



# FLASHPOINT

ROYAL AIR FORCE & DEFENCE FIRE SERVICES ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



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SPRING 2022

[www.rafanddfs.co.uk](http://www.rafanddfs.co.uk)

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Vacant

## Front cover

Fire Training

Hi all, here we are with our spring edition, and I hope you and your families are all well. I am not going to ramble on too much about the association and what the committee is doing as our illustrious chairman has covered it all in his address. Suffice to say that we have had two official committee meetings and one unofficial. Every one of us on the committee are striving to work out ways of getting new members and in particular the younger generation of firefighters without whom the association would die. If all our members recruited one new member, we would be close on 1000 members strong. Food for thought.

Been a busy four months for me, back and forth to Devon to see family, which is getting more expensive each time, but I wouldn't miss out on my daughters and grandson. I have been working on a long-term model project for over a year now and I am pleased to say it is nearly ready to go into production. I am over the moon with how

it has turned out so watch the Association Facebook Page and the RAF Fire Service Facebook page as it will be released by the end of May. Can't say what it is but I'm sure it will be liked by all. I am also in the process of converting all my moulds for my range of RAF fire Engines so I can cast them in resin instead of metal. Easier to work with. The price of a kilo of Pewter as bloody ridiculous now. I will be starting with the Mk9, Mk6 and RIV.

My good friend and Deputy Editor, Silverfox, has once again been instrumental with his support and encouragement both with the magazine and my ongoing health issues. Steve, from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Well guys I hope you enjoy this issue and I wish you and your families a safe and happy spring.

*Cheers  
Reggie and Florian  
Editor*



During the course of our last AGM held at the Citrus the ladies decided to have a get together in the lounge area and whilst they were having a good old "chinwag" my wife Doreen got into conversation with Vera Goupillot. Later that day my wife mentioned to me about the "get together" and the chat she had with Vera, my wife also told me that both Vera and her husband John Goupillot have written a book a piece, the books are by way of being Autobiography's, the books in my humble opinion are a really good and interesting read, some members may already be aware of them, however can I through the media of Flashpoint make all our members aware that these grand little reads are out there and they are Vera's Lot ISBN No 9781 9778 83537, The Boro Boy ISBN No 9781 5195 72363

We bought them via Amazon



## A WARM WELCOME TO NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS

Its pleasing to see new members joining and re- joining we would like to see you at future reunions and please contribute to the Flashpoint as this is your magazine. Thank you.

Paul Wincote 507 re-joining . Mike Lee 281 re- joining. Ian (Ned) Kelly 1169. 1170 Derek Burnett. 1171 Shane Cook.

### ATTENTION TO ALL PRESENT MEMBERS

Brian Jones the Membership Secretary has asked if you could forward to him any change in contact details i.e., Change of address, phone numbers and email. This will ensure the prompt distribution of Flashpoint and maintain his records.

*Thank you.*

# Chairmans Update - STEVE SHIRLEY

I cannot believe where the last 5 months have gone!

Since being elected in November, I have set about trying to improve the way that the committee goes about its business. With the support of the Museum of RAF Firefighting, I have been able to utilise the expanded zoom meeting facility to hold a committee meeting every month this year. These meetings have taken, on average, 2hrs each time, but it is time well spent as we have a lot of work to do to get the Association back into good shape following two years of the pandemic.

Our first task has been to arrange this year's AGM, details of which you will find enclosed with this edition of Flashpoint. The task was started by me but then taken up by Mike Clapton and Don Pape and I'm extremely grateful for all their hard work in pulling this together! Given the COVID crisis, it has been extremely difficult to find a venue that could provide everything that we need to run the event and at a price that was competitive and attractive to the majority. Trying to clear a backlog of bookings for weddings and meetings affected by COVID has meant most venues have been fully booked already! The Committee have found, what we believe to be, the best venue available that ticks all the boxes.

Although following a similar format to past years AGM's, the points raised during my take over have been noted. We must have an AGM, it's in the constitution, but unlike the past we are trying to encourage as many of you as we can to come along and take part. Not only can you help shape the future of your Association by having your say, but you also get the chance to socialise and catch up with old mates, some of whom you might not have seen for years!

Partners are welcome to join the meeting just out of interest, but they cannot vote on any items within the agenda.

A coach has been laid on for those wishing to make the most of a trip into Lincoln which is a beautiful City that has much to offer from sightseeing to shopping. If you want to stay within the hotel, I'm sure drinks and chat will be plentiful!

