguar Ground School and Elliott Automation. I joined the Jaguar Software Team in 1975.

I was awarded a permanent commission and graduated from the RAF College in 1979. After Engineer Officer training on the first New Pattern of Engineering Training course in the Communications-Electronics sub-specialisation, I was posted to RAF Boulmer in 1980 as a Duty Engineering Officer.

In 1982 I joined the Air Defence Environment Team at the MoD, working with United Kingdom Air Defence Ground Environment (UKADGE) Systems Ltd on an improved system (IUKADGE).

Following this, I spent 3 years with Hughes Aircraft Company in Fullerton, California, on the design and development of the IUKADGE Command and Control System before returning to the UK in 1985 to help form the IUKADGE System Test and Trials Team at RAF Bentley Priory.

In 1987 I was posted to the Radio Introduction Unit at RAF Benson as Project Officer on the UK AIR Command and Control Information System (CCIS) and, in 1990, moved to RAF Benbecula as OC Eng & Supply. On promotion to Squadron Leader in 1991, I took up staff duties at Headquarters Strike Command (HQ STC) in the Communication & Information Systems (CIS) ADGE branch where I was responsible for the data handling and display systems, command and control systems and data link buffers for IUKADGE.

Following that, in 1993, I was appointed OC Eng & Supply Squadron at RAF Buchan and helped the Unit to achieve its first post-IUKADGE Tactical Evaluation successfully.

I then took up the post of Communications Policy 3 at HQ STC in Sep 1995 where I was responsible for the production of CIS Facilities Requirements for new projects, and for the development of CIS policy to meet evolving systems within STC. Major areas of interest were the Defence Fixed Telecommunications System (DFTS) as STC representative on contract bid operational effectiveness; production and implementation of the STC/HQ DFTS Service Level Agreement; and staffing of papers relating to the proposed Defence Communications

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Agency. Other activities included membership of the working group on the communications requirements for the reorganisation of the Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centres, and staffing of miscellaneous CIS topics such as X.400 Messaging, X.500 Directory Services and Domain Naming.

I was a keen participant in keep fit activities, including hill-walking. I have maintained interests in railway history, wilderness conservation and dry stone walling. I also play the bagpipes, penny whistle and piano. I married Frances in 1976, and our son, Alasdair⁴¹, was born in California in 1984. He is now a Tornado pilot on 617 Sqn at RAF Lossiemouth.

I retired from the RAF prematurely in April 1997, (17 months short of my 55th birthday), to take up the post of Wing Administrative Officer (Wg Ad O) with Edinburgh and South Scotland Wing of the Air Training Corps (ATC). Later that year, I was transferred to the Wg Ad O post in Highland Wing ATC, based in Inverness. These posts have since been renamed Wing Executive Officer (Wg Ex O).

As a Civil Servant with an RAF Reserve Commission in the rank of Sqn Ldr, the Wg Ex O and his staff were responsible for all administrative aspects of the ATC volunteer staff (including recruitment, security clearances, and pay and allowances); organising courses; staff training weekends; annual cadet camps in the UK and overseas; cadet selections for the International Air Cadet Exchange; honours and awards; advising on RAF ethos and other aspects of the Service; being 'right hand man' to the volunteer Wing Commanding Officer; and managing the Wing budget. Working with volunteers could be difficult and sometimes frustrating, but it was an interesting and widely varied job which lasted 16 years.

I finally retired on 5 April 2013.

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⁴¹ In 2007 I caught a BBCTV News clip of Prince William receiving his wings from his father, Prince Charles. Imagine my surprise when I recognised Brian amongst the proud parents whose sons were also receiving their wings. A proud moment for all concerned - Editor

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Life after Halton by Malcolm Swaisland

My first posting was to 32 MU at St Athan, and I arrived there in August 1963 along with about 25 other members of the Entry, so there were a few friendly faces around. In those days 32 MU was a big place – it was the RAF's factory, reconditioning both complete aircraft and components.

I was posted to Vulcan metal repairs, in those days this was on the Mk1. We operated a two shift system, and I was on nights; this was from 16.30 to 02.00 Monday to Thursday. My weekend started at 2 o'clock on Friday morning and finished at 16.30 on Monday, and as I was going out with a young lady in Kent this worked out very well.

We received Vulcans on arrival for Major servicing and over the course of about three weeks the engines were removed, the structure was inspected and all necessary repairs were completed. I was on the general team and we replaced intake skins, undercarriage bay walls etc. The really nasty job, which had a dedicated team, was the fuel tank bays. Each of the wing tanks was assigned two men, one on days one on nights. They removed the tank, and then completely replaced all of the panels in the bay before fitting a new tank. When we had finished our work the aircraft was then towed to another hangar where the engines were fitted, everything was lubricated, and system components changed and so on.

After about fifteen months there was a gap between the end of the Mk1 Majors and the start of the Mk2, so we got Beverley Majors. Same arrangement – we did the repairs then off to another hangar for the rest of the work. On arrival the aircraft was put into the hangar, and raised on jacks. Then we started stripping them down and carrying out all repairs. Control gave us 26 working days to complete this stage of the procedure with the aim that once we became familiar with the aircraft the time taken would reduce to 21 days.

The first aircraft had spent all of its life on the OCU at Thorney Island so it was in very good condition. We completed our part in about 24 days which led Control to think that their schedule was sound. Unfortunately the next batch of aircraft due for servicing were based in Aden and the operators there clearly knew their aircraft very well because they despatched the first one followed about two days later by the second one. The second one arrived just as we finished our first aircraft; however the first one was in such a state that it took about eight weeks to travel from Aden to St Athan.

What a state they were in – the complete space below the freight bay floor was full of sand, literally tons of it. The structure, especially the top surface of the wings, was so badly corroded that the decision was made to strip the paint off of the entire aircraft. The Beverley was a big machine and aircraft tradesmen could not be spared to assist the surface finishers, so the clerks from SHQ were employed. This was the situation when I left, each aircraft was completed in the time that it took.

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In June 1965 I left St Athan on posting to yet another MU, this time 390 based at Seletar in Singapore. I had a lovely flight out along with around 40 other military personnel in a scheduled BOAC VC10 from Heathrow. The only fault was that the cabin crew had not been told that they were trooping, and ran out of beer over Italy.

The 390MU was split into 2 flights, aircraft storage, which had very few people and salvage and repair. I joined the latter and we carried out Category 3 repairs anywhere in FEAF. We were also responsible for the recovery of crashed aircraft. These were mainly Javelins. A little story although I was not on this particular expedition – a Javelin out of Labuan in North Borneo suffered an engine failure and the crew ejected. A salvage party was despatched led by our intrepid Flt Lt. They took with them a Sgt from the Airfield Construction Squadron based at Seletar.

This unit was about to be disbanded and the Sgt took with him a supply of explosives. The failed engine was located buried in very hard ground. Despite the advice from the salvage team the Flt Lt accepted the suggestion from this Sgt that he could loosen the ground with his explosives, which he clearly did not want to take back to base. The fuse was lit, followed by a very loud bang, and pieces of engine rained out of the sky.

What to do? They came up with a plan – recover the other engine. This too was well buried. At that minute, along a nearby road, came a Chinese gentleman driving a steam roller. The Sgt Rigger said that he would pay him to pull the engine out; however the Flt Lt thought that this was his job. The Sgt suggested to the Flt Lt that \$20 (Straits Dollars) would be a fair price. However the Flt Lt said “nonsense”, and suggested \$200. About 10 minutes later the engine was recovered, and the steam roller drove away with the diver counting the money – \$50 for the boss and the rest for me ...well, he will not know so “ITS ALL FOR ME”.

Later the team were enjoying nice cool Tigers at Labuan when they were summoned by the Board of Enquiry and told; “wrong engine lads go and get the other one”. Back they went, recovered what pieces they could find and delivered them to Labuan. Months later the accident report was published and it said ‘an unexplained catastrophic engine failure’ – if only they knew.

I spent 30 happy months there, with detachments to Butterworth in north east Malaysia, Kuching in Borneo, and Gan. I spent most of my tour at Tengah and Changi working on Cat 3 repairs. We travelled each day from Seletar in 3 ton trucks driven by locally employed drivers. I met a few members of the Entry around Singapore, and a very fed up Les Edwards on Gan. About 15 months after I arrived Tony Bevan joined me on repair and salvage flight. However Tony soon disappeared back to the UK to be commissioned.

One Saturday afternoon I had popped into the Britannia Club, a joint services club operated by the NAAFI located in Singapore City between the sea and Raffles Hotel. There I met Tony who said he had heard there was a market where they sold snakes. So transport was arranged, a trishaw, the

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driver briefed and off we set. Singapore is a multi cultural society, but after a while we were in an area populated only by Chinese. Suddenly the driver made a sharp turn into a short street that was completely occupied by a market.

One of the stalls was full of dead animals such as four foot long monitor lizards. Our driver spoke to the trader behind the stall, who produced what I can only describe as a large circular laundry basket made from rusty iron. Inside were two hessian sacks, one of which was lifted out, the securing string removed and handed to me. I took it, noting that it had a very musty smell, and that it was unexpectedly heavy. Peering in I found myself face to face with a live python. Now I am not keen on snakes so the sack was rapidly passed onto Tony.

Malaya and Singapore have a large snake population – they were mainly shy so you did not see them very often but squashed ones were a common site on the more isolated roads.

One day I was put on to a salvage team to recover a Twin Pioneer that had crashed into a paddy field shortly after takeoff from Butterworth. The local Engineering Officer thought that it was category 4 – *repair at the manufacturers*. The Warrant Officer Aircraft assessor and a Chief Technician flew up to Butterworth to examine the wreck and the difficulty in salvaging it. I happened to be in the office when the WO phoned in to say, “It is category five”. He was asked what the ground was like.

“Oh I don’t know we have not been to the site.”

“Well how do you know it is cat 5?”

Back came the reply, *“We flew over it on the way in.”*

The team were duly despatched in a Beverley with two large wooden pallets and two members of the Royal Engineers, who had a small diesel-driven light bulldozer. On arrival the bulldozer would not start, so movements towed it off of the Beverley then around dispersal to bump start it. The pallets were to drop the engines onto, from where they were to be picked up by a helicopter.

However that plan was scrapped, because the Accident Investigating Board had found out why both engines had failed after takeoff. The pilot was on a ground tour at Butterworth, and had not flown a ‘*Twin Pin*’ for several years. He had not gone through the full check list and as a result the fuel was not switched on! We went to the crash site to find that the aircraft was some 300 yards out from solid land in the middle of a flooded and very muddy paddy field. The crash guard cheered us up by saying, *“the hygiene section killed it last night.”* It turned out to be a king cobra that had set up home in the ‘*Twin Pin*’.

