



# FLASHPOINT

ROYAL AIR FORCE & DEFENCE FIRE SERVICES ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



**IN THIS ISSUE**

SUMMER 2025  
[www.rafanddfsa.co.uk](http://www.rafanddfsa.co.uk)

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## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION

The formation of the *Royal Air Force & Defence Fire Services Association* took place at Shoreham Airport in East Sussex, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 1995, when ex-service personnel got together to remedy the fact, that wasn't an organisation relation to the trade of firefighter when most other trade one.

Since 1995 many changes have taken place. Although at first a lot of contact with members of the Association was through the Flashpoint magazine, which is published 3 times a year we now have had to embrace modern day communications using the website, Facebook and now the Flashpoint can be sent electronically to members who require it by that means. The Committee now meets monthly using Zoom courtesy of the Museum of RAF Firefighting which the Association also supports. To see the membership criteria please visit the website.

## HOW TO JOIN

Visit the Royal Air Force & Defence Fire Services Association website [www.raanddfa.co.uk](http://www.raanddfa.co.uk) and download the application form and print it off and send the completed form with all your details and history to

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Welcome to the summer 2025 issue of Flashpoint. First of all, I would like to thank all those that have sent me content after my begging posts on social media. Your efforts are greatly appreciated as without it there would be no magazine. For those that have sent in articles and not had them published in this issue don't despair as it will be in the next issue. Please keep digging deep and coming up with your stories and keep this magazine going for future generations and us older ones alike. This issue has been hard work, and I couldn't have done it without my wingmen Silverfox and Dave Kirk so a big thank you to you two.

The annual reunion has been and gone,

and it was a great success with almost 40 attending. A great weekend was had by all. I certainly had a great time catching up with old friends and making new ones. Please see the centre spread for pictures of the weekend. We had a meeting which was well attended to discuss ways of moving the Association forward and how we will have our reunions in the future. Some cracking ideas came out and many will be implemented in due course.

Following on from the reunion we now have two vacancies on the committee. Don Pape has stood down as Vice Chairman with immediate effect and Trevor Hayes the association Treasurer is standing down as soon as we have a new Treasurer and

most certainly at the end of the year. If you fancy being nominated for any of these positions please notify any of the committee members who's contact details are on page 2 of this issue. On behalf of the association, I give our sincere thanks for all the commitment and fantastic work you have given to the association and we all wish you well for the future.

Well, I will keep this short and sweet as I need to leave space for all the wonderful articles within. So, take care and enjoy this issue.

*Reggie Metcalfe*

## Chairmans Address

Welcome to the latest edition of flashpoint. I hope you enjoy reading it. Contained within these pages you will see a report from our recent reunion. To increase participation at a formal event we used the word reunion instead of AGM to see if a revised format could encourage more people to attend. I think it was a great success and the open forum on the day encouraged many people to put forward their thoughts both positive and negative about the current state of the association. It is clear, that we are not unique, and that many other organisations like us are struggling to survive. There are several factors contributing to this problem including the difficulty in encouraging new members to join and this can include both serving and retired firefighters. The demographic of our organisation needs to be expanded to encourage more people to join. Sadly, in many cases, age is starting to creep up on us. The physical and mental challenges that some of our members face means that they are unable to travel far these days if at all. Value for money, the cost of living are all factors that we must consider. Our membership fee is probably one of the smallest when compared to other groups yet still some people struggle to find this small amount each year. Given the cost of transport, hotel fees, food and facilities it really is a job to keep our heads above water. Thanks to the efforts of the

committee, and particular our treasurer, we always try to get the best value for money. Financially we are in a healthy situation, but we cannot afford to fritter away our finances perhaps to supplement some form of get together in the future without careful consideration otherwise those funds will soon disappear. This will give the committee a great deal of work to do to take things forward. Some of the committee, have reached the point where old age and lack of spare time mean that they have made the decision to step down and make way for other people to pick up the mantle. I would like to say a massive thank you to my vice chairman Don Pape for his exceptionally hard work and support during my time as your chairman. Don has worked tirelessly to ensure that the AGM's have been a success. This has meant many hours behind the scenes dealing with hotels to ensure best value for money, a task which can be thankless at times. He feels it is time to step down and give somebody else a chance to take over. As per our current constitution we do need to ask for a volunteer, and they should be proposed and seconded. Please give this some serious thought as I cannot do everything on my own. Also stepping down is Brian Jones, our membership secretary. Not only does Brian keep our records up to date, but he also handles all the get well and sympathy cards that are sent out to our members and their

families. Modern data protection has made some of his duties very difficult and although there have been advances in technology, Brian admits himself that his IT skills are not the best. Luckily, Dave Grant, has volunteered to take over from Brian. Dave will receive support from myself and Steve Harrison whilst the transition takes place. To Brian and Don, I wish you all the very best for the future. I thank you on behalf of the committee and the membership for all your hard work and support that you have given to us all and I look forward to seeing you both at events at the future where hopefully you can be a little bit more relaxed and Stress free! The treasurer and the secretary have also made it known that they are ready to step aside and let others take over so please give some thought to joining the committee because without people in these key positions the association will not survive in its current format.

I thank you all for your continued support and as always if there's anything that you would like to discuss reference the association or the museum, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me either via e-mail, phone or letter.

*All the best - Steve*

# KEVIN “SMILER” MEESON RIP

Although “Smiler” didn’t serve long in the RAF Fire Service he held that period in his life with great affection and treasured the experiences he faced and the people he met and held kept those in his mind as he carried on his life after the RAF. Smiler became a member of the RAF&DFS Association and also volunteered at the Museum of RAF Firefighting when he could, travelling from Leeds to Lincolnshire.

I met Smiler while serving at RAF Masirah and he was a colourful character, and his exploits of that tour appear in an edited article in this edition which was published a few years ago so some newer members may not have seen it.

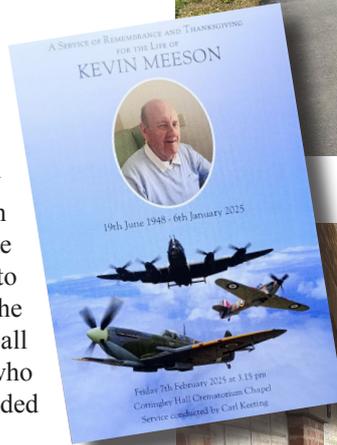
The family of Smiler asked Steve Shirley if a vehicle could be at his funeral service and the decision was made to take the ACRT. This was a truck which Smiler was well acquainted with.

So, on the day of the service Steve Shirley accompanied by Simon “Tug” Wison Association member and museum volunteer, bravely drove the ACRT on a freezing cold day from Lincolnshire to Leeds. The ACRT led the funeral cortege through the city of Leeds, stopping outside Elland Road football stadium before going to the chapel. Jim Smith, who also served in Masirah with Smiler and me also attended the service.

The family and friends really appreciated our attendance and there were many questions to Jim Smith and I about our service with Smiler while in Masirah. The service was a celebration of his life and was well attended as Smiler was a well-known local character as he was while serving in the RAF Fire Service.

*Rest in Peace Smiler*

*Steve Harrison.*



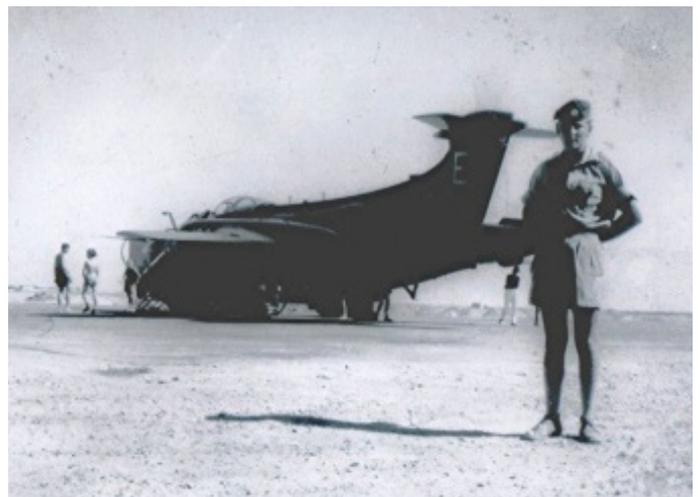
## KEVIN (SMILER) MEESON TALES FROM A DESERT ISLAND

*“Leave thine own home O youth, seek distant shores! Over there in Arabia the untroubled lands watch and see strange men behold the setting sun fall down and rise greatly be thou as one who disembarks fearless on alien sands”* Thirteenth century Arabic verse.

While serving at RAF Coningsby in the early 1960’s I was informed that I was posted to Masirah which I was told was somewhere in the Persian Gulf, it sounded romantic especially to an eighteen year old Leeds lad thoughts of magic carpets, Sinbad the Sailor, exotic belly dancers etc., but when you are recently married with a new born son it was hard to take in the fact that I was going away from my family for twelve months. We had many tears that weekend and when the time came to get on the train at Leeds Central Station, I felt like an old soldier going to war. Looking out of the old-style carriage door watching my wife Linda holding in her arms our six-

month-old son Ian.

I arrived at Masirah in June 1967 after a never to be forgotten journey via Cyprus and Aden. First person I met was Taffy Catterson who I knew from trade training. Taff took me across to my room and home for the next twelve months a four-man room with a big ceiling fan, each of the four men in residence had a corner to themselves with lockers giving us a little bit of privacy. It wasn’t long before I was taken over to the fire section to meet my boss and the rest of the lads. Introductions over, I felt quite pleased so far with what I had seen and



heard and was told to meet up that night in the Turtle club for a “ma’a salama” (leaving do) the fireman I was replacing was returning home and it was tradition that all lads attend his leaving do.

I was not a big drinker also I was not on the same pay, as the rest of the lads because



*Smiler with Steve Harrison (foreground) and Storkey Tasker (ATC)*

I was under twenty-one, and did not get the separation allowance, so most of my money was sent home to my wife Linda. The ma'a salama had a good friendly atmosphere with lots of drinking high jinks and singing. I was to attend many ma'a salama's before it was my "ma'a salama

One of my first duties was a night shift with Steve Harrison when early in the shift we got a shout, to go to the MPBW building stating it was on fire. We got there ready to get to work when a civilian MPBW workman came over to say it was not a fire and said, "I have let a smoke bomb off inside the building to kill all the insects." By this time all the off-duty lads had been called to assist. We all had a good laugh and then stood down. Another night on duty fireman, in came our Flight Sergeant, shouting why are you not up at the fire? What fire are you on about Flight? Well, there wasn't a fire at all; our Flight Sergeant was a bit deaf, and heard a song on the station radio part of which had the sound of emergency sirens in it, it was a song called 'Call the Fire Brigade, being performed. One day not long after arriving at Masirah as I was in Air traffic control visiting my mate Storkey Tasker when, I saw a large tin of Nescafe coffee (catering size) I asked Storkey where he got the coffee from? he told me SATCO gets it from the officer's mess. So Smiler big gob went to see SATCO and as he was also our Fire Officer, I asked please can you get some coffee for us Sir. No, only for my section was his reply, but sir you are our officer too, sorry Smiler, (yes most officers and other ranks knew my nick name). I can't remember where I got the nick name from, but I think it was Cpl Fairs

at Catterick who gave it to me, because every time he gave me a telling off, I could only smile at him! "So, Sir, (SATCO) are there any other officers who don't have a section of their own? " "No there are only nine officers on the camp, and they all have their own section, all except the C.O (squadron leader RJ Spears). Well, say no more, I went back to the section rang the adjutant to and asked see the C.O. "Why" said the adjutant? "It's private Sir."