The annual dinner is hoping to attract a bigger audience as well. Please don't be put off by the word formal. Most of us will wear suitable clothing anyway but it certainly doesn't have to be a bow tie and



dinner suit! You don't have to have reached the ranks of SNCO and no one will be trying to catch you out! We simply want you to join us and enjoy what looks to be a fantastic social occasion.

Now that planning for the AGM is done and dusted, the Committee has turned its attention to trying to recruit more members. Without members, we will not survive! The ex-RAF/DFS fire service community is thriving but sadly, it seems, only on Facebook. We need to get people away from their computer screens and encourage them to get on board with the Association so that they can actually be reunited with their old mates and talk over the good old days, face to face! With this in mind, I have begun reaching out to a lot of my old mates to see if I can get them to join or indeed, re-join! If everybody did that who's reading this, it might make a difference. We are also sending out complementary editions to each MOD fire Station this year in the hope of getting more people interested. A copy has been sent to each S Fire O/Fire Station Manager in the hope that they will read it and then leave it in the restroom for others to see what we're all about. I can count the number of serving firefighters who are in the association on one hand. Come on folks we need you, and I hope that you need us.

I have written to the CFO Defence Fire Rescue, the Trade Sponsor RAF Fire and Rescue Service and the CFO Capita Fire and Rescue to ask for their support towards the Association. To date, I have had an hour long zoom meeting with CFO Alex Clark to discuss how we might integrate CAPITA Firefighters into the Association. I hope to do the same with the other organisations soon.

Joining the Association has been made easier with a new online application form and the introduction of bank transfer to make fee paying easier.

We plan to update the website, produce the Flashpoint in colour and generally improve things to give a better portrayal of what the Association has to offer.

We plan to push ahead with the establishment of a permanent memorial at the National Arboretum so that our fallen comrades can be remembered in addition to those that have left us far too early or when they answered their final call.

We have a long road ahead of us and with the help of the Committee and YOU, I'm sure we can make it happen. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you want to join or simply to find out more!

*Steve Shirley MBE, GIFireE  
Chairman*

## OBITUARIES



*Proudly worn on the sleeve  
of coats their formal badge  
denotes.....*

*Safely through flames and  
destruction they will fight*

*Yet, ignoring their peril and  
their plight.*

**REST IN PEACE  
BROTHERS**

382

Reginald (Jim) Lambourne

David (Tommo) Thomlinson  
January 2022

1031

Leonard Mooney  
December 26th, 2021

1117

WG Smith

# Museum of RAF Firefighting Update

The winter months have seen a steady flow of activity on all fronts within the Museum. We were very lucky that the weather wasn't as bad as many had predicted and this in turn, has meant that the vehicles that are parked up at our dispersed locations haven't come to any major harm. The team have continued to carry out basic maintenance tasks which have included tyres and batteries, replacement of a water pump on the WOT1, regular engine run ups, brake overhauls, ignition problems and all the other unsung hero work that goes on virtually every Saturday come rain or shine (And Snow, Fog, Ice and Flood)!

We received back our 1943 Scammell Wheelbarrow pump from North Lindsey College after a three-year restoration. It shouldn't have taken three years, but two outbreaks of COVID brought work to a grinding halt on more than one occasion! It was worth the wait. The engine and pump are now up and running and the whole thing has been resprayed back to its original colour of dark admiralty grey. Although not a piece of military equipment, it compliments our existing wartime equipment and will help to tell another part of the story regarding the home front during WW2. Remember, we cannot tell the story of military firefighting without telling the story of firefighting so equipment like this is vital for us to achieve the Museum's aims. We are extremely grateful to staff and students for taking on this project. Sadly, if we'd stayed in Scunthorpe, this co-operation was going to be a regular thing as the college can see the benefits that this type of project can bring to the students working within the automotive section of the college. It certainly makes a stand-out statement when it goes on the student's CV's! Hopefully, the new home for the Museum will be in easy travelling distance of the College minibus and we'll continue to see students coming to us for work experience and projects returning to them for work to be done on their premises.

Work has continued with the cataloguing of the collection, no mean feat when you have over 20,000 exhibits! More items continue to arrive on an almost weekly basis and we're very grateful to

WO Leon Thrussell who sent back more manning boards and obsolete equipment from the FALKLAND Islands recently. Archiving has continued in the library as has the digitisation of documents and 35mm slide transparencies. This task is vital if items are to survive for years to come. It's amazing how much of our history is hidden away. We really need to encourage everyone to share it with us and not just post it on facebook!

