



FLASHPOINT

ROYAL AIR FORCE & DEFENCE FIRE SERVICES ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



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Who To Contact - Officers and Committee

Patron

Air Marshal Sir Roger Austin KCB AFC RAF (Ret'd)

President

Dennis McCann BEM Member 9

Wood View, St Andrews Close, Alresford, Colchester, Essex. CO7 8BL.

Tel: 01206 820715

Vice – President

Ron Brown Member 294

38 Sedgebrook, Liden, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN3 6EY.

Tel: 01793 496307

Email: brown026@virginmedia.com

Chairman

Neil Slade Member 934

29 Orchard Close, Ash Vale, Surrey, GU12 5HU.

Tel: 01252 492111

Email: crashmarksix@sky.com

Vice- Chairman

Howard Harper Member 682

34 The Westering, Meadowlands, Cambridgeshire, CB5 8SF.

Tel: 01223 292298

General Secretary

Mike Clapton Member 704

4 Fairfax Road, Cirencester, Gloucester, GL7 1NF.

Tel: 01285 655314

Email: fire.bucket@btinternet.com

Treasurer

Trevor Hayes

2 Gypsy lane, Hunton Bridge, Kings Langley, Hertfordshire, WD4 8PR.

Tel: 01923 331975

Email: trevor.hayes3@ntlworld.com

Membership Secretary

Brian Jones

Tel: 01269 594065 / 07772 247295

Flashpoint Editor

Reg Metcalfe Member 991

Naddlegate West, Haweswater, Burnbanks, Nr Penrith, Cumbria, CA10 2RW

Tel: 01931 713120 / 07791 075238

Email: advisorp@btinternet.com

AREA CO-ORDINATORS

The Co-Ordinators Committee Member

Vacant

Lincolnshire

Steve Harrison

58 Gospel Gate, Louth, Lincolnshire, LN11 9JZ

Tel: 01507 355740

Email: silverfoxy2k@hotmail.com

Cornwall, Devon & Somerset

Terry Mortimore

32 Newbridge, Truro, Cornwall, TR1 3LX

Tel:

Email: terry_mortimore@yahoo.com

North West & Wales

Vacant

North

Robert Atkinson Member 108

4 Fairway, Stella Park, Blaydon, Tyne and Wear, NE21 4LL.

Tel: 0191 4148176

Norfolk

John Savage MBE

Member 188

3 Mercedes Avenue, Hunstanton, Norfolk, PE36 5EJ

Tel: 01485 532353

Email: jjofrosewood@aol.com

RAF

Steve Shirley MBE Grad I Fire E

16 Rutland Way, Scampton, Lincoln, LN1 2UJ

Tel: 07912 658402

South

John Hurl

34 Copt Elm Close, Charlton King, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL53 8AE.

Tel: 01242 522503

London

“Jess” Jessup

44 Quentin Road, Lewisham, London, SE13 5DF.

Tel: 0208 2187499

Scotland

Alec Robertson

12 Kinclavin Crescent, Murthly, Perth, PH1 4EU.

Tel: 01738 710487

Cambridge & Suffolk

Vacant

Northern Ireland

Kenneth Green

2 Brooklands Drive, Whitehead, Carrickfergus, Antrim, Northern Ireland.

Tel: 01960 372595

Essex

Ben Zaccardelli

98 Lyndhurst Drive, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 1JZ.

Tel: 01708 443593 Mobile: 07702271537

Email: bennie3@btopenworld.com

First of all I hope this edition finds you all well. My sincere apologies for the delay in getting my second edition out to you the membership. My father passed away in February so as you can imagine there was a lot to sort out but here I am ready, willing and able to move forward and continue at pace being the editor of this fine magazine that is so central to the association. This year is a very special year for us all with the 100th anniversary of the Royal Air Force and the 75th anniversary of our very own Royal Air Force Fire service. I was lucky enough to go to the National Arboretum on the 13th of May for the RAFA Centenary Service which I found very moving. Unbeknown to me was the fact that our treasurer Trevor Hayes was also there and sat very close to me. We had a conversation on the Tuesday after the event and could not believe that we had missed each other. Never mind Trevor we will meet at the AGM.

In the last edition I mentioned an idea of doing flashpoint on tour and I am pleased to say that my first visit will be to RAF Leeming Fire section where I will meet up with Gordon Smith and spend the day at the Fire Section. I am so looking forward



Some of the more mature members may have seen this scene in a certain publication that was our bible. This is a diorama that I built from the White Metal Kits that I produce and a 1/72 scale Hunter.

to it. W.O. Simon Marsh is taking over the helm at Brize and has said that I can go down and spend a few days there once he is settled into his new post after having it cushy at Afnorth (Afcnt that was).

On a sad note you will all no doubt have heard the news about the museum. I am totally gutted for W.O. Steve Shirley and his team. I am absolutely certain that Steve will pull it back and move forward with some real RAF Fire Service spirit.

I want to briefly touch on Mental Health. As some of you may know I was diagnosed in 2016 with Complex PTSD, Borderline Personality Disorder and Cyclothymia (on the Bipolar spectrum). Being a bloke and having a lot of pride it took me a long time to accept that I had a problem and no doubt some of that are reading this will be thinking “ Reggie you have always been nuts so what’s different”. The difference is that I made the decision to man up and seek help. I suppose what I am trying to say is that please guys if you think you may have MH issues just get yourself to the doctor and ask for help I am lucky enough to have become a beneficiary of Help for Heroes and spend a lot of time at the Recovery Centre at Phoenix House Catterick. The place is amazing and the staff cannot do enough to help. I have done many courses there. However, what does help the most is the fact that they encourage you to chat openly with other veterans or serving personnel whilst in the centre. If any of our members want any info on H4H or Mental Health issues please feel free to give me a shout as I will only too pleased to help. May I also thank all those of you that have given me support over the last two years since having my breakdown.

Here I go begging again. Guys and Girls please could I have some more material

for the next edition. I have now run out so unless you want this magazine to be all about me, could you please dig deep. Gordon Smith is going to furnish me with a stack of pictures which I am very grateful for but it really is stories. Come on we were a right bunch of rouges so there must be some cracking stories to be told.

Well, summer might (and I say might very loosely) be upon us so get out, enjoy but above all stay safe.

*All the best
Reg Metcalfe Member 991
Editor*

Hello Reg,

I am Tim Webster association member 1013.congratulations on your first edition it is splendid.

I have been involved with Steve Shirley and the collection since 2005/6,which is my connection to the assoc. I own a tacr2a 09AY98 ex RAF VALLEY. in the next issue could you ask the members if anybody served with it and have any pictures of it in service and any stories etc.

I live in Market Harborough Leics next to the M1/A14 triangle. on your travels and you want a coffee etc please contact me ,we have a preservation club in town where the TACR is housed in luxury ,and all the facilities on site my number is 07857461166.

Many thanks Tim

FRONT COVER

This photograph was taken by Museum of RAF Firefighting volunteer Gareth Jordan who took the WOT1 to an event called ‘Baston in the Blitz’ (near Peterborough) this August. The WOT1 was driven by him from Scampton to Cranwell where he stayed overnight and carried on the next day, and pleased to say the WOT1 made it back to Scampton.

Before he left however he took the opportunity to re-create history. As we know WOT1’s also served the USAAF as part of the lend lease programme normally retaining their RAF markings they joined the crash crews to supplement the basic machines available to the Americans. The scene is now set at RAF Molesworth during WW2 and the fire battalion stands ready with their vehicles with a WOT1 and a Dodge Carrier poised to respond to the battle weary B17’s coming home from their latest raid. What a chance to re-create the past with another immaculate fire appliance.

Equipment was very basic. Extra hose, rescue equipment like axes, extinguishers etc. Some were converted to carry pumping equipment and ladders. They could also be used for casualty/ evacuation as the stretchers fit perfect in the rear compartment.

UP TO HIS ELBOW IN IT

It was a dry bright morning on the day my tale begins, it was my turn to be the JNCO i/c the Domestic Crew a duty I always enjoyed because, very often, there were many varied tasks to perform. On this particular morning the Domestic Alarm sounded originating from a teacher at the Primary School on the base RAF Laarbruch Germany, the emergency involved a five-year old boy who was apparently screaming his head off because his arm was jammed up to his shoulder in the grating of a rainwater drain at the edge of the playground one of those grating s which are very heavy with thick slightly curved bars.

Of course the Domestic Crew were quick to respond getting to the truck with the addition of Flight Sergeant Admin, who's name escapes me after all these years?, what I will not forget was the expression on his face and what he had to say when, instead of leaping into the truck I turned back towards the section (almost knocking him over) and made a beeline for the kitchen, 'where the hell are you going says

he, or words to that effect?, to this day I do not know what thought or idea made me delay the departure of an emergency vehicle whilst I ran into the kitchen to grab a squeeze bottle of washing up liquid, but that's what I did?

We were quickly on the scene, although the journey seemed somewhat longer, I think that was because of the muttered comments and strange looks I was getting on the way? The scene on arrival was much the same as I can imagine anyone reading this could picture, kids being rounded up and guided back into the school and a small cluster of adults crowded around a screaming child who just appeared to be laying in the gutter? I approached the group not with an axe or hose, but a bottle of fairy liquid, you can perhaps imagine some of the names used to describe me by my 'ex buddies' after the incident? anyway going down on my knees, something I could do then? I started to talk calmly to the boy trying my best to make a game of pouring cold washing up liquid all over and around his upper arm, I am sure many of you reading

this have experienced putting a ring on your finger only to find it won't come off until some form of lubricant is applied?, well this was exactly what happened, the boy was relaxing because I was trying my best to make the situation into a game, I didn't even need to tell him try to free his arm, it just seemed to slide out as he moved to try and dry his tears.

Of course there were a round of cheers and pats on the back from all concerned, what could have resulted in a major incident involving all sorts of cutting and lifting equipment and a very traumatized child, was solved by concentrated washing up liquid. I would dearly love for someone to explain to me how I managed to see the solution to the problem even before I actually arrived at the scene? but I was glad I did, I don't suppose the little boy will play with his marble so close to a drain ever again...

Museum of RAF fire Fighting

We are very sad to announce that the Museum of RAF Fire Fighting is unable to proceed with its planned official opening, which was due to take place on the 4th May 2018 at their newly acquired home at North Warren Road Gainsborough.

Due to the continued expansion of the Hexadex Group, it has been necessary for them to re-acquire the site for business purposes. Regretfully we will have to vacate North Warren Road by the end of September 2018.

Everyone connected with the Museum is shocked and devastated at losing this facility and wish to acknowledge the continued support of West Lindsey District Council, the local community and the Hexadex Group in developing the museum thus far. The Museum team was looking forward to renewing and establishing new relationships with the

local community, visitors, clubs and societies.

The Museum continues to work hand in hand with a number of local Councils, Heritage Networks and Armed Forces Veterans Groups in order to achieve its aim of finding a permanent residence to house a unique collection which has often been described as being of National importance. The dedicated team of Volunteers won't give up on their quest to find a permanent location for this popular visitor attraction.

The Museum phone line, website and all other social media avenues will continue to function. Your continuing support for these will be essential while the museum searches for a new home.

We remain active members of Aviation Heritage Lincolnshire and the Fire Heritage Network UK.

