



# FLASHPOINT

ROYAL AIR FORCE & DEFENCE FIRE SERVICES ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



## IN THIS ISSUE

Family Day Out • **RAF Scampton Lincolnshire 1957 – 1959**

**Re Enlistment** • Memoirs Of Taff The Fire

Warrant Officer R.J. (Smokey) Fairhurst • Museum News

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**FRONT COVER**

Well here we go for my first attempt as Editor of your magazine. As I put this editorial together, I find myself thinking what on earth have I let myself in for? I guess the first thing to do is to introduce myself to the membership and for those of you that already know me personally or have heard the mostly 'not true stories' of Reg Metcalfe, I will ignore the laughter and coughing. I joined the RAF Fire Service on the 16th Feb 1982. I remember my family came to Windermere Train Station to wave me off, either that or to make sure I was definitely going. My dear Grandad passed me two 1/2oz packets of Old Holborn and off I went to Carlisle CIO to sign the dotted line. As I sat on the train watching the disappearing mountains of the Lake District, I got the tobacco out of my bag... buggler; Grandad had forgotten the fag papers. I was lucky to have such a fantastic group of lads on my basic course and a very good instructor, Terry Shaw. Sadly I never got to work on crew with Terry as he was coming to the end of his career in the RAF. Many of us will remember our first posting for lots of reasons. My first one was to RAF Honington. Back then it was at the frontline of the nation's defence with two Squadrons of Hunters, two of Buccaneers and two of Tornados. As you can imagine it was a very busy Fire Section as my first posting and I loved it. Every shift was full of Hot Brakes, Cable Engagement's

and many other fun packed emergencies. What was immediately apparent was the immense professionalism of all members of the section, an attribute that I hope rubbed off on me. My first boss was no other than Dick Williams, a tall smartly turned out gentleman. Dick was a very firm but fair man who ran a very tight ship indeed. I learnt a lot from this man and his advice and guidance stood me in good stead for the rest of my career. He once said to me 'Reg to get on in this job you will have to pick on someone who is doing good at his job and try to better them. Who would you pick young Reggie?', I don't think he was prepared for my answer which was 'You Flt Sgt'. I thought it was a good answer but obviously Dick thought I was punching well above my station as the newest Lac on his section. I never did better than that man, well I might have done because he wasn't the editor of our magazine! However, I do thank him for being part of my life and trying his hardest to keep me and most of A Crew out of shit on many occasions. I have spoken to a lot of my friends about my new venture and have many new ideas. One which I am keen to implement is 'Flashpoint on Tour'. This will involve me visiting various RAF/DFS Fire Stations and chatting with the crews, getting their stories

and reporting back. This of course would be at my own expense but worth it just to see how our great Fire Service is getting along. Another idea is 'Beyond the RAF/DFS Fire service'. I suppose this is more like what are they doing now and this is starting with this issue with many thanks to Lee Goupilot. I would really like to get some stories from the new generation of our membership as I think it has been very sparse in the past and is not from the want of trying by past editors and the Association Committee. There are many reasons why I volunteered to be the editor but the main one is that I think the magazine is at the heart of the Association and without it the core of the Association would be gone. I would like to thank Steve Harrison for all his advice and encouragement in getting me started, to Trevor and Neil for all their help and to all who have contributed stories and pictures for this my virgin edition. For those who sent me articles that are not published in this edition please be assured that they will be in future ones. Any feedback positive or negative would be very much appreciated. All that is now left to say is that I hope you all have a wonderful Christmas and a Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

*Reg Metcalfe Member 991*

*Editor*

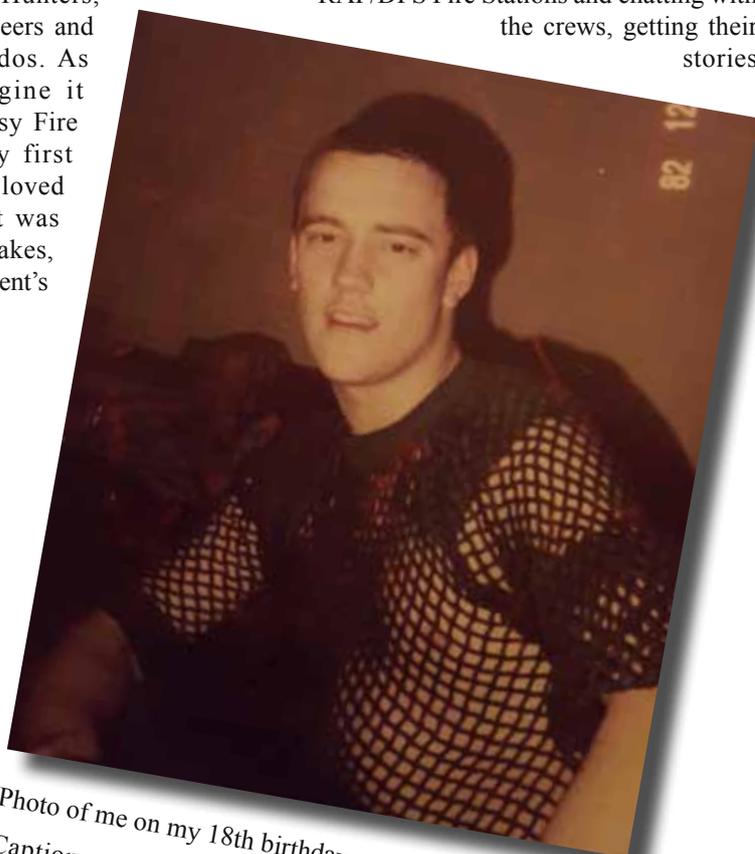


Photo of me on my 18th birthday.  
Caption competition of your editor on his 18th birthday at RAF Honington.

## Association AGM

The next AGM and Reunion will be held at the Ramada Resort Hotel, Tow Bar Road, Marston, Grantham, NG22 2HT, on Friday 21st September to Monday 24th September 2018.

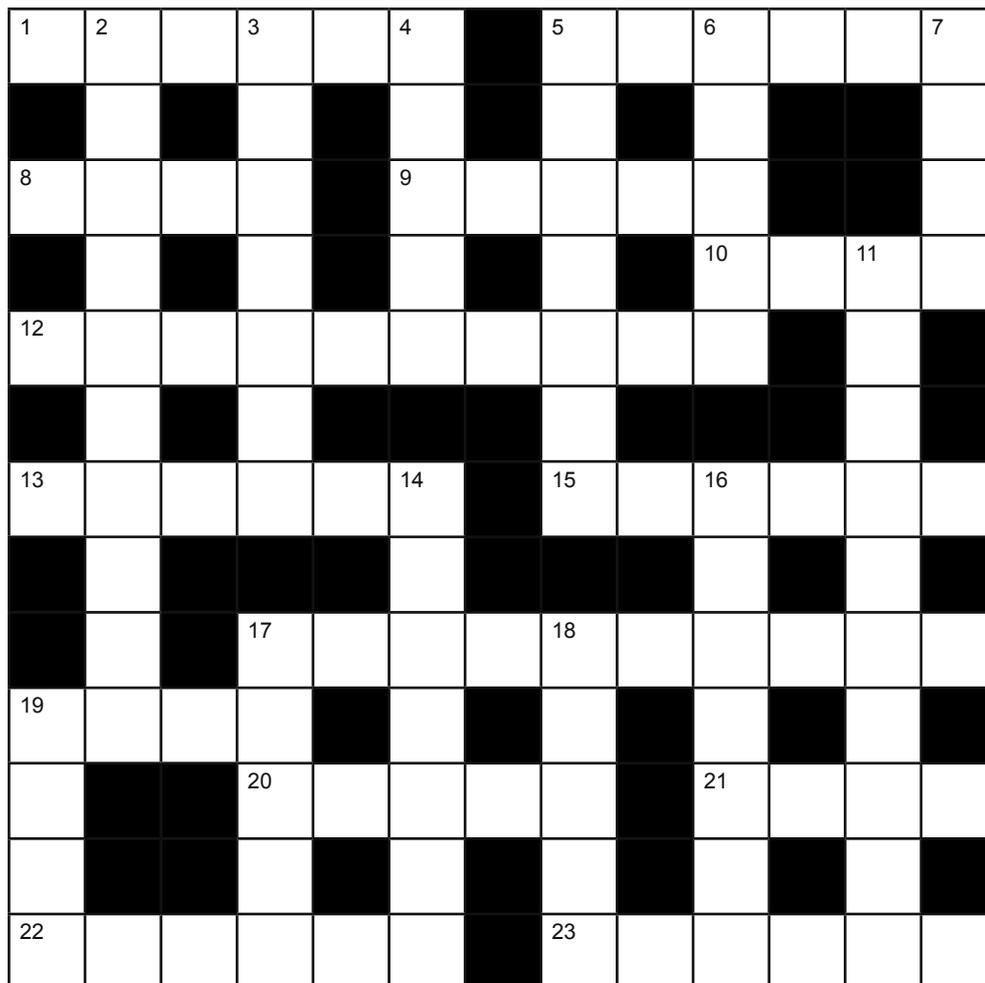
The two trips we have organised are the Bomber Command Centre and Lincoln and the New Museum of RAF Firefighting.

## Obituaries:

Frank Menzies  
Passed away 03 October 2017

Mick Moncrieff  
Passed away 30 July 2017

# Crossword by Firefly



## Across

1. Two thousand hold first class reservists at Hong Kong air base. (3,3)
5. Suspend in eleven at far eastern air head.(6,)
8. Superior mother in unresponsive state. (4)
9. Drinks usual red initially if made with this grape. (5)
10. Headwear you returned in mid-west state. (4)
12. Young horse I shall see in Norfolk base. (10)
13. To Britain, UK or North Africa? Famous battle results. (6)
15. Roof part found in RAF terminal. (6)
17. Nine flying randomly over Yorkshire airfield. (10)
19. Hat found in snake pit. (4)
20. Extreme journalist finished. (5)
21. Ensnare returning component. (4)
22. After reshuffle, deal me in for posting south of 13. (2,4)
23. Are tea breaks required to produce foam (6)?

## Down

2. Speech sounds like a single item for fire? (1,9)
3. Raise glass to queen for tea bar essential. (7)
4. Ascending divot to homeland finds prestige. (5)
5. Air Force loses iron and reforms with US fighter jet. (7)
6. It's ghastly when licit fails to start (5)
7. Creep forward in Church Fenton. (4)
11. Fire starting substance upset cat cleaner. (10)
14. While seeking Dominie finds realm. (7)
16. Oddly freight can result in Lightning or Typhoon perhaps? (7)
17. Marshal, punishment or meadow? (5)
18. Plain diamond hides jewel in the crown of the empire. (5)
19. Kit essential initially for RAF craft colloquially (4)

# FAMILY DAY OUT

Our two sons, Lloyd and Justin had left the family home some years ago, Lloyd until recently lived in Italy and Justin in Belfast and getting together as a family was a rare and still is a special event. As youngsters they were immersed in the RAF way of life, living in married quarters with the sights and sounds of aircraft, different vehicles and as their dad was a fire-fighter (cool job as far as a young child is concerned) obviously fire trucks featured greatly in their lives, quite often when a fire truck pulls up at their front door there is genuine excitement from a youngster. When it was birthday time their parties were very popular with their mates as it generally involved a trip to the Fire Section where they played with a hose reel and when at RAF Marham a ride out in the Mk9 or the TACR2 which was their favourite and the scariest as it leaned going around the corners.

The boys have always been supportive and interested in what I have been up to since I retired, whether it was editing Flashpoint or the work at the museum and there were aware of how it was progressing and with us being together for a while they wanted to visit. They also knew my passion for the Mk6 and the work Dave Jenner and I had done on the vehicle so after a visit to the annex trying on helmets looking at the crash kit with which they were very familiar we headed up to the vehicle hanger. Both of them could not believe the amount of trucks but the Mk6 was at the front of the hanger and the following are their feelings of the boys at that moment.

*Justin said "As the familiar shape of the Mark 6 came into view a friendly smile crossed my face. It was always something of mechanical legend growing up but it had only stared back from photographs. So when I had the chance to come and see what had been done with the museum I had looked forward to this moment the most. The remarkable thing about it all that this was the very same 6 wheeled beast that my Dad had known at RAF Wytton in 1970's. As my brother and I stepped into the cab it felt like some kind of time machine knowing the younger eyes of my father had looked through this frame and lent on its perches. A romantic notion to have about tonnes of metal but these machines stood so tall in my dreams as a boy the wonder of it all came flooding back for a while."*

*Lloyd's thoughts were: "I've always believed in the power of tangible history.*



*I've been like that since I was a kid...it's all very well looking at marvels in a glass case, but better by far just to get hands on - far more exciting! This was certainly the case when my brother and I finally got behind the wheel of the famous MK6 at the Museum of RAF Fire Fighting. I remember dad talking about the particular truck and that he was astounded to find that it was one that he actually used in service (when Dad was nearly 20 years younger than I am now). It's a remarkable thing to be presented with something quite unique that has somehow merged into family legend! As my brother and I jumped into the cabin I grabbed the wheel. For a second or two I closed my eyes and imagined my Dad doing the same on his way to a shout. It was quite an odd sensation and quite thrilling. The roar of the engine...the shouts of the men, urgency... my Dad's youthful eager face. I feel that such a thing could only happen when history is tangible, when we can literally get hold of the past. For that reason I think that supporting and promoting the Museum of RAF Firefighting is really worth it, not least because of a special few moments with my brother and Dad, but certainly because in the future it will offer a real insight for visitors. It's true they may lack*

*the family connection but if they close their eyes they may see further than they think".*

The disappointing thing was that the Mk 6 wasn't serviceable that day and I couldn't take them for a drive. Although I think Lloyd (in the picture) is imagining that he is driving it and Justin just smiling at this rare family event. Although the Mk9 and TACR2 had shrunk somewhat from the great monster trucks of their youth but they were delighted to see them again, bringing back memories of their birthday parties.