The Museum has acquired another vehicle thanks to the generosity of one of our own volunteers. We have been trying to get an RIV and an MFV for the collection. We were promised one of each by the former CFO of DFRMO, but when he retired, we started to run into the inevitable brick wall of bureaucracy that surrounds the MOD and were told, in no uncertain terms that we'd have to bid for them at auction just like everyone else does! Very frustrating, but not to be beaten, Stephen Farley put in a bid and to our amazement, he won! RU95AA is a desert version, one of six we believe. It finished its military service at the RN school of flight deck operations at Culdrose. It appears to be fully roadworthy and operational although we won't take anyone's word for it as we're carrying out all our own checks whilst we work through a servicing schedule. Stephen has no fire service connection with the fire service but has served in the RAF as an intelligence analyst (Reservist). He joined our team of volunteers just over a year ago and hasn't looked back since! In a strange twist of fate, I'd actually had this vehicle on strength when I was S Fire O in Basra, Iraq 2007. It was in a right state, and it spent most of my tour in MTMS where, being the ultimate fire engine spotter, I photographed it. Little did I know that I'd be reunited with it all these years later. It certainly appears to have been at Odiham, Wittering, Iraq, Boulmer and Culdrose during its service. Do any of you out there have any more pictures of it? It was red before being over-sprayed in desert sand colour before becoming red again and then back to sand! Massive thanks to Stephen for doing this for us, lets hope our quest to get an MFV is a little easier and not quite as expensive! Just to clarify, no Museum money has

been spent on this vehicle to date as we are trying to keep funds secured just in case, we need to find alternative commercial storage or for the time when we must move the collection again, hopefully, for the final time.

We are continuing to work with Scampton Holdings as they continue to mount their bid to purchase RAF Scampton. They have stated, that if successful, they will provide a permanent home for the Museum, hopefully in a purpose-built building. Wouldn't it be great to be back on an airfield once again! This is a very complicated process, that you cannot rush, but let's hope for all our sakes that they are successful, and we finally get the home that we've longed for all these years.

Please continue to support us either by the standing order supporter scheme, a one-off donation, signing up to Amazon Smile, using Paypal and signing us up as a charity that you wish to donate too. We would be so grateful for any artifacts, photographs, and documents that you might have so that we can eventually share them with the masses once we re-open. You might even like to put yourself forward as a volunteer? We have lots of roles that you could help with!

As always, if you want to know more, please get in touch.

*Many Thanks  
Steve Shirley MBE, GIFireE.  
Chairman/Founder*

*Museum of RAF Firefighting*

[www.firemuseum.uk](http://www.firemuseum.uk)

[Steve.shirley@firemuseum.uk](mailto:Steve.shirley@firemuseum.uk)

# Royal Canadian Air Force Bravery Awards

*Our good friend Tony Eaton alerted me to the fact that he had been watching a video about RAF Tholthorpe which was located near Easingwold, North Yorkshire. The video includes an aircraft incident which resulted in some awards for firefighting and rescue. After some research I have managed to put together the story of the exploits of those individuals, with the citations of the two Canadian Firefighters. The two Firefighters do not appear in Sqn Ldr Tuckers book "In Adversity" in which RAF Firefighters awards are recorded. So, I thought I would relay their exploits to you.*

*Steve Harrison.*

RAF Tholthorpe was assigned to No. 6 Group RCAF in June 1943. RCAF squadrons stationed here included, No. 434 Squadron «Bluenose», 431 Squadron «Iroquois», 420 Squadron «Snowy Owl», and 425 Squadron «Alouette».

On the night of 27th / 28th June 1944 the crew of this 425 Squadron were tasked with attacking a flying bomb launch site at Foret-de-Eawy and took off from Tholthorpe at 22.20hrs. The crew released their bombs over the target area at 00.32hrs from 12,000 feet, soon after releasing their bomb load the port outer engine failed. The crew were able to make the return flight up to Yorkshire on three engines and attempted to land at Tholthorpe at 03.07hrs. Unfortunately, the aircraft crashed into Halifax LW680 on the ground that was fully loaded with bombs and parked on a dispersal point on the side of the perimeter track. Unfortunately, a large fire developed. Some of the bombs on board the parked Halifax later exploded destroying the aircraft and injuring a number of people trying to rescue some of the trapped aircrew inside Halifax MZ683. Halifax MZ618 was also badly damaged in the explosion and was written off. Halifax LW590 and Halifax LW467 suffered repairable damage.