A later in the week a call from SHQ SAC Meeson report to the C.O's office. Off I went, called at the adjutant's door, SAC Meeson reporting sir, OK stand there, as he contacted the C.O. On his squawk box. Yes said the C.O., I have SAC Meeson to see you sir. OK bring him in. He marched me into the C. O.s office, a quick salute to the C.O. And from the C.O. He said, "Yes Smiler what can I do for you". The adjutant's face dropped as he was instructed to leave the room then I told the CO about the large tins of coffee available for other sections but we at the fire section had more staff and more visitors than any other section and were on duty 24 hours a day and we had to buy our own and it cost us a lot of cash for small jars from the NAAFI. "What can I do he said", well sir you are the only officer that doesn't have a section of your own so can you get us the catering tins from the officer's mess, and we will pay you. Of course he said, he rang for the adj and told him to get the coffee for his firemen, from the C.O.s mess bill, we will pick it up and pay for it. Off I went back to the section I told my corporals who didn't believe me.

Then a call from the Flight Sergeant, "into my office," "how dare you go and ask the

C.O. For coffee you don't go over my head." To the chief, I said, "I've done it's and the coffee is on its way." The C.O. obviously thought a lot of his firemen as he was a pilot himself and knew how important we all were. One day during a CO's inspection of our accommodation the CO asked me where I got my aircraft models from, as he had never seen any in the NAAFI. So, I told him "My wife sends them out to me". "Can she get some for me as my wife is bloody hopeless", "Yes sir I will". "Do that you want the cash now? No sir you can pay me when the models arrive." "Well, he said I only want Bi Planes, you know those with two wings." "Yes sir."

When they arrived, I would take them up to S H. Q. and when he finished them, he called me up to his room to see them.



*My good friend Sambo in his Friday best clothes*

At Masirah Fire section we had a section cleaner a local Arab known to all and sundry as Sambo. One day Sambo invited me to come and visit it him at his home for tea with him and his family., my Cpl, Pete Rodgers a funny little guy told me it's an insult if I don't go, well I was not happy but went. I got to the end of the camp where the Black Pillar Boxes were looking at me (that's women with their heads covered). It was scary asking one Arab where Sambo lived but this local man knew Sambo and said he would take me to Sambo's but not before I had a cuppa with h him. I went

to his makeshift home and had tea made with Carnation milk, which I have always detested, whilst at his home I saw on his wall a .303 rifle. Oh shit, I was shaking; but things were fine after the cuppa they took me to see Sambo, he was so happy to see me and sat me on a large carpet, it was of great colours, then out came his two wives who, put down silver plates with all sorts of butties on, then a tray of fruit, he then said do I want Fruit and cream? So, I said yes please, out he came with a large silver cup with tinned fruit and Carnation milk. And I thought I had currants or raisins. No, no they were figs big figs, he put them into his mouth and then took the figs out and gave them to me. Yuk When I said I had done he got three of his mates to sit and eat, then it was their prayer time, off they went to a corner and started to pray, only then did the women and kids come out and eat what we had left

On return to the camp Cpl Rodgers sent me to the SHQ for a decoke of my stomach, but Sambo was pleased and we became quite good friends over the next twelve months. A few months passed and one day I noticed Sambo was in a bad mood I tapped him on his shoulder, he turned so quick it startled me Smiler Mushtamam = no good) "What's up Sambo" he replied that now all bad Arabs were to go to jail in Muscat so no extra cash for me when I cut off their head. As well as being the fire section cleaner sambo was also the executioner for the local villains no more public executions meant he was going to lose another source of income

One of our firemen had built a beautiful aviary in our accommodation garden and we had obtained some budgies from Aden, He had also tried and succeeded in obtaining soil for plants, but we had no plants. So, me big gob again said I had seen some nice plants on my trips to the Officers Mess that was it we hatched a plan and formed a raiding party and after a few beers one night a few of us set off on what we considered to be a SAS type raid on the Officers Mess Garden and removed some of their garden plants. The next morning, I opened my locker to find it full of plants (shit what have we done?!). Later that day I had a call from the C.O. "Smiler bring back my plants we were all watching you take them, glad you're RAF Firemen and not SAS as you would all be dead". I took them back, no charges just a serious telling off. Another night in the NAAFI another big party most of us were inebriated when

me one said let's go for a coffee in the Army Signals room, as they were on duty 24 on arrival one of our group pointed out that that Phil Sinnnot was missing! Where can he be?, then in he came covered in concrete bits, what have you done?, then we remembered on the way back to the billet, we passed the site of the new aircraft pan that was being built and a giant cement mixer was positioned there, someone had dared us to climb into it, OK, we messed about for a while then went home to our billets. But Phil had fallen asleep inside the mixer! On our camp we used to get the locals donkeys wandering about, so if we caught them, we used to take them to the RAF Police Corporal, and when the Arabs wanted them back, they had to pay up for their return. One day when me and three other lads were walking to the hill beside the camp, when we saw a donkey loose. I then heard a funny noise pass my ear, I saw the other lads running away, so I ran after them. When I caught up with them, I said, "what's wrong" "didn't you see him" "who I said"? "The Fxxxing Arab with his rifle shooting at us," that was the funny sound I heard a bullet passing my ear! So, we went to report it to the police at the guardroom, the snowdrop called the Sergeant Snowdrop, who said he saw it all from his room, as we were out of bounds and chasing the Arabs donkey 'nowt' could be done. "What you mean out of bounds, there's no fence or 'owt" "Oh yes, those piles of white stones mark out our little England" this was never pointed out to us, Lucky or What! Now then there was a fireman whose name escapes me, but he was a strange bloke and was in fact casualty evacuated home having cracked up. Before being shipped home he went berserk with one of the large crash axes off one of the vehicles. I heard this commotion coming from my good friend Paul McGhee's room. I walked in not knowing what to expect and there was this lunatic swinging the axe no sign of Paul and in those few seconds I thought were is Paul who did what he thought was right and dived into his locker thinking he was out of harm's way but poor lad the maniac was now thrashing the axe through Paul's wardrobe door it was scary for me but ten times worse for Paul as he watched the axe getting ever closer to him. I was able to stop the assault on Paul and before long the snowdrops and medical officer arrived, and life resumed to normal in the fireman's accommodation block

One day a brand-new fire truck arrived a MK7, wow what a machine, I was given it to drive, on my crew, and I was over the moon. We used to drive down to the jetty with power steering to refuel. One day I was on my way back to the section and as this machine was the first vehicle I have driven with power steering, I decided to see what it was like with normal steering. As I was getting to a cross roads and needed to turn left to return to the section the wheel hardly moved, I went over the white painted breeze blocks that we had round junctions, over I went heading onwards towards the Pakistani mess, where they were having breakfast, 'O yes' first time I ever saw white faces on Pakistani workers. I did stop put back the lever and replaced the breeze blocks to their normal positions and went back to the section never to tell anyone. I got on well with the Pakistani labour force, as I used to play Hockey at Coningsby, so I formed hockey team at Masirah made up of firemen and several other tradesmen including a few officers. I reckon we had three games against those men and lost like a 100-2, they were great players. I made a pal of one, who six months of the year was a joiner at Masirah, and the other six months was a film star in Pakistan. He invited me to their mess for a curry, never ever had one before but as I sat down for a melon curry, I asked for a knife and fork. "No, no we don't eat it like you" on came a plate of curry and then a plate of rice. He then tore into the apatite into the curry and last of all into my mouth. Hell Fire! It was hot, I drank three jugs of water, and I remember him saying "no good water makes it worse" yes it did, but from then on, I look to curries. During my Masirah tour I was one of the RAF Fire crew who attended the MV Daphne ship Fire on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1968. Operational and technical details of this major RAF Fire Service incident are well documented on the RAF Fire Service Association website but without going into great details suffice to say Smiler left his mark with the captain of the Daphne. On completion of the exhausting and highly dangerous firefighting operation we all relaxed on board the Daphne and awaited transport back to Masirah. For some reason the ship's captain invited me into his cabin and offered me an alcoholic drink which I duly accepted. After a while the captain said he would have to leave me alone while he checked on some ship business his parting words were help yourself to whatever drink you want. I could



*Fire Section away day Smiler front row left second back also in photo Willy Adams Ian Easter George Edwards Mick Condy Paul McGhee Taff Pritchard*

*Steve Harrison John Farrell and Smiler aboard the SS Daphne*

understand his kind gesture we relatively few RAF Firemen had saved his ship with little to no help from the ship's crew. I made myself comfortable and thought that as he has not asked any other of the RAF lads for a drink I may as well have a drink on their behalf as well as my own drink. About an hour later the captain returned and in his native tongue, Greek started shouting at me. Apparently in his absence I had consumed all his prized wines and whiskeys that he had accumulated on his world travels. I woke up the next morning back on camp with the mother of all hangovers and fairly exhausted after the Daphne ordeal The Daphne Fire was a real and unique firefighting experience for me and all those who took part. I was only sorry the rest of the lads couldn't join me for a drink in the captains' cabin but to a man the lads all had a good laugh when I told them what I got up to; Smiler strikes again. On return home now stationed at RAF Church Fenton I was summoned to SHQ what for now I thought but good news this time I had received an extra £19 in my weekly pay packet this money I was informed was my share of the salvage money that must have been paid to the RAF for the saving of the ship.

My Masirah tour turned out to be a wonderful experience for me yes I obviously missed my wife and young son but I made many friends(Arab Indian and Brits) several of them I am in regular contact with forty years after we first met; we have grown old together and each of us to varying degrees carry the scars of old age but when we met up those memories of our time together on our own desert island that was RAF Masirah always come flooding back bring a smile and evoke fond memories of those halcyon days of our youth .



*This image was taken in 2008 at a re-union and it was the first time we where altogether at the same time since 1967/8 From left to right Steve Harrison, George Edwards, Smiler; and Paul McGee.*

# Tales of a Fireman's Daughter

## The Case of The Too-Small Hangar

I learned to ride my bicycle on the taxi way at RAF Gütersloh during the hot summer of 1976. On the few occasions my mother was elsewhere, my father took us to the fire station for the day. He was a casual natured babysitter, unloading our tiny bikes from the back of his blue Mazda and turning us loose to entertain ourselves. My poor mother would have been horrified at the things we got up to.