Saturday morning we were on site, the bulldozer was fitted with a winch and the plan was to pull the wreck in as big parts as possible back to solid ground. Then, using its blade as a crane, to lift the wreckage onto a trailer. Once again the bulldozer failed to start. The duty fitter from MT came. He was a locally employed Chinese man who admitted that he knew nothing about

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diesel engines because there were none at Butterworth. However he got it going and we spent a very hard day carrying the cable out to the wreck and pulling the outer wings and undercarriage back – note that these had broken off during the crash. We all wore jungle boots, like trainers, that came up to just below the knee, shorts and not much else. The sun reflecting off of the water left me looking like a Zebra – white feet, very brown knees and white where the shorts covered.

The mud and water was about two feet deep, and we saw a number of snakes crawling around, all covered in mud. Sunday morning and once again the bulldozer would not start. The duty fitter was summoned. This time it was a portly Indian man. He spent some time looking at the machine then in his best Peter Sellers voice said, *“I think it is broken.”* So Sunday became a day of rest and we retired to the domestic area, and the company of our Australian hosts. Strange people behind the servery. In the Mess stood the Sergeant cook with a big spoon in his hand. They produced great potatoes – I guess that they were deep fried. His instructions were, “You Pommies can only have one potato, but you can have as many steaks as you want.”

Come Monday the Sergeant MT fitter arrived and quickly repaired the dozer. The station sent a gang of locally employed Coolies to help us drag the winch cable out, and we transported the wreck to the dump site.



This was Cat 4?

During the two and a half years that I was there I went with one of my roommates to Bangkok for a holiday, where we made the most of the scenic and cultural delights that were on offer. We travelled by indulgence in a Service aircraft – no guarantee of a flight but if you got one then you only paid for the onboard food. The gods smiled on us and we travelled out on a Royal New Zealand Air Force Bristol Freighter. This was headed to Vietnam carrying a very large crate which completely filled the centre of the freight bay. We were in the tail section with some Kiwi ground crew. I upset them because we flew

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through cloud and being old and unpressurised, rain came in, so I put my umbrella up.

During my tour I also spent quite a lot of my free time touring mainland Malaya, and Singapore Island. Of course there were frequent visits to enjoy the delights of the bars in Singapore. Not forgetting Bugis Street where you could drink until dawn, playing noughts and crosses with very young children (they never lost), and watching the transvestites parading around.

We lived in very airy three storey barrack blocks that had been built in the late 1930's. They had wide verandas running right around all 3 floors with metal railings on the first and second floors. The rooms were laid out for six occupants, but most only had three or four occupied beds. I lived on the second floor. One night the four occupants of a room on the ground floor went to the Malcolm Club for a few beers. Later three of them went down to the local village for a POPS – (Pops was the local Indian run curry house. He only sold Kima Roty – Kima was a small portion of very hot curry and Roty was a small loaf of bread like a French stick. If you got a carry-out the warm bread came wrapped in a banana leaf and the curry in an old tin can (washed out of course).

Back at the room the fourth man got into bed dressed in the standard kit – nude, with flip flops under his bed and a towel over the bed end. This was to wrap around you if a nocturnal visit to the loo was required. There was just a sheet to cover himself. Well, after a while he went to the loo, settled back in bed and felt something heavy on his feet.

So he kicked the sheet but the weight was still there He reached up, switched on the light over his bed, and saw that the weight was a brightly coloured snake. Sometime later the other three returned and found him nude, standing on the table in the centre of the room.

“What are you doing there?”

The reply came – *“there is a snake in the room.”* Of course nobody believed him. The others got into the bed but our man refused to move. To humour him the main lights were switched on and furniture was moved – so now there were four nude men stood on the table while the snake slid around the floor.

Eventually it went near to a door. Somebody went out of the other door, which was diagonally opposite. Into the store room and came back with an empty galvanised steel dustbin which was dropped over the snake. The bin was then dragged across the floor to the door. *Now, the floors in the rooms had ceramic tiles, but the veranda was just smooth cement and the tiles stood about an inch higher than the cement floor.*

As the bin was dragged out onto the veranda this gap allowed the front half of the snake to escape, and it was very angry. Brooms were fetched and the snake was despatched to its last posting. Later the next day the snake was identified as a banded krait. The man who kicked his sheet was very lucky to be alive.

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Back to my Flt Lt – the C in C had his own helicopter, a Sycamore (Riggers will remember that there was one in the new work shop at Halton⁴²). One afternoon it suffered a minor engine problem and the Master Pilot at the controls made a precautionary landing in the middle of a building site. At that time Singapore was building tower blocks, finishing one every week or so. On receiving the news our man jumped into a Land Rover, on his own, and rushed to the site. Of course, by the time he got there the C in C, and any chance of brownie points, had gone.

That night I was instructed to report to MT in the morning. There, a convoy of a tractor towing a trailer, a Cole's crane and Land Rover was assembling. We had two trailers, a large one and a smaller one. Our observant Flt Lt had noted that between the road and the helicopter there was a narrow bridge. His plan, (this time he stayed in his office), was to take 4 long planks on site and these would be nailed to the bed of the trailer overhanging the sides and the helicopter wheels would sit on them.

We arrived on site accompanied by a Chief Tech from the Sycamore operating flight. The crane drove over the bridge up to the helicopter. We removed the blades and fitted a lifting strop to the rotor head. The crane picked up the helicopter and drove back over the bridge, where it then became apparent that fitting planks to the bed of the trailer would not work. So we set off home, tractor towing the helicopter and the crane towing the trailer.

The Chief advised that there were no proper wheel bearings on the Sycamore, just phosphor bronze bushes which needed frequent greasing. The Land Rover zoomed off to Seletar to fetch a grease gun. He caught up with us on a main road, where we stopped, greased the bearings, drank the cold bottles of 'Coke' that he had thoughtfully brought back and then we set off. I was brake man and suddenly I saw that a 'Coke' bottle had been left on the tractor. Nobody was looking at me, the bottle fell off and now we had a helicopter with a flat tyre. A new tyre was fetched, the crane lifted the helicopter causing yet greater traffic jams as we changed the wheel.

All good things come to an end and in early December 1967 I flew back to the UK in a British Eagle Airways Britannia. We left Singapore at about nine in the morning; temperature was around 85°F. Twenty two hours later, nearing our destination the Captain announced, *"In 30 minutes we will be landing at London Heathrow Airport, it is a fine clear evening; it has been snowing and the temperature is 27°F."* This was a considerable shock to all of the passengers, even more so when we landed, as there were no loading bridges in those days. We climbed down the steps and walked through the snow.

After two and a half years in the sun the UK was very cold. In February 1968 I arrived at my new station, Benson. There I was on Argosy first line, my first experience of an operational unit. The centralized line looked after all of the Argosies, but the aircrew were split into 2 Squadrons. The personnel on

⁴² This was the one that the 95th Entry moved to Henderson/Groves Parade Square as part of their Graduation pranks - Editor

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first line were divided between four shifts, however we had two on days and two on nights. Every four weeks the duty shift covered the weekend. We had a reasonable number of detachments, mainly to support the Army on various exercises.

In April 1968 I went on a detachment to El Adem, in the Libyan desert about eighteen miles south of Tobruk. We sent four aircraft; one just carried all of the ground crew and a few other passengers. The rest had spares, ground equipment and a lot of role change kit. Argosies had a short range so we refuelled at Luqa in Malta. The first three departed, but the fourth, with all the ground crew on board, had a minor engine problem. As we were officially in transit, ASF (Aircraft Servicing Flight) sorted out the problem, which required a spare part to be flown out from Benson. So we were all put into transit accommodation for the night.

The detachment entertainment committee went into overdrive and arranged a full detachment outing to Strait Street, known to the Navy as the 'Gut'. That night the American Sixth Fleet was in dock and I sat at a table outside a bar and watched a fight between the Maltese police and an American shore patrol. The Maltese had arrested a very drunk sailor and the shore patrol wanted him back. The Americans won because they had the biggest truncheons. After that I often wondered why the Snoops never took as much care to rescue a miscreant Brat from the civvy police in Aylesbury.

On this exercise we worked twenty four hour shifts. OK if you could get your head down for a few hours in the night, but not safe if you had to work straight through. Fortunately we had safari camp beds and always managed a few hours rest. We were supporting the Army transporting cans of water from Cyprus to a desert landing strip called Gott el Affrag. The Army were waging a big tank war supported by the ground attack Hunters of 1 Squadron. The orange force was supported by naval Buccaneers all operating from El Adem.

No.1 Squadron had a flag pole outside of their HQ tent at the top of which they flew, day and night, a pennant which was awarded to them in the First World War. One night we went to supper then into the NAAFI for a quick beer to find that the bar was full of sailors. Suddenly, a sailor climbed onto a table and announced "*the reason for this exercise is to prove that the Navy is better than the RAF and tonight we have done so.*" With that another sailor joined him on the table and from out of the waist band of his bellbottoms he produced the pennant.

At this stage we thought it wise to retire, but later we heard the Navy doing a very vocal Bear March around the camp. After a few hours sleep we woke to a very misty dawn and the site of Land Rovers rushing up and down the airfield. As the mist cleared we saw, parked in front of 1 Squadron's HQ, a Buccaneer. The Squadron's ground crew had stolen it, fully chocked it and had padlocked the chains. They would only give the keys to their CO when he had the pennant. Poor man. He was quite worried, for only weeks before one of his pilots had flown under Tower Bridge. However the exchange went without a hitch and honour was restored.

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In the last few days, just as the exercise was about to end, tragedy struck and one of our Argosies hit an improvised shower at Got El Afrag removing a section of the wing along with the ailerons. The resulting crash killed all eleven men on board⁴³. I had loosely been involved with recovering a fatal Javelin crash in Singapore, but that was the first time that I had been on an operational unit and then a much less fatal crash had occurred. Unfortunately years later, when on 41 Squadron at Coningsby, I had to live through that sad experience on two more occasions.

In October of 1968 I married Rose, who I had been courting since leaving Halton, and I immediately applied for an overseas posting. I spent a few more months on Argosies with more detachments, including one very nice one to Cyprus. In those days, every October, the *Red Arrows* and the *Falcons* went to Akrotiri for a week to practise for the next season. Both teams had an Argosy go with them. There were two supernumerary crew allocated to this detachment. They were supposed to be allocated to the Falcons aircraft to assist the Air Eng to keep it flying.

Fortunately Operations made a b***s up, resulting in myself and another Corporal being on the *Red Arrows* aircraft. The Load Master was not happy about this because there was one more person on the aircraft than the number of stressed seats. However the Captain was not concerned so my mate and I took it in turns to sit on the jump seat in the cockpit for take offs and landings.

We joined the *Arrows* at Kemble, and then went to Prestwick, finally down to Manston for air displays. Now the Gnat had a shorter range than the Argosy. The first stop was Nice, refuelling completed the *Arrows* pilots sat under the wings and ate their packed lunches. The Argosy crew, including us two Corporals, went to the aircrew dining room, where the RAF agent had laid on a very nice meal, with wine. Somebody ordered two more bottles; they were opened when the Captain said we cannot drink any more. The Load Master said to us two, "*Transport Command never leaves alcohol on the table.*" I have never slept so well on an Argosy as I did on that hop to Luqa.