Air Commodore Ross was at the airfield to attend the return of aircraft from operations and the interrogation of



aircrews. Flight Sergeant St. Germain a bomb aimer, had just returned from an operational sortie and Corporal Marquet was in charge of the night ground crew, whilst Leading Aircraftmen McKenzie and Wolfe were members of the crew of the crash tender. Air Commodore Ross with the assistance of Corporal Marquet, extricated the pilot who had sustained severe injuries. At that moment ten 500 lb. bombs in the second aircraft about 30 yards away, exploded, and this officer and airman were hurled to the ground. When the hail of debris had subsided, cries were heard from the rear turret of the crashed aircraft. Despite further explosions from bombs and petrol tanks which might have occurred, Air Commodore Ross and Corporal Marquet returned to the blazing wreckage and endeavoured in vain to swing the turret to release the rear gunner. Although the port tail plane was blazing furiously, Air Commodore Ross hacked at the perspex with an axe and then handed the axe through the turret to the rear gunner who enlarged the aperture. Taking the axe again the air commodore, assisted now by Flight Sergeant St. Germain as well as by Corporal Marquet, finally broke the perspex steel frame supports and extricated the rear gunner. Another 500 lb. bomb exploded which threw the 3 rescuers to the ground.

Flight Sergeant St. Germain quickly rose and threw himself upon a victim in order to shield him from flying debris. Air Commodore Ross's arm was practically severed between the wrist and elbow by the second explosion. He calmly walked to the ambulance and an emergency amputation was performed on arrival at Station sick quarters. Meanwhile, Corporal Marquet had inspected the surroundings, and seeing petrol running down towards two nearby aircraft, directed their removal from the vicinity by tractor. Leading Aircraftmen McKenzie and Wolfe rendered valuable assistance in trying to bring the fire under control and they also helped to extricate the trapped rear gunner both being seriously injured by flying debris. Air Commodore Ross showed fine leadership and great heroism in an action which resulted in the saving of the lives of the pilot and rear gunner. He was ably assisted by Flight Sergeant St. Germain and Corporal Marquet who both displayed courage of a high order. Valuable service was also rendered by Leading Aircraftmen McKenzie and Wolfe in circumstances of great danger. "Ross was also made a Commander of the British Empire (CBE).

**LAC Melvin Muir McKenzie RCAF (R/273581)** was awarded the British Empire Medal for his actions on 28th June 1944 at Tholthorpe with the London Gazette printing notification of his award on 27th October 1944. He was born in September 1924 at Little Current, Saskatchewan and worked in farming in Tehkommah, Ontario when he enlisted for RCAF service in August 1943 for General Duties. He arrived in the UK in February 1944. The recommendation for his award was specific to him and stated. "On the night of June 27/28th, 1944, Leading Aircraftman MacKenzie was on duty as a firefighter on the crash tender when an aircraft in attempting to land, crashed into another, which was parked on a dispersal and exploded. The crash tender immediately went to the scene, and in addition to trying to bring the fire under control, Leading Aircraftman MacKenzie went to the assistance of the rear gunner who was trapped in his turret. During his attempts several bombs exploded in the aircraft



which had been struck by the landing aircraft. Despite the fact that there was further danger from exploding bombs and that he had suffered extremely from blast of the first explosion, Leading Aircraftman MacKenzie continued in his efforts until the rear gunner was released. He had just achieved this when a second explosion occurred which caused him to be seriously injured - multiple shrapnel wounds. His undaunted devotion to duty during this hazardous occasion sets a high standard and his cool courage is most commendable. Leading Aircraftman MacKenzie's efforts undoubtedly assisted in the saving of the life of the rear gunner, and he is strongly recommended for the award of the British Empire Medal." He attended Buckingham Palace in November 1944 to be invested with the George Medal by King George VI, also with him were Air Commodore Ross, LAC Marquet, F/Sgt St.Germain. As a result of the injuries, he sustained on 28th June 1944 he was repatriated to Canada on 24th September 1945 and released from the RCAF on 30th November 1945