I could ride for a long while without stopping, which meant I never quite got the hang of that part. Many a fight occurred between me and the side wall of the fire station, which served as a handy but painful brake. My younger sister has always been far more accomplished than me. She never needed the wall for stoppage, but oversaw carrying the plasters I would inevitably need.

My father would hear the impact of my arrival and emerge from the fire station in his khaki string vest and grey asbestos trousers, clumping along in his giant boots. With his braces dangling by his sides, he usually brandished a cooking implement as he whipped up something special for the lads for lunch. "What are you up to?" he'd ask.

Unlike my mother, he was satisfied with the reply of "Nothing."

Health and safety advisors today will tell you that planes, bikes, and children don't mix. But in 1976, it was a different world. We followed the rules my father set out for us with a little creative deviation. We knew we must run onto the grass if the heavy

planes came too close with their whoosh of hot air, give them time to taxi, and then wave politely to the pilots. It's possible he never realised our rides had extended onto the runway.

### Until one particular day.

It was hot, and we grew thirsty. The fire station was a tiny blip in the distance, and besides, there were other buildings much nearer. And that's how we ended up in the officers' mess, slurping from a fantastic urn containing pure orange juice.

With lunch over, the men gone, and the crockery collected, we had little choice but to take turns leaning on the handle so the other one could drink. My five-year-old sister had started the day in a beautiful cream dress but after a couple of blasts up the runway, a decent tumble on the tarmac, and drowning beneath a pint of orange juice when the handle got stuck, it was a rainbow dress of many colours.

We ghosted from the mess hall into a games room after a while and inspected all the lovely things the grown-ups got to play with when Her Majesty the Queen thought they were working hard. And just like that, the table tennis bats became essential to our afternoon's disastrous entertainment.

We'd spent a lot of time watching the ground crew leading the pilots into the hangers. It didn't look that difficult. A bit of arm waving, reasonable amounts of compulsory cursing, and the ritual brandishing of items rather like the table tennis bats from the officers' mess.

We rode our bikes to the hangars and hid between them to wait for our moment of glory. Much debate ensued about the

eligibility of said bats, which were encased in a dull green rubber and not the requisite bright colour. But we figured we'd give it our best and see what happened. What's the worst that could happen?

My sister elected to go first and promised faithfully that I could go next.

Our moment arrived quicker than we expected. A massive grey Hercules carrying supplies landed, taxied, and stopped on the apron. No one appeared. It was a sign.

Out rushed my sister in her orange-stained dress. She planted herself before the massive plane like a speck on a windscreen and waved those bats as if her life depended on it. In our defence, the ground staff left us to our dubious duty. We either caught them napping or, more likely, they watched in amazement through the section window.

On reflection, it wasn't a great idea to park something that size in a hangar built for a Lightning. Especially when the resident plane was already there. But my sister is an optimistic soul and waved and cussed like a specialist. And the pilot just kept coming.

Our fun ended abruptly when someone in the tower noticed the antics on the ground. The real plane parking attendant arrived at a run and the table tennis bats were confiscated. His cheeks burned red hot when the pilot said it was the best parking he'd seen in ages. The poor man engaged in much bluster and swearing, and not one member of his crew arrived to assist him. We did however hear much hilarity from inside the building.

Of course, the pilot never intended



to demolish the hangar with his very expensive plane. He and his co-pilot thought the whole thing was a hoot. But with the sudden appearance of a senior officer, the pilots drifted away like fog and the ground staff panicked. The bikes and small children needed to disappear at speed.

There followed ten minutes of being bribed to silence with chocolate while someone dialled the fire station. Too late. The men's faces fell as a grumpy voice rang out over the Tanoy from the control tower. It summoned my father to collect his offspring without delay. And the entire camp heard.

Five minutes later, a fire truck careered

off the runway and screeched to a halt in front of the tower. Soap suds still ran off its matte sides as though someone had been halfway through washing it and turned around to find it gone.

The bikes were spirited into its green belly by many willing hands, and in we tumbled after. My sister and I huddled in the front seats, covered in orange juice, chocolate and grass stains.

My father gave us each a stern glare and said, "I need to get back because I left the curry on the stove." He raised his eyebrows. "And your mother doesn't need to hear about this."

The threat of the curry catching on the pan meant a doubly exciting blast up the

runway and a bit of burning rubber. No one remarked on our hurried expulsion from the section we were never meant to visit.

Dad emptied out our bikes and us before dashing back to rescue the lunch. And we spent the next half an hour helping to wash the fire truck but actually playing with the hose pipe and soaking everything within a twenty-metre radius.

The incident seemed forgotten by everyone except for my enterprising sister. She turned to me with a twinkle in her eye and asked, "Where can we get some bigger bats?"

*K T Bowes*

## Mick Lee (Member 281) – Akrotiri Memories

### Part One

As a bit of background to the tale I'm about to tell. I joined the RAF as a callow youth of 19 way back at the height of the hot summer of 1976 (August), when Elton John and Kiki Dee weren't going to break their hearts, petrol was just 76p a gallon, Jim Callaghan was prime minister and the Ford Fiesta was released onto our roads for the first time.

I completed my basic training, like many others at RAF Catterick (my thanks go to John Goupillot and Mick Moncrief). I was posted to RAF Waddington in Dec 76, and there began, what was, unbeknown to me at the time, a 31 year career as an RAF Firefighter.

Let the adventure begin. In 1979, following 3 very enjoyable years at Waddo and having had the privilege of serving with some of the legends of the trade (too many to list here), I was given my first posting overseas to Akrotiri in Cyprus. This would also see me experiencing my very first flight of any kind, a 4 hour trip in a VC10.

When I arrived on the section, the bosses were WO Ken Crouch, FS Alan Pegram, Sgts Dougie Flemming, Ken Jones & Jan Metters. With the guys who were there at the time, work was always fun, we had some real characters, (Roy Twiggs, Pip Piper, Martin Lloyd, Colin Murphy, Stu McMahon to name but a few). It was also my first experience of working with locally employed Cypriot fire-fighters and again there were some real characters amongst

them. All in all it was a great place to go to work and made being away from home a little easier for all of us. As a group we experienced fun times; as well as the occasional bad, but we were always there as a support for each other no matter what.

As I began to settle into my sunshine tour, the daily routine was pretty much the same as you would expect on any section - "only warmer", so the bays were washed and squeegied daily, tools were inspected/serviced, vehicles cleaned, training carried out. The crash line itself was a mix of the old and the new, with vehicles ranging from Mk VIIIs, MK VIIIIs, Mk IX's, we even had a couple of DP3s, TACR 1 & 2s; we were also responsible for 2 Gemini Inshore rescue boats (1 kept on the section and 1 down at the Akrotiri mole). In addition to all that, we also looked after one of the last operational foam laying vehicles, which had to be checked out as part of the daily routine (Crash 1 task).

As with most RAF fire sections Volleyball was always the sport of choice at work. I bought my first ever brand new car (Tax Free) within 6 months or so of arrival, it was a bright pea green Toyota Starlet. At the time there was petrol rationing on the island at the weekends, so odd number plates were allowed on the roads one week followed by evens the next. We had fuel coupons and ration cards for booze and cigarettes, BBQs were a way of life and kebabs and mezzees in the village were a must, we couldn't complain really.

Facilities on camp weren't too bad either,

of course we had the NAAFI, a sports stadium, an ASTRA cinema the Shallamar curry restaurant and Lady Lamptons "Café", along with the Flamingo Theatre club, which became a favourite watering hole for the section, as one of our own just happened to be the bar manager there (Tim Gates and his lovely wife Hazel). I took over from Tim when he was posted back to the UK.

Because of the almost guaranteed fine weather conditions, the airfield was always busy, Akrotiri was traditionally used by UK & Germany based fighter squadrons coming out on Armament Practice Camp (APC) detachments. We found ourselves having to train on a variety of a/c such as Phantoms, Lightning's, Hawks (Red Arrows) Canberra's, Hercules, VC10's and Nimrods, we also looked after station based a/c such as the Wessex and Whirlwind helicopters of 84sqn and a certain US a/c that will remain nameless.

The accommodation for us singlies was generally a very basic, 3 or 4 man room in one of the on-site barrack blocks (my room mates for most of my tour were Dave Calvert and Jed Ruddy see happy snap), the rooms consisted of louvre style windows, a ceiling mounted fan the size of a propeller, tiled floors and basic built-in wardrobes, we were also issued with a paraffin heater for the winter months to keep us warm (more on that later maybe). The toilets and showers were outside in a separate ablutions block, there was none of this en-suite stuff like a sink! Due to the

dry conditions we were always sweeping sand out of the rooms and shaking it out of our gear. Even overseas we were still subject to the occasional bull night and the inevitable CO's & AOC's inspections, but hey-ho that's life in a blue suit I suppose lol.



As I previously mentioned we did suffer some sad times, one of the saddest of which was the passing of a true gent in FS Alan Pegram. He left a huge gap not just on the section but within the trade as a whole and everyone felt his loss in some way.

WO Trev Chambers (another true gent) came out as the replacement for Ken Crouch upon his return to the UK and was there for the remainder of my tour.

## Part Two

Before I got to Cyprus, even as a keen sportsman I had never broken a bone in my body, but over the course of the next 18 months or so I ended up breaking both ankles and my neck.

The first break occurred when I had gone over to Germany on leave to meet up with an old Waddington mate (Stevie Holt) he was stationed at Bruggen and during my trip he somehow persuaded me to play football for the section, (the day before I was due to fly back to Cyprus), things were going ok, until I literally just stood on the ball and ended up cracking a bone in my ankle.



As I said, I was due back the next day, and was lucky enough to have already sorted a flight back on a Canadian Air Forces C130, but they certainly weren't expecting me to turn up with my leg in plaster. I ended up sitting with my leg up for the entire journey, given the seats on a herc (which I'm sure you're all familiar with) and the amount of cargo down the centre of the plane, well let's just say it wasn't the most comfortable of flights.

Needless to say when we landed at Akrotiri and I got off on crutches looking like something out of a Robert Louis Stephenson novel the bosses were non-too impressed. I ended up on light duties for a couple of months which basically meant I was on permanent control room duties.

Fast forward about a year and guess what happened (perhaps you're already ahead of me), I broke the other bloody ankle playing volleyball during a lunch time game at work. Let's just say that the control room became quite a familiar workplace.