Having seen other ex RAF Firefighters come to the museum with their children and grandchildren it does become more tangible as Lloyd has mentioned, the fact that children and grandchildren can actually sit in a fire truck like dad or grandad used to drive and see the equipment he used it certainly is better than stories when sometimes it is hard to imagine.

So when the museum has moved to its new home let's hope that some more of you can have a family day out reliving those memories. It certainly was a great time for Lloyd, Justin and I.

*Steve Harrison*

# RAF Scampton Lincolnshire 1957 – 1959

Joining as a regular serviceman at the age of seventeen and a half years I arrived at RAF Cardington for signing on, kitting out, issuing of a service number and 1250 ID card, and swearing in service for defence of the Queen. The memorising of your seven figure service number was difficult at first but soon fell into place. After a few relaxing days and getting to know some of my peers we were herded on the a train at Cardington rail station en-route for basic training at RAF Bridgenorth, Shropshire, innocently not realising what we were letting ourselves in for. On arrival at Bridgenorth rail station all hell was let loose from drill instructors bellowing orders for us to swiftly grab our kit bags from the train guards van and get on the Bedford trucks outside the station. On the short journey by road to RAF Bridgenorth we were all in a state of complete shock and silence this was our first taste of service discipline and thoughts of just what had we let ourselves into.



1958 Crash Crew outside Fire Section by airfield control tower

Arrival at RAF Bridgenorth was worse than at the rail station and even more drill instructors screaming in your ear to get a move on or else, which all of course we all did at high speed. Basic training or 'square bashing' as was popularly known, was 12 hectic weeks of non-stop billet and kit inspections, cleaning and clean again, physical training, every day marching and rifle drills, and increased team work discipline. Then the great day arrived for the 'passing out parade' a day everyone on the three squads had been waiting for. From here I was posted to RAF Sutton-on-Hull School of Fire Fighting and placed in the hands of instructors Sergeants Rocky Rich and McCaffery for basic fire fighting training over a number of weeks. I can still smell the strong characteristic odour from foam liquid

kept in metal drums, made from animal blood, horn and hoof, the sound of trailer pumps at full revs, and difficulty at first in holding a fully pressurised non-lined delivery hose and brass branch nozzle. Passing out from RAF Sutton on Hull after successfully completing a written and oral examination, my next posting was to RAF Weeton School of Driving Instruction near Blackpool in October and November. I must admit the weather was colder than I could have ever imagined. We were billeted in the usual timber huts heated by one small coal/coke stove fire that we all took turns to collect coke fuel to keep the fire going. The glass in one window pane was cracked with a small piece of glass missing, and on waking in the morning there was frost on top blankets of beds nearest the window. Driver training was over several weeks starting on a Bedford truck, followed by a short wheelbase land rover, an airfield towing tractor, and finally a Mark 5 crash rescue tender. As new drivers we were taught the 'double

de-clutch' method of changing gear due to heavier fire vehicles having a crash gearbox instead of a synchromesh gearbox. We had to pass a road test in each vehicle, including a systematic pre-vehicle oil, water and tyre pressure and before driving off a check around the vehicle. On

successful completion of the driving course we were given our postings with all my pals being posted to Germany and for me it was RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire. I must admit feeling jealous at my mates postings, and also at the time as my late elder brother in the Royal Engineers was also stationed in Germany at the time. Nevertheless recalling second world war history of RAF Scampton and 617 Lancaster 'Dam Buster' Squadron famously led by Wing Commander Guy Gibson in successfully breaching both Mohne and Eder Dams, and subsequently severely disrupting German war industry, with the famous bouncing bomb created by Barnes Wallace.

On arrival at Lincoln City rail station and public bus ride I arrived to my new posting at RAF Scampton, in pouring rain and

darkness reporting to the guardroom who directed me to the fire section at the rear of the building. I was welcomed by the Flight Sergeant, two corporals, and SAC and an LAC. This was to be my home for approximately the next two years. In the morning after breakfast I was taken on an induction tour of all relevant parts of the RAF station and airfield in a Bantam domestic fire tender. An existing WOTI foam producing crash fire tender that had seen better days was replaced with a new Thornycroft Mark 5A foam crash fire tender, a Mark 1 Dual Purpose foam crash fire tender and a long wheelbase Land rover (ACRT) aircraft crash rescue tender. At this time there were no other aircraft movements to and from the airfield and 617 Vulcan V-Bomber Squadron had yet to arrive at the base. While we were waiting for their arrival myself and Bill (sorry cannot remember his surname) were sent on temporary posting to assist at RAF Wittering fire section, but recalled after only a week due to the imminent arrival of 617 Vulcan Squadron at RAF Scampton. On different dates five of us were sent in groups one of three and one of two, on an Alvis Mark 6 foam crash rescue truck driver operator training course at Sutton on Hull School of Fire fighting. For me as the new boy having only left Sutton on Hull on completion of basic fire training recently, this was a thrilling experience and a challenge having only learnt to drive a few months ago a RAF Weeton. After an enjoyable and successful completion of a Mark 6 driver operator training course we returned to RAF Scampton to find a brand new Alvis Mark 6 crash rescue fire truck had been delivered. What a vehicle with its central position power assisted steering, six wheel drive with front four wheels steering, pre-select gearbox, great suspension and handling over off road undulating ground, and capable of high gallons per minute foam production by a roof mounted monitor and with practise on the move before bringing the vehicle to a stop. Two hand line delivery hose with foam branch could be deployed from each side of the vehicle, and back-up tank of CBM (Chlorobromomethane) with two small diameter hose reels on rotating drums located on each side at the rear of the vehicle. Soon after this the first wave of the majestic Avro Vulcan 617 squadron aircraft all in white livery landed with a great roar from reverse engine thrust and drogue parachute was deployed from the rear of the aircraft to



1958 Crash Crew outside Fire Section by airfield control tower

assist in braking. The drogue parachute was later ejected and we were deployed to pick up from the runway and return. From then on the airfield became very busy with Vulcan aircraft carrying out regular take off and landings ('circuit and bumps') and the ground shaking on taking off. Other aircraft visiting the airfield were Dehavilland Vampire and Venom fighter jets, English Electric Canberra bombers, Dakota DC3, Varsity transport aircraft, and an Avro Lancaster owned and flown by the Royal Canadian Air force made one visit. Serious aircraft incidents were few and mostly small fires from undercarriage hot overheated brakes or burst tyre, mainly from Vulcan aircraft. Even so these particular incidents had to be dealt with carefully and with caution as a fire fighter in ensuring you were correctly positioned as there was always the risk of a metal wheel fracturing outwards with explosive force from a hot brake fire. There was one 'full emergency' when on take off a Vulcan lost its nose wheel that went bouncing off down the runway for some distance before finally coming to rest beyond the threshold end of the runway. The Vulcan aircraft continued flying around for some time out to sea using up fuel before finally returning for its final and very difficult landing. As the duty Crash Crew with three

foam producing crash fire tenders we were positioned at rendezvous points one midway opposite the runway and one opposite the end of the runway threshold. After a low level fly past the Control Tower by the Vulcan a final approach was made by the pilot and a text book landing on the two main undercarriage

wheels keeping the nose of the aircraft up off the runway until sufficiently slowed down the undercarriage nose stump minus the nose wheel, was lowered to the surface of the runway in a shower of sparks and smoke. Once the aircraft had come to a stop the crash crew arrived to deal with any fire resulting from the magnesium metal undercarriage nose stump. Dealing with a magnesium metal fire in those days was difficult due to the lack of a suitable fire fighting extinguishing media with foam, water, CO2 and Halon being both unsuitable and dangerous. Fortunately due to the expertise and competency of the Vulcan pilot landing the aircraft the risk of ignition of the magnesium undercarriage nose wheel stump from friction in contact with the runway surface had been kept to the minimum.

Due to the increase in numbers of fire fighters required to form two duty shifts our small fire section building at the rear of the guardroom was no longer large enough to accommodate us all and we were moved to a two storey block opposite the other ranks mess room building. A new Bedford domestic fire tender was added to the fleet, replacing the old Bantam domestic fire tender, and stationed in the garage at the front of the old fire section building. We were a mixture of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish regular and national servicemen

who got on extremely well and had many enjoyable relaxing times at the Services Club in Lincoln City, and dances on the first floor of the other ranks mess hall at RAF Scampton. Two of us played regular first team football for RAF Scampton with memorable games against local RAF stations at Waddington and Swinderby. Although I can recall first and surnames of some of the guys on the Scampton fire section regrettably many other surnames escape me as it is so long ago now. Some of you reading this may recognise faces from the accompanying photos.

After serving nearly two years at RAF Scampton I returned from one weeks leave to find myself on one weeks embarkation leave prior to being posted to RAF Khormaksar in Aden a British Protectorate at the time on the Persian Gulf, between Oman and the Red Sea. And that of course is another story and experience.



1958: Pete, Roy, Ken, Jock, Bill, Myself, Ted Hall, Mick Centre front: Corporal John Hodges

A few years ago I made a very enjoyable return visit with my wife to RAF Scampton and arranged a day visit with Steve Shirley who runs and organises the very impressive RAF Fire Fighting Museum. We spent most of the day at RAF Scampton and as well as the impressive fire fighting museum Steve kindly took us around station buildings, old aircraft hangers, the existing operational fire section building and crash rescue trucks by the air traffic control tower, and off course a view of the famous Red Arrow aircraft who unfortunately were not flying that day, parked nearby in readiness on the tarmac.

Many memories of my time at RAF Scampton were resurrected during the visit and made a very enjoyable day thanks to Steve Shirley.

Roy Kane Membership No 577



1958 Fire Section Garage Russ, Mick, Don, Jock McPhee

This is a massive article of many chapters so I will be putting this in future editions as it would fill the entire issue. Ed.....

## Chapter 1

One little brown envelope. To say that this envelope would have some effect on my future equals Noah's words in the Old Testament when he said, "I think it's going to rain"

I was eighteen and due for "National Service", a two year stint in some branch of the armed services. In the fifties all fit, and some not so fit, young men were expected to do their bit for King and Country. Do not bother to look up the word "Expected" in the dictionary, for when the government uses the term it has a slightly different meaning. Their "Expected" means "You will or else"

The "OHMS" (On His Majesty's Service) stamp in the corner of the envelope worried me. Opening the letter confirmed my worst fears. Inside a typed sheet informed me that I was to report to the military recruiting centre a few days later, for a medical examination and attestation. ie I promise to serve the crown. Being the average teenager, I was quite happy looking after my own needs and felt no desire to serve the needs of the crown, or any other person come to that. I had a good job, nice home, ample food and most important at all, I managed to fall in and out of love on a regular basis. What more could any young man ask from life? As far as I was concerned two years of my life were due to be wasted doing what some other person thought was "Expected" of me.

The day I reported for my medical opened my eyes to the rather strange way service personnel think. I followed other baffled young men into a building with a rather tattered "Union Jack" fluttering over the entrance and an equally tattered mat on the floor. Some comic had scribbled on the wall, "Abandon hope all ye who enter here" and "Roll on death, demob's too far away". The doom and gloom experienced on receipt of the little brown envelope took a turn for the worse.

Inside our details were taken down, followed by our trousers, in preparation for the so-called medical. There was a

row of little rooms, each one dedicated to assessing various bits of us. The results were to be entered on a card with boxes on it, two for each test, one marked "Pass" and the other marked "Fail". There was no middle road. I heard my name called at the first room, went in and a voice said, "Passed". As I left the room I noticed a sign on the door 'Hearing Tests'. The next room was the eye test.

The doctor said, "See that chart on the wall?"

I replied, "Yes" and he said "Passed".

In the next room a chap put a stethoscope to my chest and told me to take a deep breath in. Once again I heard the word "Passed". Coming to think of it, he never actually told me to breathe out. Could this be the reason for the row of blue-faced chaps, gasping for breath after this test?

The next test, where one had to step up and down on a bench, had been cancelled. I gather that some bright person realised that you had to climb up two steps to enter the building; therefore, anyone in the building had automatically passed the test.

Many tried various tricks to beat the system, but to no avail. We all passed and were given a certificate stating that the bearer was deemed to be "10% FIT". To this day I wonder if the typist had left a "0" out by accident or the "10%" was nearer the truth than "100 %". That was that.

A few weeks later another brown envelope arrived containing a request (another government word meaning "You will") that I report to RAF Padgate. A train warrant, one way only, was attached.

They say that a journey of a thousand miles starts with one step. As far as I was concerned, my journey had started on the two steps of the recruiting office. Little did I know, but those two steps would take me half way around the world.

## Chapter 2

As they say, "What do you want first? The good news or the bad?"

Well the good news, as far as I was concerned, centred on the fact that service life was not so bad, in fact it was a lot better than I had expected. There had been stories of horrible Sergeants shouting at you, rifle drill, tough physical training, exercises at night in the wildest bits of countryside and

continuous "spit and polish" etc.