We then staged through Crete where we watched Ray Hanna march down the line of Gnats inspecting them closely and b*****ing certain pilots. It turned out that over the Mediterranean they had seen and had beaten up a large sailing ship. The ones receiving a b*****ing had spots of salt on their canopies received when flying 'UNDER' the bowsprit of this ship! Once at Akotiri our aircraft was used by the Red Arrows as a crew room. We spent the week in a hotel in Limassol with the aircrew. Hired two cars and travelled all over the island.

The line at Benson consisted of 18 parking pans which were off the side of a taxi way that had a gentle S-shaped curve and was on a slope. We had pans 1 to 3, and 4 5 & 6 belonged to '*The Queens Flight*' (TQF); we used the rest. On weekends, when there were very few people around, attempts were

⁴³ The Flt Engineer was Sgt Jeff Wass who, as a Corporal Technician had instructed 96th Entry Electrical Fitter Brats and was himself a Brat - Editor

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made to drive our venerable petrol driven Land Rover from pan 18 down to pan 1 at speed. It was rumoured that you could achieve 70 miles an hour, but 60 was about the fastest that I saw.

This particular Saturday I was sat in the back with two other lads. As we approached the TQF pans we saw a young couple walking out to a one of their aircraft. Some distance behind was a small group of officers and civilians who were frantically waving at us. Well, the Land Rover passed between the two groups, straight past number one dispersal, and through the open doors of our hangar. There it was rapidly abandoned where it stood, coughing and spluttering, while we all fled the scene. Strangely we heard no more about this incident. I have no idea who the officers were, but the young couple was the heir to the throne and his sister!

In January 1970 I made my first visit to Coningsby as a student on the Phantom airframe course. This lasted six weeks and gave us a detailed insight into what was a very complicated aircraft. My six weeks were extended to include three weeks practical experience on the OCU rectification flight night shift. Then in May it was off to Bruggen for a three year tour.

Initially Bruggen was a great place to be. It had no aircraft, and I arrived early enough in the build up to be awarded a Married Quarter. This was a MoD multiple hiring at Wickrath some twenty miles away from base. My first posting was to ASF. As I was arriving the question asked was "*do you want to go on tomorrow's visit to the Amstel Brewery in Amsterdam?*" A silly question. Do you know they actually made us walk for two minutes through the Brewery before we got into the sampling room? As invited guests we had an extended visit with lunch provided before we all staggered out of the front door across the road and onto Amstel Breweries very large boat for a tour around the canals.

After about a month of painting toolkits etc the first Phantoms arrived. These were straight from 23MU at Aldergrove. Most of these aircraft had only flown around seventeen hours. Phantoms were interesting aircraft to work on, always producing new snags to keep us on our toes. The major problems for the riggers were fuel leaks from the integral wing tanks, hydraulic system failures and burst tyres. '*The Tomb*⁴⁴ had a large keel area and was badly affected by cross winds. Additionally, if the rudder pedals were depressed by three degrees then the brakes were applied. All too frequently we had to recover aircraft from the runway with no tyre on one wheel and shredded undercarriage doors.

The other major fault was engine failure. After TSR2 was cancelled and Phantom ordered in its place, as a sop to British industry Rolls Royce (RR) Spey engines were fitted. In the early seventies RR were in a mess and eventually they went into administration. They had only had a relatively short time to fit reheat to the Spey and the engine was not properly sorted. At the end of 1970 Bruggen was averaging 17 flying hours per engine change.

⁴⁴ The nickname given to the Phantom - Editor

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After a few months I was posted onto 17Squadron, from where I transferred into the centralised rectification flight. Eventually, after about a year, when all three squadrons were up and running this unit disbanded and the manpower was spread over the squadrons. Every year there were armament practice camps, so between 1971 and 73 I spent March in Sardinia. The down side of course was TACEVALS and all the build up exercises spent living in NBC kit.

On one of these I was listening to the engineering net radio when an exercise bomb disposal team was despatched to an incident. Shortly after an anguished call came over the radio *“you didn’t tell us this bomb was a real one”*. Contractors digging near ATC had found a hand grenade. Our role was strike and we were allocated to SACEUR. This meant that off the end of the runway was QRA with three armed aircraft and crews at cockpit readiness. The bombs belonged to USAF and in front of each aircraft was a white line which only the aircrew were allowed to cross. At either end were sentry boxes, one for a Snoop and one for a USAF police man. It was believed that the USAF man was there to protect the bomb, and the Snoop was there to shoot the USAF before he shot one of our guys who had put a foot over the line. Serious stuff!

QRA was ringed by a double barbed wire fence some three metres tall. The area between the fences was often patrolled by dogs. Pedestrian entry was through an electrically controlled turnstile. We had passes and the police station had a duplicate copy. You showed your pass, they produced their copy and let you in. Next to this turnstile was a road entry controlled by a powered gate. In the queue one afternoon, waiting to gain entry, I heard a horn. I looked around to see the gates swing open and the local municipal dust cart enter. So much for security.

Yet in August 1972, after the Munich Olympics, Germany was in a security melt down. Every three weeks the aircraft on QRA were rotated and the Americans convoyed the bomb back to their bunker and delivered a replacement. They were so paranoid that the bomb convoy might be attacked that they serviced the bomb in QRA and it was then loaded onto the new aircraft. From a distance bomb servicing appeared to require a big tin of wax polish and lots of elbow grease.

Every March for the three years that I was there saw me in Sardinia for a 4 week armament practice camp. We were based at Decimomannu where 50% of the facility was paid for and used by the Luftwaffe. The Germans had a large permanent staff based there. Unlike us they sent aircraft and crews but very few engineers.

We had a NAAFI and Mess, etc; they had a club which was open to us. This club served draught Lowenbrau, in my opinion the very best lager. They had a monthly supply sent by air. This supply was due that evening and the Germans went into the bar and enquired, “Had it arrived?” “Yes”, was the answer. “Good. We will leave it to settle and enjoy it tomorrow”. The next evening a group of Germans arrived and ordered draught Lowenbrau. “We

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have not got any", said the barman. *"But it came yesterday."* To which the barman replied, *"So did the English."*

Rose and I had a great tour. She worked, but as a dependant, paid no income tax or national insurance. We purchased a tent and visited a good part of Europe, driving as far south as Rimini in Italy. In May 73 my tour ended and I was posted to 41 Squadron, which was a Tactical Fighter Squadron at Coningsby. This meant multi role – air defence, ground attack and photo reconnaissance. We provided the major UK based photo reconnaissance source.

Unusually for a fast jet squadron, all of the crews were on at least their second tour; some had many more under their belts. This resulted in a good relationship between the air and ground crews. Morale on the squadron was really high. The squadron badge was the cross of St Omer, very easy to display as a zap, which on occasions got a few people into trouble. When I arrived they were in the midst of preparing for a detachment to Singapore. Unfortunately I missed out on that trip. However I did get as far as Malta as part of an engine change team.

In October of 1970 Rose and I purchased a bungalow in Boston and I became a commuter. Every month we sent 2 aircraft and 4 crews plus supporting ground crew to Laarbruch. One of our wartime roles was to support No 2 Squadron who were based there. I managed to upset our WO by refusing to take over the inventory of the barrack block that our airmen used when there. My argument was that when not in use by us, Laarbruch used it as their transit accommodation so they should administer it. Apart from the monthly detachment to Laarbruch we spent a lot of time away from base – full squadron deployments to Germany, about twice a year. Then NATO squadron exchanges to Norway, Italy and Belgium. Long range refuelling exercises to Cyprus, base deployments to Denmark – it never ended.

The full squadron deployments to Laarbruch meant that we had as many SNCO's in the mess as there were permanent, living-in members. We were a lively bunch and this resulted in quite a bit of friction. One of our airmen painted the Squadron badge onto a bed sheet then climbed the boiler house chimney and suspended it from the walkway around the top. Our Wing Co was ecstatic at this outburst of morale and decided to take a photo of it. Now most people would wander around with a camera, but no, we were a reconnaissance Squadron and the photo had to be taken from the air. Furthermore, he detailed himself take it.

The Sergeant's Mess was a single storey building and lunch was waiter service. Our early shift had just arrived, and was waiting to be seated when he arrived. Slightly off line he (the Wing Co) put one engine into reheat to yaw the aircraft onto course. The city fathers had just been served soup, and it was "drink soup by numbers spoon in 1, 2 up 1, 2". They had the full spoons level with their mouths when at about 100 feet above the roof, the reheat lit. It made loud bang and the whole room seemed to lift, and there were the city fathers with brown Windsor soup dripping off of their eyebrows.

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On another occasion we had despatched our aircraft back to the UK, but the Herc for the ground crew was delayed. We had been to lunch but all the SNCO's were sent back to the Mess, the instruction being to sit there until we send a coach for you. The bar was about to close, however we had a quick collection of any coins in people's pockets and had enough to buy everybody a beer. In the Mess was a corridor lined with one armed bandits. These had been heavily played during the lunch hour, but nobody had won a jackpot. The small amount of change that we had left was gambled and won a jackpot. About two hours later when the coach arrived, the bar was still open we had all drunk more than was wise and all of us had an extra bottle of duty free purchased from behind the bar. Oh and the one arm bandits – they had all paid out a jackpot.

On a NATO exchange with the Italians at Villafranca, near Verona in the Po valley on a Saturday we were taken to Venice. After an early start we got there at around 10am and were instructed to be back at the coach station for midnight. We split into small parties, got onto the water busses and travelled down the Grand Canal to the city centre. Near to the Doge's Palace was moored a RN minesweeper. One of our propulsion Chief Techs, who looked very like an Italian, stood near the bottom of the gangplank. Down came a sailor in full uniform. As he neared the bottom our man said, "*Hello sailor.*" The startled sailor turned and ran back up the gangway peering at us from the safety of the deck. It was so funny we were all laughing. Realising that we were Brits, he came back down.

In 1974 I was part of the team that took part in the NATO photo reconnaissance competition held at Leck, near to the German/Denmark border. The event started on Sunday afternoon with a parade and the hoisting of the competing nation's flags. At the same time the bar in the accommodation area opened and stayed open twenty four hours a day until the following Sunday when the competition finished. Unfortunately we did not win, but had some great parties – all paid for by our hosts.

Come Sunday afternoon we arrived back at Coningsby in a Britannia to be met by a small greeting party which included the SWO. He nearly had a heart attack when one of our J/T riggers, Rich Kelley, appeared at the top of the steps. Rich was immaculately dressed – his uniform was pressed; buttons all done up, his dress cap was on square. Just one problem – he had swapped his best blue for the uniform of a German sailor.

In 1977, as the Squadron was re-equipped with Jaguars. I was posted onto a Vulcan Crew Chief course. Being a Crew Chief had a horrible reputation, which I think started with the very first Valiants when each aircraft was wed to one crew chief. In fact if you had to work on the Vulcan, it was the best job to have, but saying that I did try to get off using my two years seniority as a Chief Tech as the reason. However I lost so it was back to Halton for three months, then to Waddington for a further three months.