Of course through all this I was thankful for the support of my fellow fire-fighters who didn't take the proverbial p... not once (like hell they didn't)

I hope you'll forgive me for going on somewhat of a detour, you remember in part one that during the winter we "singlies" were given paraffin heaters for our rooms. WELL LET ME TELL YOU they don't operate so well on their sides and especially not when lit. As Jed, Dave

and I can vouch for. We had been out, had come back and one by one we fell asleep, I think I was the last one, anyway sometime during bye byes in the land of nod, the heater had fallen over (to this day we still don't know how it happened), but to cut a long story short our room caught fire.



As daft as it sounds we woke up within seconds of each other, all feeling rather warm, we managed to get out safely, but we were then confronted with every fireman's worst nightmare..... what are we going to tell the duty crew when they pitch up and they see who's room it is, add to that, that of course the whole block had, had to evacuate as a result of the fire.



There was the inevitable enquiry, all I remember of which was that I was very close to being charged and possibly court martialled, something to do with saying in my statement to the RAFP that I had fallen asleep whilst the heater was still on. I don't mind admitting that I was bricking it. But for the intervention of Jan Metters I have a feeling my career would have been over then and there.

### Part Three

Anyway moving on; time flies as they say and after nearly 3 and a bit years, I was due back to the UK, this would have been around April 82(ish). I had received my posting and was heading for RAF Marham, which at the time was still a Victor tanker base, but which was also preparing for the arrival of the historic 617 squadron which had been reformed and equipped with the "new" Tornado a/c.

Back to Cyprus, I was within a couple of days of flying back, so we had organised a gozomee do at the local Kebab restaurant. I wasn't going to drive so me and a couple of the lads (I think it was Jed and Dave) got a lift down, I can't remember his name (but I do and will always remember his car) he drove a White Mazda 323 (I swear I haven't been in one since lol).

After a great evening good food, beer and wine, it was time to go back to the block, the same guy gave us a lift back, all was going well, we had just been passed through the barrier onto the main camp road when all of a sudden, BANG one of the rear wheels had, had a blow out and we found ourselves turning over and landing on the opposite side of the road. The alcohol had probably numbed us to any shock or injuries at the time but our driver got out, took one look at his car and collapsed unconscious. We contacted the duty medic who with the crash ambulance were on scene pretty quickly. Those of us who were in the car helped get the driver onto a stretcher and loaded him on the ambulance, so far so good. The medic had said that as a precaution we should get checked out at the med centre the following day. We got back to the block and crashed out till morning.

Now the fun begins, because when I woke up and attempted to get ready, it became apparent that I couldn't get off my bed; Jed and Dave gave me a hand and once upright I seemed ok, the 3 of us made our way to the med centre where Jed & Dave



*Yours truly (note the callipers in my head)*

were given the all clear, but I was told that I had probably received a whiplash injury and that I was going to need an X-Ray down at TPMH, so off we popped.

On arrival at TPMH I was taken to X-Ray, once there I was asked by the army medic to lower my chin onto my chest, it soon became apparent that I couldn't do that and from then on things began to move quite rapidly. I was seen by a senior RAF Consultant and was told in no uncertain terms not to move a muscle as they were going to admit me with a suspected broken neck. (this was soon confirmed by further X-Rays – deep joy)

I was then told, that I would need an operation under general anaesthetic. All I can remember was that it felt like a brace and bit was being used to drill into my

skull and that when I woke up, I pretty much looked like a ten pin bowling ball. There was dry blood and two plasters on my head where they had initially drilled the two holes in the wrong place. I was flat n my back on what I later learned was something called a Povey turning frame.

I was on this bed for approximately 8 months (5 months in TPMH and the rest at RAF Wroughton military hospital back in the UK). To get me back home they had to medivac me on a VC10; I found out later that they had, had to take out about 40 seats to get my bed on board (I'm guessing that wouldn't have gone down well with those people who had their flights cancelled lol).

Ah well all's well that ends well



*Turning Frame Bed very similar to the one I was on*





# Who were the “Elite”?

When I was serving in our brilliant trade (74-88) it was generally considered, mainly by themselves! That the blokes on the Royal Flight were the elite of our trade. However the blokes on the ASU, protecting our nuclear deterrent, may have thought they were as well.

At this stage it is worth pointing out that the Royal Flight chaps suffered undue hardship travelling around in their big blue bus, staying in 5 star hotels and living off rate ones. Whereas the ASU blokes mostly travelled in a convoy truck, part of a rolling roadblock, staying in service accommodation.

I would say though that the true elite of our trade was that fine body of men, the RAFG Harrier Deployment Fire Service. We lived in 12x12 tents in the middle of forests with no creature comforts, we had to boil water for a brew using an old kettle on an Alladin paraffin heater, for younger readers, your local museum may have one! During Exercise Hard Frost held in March/April every year we would find ourselves boiling ice for water, washing and shaving using a bowl on the bonnet of the TACR 2, utilising the wing mirror for the shave.

Everything we were likely to need, including our tent, safari beds and bedding had to fit into a ¾ ton Sankey trailer with a spare drum of AFFF and our kit. It was always a tight squeeze packing the trailer, but we were always, somehow, able to find room for enough beer for 3 blokes for 2 weeks.

In a previous article for Flashpoint I wrote about an incident in the field where I, with Kev Pateman and Paul Morris(RIP) had a Harrier engine fire in a hide when junior pilot flooded the plenum chamber which caught fire, we had to use the light water from the TACR2 to put the fire out, whilst engaged in this operation Paul reported that a Harrier taxiing out had lost his nose wheel!

A consequence of this incident was that F/S Mc Greavey(RIP) had to be summoned from his slumbers with the reserve TACR2 so that we could take ours to Sennelager Army Fire Service to refill the tank (and have a shower!) This wasn't the last time I would need the F/S support, more of which later.

Perhaps though, the big plus of being a member of this special group of firefighters, was that every summer we bimbled about all over Germany supporting Harrier

displays at Airshows.

We were accommodated in the same hotel as the Pilot/s which was paid for by the Air Show organisers and essentially it was a weekend of wine, women and song and quite often drinking games!

My most memorable display was in the company of Adrian “Slim” Davies at a Gliding Club which was also used by light aircraft using a grass runway which would later create some slight excitement for the show patrons.

We had arrived early to do a recce and await the arrival of the aircraft being flown by that years display pilot S/L Les Evans. Whilst waiting a Jolly Green Giant from the US Army entered the circuit, he decided to make his final approach over the top of the smartly parked light aircraft, resulting in several of them being blown onto their backs by the downdraft!

We went to assist the recovery but fortunately were not required, damage being minimal and amazingly no fuel spill. A little later a Puma of 230 Sqn at Gutersloh arrived and I would just like to observe that the pilot of that chopper could drink more than any fireman I ever met!

Once our jet had arrived and landed safely we were taken to our hotel by the organisers to drop our stuff off, then back to the Glider Club for welcome drinks. The event was exactly what you would expect in a hangar full of NATO allies, German civilians and free beer and schnapps. Highlight of the evening being the Puma pilot standing on a table single Head and Shoulders Knees and Toes in German.

Next morning we left the hotel fairly early to make sure all was well at the venue, which was when things started to go awry. In my experience the signal square at RAF airfields was set into the ground in front of ATC. Not here though no, the landing T was on stilts, and with the grass being covered in dew, when I applied the TACR2 brakes we aquaplaned straight into the landing T. The collision resulted in the bull bars being pushed back and the bonnet folded up so you couldn't see where you were going.

So there we are, due to cover a Harrier display later that day with a U/S vehicle. Given that our W/O was Ted Firmager(RIP) Monday morning wasn't looking to promising for me! But, with typical German efficiency it turned out there was

a sheet metal worker with his welding kit on site, and he was sure he could repair the truck in time.

Not long after this the pilot turned up and ripped me a new one for leaving my alarm on in the hotel room, it had woken him and Mrs Pilot in the next room before they planned on getting up. Discretion being the better part of valour I decided not to mention the damaged truck, and he didn't notice 2 firemen in attendance and no truck.

Fortunately the German was as good as his word and the truck was returned, repaired, with about an hour to spare. The display went off without a hitch until the end when, with the aircraft in the hover to bow to the crowd, the jets set the grass on fire.

Further to my opening paragraph about the Royal Flight I should add that Royal Helicopter movements in Germany were covered by the Harrier Deployment Fire Service, not for us though the 5 star hotel and rate ones. I recall having TACR2's all over Germany to cover the Prince of Wales visiting his regiments. Robbie Parker and I ended up going to a place called Delinghofen home of 1st Battn Gordon Highlanders. Our accommodation was in their transit block where not one window had an intact pane of glass, and they wouldn't give us any bedding. We went to their mess for our evening meal, got our plates of food and discovered the army don't have cutlery in their messes, apparently squaddies are issued with their own during basic! They kindly loaned us spoons, and we also discovered that cooks who fail RAF training go to the army!

Just to end, that tour with HDFS was the best of my career and on the Saturday of my final deployment F/S Mc Greavey again turned up so I could go for a jolly in a Harrier with Flt Lt Les Evans. We “bombed” the Mohne dam flying the Dambusters route, and proving the lesson had been learned as we turned away a German SAM site locked on to us. Thanks to Dave Mc Greavey I can tell my grandchildren that I have flown backwards in a fast jet.

*Adey Tearle*

# It's a Small World

Back in August 2022 I received an email from a German Firefighter based in the City of Hamburg requesting a visit to the Museum of RAF Firefighting which was, at that time, based at RAF Scampton. During his visit, Dr Holger de Vries gave me, amongst other things, a photograph album containing black and white photographs, some of which were taken at RAF Sydenham. The album had been given to Holger by his partner who worked for a legal company in Hamburg. Her company was tasked with carrying out a house clearance for someone who had sadly passed away leaving no relatives. As items were being thrown into the skip, she spotted the photo album. She thought Holger would like to see it as there was an obvious fire service connection. Holger was interested in it of course, but thought the natural place for it to go would be the Museum.

I immediately recognised some of the people in the album, which appeared to have belonged to a Fireman by the name of Des Mullen. Des was obviously a member of the Belfast City Fire Brigade before joining the AFDFS. We believe Des passed away in 1977, but we do not know how this album found its way to Germany. The people I recognised were Trevor Price and Dave Hannah.

Fast forward to February 2025 when I received a very random email I think through Facebook requesting info on a Fireman R J Elliot believed to have been in the Army Fire Service. This email came from a chap called Mick Rippley asking if I could help his friend Keith Morris who was in turn, helping his friend Jim Brown to track down the history of a medal which had recently come into his possession. Quite literally, on the same day I got the email I was actually looking through the photograph album that Holger had given me and the name Robin Elliot leapt out at me! Could this be the same guy?

I contacted Jim for more

info. Jim told me that he was a medal collector and that he had bought the medal from a chap in New Zealand! The medal in question was the Military General Service medal with a Northern Ireland clasp. Engraved around the edge was the name L/Fm Robin Elliot. Jim had tried to get more info from the Government Records Office who had no record of a medal being awarded to Robin. He then spoke to the Army Fire Service Golf Society (Tom Waldrop) who couldn't help him. He also tried the Manchester Fire Service Museum in Rochdale but again they couldn't help.