RAF Padgate, or to give it its correct title, Royal Air Force Personnel Reception Unit, Padgate, seemed quite a friendly place. The Sergeants would say, "Right gentlemen, please follow me and we will get you fitted out with your uniforms and any other kit you might need." It was the first time anyone had ever called me a gentleman, I felt quite proud.

The kitting-out took a few days, and we were issued with everything needed to exist in air-force life. Uniform, underwear, towels, knife, fork, spoon, needle and cotton, plus the most important bit of kit, a giant one-pint mug. Where the army marches on its stomach, the RAF obviously flew on a continuous supply of tea, drunk from pint mugs. On my second night an omen of things to come occurred. Away from their mum's apron strings, a load of teenage lads took the opportunity to sample the delights of the NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institute) club and bar. The beer flowed and young men who were not used to it got rather drunk; two or three pints seemed to be the average needed by most.

On the way back to our hut, one lad decided to do a balancing act on the wall of an emergency water tank. His ability at balancing equalled his ability to hold his beer, and he fell in. Not to worry, we would soon dry him off in front of the pot-bellied stove back at the hut. When we entered the hut the stove seemed to have gone out. ie gone out as in no fire, not, gone out for a walk. Still, the pipe, which led up to the ceiling, was still warm, so, having undressed the soggy lad, we wrapped old newspapers around the stovepipe and then hung his clothes on it. Hopefully by morning, the clothes on the outside and the lad on the inside, would be back to normal.

Sometime during the night I was rudely wakened by shouts of "Fire". Climbing out of bed, all I could see was the hut full of smoke and lads jumping out of windows. Not wanting to be the odd one out and having no desire to end up looking like a smoked kipper, I followed them. I gather that the fire in the stove was not completely out and as the wind rose during the night, the fire rekindled and the pipe got rather hot. Now red-hot pipes, newspapers and clothes do not mix, and, the rest you can guess. The RAF Fire Crew arrived and watching them at work I decided that I

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would never join that lot. Famous last words. Little actual damage was done and the good life plodded on as if nothing had happened.

Soon we were fully kitted-out, our uniforms had been taken in or let out where needed by a team of tailors, and we were at last looking something like airmen, or so we thought.

The following day we were taken to a large hangar with hundreds of desks laid out in rows. This was to be our "Trade aptitude test", a test where we were to be asked a load of different questions on various subjects to see which RAF trade we would be best suited to. I wanted to be a motor-cycle driver, so having had one before joining up; made sure I answered all the questions on motor vehicles and road knowledge correctly. On the other hand, any questions on trades I did not want, e.g. cook, police, fireman, etc. I answered wrongly. The tests lasted all morning and later that day we were all lined up in the hangar to hear the results. An Officer shouted out, "First two rows, cooks; next row, police; next row, clerks; next row (mine), firemen." I had just learnt another fact of service life. Now in civilian life we know that justice must not only be done, but also seen to be done. Well in RAF life, tests must not only be done, but also seen to be done. The fact that the results will be completely ignored is of little consequence. No doubt half the clerks would be unable to write their own name, and from future first hand experience of service food, half the cooks would possibly have made first class cement mixers. As for my famous last words the day before, no way am I going to be a fireman? The omen had proved true! Possibly, if the lad had cracked his skull open on the side of the emergency water tank that second night, I could have been a brain surgeon. We will never know; such is the way of fate.

Well, as I said, that's the good news, sort of. The bad news? Our idyllic life at Padgate would soon become a distant happy memory.

Looking in the mirror convinced me that I was now the perfect airman. I must have been right, for the two or three hundred other eighteen-year-old chaps who had passed through the kitting-out period at Padgate, also felt the same. Well for some unknown reason the RAF did not hold the same view. All of us were to be posted

to a recruit-training unit at a place called Hednesford. To this day I have never fully understood the word "Posted". It sounds as if some person will come along and stick a second-class stamp on you. NB Second class for airmen, First class for Officers. Anyway posted to the RAF meant, "Sent to."

On arrival at Hednesford we were met by one of the most evil men I have ever come across. To those who were under the impression that heart operations were only thought of in the late sixties, here was living proof that such operations were being carried out in the fifties. This Sergeant assured us that he had no heart and over the coming weeks he would make us aware of this slight modification to his person.

Our belief that we looked like airmen was soon shattered. Sarge assured us that we were the scruffiest load of deadbeats he had ever seen and if he had his way, we would all be shot at dawn. He called us many other things, but as this story will not be printed on fireproof paper, I will not mention them.

Breakfast, for want of a better word, on the first day consisted of porridge which, when slapped onto your plate, stuck there and even turning the plate upside down had no effect on this concrete lump. This was followed by kippers. Now I know there are so called 'Boneless kippers' and I'd often wondered what happened to the bones once taken out. Now I knew — we had them. I hated kippers, and on pushing them one side my mate asked if he could have them. "You're welcome" said I.

Soon we were marching, drilling, doing physical training, cross-country runs and endless polishing. The following day I was famished and when my mate again asked if he could have my kippers I said a definite "No" and scoffed them down. It's amazing what one will eat with an appetite brought on by hard work.

On one parade we were asked if any of us could play a musical instrument. Although I played most brass band instruments and the organ, my mate advised me to say nothing. He had heard that they wanted a gang to move the NAAFI piano to the Officers' mess and it was a catch question to try and fool a few raw recruits into volunteering for the job. The Sergeant soon proved the "no heart" theory and

life seemed to get worse each day. After a day or two of constant marching our boots felt as if they were killing us. A day or two later, we wished they had.

At the end of the first week we had a parade on the drill square - complete with the station band. At the end I chatted to one of the bandsmen and mentioned the fact that I also had been in a brass band. He took me straight to the Band Sergeant who asked me why I had not been informed of the request for men who were musical. I gave my story of the NAAFI piano; he laughed, went over to the Drill Sergeant and said:

"He's one of us now, so lay off OK"

I gather RAF camps were proud of their bands and every camp wanted the best. Due to this, bandsmen were treated with the greatest respect and excused all unpleasant tasks. Whilst the other men were marching up and down the parade square in the rain, bandsmen drank tea in the band hut. At last, the pint mug came into serious use. The biggest shock of all was, besides having an easy life; the Sergeant now smiled at me and called me "Taff".

The eight weeks training flew past and soon we were all to be informed of where we were being sent to for our stint in the mob. The big day came, and I jumped for joy when the Officer in charge said, "Jones, you are off to the Middle East".

The exact base had not been decided, but I was to fly out to Malta, the headquarters of all RAF bases in the Mediterranean, and would receive my final routing details there. In the fifties, you were lucky if you went to Skegness, Blackpool or Southend-on-Sea; only the really rich went abroad. I was going to Malta.

Having been kitted-out with a nice warm uniform I now had to be kitted-out again, but this time with a lightweight overseas kit and shorts. This was done at RAF Lytham, a few miles outside Blackpool. Days of little to do and nights on the town (and up the tower) in Blackpool ensued. For some unknown reason, possibly the low pay servicemen received, as long as you wore uniform everything was cheap. One only paid half-fare on the buses, entered the tower half-price and even a six-penny bag of chips was only four-pence.

What a life, and I was being paid for it; but not much. One pound five shillings a

week, that's One pound twenty-five pence in today's money. I know that a pound was worth a lot more then, but even allowing for that it was still a pittance I can assure you. Soon my stay at this holiday camp would come to an end, but 'The Med' was around the corner and considering it was now January, with all the frost, snow and wind, I couldn't wait to get out to the sun.

To those who now fly direct to Malta in a few hours, I give a brief description of the journey in 1952.

We took off from Bovington in the south of England in a Vickers Viking. Two petrol engines driving two propellers. It chugged along at a nice steady 180 miles per hour but flat out it was capable of over two-hundred mile per hour!

It carried twenty-eight passengers in reasonable comfort and more legroom than today's charter flights. We landed at Paris to refuel; then Nice, to refuel; then Rome, to refuel; then, at last, we arrived at Malta; twelve hours after leaving the UK. Slightly slower than today, but in a lot more style.

### Chapter 3

Music, besides being something I have always enjoyed, also forms part of my memories. Whilst on basic training we were woken up, not with a bugle call, but by the tune "You touched my finger tips and my heart was aglow". This was broadcast over the camp 'Tannoy' system first thing every morning. The thought of the Sergeant touching my fingertips? Yuck! Last thing at night they played "I'll see you in my dreams". Again, the last person I wanted in my dreams was Sarge. (Nightmares, yes?)

Malta always comes to mind when I hear the tune "Perfidia". It was, or seemed to be, the only record in the possession of the local cinema at Sliema. Well it was the only one they ever played. Most nights were spent at the local cinema. We had started going to the many bars located in the famous Straight Street. (Famous to any servicemen stationed there and affectionately known as "The Gut"). Here we were surrounded by beautiful, and some not so beautiful, ladies of the night. They offered some of the most unusual services one could think of. After introducing ourselves, they soon realized

that we were National Service Airmen with no money. They left without even a "Good-bye." During the day we went swimming, sightseeing or just hung around wondering what was going to happen to us. After an enjoyable, though too short a stay on this pleasant island, about fifty of us were taken to Valletta harbour and embarked on the MV Empire Shelter, a troop-ship bound for Tobruk in North Africa. She was not what one would call a luxury liner, but the sea was calm, the food good and the accommodation reasonable. Chugging along at a steady twelve knots the journey would last three and a half days. The entertainment consisted of a few well-thumbed books and a pack of cards, so I spent most days just watching the world, or at least the sea, pass by. It was a life I could get used to; nothing to do and all day to do it in.

We arrived in Tobruk harbour about mid-day. If you looked north there was nothing but sea; If you looked south, nothing but sand. The thought crossed my mind that if you were into building sand castles, this was the place to be. I was not into sand castles, so the future looked as bleak as the view.

Our destination was a little airfield called El Adem, which lay roughly, in both meanings of the word, twenty miles inland from Tobruk. I gather that many battles had been fought over this desert outpost, not trying to capture it, but trying to give it away!

As we approached this RAF camp, the view of the sea disappeared and other than a few dreary tin huts and a barbed wire fence, there was nothing but sand. There was a sign, which said, "Welcome to Royal Air Force El Adem". Welcome? Who's kidding who?

Like all RAF camps, when you first arrive, nobody knows what to do with you, so they put us in some empty huts, told us where to get a meal and left us. The following morning an Officer rushed in, shouted "Get your best uniforms on and make sure your shoes are clean, then fall in outside". Baffled but obedient we did what we were told. We were inspected, passed as OK and marched up to the airfield. Here we were lined up, inspected again and left, still baffled. Soon all the top brass on the camp arrived, seemingly in some state of panic. In the distance the sound of an approaching aircraft brought them to life

and as the little dot in the sky grew larger, the more they panicked. When it landed, out came someone we all recognized, Princess Elizabeth, escorted by the Duke of Edinburgh. All not in the know thought, "What in Heavens name are they doing in this God forsaken hole?"

Later we learnt that the King had died, and the Princess, (now Queen), had been recalled urgently from her holiday at the Tree-tops hotel in Kenya. The King's death was to be kept a secret until all who needed to know had been informed. When I think of the crowds who spend hours waiting at great state occasions, just to catch a glimpse of the queen, and those who would do anything to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace, just to stand near her and there was I, standing only two feet away from her and the Duke. I can still remember thinking: "Gosh! That perfume smells expensive."

For reasons which always baffled me, reporters at any royal function always start with the phrase, "Her majesty appeared wearing a...". There would follow a detailed description of every item of clothing from hat to shoes. I cannot remember what she wore that day, but one thing I will always remember:... As she approached our eyes met for a moment, though I doubt if she noticed it. Suddenly I saw, not some high and mighty member of the royal family, but a sad young lady who was returning home to a house where a seat at the dinner table would now be empty. Someone she had loved had gone, never to return. Grief for prince or pauper is a burden one has to carry alone. She was head of a great empire, millions of loyal subjects, people prepared to obey, instantly, any request she made and always surrounded by servants, great and small. The expensive clothes, fancy make-up, and typical British "Stiff upper lip" showed to all that here was royalty at its best, but in that brief moment when two pairs of eyes met, I saw a human being, alone with a burden no one could help her carry. For once in my life I said "God bless the queen" and meant it.

Soon they returned to the Royal Plane, salutes were given, engines started, and once again it returned to its "Little dot in the sky" position, and then disappeared into the desert haze. The top brass breathed a sigh of relief and life at RAF El-Adam returned to normal.

I use the term "Normal" very loosely when referring to the day-to-day routine at El Adem. Though the British were in control of the base at the end of the war, the day hostilities ended they should have given it back to the Arabs. Waiting a few days gave the locals a chance to think about it. They had more sense than us; they said: "Keep it!" and we were stuck with it.

The base consisted of a few rows of tin huts, an Air Traffic Control tower, a cinema of sorts called "The Astra" and a strip of tarmac called a runway. The Royal Plane was the only aircraft seen for weeks. I gather the odd plane dropped in to refuel if it needed to after practicing dummy bombing over the desert, and the CO who had his own plane, took off now and again. (He also came back, but not of choice.) The only other activity to take place on the runway was the runway sweeper, a contraption that spent all day sweeping the sand off the tarmac. It, needless to say, fought a losing battle.