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At the end of this I was posted to 101 Squadron based at Waddington. This suited me because we could continue to live in Boston and I could claim travelling expenses for the whole journey. Of course when we had an alert I was usually the last person on the Squadron to arrive on camp. There were two members of the 96th already employed as Crew Chiefs on 101, Ivor Maggs and Allan Rosethorne.

I pretty quickly settled into the routine and can now tell Rose that I volunteered for any Rangers that I could. For the first year or so we routinely went to Malta for low flying over Italy, usually ending with a weekend in Cyprus. Straight Goose Bay Rangers, providing no major problems, out on a Monday, winter survival Tuesday, the crew would fly three, two hour low levels then back on Thursday or Friday. The longer trips were Western Rangers where we did the Goose bit but then went to Offutt in Nebraska. There were RAF teams posted to both of these bases so it was really very much like operating from Waddington, but much colder in the winter. I was at Offutt in February 1978 when the chill temperature was minus 40°C.

I liked flying in the Vulcan although I did experience a few incidents; a bird strike on the windscreen while low level over Sicily; number two engine fire warning light on at 43,000 feet and about thirty miles south of Crete. In those days you could not change Cyprus pounds in a UK bank; the Co-pilot drew the imprest from accounts (like a big petty cash box with serious money in it) and he paid the crew's allowances and whatever other money they wanted. So there we were, an hour out, he was taking Cypriot currency off of each of us and making sure that each had drawn slightly more than their allowance paid in Maltese currency.

The Captain called the emergency; the co rapidly shut his imprest and bank notes fluttered down like confetti. Fire bottle was activated – light stayed on. The AEO scanned the wings through the periscope – all OK. While this was going on my mate and I tried to beat the "*Guinness Book of Records*" time to put on a parachute. Now flying is a bit boring, although on this occasion we could take turns to stand on top of the pilot's ladder and look at Crete bathed in the August sun. To make things more interesting I had plugged into the AEO's intercom and was listening to the radio traffic. As the light would not go out he put out a PAN call, which was ignored, so after consulting the Captain this was up rated to a mayday. Not nice listening to one of those being broadcast from the aircraft you are in. We were rapidly diverted to Souda Bay in Crete and as the undercarriage was selected down, the light went out.

Safely on the ground we Crew Chiefs diagnosed a hot air ducting leak in the nose undercarriage bay, suspecting that this had cooked the number two engine fire tech box. The British Embassy arranged a nice hotel for us and credit facilities. I spoke to the Squadron at Waddington, where a Sergeant Electrician kept saying to me, "You do want technical assistance don't you?" The answer was yes, so about thirty six hours later he and a J/T propulsion arrived, dropped off from a Hercules with the necessary spares.

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Crete is very nice. We finally left on the Thursday morning. Our two technicians had to make their way by ferry to the Embassy in Athens, where the air attaché arranged their flight home.

An incident that worried me more was a night away from Goose; this was fairly common in the summer. We did two low level targets out of Goose then flew down to New Brunswick to act as a target for Canadian fighters carrying out coastal penetrations at between one and six thousand feet. The last *Voodoo* then accompanied us to Chatham Air Force Base where we spent the night.

The following day was a high level transit back to Goose, but we were going to play with one fighter and had been given a cleared corridor of between 40,000 and 50,000 feet. We ran silently with radio on receive and everything else switched off. We flew straight and level at 45,000 – the ARI18228 soon detected our friend sitting some miles to our rear. Height was gradually increased up to 50K and he followed us up.

The Captain said, “We are going to lose him; we will do a 180° banked turn and as we pass through 90°, on my instruction, the AEO will fire one rapid blooming window cartridge. As we roll level on the reciprocal course I will push the stick fully forward and bring the throttles back to flight idle; the Co-pilot will extend the airbrakes.” This was done and the rate of descent indicator spun at an alarming rate. The Navigator Plotter started to call, “44 cleared 40, 43 cleared 40,” and so on as fast as you can read this. He finally got down to 34 climbing. We had dropped like a stone 6,000 feet into controlled airspace off of the Eastern Seaboard of Canada. Just take a look at where all of the civilian transatlantic traffic goes!

In 1981 I was going on a *Western Ranger* and a few days before the scheduled departure, I met one of the navigators who told me that the trip might be cancelled. They were not allowed to do this – cancel my holiday to America – whatever next? The reason was that the OCU had closed and my crew had a new co-pilot. He had been through the basic multi-engine course and had to be brought up to the required level by the Squadron. Apparently he was not doing very well, although some twelve months later he was co-pilot on the first *Black Buck* raid on Stanley. Anyway we went.

Thursday afternoon I was on top of the ladder watching the landing at Offutt with Co-pilot flying. A very smooth descent and the Captain was very quiet – just one problem – we were lined up on the left hand side of the runway. Eventually the Captain took over, overshoot and we went round for a perfect landing. I got my ear bent by the permanent staff, who told me that rollers were only done at Waddington not at Offutt. Friday they flew again, and, yes, yet another overshoot. The reaction was if he does that again we are going home and you are on your own.

Crew got out – no snags and the Captain said, “No rush, Mal”, we will meet you in the hotel bar. All RAF crews at Offutt stayed in the same contract motel. A bit of a soulless place but there were bars, restaurants and shops in

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walking distance. As was usual we had obtained a car for the weekend, a large saloon from Rent A Lemmon. I got back, had a shower, walked into the bar to find Brian, the Captain, and the two Navigators sat at a table. Got a beer and joined them, and asked where the other two were. Brian replied, "the AEO is a hero. He has volunteered to look after the boy for the weekend; I did not know what we were going to do with him."

At 37 I was the youngest of the crew by at least ten years apart from the Co-pilot who was 21. Vulcans had been going to Offutt for many years and there were a group of, shall we say, ladies, who always managed to appear in the hotel bar when a crew was there. A few minutes after I arrived, I walked the AEO, bought himself a beer and sat down.

Brian was instantly on his case, "where is the boy?" The AEO sipped his beer and said, "I phoned up Maggie and asked her if she would like to look after a young Englishman for the weekend. She is getting old you know, it took her 30 minutes to get here." Brian was now worried he had lost a member of his crew. "What did you tell him?" The reply was, "he is to stay at Maggie's all weekend. If he goes anywhere it is to come back here, and he is to be in the dining room dressed ready to fly at 8 o'clock on Monday." Monday morning, there he was, dressed in his green romper suit, eating breakfast. From his appearance it was doubtful if he was in a fit state to fly. Maggie appeared to have well and truly looked after him.

During my time on Vulcans the Harrier force was using the Canadian training facility at Cold Lake in Alberta. This is similar to the USAF facility at Nellis, but offers terrain similar to that of northern Europe. It was decided that the Vulcan was the ideal means to transport the 1,000 pound bombs for the Harriers to drop. On one of the normal Offutt trips we double staged through Goose Bay carrying 14 of these beasts. The take-off run was much longer than normal, and Goose wanted us on our way as quickly as possible.

I was fortunate enough to go on 'Giant Voice', which is the USAF Strategic Air Command bombing and navigation competition. This was held at Barksdale Air Force Base in Missouri; a long run-up period at Waddington followed by about seven weeks in the States. After five weeks our two best crews with the two most reliable aircraft stayed at Barksdale, two Vulcans came out from the UK and our second two crews took them back. The two fresh crews took our aircraft, complete with us Crew Chiefs, to Offutt then on to Goose. We handed over our accommodation to the new guys and late in the afternoon started to crew in for the transit to Offutt when we were told that Offutt was shut.

So we all had no beds! However, we were transported to the local Sheraton Hotel for the night. We got there to discover that they had no rooms. Now to keep them happy, aircrew need two things in life – a bed and regular supply of food. There was a milling mass of aircrew at reception, the two Crew Chiefs just stood back. Suddenly an old wizened Squadron Leader burst out and said, "I have got you two Chiefs a room." He thrust a key into my hand and fought his way back into the throng. The nameplate on the key said:

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“THE PRESIDENTIAL SUITE”;

the suite was huge – bigger than a lot of houses. Cliff Doe and I slept in luxury that night.

The crews also had suites but smaller and with camp beds. We travelled back from Goose on a Thursday night planning to deliver my aircraft back to Waddington in time for the annual Taceval that was due to start on Sunday. Unfortunately it was foggy and the duty pilot would not let us make an attempt to land so we diverted to Lossiemouth, spent time at low level over the sea with the airbrakes out, burning off fuel to get down to our landing weight. Then I had to walk the aircraft, miles around the narrow taxiways on a short lead, to dispersal.

The Captain said, “Remove your badges of rank – you are with us in the Officer’s Mess visiting aircrew accommodation.” No complaints! They signed for beer on their mess chits – I drank for free. Also in the accommodation was a Squadron Leader on an exchange with the Luftwaffe. He had been on some form of Squadron exchange and was complaining that he was hungry, also that in the camera bay of his Phantom he had a case of duty free whisky. Well, we were entitled to a post flight meal, so sandwiches were ordered from the cook house and transport from MT. He was fed and the whisky transferred to the Vulcan. The only time that I have ever got a bottle of duty-free travelling from Scotland.

Got back to Waddington to be told by my S Eng O, “you are going back to Barksdale with the AOC and the two crews for the end of exercise presentation and meal.” So on Sunday I met the crews at the Officer’s Mess, down to Brize Norton, the VC10 back to the States. The longest journey to a party that I have ever made.

The best trip of them all was to an air show at Cleveland, Ohio. The show was held at Burke Lake Front Airport. This is located on a narrow strip of land separating the city of Cleveland from Lake Erie. At just over 5,000 feet the runway was shorter than normally used by heavy jets such as the Vulcan and some of the large transport aircraft that the Americans had on ground display. We, and the US Navy *Blue Diamonds*, were the stars of the show. Prior to departure the local TV station sent a crew to Waddington where they spent time with the Squadron, and a cameraman flew in one of our aircraft. We arrived on Tuesday afternoon after double staging through Goose Bay. After parking the aircraft and negotiating with the organisers for ground equipment, of which they had very little with any useable height, we were issued with cars.

Our accommodation was in the Bond Court Hotel. No idea what star rating but it was high. Accommodation was paid for by the air show which was run by two ex air force fliers as a business. The RAF had a liaison officer who was dropped off from a Nimrod just as we arrived. He had a car, the aircrew had a car and the two Crew Chiefs also had a car. The liaison officer knew where the hotel was. I don’t think I had even absorbed the name. Ken did not drive but after an interesting journey as the third vehicle in a 3 car wagon train

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through the rush hour, I managed to keep the lead car in sight and we arrived at our hotel.