With this year being the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Royal Air Force, and the 75th anniversary of the RAF Fire Service, we hope that the Museum will remain in The Bomber County of Lincolnshire. If you know of a location suitable to house the collection, then please contact the museum urgently. We will consider every option!

The dream will continue... watch this space, but above all, please continue to support us.

Talks with Hexadex group are still ongoing and therefore it is imperative that the matter is not discussed on any forms of social media. I am sure we can count on your support in this.

Taff the Fire Part 2

Chapter 4

My existence BC, that is 'Before Call-up', had been nice and steady, now I found myself on what is often called 'The roller-coaster' of life.

The organised routine of training, the slap-happy transit camp, the moments of laughter and the moments of sadness. El Adem where the whole camp turned out at the sound of an aircraft, then RAF Luqa. Here planes waited for the odd vacant slot to land or take off, twenty-four hours a day. Luqa, besides being one of the busiest RAF airfields in the Mediterranean, also doubled as the civilian International Airport for Malta.

For all the ups and down's of Air Force life there was the levelling effect of having every need catered for. I didn't have to think, "What's for breakfast?", "Where am I going to sleep tonight?", "How do I get to my next posting?", "When is my electric bill due?" Every little detail of one's life had been taken care of. All you had to do was obey the last order given by the next rank above you. Any problems? Pass them up the line. When they reached the top someone delegated them to someone else. They passed them on, so by the time the problem finally reached the person responsible, it was too late to do anything about it. The problem finally ended up in the "File closed" cabinet. Life is easier for all under this excellent system.

Stres? I can't even spell it.

Compared to the laid back attitude of El Adem, life at Luqa was a real culture shock. The super efficient Sergeant arranged for me to have fire training, sit RAF education exams, receive driving lessons on public roads and he continually monitored my progress. The final test was a fire of a few thousand gallons of aviation fuel. This was poured over an old aircraft with dummies placed inside. I had to take charge of a fire crew, drive them to the fire, rescue the dummies, put the fire out and then write up a full report on the incident. Sarge was very impressed with the end result, so much so that I was promoted to the rank of 'Local acting Corporal' and put in charge of one of the crash fire crews at the main airport.

My pride came down with a sudden bump on the first day as a Crew Commander when the dreams of fantasy were replaced

with the facts of reality. A fully loaded passenger aircraft developed steering problems on takeoff. It crashed into a caravan just off the end of the runway and burst into flames. The fire crew did an excellent job, I could not fault them but, sadly, a few lives were lost.

When the fire is out, the ambulances have left, and one is left looking at the scene, you think, "Could I have done more?" Every person you speak to tells you that you did all that was possible, you and you alone still wonder, "Did I?"

In one day I had passed over the bridge from boyhood to manhood. It was a hard journey for me; I pray others find an easier route.

Life goes on, possibly in a more sombre mood for a while, and then it does get better. I know.

During the years to come I would experience many more disasters in my job as fireman. The immense feeling of satisfaction when a life is saved can never balance the sadness one feels when you fail.

Having spent twenty-two years in the crash rescue service, I could easily fill many pages with accounts of incidents attended, but I have no intention of turning this into a disaster novel, so detailed accounts of future crashes will not appear in my story. I hope the reader will understand.

Life whilst off duty was just as busy. I returned to the bars where the ladies of the night plied their trade, to those who could afford it, which excluded us. The local cinema still played 'Perfidia', now beginning to sound a bit worse for wear. We wondered if there would be a special 'Gala' night when a replacement record was eventually found. On the musical side, I now not only played the organ but had also become a member of the RAF Malta Military Band. The need for an eight-day week with twenty-five hours in each day crept up on me.

During one of my rare quiet moments, whilst relaxing in my room, the door opened and a mate of mine popped his head in and said the famous last words, "Taff. As you're not busy can you do me a favour?"

Wise men should answer "No"

I, being a fool said "OK"

All he wanted was a hand to answer a few

letters that had arrived in the post. A few! Let me explain. He had put a request in a popular magazine reading:

Lonely, good-looking RAF lad stationed in Malta would like a few pen pals to write to.

All letters answered.

On entering his room there were letters everywhere and half a dozen unopened mailbags stacked on his bed.

Being a man of principles and having written, "All letters answered" this was going to be one heck of a favour. We enlisted the help of a mate who worked in the main office. He duplicated a few thousand letters stating:

"Dear,

Due to the thousands of replies, I am sorry that I am unable to reply to your letter personally, etc etc"

The other lads on the section joined in, helping to open every letter, put a name on the duplicated replies, address envelopes and stick on stamps. Letting other lads on the camp sift through the letters, for a fee, solved the cash problem regarding the stamps. Due to this system many of the letter-writers did end up with pen pals. It took weeks of hard work but all letters were answered, though I vowed that the next time I hear the words "Taff. Can you do me a favour?", I intend to do a quick disappearing act.

One day Sarge called me into the office and asked me when I intended taking some time off. I had not given the matter much thought but he pointed out to me that as I was half way through my service why not take this year's leave (Two weeks) and next year's leave all at once, thus giving me four weeks off?

I checked on the chances of a free trip back to the UK but as my leave covered the Christmas period, no chance. My next stop? The BEA (British European Airways) ticket desk. Again, as it was the Christmas period, no cheap flights. If I wanted to return for the holiday season I would have to pay the normal fare - Fifty-two-Pounds, return. This was a small fortune in those days but I decided to splash out. After a year in the sun I felt like a change, anyway Christmas was a time for

spending round the fire with family, so I bought the ticket.

Once again the many stop journey, Rome, Nice, Paris, UK but this time in real luxury. Only the rich flew in those days so every passenger had an armchair, their own table, meals served on best china with silver cutlery and stewards who waited on you every minute of the journey.

Years later when flying to Spain, with my knees stuck against the seat in front, trying to eat dry meat off a paper plate with a plastic knife and fork, the lukewarm coffee dripping from a plastic mug balanced on a tiny tray - my mind drifted back to BEA Silver Wing service. Progress?

Christmas 1952 was the rare greeting card type. Still, clear, frosty nights, the smoke from the chimneys drifting slowly upwards to the starlit sky. An artist's dream. Old friendships were renewed and various relatives visited. All listened intently to my stories of sand, sun and the strange people who lived in far off lands. My deep tan looked a bit out of place in the middle of December, but added realism to my patter.

As the days sped on, I realised that the phrase "Travel broadens the mind" was indeed fact, not fiction. My 'Stay at home' friends now seemed to be a bit boring, their conversation restricted to work, or football. Their life plodded on day after day, same routine, same pastimes, same friends, same every-thing. If you have ever wondered where Henry Ford found the idea for his monotonous production line system, have a look at the average man in the street.

On first joining up, I felt home sick, now I couldn't wait to return.

Once again the many stop return journey to Malta, but this time one of the stops lasted rather longer than expected. On our approach to Rome airport, an engine failed. Now most people will have noticed that gardeners minds are in top gear whilst in other peoples gardens. Decorators always notice the finer points in other people's houses. Chef's palates are extra sensitive when eating out at other restaurants. At this stage of my story one should have noticed that my speciality at the time was "Aircraft crashes". Now sitting in a twin-engine aircraft when one engine decides to have a day off is something that specialists in aircraft crashes become very interested in. One of the thoughts that flashed through

my panicking brain was, "I knew I should have packed my spare underwear in my accessible hand baggage, not in the hold!"

Looking out of the window and seeing the fire tenders lined up at the side of the runway did nothing to reassure me. Thankfully we landed safely.

Due to the faulty engine, we were stuck in Rome. The spare part would have to be sent out from the UK, so BEA whisked us off to a top four-star hotel and soon we were seated in the restaurant, being waited on 'hand and foot' and a small orchestra playing quiet music in the background. The waiter arrived with the menu, and that was the start of our problems. Being given a French menu by an Italian speaking waiter can be a bit off putting if you are Welsh.

The solution? - Let the waiter choose.

The meal arrived. It smelt fantastic, looked like giant size minced beef, and was, the waiter assured us, the hotel's speciality. On the same flight, and therefore at the same table, were three fellow RAF lads, also returning off leave. We enjoyed the 'Hotel speciality' but were a little curious at the ingredients. At the hotel bar later, we met up with an English couple who visited Rome quite often and "Spoke the Lingo" as it were. They helped satisfy our curiosity regarding the food. It was snails. Four pale faced airmen made a quick visit to the bathroom. When you spend most of your life eating meat and two veg, or fish and chips, snails do not come under the heading of 'My favourite food'.

With the meal, and our visit to the bathroom, over and done with, we returned to the bar. The night was young and so were we. After a short discussion four young airmen decided to see the sights. A quick visit to the hotel's "Bureau-de-change" and our few Pounds Sterling were changed into a few million Liras. At last I could call myself a millionaire. Rome is a fascinating city and we were captivated by its sights and driving habits. It seemed that the most essential requirement for all vehicles and drivers was — blast away as often as possible on the horn. Courtesy, traffic regulations, steering, brakes, tyres etc. came bottom of the list of priorities, or so it seemed. After seeing the Coliseum, St. Peters, and the hundreds of fountains we headed for the nearest bar. Looking at the wine list, beer being noticeably absent, we worked out what our millions of Lira

would buy and ordered two bottles of a rather cheap wine.

When the bill arrived, there was the price of the wine, as shown on the wine list, plus "Local Tax", plus "Service Charge" plus optional "Tip".

A quick mathematical calculation revealed that there was no way this bill was going to be paid. The look on our faces told the waiter all he needed to know regarding our financial situation. The look on the waiter's face as he summoned four rather tough looking bouncers told us all we needed to know. He took what little money we had and the bouncers escorted us into the kitchen. We were given the choice of "Police or washing up?". We chose washing up, as the RAF does not look lightly on young airmen who upset the local police in a foreign country. On entering the washing-up room and seeing the mountain of dishes, I wondered if this chap had contacted every hotel in Rome, offering to do their washing up, no doubt for a small fee.

Many hours later, and with hands that definitely did not "Look as soft as one's face", we returned to our hotel, worn out and a lot wiser.

The following day, plane fixed and in better condition than us, we left Rome and headed back to Malta and duty.

One of the many tasks that firemen were expected to carry out, besides fighting fires, were 'Flare-path' duties. In the fifties, electric lighting on runways did not exist. To illuminate the runway at night paraffin flares were used. They looked something like giant oil-cans, with a wick sticking out of the spout. These flares were placed at one hundred yard intervals each side of the runway and lit whilst night flying was in progress. Serviced (wick trimmed and can filled with paraffin) during the day, they were put back out during breaks in flying and re-lit as soon as darkness approached. One busy evening it slowly got darker and darker and with no sign of a long break, we knew we were going to have a problem. Suddenly the air traffic controller informed us that there would be a short break soon and could we do an extra quick lay-out?

Our answer - "Leave it to the experts. We'll get it done in no time."

Normally two men, one for each side of the runway, laid the flares out and then

lit them once they were in their correct position. Our brilliant plan was to have one man each side as normal on the tailgate of the lorry carrying the flares, but have another man on board, getting them ready and pre-lit. This would save time, as the lorry would not have to stop whilst we lit the flares after placing them on the ground.