**LAC Robert Rubin Wolfe RCAF (R/188008)** was awarded the British Empire Medal for his actions on this night, notification of his award was printed in the London Gazette on 27th October 1944. He was born in June 1906 and was living in Toronto when

he enlisted for RCAF service in August 1942 for ground duties. He served in the ground trades and was posted to the UK in January 1943. The recommendation for his award was specific to him and stated. "On the night of June 27/28th, 1944, Leading Aircraftman Wolfe was on duty as a firefighter on the crash tender when an aircraft in attempting to land, crashed into another, which was parked on a dispersal and exploded. The crash tender immediately went to the scene, and in addition to trying to bring the fire under control, Leading Aircraftman Wolfe went to the assistance of the rear gunner who was trapped in his turret. During his attempts several bombs exploded in the aircraft which had been struck by the landing aircraft. Despite the fact that there was further danger from exploding bombs and that he had suffered extremely from blast of the first explosion, Leading Aircraftman Wolfe continued in his efforts until the rear gunner was released. He had just achieved this when a second explosion occurred which caused him to be seriously injured - shrapnel wound in right chest. His undaunted devotion to duty during this hazardous occasion sets a high standard and his cool courage is most commendable. Leading Aircraftman Wolfe's efforts undoubtedly assisted in the saving of the life of the rear gunner, and he is

strongly recommended for the award of the British Empire Medal." As a result of the injuries, he sustained in the events of 28th June 1944 he was repatriated to Canada on 16th September 1944. He was presented with his B.E.M. in Canada and was released from the RCAF on 23rd June 1945. He sadly then died on 26th December 1966.

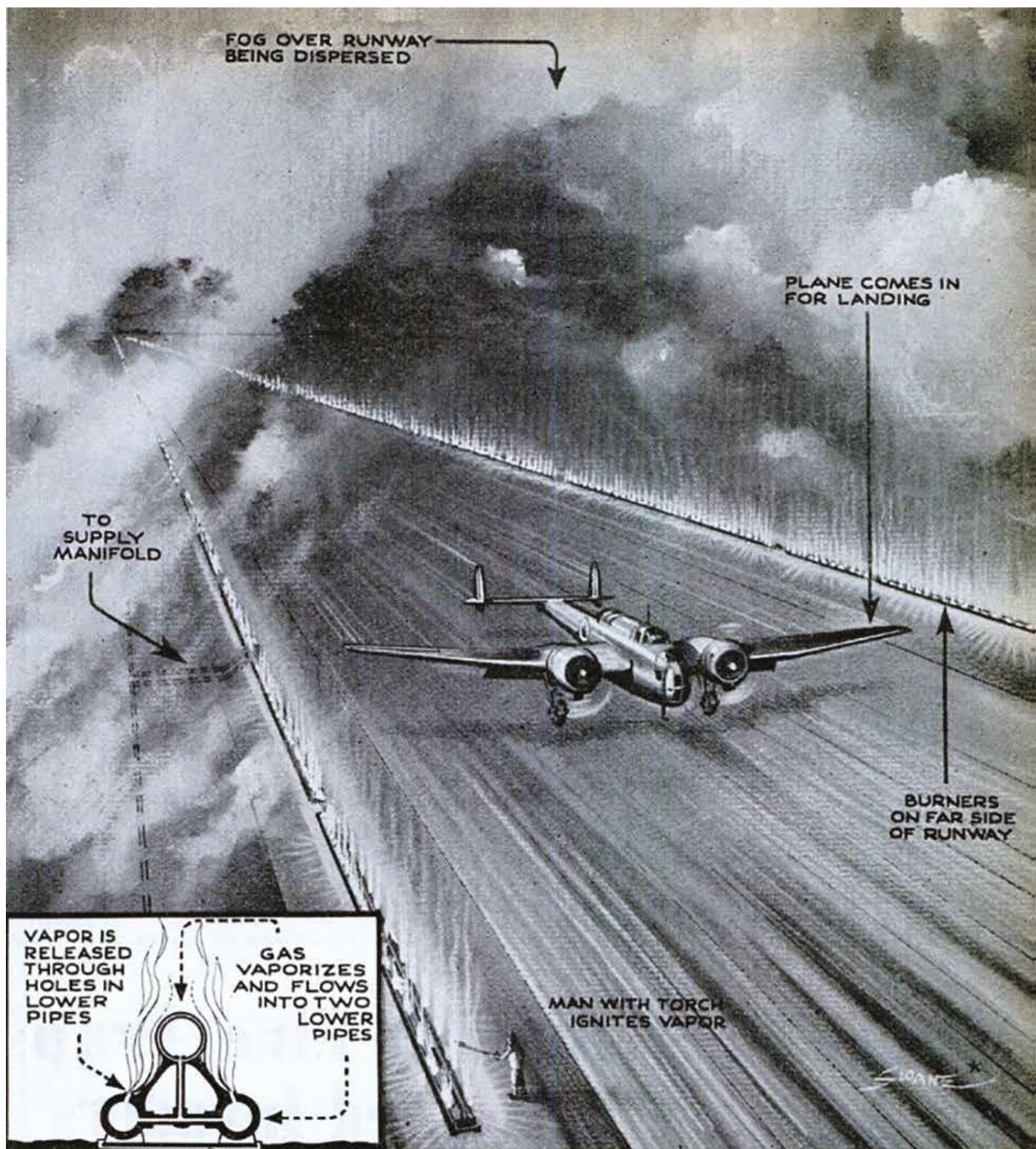
Air Commodore Ross was awarded the George Cross. Flt Sgt St.Germain and Cpl Marquet both awarded the George Medal

