

Brize Reunion & Reminiscences from Steve Carlson

It started with phone call from my old friend Chris Hodgkins; we were at Brize Norton together during the late seventies. Chris said he was visiting the area and asked whether we could meet up for a coffee in my home town of Witney. Having agreed to the meet I then realised it was nearly thirty-six years since we had last met, and decided it would be a good idea to call a few more ex RAF Firemen who had been stationed at Brize at the same time as the two of us. One thing led to another, and after two weeks of ringing round I succeeded in recruiting a further eleven old comrades.

We arranged to meet in the Wetherspoons Pub "Company of Weavers" on Sunday 17th March 2013, and on the morning in question I drew my curtains back to be greeted by a sky full of massive snowflakes falling, and starting to settle. I was gobsmacked; this was just the start I needed. One of the guys then phoned to say he probably wouldn't be able to make it because of the snow, but thankfully, in the end everyone I'd contacted did show up, some with wives in tow.

I hadn't told the lads that a couple our ex-bosses had been invited, so it was a treat to see their faces when Ken Leverett and Pete Daniels turned up, and we had a great day reminiscing about old times at Brize. In attendance were, Steve Carlson, Chris Hodgkins, Stevie Clent, Terry Clent, Dave Whitlam, Tony "Pug" Humphries, Alan Gitsham, Taff Birkin and Joey Birt. Stevie Clent travelled with his wife all the way from Isle of Wight, and Taff Birkin came down the day before from Hull. It all started at 10.30 am and the last of us left the Company of Weavers at 4.30 pm. Taff, myself and our wives ended up in our local club from 7pm for a few more bevvies and managed to see the night out until closing time; all in all a great day was had by all.



Ken Leverett didn't recognise me at first, but I soon jogged his memory by reminding him of the day that ITV visited the Fire Section. Chris Tarrant and the TISWAS Crew were there to help fulfil the dreams of a little lad who wanted to ride a fire engine to a real fire. It was our shift (A Crew) on duty, and after showing our visitors around the vehicles, we decided to do a dry run to the burning area, where everything went well. The next time would be the real thing, and so as branch-man on one of our shiny new Mk 9's, I was keen to display what the RAF Fire Service could do. However, unbeknown to me, during the static demonstration my branch-line had been put back in the locker but not reconnected to the delivery. Consequently when we rolled up at the fire, I ran my hose out with all the enthusiasm of a young fireman showing off to the camera until I twigged that I'd gone a bit too far, and on realising what had happened threw my branch-pipe down in disgust! Needless to say there was much hilarity when the footage was played back at the Domestic Section later with the TV film crew. I often wonder if it's still in an archive somewhere, ready to appear on "It'll be Alright on the Night" at any time.

For my first six months at Brize Norton I was the only LAC on the crew, so had a long stint of tea and toast making while I waited for a new sprog to arrive. I took my share of kicks and punches as was the norm during those times, but it was all friendly banter and is now a fond memory of great times with good pals. I remember Alan Gitsham delivering a Knots and Lines lesson, and as usual, being the newest I was picked upon. When he asked me to demonstrate a bowline on the bight I duly tied a bowline then bit into the rope, which had the rest of the crew in fits of laughter except for Alan. He had had the last laugh the following night though, when he had me map reading; it was a total disaster.

Ken has asked if we can get another reunion organised, maybe a visit to the new fire section at Brize, so hopefully there will be another story to follow.

Steve Carlson