

It was a summer's afternoon at RAF Acklington, an old RAF station not far from Morpeth in Northumberland, to which I was posted to in 1971 on my return from RAF Changi. I was NCO IC of the RAF Fire Service Detachment tasked to provide fire coverage for the Wessex helicopters of 202 Squadron, 'A' Flight RAF Search and Rescue, with 6 airmen under my command. Our parent unit was RAF Boulmer, where fire coverage was maintained by members of the Air Force Department Fire Service, making me and my team the only RAF Fire Service members serving in the county of Northumberland.

We had two ACRT's (Dry powder) and on this particular afternoon i was visiting Squadron Headquarters using one of these vehicles when a call came through to me from the tower. The Controller said "There was a fire at Acklington Motor Company and could we assist. Knowing that the nearest civilian fire brigade was at Amble, a few miles away, I immediately responded to the call and took the appropriate action as described in the award citation. I must stress however that my supporting crew member carried out an excellent response and deployment.

I visited the village garage a few years ago but sadly Gordon (the mechanic) had passed away. I did speak to relatives and friend who had been told about the incident. I can remember Ron Newsome, an Association member, who left Acklington before this period of time, and who has posted photos on our website Memories page. I left the unit in November 1973 on posting to RAF Detachment Salalah in Oman, and received my award from HM The Queen on the 14th.November,1974 at Buckingham Palace on my return to the UK and on posting to Scampton.

*SUPPLEMENT ID THE LONDON GAZETTE, 13m NOVEMBER 1973 13475*

#### *HONOURS AND AWARDS*

*CENTRAL CHANCERY OF THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD St. James's Palace, Linden EWA. 13th Novm,ber 1973.*

*The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the British Empire Medal for Gallantry (Military Division) to the undermentioned:*

*L4240051 Corporal Alan WARDLE,Royal Air Force Regiment.*

*In September 1971, Corporal Wardle was posted to Royal Air Force Boulmer as the non-commissioned officer in charge of the Fire Section, located at Acklington but on the establishment of Boulmer. On 21st June 1973, the Fire Section at Acklington was alerted that there was a serious fire on the premises of the Acklington Motor Company situated in Acklington Village. The fire started beneath a car which was being repaired over a servicing*

*pit and was caused by an accumulation of petrol fumes which had been ignited by a flame from a welding torch. The fire involved the car and an oxyacetylene trolley, which was being used by a mechanic who was then trapped in the pit as a result of the fire. The Airfield Crash Rescue Landrover was immediately sent to the scene of the incident. Corporal Wardle was not at the Fire Section at the time of the alert, but on learning of the incident on the communications radio of the second Airfield Crash Rescue Landrover, he acted on his own initiative and drove to the scene of the fire. On arrival, he fought his way into the building, which was filled with smoke and toxic fumes, and immediately noticed that the set of oxygen and acetylene bottles was excessively hot and that the hoses from these bottles were feeding the fire. Assessing the danger and with complete disregard for his own safety, Corporal Wardle approached the bottles, turned off the control valves and pulled the bottles clear of the building in a safe area. Having previously positioned his two vehicles for maximum effect, Corporal Wardle extinguished the fire with dry powder, thus enabling the civilian mechanic to escape from the pit, relatively unharmed. Corporal Wardle acted completely professionally throughout the incident and with complete disregard for his own safety. As a fireman, he was fully aware of the dangers inherent in a fire in a garage workshop but, by his coolness and by his prompt and magnificent example in the face of danger, he averted a serious explosion and almost certainly saved the trapped mechanic from death or serious injuries.*