If you are interested in this story, you can read more if you go to [www.yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk](http://www.yorkshire-aircraft.co.uk) and search Halifax MZ683 at Tholthorpe airfield. The video is on YouTube. It's well to remember what our empire allies sacrificed for us.

# My FIDO Experience

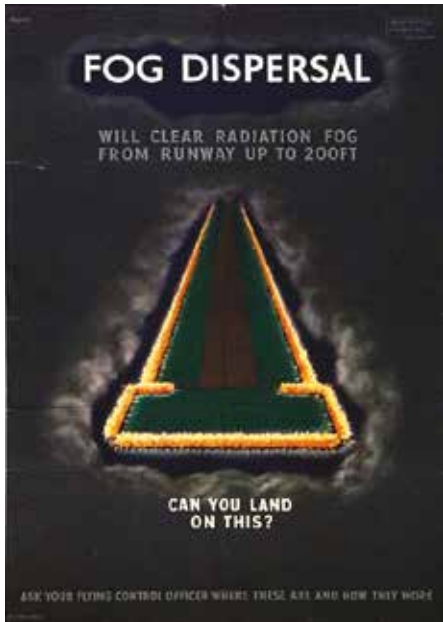
Back in Autumn 2019 I wrote about a RAF Firefighter's experience with FIDO, quoting from a book called 'Flying Through Fire@ by Geoffrey Williams. The Fire Firefighter was Donald Sinclair. This year I found a small piece posted on Facebook from an ex-Firefighter Brian Simpson which gave a brief account of his experiences at Manston. So, I asked his permission to tell his story and here a upgraded version reproduced for the Flashpoint.

*Steve Harrison*



Fido's triple pipe line flanking a landing strip is 1,000 yards long on each side, 500 yards of it in the approach and 500 on the runway. In equipping intersecting runways, lines are sunk flush with ground.





Four rookie airmen were posted from Sutton on Hull to RAF/USAF Manston as fully qualified Aerodrome Firefighters to join the Fire Section, so we thought, how wrong we were. After checking in, the Flight Sergeant informed us that we were going to reinstate the FIDO System that had not been used since 1945. This was news to us, as we had never heard of FIDO, and nothing was mentioned on Course 180 about this Fog Installation Dispersal Operation.

We soon found out what it was all about, the Flight Sergeant explained the FIDO H/Q was situated on the far side of the runway three miles away, your transport has been arranged, take your kit and I'll see you later.

Arriving at the site we were amazed how close it was from the edge of the runway 100ft (30mtrs) There were two very old Nissan huts and a few small buildings containing the equipment, a washhouse and toilet block, the a large building contained the 8 Ford V8 engines and pumping equipment, also nearby were four massive storage tanks for the thousands of gallons of petrol. These were checked every



morning by the FIDO Firefighters by climbing the ladders and opening up the hatch on top and lowering a dipstick, all this was recorded by the Corporal in charge. We kept in touch with the Control Tower which was manned by the Americans by a wind-up telephone in the office.

We had no transport except the RAF cycles which had been supplied and we were supposed to cycle the three miles to the main camp to get our meals. There was no chance of that, so we made friends with the owners of small café near the main road, we had to pay for our meals, but it was better than cycling three times a day to the Airmen's Mess.

The Firefighters duty was cleaning the miles of pipelines making sure the small holes were clear, checking the burners, pumping water from the many pits that were flooded during heavy rain and reporting to ATC when all was okay for a practice FIDO burn. It was the engineers that looked after the engines and all the valves on the airfield.

So that was the life of the FIDO Operators at Manston, not a great job, but someone had to do it.



Some of the lads at Manston names unknown.



Picture shows top left, Mick McMenamin, Mk5 driver SAC Rolls, bottom left LAC Pettit, and yours truly Brian Simpson (Simmo)

After Manston we were transferred to Blackbushe (ex RAF Hartford Bridge) then back to normal firefighting duties at RAF Odiham.

Brian Simpson.