All went well for the first few, then the chap lighting them tripped. In seconds the whole lot went up in flames, the driver panicked, jumped out of the cab and ran for his life, followed by the flare laying gang, followed by the lorry, still going strong. This strange state of affairs was due to the fact that the driver had left the vehicle in gear! We now had a three-ton vehicle, self-propelled and looking like a portable Guy Fawke's bonfire, heading down the main runway. The fire crew were called out, but fighting a four-wheeled bonfire on the move is not easy, in fact, not possible. Thankfully the whole lot headed for a remote corner of the airfield and came to rest in a ditch. What if it had headed towards the main aircraft parking area? I dare not even think of the end result. The air traffic controller, the driver, the flare lighter, my mate and I all had a right telling off by the boss, but like "A problem shared", a "Telling off shared", isn't so bad.

Thankfully my stint on the flare lorry ended soon after and I returned to normal fire fighting duties. At the same time it was noticed that a few cracks had appeared in the runway surface, so a firm of contractors was brought in to solve the problem. The solution was to pour pitch, in its molten form, into the cracks. This involved a portable boiler into which solid lumps of pitch were placed. When melted, the stuff was poured into the cracks, solidified, and all would be well. Within an hour of starting work, the contraption burst into flames and we were called out. I decided to use CO2 gas to put the fire out and it worked. On my return to the section the boss gave me a right telling off for not using water. He was convinced that pitch was a solid, and I, unsuccessfully tried to point out that as it was heated, it was a liquid. I say unsuccessfully as, in the RAF if the boss says "Pigs fly", pigs do. Two days later the pitch contraption once again burst into flames. The boss was at hand so I suggested he came along. When we arrived, the boss, full of bravado, grabbed a hose and shouted "Water on". The water

hit the fire, there was a loud bang, and as the smoke died down all we could see was this black tarry statue, where the boss had been. Luckily, the only real damage done was to his pride and not him. I felt like saying the famous words "I told you so", but the look on his face as we peeled the tar off was enough for me, and my pride.

Whilst based at RAF Luqa I watched the film 'Malta Story', being made. The film had many of my great film star heroes in it and having seen their fantastic feats on the silver screen convinced me that these men were invincible. One day Alec Guinness, in full flying gear, climbed into the cockpit of a Spitfire, pulled his goggles down and gave the signal to start engines. At that point the director shouted, "Cut". Alec Guinness climbed out of the plane and a real pilot climbed in, pulled his goggles down and gave the signal to start engines. The director shouted, "Roll", the engines started up, the plane taxied and took off. My hero couldn't fly! That was the end of my awe for the great stars of the silver screen. Now I even have my doubts when I see passionate love scenes, but that's another story.

Chapter 5

Due to RAF life tearing along at a pace I had some difficulty in keeping up with, time flew by. The realisation that my two years National Service was nearly over came as a bit of a shock. For two years I had been thinking, with dozens of other young lads, "Roll on demob". Now it was here I wondered "Why?" Life, though a bit hectic at times, was on the whole quite enjoyable, but the "Roll on demob" attitude had been imprinted in the subconscious area of my brain. As, due to being told what to do for such a long time, this was the only bit of my brain still working, it took over. My boss asked me to sign on in the RAF, pointing out that I had a great future in front of me. Looking back, he was right, but I had youth, inexperience, foolishness, a subconscious brain and "The grass is greener in the next field" attitude. He lost, I won. I opted for demob. A few weeks later the familiar multi-stop journey back to the UK came. My uniform was handed in and once again I became Mr. Jones.

For a while the novelty of this seemed great. It soon wore off as I realised that one still has to work for a living, in or out of

the RAF My first job, as a trainee manager with F W Woolworth and Co, demanded more than I was prepared to offer. The hours were long and the pressure to make more and more profit as the days wore on, proved to be a bit stressful, to say the least. I left. My next job was in the rolling mill of a steel company. Hard work but good hours and even more important, good pay. As technology improved, the work was transferred to a more modern plant. Machines did everything and, although the pay was still well above average, the job was now rather boring. I left. Half a dozen jobs later and I still was not happy.

Out of work the daily plod of my mates proved equally boring. Football, the kids, mother-in-law problems, and what the wife was cooking for tea seemed to be all their life revolved around.

Changing jobs and mates by the week was, obviously, not going to solve the problem. Something had to be done, soon! I looked back over my life and realised that my brief time in the air force had been the happiest days. There was only one solution.

RAF get ready. Jones is on his way back.

Once again I visited the recruiting office, this time voluntarily. It hadn't changed, in fact I'm sure the same tatty welcome mat lay at the entrance and the equally tatty flag flew over the door, but this time they seemed to be saying "Welcome back mate".

I felt at home.

Whether the recruiting Officer received extra pay for each recruit he signed on I don't know, but he really made me welcome. He offered me half a dozen different trades, pointing out the advantages over just re-enlisting as a lowly fireman.

Whilst considering the various options, I looked back at my many jobs in the recent past, should I try something different? Logic took over. I knew that my days in the Fire Service were happy ones so why start looking for "Greener grass in another field"?

I re-enlisted as a fireman, and that was that.

Having no desire to go through the marching and cross country running bit of

joining up, I asked the recruiting Officer about it.

He said "You have my word that you will avoid all that."

I asked for it in writing, to which he replied, "Isn't my word good enough?"

I said "OK"

He then asked me to sign this bit of paper confirming the fact that I would serve for the required number of years.

I replied "Isn't my word good enough?"

He got the point. I got my bit of paper and he got his.

During the few years I had spent out of the RAF the fire trade had advanced quite a bit. New fire tenders, new equipment, new ways of doing things, etc It was "Back to the fire school" for me. Another great advance, compared to my two years National Service was the food. It was first class. Four star hotel quality without a doubt.

My previous knowledge came in very handy and I soon picked up on all the new fire equipment. Due to my previous experience I was often asked to help out on instructional duties, covering for staff that were sick or on an odd day off.

Also, due to my previous experience, I was a bit quicker off the mark when it came to taking advantage of the system I palled up with another re-entrant, Fred, who was as crafty as me. On Wednesday afternoon all recruits were expected to take part in some sports activity. Now Fred, like me, had this allergy to energetic activities, especially if there was no chance of gaining a few pennies at the end. Turning up at the sports assembly point, I could see Fred deep in thought. Suddenly, his face lit up.

"Taff" he said, "We are going cross-country running".

Whilst others joined up with activities such as rugby, soccer, swimming, cricket, etc, Fred and I tagged onto the back of the cross-country group. As we set off on our run, Fred whispered "Slow down".

Soon our fellow runners disappeared over the horizon. We peeled off down a side-track and came to a halt on the banks of the local river. Sitting down on the bank puffing away on a cigarette, this is the life, I thought. A few yards away, another contented chap was spending his

afternoon fishing. Strolling over to him, we started chatting to our new-found friend. He seemed such a nice bloke and ever so well spoken. He asked us what we did. We laughed and told him of our crafty scheme. Fred then asked him what he did for a living. He replied, his well-spoken voice now sounding rather stern,

"I'm the commanding Officer of this RAF base. You two had better catch up with your fellow runners. Tomorrow I'll check up to see if you arrived back the same time as the rest. If not, you're for it."

Now what "It" was, I don't know and had no intention of finding out, but I have never run so fast in all my life. Thankfully we did catch the other runners up, though we were puffing more than they were. I wonder why? Fags, extra effort, or possibly a combination of the two.

After five weeks of training all recruits spent a week, working nights, in the station Fire Section. Normally this meant a week sitting watching TV and sleeping. Well, let's face it; one does not expect to have the RAF fire school catching fire. When Fred, I and four other lads turned up for our stint, we were introduced to the fireman in charge, shown to our bed spaces and instructed in how to change channels on the TV

All went well till about nine o'clock, when this loud bell started ringing. The chap in charge picked up the phone and shouted

"Move, you lot, there's a chimney fire in married quarters!"

We leapt onto the fire tender and set off. On arrival we could see smoke billowing out of a chimney, and a rather distraught woman, waving like mad, at the front door of the house. Super efficiently, we entered the house, doused the fire and gave a sigh of relief. Nothing too serious and, "all's well that ends well." Heads held high, with a feeling of pride that only experts ever experience, we strolled back to the fire tender.

With that some bloke comes up to us and mumbles something about seeing some smoke coming out under the roof gutter. Out came a hose and ladder, in the house, into the attic and we were ready for the worse. By now the lad in the attic, holding

onto the hose, checked to see if he could see any smoke.

Nothing.

After a few minutes, and getting fed-up of just standing there, he shouted, "What's going on?"

The lad on the landing thought he had shouted "Water On" and repeated the order. Within seconds, the fireman at the pump had revved up the engine, opened the required valves and sent water at one hundred pounds-per-square-inch shooting through the hose. The lad in the attic, balancing on one of the rafters, was taken by surprise, lost his balance and fell through the bedroom ceiling — complete with hose, now spouting hundreds of gallons of water a minute.

In no time at all, the water filled the bedroom, flooded onto the landing and made one of the most beautiful waterfalls you have ever seen, as it flowed down the stairs and started to fill the living room. By the time we had realised what was happening, the damage had been done, and the boss shouting "Water Off" sounded very similar to the phrase the woman of the house shouted at us.

We spent the rest of the night trying to clear things up, and failing. The following morning was spent trying to explain things to the Senior Fire Officer, and again, failing.

Towards the end of our training the "National Blood Transfusion Service" team arrived on the camp. Now the Commanding Officer, wishing to make a good impression, decreed that any airman giving a pint of blood would be issued with a weekend pass. Now in those days, everyone worked on the Saturday morning, so the chance to have a nice long weekend off was sure to bring in plenty of blood donors. His plan would have worked if the Sergeant in charge of the passes had given out the passes after the blood had been given. He gave the passes out first. Result: - three hundred passes given out. Seventy pints of blood collected. In all fairness, seventy honest firemen was good going for a RAF Camp!

After eight weeks our training was complete, or sort of. Anyway we were all given a certificate and off we went to our various camps. As all the camps already had firemen, I assume they knew exactly

what to expect; for, in the RAF only a fool fails to prepare himself when a new fireman is posted in.

Chapter 6

I arrived at RAF Gaydon, Warwickshire in the autumn of 1962 and fell in love with it straight away. The camp itself was just like any other RAF station except for the location. Situated a few miles outside the attractive town of Leamington Spa, and with easy access to Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick, Coventry and, by express train, Birmingham, it was perfect. The lads on the section were friendly and welcomed all newcomers with open arms. Our Boss, an old World War Two veteran, was a cheery old soul and as long as he was topped up with regular mugs of tea was quite content to let life plod along at its own pace.

Possibly one's memory plays tricks with past recollections but I am sure that in those days summers were warm and sunny, autumns cooler but still pleasant and when winter came you could guarantee frost and snow on a regular basis. The seasons could be depended upon. As the days shortened and winter drew near, tell-tale columns of smoke could be seen rising from the chimneys of the many houses, known as married quarters, which had been built near the camp. Winter was on its way and coal fires were being lit in living rooms ready for an evening where families sat and listened to the wireless, read books or just chatted to each other. TV was a luxury few could afford. At meal times, with no Big Mac's, no cans of Coke, no ready meals, no pizzas etc, mum prepared everything and the whole family sat round the dining table at meal times.

Happy memories.