This was a tower block – the first four floors were car parks, the fifth housed reception, bar, restaurant, etc. The sixth floor was ballroom and conference rooms and the rest was accommodation. The Vulcan was on the local TV news at 6, so into the bar for a few drinks and watch the programme. After booking in, back to the cars to get our bags. Our liaison man said, “I have stayed here before. There are two lifts from the car parks, one to reception, the other goes up to the sixth floor. We will go up in that one then transfer to the accommodation lifts.”

Button pressed, lift moved, door opened at Reception, button pressed back to the car park. This was repeated a number of times before a brave Yank jumped into the lift as it briefly stopped at Reception and he explained that the lift only went to the sixth floor when there was an event on. So we all sheepishly filed, off got into the correct lift and up to our rooms.

The Wednesday was spent at the TV station; our aircrew dressed in their tropical best uniforms were on air while Ken and I sat in the control room watching them through a plate glass window. We got a thorough tour of the station from the aerials on the roof through the Chief Executive’s office down to the basement parking lot. Then it was out to a formal lunch followed by the first evening entertainment laid on for us.

This was a garden party. Now the air show staff were nearly all volunteers, three of whom were ladies. They persuaded us all to go with them to a night club which was in an old supermarket. We got there to find that up until about nine o’clock it was a hen night. However, we sneaked in and sat at a table near the back, aircrew still dressed in their number one tropical uniforms. In the centre of the dance floor was a temporary stage, more like a boxing ring.

The performer was a male stripper called Rocky. He got down to his gold G-string, no pockets in it, so he had stuffed the contents of his pockets down the front. The educated American female audience were getting restless, chanting, “*get them off.*” He just paraded around smiling, when the shout went up, “*get him.*” The stewards had no chance. A mass of women climbed onto the stage and for the rest of the evening the PA system kept saying, “*Rocky would like his gold G-string back.*”

Thursday was practice day. The timetable was delayed by a violent thunder storm. The Vulcan has a large wing area and was soon being used as a shelter by members of the local police force who parked their motor cycles in the dry, while Ken and I gave them a tour of the cockpit. One of the organisers was an American Italian who appeared with a man called Tony. Tony was the manager of the local *Holiday Inn* and he was tendering to supply the Air Show accommodation for the following year. “Could we show Tony around the aircraft,” “Yes, no problem.” Tony, suitably impressed said, “come and see me at my hotel.” That night a few of the crew took up his offer and

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enjoyed his hospitality. By now we were aware that the Italian organiser, Tony, and all of his mates had a shared business interest – we know it as the *Mafia*.

The rain finally stopped and it was our turn to fly. While the aircraft was away from our dispersal, the *Blue Diamonds* ground liaison officer appeared. He was a Captain dressed in a rather tight, pale blue flying suit and wearing black patent leather shoes – they had a shine that would have bought a smile to Barney's face. He wanted to know if we could park one slot further out from the terminal building. The *Diamonds* had yet to arrive and he wanted to park their Hercules in our slot. No problem. However when the Vulcan arrived back the Captain wanted to know why we had moved and he was quite annoyed when told the reason.

Friday was a recreation day – that meant shopping. While we were at Goose Bay the Co-pilot had given each of us \$100 advanced allowances. The Americans were so hospitable, insisting on buying us drinks and coffee and so I still had \$88 left. The air show lasted three days, Saturday Sunday and Monday and Labor Day fell during that period. Some 100,000 people paid to enter. The *Blue Diamonds* had arrived and their display, while good, was not a patch on the *Red Arrows*.

It started with a big ground display. First the ground crew then the pilots marched out to their aircraft. The *Yanks* loved it but it was a waste of time. There were a number of USAF fast jets and WW2 aircraft, most of which were operated by the Confederate Air Force, an organisation based in Texas. The Hercules had arrived along with some of the *Blue Diamond's* pilot's wives and girl friends who were sat around it on deck chairs. From my earlier observation with the *Red Arrows* I would imagine that they were there to protect their property. Mention that you were a display pilot seemed to cause knicker elastic to dissolve.

Our turn came and we crewed in. I was on the lead and as he taxied out the Captain asked, "*Where are the jet pipes pointing?*" "*Straight at the Hercules.*" "*Good. You can go off lead – we will hold here,*" and he came to a halt. After a brief time he advanced all four engines to about 80% power. Remember the Marilyn Monroe photo with her skirts blown over her head? Well that was the *Diamond's* women, and their deck chairs were blown clean over the top of the Hercules.

All three flying days went without a hitch, but on the Monday, Ken and I had to go and stop the Vulcan on the taxiway in front of the spectators. The reason was that on our flight out from UK, Roy Bully, the AEO, had logged up 10,000 flying hours on the Vulcan. The air show made a big event of this, slightly distorting the story to say that he had reached this achievement during the display. There was a group photo session, then an airfield fire tender manoeuvred into position. Not, as I briefly thought, to provide cover while we started engines to taxi back. No! It was to give us a bath. Anyone wants to know; those big fire trucks hold a lot of cold water.

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Back at dispersal the Captain said, "Chock and lock it, we shall all be here tomorrow to sort the old girl, and will transit back to the UK on Wednesday." However, before he said that, I was in the bomb bay to read the fatigue meter to discover that he had pulled a J count. At Base that meant a detailed inspection, X rays etc. A signal was sent to Waddington, Ken and I carried out a ducting leak check to discover that we had a hot air leak in the nose undercarriage bay. With that we retired for the night.

The evening's entertainment was to go to the Irish American friendship club for a very good meal and drinks. The local RC father was very interested that we came from Lincoln – he knew the Cathedral better than we did. Then it was on to a local Italian's cellar, literally the cellar under his house where there were bottles of wine and hams curing on the beams. I spent some time talking to him. He told me that all summer he had been painting his house. Houses in the area were constructed from wood but he had used 40 gallons of paint. Also that he made wine, not as I did from a kit from Boots. Oh no! He had grape juice sent from California, 100 gallons of the white and 100 gallons of the red. I asked our Italian air show organiser if our host was the local godfather. He replied, "*no but his father was.*"

Tuesday morning the aircrew started to remove panels while Ken and I started to fix the ducting leak. Then a signal arrived authorising a high level transit back to the UK with no inspection. On receipt, panels were refitted and we retired for the day. Well, you cannot rush these things and the show had been such a commercial success that the organisers were happy to continue to pay for our rooms. Tuesday evening we had a drink in the hotel then decided to walk over the street and eat in an Irish bar. On our way back across the road a car drew up with *Holiday Inn* Tony in the back, accompanied by his unofficial body guard. These two were policemen members of the local *SWAT* team. We went to the hotel bar had another drink, when he invited us to the *Crazy Horse*. Another 3 car wagon train. This time I kept up by running red lights!

We arrived in the car park and Tony's guards took up position, pistols drawn. We went in and were stopped at the entrance desk where Tony asked for the manager, telling us to go into the bar. This turned out to be horse shoe shaped with a small stage built over the curved end. On stage were some of the most attractive girls you could wish to see, stripping. Tony arrived with the manager who promptly bought us all a beer and when that was finished more arrived.

Wednesday we fixed the aircraft. Thursday Ken saw it off while I positioned myself at a *NASA* hangar at Cleveland International Airport. I had to park the *Vulcan* so that we could connect to a single refuelling hose from an underground supply. We finally fuelled up to go to Goose, departing on the Friday to double stage back to the UK. It did not finish there. The following week I was on nights when the Co-pilot and one of the Navigators came and found me. They had made a mistake and had to withdraw the imprest from accounts. We had been underpaid our allowances, please sign for \$400 dollars. Now in 1980 that was nearly a month's salary.

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The Vulcan force was coming to its end and 101 Squadron was scheduled to disband in June 1982. However Argentina invaded the Falklands and everything was put on hold. I was on a last tour at Waddington, and the nearest posting that Innsworth could find for me was to Wittering. I had spoken to the WO in ASF there who told me that they had no vacant posts, but were going to create one for me. Using my experience on MU's, fast jets and dealing with air crew as a Crew Chief I was to be i/c battle damage repair. If the invasion had been 4 months later I would have been the most experienced team leader in the RAF.

I seemed to spend a lot of time on the *Black Buck* support team. One Friday the Station Commander walked into ASF where we had a support team from AVRO. He asked how long to fit radar homing *Martel*. They had a huddle and worked out time required to design the system, time to manufacture components etc. The CO patiently listened, then said, "*Good. The range is booked – we are live firing Monday morning,*" and he left. It was pointed out to the AVRO lads that as they usually went back to Manchester on Friday afternoon, perhaps they should go early. The Station Blacksmith was told yet another working weekend to build a pylon, and work commenced. About 4 o'clock Sunday morning I was told to take it out put it onto *Alpha* dispersal on a safe heading. Now we did not do safe headings at Waddington – if anything went seriously wrong with our normal weapon load it did not matter if you were in the same county. However I did as I was told.

Did we fire on Monday? No. There was too much electrical noise in the system, which took another two weeks to sort out. Once successfully tested, an aircraft was despatched to Ascension. However another Vulcan, also fitted with a *Martel*, flew around the UK when it was discovered that the increased drag meant that the Falklands were out of range.

When the war finished 101 did disband. We scrapped some aircraft, and delivered others to museums and collections. The one that I was involved in was the transfer of XJ824 to Duxford. I then moved to 50 Squadron, who were operating the hastily modified tanker variant.

In December 1983 I finally got my last blue chit and came out of uniform finally retiring the following February on my fortieth birthday.

The big decision was what to do, what second career to follow? I went into industrial sales and in January 1984 joined Woods of Colchester as a very inexperienced sales engineer based in their Manchester Office. Woods manufactured industrial fans, mainly axial flow fans, like a single stage jet engine. My Halton training and RAF experience served me well especially when dealing with customers who always wanted to blame our fans if a system did not work. Usually it was the way that they had designed their systems. I spent the next 25 years working for Woods in a variety of roles logging up something like 500,000 thousand miles in various company cars. I travelled over quite a lot of the UK spending time on construction sites, but also in a variety of different manufacturing industries. I always seemed to be talking to very interesting people about all manner of opportunities.

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I finally retired in February 2009. Rose and I still live in the house in Warrington that we purchased after I left the RAF. For the first four years of my retirement I worked two days a week for a company who had been a customer when at Woods. This February I gave that up, but still find plenty to occupy my time. Fortunately to date both Rose and I have been blessed with good health. We have one granddaughter who we look after one day a week. We enjoy walking, often going on walking holidays. We have a dog and a garden to look after and both play badminton.

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Diary of a No Hoper by Colin Woodland

As I was about to leave home to become a 'Trenchard Brat', my grandfather muttered to my mother, "Mark my words, gal, that one will come to nothing!" So, I left for Halton a no hoper. Worse than that, I had absolutely no idea what lay ahead or what was expected of me.

I had taken five O levels and successfully failed all five. I firmly believed that the sports field was where I belonged, not school. I had taken an exam at the local Recruitment Centre in Chatham in the hopes that I could become a pilot or a PTI, I did not mind which. I must have scraped through the test as I received a letter inviting me to an interview and medical at RAF Cardington.