Also did you know that Ferry Ales Brewery (FAB) produced a bitter beer called FIDO. The brewery is not far away from the RAF Fiskerton which operated the FIDO system. This beer is available online. (And no, I am not on a commission)



## Background:

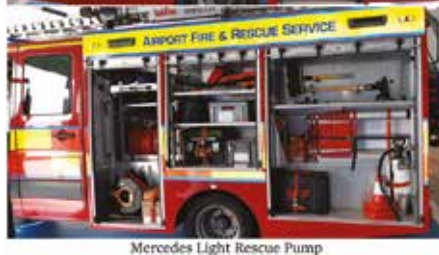
Prior to the onset of WW2, flying at Gibraltar was primarily conducted by Fleet Air Arm aircraft operating out of the harbour. In 1939 an airfield was constructed at North Front as an emergency landing strip, and shortly after that, work commenced on the 6000 foot runway we see today. Rocks excavated from the defence tunnels were used to reclaim land in the Bay of Gibraltar, and the building work was eventually completed in 1942. The new airfield quickly became a valuable asset to the war effort. Indeed, the newly named RAF North Front played a big part in the preparations for the invasion of North Africa, and continued to provide vital support for allied shipping entering the Mediterranean during the multitude of other campaigns that followed.



Because of its strategically important geographical location, the base has continued to be used in a predominantly maritime role, as well as providing an international airport for the Territory. In 1982 it was a major staging post for the South Atlantic campaign, and played a big part in the transportation of vital supplies and equipment to Ascension Island and beyond during the conflict. Those of you who have been stationed there will remember it for some of its quirky nuances; like the main road and pedestrian walkways running across the middle of the runway, the chain arrestor gear, and the rocket trailer that we used to assist boat launches from Eastern Beach. Having a

short runway with sea at both ends, it is still considered to be one of the most tricky airports to land at, and NOTAMS require that captains only are to perform landings there. The main problem is due to the 1300 foot high lump of limestone, which causes severe turbulence on the approaches whenever there is a strong south-westerly or south-easterly wind. This hazardous situation is further exacerbated by the fact that incoming aircraft are still prohibited from using Spanish airspace, and are therefore unable to perform a straight-in approach when landing. In recent years the airfield has been handed over to the Gibraltar Government and the admin and accommodation site at Devils Tower Camp taken over by the Gibraltar Regiment. The RAF now have a very much reduced presence, being based between the two hangers to the south of the runway and the Four Corners site, which is opposite the Air Terminal close to the border with Spain.

The airfield fire station started life on the



south side of the runway before being relocated under the new control tower

to the north. Since then it has expanded eastwards as new bays and facilities have been added. It was originally manned by RAF Fire Service personnel, who were later supplemented with Locally Employed Civilian (LEC) Firemen when the AFDPS came into being in the 1960s. More recently it became 100% DFS manned, and on 1st October 2015 it was formally handed over from MOD to the Government of Gibraltar, after which it became known as the Gibraltar Airport Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS). However, it remains partly funded by the MOD, and the firefighters do still carry out specialist tasks and standbys, not only for the RAF but also some of the duties previously undertaken by the Admiralty Fire Service.

## The Visit:

As my granddaughter currently lives in Gibraltar so I try to get out there as often as I can, and having been stationed at the RAF Camp from 1979 – 1982 I still have friends to look up while I'm on the Rock. This time I asked my old mate Neil Hall if he could arrange a visit to the airport fire station so that I could write this piece for Flashpoint, and also see how the place had changed over the last 40 years. Neil put me in touch with the Fire Chief, Nicky Viñales, and a visit was arranged for Thursday morning 24th February. During a bit of a reunion drink in the town the night before, Eric Bossino also agreed to come along and join Neil, myself, and in addition to that, my sixteen year-old granddaughter Alisha opted to come along and act as our photographer. Alisha and I were staying at Wessex House, just over the road from the Control Tower, so we didn't have far to go.

It was 10am when we arrived, a time when you'd expect most crash crews to be tucking into the morning ritual of tea and toast, but at Gib the duty crew commander, Tito, had his men at the training area busily perfecting their trade. We were met by Leading Fireman Gavin Cockburn who showed us round the premises, much of



VIEW FROM THE REAR OF THE FIRE STATION LOOKING AT THE NEW AIRPORT TERMINAL

which had been improved and expanded over the years. First port of call was the kitchen, which looked more like the domain of an Officer's Mess Chef than what you'd expect to find in a Fire Station – a far cry from the old electric cooker and sink I remembered. Shortly afterwards the Senior Fire Officer, Nick Viñales, returned from a meeting he'd been attending and gave us a detailed briefing on how the Fire Service had evolved since becoming AFRS. Nicky had been personally involved in the procurement of new crash trucks, and the station is now manned a state of the art fleet of appliances, consisting of three Rosenbauer Panther foam vehicles, two 6 X 6 and one 4 X 4, a Command Vehicle for the Crew Commander, and a Mercedes Light Rescue Pump, capable of getting places the larger appliances can not. Rather than just buying off-the-shelf models, the Panthers were all purpose built to Nicky's specifications based on the requirements of the airport at Gibraltar.