I explained to Jim that I had a picture of Robin at RAF Sydenham, now Belfast City Airport, in AFDFS uniform and that I was convinced that they were one and the same. I offered to do more research for Jim and reached out to Trevor Price who was also in the album. Trevor had been a Station Officer at Sydenham, and he remembered Robin straight away. So, I asked, did AFDFS Firemen receive the GSM for Northern Ireland? Yes said Trevor!

Apparently, a Sub Officer at the time, put in a request, through the Army I guess, for firefighters at Sydenham to receive the medal. I'm unsure what dangers they were exposed to apart from the obvious, but

Trevor remembers IRA snipers taking pot shots at people and vehicles on the camp.

Trevor knew nothing about the request until he was invited to a medal presentation where he was formally handed his and told to give the others out when he got back to the Fire Station. Robin Elliot was amongst the recipients.

By a bit of luck, fate or divine intervention, the mystery had been solved via Hamburg, New Zealand, Lincolnshire, Manchester where Jim lives and Northern Ireland. Not forgetting Wales where Trevor now lives.

Sadly, Robin was killed in a car crash whilst attending a course at Andover.

In another instance of it being a small world, Jim served as a prison officer during the 1990 Strangeways prison riots and was part of the fire team manning a Green Goddess. To deflect some of the bad publicity away from the civilian fire brigade they marked up their Goddess with the words ARMY on the side in big white letters made of masking tape. Jim had several photographs of him and his crew during the riots and some Green Goddess manuals in his possession which he has now passed onto me.



## The Invisible Risk

**Simon Marsh**  
**Ex RAF Fire & Rescue Service**

In the early days of my career with the RAF Fire and Rescue Service, it was almost a badge of honour to wear dirty kit. No one wanted to turn up to parade before shift with pristine gear. I think back to my time at RAF Brize Norton, where operations ran 24/7. We had to wear our crash kit all day—sometimes even in bed at night—because every second counted in our response to an incident. I remember playing volleyball in our gear, sweating into it, then heading off to practice hot fires fuelled by lethal mixes of aviation fuel and aircraft engine starter fuel and crawling around the Breathing Apparatus facility.

There was almost a pride in grime. A white crash helmet turned black, a soot-filmed visor on your yellow domestic helmet—these were marks that you'd earned your wage. At night, you'd go to bed stinking of smoke, a sign of a hard day's work.

At FSCTE (Later DFTDC) Manston, our instructors recreated impressive backdraft and flashover scenarios in the 'flash cans'. These guys, exposed to brutal temperatures in the cans, wearing their scorched PBI Gold gear—better described as PBI black.

We were only ever issued two sets of fire kit, and the old green kit could take what felt like forever to return from dry cleaning. This often meant wearing the same contaminated kit for extended periods. And it wasn't just the outerwear—underwear, string vests, and t-shirts all absorbed smoke and toxins. Gloves were commonly stowed inside helmets, a practical but risky habit that trapped sweat and soot together. Flash hoods rarely got washed at all. Without proper decontamination routines, we carried the hazards of each incident/practice 'hot fire' on our skin, day in and day out.

But back then, no one really talked about our contaminated kit, what we were wearing on our skin. The drying rooms reeked of soot and smoke, saturated with carcinogens. WO Jim Baron (RIP) was one of the few who championed proper decontamination, particularly around man-made mineral fibres, but toxic chemical exposure through smoke wasn't part of the wider conversation. Of course, we all knew to park downwind and wear breathing apparatus where applicable—but the particles embedded in our kit were invisible, unspoken threats.

And that's precisely why now, in hindsight and with advancing medical knowledge, it's critical that current/veteran RAF firefighters—and all fire service personnel—have their NHS records annotated with the correct SNOMED CT codes.

### What are SNOMED codes?

SNOMED CT (Systematised Nomenclature of Medicine – Clinical Terms) is a global clinical terminology standard used to consistently record health information. These codes allow clinicians, researchers, and health systems to use a shared language to describe symptoms, diagnoses, treatments, and even occupations.

### The Unique Health Risks Faced by RAF Firefighters

RAF Firefighters were regularly exposed to extreme heat, smoke, toxic chemicals, and traumatic incidents. These exposures can lead

to a range of physical and psychological health issues, including:

- Prolonged exposure to aviation fuel and combustion byproducts
- Repeated thermal stress from hot fire training scenarios
- High-pressure environments contributing to psychological strain
- Long-term contact with contaminated PPE

These risks contribute to a wide range of physical and mental health conditions, including:

- Respiratory disease (e.g., occupational asthma, chronic bronchitis)
- Increased cancer risk (especially of the respiratory tract and skin)
- PTSD, anxiety, and depression
- Repetitive strain and musculoskeletal injuries

### Why SNOMED Codes Matter for RAF Firefighters

These occupational hazards are not always immediately apparent during routine clinical care, which is why proper documentation is critical.

- **Enhanced Clinical Awareness** - Coding "Firefighter" and related occupational exposures in a patient's record helps GPs and specialists interpret symptoms within the correct context—especially for long-latency conditions like cancer or complex mental health issues.
- **Occupational Health Safeguarding** - Accurate coding supports ongoing surveillance of work-related illnesses, enabling earlier intervention and long-term support for those affected.
- **Access to Specialist Services** - With clear documentation, patients can more easily access appropriate referrals, occupational health resources, and compensation pathways where applicable.
- **Informing Research and Policy** - SNOMED-coded data can be aggregated to study health trends in the fire service. This evidence can be used to improve training protocols, design better PPE, and shape national policy for service members.
- **Cross-Service Continuity** - SNOMED CT ensures that whether you're seen in primary care, A&E, occupational health, or a military medical centre, your occupational risks are understood—instantly and universally.

### A Personal Reflection: The Importance of Taking Action

Recently, I began noticing more frequent trips to the toilet and a loss of pressure while urinating. I decided to see the doctor, who suggested the dreaded prostate inspection.

*I always remember the old joke: The doctor says, "Don't worry David, it's normal to get an erection during a prostate examination."*

*"My name's not David!", I said.*

*"Mine is!" replied the Doctor.*

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Thankfully, while the examination revealed an enlarged prostate, blood tests and scans ruled out anything more serious. However, I'm now on medication for the rest of my life to keep the size reduced.

This personal experience reinforced something vital: we must be proactive about our health. We spent years unknowingly absorbing harmful substances through our gear and environment. It's no longer acceptable to brush off these exposures as just part of the job. We need to act, and accurate clinical coding is a powerful tool in getting the care and attention we deserve.

**John Lord – SimTrainer UK ([www.Theinvisiblerisk.co.uk](http://www.Theinvisiblerisk.co.uk))**

During my last year in the RAF, I met a guy called John Lord, he is the Managing Director of a SimTrainer UK, he had come to RAF Brize Norton to deliver a brief on how he can provide effective Command and Control training for Crew Commanders. I stayed in touch with John, mainly on social media. He is championing a call for all serving and veteran firefighters, and military personnel to get their medical records updated. John is also a cancer survivor, as is his wife. He has lived firsthand through the experience, and the spectre of the disease has loomed over them for the last 13 years.

In June 2022, the international agency for research into cancer, part of the world health organisation reclassified by the agreement of 32 countries, firefighting to be a class 1 cancer risk profession.

Firefighters are at a much greater risk of developing cancer, indeed Professor Anna Stec of UCLAN in her research and testing in Scotland showed this equate to 4 times greater for prostate cancer alone.

John has run the two largest conferences to date, with over 400 delegates attending the two events and conducted over 40 talks since last August. He confirms, it is not just local authority firefighters at risk, it is aviation, defence and industrial, it is agencies that work along fire at scenes, paramedics and Police, fire investigators.

One way to help reduce the risk is by effective screening, yet the NHS is currently out of steps with the wider world and research in the USA has shown the benefit of screening for prostate at the age of 40. John hears lots of myths and untruths on PSA testing, it is a first stage step only, John has had every test known to man, had the surgery and 10 subsequent operations for both malignant and benign tumours elsewhere

The fact is testing saves lives and always will, the cost is minimal and a fact of this is if found at stage 1 cancer, over 90% return to work, at stage 4 only 22% are likely to return and then not for many years. Important is for people to understand the regime, how quick the PSA score changes after a first baseline score.

You could have a very low score but if it doubles in short order, it will likely warrant concern.

Any firefighter in the RAF has been exposed routinely to smoke, foam and practices that will increase the risk, any retired RAF or defence firefighter needs to be tested and monitored in Johns opinion, male and female.

**The risk is very real and proven in over 1200 studies worldwide.**

SNOMED codes are a system that the NHS should be using

for digital compliance, When used they show the GP tests and things to consider based on risk of that individual. The use of SNOMED CT as a consistent vocabulary for recording patient clinical information across the NHS helps ensure data is recorded consistently and accurately. This simplifies exchanging clinical information between systems. For example, clinical information in a discharge summary can be incorporated directly into a GP patient record, without a care professional having to re-enter the data by hand, not only saving time, but also avoiding the chance of human error.

The use of computerised clinical decision support within systems is also increasing, supporting care professionals and patients by allowing their IT systems to react to clinical information. For example, some systems have rules that alert care providers to the early signs of sepsis or, in a hospital setting, a specialist team might be automatically alerted that a patient with Parkinson's disease has been admitted. These functions enable better patient care by ensuring the right information is given to the right people at the right time.

**Conclusion**

All RAF firefighters have provided a deployable Aerodrome & Rescue Firefighting capability to Defence in the UK and overseas, our courage is unquestionable—but our health risks are often overlooked. Annotating your NHS records with the appropriate SNOMED CT codes is a vital step in acknowledging our service, understanding our medical needs, and safeguarding our futures.

Please pass this message on to other colleagues, we owe it to every firefighter whose helmet turned black with soot, whose uniform absorbed chemicals in silence, and who went to bed each night reeking of a day's sacrifice. Let's honour them not just with medals or memories—but with healthcare that truly understands the price they've paid. There is an 'example letter' below that should be sent to your GP.

**Example GP letter**

Dear GP,

As an ex Royal Air Force firefighter and a patient at your surgery, I am writing to you to ask you to record my profession on my records.

My details are as follows:

- Full name:
- Date of birth:
- Home address:

All NHS healthcare providers in England must now use SNOMED CT for capturing clinical terms within electronic patient record systems. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales also have programmes of work underway.

If the system is in use in this surgery, I ask for the following codes to be placed on my patient records:

- **Firefighter – 106382009**
- **Occupational exposure to toxic agents – 1609 057 1000 119 109**
- **Royal Air Force Veteran 986781000000101**

If the surgery is in a region not currently using the SNOMED

system, or utilises a different recording system, please update my records accordingly by other means.