The interview went very badly indeed. An elderly Flight Lieutenant asked me what my hobbies were. I responded enthusiastically, "Aircraft recognition!" I was sure this would impress. I was asked to identify each of four aircraft, whose photographs were on the walls of the office. I had no idea and, as my interviewer pointed to each one, I responded "Hunter". "Your recognition isn't that hot, is it? Do you have any other hobbies?" said the elderly officer.

Forlornly, I suggested French. The officer immediately broke into French and was met by a bewildered look from me. "OK", he said, "what is the French for wastepaper basket?" Again, my cover was blown and a wry smile spread across the officer's face. Probably the only question to which I gave a sensible and heartfelt response was, "Why do you want to join the Royal Air Force? My reply would, today, probably bring laughter and derision. I said, "I want to serve my country." Needless to say, the interview ended with the officer saying, in not so many words, "Don't call us, we'll call you."

I left school and began working as a parcel sorter in a laundry. There were plenty of people there I had to look up to, but not a soul for me to look down on. One day, not long after starting at the job, the worst thing that could happen to a 16 year old came to pass. My mother turned up at the laundry and went to the manager's office – Oh the shame and embarrassment! To make sure everyone new, over the Tannoy came the message, "Colin Woodland go to the manager's office immediately."

I had received a letter from the Royal Air Force and my dear mother could not wait to know what it contained. It was my invitation to a life beyond my wildest dreams and it was to begin with a journey to Wendover station and I did not even have to buy the train ticket, the letter contained a warrant!

Here follows a very, very abridged diary (or should it be a timeline in modern parlance?):

Date	Event
14 September 1960	Arrived about 2pm at Wendover station, met by a very friendly man in uniform with 3 stripes on his arms and given a lift in a grey bus to 3 Wing at RAF Halton
15 September 1960	Battle of Britain Day and Attestation Day. That kindly gentleman in uniform with 3 stripes turned out to be a

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	sergeant and not so nice after all!
About 3 months later	First day at Workshops. I found out I was going to be an Instrument Fitter General. Great, what is one of those? I was called into the Workshops Flight Commander's Office and there he was, that elderly officer I had met at Cardington. He reminded me of the interview and what a mess I made of it. "You are here by the skin of your teeth, Woodland," he said. "If you fail as much as one end of phase test, you might as well pack your bags, because you will be out of here!"
Mid 1962	I was back before the now about to retire Flight Lieutenant (I think his fellow officers referred to him as "Doc"). The worst had happened I had made it all; the way to 'Compasses' without failing a test but this one toppled my gyros and I had clanged it. I thought that I had reached the end of the road. Doc informed me that no one else had expected me to make as far as I had, that he still had faith in me and that I would get one more chance. I more than passed the resit and never failed another test.
June 1963	Finals! What a gruelling time. More than once I left the practical test and sank to the ground in the corridor outside. I had never studied so hard, worried so much or been so scared in all my life.
July 1963	Result! I passed beyond my wildest dreams. Junior Technician with two years accelerated promotion to Corporal Technician. I could wear, with pride, my single upside down stripe, and I did! Even my grumpy old granddad had to admit, "the boy done good!"
3 August 1963	Arrived at my first posting, Ballykelly, Northern Ireland. Not many went straight from training to overseas, well, over the Irish Sea anyway.
4 August 1963	Reported to ASF to start work on servicing Shackleton MR MkII. Chf Tech Chalkley almost fell off the wing when he saw me. He had been one of the instructors at Halton. He soon put this cocky JT in his place. He called over SAC Myerscough and instructed him to watch me like a hawk and teach me all he knew, if I could take it all in.
April 1964	They want to take my stripe off me and give me a four bladed prop instead! This is tantamount to demotion to super SAC! Over my dead body!
June 1964	Flight Commander promised I would be a dead body if I did not get that four bladed prop on my arm by start work the next day. I decided that discretion was the better part of valour and, using Evostick, I gritted my teeth and replaced my tape with the dreaded apprentice wheel without a rim.
July 1964	Detached to Machrihanish. Warrant Officer ordered me to get my hair cut and report back to him at 0830 next day. Would you believe it? All the barbers in Machrihanish take the same week off as holiday so that they cannot steal each other's customers, and this was the week! The Warrant Officer did not believe me either. Fortunately, others

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	confirmed my story and I narrowly escaped a fizzer.
1 August 1964	Called into the Flight Commander's office and told he would not give me my tapes until I got my hair cut. In fact, if it was up to him I would never get them. Got my hair cut grudgingly and received the tapes from an equally begrudging Flight Commander with a reminder to put them on the right way up. Cpl Tech had been abolished in April 1964, more's the pity. I knew there was a good reason not to glue the props on my sleeves. It cost me a new Battledress Jacket. Thank goodness I had not taken the J/T stripe off my No 1.
14 September 1964	My Granddad was right; I was amounting to nothing, though deeply religious, I was not a nice person. The Bible says <i>"The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."</i> <u>Galatians 5:19-21</u> . I had to plead guilty on all counts but one. I was not aware of any witchcraft in my life. However, to all the others, guilty as charged. That night, I confessed my evil ways to God and pleaded with Him to cleanse me of my sin and give me a new life – and He did! <i>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.</i> <u>1 John 1:9</u> . Jesus said, in <u>Revelation 3:20</u> , <i>"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."</i> I opened the door and He came in. Now, I am free from the burden of my sin and on my way to heaven. <i>"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!"</i> <u>2 Corinthians 5:17</u>
Nov 1964	Detached to Singapore (Changi) on "Reforce" with 210 Sqn. We are parked next to 205 Sqn – Penguin Sqn – All flap and no fly.
One dark night	"Woodland, get out there and marshal that Shack in!" I grabbed two wands and rushed out to the pan. I could hear it but I was blowed if I could see it. Suddenly, there it was, lumbering straight at me much faster than I would like. I switched on the wands but only one lit up, and even that was dim. Any waggling of the wand could be interpreted as turn left or turn right and I wanted the beast to come straight forward and SLOW DOWN. Then, the only lit wand also went out. These situations do wonders for your prayer life. At the last minute the pilot switched on the landing lights, saw me frantically crossing and uncrossing my hands above my head and came to a halt.
December 1964	Went to Victoria Hall, just opposite the Cricket Club at the end of the Padang. It was a great night of testimonies and

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	singing. I was introduced to two girls by my mate, Barry. One of them was, you might say, rather fit, if you know what I mean. Unfortunately, both girls chatted with Barry and didn't give me a second glance.
Early March 1965	"Woodland, we have had a signal, you are to return to UK immediately." "Why?" I asked. "Dunno," was the reply. I rushed back to the Block, grabbed my very meagre belongings and was airborne in the Britannia within a couple of hours. Had someone died? Had something I had done or not done been discovered? I had no idea.
2 days later	Off loaded from the Britannia at Heathrow, bundled straight into an Argosy and off to Ballykelly. Met by the Sqn WO at the aircraft steps. "Get over to SHQ right away," he said. In fear and trembling I entered SHQ. The SAC clerk, in riper language than I would use, said, "Thank *@!?! you are here. You have been posted to Tengah, Singapore, and we need to get you off on embarkation leave!"
25 March 1965	My 21st Birthday. What an amazing outfit I work for! They are sending me on a 2½ year paid holiday in the sun for my 21st birthday present.
27 March 1964	I now know why the Britannia is known as the Whispering Giant. There is no noise outside because they keep it all inside. I'll be deaf for a week, or maybe even forever.
Christmas 1965	Christmas dinner at the Sandes Soldiers Home in Portsdown Road. Met that fit young lady that I met last year. This time we chatted a bit. She's American and struggles with a knife and fork, so I helped her out a bit. Asked her if she would be at the New Year's Eve party. She say YES!!!!
31 December 1965	Went to Bethesda Brethren Assembly with Sharon. We missed out on the taxis and walked the 7 miles to her home. Almost home when mother passed in the car taking father to hospital. Stayed until dawn to look after Sharon and her sister. Mother arrived just as I was leaving. I think she got the wrong end of the stick. I arrived back at Sandes home and I think my roommate also got the wrong idea. He just gave me a very disapproving look and went back to bed, never to mention the incident again.
7 September 1967	Flying back to the UK in one of those new-fangled VC10s. Just doesn't look right, no propellers and the engines right at the back.
8 September 1967	Scared Mum silly today. I said I was going to take my first bath in nearly three years. We only had showers in Singapore but Mum had never seen one.
21 September 1967	Start work at the Institute of Aviation Medicine. All these doctors who hardly know how to salute! The only profession that gets to bury their mistakes.
March 1968	Indulged to Singapore. Upset a Wing Commander's wife by getting a seat when she didn't – RESULT.
30 March 1968	The fatal date. If I ever forget it she'll kill me. Our wedding day!!

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6 April 1968	Just back off honeymoon and we have been offered an indulgence flight tomorrow!
7 April 1968	Could not understand why Sharon and her mother were so tearful as we waited to depart at Changi. Later I discovered that they were saying farewell forever. They both believed that a lowly RAF Corporal would never be able to afford to take her back to Singapore and her parents, as humble missionaries would never afford to come to the UK. How wrong they both were.
Aug 1968	Promoted to Sergeant. Alfie Burton and I were promoted on the same day. I don't remember who went into the Commandant's office first (probably Alfie) but the newly promoted Sergeant came out of the office and ordered the Corporal waiting to go in to get his hair cut.
28 March 1969	Horrors!! Away at RAF Newton on the conversion course to make me an electrician and I forgot our very first Anniversary is on Sunday. I excused myself from class and drove like a demon into Nottingham. I arrived at the Post Office as the shutters were coming down. I pleaded with the guy behind the counter and he took pity and let me send a telegram.
30 March 1969	She thinks I am the best and cleverest husband in the world, that I should know that the first anniversary is the paper anniversary and I sent a telegram. Did you know that? I most certainly didn't!
3 September 1969	Oh happy day! What a miracle birth is. A perfect, beautiful, wonderful daughter born at the Louise Margaret Military Maternity Hospital, Aldershot. But, wait a minute. It won't be that many years before she will be asking questions and I won't have the answers. I drove straight to the Farnborough Technical College and signed up for an ONC course.
March 22 1972	They say any fool can make a tin can but it takes an expert to put a spout on it. I am an expert, my son arrived safely today.
1 August 1973	Promoted to Chief Technician. No ceremony, no fuss, in fact, nobody noticed. My wife just sewed on the dreaded four bladed props and life carried on just the same.
July 1974	The cushy life at the IAM is over. Despite deep protestations, I've been posted to RAF Scampton, home of the Dambuster Squadron 617. But I've been lumbered with the Gin Palace, EES, working in the Instrument Bay.
March 1976	Called into the Squadron Commander's office. "Have you ever thought of a commission, Chief?" said the boss. A long discussion ensued. I had tried before with no success and felt it wrong to apply again. "No problem," said the boss, "you don't need to apply, I have recommended you and you go for selection next week."
April 1976	What is this Air Force coming to? I've been selected for commission training at Henlow!
May 1976	Arrived as a "hairy" at Yellow Squadron, Henlow.