There were six new arrival firemen, including myself, though we knew nothing about fire-fighting, having had no training whatsoever in the trade. We reported to the Fire Section and met our boss-to-be, a Sergeant with a fag in one hand and a bottle of Gin in the other. In the corner was a Corporal's body. I refer to him as a body, for, at first sight it was rather difficult to tell if he was alive or not. A yell from Sarge brought the body to life and the Air Traffic Control tower. Most days were spent either polishing the fire engines or drinking tea. Being a fireman did have advantages. In those days Saturdays were working days and once a month there was the obligatory CO's parade. Firemen were excused, as full fire crews, domestic and crash, had to be on duty at all times, parade or no parade.

At El Adem, which had no parade square, the parade was normally held on the main road outside the Astra' cinema. At 09.30 all airmen not on essential duty picked up a .303 rifle at the station armoury; then followed a rehearsal. At 10.45 they laid their rifles down on the road and leant back in the shade of the 'Astra' for a fag break, ready to take up their positions on the word that the CO was on his way.

At 10.46 Reg, the Corporal and driver of the domestic vehicle, was busy in the office polishing the two telephones. The black phone was for routine calls and the red phone for emergencies. The lads were out

in the sun, busy polishing the equipment on the 'Karrier Bantam Domestic tender'. What use this vehicle was has always been a mystery to me. It carried hoses, two standpipes, a ladder, a 30 gallon foam extinguisher, and no water. Behind it was towed a 'Coventry Climax' water pump. Considering there were no water hydrants at El Adem, why the standpipes? The only emergency water tank was normally full of sand, so why tow a water pump? Add to this that all accommodation was of the Nissen hut type, why the ladder? This was before the days of the sound barrier fire engines, but the 'Carrier Bantam' did have a sort of speed barrier. This was about 20 MPH and above this it bounced up and down like a wild horse. Any control the driver had over it seemed to disappear above this speed and drivers who hit the magic 30 MPH were worth a medal, or a visit to the mental ward of sick quarters.

At 10.47 the biggest disaster that can hit an airfield crash crew occurred. They ran out of tea. The Crew Commander tried to ring the domestic crew to try and solve the problem, but Reg was polishing the routine phone, so there was no reply. The Crew Commander, with the normal brilliance they are renowned for, picked up the RED phone which set off the alarm in the domestic section. Now the domestic crew had never had a fire callout so Reg panicked. He picked up his RED phone, and as soon as he heard the words "Crash Crew here" he said "We're on our way" and slammed the receiver down.

At 10.48 Reg is tearing up the main road gritting his teeth, as he was about to hit the 20 speed barrier, (the teeth gritting was due to his slight problem with piles), and when he hit the speed barrier, the bouncing of the vehicle made his little problem into a big problem. As they approached the Astra, Reg was elated to see the cheering, waving crowds, led by the Officer in charge of the parade. Due to the noise from the engine he couldn't hear what they were shouting and gleefully waved back. As his speed increased, the ride seemed to get even rougher than normal. He surged on, oblivious to the cries of "Watch the bleeding rifles!"

By now the parade Officer had burst into tears and a deathly silence fell; well at least from the men. There was still the noise of Reg complaining about his piles, the roar of the vehicle engine - and the sound of

200 rifles being turned into scrap.

Needless to say, the Fire Section was not very popular. Well that isn't exactly true. They were very unpopular with all ranks from the CO (Commanding Officer) down to some SNCO's, (Senior Non Commissioned Officers, e.g. Sergeants, Flight Sergeants, etc), but they were heroes to the average airman, who sadly had to miss the monthly parade. Hooray!

That night in the NAAFI everyone wanted to buy the firemen a drink. Now as most readers will be aware, firemen are noted for refusing this sort of offer, but firemen are also noted for making supreme sacrifices if needed. Reluctantly they made the supreme sacrifice and accepted the free drinks. It is sacrificial acts like this that makes one feel proud of the RAF Fire Service and could even bring a tear to the eye of the most hardened Crew Commanders.

By the end of the night a few of the lads were a little bit, (well OK, a big bit,) under the influence. Now firemen under the influence seem unable to return to their Fire Section billet until they have proved something. Tonight's proof was to pinch the old 'World War 1' cannon from the front of the Station Headquarters building and leave it as a present for the CO outside the Officers' Mess. Now the cannon, weighing in at about half a ton, took a bit of moving, but as soon as it started to roll, there was no problem. As they got close to the Mess doors, someone shouted: "OK put the brake on" followed by someone else shouting: "What bleeding brake?"

This, alas, was followed by a large crashing sound as the weapon entered the Officer's mess at a speed it was never designed for.

On Monday morning the Section was visited by the CO, OC Admin, Station Warrant Officer, Provo (ie police) Officer etc - and it wasn't a social call. The Motor Transport Officer had been asked to attend but had to be excused on medical grounds. He suffered from a rather strange affliction. Every time he heard the words "Firemen Drivers" he would lock himself in his office and refuse to come out until the Medical Officer had given him a sedative.

If the Fire Section was ever to get back in favour, something had to be done - and done soon.

At this point fate decided to give us a sort of welcome hand. Reg grabbed hold of the

“Station Notices”. He shoved them under Sarge’s nose and pointed to a paragraph, which read:- ‘To boost the morale of the troops, the CO has decided to put on a live variety show in the ‘Astra’. Volunteers, actors, singers, musicians, stage hands or any interested personnel are asked to meet in the ‘Astra’ cinema at 18.00 hrs Tuesday night. YOUR help will be appreciated I can assure you.’

Signed,

Joe Bloggs, CO

Sarge, who was proud of his rendering of ‘Land of hope and glory’ in the mess bar after a few pints of the local beer, would sing. He offered me the choice of volunteering to play the piano, or extra night shifts. Reg, who was famous for his wit, was ordered to volunteer as compare, and the three butch firemen who had pushed the cannon into the Officers mess, were detailed as stagehands. At that time ‘The Chippendales’ had not been thought of, though coming to think of it, they have big chests and small waists. Our lot had big chests and even bigger beer-bellies, so it wouldn’t have worked. Here was a chance for the Fire Section to become ‘Flavour of the month’ again.

Tuesday night we turned up on time. There were a few others there, including a rather pretty signals lad with soft pale skin, blue eyes, blond hair and a pink dress on, which he had made out of some old curtains. He convinced us that he did a fantastic Shirley Bassey act. I was about to point out to him that Miss Bassey wasn’t exactly a blond, blue eyed, fair skinned lass, but by now he/she was surrounded by the three firemen, sticking out their chests and trying (and failing) to pull in their beer-bellies. Owing to curry for tea, all this belly pulling in was a disaster, for one of them passed wind and rehearsals had to stop whilst the ‘Astra’ manager switched on the ventilation fans. While Sarge sang a bit, the blond climbed onto a stool and Reg practiced his jokes etc., I tried to get the piano from the side of the stage into the centre. Now the piano had been there for years and the little wheels under it had stuck solid. Dragging the three firemen away from the blond was harder than trying to push the piano. In all fairness to them, the nearest thing to the fair sex out in El Adem were three old hags who ran a house of dubious pleasure, just outside the camp gates. Officially out of bounds, it baffled me at the well-worn path

leading from the camp gate to this house. Finally I borrowed the three firemen and with a great heave - the piano refused to budge. The blond made some camp remark (camp, camp, not RAF camp.) about butch firemen. This hurt the lads pride and drove them to put everything they had into the effort. Suddenly the piano gave a shudder, the little wheels came unstuck, and the piano shot across the stage at a similar rate to the SHQ cannon, heading towards the stage door. There was a slight problem. Between the piano’s present position and the door, were two obstacles...

1) The blond, standing on his stool. He somehow jumped up in the air and did a landing astride the piano that would have put the average horse rider in Hollywood westerns to shame.

2) A rather large sheet of canvas, called a screen. Thankfully, instead of demolishing the whole thing, the piano, complete with rider, cut a perfect hole right in the centre. Finally, with a scream that would have done Shirley Bassey proud, the piano and blond disappeared through the stage door, completely ignoring the “FIRE DOOR – PUSH BAR TO OPEN” sign.

Sarge could see his position in the CO’s friend of the month book going even lower, which was a slight problem, due to the fact that he was already at the bottom. Quick action was needed. I was sent to buy some needle and cotton from the NAAFI shop and we set to work repairing the hole. Sadly, this little episode not only lost us the good-will of the higher-ups, but also the lads. Everyone went to the ‘Astra’ and there, displayed for all to see, was an example of fire-section sewing. Our repair left a bit to be desired and all films from thrillers to ‘Tom and Gerry’ now had the outline of a man riding a piano etched across the middle of the screen. This lasted for six weeks as one cannot pop down to town and buy a new cinema screen.

My ability to play the piano had been noticed, unbeknown to me, by Harry. He was a bit of a lad who, before joining the RAF, ran a stall in one of the many markets located around London. He was proud of his “Barrow Boy” upbringing and his skills at making a few pounds out of any situation that came his way. After the fiasco in the station cinema, Harry approached me and offered to do all my washing and cleaning - if - he could be my manager. This seemed to be an offer too good to

miss, so I accepted. He somehow managed to have a load of posters printed stating ‘Have a good night at Taff’s sing-along. NAAFI bar, Saturday night.’ The bar was packed and soon I started playing some of the many popular songs of the day. As things picked up, Harry shut the lid of the piano and grabbing me by the arm, headed towards the exit. There was a great roar from the crowd, to which Harry replied, “You lot can’t expect a bloke to play the piano on a dry throat?” “The hint was taken and a free beer appeared for me. Harry nudged me and I said, “What about one for my manager?” “Harry’s free beer appeared. The night was a roaring success and it hadn’t cost us a penny. At the end of the evening Harry had a word with the NAAFI manager and pointed out to him the sudden upturn in his profits due to our efforts. We would be available every Saturday if he wished but? Harry came back to me and gave me a pound and pocketed one for himself. One pound may not seem much now but it was equivalent to a weeks wages for a National Serviceman. Life was getting better at last.

One day Harry noticed a stores wagon heading out into the desert with a load of old bedding on the back of it. A short time later a small cloud of smoke could be seen on the horizon, then the wagon returned empty. I could see Harry deep in thought (a rare event!) After making a few discreet enquires he discovered that all old bedding was dumped in the desert miles from the camp and disposed of by burning. Harry arranged an interview with the safety Officer and convinced him that, as fire was involved, surely fully trained firemen and not stores personnel should carry out this task. Volunteering for work was not a trait Harry was noted for, so when he offered his and my services for the bedding disposal job, I knew something was up.

On our first run with the old bedding we loaded the wagon up with mattresses, blankets, sheets, plus a can of petrol and an old tyre Harry had found. Once out of sight of the camp we poured the petrol over the tyre, set it alight and I was all set to start chucking the bedding on.

“Hold your horses” said Harry as he leant back lighting a fag.

In no time at all a few Arabs on camelback appeared, then more. Harry’s skills as a ‘Barrow Boy’ were realised, and the cries of “Mattresses twenty Ackers, blankets

ten Ackers and sheets five ackers” rang across the desert. In ten minutes we had got rid of the lot and left with our pockets brimming with the local currency. Work? Not Harry’s favourite pastime. Making money? He was an expert.

Besides playing the piano, I also played the church organ every other Sunday at the C of E church. This strange arrangement was due to the fact that there was only one little organ at El Adem. One Sunday we had it, the next Sunday the RCs had it. Being carried back and forth across the desert between the two churches, the organ covered more miles and saw more Arabs than a Bradford bus.

The organ was one of those little harmoniums which you pumped with your feet, though for some unknown reason, it mattered not how hard you pumped, all that came out was a faint wheeze. Once again Harry had an idea. We took the organ back to the Fire Section workshop and dismantled it. Surprise, surprise It was full of sand. Cleaned out and reassembled I tried it out. The sound was fantastic. Much to my amazement Harry stuffed an old sack inside it and returned it, now sounding wheezy again, to the church. He told the Padre that the oscillating valve leading to the air inductor was faulty but he knew a mate in London who might be able to get a replacement valve at cost price. A week later we returned to the church, took the sack out of the organ, and it sounded great. Harry told the Padre that the spare part had only cost two pounds, including postage. That night Harry slipped two pounds into my hand. I said, “What about your share?” He replied, “Oh that’s OK I spun the same yarn to the RC Padre so I’ve got my two quid.” I pointed out that I did not agree with swindling the church, but he pointed out that it was the RAF who paid the bills, so that was not a problem.