In the sixties most houses had open coal fires, lovely to look at, wonderful to sit in front of and if you haven't tasted toast made in front of an open fire, spread with fresh farm butter and home made jam, you haven't lived. For all the plus points of an open fire there were also the minus points. Sometimes reluctant to light, smoky if the wind was in the wrong direction, dusty and continually needing topping up. The other big disadvantage for us, as firemen, was the dreaded chimney fire. Unless chimneys were swept regularly, soot would accumulate, catch fire, and could be quite dangerous. During my first December at

Gaydon we were called out to eighteen chimney fires.

Now the Fire Officer realised that by applying 'Sod's Law' there was a good chance that his chimney would one day become a victim of this curse of the coal fire. The idea of his house catching fire did not appeal to our boss and, considering his position; it would be a bit embarrassing to say the least. To play safe he asked me and another new arrival to pop round and give his chimney a quick sweep. Armed with two dozen chimney-rods, a chimney-brush, a bucket and a large blanket we set off. My partner was a RAF boxing champion and built like the proverbial brick out-house.

On arrival, we set to work and he insisted on doing the hard graft of pushing the rods up the chimney. As we worked the rods up and down at an exceptional speed, soot seemed to come from everywhere. The idea of the blanket was to hold it against the fire grate and somehow prevent the soot entering the room. This system of doing things proved to be of little use and soon the living room started to look like the inside of a coalmine.

Ah well, we could always clean up later. Whilst still pushing the rods up the chimney we heard a muffled crash outside. Intent on getting the job done we ignored this, but soon after we could hear the sound of laughter, so I went to see what was going on.

There, in the street were dozens of onlookers, all laughing their heads off and looking up at the roof. Sticking up about twenty feet above the chimney, which seemed to have lost its chimney pot, was the brush and half a dozen rods waving gracefully back and forth in the breeze. On the way back into the house I noticed some fragments of glass by the back door. Closer investigation led to the discovery of a hole in the roof of the conservatory and a broken chimney pot on the floor. The mystery of the muffled crash had been solved, worse luck. I pointed out to my mate that we were there to sweep the chimney not the sky and it might be a good idea to get the rods down as quick as he could before the crowd outside grew any bigger.

In the panic to pull the brush and rods down the chimney as fast as he could, he failed to keep the threads, which locked the rods together, tight. This slight lapse of

concentration soon became apparent when we calculated that twenty rods, complete with a brush, had gone up the chimney.

Now we had only eighteen rods on the living-room floor and no brush. A bad omen. We looked up the chimney and there, just out of reach, we could see the other two rods still attached to the brush. Try as we did, there was no way of reaching them. Admitting defeat we got in touch with the Camp's Works Services Department and out came their team of experts. After various failed attempts their boss decided the only solution was to cut a hole in the wall of the first floor bedroom, so he and his team got to work. With that, the Fire Officer arrived.

How does one explain a crowd of laughing sightseers, a missing chimney-pot, a smashed conservatory, a living-room full of soot, half a dozen workmen, also covered in soot, trundling up and down your stairs, and a hole in the bedroom wall?

With hindsight I think the boss would have preferred a chimney fire. As for my mate and I, The Fire Officer's comments I consider rather unprintable and best left to the imagination. Anyway, I was unable to find some of the words he used in my dictionary, so I am unable to check for spelling errors. Luckily for us he was posted soon after and we were able to come out of hiding, though we were the laughing stock of the camp for many months after our little disaster.

The other chimney fire disaster at the camp thankfully involved other members of the fire station. Some bright airman had come up with a novel way of fighting chimney fires. Instead of fighting the fire from the bottom up with a small hose attached to the rods, he devised a system where someone climbed up on the roof and a small amount of water was allowed to trickle down the chimney. As the water hit the fire, it turned to steam and extinguished the fire. This, in all fairness, did seem to work, until :—

One wet and windy night the crew turned up, one lad climbed up on the roof, water was turned on and . . .

Out from the house next door came a rather irate man covered in soot. With the wind, rain and smoke from the fire, the lad on the roof had got the wrong chimney pot!

It was at RAF Gaydon I palled up with Roger, a gentle giant of a man with a bright

blond crew-cut that was so thick you could have swept a cow shed out with it and still have enough bristle left to do the same the next day.

His sister had married a chap who we'll call Roy. In his boyhood days he had made the mistake of playing with some railway fog detonators. One exploded and he lost his sight in both eyes. He never moaned about his disability, in fact he was quite a cheerful character, as I was soon to discover.

Fully equipped with a guide-dog he had secured a good job in London and got on with life. Now anyone with a guide-dog has to return to the guide-dog school every few years for refresher training. It's not just the dog that has to be checked out to see if it is doing its job correctly, but also the owner. As the old saying goes, "There is no such thing as a bad dog, only bad owners."

Anyway, as it happened, one of the training centres designated for this course was in Leamington Spa, just down the road from us. As soon as Roy and his wife booked into one of the local hotels, Roger and I popped down to see them. We took the three of them, ie Roy, wife and dog, round the town, went out for the odd meal in the evenings and one day — Well you know what lads are - A night on the pop.

The missus stayed in the hotel and off we went. I don't think we covered half the pubs in Leamington, but I can assure you that by the end of the night we were in a rather sorry state and even worse, lost. Panicking, and wondering where Roy's hotel was, Roger and I were quite worried. Roy calmly patted the dog on the head, said something about hotel and off we went, dog in front, then Roy, then Roger and I hanging on sheep-like at the rear. As we approached the hotel Roy laughed and said, "You sighted people! Bloody useless."

We got the point.

The ability of Roy and his guide dog to overcome most difficulties came in handy for Roger and I a few months later.

We were staying at Roy's house one weekend and we decided we would like to see the sights of London. Roy offered to show us round. First hurdle; the complicated London Underground system. Roy knew exactly which station we needed, where to change lines, which

platforms to use, what the fare would be, etc, and the dog took us through all the busy interchange stations with no problems at all.

Above ground Roy would say, "If you look to your right you will see St. Paul's Cathedral, then over there are the houses of parliament, if we pop up this street you will see the changing of the guard in a few minutes time, and whilst we are here (Westminster Abbey) we might as well pop across the road and see the Methodist Westminster Central Hall and then it's only a short walk to the Roman Catholic Westminster Cathedral."

It was unbelievable. A very humbling experience that made me realise that we who have eyes, look at many things, but we see so little.

(To test this theory you must have gone up the stairs in your house thousands of times. Don't cheat. Without going to check, how many steps are there?)

One of my jobs at Gaydon was to carry out a weekly test of the fire appliances located in the top-secret bomb dump. To gain entry each week I first had to go through a security check at the main camp police station. There I was issued with a new pass every week, I drove to the bomb dump, showed my pass and RAF identity card at the outer gate, passed through a courtyard and then had to identify myself again at an inner gate and repeat the identity and pass procedure. Then and only then was I let into the inner sanctum. Even with all this security I still had to be accompanied at all times by a police escort.

One night a gang of us were returning from town after going to the local cinema. All were dressed in civilian clothes. We were passing the Fire Section the fire alarm went off - there was a fire in the bomb dump.

As the duty fire crew sped off in one of the fire tenders I suggested that as a fire there could be quite serious, the rest of us would take the spare fire tenders and follow on. We weren't expecting to get into the place, but at least the vehicles would be there if the duty crew needed them. On arrival, this motley bunch of lads, dressed in our civvies, were waved straight in without any formalities whatsoever.

The fire turned out to be a minor one and was soon put out. On leaving the site I stopped and commented to the Officer

in-charge, "Every week I come up here, everybody knows me, yet I have to go through endless security checks. Tonight a bunch of scruffy yobs drive up and you wave them straight in?"

His reply:

"Taff, when this place catches fire, if the Kremlin turned up in a fire engine, I'd let them in."

With no TV, visits to the local cinema in Leamington Spa were a regular occurrence. One evening a gang of us turned up at the local picture house. At the end of the row of seats we had been shown to was a little old lady, all by her self. Half way through the show during a very quiet bit of the film one of the lads passed wind, rather loudly. Half the cinema turned round and looked at our row of seats. The lad at the end, without batting an eyelid, turned to the old lady and said in a loud but clear voice, "Don't worry madam. I'll take the blame."

One film that I will always remember is the great biblical epic 'The Bible'. A gang of lads from the Fire Station had made a special effort to see this film which was being shown to packed houses at every cinema in the land. Full colour, wide screen, stereophonic sound, and a cast of thousands, this film had it all, not forgetting the story of course.

On leaving the cinema we chatted about the fantastic special effects, (well fantastic for the sixties I can assure you.) I jokingly commented, "Yes, it was a good film but not as good as the book."

One lad replied, "Oh! Have they brought the book out?"

The other cinema incident I will always remember was when a mate and I asked two WRAF girls out to the cinema. Mine was quite a pleasant lass, but the one he had chosen thought she was God's gift to all men on earth, a real snob. We had stood in a queue for about half an hour waiting for the first house to finish then we started to go in. Neither of us lads had much money, and the seats were priced at 'One-and-nine pence' or 'Two-and- six

pence'. On reaching the ticket box I said, "Two 'One-and-nines' please."

My mate followed and said the same. With that his girl said

"I am not going in the 'One-and-nines."

He turned to the cashier and said, "Change that love. ONE 'One-and-nine' please", and walked in by himself, leaving miss-high-and-mighty standing in the foyer.

Once again the nights grew longer, the weather grew colder and the thought of another few months of chimney fires and freezing cold sent me up to the main office:

"Application for overseas please", said I to the clerk at the desk.

"Where to?" he said, to which I replied, "Anywhere hot".

He looked me straight in the eyes and said, "You said anywhere. There's a vacancy for a fireman driver in RAF Gan. You'll get that no problem." And that was that.

The only question on my mind was;

Where the heck is Gan?

Chapter 7

For some unknown reason, great explorers always head for the highest and coldest places like Everest, or the North and South Poles. Possibly one of the reasons I will never be famous is that you can give me somewhere flat and hot anytime.

Now when you look at the world you will notice it's just a giant ball. At the top and bottom are two white bits and they are cold, very cold. Around the centre is a line, the Equator, which is the hot, very hot bit.

Where is RAF Gan?

Right bang on the Equator. It is only a tiny little island and you will not find it on the average map because it's so small. A mile and three quarters long and three quarters of a mile wide, plonk in the middle of the Indian Ocean. The actual runway starts on the beach at one end and ends on the beach at the other end. Any RAF plane that lands short of the runway or one that fails to stop at the other end becomes a Royal Navy Ship, sort of.

Gan itself is one of a thousand islands that form The Maldives archipelago, a line of islands starting just south of the bottom of India and ending at the Equator itself. All the islands are formed in little groups

called Atolls. Basically each group is the rim of a sunken volcano with a lagoon in the centre. Over thousands of years the sea washed parts of the rim away, leaving a circle of little islands with shallow channels between them, shallow enough to walk across at low tide. Over the years coconuts floated ashore, birds dropped seeds and lush vegetation sprung up.

Man followed, survived and prospered, living mostly off coconuts, a plentiful supply of fish and some imported food like rice etc. The coconut tree, or rather the coconut palm is more than just a source of food. The plant supplies wood for building, leaves for roofing, coconut milk, husks for fires and the juice when fermented provides a rather potent brew stronger than the many ales or lagers we are used to. Drink too much of it and one will certainly end up stoned, with a hangover to beat all hangovers the following morning. Fresh water is no problem. As the seawater seeps through the coral that forms the base of the islands; the coral filters the water and it becomes fresh enough to drink, though it does have a distinctive taste, which you soon get used to.