After thoroughly reviewing the available scientific literature, the World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer has classified occupational exposure as a firefighter as carcinogenic to humans (Group 1), on the basis of sufficient evidence for cancer in humans.

This is supported by an ever-increasing raft of research, including the biomonitoring research study of UK firefighters, conducted by Professor Anna Stec and her team at the University of Central Lancashire and Lancashire Teaching Hospital. This work was commissioned by the Fire Brigades Union.

It has been identified that regular health monitoring and early detection can play a vital role in protecting the health and lives of firefighters. I kindly ask for confirmation that the above steps have been completed.

Yours sincerely,

#### **Further information:**

The Emergency Services Show - Insights into SNOMED and firefighter health - John Lord and Robbie Burns spoke at The Emergency Services Show about the SNOMED system, a means for GPs to consider whether firefighters concerned about their health may be showing early signs of cancer. They discuss how a firefighter can register with the SNOMED CT system and have that attached to their GP record, adding that other first responders should consider this too as they may have repeated exposure to contaminants over time. <https://youtu.be/jWRCHhqaQrU?si=09Qqpvt1OD35HhA>

Website - [www.Theinvisiblelisk.co.uk](http://www.Theinvisiblelisk.co.uk)

#### **Other applicable SNOMED codes:**

##### **ARMY**

Active serving member of the Army. 986471000000105

Active serving member of the Army Reserves 986551000000102

Army Veteran 986751000000107

##### **ROYAL NAVY**

Active serving member of the Royal Navy. 986511000000101

Active serving member of the Royal Navy Reserves 986591000000105

Royal Navy Veteran 986811000000103

##### **ROYAL AIR FORCE**

Active serving member of the Royal Air Force 986491000000109

Active serving member of the Royal Air Force Reserves 986571000000106

Royal Air Force Veteran 986781000000101

##### **IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBER SERVING**

Family of active serving member of the Armed Forces 98881000000102

## Obituaries



Rest in Peace Brother

DO NOT STAND AT MY GRAVE AND WEEP  
I AM NOT THERE; I DO NOT SLEEP.  
I AM A THOUSAND WINDS THAT BLOW,  
I AM THE DIAMOND GLINTS ON SNOW,  
I AM THE SUN ON RIPENED GRAIN,  
I AM THE GENTLE AUTUMN RAIN.  
WHEN YOU AWAKEN IN THE MORNING'S HUSH  
I AM THE SWIFT UPLIFTING RUSH  
OF QUIET BIRDS IN CIRCLED FLIGHT.  
I AM THE SOFT STARS THAT SHINE AT NIGHT.  
DO NOT STAND AT MY GRAVE AND CRY,  
I AM NOT THERE; I DID NOT DIE.

- ELIZABETH FRYE

It's time to say goodbye to our friends and comrades. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families and friends of our departed brothers.

Tam McCorrie Member 739 January 2025

Alan Wardle Member 473 January 2025

John Sanders Member 721 February 2025

Paul Townsend February 2025

Dave Kenyon Member 239 March 2025

Dave Sutton March 2025

Tony Doan April 2025

John Spong May 2025

Chis Sheridan May 2025

James (Jim) Sadler May 2025

*In The spring 2025 edition of the Flashpoint the "Above and Beyond the Call of Duty" story was about Corporal Lovell who was awarded the BEM for his actions at an incident at RAF Christchurch. He had travelled from nearby RAF Holmesley South to assist at an incident because the crash crew at Christchurch had been killed!*

**Excerpt from forthcoming book by Joe Molyson 1Lt John Drummond oral history, January 22, 2003**

The ALGs were dangerous, cramped places limited by lack of available real estate and surfacing materials. Based at one of these was the 405th Fighter Group, the unit of then 1Lt John "Ace" Drummond. Drummond is now President Pro Tempore Emeritus of the South Carolina Senate, but his memories of Christchurch are vivid after almost sixty years. Christchurch was sandwiched into the local terrain just west of Southampton on England's Channel coast. The airfield was tiny and surfaced with PSP (pierced steel planking). The men lived in tiny neighbouring cottages taken over for the war and in tents. The runway was very short for a loaded Thunderbolt. On June 29, 1944, the hazards of a temporary airfield claimed 13 lives and caused 14 other casualties in what came to be known as the "Foxwood Avenue Disaster":

It was a very small, short runway. You know we had some of the rookies come in there. To get off that strip with bombs you had to go down to the end and lock your brakes, kick in the water (injection) in and turn it loose! This one guy came in and I had just landed from a mission and this young boy tried to get off and he didn't make it. He crashed near a house down at the end of the runway. Actually, it didn't kill him. That old P-47 was pretty tough. So, they brought him back and they put him back in another plane for the next mission!

So, I'm standing there with my wing man ol' Williams (Lt Arthur F. Williams Jr.). He had just gotten some mail. The little girl he was engaged to had finished high school and he had sent her a ring. The letter had a picture of her showing him that ring. All of a sudden BOOM! And we looked out at the end of the runway and there was a big old smoke cloud where a bomb had gone off. So, we ran across to it. The kid (the one who had just crashed a few minutes

*The question was who was the crash crew, Navy? Because it stated that the fire tender was provided by the Royal Navy or was it RAF personnel or indeed American.*

*Steve Shirley and I talked about this from a historical perspective for the museum archived stories. Then Steve found an email that someone had sent*

before) had crashed again, this time into a house that had a lot of children in it. We knew the family made the children go in the basement when we were taking off.

There was a big group of firemen and engineers clearing that wreck from that morning and he had crashed the same way in the same place. Except this time the plane had gone up in fire. They said it had blown him on top of the roof. The house was on fire. So, we ran across and I went in that house and the woman was coming up out of the basement and my God -- her skin was hanging off her arms. I starting to get her out and just as we went out -- and my wingman ol' Williams was taking one of the little kids out -- and as went we bye they were hosing the wall. They knocked loose one of those bombs that they thought had already exploded.

It was white hot, and I remember seeing it and I hollered something but -- no one's ever been able to explain this to me -- it was total slow motion. I know I was picked up -- and rolling around in the air -- and I saw Williams come up off the ground -- and I saw a big hole in him -- I saw blood -- and I don't know how far I was thrown and I hit on my right shoulder. And I thought, "What is my mother going to think?" I guess I thought I was dead. I was rolling and everything. A piece of shrapnel had gone through here (in front of the left ear) and just barely cut me and through my ear and out the back. This is how lucky I've been.

And Williams was ... I didn't know what had happened to him, but I walked on up to end of the runway and there were people coming from everywhere. The captain in charge of the crash crew was sitting on the curb and he had blood all over him. Of course I had blood all over me. And here comes a little car and I helped this guy get inside. He was holding his neck; the shrapnel had gone through the back of his neck. We were sitting in the back seat. I'll never forget this, he looked down and blood was flowing from the back of his boot. I grabbed his leg and tried to put pressure, as I pulled his leg up his foot was

*him and indeed we think this answered the question. In the story by an American pilot below, it mentions "the captain in charge of the crash crew" surely this would make the crash crew American.*

*Steve Harrison*

raised and the blood that had coagulated on the floor came loose. He had part of his heel shot off too. He was happy as a lark when he saw that, it could have been worse.

They got us to the hospital at Bournemouth. I wasn't hurt much, and they put me aside. 27 people were hurt or killed, and they were bringing them in. Here was Williams lying on an old stretcher. He was lying there, and all his blood was running down into a bucket at the end of the stretcher.



## NEW MEMBERS

Welcome to Alan Coates member 1208, Colin Ross member 1209, Paul Bowen member 1210, Sam Kendall 1121

Thank you for joining. Over the last year we have lost a lot of comrades and friends, and this has depleted our ranks somewhat.

As always, we say to new members, if would like you to contribute to the Flashpoint magazine please do so, it is your magazine and it's your stories that make it, your contributions would be most welcome.

**ATTENTION TO ALL PRESENT MEMBERS** Dave Grant the Membership Secretary has asked if you could forward to him any change in contact details i.e., Change of address, phone numbers and email. This will ensure the prompt distribution of Flashpoint and maintain his records. The emails are important also because of the PDF copies of Flashpoint which are sent out. Thank you.

The membership is now below the 400 mark, so, please encourage any friends to join or rejoin.

# PUTTING ON THE BLUE

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It was the summer of “63” that I walked out of the gates of Ashton-on-Mersey, Secondary Modern School for boys on Cecil Avenue to start my life in the real world. I was going to be a trainee manager for ‘Mac Fisheries,’ probably one of the biggest fish mongers in the country. I had arrived at the job by finding out what I was not good at. Schools in those days trained pupils for jobs in the local area, ours was Trafford Park and Broadheath, both areas needing skilled workers in engineering. My first technical drawing lesson told me that I would not become a draughtsman. Metal work and woodwork also told me I would not earn a living in these areas. I had found that I could talk to people, so shop work was where I was pointed; in particular, food shops as everyone had to eat!

I started work in Altrincham on £4.10 shillings per week, I enjoyed the job and learning how to bone and fillet fish, how to hold a knife and not injure yourself. The shop also had a small vegetable counter, so I was taught about green grocery. What nobody warned me about was the teasing and groping from the female staff (all mothers), it was not just the girls who got fondled! They would wait until I was carrying a big box then would squeeze past me and catch parts of my body, making me blush and leaving them in fits of laughter. After a few months I was given a pay rise to £4.15 shillings, but I was worse off as I had gone up a tax bracket, I asked if I could not have the pay rise but was told that the next pay rise would be better. The powers that be decided that a spell at the Wilmslow shop would be good for me. This was the area flag ship shop, with a lot of very rich people in the town and surrounding area. Price’s bread shop had a Rolls Royce van with a chauffeur in uniform driving the bread van and a man with a big basket to take the orders to the house door. The shop was bigger and busier than Altrincham shop but the draw back was to get to get to Altrincham was two buses and about one hour but Wilmslow was a bus from the village to Sale Station, train to Oxford Road, train to Picadilly, train to Wilmslow then about a mile walk to work. I would and leave home at 6.30 and get to work 09.30 and leave at 16:45 and get home 19:00. They did pay the difference in travel costs, but they were long days, and on my half day I left when everybody else did at 13:00 and got back just before tea. This only lasted a

few months, and I was back in Altrincham; however, after a few more months I then transferred to Chorlton-Cum-Hardy, again three buses and a lot of walking. By now I was getting fed up with always smelling of fish and being “Billy No Mates” on the bus or train so I started looking for a less smelly job. Started work at Whitwams licensed grocers at their Well Green store. This was three bus trips, but the shop did not open until 09:00, so it was not too bad, but the half mile walk from the bus stop to the shop in the rain was not nice. The advantage of working for Whitwams was they were wine importers and had their own vineyards in France. All shop staff who wanted were given membership to the “Northern Wine Tasting Association” who had monthly wine tasting at Hollings College, known as “The Toast Rack,” in Manchester. The “Toast Rack” was so called because it looked like one and was the trades college for Manchester. I went one day a week to learn to be grocer and get a City and Guilds Certificate.