One Saturday night we were having a right old knees-up at the now regular sing-song, beer going down at a rare rate of knots and NAAFI profits going up at a comparable rate. The singing would have made a Welsh male voice choir proud. All went well until the orderly Sergeant appeared on the scene and called “Time”. He was the NCO i/c the RAF police and pleading with him was a complete waste of time. The NAAFI manager, seeing his profit related bonus going down the drain, (which is where all beer finally ends up when you think of it,)

came up with a solution. If we brought a fire engine round the back of the NAAFI, plus of course the necessary pennies, he would supply our needs and we could carry on with the booze-up in the Fire Section block. The Austin Domestic fire engine, which we used for odd jobs, was ideal for this task. It was a box van, which carried more water in its radiator than it’s water tank. In fact, as a fire engine it was as much use as a bicycle. Perhaps the bicycle had a slight advantage - the bike was faster and you didn’t have to take your hands off the steering to ring the bell. Any way, booze back at the Fire Section, but without the piano to sing to, it wasn’t the same. Bright idea! Why not borrow the little church organ? The NAAFI piano was a bit on the heavy side and the manager might have wanted a few more pennies, so the organ was decided on. Out came the trusty Austin Domestic, and with strict instructions from me that the organ must be returned to the church later that night ready for the C of E service on Sunday morning, the organ was “borrowed”. Now we could now carry on with our sing song. The organ was placed at the bottom of my bed and my faithful mate Harry lay under the bed, pushing the pedals up and down to get air into the thing. Soon the various verses of “There was a young lady from Ealing” echoed round the still night air of the desert. Some of the verses were rather rude, but the camels couldn’t speak English, and if the Padre heard them - well he knew more verses than us with more songs and a plentiful supply of the amber nectar, the night slowly faded into oblivion. The next thing I remember was looking at my watch. It said one- o’clock and the sun was shining. The next thing I noticed was that there was an organ at the bottom of my bed. Making a quick calculation (firemen are renowned for this if the sh-t is about to hit the fan) I worked out that at one o’clock on a Sunday there shouldn’t be an organ there, and .....

Later that night we sneaked the organ back into the church and every loyal fireman was sworn to secrecy. Church organ? What church organ? Looking innocent, when you know you are not, is another quality fire men have to be admired for.

The following day I was walking down the main camp road and passed the C of E padre mumbling to himself “Bloody Catholics. They’ve kept the organ for two weeks; I’m going to see the CO about this.” The mystery was never solved, even with

the help, or should one say, the hindrance of the RAF police.

Finally my musical abilities really paid off (bad news for Harry). The padre, on a visit to Malta HQ, had made the mistake of telling the Chaplain in Chief at Malta about this fantastic organist at El Adem. Now the Chaplain at Malta had a large church, a large congregation, a large pipe organ and guess what? - No organist. As he was mates with the Air Marshall in Chief, I received a signal asking if I would like to take up the position of organist at RAF Luqa, in Malta. They realized that it would be hard to leave my friends etc, but to make up for this I was to be promoted to SAC (Senior Aircraftsman) and given another pay rise. At a speed equivalent to a fireman picking up a duster when he sees the boss coming, I replied “Yes”.

As I went round saying my farewells, I bumped into Harry fixing a small water tank onto the back of his blanket truck. He had convinced Sarge that, as he was burning stuff, it would be a good idea to have some water handy, just in case the fire spread. Thinking back to our burning site I wondered, how does fire spread in the desert? I also thought, Harry sold the blankets, not burnt them.

There must be a catch.

Two days later I boarded a DC3 (The famous Dakota aircraft, with a cruising speed of 160 mph) As we climbed away I looked out of the window and watched El Adem, with its crash line stuck in the middle of the desert, slowly fade into the distant haze. Looking down at the slowly disappearing desert I thought I saw a plume of smoke and a RAF truck in the distance. Alongside it were two men, one appeared to be selling blankets and the other one looked as if he was selling water.

Bye, bye El Adem. Malta, here I come!

*Taff the Fire*

# Re Enlistment

Further to my story of my first spell in the RAF Fire Service after demob in Nov 1959 I went back to my old job in the market gardens at Leverton (this was the walled garden which later featured in the TV programme "Victorian Kitchen Garden") I was only there for about a year then did a bit of lorry driving for a Corn Merchant collecting animal food from London and Bristol then delivering it to the local farms. I married my wife on June 18th 1960 and went to work at AWRE Aldermaston again driving a lorry for a construction company as they were still building Aldermaston at the time.

In January 1961 the New Zealand Air Force were advertising for ex RAF Firemen so I applied for that, I went to New Zealand House in London and passed medical and interviews but unfortunately as my wife was pregnant they wouldn't take me until after the birth. By the time they were born (twins) and I contacted them again I was informed that as it had been several months they had filled all the available slots and I could apply again in the future. Shortly after this I had a letter from the RAF offering me the opportunity to rejoin the RAF with no loss of seniority same rank and straight to a permanent unit. I know several other firemen who were given the same opportunity, I understood that the reason for this offer was because National Service had just ended and they realised that there was a shortage of men joining up. I decided to take up their offer and re-enlisted. I went to Reading recruiting office on January 22nd 1962 and was sworn in then sent to RAF Bridgenorth for rekitting. I spent two weeks there along with about a dozen other re-enlisted men being rekitting but otherwise doing nothing constructive, at the end of those two weeks I was told my posting, it was to the WRAF Depot Spitalgate just outside Grantham.

On arrival I was informed that I could either do fire piquet for a week at a time which meant sleeping in the guardroom which didn't appeal to me or I could do duty driver for MT which meant I could sleep at home but be ready for call out so I opted for that. One night about two in the morning I was called out to take a WRAF recruit to RAF Nocton Hall Hospital which was up near Lincoln, next day she was back with her fellow recruits apparently she was suffering PMT WRAF medic wasn't taking any chances. I did several runs to Nocton Hall which was quite a journey through Cranwell to pick up I believe the A19 to Lincoln. I did spend a few days in Nocton Hall as I had an abscess

on a tooth and had to have it cauterized.

The Fire Section consisted of a Cpl and two SACs. The Cpl I/c was Andy Robertson and the SAC Taff Rogers, the vehicle we had was Bedford TK domestic. One of the tasks we had was to give lectures to the WRAF recruits once a week we took it in turns it was very interesting but could also be embarrassing at the same time, those girls might have been youngsters but they certainly knew a thing or two, one occasion when they embarrassed me was when I was going to demonstrate how to remove someone from a building. I spread a blanket on the floor and asked this very young and pretty girl to lay down this she did and lay on her back looking up at me I then said roll over on to your stomach please, she looked straight in my eyes and said "I've never had it that way before" all I could hear was the other girls saying "Look he's blushing" I was too.

After I had been there about nine months Taff got demobbed and a new SAC was posted in, Jack Cooper an ex army lad we got on like a house on fire he was a real character.

Shortly after Jack arriving Andy decided to remuster and joined the Regiment he was the only fireman I knew that went over to the Rock's and never came back, he did very well for himself and ended up as a WO, I met him again many years later when I went to Catterick for the Mk6 deployment course. The new Cpl posted in was one Gideon "Jock" Webster according to him he had been on domestic units his whole career he came to us from Melksham which at the time was a training school. More of him later. Shortly after Jock arrived I was sent to Catterick for the Advance Fire Course which was where I came across the famous WO Danny Gault. I passed the course and returned to Spitalgate.

There follows a brief rundown of the happenings working for Jock. He had a nameplate on his desk with I/C section on it so I got hold of a Double Diamond beer desk sign and put SAC Brown 2 i/c Fire Section on it. This upset Jock so I had to remove the 2 I/c from it. About this time they took our Bedford away from us and gave us an Austin domestic in its place, older members will remember this vehicle which was called the matchbox on account of its shape, a square box with canvas curtains on the back instead of doors. One day Jack and I went round camp picking up two gallon foam and Soda Acid fire extinguishers, Jack insisted on riding in

the cab with me so there was nobody to look after the extinguishers so the obvious happened, they all fell over, when we got back to the section and opened the curtains there was foam and water everywhere, Jock was not a happy Cpl.

Our office was a seco hut and our vehicle was kept in an adjoining hangar. During the severe snow in the winter of 63 the snow had piled up the doors to a depth of about fifteen feet so we had to dig a lane to get to the doors, took us all day until we went home at 17:00. Next morning it had all filled in again. The snow was about three feet deep all over camp and what did our genius of a Cpl do? Sent Jack and myself out checking hydrants Honest. When asked what he was going to do he said he was going to stay in and check all the record cards. Jack didn't say a word, he just went into the hangar and got a tin of CTC climbed on the roof and poured the lot down the chimney, a few seconds later Jock comes tearing out of the office followed by a cloud of greeny yellow smoke. The Section stunk of the stuff for quite a while. Our Fire Officer was the

Ped O so we went outside his office window and started clearing the snow from the area, naturally he comes to the window and asks what we think we are doing, our answer is checking hydrants because we have been told by the Cpl to do so. He sends us back to the section and phones the Cpl to give us a job in the warm.

One day the fire alarm sounds Jock answers the phone then tells us "Chimney fire 92 AMQ," Pull the other one that's my quarter" I said we turned out and when we got there my wife had carried out the instructions I gave her in case this should happen, carpet rolled back fire in grate extinguished. Took me quite a while to live that one down.

In February 1964 I was told I was posted to RAF North Front Gibraltar so it was packing my wife and three children off to her mothers in Kent where they were going to stay until I could get quarter in Gib. I left Spitalgate in April 64 so ended 2 years four months of laughs. I've no idea what happened to Jock but when I joined the Association back in 1997 I asked one of our members Joe Shackleton if he could trace Jack for me as I knew Jack lived in Stockton on Tees, I then found out that Jack had sadly died in 1995 of lung cancer which didn't really surprise me as he smoked constantly and it was always Capstan full strength. RIP Jack old friend.

*Ron Brown - Mem No 294*

# Museum of RAF Firefighting

Where has 2017 gone? I cannot believe how busy we have all been trying to keep the Museum of RAF Firefighting out in the public domain. Regular updates on the web site, twitter, facebook, radio and newspaper interviews together with several magazine articles have done so much to keep our story out there. The interest has been fantastic and has done much to keep our spirits high through a very difficult year. We have taken our vehicles to shows at RAF Digby, The Lincolnshire Show, Pistons in the Park (Lincolnshire Showground), The Lincolnshire Steam and Vintage Vehicle Rally, Cranwell Aviation Heritage Centre Open Day, RAF Elsham Wolds Annual Reunion, Aviation Heritage Festival at Hibaldstow Airfield, Scampton Airshow, RAF Metheringham Wartime Weekend, Baston in the Blitz Weekend and the Preston Hall Fire Engine Rally. The WOT1 also had a part in a new film about the Battle of Britain. I'm afraid I can't give you any more details at the moment as it's a bit hush hush!

Not bad for a Museum that's closed!

Obviously work has continued throughout the year, predominately on the fleet of vehicles, where we concentrated on making sure that they were mechanically sound and in fine fettle ready for their adoring public. More artefacts have also been collected over the past few months so there will be even more to see when we re-open!

Now then, what's been going on behind the scenes?

In order to move the Museum forward we had to take a good look at ourselves to see what we could do to survive outside the wire as this was considered our best chance of re-establishing the Museum in a secure environment. The first task was to set up a registered charity. Now that's



*Two Storey External Office Block*

not as easy as some of you might think, but fortunately, the Museum had always been run along a set of fairly tight rules and regulations. We had a management committee, an AGM, a constitution, a bank account. Surely, that's it, isn't it? Well no! Luckily a local solicitor heard about our plight on the local radio station and had offered us help with any legal work required free of charge! It actually took 5 months to get the application form filled out with their help! When it was completed, our solicitor told us it would be at least 40 days before we'd get an answer. Two days later, I got an e-mail from the Charities Commission. Thinking I'd missed something off the application I opened the e-mail with a sinking feeling in my heart. Imagine my surprise when I read that we'd been granted our charity status! Our solicitor couldn't believe it, this was unprecedented! All that effort getting the paperwork right had paid off.

Our official title is now Museum of RAF Firefighting and our registered charity number is 1172939.

Now the best bit! Having given an interview on BBC Radio Lincolnshire

about our search for a new home, I was contacted by a chap named Bob. He was a security guard who was guarding an empty factory complex that had been mothballed for four years. Perhaps if we spoke to the directors, a deal could be done? A meeting was arranged soon after and yes, they were very interested in providing a new home for the Museum! At this stage we felt it prudent to contact the local council to see if they would support us in our quest to find a new home. West Lindsey District Council have given us 100% backing to establish the Museum of RAF Firefighting in the town of Gainsborough. Numerous meetings have followed and we are nearly at the stage when we can formally sign a lease. Unfortunately, there was a small delay as our project was considered so big that we had to apply to the planning department to change the use of the building from an industrial unit to a Museum even though we were not actually doing any building work to the building itself! This took an extra 8 weeks and has put us a little bit behind.

We have a 5 year business plan in place and that calls for the Museum to be self-



*Three Bay Workshop (Crash Bays?)*



*View of the complex from the carpark*



Lincolnshire County Show

supporting by then. Although this is a big leap into the unknown, on paper at least, we are very optimistic that we can do it. The problem comes with our first year of operation. How can we sustain ourselves whilst we open up and start to attract visitors? We'll still have quite large overheads to cover. At this point, both Steve Harrison and I decided to approach the Association for help. A meeting was held at RAF Waddington between our Chairman Neil, the treasurer Trevor, Steve and myself where we outlined our plans, aspirations and worries. We then asked if the Association could assist financially. The initial plan was to give us a rolling loan that would tide us over. This was fantastic. Obviously, this was only the four of us coming up with a plan. It would have to be discussed at the AGM.

Sadly, I couldn't make the meeting as I was on holiday so Steve Harrison attended on behalf of the Museum.

Well, I'm still not sure what happened next, but I was completely amazed when Steve text me in Malta to tell me that a unanimous decision had been reached to give the Museum of RAF Firefighting a donation of £5000 in order to get it up and running in its new home.

As if that wasn't generous enough, we also received another sum from the evening's raffle!