So there you have it. Clear crystal blue seas, skies to match, all year sunshine, palm trees gently swaying in the cool breeze always present due to the low lie of the islands, most only three or four feet above sea level, dazzling white beaches, safe swimming in water you don't have to test with your big toe, multi coloured tropical fish, fantastic sunsets that artists couldn't even dream of, the list is endless. There was one drawback, neatly summed up in the song from the musical 'South Pacific', which goes, "What don't we have?"

"We don't have dames."

Twelve months of monastic existence on a paradise island? Not exactly what most lads in their early twenties desired. There were a few chaps who were not bothered by this problem, but we won't follow that line of thought, if you get the gist of things?

The island had all the facilities of a major town. It generated its own power, had canteens, clubs, a church, a cinema and even a fully equipped hospital complete with operating theatres. It was completely self-contained. It had to be, the nearest main RAF base was in Singapore, one and a half thousand miles away. It was quite

a busy airfield, though nothing actually stayed there for long. Its main purpose was to serve as a refuelling stop for aircraft flying to or from Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore and all stops en route. Whilst planes were being refuelled the passengers were taken off, fed and had a walk around to stretch their legs. The news that there was a possibility of some female passengers wandering around in skimpy clothing due to the heat usually brought the island to a stand-still, and some of the lads who had been stationed there for months had to be held back. Tense moments!

Now anyone stuck out there for a twelve-month stint, with just a brief spell of leave in the middle, had two choices. Grin, moan and bear it, or, make the best of it. During my stay out there I played the organ in the station church, formed a church choir, put popular musical shows on in the cinema, kept fit by swimming every day, wrote a regular article for our local news sheet "The Gan Island Post" and thanks to a first class education department, I gained four GCSE '0' level certificates. Oh! I also had to go to work, worse luck.

The problem with work was that aircraft are more fuel efficient in cool air, therefore most long-haul flights to and from the Far East took off at either end during the evening. We were roughly half way, so by the time they reached us it was two or three in the morning.

One of the shows we put on in the station cinema was 'Maria in the Red Barn', a Victorian music hall type of show. Now you will have noticed from the title that the leading role called for a girl called Maria. Problem? There were no girls on Gan.

Now a rather pretty young lad whose name and trade I will not reveal for professional reasons (As they state in many film credits "All names and places are fictional. Any resemblance to any person living or dead is purely tough luck." Or something like that.)

Anyway suitably attired, in a revealing costume and bits of foam padding in the parts where his body that lacked the necessary bumps, the result was amazing; not only for him but also the audience.

Originally planned as a one-night show it went on for three nights plus an extra

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Vulcan B2 XL358



On the night of April 16th 1967 at about 21.15 hrs the crash crew was sitting in the crash bays at RAF Binbrook. Flying had just finished and we were waiting to be stood down for the night, when a call came through from air traffic that a Vulcan had crashed and exploded at RAF Scampton and assistance was required urgently. Air traffic were prepared to release one foam tender with a crew of four. The rest of our crew were stood down for the night.

The 5A, and 4 crew volunteers was detailed. The only crew member, other than myself, that I can recall was Coss Costello. We were both SAC's at the time. Coss was in the driving seat in a flash. I'd never seen him move that quick. I was in the left seat and got stuck with the hand bell.

RAF Scampton is about 25/30 miles from RAF Binbrook. As it was dark, and not much other traffic, we made it in record time, which is just as well as operating a hand bell is really hard on your arm. The journey must have taken about one hour. There were no dual carriageways in those days.

On arrival at RAF Scampton we were waved straight through the main gate with an RAF policeman on board giving directions. We soon arrived at the crash site, runway 05.

As we arrived, the aircraft or what was left, an Avro Vulcan B2 of 617 sqdn registration XL385, was much as you see in the photograph.

The cockpit was lying on its side, looking

clean and untouched as though it was not part of the rest of the aircraft, which was totally burnt out, with much smoke and a few remaining small fires, in particular the wheels. The situation was well under control with the whole remains covered with foam. A foam blanket surrounded what remained of the aircraft.

The Binbrook crew were quickly put to work in support of the Scampton crash crew who must have been well and truly knackered by this time. While they had a brake, we assisted by continuing to place foam in patches where the blanket was becoming thin. There was still a strong smell of fuel as there was so much about.

Later, I recall, along with others, being detailed to place sand around all the wheel hubs which were still burning.



There was a very strong crosswind that night which made it almost impossible to fight the running fuel fire. The RAF Scampton crash crew had done a great job.

We were there for many hours throughout the night and I do not recall returning back to RAF Binbrook. I probably was asleep, but who cares, Coss was the driver!! We had to return by 7am to service the MK 5A as flying always started at 8am.

RAF Binbrook, at that time, had 5 squadron stationed there with it's MK6 Lightnings.

The accident report from aviation Safety network is as follows:-

Occupants 6, Fatalities 0.

Destination was Goose Bay.

Aircraft written off, damaged beyond repair.

At the start of the take-off run there was an explosion in No 1 engine. Debris from the engine ruptured fuel tanks. The aircraft was destroyed by fire.

According to an Air-Britain report it's possible that two engines may have exploded as the aircraft was preparing for take off. The engines were run up and an HP turbine disc failed.

The crew, which included an ATC cadet whose parachute opened as he vacated the aircraft, escaped safely.

The explosion in No1 engine was probably caused by a failed swirl vane in the combustion chamber. This probably passed through the power turbines, No1 engine, which was at full power, surged, the LP compressor disk broke away,

passed through the aircraft, flew across the airfield, passed through an RAF Police land rover, crossed a minor road and came to rest in a nearby field.

For some years the threshold of runway 05 at Scampton, where this accident took place, was displaced by some 500ft until the runway had been repaired.

A subsequent fatal incident at RAF Cottesmore some time later, on 30 January 1968, was probably of a similar engine failure.

It would be interesting if any other members recall this accident on the night of 6th April 1967, or the one at Cottesmore in 1968.

afternoon matinee, Its success could have only been due to the fantastic script, my brilliant musical rendering on the borrowed NAAFI piano, or possibly Maria. Why he/she always received a standing ovation at the end of every act has always baffled me. I, as musical director, and the rest of the cast received no such adulation. I will let one little secret out. The lad, alias Maria, had something to do with the medical centre reception and for some other unknown reason the number of lads needing sick treatment on the days following the show went up by two-hundred percent.

I still wonder why our show had this strange effect on so many airmen.

The other main attraction seemed to be the NAAFI bar. At the start of my story I mentioned the fact that two or three pints seemed to be the required amount of beer to render the average airman legless. With a few years of training, (NAAFI bar — not fire), the two or three pints soon became three or four, then four or five, and so on. This had what is called “The inverse law effect”. ie The more one consumed the fatter one’s belly became and the thinner one’s wallet. It didn’t really affect me as I’ve always managed to stay slim and with the free beer generated by my piano playing abilities, my wallet still grew. One night I had popped over the NAAFI to get a thermos flask of tea and a sandwich, intending to have a quiet night in reading a book. I got as far as buying the tea, but there was a crowd in the bar and they wanted a sing-song. My arm was twisted and soon I found myself sitting at the faithful old piano with the usual copious pints being delivered at a faster than normal rate.

At eleven o’clock the duty Sergeant should have arrived and called “Time gentlemen please.” As it happened the duty Sergeant was also partial to the odd pint and had no intention of leaving the Sergeant’s Mess bar, so we carried on drinking. At some unearthly hour we decided to call it a day and after staggering over a heap of drunken bodies, yours truly complete with thermos flask, heading back to bed, or that was the plan. I felt terrible and decided to pay a visit to the toilet block. That’s the last I remember. My next recollection was of a

heavenly voice, sort of deep and echoing, shouting:

“Taff, Are you there?”

I lay where I was, trembling and wondering what the heck was happening to me. Then, bravely, I slowly opened one eye and to my horror all I could see was millions of bright shining stars.

“I’m dead” I murmured quietly and shut my eyes tight, preparing my apology speech to my maker for the few (well perhaps a bit more) faults I had acquired since joining the RAF.

Bravely, and a bit wobbly, I stood up and opened my eyes. There was my mate calling my name, his voice echoing through the tiled toilet block. On the floor lay the remains of my thermos flask, smashed to bits with the morning sun reflecting off the thousand or so fragments of broken silvered glass from the inside. Out came one of the most famous sentences in the world.

“Never again”

Normally this statement is usually forgotten as soon as the bar reopens but for some unknown reason I haven’t been stoned since. I still go out with the lads but stick to ‘Coca-Cola’. In fact I think I have more enjoyment watching them make a fool of themselves. Little do they realise how daft they look at times and, on a more serious note, how much damage they are doing to their health - and wallet. But, live and let live, and as I used to say whilst living in England:

“If everyone in the world was perfect, we would all speak with a Welsh accent.”

The padre (RAF vicar) on the island was a cheerful old chap, about five foot tall and five foot round the waist. Here was a man who could drink gallons and still remain standing whilst all about him had fallen. He regularly used to challenge the naval crews of visiting supply ships to a drinking contest, and never lost. Possibly when one has neat alcohol running through ones veins, you can’t really get drunk.

His other great love was golf. Many a Sunday morning he would arrive at the station church and outline the order of service.

“We’ll start with just two verses of ‘Onward Christian soldiers’, speeded up a bit, then a short reading. Then we’ll leave

out the next hymn and go straight into a short prayer, then sing one verse of the next hymn, followed by a short sermon. We had better sing all the verses of the last hymn but play it fast, that way I’ll get a round of golf in before lunch.”

In all fairness, he had his faults, but was a man any airman could turn to in time of trouble, he had a listening ear and was respected by all ranks, high or low. He didn’t walk around the base with a halo on his head, though he did ride round with a sign on the front of his bicycle which said, MAKERS REP.’

There were times when he would jump to the wrong conclusions regarding his ability as a minister of the gospel. At the end of one service he came up to the organ and asked me if I had noticed his ability to hold the attention of the congregation during his sermon. I didn’t have the heart to tell him the reason for the attentiveness of his congregation. Just as he had started to give the sermon two chameleons, the little lizard like creatures with the ability to change colour, appeared on the wall behind him. Slowly eyeing each other the little lizards got closer and closer to each other. After a while they met and started to make mad passionate love right in front of us, but behind the padre. How does one tell a preacher his sermon had been completely ignored and the staring congregation were engrossed during the service by two chameleons having sex.

On another occasion he joyfully decreed that he had managed to convert a few local Muslims to the Christian faith; no mean feat you may say. At work the next day I asked one of the converts what had attracted him to the church. His answer:

“It’s the middle of Ramadan” (the religious period when all true believers in the Islamic faith fast) “and I’m starving. Now I’m a Christian I can eat as much as I want to.”

Sorry Padre, filling ones belly is not an ideal conversion in anybody’s book.

One member of the congregation told me that the Padre’s sermons definitely had a mystical healing effect. When I asked for a more detailed account the lad said, “I used to suffer from insomnia. Now during church services I have no problem in dropping off to sleep.”