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<p>July 1976</p>	<p>This way chaps! We were on a task and the leader was undecided what to do when we reached a stream with no bridge. I may have been the oldest in the team but I would show them. I launched myself off the bank to the other side. It was a soft landing – a very soft landing. My feet disappeared instantly, followed by my calves, thighs, hips, waist and half my chest. I was firmly wedged in mud and slowly sinking deeper. For the first time on the course, the DI STAFF had no need to inject a problem, we had a genuine emergency! Most of the flight were youngsters and had no idea what to do. Realising that to rely on the rest of the team to come up with an idea was tantamount to suicide; I took charge of the situation. Once I had convinced them I was serious, the team stripped off their combat jackets, tied them sleeve to sleeve and threw one end of the makeshift rope towards me. I am convinced that had I not told them to hang on to the other end, they would have thrown the whole lot to me! After a lot of grunting and groaning from everyone, I was extricated from the mud and able to crawl on my belly to firmer ground.</p>
<p>6 August 1976</p>	<p>Good grief, I'm an officer! The trouble is I know what the other ranks think of us "Rodneys and Ruperts".</p>
<p>6 August 1977</p>	<p>A year ago I had trouble spelling Engineer, now I is one. A fully-fledged Avionics Engineer and posted to Staxton Wold – a Ground Radar station! There is no accommodation at the site, so I have to book in to the Mess at Leconfield. It used to be RAF but was now Army. My predecessor was a female Engineer so the Army assumed that all RAF engineers were female and I was put in the women's wing. There I stayed for six weeks while a married quarter was found. The inmates soon got used to me being there and wore slightly less scanty items of clothing in the corridor.</p>
<p>10 May 1980</p>	<p>Two years, nine months and four days working in a building with no windows but, at last, it was over and I'm off to RAF Wittering and a real aircraft, Harrier GR3. If I had not had the joy and privilege of acting as Pastor for the Driffield Congregational Church, despite being born an Anglican, defecting to Baptist and worshipping for some time in a Brethren Assembly, I would probably have gone mad. Maybe I did anyway!</p>
<p>Early 1981</p>	<p>I always thought the account of the storeman who would not issue the last item off his shelf to a technician because someone might want it was apocryphal but I was wrong. I met him in EES stores. I had to wait until his back was turned, hop over the counter and run off with the Present Position Computer he was hoarding. Most undignified for a Flight Lieutenant!</p>
<p>May 1981</p>	<p>Posted to Boscombe Down as an Electromagnetic Compatibility Specialist in Armament Division. What's one of those? The Squadron Commander said I would be</p>

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	responsible for making sure bombs did not go bang unless we wanted them to.
June 1981	I became a member of the 40dB club! The initiation ceremony was to walk into a radar beam pushing a trolley with a 30mm round on it until the round went off! Fortunately, the main charge had been removed and only the primary charge remained. Like a fool I wore the specially prepared helmet and Cricket Box covered in tin foil they told me was essential to protect the brain and soft tissue in the nether regions.
Early 1983	Volunteered for the Falklands but was emphatically informed that at 38 I was too old for such a thing.
April 1983	Received a signal asking how to dispose of a rocket that had been inadvertently armed while on-board a ship. Replied, try getting the safety pin back in but, if that fails dispose of weapon in the usual manner. Another signal, what is the usual manner? Response, ditch over side and depart the area!
July 1983	PWR for the Falklands – I must have suddenly got younger!
November 1983	Flew down to Ascension Islands in a fairly new Tristar, well. British Airways seemed to have looked after it pretty well before it was sold to the RAF. Then on to Port Stanley Airfield by C130 Hercules and to my four little charges, Harrier GR3s with tail letters Victor, Tango, Oscar and Lima (VTOL). Just outside my Portacabin office was a barbed wire fence with a notice on it, <i>“The throwing of stones at mines is a serious offence.”</i> Standing by the wire I could see three mine pressure plates protruding from the sand in easy tossing distance.
December 1983	Took a walk to Wireless Ridge. It was a lovely sunny day as I walked among the debris and abandoned kit, weaponry and ammunition. I take my hat off to those ‘Yompers’ who walked the whole way from Goose Green and took the ridge from the Argentinians; I struggled to walk from Stanley to the Ridge without any enemy resistance – perhaps they were right, I was too old to be in the Falklands.
March 1984	Heading home. What a fantastic time! Four months looking after four beautiful aircraft and only two heart stopping moments. The first was after a long period of no flying due to a fog bank of the coast. Aircrew were very twitchy from lack of flying and finally convinced the powers that the fog bank would not move and all four babies took to the air and flew off to Onion Range. Within minutes, the fog bank drifted over the airfield. The aircraft were recalled but it was too late! One aircraft flew three times overhead and then it suddenly appeared out of the gloom, tight on the centreline. The pilot said he saw a white line and aimed for it, hoping it was the right one. The other three showed the benefit of the VTOL capability as they each found a makeshift helicopter pad at various places around the Island, one at Goose

And Then...

	<p>Green. It took almost a week to recover the aircraft to Stanley. The second was an undercarriage failure as an aircraft was coming in to land. When the pilot used the emergency gear blow-down facility, all the hydraulics drained from the system and all the stabilising controls stopped working. By bringing the aircraft to the hover, the pilot skilfully lowered the aircraft to the ground, albeit in a somewhat rocky manner.</p>
6 August 1984	<p>I handed my ID card to the SAC in HQ. "Thank you, Sir," he said as he looked disdainfully at the card I had carried with me for 24 years and tossed it into the back of a drawer in his desk. I did not believe that grown men cried until that moment. All that I had been for 24 years tossed away in an instant.</p>
6 August 1988	<p>I thought it was all over. Now I would be a civilian for the rest of my life, but, as usual I was wrong. Just four years in a civilian job and I was made redundant and, exactly 4 years to the day, I was back in the Royal Air Force I loved and served for another amazing career lasting 15 years. But that, as the Americans would say, is a whole nother story!!!</p>

Editor's Note: The Queen's Birthday Honours List for 2013 contained the name of Sqn Ldr Colin Woodland RAF(Rtd), who was awarded an MBE for services to Scripture Reading within the Soldiers and Airmen's Scripture Readers Association. Not a bad achievement for someone designated a 'no hoper' 50 years ago.

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And Then...

Low flying...⁴⁵

Traditionally, on leaving overhaul at St Athan, aircraft would do a fly-by for the benefit of the groundcrew who had worked on it. The pilot of this particular Phantom FG1, a retiring Wing Commander, was chatting to a member of the ground crew the day before the departure flight. He said he was going to fly between the hangars and that the guy should be ready with a camera to record the event. It was due to be his last flight, so he was going to do something 'special'.

The groundcrew weren't too convinced of the pilot's claim, but stood around as usual anyway watching as the F4 took off, destination Leuchars.

As the photo shows, the pilot was not joking; you can see the afterburner diamonds quite clearly in front of the hangar. You can also see personnel standing underneath it. The recently tuned Speys allegedly shook a man working in the roof of one of the hangars enough for him to fall and break his leg. These hangars are set east to west, about 75 yards apart, and you can estimate the height from the length of the Phantom.

Immediately after the event, the pilot was contacted by the tower and was instructed in no uncertain terms to 'return and land immediately'. As I am told, he did so and was given a severe rollicking. I don't know what action was taken, but it was his last flight in any case. What a way to go out, I wonder if it ranks as one of the shortest logged emergency-free Phantom flights?

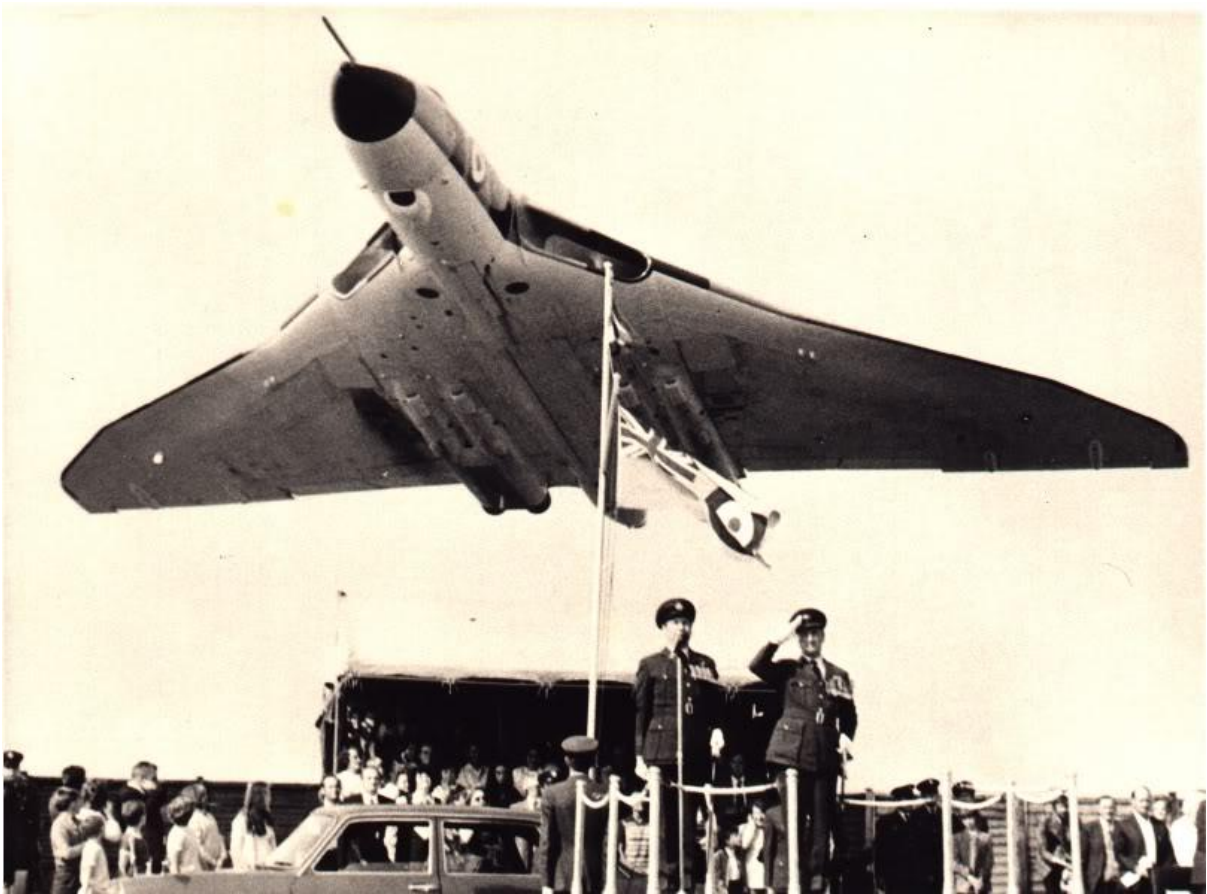
This story is not exaggerated – I don't know the original photographer, but the picture was taken on an ordinary instamatic camera, and then a blow-up was made. The original is, as a favour, temporarily in the possession of the current Station Commander at St Athan who is an ex-F4 jockey. From the enlargement I have made the Phantom as XV575. The aircraft was scrapped in September 1991, but its legacy has to be this photograph.