I cannot thank you enough! This is a fantastic gesture and one which should see us achieve our aim of re-opening in Gainsborough, in a new building, early in the New Year just in time to support the RAF 100 celebrations and the 75th Anniversary of the RAF Fire & Rescue Service. The building itself will enable us to house everything under one roof for the first time ever. There is enough under cover parking space for 100 vehicles. It has a separate three bay area which would make an ideal vehicle workshop. There is a two storey internal office block, an external two storey office block. Both have plenty of display rooms, offices and classrooms to display the 20,000 exhibits. There are toilets, and a canteen area. Outside parking for 100 vehicles, a picnic area and local amenities close at hand in a thriving town.

The potential is enormous as is the

site, we cannot wait to get moved in.

Thank You All for your continued support, please stay updated via our website and stand-by for the next exciting chapter in the history of the Museum.

*WO Steve Shirley MBE, GIFireE  
Chairman  
Museum of RAF Firefighting.*

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The RAF Fire Service Museum at RAF Scampton became a Charity earlier this year and is now called "The Museum of RAF Fire Fighting". This charity is organised and run by five Trustees.

WO Steve Shirley's vehicles and his other RAF fire fighting equipment and memorabilia is on permanent loan to the charity.

Due to the RAF's demand for their hanger to be returned, The Museum of RAF Fighting's estimated 20,000 items had to be moved and are currently in secure storage. The trustees hope to move to a permanent building in Gainsborough, 15 miles north, in the near future.

Two months prior to our AGM in Bristol in October, a request was made from the museum to the committee for funds to assist the transportation of the Museum of RAF Fire Fighting's equipment and memorabilia to its new home. The request was for a gift of £5,000. A meeting with the trustees was requested by the committee.

Prior to that meeting I forwarded a list of thirteen searching questions and a request for a copy of the museum's last annual accounts to establish the charity's financial situation. I also suggested to other members of our committee that an interest-free loan for £5,000 over 5 years and reviewed in 5 years could be offered. This was financially viable from

the Association as the end of year accounts at 31st August 2017 would show cash assets exceeding £26,000.

Our chairman, Neil Slade, and myself had a meeting on 17th August with two of the Museum's Trustees, Steve Harrison and Steve Shirley, at RAF Waddington.

At that meeting, a copy of the accounts were provided and all questions answered adequately in writing. The accounts clearly showed that the museum would be unable to cover the cost of this forced move from RAF Scampton, and their funds were reducing by £96 per month, which was the cost of storage.

At our committee meeting on 5th September, it was agreed to put the suggestion of the 5 year loan before the members of the Association at the AGM.

During the meeting at the AGM, Steve Harrison comprehensively explained the changes and challenges to the Museum and its charity status. I explained that a loan was well within the Association's



*Steve Harrison receiving the Cheque for £5000 off our Association Patron, Air Marshal Sir Roger Austin*

capability and financial support for the Museum's purpose was written into our constitution.

It was then suggested from some Association members that what seemed to be a continuous loan should be changed to a donation without ties from the Association to the Museum. This idea was seconded and the vote passed unanimously.

Please see the photograph of a cheque for the £5,000 being presented by our Patron, Air Marshal Sir Roger Austin, to Steve Harrison.

*Trevor Hayes  
Treasurer*

## **Michael Moncrieff: ex Warrant Officer RAF Fire Service.**

It is with great pain and sadness that I write to inform you that my dear friend and colleague Mike Moncrieff was called to the Lord on Sunday 30th July 2017 after a determined battle against a terminal illness. He will be greatly missed by all his family especially his wife Mary and his 3 children: Heather, Paul and Jenny and his grandchildren. Mike was a loving, caring and devoted husband to Mary and their 3 children. Everyone who met Mick would be aware of his boundless energy, sense of humour, thoughtfulness and professionalism.

I first met Mike at RAF Sutton on Hull in 1959 when we attended the basic Fire Course-that was the beginning of a lifetimes friendship. Mick served in numerous locations abroad and in the UK. He completed 34 years service and retired from RAF Brugen deciding

to reside in Holland where he had a property. After a period of time he moved back to Narberth in Wales to the house he had purchased while based at RAF Brawdy. During his career Mick always found an opportunity to find employment to supplement his RAF income. He had numerous jobs including lorry driving in London window cleaning, buying and selling everything from cars, caravans, furniture, toys, balloons, he also did taxi driving; you name it and Mick would have done it!

While serving at RAF Catterick Fire School as an Instructor he instructed on all courses- he particularly enjoyed the further training courses on Fire Fighting where he was known to be a very hard taskmaster and mentor but very fair. He will be remembered by many students who were fortunate to have had the

experience of knowing him.

Mick you were a wonderful lifelong friend: our paths have crossed many, many times during our careers and after our retirement. I will always have fond memories of you- RIP my friend until we meet again.

*Mike Traynor  
5th August 2017*

"Sadly since writing this tribute Michael's wife Mary died 10th September 2017: 6weeks to the day after Michael. Mary had suffered from terminal cancer for many years and was an inspiration to all who knew her- now she is at peace with Michael. Our thoughts go out to their family. "

*Dennis McCann  
President*

# WARRANT OFFICER R.J. (Smokey) FAIRHURST

## Service Details and History

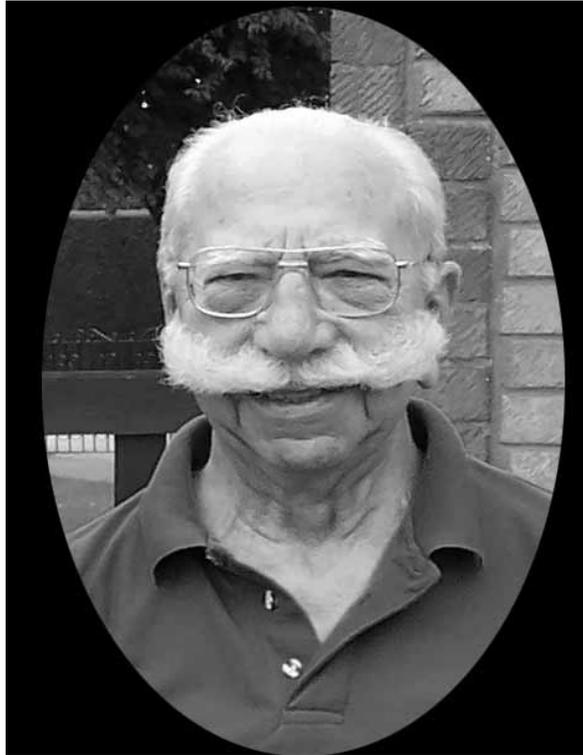
I enlisted at the Bolton recruiting office early in 1940 I was called up to R.A.F Padgate, to be 'sworn in.' I was called up to 10 R.T.C (recruit training centre) at Blackpool for basic training on the Wireless Operators/ Air gunner's course. After 6 weeks training several of us on the flight were involved in a training accident, this unfortunately affected my eyesight, bringing it below aircrew standard. I was posted, to R.A.F Pershore in deepest Worcestershire.

Pershore was still in the process of being built, it was a sea of mud filled with large hunks of construction machinery and hundreds of 'wimpy' workmen. However, after a period of walking and, sleeping in and damn near eating mud the airfield was completed. The billets became habitable, the hangers built, the runways laid, and all the other thousand and one things needed to open an airfield completed.

We became operational and the aircraft flew in. These were Wellingtons (known to us as 'Wimpies') and were to form 23OTU (operational training unit) they were large twin engine bombers with crews of 5 or 6 on each aircraft...

In those days there was no formal 'Fire Section' fire cover was provided by a 6 man 'Fire Piquet', this was formed by airmen being detailed from the various sections on the station. They received about 4 hours training from a SNCO who had been on a short fire course which I believe was at R.A.F Cranwell. They manned the Crossley FWD crash truck which held 300 gallons of water and 25 gallons of a foam compound called 'Saponine' which was pure liquid soap; this was lovely for washing shirts and sheets etc.

The fire piquet was changed weekly, so it was quite a haphazard affair (although it ensured everyone on the Unit knew how to set up a hydrant and run out a line of hose) in the end the "powers that be" recognised in their wisdom that a permanent full time fire section was required to meet the flying commitment, as I had been in the Auxiliary Fire Service before joining the Royal Air Force, I quickly became a member of our newly formed Fire Section, in no time at



all we had a Sergeant, two Corporals and a full section of twenty men.

RAF Pershore became fully operational. 90% of the aircrews were Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, South Africans etc, etc, so we had a very mixed bag of personnel. We had many incidents, some very serious, some very hilarious, as can only be expected with so many young chaps who were mostly in their late teens and early twenties, each full of their own invincibility, hurling huge lumps of metal around the skies. We learned rather rapidly and coped reasonably well and at least none of us were shot at dawn! We learned our trade through trial and error, and I think we became quite efficient.

I spent 3½ happy years at Pershore, during which time I attended a formal fire course at RAF Weeton.

In September 1942, I was involved in a rather bad incident and finished up in the Queen Victoria Hospital at East Grinstead for nearly six months amongst the legendry Mc Indoes 'guinea pigs!!' This was quite an experience for a fireman.

On return to Pershore I was promoted to Corporal and became i/c B crew. This was quite an elevation in status and the increase in pay did not go amiss either. Many incidents happened in the following months, to mention just a couple of the less serious ones. We were called out to a village outside the unit; a 'Tiger Moth' had crash landed, finishing upside down

in a pub yard. We arrived to find the pilot hanging upside down in his harness, complaining bitterly that he was soaked in high octane. However we cut him free and after he had been carted away, the landlord of the pub invited us in for a drink.

Another one with a much more entertaining note, was when we were called out to the WAAF Quarters at 04.00hrs one lovely summer morning to remove a very large sow from a Static Water Tank. With an audience of lots of lovely scantily clad young ladies cheering us on. This had a lovely sequence, sometime after the 'Wingco' called me in, and on behalf of the farmer who owned the sow, gave me a large £5 note, as it had farrowed nicely and produced lots of little piggy's, this was shared among the section and we had a bit of a "do", beer was only about sixpence a pint in those

days so it went a long way!!

Early one morning I was sat in the office wondering when the tea bucket would be around, when the phone rang "Command Fire Officer" here. "There is a Corporal required at RAF Valley, would any of your Corporals be interested in the posting there? With the possibility of promotion after a probationary period, ring me back ASAP". I went to the door and shouted as loud as I could, but there was no answer, the fact that the Crash Tender bay was a few hundred yards from the living quarters was unfortunate! It was not my fault that no one heard me, I rang the CFO back and told him I would have to take this task on my own!

I arrived at RAF Valley, to be really thrown in at the deep end. I was suddenly i/c of a full Fire Section, with all the administration jobs, duty rosters, leave roster and crash details etc which I had never had been involved in before. I must have got something right along the way. For after three months I was wheeled into the Group Captains office and marched out proudly with a third tape!

The SWO (of whose kind I had spent most of my time at Pershore avoiding like the plague) escorted me into the Sergeant's Mess, explained the mess rules, and bought me a drink at the bar. A new life had begun, I sat down to my first meal with a knife and fork laid out on a pristine white clothed table and a very pretty young lady asking

me "Would I like soup to begin with?" What a lovely world I had entered.

The war had progressed and the "D-day" invasion of the 'Fortress Europe' had begun. We were one of the Atlantic Ferry Terminals for the U.S.A.A.F. B17's, B24's, (Fortresses and Liberators) also Marauders, Mitchels, Lockheed Lightning's and A26 Invader's. You name them we got them; they were serviced, refuelled and then passed on to the operational stations around the UK. There were some hairy moments and some strange, like the time when an engine fell off a Liberator and landed on the railway line that ran through the middle of the camp. This held up the London to Holyhead boat train, this pleased a lot of the Yanks. Instead of travelling on to Holyhead and having to walk a long way back to camp, they just got off the train and walked across the fields to their billets.

It was while at Valley I was first given the name of "Smokey" this was by the Yanks, after a cartoon in one of the American comic strips at the time, 'Smokey Stover' the Fire Chief. And it appears to have stuck to me ever since. I was really settling in and getting things organised, then the phone rang again. Command Fire Officer again, but this time a different one. A Mr. Johnson, he asked me If I would join an 'inspection team' I knew that "inspection teams" did not do any work they just went round finding things wrong and telling other people to put it right!

A winter cruise (at high speeds to avoid 'u-boats') across the Atlantic on the "ANDES", till we almost touched New York. A smart 180° and back across again, and we eventually arrived at the dead of night to the safe haven of Freetown harbour in sunny Sierra Leone. Except that it was throwing it down and did so for the next three weeks, so I did what every good «Coasty» did I bought an umbrella!

I was posted to A.H.Q, Freetown, as a member of the Command Fire Staff. The full team consisted of Mr Johnnie Johnson who held the honorary rank of Flt Lieutenant and yours truly!

We were to visit Maiduguri and Fort Lamy, (where?) we found them (right at the top of Nigeria, turn slight left at Kano and you can't miss them!) we would be calling at Accra, on the Gold Coast now Ghana, Abidjan on the French Ivory coast, Lagos, Ekegja, Appapa, Port Harcourt, Jos and Kano all in Nigeria. These «exotic» sounding places were small staging posts

stretching all down the west coast of Africa and up through the centre of Africa to Khartoum and on to Egypt.

Then to the North African front of Tubruk, Ben Gazi and El Alamein. Spitfires, Hurricanes and other fighter aircraft were shipped out to West Africa, built up and then flown, In short stages for refuelling up to the war front.