About six of us would go in the works van and sample wine from different importers. The bottles were labelled “A”, “B”, “C” etc; you had a talk on the vineyard the wines came from, and you then sampled the wine making notes on colour, nose, legs (the way a wine runs down a glass after being spun) and preference. These were then collated and handed in, we would then get in the van and head to a pub in Withenshaw which had good acts on during the week. One night it was Bob Monkhouse who had to stop his act because people were laughing too much, and drinks were not being drunk.

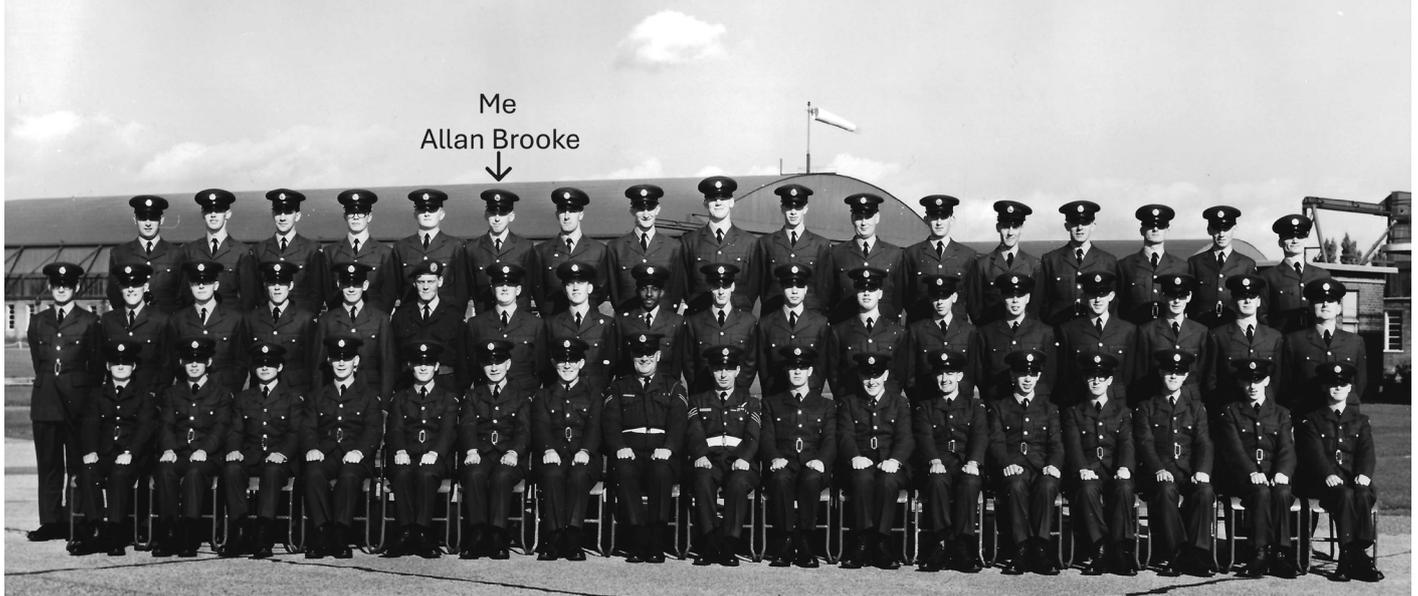
This was all to change as developers had bought a row of very old houses in Ashton Village and knocked them down to build a supermarket, bank, chippy, and gents outfitters. This was a dream come true if I could get a job in the supermarket, I would have no travelling expenses and one fifteen-minute walk to work. I applied for a counter job and got a Provisions Managers position with an overview of the fruit and vegetable area. The shop also had an off license built into it. The work was good and easy as I spent more time in the back of the shop boning bacon etc than serving. One of the perks I did enjoy was my Manager, Alan Kennedy, did not live local and in winter or cold days he would give me his car keys and tell me to take the car for a run to warm it up. The car was a Ford V4 Corsair, and it was awesome. I

would drive very carefully and slowly past the shop until I was on Carrington Lane then slowly speed up until I go past Manor Avenue then floor it, turn around in the layby, and bring a nice warm car back for my boss. Wednesday was half day closing and my mate Anthony who worked in his father’s green grocery shop opposite us, meant that we could to Manchester which broke the week up. Our opening hours on a Friday change from 18:00 to 19:00 which did not go down too well, but if you did not like it you could leave.

I had for some years always found the local fire stations and visited them on open days. We did not get a pay rise for working the extra hours as we were management. One warm summer’s afternoon, I walked up to Sale Fire Station and asked about becoming a fireman. The Sub Officer measured my height (six foot and a half), then my chest (36”) and then said I could not join as my chest had to be 38” and to come back when it was. I went straight to my doctors and sat in the waiting room (as you did not in those days) and saw the doctor and told him my problem. He informed me a new drug had just come out called steroids and with exercise I should build up my chest. At work I carried 112lb barrels of butter about, 56lb bags of potatoes, sides of beef, pig carcasses, barrels of wine and when five tons of sugar were delivered it was unloaded by hand. Each bag containing 14 x 2lb bags of sugar which was stacked into a 20-leg stack of sugar, all the stock came in loose and was unloaded by hand and not in cages like modern shops. After a few weeks of press ups etc, I went back to the doctors, and he measured my chest. I had in fact lost some weight by doing the exercises so stopped doing them anymore. One lunch time as I was reading my copy of Weekend, a weekly magazine, and saw an advert for RAF Firemen. So, Wednesday afternoon I went into Manchester C.I.O. to see about joining. I was surprised to find nobody about and after a few minutes of me saying “hello?” a sergeant appeared and asked me what I wanted. I informed him I had seen an advert in the Weekend magazine asking for people to join the RAF Fire Service. He then asked my age, I had just turned twenty-one, and why I wanted to be an RAF fireman. I told him I was too skinny as I only had a 36” chest and I had to have 38” to join the Cheshire Fire Brigade, he told me that didn’t apply in the RAF, you just had to be fit. He then

# Flight 16

## RAF Swinderby 1968



gave me a question paper and asked me to fill it in to see if I was suitable to be a fireman; having filled in the paper, he then took it away to check the answer. When he came back, he informed me that I would be better suited to Air Traffic Control. I was then informed that at the moment the Fire Service was full and try later but ATC was open. I left informing him I would be back. Every Wednesday I would go to the Manchester C.I.O. to see if there were any fire service jobs. I had also worked out why there did not seem to be anybody there and then somebody would appear. There was a narrow alley between the C.I.O. and a pub. The back door of the C.I.O. and the pub back door of the back bar were opposite each other, literally a step across from bar to C.I.O. so I started going to the pub and drinking with them until September when the Sargeant took me into the C.I.O., picked up the phone and informed somebody that I was not going to give up and I was therefore going to be an RAF fireman. Doing my ATA station on 23 September 1968 and being given the Queen's pound, I was told to report to number seven school of recruit training RAF Swinderby and given a rail warrant from Manchester to Newark. I handed in my notice and prepared myself, had a haircut, got a small suitcase to put my things in, and said goodbye to my friends and family.

The three other lads who had joined up on the same day met up with me at Piccadilly

Station where we all boarded the train for Newark. This train was one I would use many times in the next couple of years as it was the one I used to get to West Raynham, something I was not aware of at the time.

We arrived at North Gate Station in Newark and went out of the station to see a few more new recruits waiting for transport to Swinderby. Some of the lads spotted "The Bowling Green" pub opposite and went for a drink while they waited for transport to arrive. The coach arrived and very nice Corporal got off and asked us to get on the bus, he then strolled across the pub and got the drinkers out and onto the bus. We arrived in time for tea and went into the airman's mess. I cannot say it was the best food I had ever eaten but it would have to do. We were then all assembled, and names called out and told where to stand, this was the start of joining your flight.

I was put in FLT16, it was a big intake and there were three flights of us. The other two flights went into the barrack blocks, we went into the wooden huts opposite the sergeant's mess, we were two to a room, these huts were wartime accommodation. The station's permanent staff were in another part of the hutted complex with their own N.A.A.F.I/bar and mess.

We then had a haircut and paid the barber two shillings and six pence which was money for old rope as most of us had already had a haircut. One of the lads

from Scotland was an ex-prison officer and was almost shaved to stop prisoners "from grabbing your hair to hurt you" he told us. He still had to pay.

We then went to get some of our kit; pyjamas, vests, underpants, socks, shirts and three collars, boiler suits, shoes and boots, caps, or berets (depending on your trade) tie and pullover. This was a first for me, the tie was worn outside of the pullover. We were told at the C.I.O. to purchase some collar studs, front and back. The front stud made a hard patch of skin near the Adam's apple. The battle dress and best blue were issued at the tailor's shop and was supposed to be a measured fit. I was lucky mine did fit properly when I got it. We wore the boiler suits until the battle dress was made, and a plastic disk was then given to everyone to put behind your cap badge. Flight 16 was pale blue. Because I was older than most of the flight I became a senior man with the white flash on the battle dress shoulder tabs. Our service number had to be written on every bit of kit, I think this was get you to remember it, as no number, no pay on Thursday. I had one pair of shoes and two pairs of RAF regiment issue boots; other trades got two pairs of shoes and one pair of boots. One of the flights only received two pairs of shoes as boots were not going to be issued except to regiment personnel. These needed to be all nice and glossy. The non-RAF regiment boots once they had been broken in were sent to the cobblers for studs to be fitted.

This changed the way you marched as you could hear the beat as the boots went down, mine being rubber soles were like shoes. The webbing and brass were a problem for some of the lads as they had never had to clean things at home. I had taken a tin of Silvo Metal Polish with a spoon of jeweller's rouge in it, this made the brass like silver and looked good. A tip my father had given me, Kiwi black boot polish was much better than the Naafi stuff, and I had been in the cubs and scouts, I knew how to clean shoes.

Over half our flight was from Scotland and Tyneside which was a bit of a language barrier to start with. My dad had been in a Geordie Regiment, 4th (Durham) Survey Regiment Royal Artillery, and I had grown up listening to a programme on the Home Service with Geordie singers and comedians which came in very handy. The nice friendly corporal who met us at Newark was our Flight Corporal. He was very much like Sargeant Wilson out of Dads Army. I never heard him swear or shout in peoples faces, but it worked as we won the drill trophy.