⁴⁵ This article was discovered on the Internet and might interest those who served at Saints - Editor

And Then...



Or this one



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And Then...

Our Early Days in The RAF

by John Baldwin

When we were only sixteen years old and just wee “green” lads,
We left home for the RAF, with the best wishes of our Mums and Dads.
They waved goodbye and shook our hands, as our trains, or buses, departed,
And for us, as we looked back, a whole new period of our lives had started.
We came via London’s stations to Marylebone and then finally on to
Wendover,
Where “Civvy Life” was about to end and the RAF was to take over!
Up the road to Halton from the station we went, with more of Britain’s fine
upstanding youth,
It was a journey made with some trepidation and fear of the unknown, now
ain’t that the truth!?
In through the Maitland guardroom entrance, up onto 3 Wing square,
Sorted out into flights, blocks and rooms then, priority one, off to lose all that
hair! (If not then ---probably now!)
Put away our “civvies”, for quite a while, and the shoes with the “winkle-
picker” toes,
For now we were to spend the next 3 months in denims, big boots and those
scratchy blue serge clothes!
“Now you’re here at Halton lad, - forget about women and the joys of civvy life,
For after 3 years here, if you survive, you’ll have time then to find yourself a
pretty young wife!”
Fall in. right dress, quick march, eyes right, halt,
Will myself and the others ever get the timing right, so the DI sees no fault!?
After a while we got a break from driving that DI berserk,
And ventured down The Hill, to schools and shops, to finally get to work.
Going down was much more fun following the more senior entries, with their
pipes and drums,
But later in the day, when we came the other way we were too pooped-out to
think of writing to our dads and mums!
Wearily coming up the hill, young stomachs would start to rumble, at the
thought of consuming food quite soon,
And once at the top, we then raced to our block to get our mug and our knife,
fork and spoon.
You had to be nimble, you had to be fast and you certainly had to be fit,
Or else you ended up in the mess, fighting for a place in the queue, most likely
at the wrong end of it!
Fridays, at week’s end, as we dragged our tired bodies to our bed-spaces, to
rest them on our very own pits,
Our Flight NCO’s eyes would gleam brightly, as they narrowed down to evil
slits.
In fact, they would be so narrow they were almost out of sight,
As he gleefully declared “There’s a room inspection tomorrow, so this evening
we’ll have a full “bullnight!”
We’d bull-up our boots, brasses, bowls, taps, mirrors and showers,
Fold bed packs, sheets and press uniforms for hours and hours.

And Then...

All the mind boggling, inane things, we did, in the name of discipline,
channelled us in the same direction,
Culminating, hopefully, the next day in another successful CO's inspection.
Despite all the trials, tribulations, and hardships we endured, when all is said
and done,

50 years later we can look back, and say that we also had some fun!
Some played football, basketball, rugby, or some other kind of sport,
And others took pleasure in hobbies and activities of a much less strenuous
sort. (Egyptian PT)

There was many a person, who fell victim to a room-mate's prank,
Only to find that the prankster had disappeared and was to be found
innocently drinking a Coca Cola over in "The Tank!" (What! Who me!? Nah!).
One huge, entry organised, prank did not involve valiant "deeds of daring", or
the climbing of mountains,

But, gathering large quantities of potassium permanganate to colour, purple,
London's Trafalgar Square fountains!

A few car loads of us 96th took the route south, on the old London road,
For to lighten a number of London's pharmacies of their chemical load.

We formed groups of "chuckers", lookouts and one of us was the central co-
ordinating key man,

Once strategically positioned around the fountains, the all clear signals given--
all went well and to plan.

Successfully in went all the chemicals, it was now time to go,
And with no one suspecting us,- there was no policeman's challenge of
'ello,'ello, 'ello!

We retrieved our cars and got into the usual Trafalgar Square traffic queue,
Just as the fountains began to take on their new found rich deep purple hue!
Next day in The Daily Telegraph the "ban the bomb marchers" got all the
blame,

But we had to "keep mum", so as not to be fined, or confined, what a shame!!
Another memorable time for us all, was when we crossed Dartmoor from
Collaton Cross,

To do it we used Shanks' pony not being able to capture one single wild (wait
for it!) hoss!!

Way up through the briars, over rocks and streams, enthusiastically scrambled
every keen young teen,

But the hiking sounds of some teams was suddenly decreased, by the silence
brought on, from where one of their fellow members should have been.

Not wishing to lose any points, through lack of numbers, they invariably
backtracked and found him laying prostrate in the heather,

He had, of course, succumbed, like some others, to the really unusual hot
spell of Dartmoor weather!

When the hiking was done we were allowed to relax and "let- go",

So we, naturally, all headed for the nearest town of Plymouth, not the Ho.

The folly of drinking strong ale and Royal Vintage Cider came without warning,
As those of us who were picked up inert off the grass in the bus station that
night, found out next morning!!

It was the only time a flight commander asked about my health, he thought
that I might die,

And Then...

But, I was a young growing lad then and couldn't for the life of me think why!
(He didn't worry so much, when he awarded me 14 day jankers for parking my car behind workshops one Saturday night! That was bad for my health too!!)
Despite all the blisters, bruises, sprained ankles and over exposure to the sun,
It was declared by one and all, that summer camp had been great fun.
So, following this, back to Halton we all went for to finish our final graduation year,
When some of us, who were now old enough to celebrate properly, did so, with their first legal beer.
As a supporting Entry the parades became somewhat easier, and for arms drill with fixed bayonets was developed a much more fluent and safe knack,
And for those of us "skivers", in the Tin and Pipe bands and Corps of Trumpeters we could keep count of those who fainted, from our prime position, at the back!
Finally it was our turn to graduate and Schools and Workshops finals came and went, with nary too much fuss,
Also, of course Airfields finals ended and so no more up and down the hill, on the great big double-decker bus!
Some of us excelled in the finals and most of us made the passing grade,
But it can be said that as an Entry, from everyone, a maximum effort was made.
50 years later, as we look back at some of the scrapes we got into, what harm to us, by Halton, was there done,
For 3 years later after having said goodbye to them, many parents came specially to Halton to share the graduation of their, now grown up and proud 96th Entry son.

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And Then...

Whitehall Cenotaph

In addition to the regular Reunions, which provide the opportunity for the Entry members to gather in a convivial environment, there is also a more sombre gathering every November. Members from many Halton Entries, along with those from other Apprentice and Boy Entrant establishments, form a large group who march down Whitehall and pay homage to the Nation's war dead. The 96th has been represented at this event for several years.



Merv Kelly & Gerry Law at Horse Guards Parade

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St George's Church, Halton – 1963

Early in 1960 a fire totally destroyed the Station Church of St George. Fortunately for the 96th their arrival in September meant that they could not be blamed for the event. For the next 3 years, Church Parades were held in the Burnett Gymnasium until, in May 1963, the newly built St George's Church was completed, just off Chestnut Avenue. The 96th were, by this time, the Senior Entry and so it fell to us to provide the ceremonial for the Dedication Service. Many former Halton Brats of other Entries were in attendance.

And Then...

The Colour Party consisted of SAA Jim Duff as Colour Bearer, LAA Dave Sinclair and LAA Trev Taylor as Colour Escorts, and CAA Dick Wilson as Colour Warrant Officer. The story of St George's rebirth and the Dedication Service are well documented in the book *'The Phoenix Project'*, which is available from the Chaplain's Department at Halton.

The 96th Entry took the collection, by which is meant that they passed around the collection tray, rather than that they 'legged it' up the road to *'The Tank'* with ill-gotten gains. The sum collected amounted to £72 8s 1d, which equates to £1218.56 in today's money – a lot of *'Tizer'*.

On 28 July 1963 the Entry was back at St George's to become the first Entry to hold its Graduation Dedication Service in the new Church. Thus the history of St George's and the history of the 96th Entry are inextricably linked.

So on 19th May 2013, when a congregation of ex Brats of all Entries gathered to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Church, it was only natural that the gathering included a significant number of members of the 96th. To add to the significance of the event, Jim Duff, who had carried the standard 50 years before, made the journey from Scotland specifically to attend.



Another Church Parade – 50years on

David & Jill Mawdsley, Tony Robson, Gordon & Anne Sherratt, John & Pat Crawford, Merv & Pat Kelly, Dave Murray, Jim Duff, Alf Burton, Graham & Jill Castle, Gerry Law, Sharon & Colin Woodman.

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And Then...

The Halton Apprentice's Hymn

One moment that many found to be poignant was the singing of;
The Halton Apprentice's Hymn: 'When Beech leaves are falling'.

1. (Solo) How green are the beeches that grow on the Chilterns,
At Halton, up Beacon on Boddington crown,
But best I remember when beech leaves were falling
And painting the hillside a deep golden brown.
- 2 (Chorus) When beech leaves are falling, are falling, are falling,
Where ever I'm stationed where e'er I may roam,
Old Memories come calling,
Come calling, come calling, of youth's golden scenery, of Halton and
home.
- 3 (Solo) How light were our steps as saluting the colours,
We passed with our bayonets a-gleam in the sun,
As bright as their gleams were our hopes for the future,
Of things to achieve, of adventures to come.
- 4 (Chorus).
- 5 (All) If, firm as the trees that stood out on the skyline,
We stick to our purpose and never forget
Our grand Air Force motto; then leaves may come falling,
Un-shadowed by sorrow, un-tinged with regret.
- 6 (Chorus).

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And Then...

In Memoriam



649 A/A Arnott, DP
B Flight – Engines



528 A/A Booth, JM
A Flight – Armourer



587 A/A Brenkley, D
C Flight – Airframe



658 A/A Cresswell, M
B Flight – Engines



599 A/A Fousert, P
C Flight – Airframe



538 A/A Frost, AE
A Flight – Armourer



889 A/A Gibbons, LL
B Flight – Dental



602 A/A Gilbert, JB
C Flight – Airframes

And Then...



665 A/A Hartley, JM
B Flight – Engines



550 A/A Hilder, JDL
A Flight - Inst Nav



672 A/A Jeffries, DAW
B Flight – Dental



612 A/A Ledsham, NR
C Flight – Airframe



712 A/A Lewis, J
B Flight – Elect



555 A/A Marshall, AC
A Flight – Armourer



625 A/A Meacham, RW
C Flight – Airframe



626 A/A Millam, RC
C Flight – Airframe

And Then...



709 A/A Thomas, AR
B Flight – Elect



704 A/A Walsh, JC
B Flight - Elect

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