The fighting was over in North Africa, these stations had to be inspected. Some of these units were very small by this time (in fact I was told that one unit was so small the Station Commander was only an L.A.C!). So the inspections did not take too long, we usually had to wait a few days before the next available transit aircraft. Some of the places we explored are perhaps not for your delicate ears, some were quite exciting and some very illuminating (very!)

At Maiduguri on the southern border of the Sahara desert we really lived it up. Johnnie had managed an invitation to a luncheon party at the District Commissioner's residence. It was all very 'plus fours and bay window' white shirts. A temperature of about 90° a really substantial lunch, and several large G&T's later, all helped to create an overall sense of well being!

The boss insisted that we took a walk around town! This was the walled town of Maiduguri all built of dried red mud. The sun reflected off these buildings and the heat was unbelievable. So with great reluctance and much complaint I staggered along to be met with a sight that was certainly a life-time experience.

As I found out later, the Hausa and Fulani tribesmen, who roam the southern Sahara desert, bring their camels, goats, donkeys, sheep, wives and children, in fact everything, about twice a year to a huge market and general 'Ram Sam'. It was fantastic sight literally thousands of animals and people dressed in their tribal costumes, swirling around in a cloud of dust and noise that is really beyond description.

We dived into this merry throng and began to carry out our 'secondary duties' we began 'shopping'! One of the perks of these inter unit/inter country flights was that various goods and items were available in some places and not in others. This covered lots of 'goodies' highly coveted by the lads who never got more than a few miles from their bases. On each trip we were deluged with requests to bring

this back and that back and we did our best to get the desired items. In fact, sometimes the aircraft was so full of goodies there was hardly room for the pilot to squeeze in.

The last scheduled trip in Nigeria was to Fort Lamy, this actually was a real French Foreign Legion fort, and the airstrip was situated on the only dry bit of the land in the middle of many square miles of marshland called Lake Chad. We were trying to sort all this out when the real mother and father of all sandstorms blew up (yes I know, I know, a sand storm in the middle of miles of swamp, I couldn't believe it either) However it was still blowing when we were due to leave and the aircraft was grounded, and we were stranded.

Eventually it was decided that we could join a convoy of French Legionnaires travelling overland to a place called Dikwa, and then on to Maidugerie to catch the next transit out. That journey is a tale in itself. And then finally back to Freetown and the promise that we would be static for a while.

Three days later we were informed «go north young men» first to Takoradi, then on to Bathurst, in the Gambia, then onto further points up the chain. 'Tak' was no problem. We gave ourselves a day off at Bathurst. We lunched on the veranda of the central hotel as we watched a cricket match on the grassy town square. Later on in the week we had to inspect the installation of the «Base line Foam Induction system» in the bulk fuel storage tanks at the Sunderland flying boat station at 'Half Die' way up the river Gambia.

This had to be finished that day as we had an air passage booked for the following morning, perhaps what I should have mentioned before, was the small matter of the end of the «War in Europe» had been officially announced earlier that day!. Yes it was «VE» day so we thought we should finish the job early and get back to Bathurst smartly. We arrived back at the Mess to find everyone in, shall we say an emotional state!! They just had to be, all the beer had been disposed of.'

Then we off was to Dakar, in French Senegal, it was only a short flight and we arrived to find Dakar in a complete state of madness! They were dancing in the haystacks they were dancing in the ricks. Joy was unconfined (and her sister wasn't doing too badly either), and we were out on the town, to join in the celebrations. The local French people took us to their hearts

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and feted us well. The liberated free French were certainly free and very liberal!

Have you ever flown in a Dakota the morning after a gigantic three day thrash? When we landed we saw the foreign legion fort. This was at Port Etienne, on the border between Mauritania and the Western Sahara. The Legion was there to stop cross border traffic, why?

The Fort was there and it added much to the Mess facilities. The Flt Sergeant caterer evidently went up to the fort now and again with crate of corned beef, and came back with a large carboy sized bottle of rough red wine that was the legionnaires daily ration. We returned to Freetown.

I unpacked my bag and prepared to rest on my laurels for a while. Orders came from high above; I had to settle for the SASO, (Senior Air Staff Officer) which I suppose is fairly high. "Pack your bag again and get the next transport to RAF Jui." This was the Sunderland flying boat base right at the top of Freetown creek.

The MU hangar was laid out with rack after rack of hoses, couplings, breechings, extinguishers, thousands of refills, and ten trailer pumps.

I had two qualified store men and about six African labourers to do the donkey work. Testing all the hoses and checking that all the couplings screwed together. I finally returned to Freetown with reams and reams of paperwork. Where, after it had been checked by AHQ staff, I was told to return to Jui to supervise the disposal of the equipment. So off I went, to be met by the O.C of the M.U who told me a 'Bomb Scow' would be at the dock the next morning and a truck would be at the hangar to take the equipment to it. Once we got it all on board and into a deep part of the river it was ditched over the side!

Things had been happening at very high levels. AHQ was to move to Accra on the Gold Coast, and to be re-sited on the USAAF base there. Mr Johnson was due to return to the UK, and I was to fly to Accra immediately to take over the USAAF fire trucks and form a RAF Fire Section.

I lived on the Yankee base and tasted 'food' again, instead of 'rations'. I had steak, instead of corned beef, potatoes instead of yams, ice cream instead of bananas and real coffee. I actually began to take an interest in life again. After a slow start a few more 'bods' were posted in and with about 20 members of the West African Air Corps (all from the local population).

The intricacies of the Yankee trucks were finally mastered, Dodges, Chevies and rather a large beast called a 'Mac' A lot of training had to be done, perhaps one of the hardest was to convince the West African Air Corps lads that the shiny new boots they had been issued with were for protection when fire fighting, and not solely for wearing back in their villages to impress the local beauties!

Eventually we became operational on a not too busy airfield. Two Dakota transit, one north one south, each day. A twice weekly 'Sabena' transport to the Belgian Congo, and the odd VIP aircraft. This routine carried on till at last 'VJ Day' arrived and our thoughts turned to the 'BOAT'. Some more than others, who let it be known.

Eventually I was on the 24hour train trip to Kumasi and Takoradi and then the 'Boat' home to England. I was posted to Woodbridge in Suffolk to be presented on my arrival with my 'Crown'.

During the war RAF Woodbridge had been a 'crash landing airfield' for damaged aircraft returning from raids over Germany, France etc. It had 3 parallel runways a mile long and judging by the number of wrecks in the scrap dump it had been very well used. We carried on using it for emergency landings, hydraulic failures, no brakes; also under carriage problems etc.

Whilst I was there the airfield was used for lots of experimental flying and testing newly designed aircraft, The first delta winged 'Swallow' (a fore runner to the Vulcan), was flown by Geoffrey de Havilland. Also the new Bristol passenger planes Hermes and Hastings. We were actively involved in filling large tanks in the fuselage with water for weight ballast this was dumped after takeoff, and they would land and the whole procedure would be repeated day after day.

We also manned the "F.I.D.O" installation, I love that title ('Fog, Intense, Dispersal, Of') a hangar at the end of the runway which housed 10 Coventry Climax fire pumps, these pumped hundreds of gallons of 100 octane through pipes that ran either side and the length of the runway. This sprayed out of thousands of small holes and when ignited created two lines of flame the length of the runway, the heat created lifted the fog and left that runway clear for a safe landing.

We only used the FIDO once in 'anger' while I was there, a Dakota filled with army bods was returning from Germany,

on a very dark and foggy night. We lit the FIDO, the whole system worked like clockwork and they landed safely.

It was during this time a lot of Jamaicans had been enlisted into the air force and we had several at Woodbridge at the time. A couple of them had been very naughty and where under close arrest, and somehow they had escaped. Bob Man and I were detailed to go down to Ipswich docks to see if they had attempted to board ships there. We were both armed with revolvers going on various boats asking if they had been seen any rather dark looking gentleman hanging around, on one boat we went to the crew room, asking if they had seen anyone.

Bob tried to explain who we were and pulled out his revolver to emphasise his point, and suddenly there was a mass exodus the crew disappeared out through portholes and doors. The Captain called the local police and asked for their assistance in getting rid of the two lunatics who were attempting to shoot his crew.

After a rather interesting 9 months at Woodbridge the very bad winter of early 1947 hit us and the runways began to break up, and the whole unit moved across Suffolk and we opened RAF Lakenheath which had been on a care and maintenance basis since the war had ended, and we became officially a Master Diversion Airfield. We remained an MDA until 1948 when the 'cold war' heated up and 3 squadrons of B29's of the USAF arrived and I was back with American Air Force again, this time as I/C of a combined RAF and USAF fire section.

This was the start of a very busy three years, but thankfully no major incidents took place, although at one period it got a little tense. A Daily Express reporter, wandered across the Airfield from the Brandon road and placed stickers, printed "Blown up", on about 10 of the B29 Super Fortresses and all hell broke loose. Within two days, two squadrons of the RAF Regiment, a company of the Green Howards, a company of the Sherwood Foresters, a company of the Parachute Regiment arrived on the unit and erected a tented camp in any available space that could be found for them.

Every aircraft was guarded by 3 Americans, each with a rather large nasty looking gun, which they did not hesitate to point at you if you got within a 100 yards of their planes, so you we kept as far away from them as we could. The British troops guarded the airfield perimeter until

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hundreds of workmen arrived and built a barbed wire fence around the entire airfield, so we carried on under very strict security, and managed to get used to showing our I.D card every three or four feet, at least that is what it seemed like.

In 1951 the USAF took over the Airfield completely and I was posted to RAF Hemswell in Lincolnshire and to RAF flying again, we had three Squadrons of 'Lincolns' 83, 97 and 199 ECM, and two squadrons of Mosquito's 109 and 39. Hemswell was a very busy airfield and many incidents took place while I was there. 6 Mosquito's returning from a training flight, and unbelievably all suffered a fuel problem and all tried to land at the same time! They landed all over the airfield, on the perimeter track, on the runway; on the grass luckily they all managed to get down in more or less one piece.

Another unusual incident was when a Lincoln tipped its wing against a concrete block house and ended up lying across the main Lincoln, Scunthorpe road. When we arrived, we were met by what seemed like hundreds of airmen bailing out of every orifice of the aircraft, it eventually turned out that the aircraft was going to an air display at RAF Leuchars and as it was a 'Grant' weekend and lots of clever 'Jocks' had scrounged lifts to Scotland.

The Lincoln had completely blocked the road, so the C.O ordered it to be removed immediately no matter how it was done and told us to cut it in two pieces and drag them to either side of the road. Another incident that was rather a personal one, which stands out in my memory is that in 1952 King George VI died at Sandringham and many worldwide members of Royalty and High Dignitaries were due to fly into RAF Marham. I was detailed to go there immediately and take over the crash line. The C.O told me at 11.00 hrs, and by 11.30 I was airborne in a Mosquito, and almost before I had time to adjust my oxygen mask I was landing at RAF Marham!, being briefed by the Station Commander as to what my duties would entail. After 5 days I returned to Hemswell this time on a very slow train! Shortly after my return I received a letter from H.Q. Bomber Command thanking me for my part in the arrangements in accepting royal visitors at RAF Marham.

In October 1955, after 9 years on the Bomber Command Stations I was posted to M.A.E.E (Marine Aircraft Experimental

Establishment) at RAF Felixstowe. I was to take charge of the 'working up' trails of a new type of fire boat, designated 'P81' this was being designed to cover the new 'Princess Flying Boat', a large passenger carrying flying boat able to fly worldwide. The fire boat was double hulled (the space between the two hulls were used as foam compound tanks) a large 1000 g.p.m. marine pump supplied 4 monitors (2 forward 2 aft). The propulsion gear was completely strange to us, it had 2 discs that revolved under the hull and each disc had featherable blades that pointed downwards, so that as the discs revolved and the blades feathered we could steer the boat forwards, backwards, diagonally, sideways, in fact every which way up, and hopefully not down. We spent many happy hours in Felixstowe harbour and at times creeping up on the Harwich to the Hook ferry and probably scaring the lives out of the passengers when jets of foam shot up alongside them.

There was another reason why Felixstowe was a very happy posting for me, I married my wife Glad, who I had met at Hemswell, and became a 'liver out' and lived in a 'house' instead of a 'bunk' in the mess. However all these good postings come to an end too quickly, the Princess Flying boat was cancelled and my lovely boat with it, and I was posted to RAF Oakington, in Cambridgeshire.

I arrived there to find lots of Vampires flying round in circles, after being away from an active airfield for 18 months.

We covered 2 airfields, RAF Oakington and RAF Gravelly, training Vampire Pilots, a very busy period but happily incident free. After 18 months I was given my marching orders again. This time to the "Antipode's", To the Atomic Test Range at Maralinga in South Australia, north of the Nullarbor Plain. It was 750 miles from the nearest town, and was manned by the three British and the three Australian Services (army, navy and air force), and civilians from Health Physics the atomic test community it was a fantastic mix of trades and skills to cover all the specialised tasks that we were called on to perform.

And under the official secrets act details of some of them cannot be spoken about even now, sounds awfully dramatic, but that the way it goes. In fact some of the buildings were so out of bounds that if they had caught fire we were not allowed to enter them and had to be left to burn! Fortunately nothing happened along those

lines while I was there. There were lots of bush fires which at time were very, very interesting! (a quarter of a mile of fire front can be a little intimidating) however with the help of the Royal Engineers with their bulldozers, and the Royal Navy chaps we coped and the only things damaged were the local flora and fauna!