The tune that always seemed to be on when we went into the N.A.A.F.I./bar was the theme to a 'First Full of Dollars.' The days passed with drill, range shooting, RAF law, PE, medicals, injections, sports afternoons, and church parades. When I was at school cross country was not a thing I enjoyed, being about 40 out of 43; but at Swinderby I was normally in the first ten of our flight. Either I was fitter or my fellow flight members were not very fit. And they were younger so that did not seem right.

We were lucky being in the wooden huts because our "Domestic Evening" were not as harsh as the lads in the blocks, having bedding and kit thrown out of the windows. Our substandard accommodation meant if each two-man room was tidy with well-made beds, the floor was shiny and no dust, we were good. The downside was the water in the showers was extremely cold and if it was raining you were a long way from the N.A.A.F.I. and the mess.

The lad I shared with was married and came from Liverpool; we got on very well which is good in a small room. He had a car and the first Saturday afternoon we could go off camp, he asked me if I wanted to go into Newark with him. Off we went in best blues and great coats, we parked up and walked around and found a fish and chip shop "Bentleys" and had the

first decent food in weeks then we walked around the market and the town and went into the Castle & Falcoln for a drink (the pub is still open, the chippy closed in 2024). On our way back to the car I put my hands in my pockets as it was freezing, and my gloves were in my mac pockets. Out of nowhere came a shout of "Airman, get your hands out of your pockets" and one of the other flight drill pigs appeared in front of me and let rip about me being scruffy and a disgrace to the uniform. I just wanted to die. He then stormed off leaving us standing in the marketplace red faced with people staring at us. We made a hasty retreat to the car and back to camp.

My first taste of RAF justice came when I was escort to one of the Geordie lads who was accused of swearing at one of the NAAFI lady bar staff. AT that time you queued to be served and if you knew some one in the queue you gave them your money, and they got you a drink when they got theirs. This lad had done this, and the bar lady had seen it and told him to queue, and he said fair enough. She had reported him, in her words, saying "F\*\*\* off." The officer asked the lad to say "F\*\*\* off" and said that does not seem like "fair enough" and gave him three days jinkers. I was about to open my mouth to say but you have not asked him to say "fair enough" when the look from our Corporal made me stay silent.

The passing out parade was in the hanger as the weather was awful, we had been escorting the two flights passing out the week before. The passing out flights marching through the escort flights on their way off the parade. This could not be done in the hanger, so it was just the three flights. I was a tight parade with three flights, but we did it. Then off to the NAAFI for a drink with our families then pick up kit and home for a few days and then onto Catterick. Passing out parades were on a Wednesday, I think with new arrivals on a Thursday (but do not quote me). I had to report to RAF Catterick on Wednesday 13 November 1968.

The train to Catterick was from what used to be 'Exchange and Victoria Station' in Manchester which was two stations joined together by a mile long platform. The station was near Manchester Cathedral; the train went to Darlington then a train to Catterick Bridge and a phone call to the Guard room for a pickup. Catterick in winter was not a very welcoming pace and

I was back in old wooden huts again that were not very warm and overrun with mice and food or biscuits left out at night were either gone or well nibbled by morning. The toilets and showers were freezing; hot water was not always available. The floors were always wet due to burst pipes. Shoes were necessary to avoid we feet, also the power for lights was not always working in the toilet block. We were very pleased when we got moved into a block near to SHQ, warm dry and well-lit bliss. It took ages to get the numbers up for a course to start. We were getting up brushing the hanger and polishing anything shiny. I remember W.O. Ron Shearne walking across the hanger towards me with his hands behind his back. He stopped in front of me and asked, did I know why there was brass on the trailer pump? I replied that it was, so things did not rust. "No," he said, producing metal polish and two clothes. "It's so that fireman who have nothing to do can have something to do." He gave me the contents of his hands and strode back across the hanger. That was my job sorted for the rest of the day.

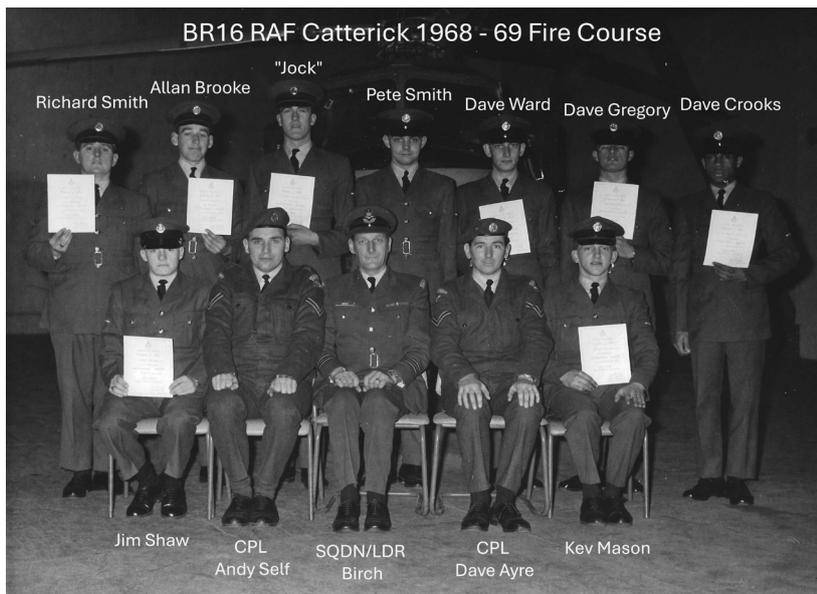
BR16 started with nine of us from all walks of life and ages. Our instructors were Corporal Davey Ayes and Corporal Andy Self; looking back there wasn't much health and safety in the training, especially the C.T.C extinguishers (put water near the liquid and you had sulphuric acid, being in the smoke when putting out the fire and you had Phosgene gas – a killer) and so you would recognise the smell, we put out fires with CTC in the fire pits then walked into there to smell the smoke with an instructor to make sure you did not smell too much smoke and give everyone a lot of paperwork. At the end of the day, after we left school, we got into a routine as a group. We would go for tea then back to block, change into civies, bit of a rest then draw keys for the hanger and back to classroom to copy up notes and run through what we had learned that day. When everyone was satisfied that we thought we had got it, back to block to drop off books then NAAFI for a few beers and for me, a pie. We then went back for sleep and up between 06:30 and 07:00 for breakfast and march over to the fire school, and another day of learning. Dry drills in the hanger were good but drills in the wet area in November-January were not much fun as you just got very wet, cold, and learned how to walk on ice. The turning point on the course was when we moved from

hose running to aircraft fires and started to learn all about D.P.1, D.P.2, MK5A, MK6, MK7 and Bedford Domestics. All of which I was able to drive during my time in the RAF except the MK6 which is a story for another day.

The practice crashes on a Friday afternoon were brilliant. The AI used to come to a standstill every week to watch the show. During one very cold spell one of the hanger staff had taken a MK 6 down to the wet

area only to find a sheet of ice and the six just slid down the length of the wet area and into the River Swale, then using the hatch to climb out of the MK6, they came back to the hanger and legend has it told that the sergeant in the cage was told the MK6 had water in the engine and would not start. When he asked why water was in the engine, he was informed that it was in the River Swale. He was not a 'Happy Chappy', and it is said he used some rude Anglo-Saxon words. The upshot was that the army towed the MK6 out by dragging it across to the other bank where it stood to drain the water out of the body etc. It was then started and driven back to the school and M.T.S.S. checked it over and it was soon back in the hanger.

Wednesday afternoon we were left to our own devices, as to sports afternoon as there was only nine of us, so we used to go on the assault course for our exercise in PT kit and at our pace which was not flat out. One Wednesday it had been raining and everything was wet and slippery when we got to the suspended logs over the pit, very slowly we walked across the logs, except Jock who slipped and fell with a leg either side of the log, his legs locked under the log, and he spun under the log with his legs locked on top. Then we heard him fall into the pit, he came out in one large step one hand down the front of his shorts, the other waving over his head and he set off for the block; We could not keep up with him. When we arrived, he was running between a hot shower and a cold shower with dark rings starting to show around his eyes. After a while and after we had all stopped laughing, all except 'Jock,' we suggested it might be a good idea to go to



the sick quarters. He declined and went and laid down, surprisingly he did not feel too bad in the morning and got through the next couple of days okay. Moral of the story, down walk on wet logs in RAF issue plimsoles.

Being HQ, Regiment RAF Catterick was a bit keen on discipline; when in uniform you marched and if there were two or more of you, one was in charge of the others i.e. for saluting officers etc. One day, three of us were marching back to the block from the mess after lunch (I was in charge) when an officer walked towards as I saluted and, said, "Afternoon Sir" and got no response. How rude I thought, a window in S.H.Q opened and the S.W.O shouted, "that officer stop," "those airmen halt," which we did wondering what was going to happen next. The S.W.O (cannot remember his name) walked briskly past us saying "stay where you are gentleman" and walked up to the officer. We could hear him pointing out that the salute was for her Majesties commission and not for him, he then marched the officer back to where we were stood and made him salute and apologise to us and then sent him on his way. He then apologised again for the officer's behaviour and send us on our way. The guy had incredible eyesight. Stepping out of our block one very cold misty morning and adjusting my beret and before I could tap the brass buckle on my webbing belt to lock it properly a voice from out of the mist from the direction of SHQ shouted, "Airman, fasten your belt". I could not even see him!

I decided to hitch it home one weekend and got to Manchester by early evening and home for some home cooking.

My father drove me back to Blyth on the A1 on Sunday afternoon and the log slog back started. It was not too bad while the light held but as it got darker an airman in his best blue and great coat starts to be invisible. I had set off on the A1 at 14:00 and got to camp at 22:00, cold and fed up. Talking about it in the fire school on the Monday, I was informed a coach left the Guardroom for Manchester every Friday evening and returned Sunday evening. This

coach I used every weekend until I left Catterick. The coach was targeted later by the IRA on its way back to RAF Catterick and its destination Catterick Garrison. Thinking back the security at Manchester was non-existent. The coach was parked on a bomb site car park near Picadilly Bus Station with the boot open and you just chucked your bag in and stood around talking and went off for a pint. I think it left Manchester about 21:00 calling at Sheffield and Leeds if I remember correctly. I was very lucky.

The going back every evening to go over our work paid off as eight of us managed a distinguished pass which really pleased "Uncle Ron."

When the postings came in, I had been posted to RAF West Raynham, we all looked at the map in the hanger to find out where the stations were. Mine was near to Marham which I knew of as my dad's eldest brother lived in Wisbech and we would pass Marham sometimes on the way to the coast when we stopped with them. I only ever met up with one course member after leaving Catterick and that was Richard (Dick) Smith who by then was a Sargeant at Withering. I was in the Nottinghamshire Fire Service by then and was at a Sargeant's Mess Autumn ball with a friend of mine who was a Sargeant Storeman at Withering, a friend from Raynham Days.

I was now about to start being a real fireman and had no idea what kind of Station West Raynham was.