One thing both the Padre and I were

proud of, we broadcast to the World. During our tour out there the BBC World Service decided that their Easter service, normally broadcast from great cathedrals and churches all over the World, would come from our little station church on RAF Gan. The broadcast, called "Easter on the Equator" was transmitted worldwide, with yours truly at the organ. Fame at last.

Like the Padre, I also had a go at this thing called golf. Now in theory it is quite simple. There is this little white ball that you place on the ground. You have this sort of club that you hit the little white ball with. The ball then goes up in the air, covers a few hundred yards and lands in this little hole in the grass. Now though this has been done in one shot by some clever berks, most people take three or four separate shots to get the ball to reach its destination. Then there was me. Now when the ball goes down the little hole in the ground you can't see it, you seem to have lost it. I achieved the same effect of losing the ball but not in the little hole. Regardless of my efforts, my instructor's efforts and endless advice from various golf club members, the stupid little white ball seemed to have a mind of its own and disappeared every time I hit it. Most club members preferred to stand on the green near the little hole whilst I was playing. That, they reckoned, was the safest place on the golf course when I played a round. No way was there any chance of me landing a ball anywhere near there. At the rate I was losing golf balls, the club would soon be out of spares, so for the members benefit, my instructors benefit, (he had started to behave most oddly) and finally for my benefit, (I have never been so frustrated in my life), golf and I parted ways never to meet again. The day I resigned from the club they had a party. Wasn't that a lovely gesture?

Jumping completely out of sequence and into the present day:

The RAF pulled out of Gan a few years ago and the top travel companies realised the potential of this beautiful island paradise with ready-made accommodation, power plant, hospital, runway, etc. and bought it. It now cost a fortune to stay there for a week or two. Some lads who were stationed there have returned and have told me it hasn't changed a bit. The other evening I was having my usual 'Coke' at the local when I walked two regulars

all tanned. I commented, "You've either stopped washing or you've been abroad." With great pride they told everyone of the rather expensive three-week holiday they had been on in the Maldives. I commented, "It's nice there isn't it". They then asked if I had been there and how long had I stayed, as most people only go for two weeks. When I replied "Twelve months" I think it rather took the wind out of their sails. Silently I thought to myself, "And you paid a fortune. I got paid for being there!"

As my time to leave Gan drew near I naturally looked forward to my return to the UK. It's strange but as nice as guaranteed sunshine greeting you every morning when you climb out of bed, silver sand, crystal clear blue water, swaying palm trees and all the other attributes Gan had to offer, after twelve months a cold breeze and a shower of rain is something you look forward to. Strange things us human beings; agreed?

Now all I had to do was wait for my flight. The day before my flight was due an aircraft carrying a load of explosives landed en-route to the UK. Now hazardous cargo aircraft are not allowed to carry passengers, but they do carry firemen. I was a fireman so was offered a seat. I took it, just to get home a day early. With hindsight I think, "Me sitting there on top of a load of high explosives, just to get home one day early?" Thank heavens all went well and we got home in one, not a thousand, pieces. Given the chance now, being a few years older and wiser, I think I would have hung on for twenty-four hours. Remember, for every dead hero there are millions of live cowards and I think I'd prefer to be one of the latter group.

Chapter 8

On return to the UK I was posted to RAF St Athan, South Wales, the largest RAF base in the world. I hated it. It had the advantage of being close to my home but the camp itself was massive and due to its size, nobody new anyone, it was a camp of a thousand strangers.

As usual I ended up playing the church organ, quite a nice instrument, a real pipe organ and not the electronic type found on most bases. One Sunday there I was playing away and joining in with the singing. At the end of the service this chap came up to me and commented on the fact that I obviously enjoyed singing as

well as playing. He belonged to the 'Barry Male Voice Choir' and asked me if I was interested in joining. The idea appealed to me so I agreed. He arranged to pick me up at my billet on the Tuesday evening and off we went.

"Where do you actually work?" he asked me, to which I replied, "The Fire Section".

I then asked him where he worked to which he answered, "Station Headquarters." and that was that.

During the weeks to come we went to the choir practice every Tuesday evening, followed by a few drinks and a chat at the local pub, me on my 'Coke' and he with his pint. One day, whilst at work the boss came rushing in, obviously in a state of panic, shouting,

"Attention. Commanding Officer present!"

Now the CO at RAF St. Athan was an Air-Commodore, a very high ranking Officer and a visit to the lowly fire station was a rare event so we all panicked. As he entered I thought "I recognise that face". His first words to our trembling boss were,

"Is Taff on duty today?"

The boss looked at me as the CO calmly strolled over and said, "Sorry Taff, I won't be able to make choir practice tonight, there's a bit of a do on in the Officer's Mess."

I mumbled something about him not telling me the truth regarding his position.

His reply:

"You asked me where I worked and I said Station Headquarters. That's not a lie."

We had a good laugh over it and he left promising to pick me up the following week. Our boss nearly had a heart attack. The Air-Commodore and SAC Jones were mates; unbelievable!

From that moment on the boss treated me with a bit more respect; I wonder why?

Whilst at St. Athan I discovered the fact that anyone playing the church organ on a RAF base was entitled to claim the princely sum of four shillings (20p) a week. It was hardly worth the effort of filling in the form, though I think that was what they were hoping for. I decided to let the weeks mount up and then put a claim in when the money had reached a few pounds. When I put my first claim in the

rather snotty accounts Officer rang me up and told me that, considering the amount of paperwork involved, it wasn't worth the effort of his staff to bother with such a small amount.

I agreed with him and suggested that, to make it worthwhile, perhaps he could increase the amount and we would both benefit from this gesture. The huff at the other end of the phone told me all I needed to know. His staff did the necessary work and I got my few quid.

The Fire Station at St Athan was located in an old aircraft hangar, in the far corner of which was the sole toilet and wash-hand basin. This created a slight problem due to the fact that both Officers and airmen had to use the same facility, something the RAF or any branch of the armed services frowned upon. To paraphrase the old poem 'East is East and West is West, and ne're the twain shall meet', in the forces 'Officers is Officers' and 'Airmen is Airmen', and ne're the twain shall meet.'

To overcome this problem the wash-hand basin had two soap dishes. The one on the left, which contained soft scented soap, had a sign above it, 'For the use of Officers only.' On the other side was a bar of carbolic soap, again with a sign above it stating, 'Airmen's soap'. Similarly there were two rolls of toilet paper, the soft roll marked, 'For the use of Officers only' and a roll of cheap hard paper marked 'Airmen'. Every time I heard the Officer complaining to our boss "Somebody's been using my soap", I thought of the story of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' and the words "Somebody's been eating my porridge."

Another example of these strange rules came to light when the section was extended and the fire Officer had a new office. This meant that the Warrant Officer could now move into the old fire Officer's room.

Problem: Commissioned Officers are entitled to fully fitted carpet; where as Warrant Officers are only entitled to a normal carpet. Sending out for a carpet fitter solved the problem. He arrived, cut six inches off the border in the Warrant Officers room and all was well.

'Long in the tooth' Sergeants took great pride in their ability to pull young Officers down a peg or two if needed. I remember

one young Officer going up to a mate of mine and saying, "Sergeant, I need to make a telephone call. Have you any change?"

The Sergeant, putting his hand into his pocket, replied, "Yes mate".

The Officer, sounding rather pompous, said, "Sergeant, may I remind you of our respective ranks. Please address me as Sir. Now we will start again."

"Sergeant, I need to make a telephone call. Have you any change?"

Sarge replied "NO SIR!"

I wasn't really happy at St Athan and when a chap from Gaydon wrote to the camp asking if anyone wanted to swap postings with him, as he wanted to be near his family living in Cardiff. I jumped at the chance.

RAF Gaydon was still the happy camp I remembered from my early days, and I soon settled into the day-to-day routine. By now I had gained my heavy goods licence and also passed my driving instructors course. Normally when taking out raw recruits on driver training, I started off on a deserted area of the airfield and then progressed to camp roads before taking them out on the public highway.

One day the boss asked me to take out a chap who had done two driving courses but had yet to pass his test. I naturally assumed that this chap would be fairly competent so took him around the camp to check on where he was going wrong on his driving test. We headed up the main camp road and at the end, just outside Station Headquarters, was a roundabout covered with the CO's pride and joy — A fantastic display of the finest rose bushes you have ever seen. As we approached this beautiful display I asked the lad who was driving the truck to turn right. Observing that he had made no effort to neither change down a gear nor give any hand signals, I pointed out this slight error in his driving technique. With that he took his right hand off the steering wheel and made the necessary hand signal and at the same time took his other hand off the wheel and changed gear. The three-ton truck we were in shot straight ahead and ploughed into the middle of the roundabout.

As the old TV advert used to say "Roses grow on you." If you think a three-ton truck covered in roses is a strange sight,

you should have seen the CO's face as he came out of Station Headquarters. My excuse that I assumed the lad could at least drive a bit, having done two driving courses, cut no ice. The CO's roses were in one hell of a mess — and — so was I.

Besides playing the organ at the station church I was now in demand for RAF weddings in various churches in Leamington and the surrounding area. The local vicars were only too well aware of crafty firemen and if the church fee was to be paid by cheque, some form of security was always asked for until the cheque cleared. Often wedding guests were fellow RAF or WRAF personnel, and sometimes the comments were not too kind. After one wedding three WRAF lasses stood outside the church admiring the bride. Tinted with a bit of envy one commented,

"He'll have her knickers off tonight."

The next one sarcastically said, "Everyone on camp has had her knickers off."

Not to be outdone, the last one said "Oh! Has she started wearing them?"

Hell hath no fury like a woman; doesn't matter about the 'scorned' bit.

There was one really hard-case on the Fire Section (I actually played for his wedding, and if you think he was hard, you should have seen his wife!). One night while out on the 'pop' in town, he decided to show off his prowess with his fists, by boxing with his reflection in a shop window. Suddenly his real fist met with his reflected fist and there was a terrific crash as the window disintegrated, followed by the sound of two police Officers shouting "Hey You!"

As the lad ran off, the Officers gave chase. He ran down the main street, turned off up a side street and in an effort to lose the policemen ran up a little back lane.

Bad move; it was a dead end.

Looking up he saw a small window at the back of a building. Climbing up, he broke the glass (obviously a favourite pastime) and climbed in.

Another bad move.

It was the back window of the police station, and as he climbed through it and dropped to the floor inside, the immortal words "You're nicked" rang in his ears.

Beyond the RAF Fire Service

Twenty Eight years ago I made the journey to basic RAF training, for me it was from Middlesbrough to Swinderby. It felt like an eternity to get from my home town to Newark, funny how all the journeys in the Service for the next 24 years after that never seemed as long! Next stop after Swinderby was Manston, the Basic Firefighters course I was on in 1989 was one of the first batch after the move from Catterick. I like a lot of new Firefighters from that era had to bare the shame for a fair few years from our more experienced colleagues that we weren't trained in North Yorkshire! Once we arrived at Manston we were shown to our accommodation and met by our course Tutors. I won't mention their names; the Cpl was the good cop and the Sgt was in my eyes from the moment I met him the bad cop! He wasn't of course but as a young man just turned 19 he scared the you know what out of me! I'd lost a lot of weight at Swinderby, as soon as Bad Cop laid eyes on me he called me 'Beaker' (from the Muppets) a name that thankfully never stuck! It will be no shock to many that when I left for my first posting at Conningsby 9 weeks later, that Bad Cop had turned into an inspirational figure. It was through him I found my passion for training and the aspiration to be a TG8 Manston instructor myself one day.