Our main task was covering the trigger mechanisms, this consisting of standing by the 'explosive firing area,' dressed in full noddy gear and masks, as the scientist's let off rather loud bangs, then we would rush in and put out the bush fire they had started, before Australia went up in flames.

After 12 months in the Aussie bush/desert (except for a 4 days jolly in Adelaide) I returned to the UK and England. Posted to the School of Fire Fighting at RAF Sutton on Hull as a Supervisor Instructor. While at Sutton I attended an instructor's course receiving an A1 Merit. After 7 months at Sutton the whole unit closed down and we moved to RAF Catterick.

There we had a whole airfield to ourselves, with lots of room to hurl our trucks around and to set fire to lots of different aircraft fuselages (ferried in specially for us to set ablaze and put out in our many different ways), hundreds and hundreds of gallons of contaminated octane were always to hand to give us lots of practice. So we "poured" and "lit" to our hearts content, until one day someone surprised us.

We had a Javelin fighter on the pan prepared for a Crash Fire Exercise; we poured 4x45 gallon drums of fuel around and under the aircraft.

As it turned out luckily for us the Fire was going to be lit using a Very pistol. We stood back and the Very was fired, there was a massive explosion the, Javelin leapt about 10 feet in the air and we were thrown about 20 feet from the Pan.

After the exercise was over, on investigation we found out that some 'Bright Spark' at the Fuel Depot had shipped in ten drums of 'Avpin' (a Highly Explosive Engine Starter Fuel). We never heard quite what happened at the Fuel Depot, but I did hear that someone had got his wrist slapped rather seriously!

During this period I had attended an Instructors Course and Instructor Supervisors course at RAF Uxbridge. Back at RAF Catterick I instructed on the Regiment Officers Fire Courses, SNCO Courses and developed the Cross Country Driving Course, with Aircraft Fuselages

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hidden in the Woods and on the opposite side of the River Swale to add to the confusion!

Altogether I had a very happy time at the School at RAF Catterick, along with Tom Woodburn, Ron Shearn, Bob Brean, Bill Ross, Jock McCaffery and lots of other stalwarts of the RAF Fire Service.

After 5 years at the School I was posted to RAF Laarbruch in Germany, back once again to an Active Airfield, with two Canberra Squadrons. As this was in the "Cold War" period Laarbruch had a Q.R.A. commitment so this involved lots of 'Tacivals, with the, Hooter, sounding off in the small hours of the morning.

This meant fully manned crash crews at all times until the Exercise was over, with all sorts of problems thrown at you that had to be sorted out in Double quick time and the results, and actions being assessed by officers of the many Air Forces involved, RAF, Dutch, Belgian, French etc etc. some of these problems could be a little complicated some positively hilarious.

One incident which was a bit dodgy at the time but amusing was about a Canberra on QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) which had developed a leak in the fuel tank above the bomb bay. And AVTUR was pouring over the weapons in the bomb bay.

The aircraft was parked of course, beyond the 'No Go Line'. This in turn was guarded by a USAF 'Snowdrop' and a RAF 'Snowdrop' both had orders to shoot anyone crossing the 'No Go Line' unless escorted by and authorised by an American Officer. Somehow though this order seemed to go by the board that day, so when someone had to go into the bomb bay and plug the leak and wash fuel away who do you think got the job of doing that?

On return to the UK I was posted to RAF North Coates on the east coast, a complete change of territory on the cold foggy coast of Lincolnshire. No aircraft just static surface to air missiles sitting pointing to the skies.

Then after 11 months in Sept 1969 I was promoted to Warrant Officer and posted to RAF Scampton, with 3 Vulcan Squadrons 617, 83, 27 and a Vulcan Conversion Unit. The fire section was a rather large one which consisted of 4 Mk6's, 6DP2's and 2DP1's and as far as I can remember a section of 60 firemen and 4 SNCO's.

This was a very busy period of my RAF life, the Vulcan bombers were armed with

the 'Blue Steel missile' and we always had 4 fully armed Vulcan's on permanent Q.R.A. the Blue Steel missile was fuelled by H.T.P (High Test Peroxide) it was rather dangerous stuff, if you looked at it sideways it burst into flames if any form of contamination got in the equipment used to handle it, it ignited spontaneously, it was stored in stainless steel tanks and the buildings and areas where the work was carried out were constantly flooded with running water and around the dispersal areas there were large tanks of water, where if anyone was splashed by the HTP immediately plunged in.

Once one of the ground crew chaps was splashed with the stuff but as it was raining at the time his uniform was rather wet, it was not noticed. However, a while later when he was in the dining hall his battle dress jacket dried out somewhat and burst into flames, they told me later.

There were lots of incidents at Scampton, some minor, some rather hairy, one when a Vulcan landing in a very strong crosswind shed one of its "bogies", this shot across the airfield hit the corner of the control tower and finished about 20 feet in front of the crash bays. In those days as I have said the unit was on constant readiness alert, and from time to time we were involved in what we call a 'Generation' this consisted of the QRA aircraft dispersing to different airfields' around the country, this meant of course a fully manned crash crew had to be sent out to these airfields to cover the Vulcan flying.

Then one Thursday evening the hooter sounded and the system rolled into action, all the necessary took place and another 'Generation' began, this lasted till the next afternoon and we received the 'stand down', We were just winding up when suddenly the hooter sounded again, what was happening?. We all doubled back to our prearranged slots expecting to hear the worst. Then a tannoy announcement! It was a full stand down the Blue Steel was finished the Navy had taken over our duties. The Polaris submarine was now the UK defence in the cold war.

We designed a new Fire Station next to the Control Tower with proper vehicle bays, crew accommodation and workshops, and we carried on with the normal airfield crash cover.

Then in August 1970 I was posted to RAF Lucca, Malta to the Joint User airfield and looked forward to the next three years in the sun! Several notable incidents took

place during the Malta tour; one when an Italian Air Force Fighter crashed on takeoff and smashed into the airfield boundary fence and a solid Maltese stone wall this jammed the cockpit canopies and trapped two crew pilot and navigator inside. Sgt George Masterson and 2 Corporals broke into the cockpits and rescued the two air crew, for which George received a Queens Commendation for Bravery and the two Corporals receive a C in C's Commendations.

Another potentially bad accident was when a fully loaded Air Malta airliner with 80 passengers and crew arrived at 04.30hrs showing only 2 greens and after flying around to use up fuel it finally landed and deployed the escape chute. Luckily only a very few passengers received minor injuries and although the undercarriage caught fire it was soon put out and the passengers (through the Air Malta airline) sent a letter to the station Commander thanking the Royal Air Force Fire Service for the most excellent handling of a possible tricky situation.

In 1971, on a quiet Sunday afternoon I looked through the window of my married quarter and saw the sky turning black with lots of queer stuff blowing about. It turned out to be a tornado sweeping across the airfield; it had lifted a Shackleton Bomber in the air and smashed into 2 naval helicopters on the dispersal. The crash crew saw this happen from the crash bays and immediately set off to see what they could do, they met the tornado half way over it stopped them in their tracks with the ferocity of the wind.

There was nothing they could do at dispersal and when they returned to the crash bays, they found the wind had ripped off the complete corrugated iron roof from the crash bays and rolled it up like a sardine can lid and crashed it down on the crew room at the rear of the bays. So by answering a call to the dispersal had certainly saved lots of injured, if not the lives of the crash crew. This meant of course that a new Fire/Crash Section had to be built, but on New Year's day afternoon 1972 Mr Mintoff the Prime Minister (or was it president) waited until we were recovering from the night before, and over Malta radio waves told the British to "GERR OFF" He very kindly allowed 7 days for the British forces to get off the island, (very good of him).

It was decided by the powers that be that all the families (wives and children)

would be evacuated by the end of the week. Then started a fantastic period of activity, throughout the nights and days that followed, the whole unit rang with the noise of packing crates being delivered, and hammering of nails in the packed crates. This was also being done around the island for the personnel who lived in hiring's. Then the Army and Navy lads collected all the crates and took them to the docks in Grand Harbour to be shipped home. Lists of names and dates of departures were issued and aircraft began to fly in to take the family's home, it really was a most efficient and smooth operation.

VC10's and Britannia's swooped in and out and by the end of the week all the families had departed and we service men were left with the job of winding up the presence of the British armed forces in Malta. This was after a stretch of 150 years tenure when it became part of the British Empire after the removal of Napoleon in 1814.

It had been agreed that a period of 3 months would be sufficient to wind up the services establishment on the island, there was only 35 of us servicemen left, ATC, Movements and Fire Services to keep the airfield open for our own aircraft and of course the civilian air movements. On the 28th March the last of us were to be lifted off by naval helicopters, and taken to HMS Bulwark a naval aircraft carrier and sail home to the UK. So with only 3 days left our friend Mr Mintoff signed a further agreement for the British services to remain on the island till 1979.

So we unpacked our bags and began the task of putting everything back together again. Equipment began to flood in slowly more bods and families arrived back. I was asked if I would like to remain in Malta, but if I did I would have to complete another full tour of 3 years. I only had 3 years to complete my service till retirement after 35 years and I had to think of house purchase and civilian job so I turned the offer down and returned to RAF Scampton, there hopefully to begin to arrange my change to civilian life.

However life in the 'mob' never went that smoothly, we had put down a deposit on our future home just outside Lincoln, then true to service bloody mindedness I was posted to RAF Gan, I was not chuffed but I went ([and bought myself an umbrella again) and began sweat it out in the sun once more. In truth I cannot say Gan was an onerous task, I had some good

flight sergeants, Glyn Tow, John Sanders, Wilf Longmire, who took the weight of my shoulders and made the job a lot easier. Then of all things, I had to catch pneumonia (on a tropical island!!!!!!) although that allowed me to have 14 days sick leave, and through the good offices of the Wng/Cmr Ops, to break my tour with 10 days back in the UK.

On my return to the UK I was posted to RAF Fairford to take charge of the Fire/Crash section covering the 'Concorde' flight test program. This was a really wonderfully interesting period! The flight testing of the 'Concorde' was really interesting and generally trouble free. There were or two instances when our hair stood on end. Once when on takeoff, it was moving along the runway rather rapidly, and the 'reverse thrust clamshell shields' suddenly operated on the port engines resulting in the pilot aborting the take off and finishing up on the taxiway with large dense clouds of smoke pouring from the undercarriage. The crash crew swung into action and got on with cooling everything down.

On another occasion we were called out to the Concorde hangar to find lots of people rushing about shouting "this" and "that" it turned out the container of the engine starting fuel was leaking on Concorde 002, which was up on jacks. (The engine starting fuel was rather dangerous stuff) the hangar was reeking of the fumes so the only thing to do was to open the doors at both ends and let the breeze take over. Luckily no one had attempted to move any electric switches as a spark might have meant that 002 would have 'taken off' without needing a runway!!

Another incident happened one early summer evening there was an extra strong cross wind on the runway, Concorde 004 landed and veered across the grass and came to rest on the taxiway. Brian Trubshaw who was piloting the aircraft at the time exited the aircraft by means of the Crash Landover ladder. Then when he examined the aircraft he found out one of the undercarriage securing struts was swinging free and asked us to use our ladder to rig up a 'jury strut' until the ground crew arrived to secure it properly. On examination later on it was found that as the aircraft had landed, the cross wind had caused over strain on the undercarriage this caused a lot of concern and the technicians had to put their thinking caps on rather smartish.

The posting to RAF Fairford for the last 18 months of my service was a really enjoyable ending to 35 years of service career as a member of the Royal Air Force. On my retirement from the RAF I joined Hawker Siddeley Aviation as Chief Fire Officer based at Bitteswell in Leicestershire. At that time they were servicing Vulcan's, Shackletons, Hunters, Buccaneers and the Red Arrows Gnat aircraft and later on built up the first Red Arrows Hawks. So it was the same trucks, same job, only thing different was the colour of uniform! Which was from blue to black? So I slipped back into civilian life quite effortlessly. Then British Aerospace was formed and I stayed with them as Chief Fire Officer until 1983 and decided that I had been attached to the end of a telephone 24/7 for long enough and finally hung up my boots and retired gracefully. So when I gave up trying to save the world from going up in flames, Glad and I moved back to Lincolnshire, to just a couple miles from RAF Scampton and became a Honorary Member to the WO'S and Sergeants Mess so I am still in contact with the Red Arrows and the service in general, and still go up to the mess once a week for a game of age). So after a long and happy career in the Royal Air Force I can truthfully say I would do it all over again. As the years advance (all too quickly!!). I still have many many happy memories of the wonderful friends I have met and cherished over the years with whom I have been proud to serve. That I thought was end of my connection with the Fire Service. Then the RAF Fire Association was formed and I became a member (No 35) and attended many reunions around the country. Out of the Blue came an invitation from Buckingham Palace, to a Luncheon hosted by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, I had the privilege, along with Wilf Longmire and Keith Penfold and our wives to represent the Many Many Firemen who had served in the Air Force over the years, (on the occasion of the Anniversary of the end of the 39/45 war) for which I thank the Association. This really was the icing on my cake and I retire happily.

After what I am sure you will agree, was to say in the least an interesting life

***Smokey Fairhurst Passed away 5th April 2011. Ed.....***