Well that day came 16 years later, my first posting as a Sergeant. I was involved in a fair few courses as a second instructor until I was given my first basic course. It was then that I really started looking back and thinking of my instructors in 1989, thinking if I could inspire a new generation of RAF Firefighters in the way that they did? I'd like to think that was the case. The Basic Firefighter course was always my favourite to deliver. I truly felt the achievement of getting those lads and lasses through a tough 16 weeks, I also keenly felt their sense of achievement too. I hope they look back at their time with me as fondly as I do during my basic training with my Tutors and that they don't refer to me as bad cop! Two of my previous students refer to me as Fire Dad, it's an accolade I couldn't be more prouder of.

After leaving the RAF in 2013 I had a couple of jobs, the first being Fire related

with an Industrial brigade. They were a fantastic professional Fire Service and it was an extremely hard decision to leave them after just 9 months. It's was probably a harder decision than when I left the RAF as I knew like many before me the time was right. The challenge of a training role in Renewable Energy lured me away. I suppose it could have been viewed as a left field move for me; when I said to the person who recruited me (coincidentally an ex RAF Firefighter) 'I don't know anything about Wind Turbines' he said 'So! You can train people though can't you?' I left that role 18 months later to take up my current employment back we're I feel most comfortable training Firefighters at the International Fire Training Centre (IFTC) referred to by most as 'Teesside'.

It's not unique that a Manston or Catterick Instructor has found themselves delivering training at IFTC, my fathers cousin Ex Flight Sergeant John Goupillot did it and I currently work with one of the RAF's (Ex) finest. I do consider it a privilege though having had the opportunity to have worked at 2 internationally renowned Fire Training Centres. I often get asked how different it is working at IFTC compared to Manston? I suppose the first and maybe not necessarily the most obvious is that IFTC is a business and that the Firefighters I train are customers. The training is just as intense and they are committed but they can go elsewhere for their training unlike the RAF Fire Service. The second is doing the same thing but in a different way, the terminology is a-lot different. So much so that during my first month I was told that we would hosting a Sapho's convention! I thought 'OK a convention for Bird Scarers'. It was only later I was told that the convention was for SAFO's (Senior Airport Fire Officer's)!

Like Manston my favourite course to deliver is the Firefighter Initial. The men and women on this course have the same desire to join the Fire Service but not to serve in the way we did. I do look forward to weeks 4 & 5 of the Initial course as that's when RAF Firefighters leaving the Military for employment within a civilian airport Rescue Fire Fighting Service (RFFS) join in what's known as the 'Bridging' element. It's here that they make the transition over

to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) way of doing things. It's a pleasure for me and also for the Initial Delegates to have such highly skilled and motivated Firefighters join them. It's only my opinion and it may be biased but they stand out a mile from other experienced Firefighters with no Aviation Firefighting experience who join a week earlier.

It is with fingers crossed that IFTC and it's parent company Serco await the results of the contract award to take over the running of the MOD's Fire Services.. If successful the MOD's Fire Services and in particular TG8 will again train in the North/North East of England and cap a full circle return for the RAF Fire Service. I may be one of the generation who just missed out on the Caterick experience but I'm relishing the chance to train RAF Firefighters again just down the road...

*Cheers
Lee Goupillot (Guppy)
Flight Sergeant (Retired)*

Ascension Island - Ewan Dunsire

In 1995 I was posted to Ascension Island for the second time. Two weeks before I left we found out my missus was pregnant with our first child, needless to say when I got there I was a bit concerned as she was in the early stages of pregnancy. The padre at the time seeing my mind wasn't on the job, organised for me to have a week back in the UK even though I had only been there a month, without boring you, everything was fine and a few days later I was headed back to the South Atlantic.

I rolled up to Brize Norton with what I thought was time to spare, as I was checking in this warrant officer eyes me up and declared "your Late"!!, checking my watch I pointed out that I was on time with half an hour to spare. He then went on to explain that someone should have been in contact as the clocks were going back (whilst we were in the air I may add) and this somehow screwed the whole schedule up. Any how in the end he was cool about it and passed my check in, to a SAC who went through the process of checking me in. I had only been back for a few days, therefore, I only had hand luggage with me so I didn't need to check any bags in, the process didn't take long so in no time I was sitting in the departure lounge at Brize Norton.

After about 20 minutes there was a PA announcement for a Mr Gardner to go to the check in desk. Didn't pay much attention to it and had a fleeting glance around the room as it was crammed with mostly squaddies. A few minutes later the same announcement was made for Mr Gardner to please make himself known at the check in desk. I remember thinking that it was a good job he was a Mr at least they won't chew his arse. All of a sudden a red faced SAC approached me, all flustered, he looks me dead in the eye and says "I'm sorry Mr Gardner but you are required at the check in desk, we have been calling you", I looked behind me thinking maybe the poor chap had a squint, when I realised he was, in fact, speaking to me, I corrected him that I wasn't Mr Gardner but SAC Dunsire. He spun around and disappeared as quickly as he had arrived.

Sometime later, the aircraft was now late in taking off and people were getting restless when the PA went again asking for My Gardner to go to the check in desk, this time I went towards the check in desk when the flustered SAC approached again looking even more flustered and went on

to explain that there had been a mix up, they had, in fact, put my luggage in the bins for the Falkland Isles and they were now trying to retrieve them so they could put them in the correct Ascension bins. The poor lad almost vomited when I told him I only had a carry-on and they were wasting their time looking for my non-existing stuff, he disappeared, then a few minutes later they started the boarding process, "could people in rows 1 to 7 (whatever the number was) please board now.

I was on the aircraft quickly as I had been allocated seat 1j once everyone was seated the doors closed, the aircraft pushed back and I was delighted as I had no one sat in the 2 seats next to me.

The aircraft climbed into the sky and after a short time the captain switched off the seatbelt signs, I took this opportunity to stretch out over the 3 seats of the front row. A lovely Trolley dolly asked if I wanted a blanket to which I agreed and accepted gratefully, wrapped up warm and stretched out, I fell asleep.

I was awakened with a gentle nudge from the same trolley dolly who asked if I wanted to eat, I agreed and sat up, as I looked to my left there were 4 people sat in the middle 4 seats of the front row slightly forward of myself. A distinguished looking gentleman on the second seat in smiled, nodded and asked if I was comfy, I replied with a big grin, a thumb up with a hell ye. He chuckled and carried on talking to the folk sat next to him, it was then I realised or I thought I was looking at Mr Gardner.

Dinner was soon served and I should have known something was wrong when I was asked if I wanted a glass of wine but my young stupid mind thought it was my Christmases and birthdays all rolled into one, with my wine in one hand I caught the eye of the distinguished looking gent again so I nodded and raised my glass (it may have been a cup, all I remember is the wine in it) and he did the same. To this day I cannot for the life of me figure why I would just accept a glass of wine on an RAF flight as normal!!

Anyway, after a great meal I settled back down into my 3-seat heaven and fell asleep again, hours had passed as I woke when there was a change in the engine pitch and the nose of the aircraft dipped slightly. We were finally on the descent into the Ascension Islands. A time later after an uneventful landing we finally

parked at the airhead on Ascension, the captain welcomed everyone to the Island with a weather update and asked if everyone could stay seated until they had disembarked a VIP.

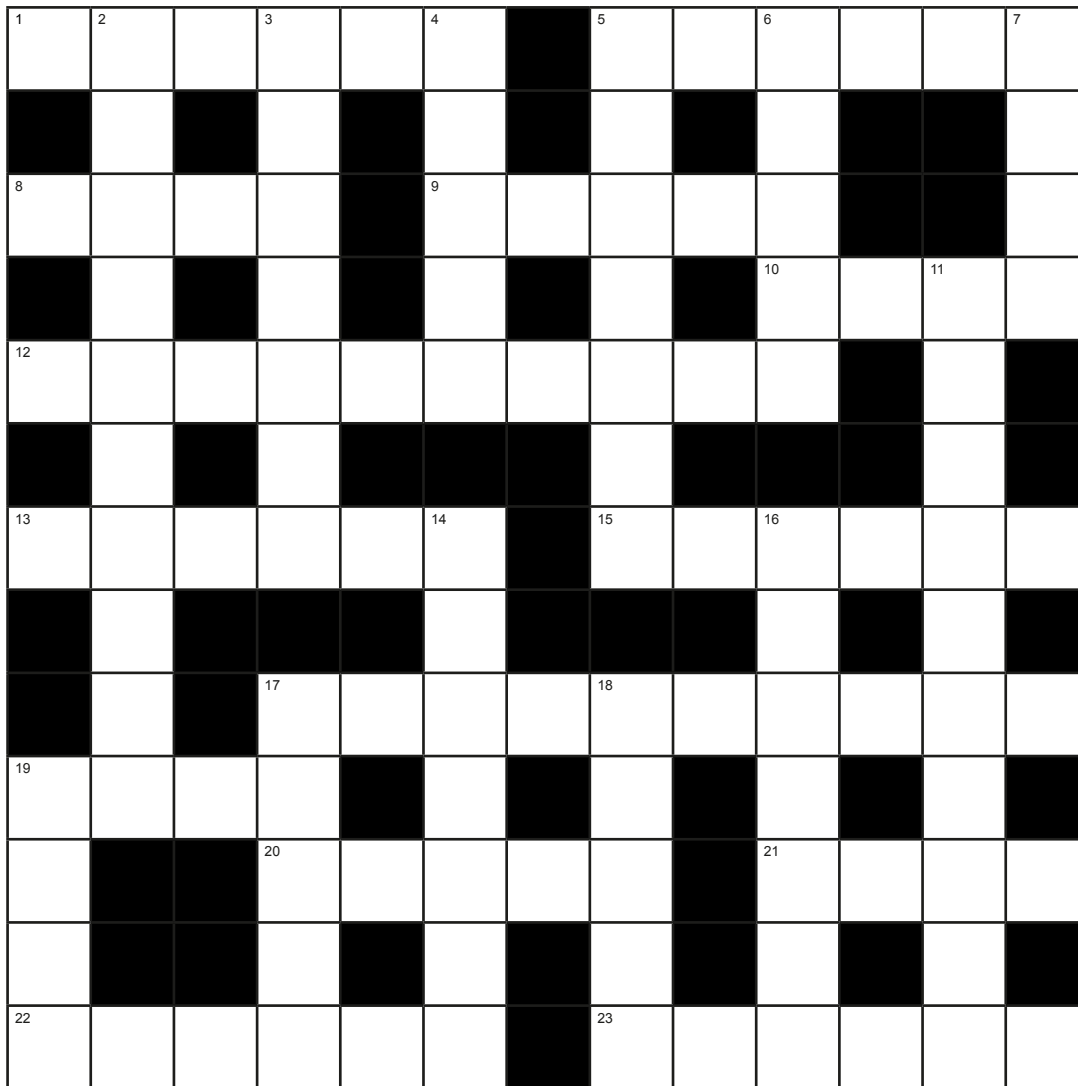
The Trolley dolly beckoned me over to the front door (L1), I grabbed my bag and went to her and she motioned for me to go down the stairs, as I looked down all I could see was a group of people and 2 cars, one was the station commander's car, the first one though was what I believe now to be the Islands administrators car, both flying flags on the front wings. I turned to the Trolley dolly and blurted out that there must be a mistake, she smiled and gently guided me out the aircraft and onto the steps, by this time everyone on the ground was looking smiling at me so the only thing I could do was go down.

On reaching the bottom step the Station commander stepped forward to put his hand out for a hand shake and said "Mr Gardner, welcome to Ascension Island", I grabbed his hand and said "I think there's been a cock up sir, I'm SAC Dunsire from the fire section". A quick flurry of activity with a quick radio call and crash one was on the scene in seconds whipping me away to the fire section.

A few days in and we had an AOCs Inspection, we were all down at the fire section when the AOC and his entourage turned up, we were all standing to attention when in came the AOC who was the distinguished looking gent from the aircraft. When he got to me he stopped and asked if we had ever met as my face was familiar. I did not have the bottle to tell him that whilst he was cramped up with his flunkies I was the airman chilling and relaxing in the seats next to him.

Nothing was ever said about that day and I never found out who Mr Gardiner was but one thing is for sure he must have been important as they were willing to take him off the aircraft before the AOC.

CROSSWORD No 9 BY FIREFLY



Across

1. Tingling D Class burns. (6)
5. RAF Regiment alien spacecraft. (6)
8. Cosy firearms returned. (4)
9. Deserter journalist held in esteem. (5)
10. Cupola in distressed mode. (4)
12. Snorkelling the French year at South Yorkshire station. (10)
13. Jettisoned fast planes in the morning. (6)
15. Court in door leading to SMO perhaps. (6)
17. Beer in ship angling for rep's patter. (5, 5)
- 19 & 14 Dn. Way to shopping centre in Gateshead or Kentish fighter base. (4, 7)
20. Nick Clegg surrounded by Artificial Intelligence is elsewhere it's alleged. (5)
21. Headless timepiece found on canal. (4)
22. Strange old gap in canine friend. (3,3)
23. Large viper found on roof of appliance. (6)

Down

2. Hour in middle of short distance. (10)
3. EG sling, badly worn below tunic. (7)
4. Lord North of warning device. (4)
5. Tread carefully around turntable ladder having been distressed. (7)
6. Golfers mate on tea bar perhaps. (5)
7. Volunteers the French yarn. (4)
11. Annual test or loop for two wheeler. (10)
14. *See 19 Ac*
16. Laid back in the cooler. (7)
17. Be upright with pipe perhaps. (5)
18. Upset pills. (5)
19. Water supply found in endless wellies. (4)

On page 7 there are two very interesting pictures of a mark 6. 23-AG-76, the other a Mark 5A, 22-AG-52 (attached pictures).

They are shown in the Fire Section, 1958, RAF Scampton. The registrations have been double checked.

These two vehicles are a special interest to me, as the attached photographs show on leaving Scampton, they were moved to various stations, UK and overseas.



This picture below shows the Mark 6 in Hendon. The connection to page 7 is that I was stationed at RAF St. Mawgan. It shows me reunited with the Mark 6, 23-AG-76, that I drove whilst at RAF St. Mawgan.



These two pictures show a different story, how and when was 22-AG-52 shipped to RAF Salalah. I do not know, does anyone know the answer?

How I got stuck like that, was due to a massive four hour ran storm, and returning from the Fire Section, "WHOOPS". It took quite an effort from the MT section to recover.

The next one is AOC's Inspection. All the vehicles had been resprayed for this by SAC Doug Fountine. (25-AG-52 is second from the right.)



FLORIAN, PATRON SAINT OF FIREFIGHTERS.

Florian was born in Cetium (Austria) in the fourth century, he joined the Roman army as a youth, and progressed to become the senior administrator in the Austrian district of Noricum.

One of the failings of the Roman Administration was to dispose of anyone, or anything which presented a threat, the biggest threat at that time was the spread of Christianity and to this end Florian was ordered to put to death all Christians, (death by fire) destroy churches, and burn Christian literature, as Florian was himself a Christian he could not carry out his orders, word of this got back to Rome who sentenced Florian to death by fire, the Emperor tried to bribe Florian, with offers of money and a higher status, but because of his beliefs Florian refused.

Whilst Florian was standing on his funeral pyre he uttered the words "I will climb to heaven through the flames" because of the Roman's fear of Christianity, after

Florian's cremation his body was removed from the pyre and a millstone was tied round his neck and he was cast into the local river where he drowned, he was placed into a paupers grave, and sometime after a local lady of means exhumed his body and gave him a Christian burial.

Whilst in the employ of the Roman army one of Florian's tasks was to organise firefighting teams, and on one occasion he was reputed to have extinguished a large fire with a single bucket of water (so legend has it)

About 600 years after his death a monastery was built close to Florian's grave, in addition a village was also built, both monastery and village bore the name Saint Florian, Florian's final resting place was within the Augustinum monastery near Linz.

Florian was made a Saint at some time after his death, (I was unable to find a date for this event)

Florian's "legend" lives on, he was and still is the patron Saint to Firefighters, Soap makers, and chimney sweeps, he also had an association with brewers, hence the bucket on his many statues.

Statues and reference to Florian can be found in many East European countries., the Central Fire Station in Vienna is guarded by a statue of Saint Florian.

One of the many relics found in Florian's tomb was a crude "Maltese Cross" pendant, the cross forming the basis of many a fire service badge even to this day.

Until I reworked this story I was unaware that many East European, and worldwide countries celebrate National Firefighters Memorial day on the 4th of May each year.

Howard Harper member 682

July 2017

RAF CHIPMUNK T-10 NUMBER WP 979 CRASH

De-Havilland Chipmunk T-10, number WP979 was operated by Number 5 A.E.F (Air Experience Flight) and Cambridge University Air Squadron, based at Cambridge Airport.

On Saturday the 23rd of May 1982 the pilot, an RAF Volunteer Reserve, was briefed to carry out four, twenty five minute sorties during the afternoon. Sorties number one and two were both uneventful, sortie number three was to prove otherwise, the pilot informed Air Traffic Control that he was turning downwind, it was on this leg of the flight that the pilot became incapacitated, with his head slumped forward, and with a lack of control the aircraft commenced a shallow dive to circuit height, it continued to dive until it impacted with the ground, finishing up inverted in three sections in a cropped field.

Action taken by the Airfield Fire Section.

The fire station watchroom was manned, and by some stroke of luck the binoculars were being used to check on birds feeding on the airfield, ATC were informed that either a model aircraft or a light aircraft was seen in a shallow dive beyond the airfield boundary fence on the downwind

leg, at this time ATC sounded the crash alarm, the fire station dispatched a Range Rover R.I.V. and a Nubian Major foam tender, the RIV routing direct to crash gate number eight from the fire station, and the Nubian routing via taxiway Alpha, after passing through the crash gate we could see the Chipmunk, which fortunately wasn't on fire, a guard line was deployed, and the spilt aviation fuel was given a foam blanket.

Aircrew extraction was given urgent priority, to slide the cockpit canopy backwards we raised the fuselage and supported it with a short extension ladder, I found it difficult to work upside down, after reassuring the cadet and the pilot, I released the cadet's seat harness and parachute harness sliding him out to my colleagues, the pilot had a dislocated hip, after strapping his legs together and me taking his weight my colleagues slid him out and onto a stretcher.

Both pilot and cadet were examined by the Magpas Doctor, and both were conveyed to Addenbrookes A.&E Department.

The crash scene was made safe, the aircraft battery was removed, as were the starter cartridges, with the Airport Fire Service satisfied that we could do

no more, the incident was closed.

On return to station the Range Rover was washed out and the foam and water tanks replenished.

Fire and other vehicles in attendance.

Range Rover RIV.

Nubian Major Foam tender.

Land Rover Ambulance.

1x car, Airport Manager

1x car, Magpas Doctor

Ambulance, Cambs Ambulance Service.

1x car, Police.

Cause of accident; Pilot stress/fatigue, incapacitation, no outside forces contributing to the accident.

Aircraft serviceability; At the morning and afternoon pre-flight checks the aircraft was declared fit for flight.

Aircraft hazards; Avgas, (aviation gasoline) and engine start cartridges (stowed in the engine bay)

Removal from crash site; the aircraft was removed from the crash site and taken to RAF Wyton ready for the board of enquiry, it is believed that the aircraft was subsequently struck off charge.

By Howard Harper (member 682)

Memories of Gutersloh, Falklands & Cats!

The memory Lane article from George Edwards certainly stirred my grey cells. RAF Gutersloh was indeed a unique station with an excellent mix of personnel both Brit and locally employed civilians. Warrant Officer Morrell was a firm but fair leader who originated in Devon and possessed all the country mans lore and values. I shared an office with him and his homespun philosophy for 2 years sayings like “Never associate yourself with a failure”. He never did of his own volition.

Fire Demo Highlights

However in 1976 when a high ranking government official visited the station we staged a quick knock down fire demo on an old Hunter fuselage. This had been meticulously rehearsed with lines drawn for stopping positions and crowd viewing area. On the” day” the event was perfect and the minister was greatly impressed. He said what a wonderful vehicle the MK9 obviously was. The Flt Lt Fire Officer then volunteered the information that the truck could also produce foam on the move and, before Jack could step in, offered a demonstration. I believe that the driver was Geordie Donaldson; The man wielding the monitor remains a mystery.

The truck circled away from the watchers, came back from the down wind side, and produced foam on the move, but towards the VIP assembly! I am sure that Mr Morrell thanked the Fire Officer when he caught up with him and the prominence in their rapid retreat from the snowstorm!

1986 Falklands “Napalm”

Moving onto 1986- When the Fire section at RAF Mount Pleasant MPA (Falkland Islands) was new and everything was moving up from RAF Stanley, it was intended to cull which had become personal pets during the occupation, ostensibly to prevent a proliferation of pussies* at MPA. The firemen “Spirited” one tabby moggie away from Stanley to MPA ahead of the hunt. The lads christened it “Napalm”. I don’t know why but would hazard a guess that it had dropped a few nasty “Bombs” in its time. The boys made it a home in a cardboard box with his name painted on it. One fine day the cat found itself in its box in the crew room with the

phone placed on top of the box.

Following the afternoon Tristar flight, an FNG (Falklands New Guy) fireman found his way to the section and was alone in the crew room with the box/cat/phone.

The established hands had observed this situation through the Georgian wire viewing panels in the crew room door. One bright spark then called the crew room phone from another extension in the section. The FNG detects the ringing and looks around, but no one comes to answer so gingerly he picks up the receiver on top of the cats box and sez rather timidly “Fire Section”, “Hello “ says the Wag, “Is the cat in?” The FNG locates Puss in the box and replies “Yes, but he’s asleep!” “OK2 sez the WAG, I will call back”. Everybody fall about!

1966 RAF Oakington cats!

Talking of cats. At RAF Oakington in 1966 the heating ducts around the station became the home of free breeding feral

cats. The RSPCA or some other humane animal organisation provided steel –trap cages to put in the ducts to catch the moggies.

This job fell to the Firemen. The “Pest Control Officer” came into the section one morning and asked SAC Paddy Tipper “Any luck last night?” “Yes Sor” sez Paddy. “We got an ginormous black one” “Was it wild” enquired the Flying Officer? “It wasn’t very happy Sor” was Paddy’s reply.

Steve Davey 670

CROSSWORD SOLUTION

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