Nicky told us that he has a total of 28 personnel operating on a two-watch 13 hour shift system, and as well as being specialist airfield firefighters, they are nearly fully interchangeable with the Gibraltar Fire & Rescue Service (GFRS), doing everything they do apart from diving.

After viewing the impressive office and workshop facilities, Nicky took us to the training area to see the main part of the outfit in action.

As with the Fire Station itself, the training facilities now available to the AFRS at

Gibraltar are light years ahead of what I remembered from my time there. Back in the 70s and 80s we had a burning pit at the west end of the runway and the fuselage of an ex Royal Navy Gannett aircraft at the other end. There were some empty buildings we could use to have exercises in and we had a good liaison with both City

and Dockyard Fire Stations who had better BA training facilities. Where the Gannett used to sit, the AFRS now have a full size passenger aircraft simulator on which they can practice their Firefighting and rescue procedures in realistic conditions.

Nearby, they also have a purpose built Structural training building which can be used as a smoke house, and also an area for practicing vehicle rescue techniques.

It struck me as odd that the crew was busy training while flying was in progress; we would not have been able to do that in the RAF days. However, Nicky explained that the computer systems in the Panthers were set to ensure that during training periods there would always be sufficient water



PANTHER 6 X 6 WITH ERIC AND ALISHA



PANTHER 4 x 4 ON THE TRAINING AREA



AIRCRAFT TRAINING SIMULATOR



BREATHING APARATUS AND RTC TRAINING AREA



**ERIC ALISHA DAVE TITO NEIL NICKY**

in the their tanks to meet the minimum requirements for airfield standby. The fact that the new vehicles are so big means they carry sufficient water in excess of that to enable the crews to carry out wet drills in such circumstances.

Up close, the Panthers were really impressive. The 6 X 6 versions carry 11,500 litres of water and 1,500 litres of foam which is delivered through a high output bumper monitor and 16 metre High Reach Turret (HRT), as well as the more conventional side lines that most of us are familiar with. Nicky showed us some of the bespoke features he had included in the initial procurement. These included fold-away steps for reaching equipment stowed high up, extendable hose reels that deploy on an arm that swings out, and a Monnex Powder system that is considered

the best in the world for dealing with Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) fires – a local risk at North Front. Another specification was for the pumps to be more resilient to corrosion from the salt water which flows through the fire main in Gibraltar.

The 4 X 4 Panther has a 6,200 litre water tank and 750 litres of foam liquid. It is geared more towards the rescue element of the job and has a roof monitor rather than a HRT. Peeking out from behind the 4 X 4 in the above photograph is the command vehicle. Under the modern way of doing things, this is used by the Crew Commander to assess incidents and direct operations remotely.

Overall, it was a most interesting visit, providing a fascinating insight into how

the job has evolved in recent years. Nicky Viñales and his staff could not have been more helpful, and they made us feel most welcome during the tour of their facilities. Afterwards Nicky gave me a collection of badges to pass on to the Museum of RAF Firefighting, for which our Chairman, Steve Shirley is most grateful.

To finish off I'd like to say a big thank you to all involved!

*Dave Kirk  
Mem No 414*

# “Unquenchable Fire” - The Story of Asbestos

Mention asbestos in the modern age and it brings many reactions as it has blighted so many people’s lives because of its wide use. Many of us will remember the weekly check on the asbestos blanket, the use of asbestos gloves and of course the asbestos suit in the 1940’s. Below is an extract from the “The National Civil Defence Journal” from 1944, explaining its ancient history and a very different perspective, which differs now.



Everybody knows about asbestos and its fire resisting properties, but what does the name mean? From which part of the world does asbestos come from? In what quantity and form? Why is it fire proof?

Asbestos was the ancient Greek name for a fabulous stone- probably unslaked lime which set on fire could not be quenched. The word means ‘unquenchable’ or ‘indestructible’ It appears in the original Greek New Testament, Matthew iii 12. Luke iii 17 with the same meaning; unquenchable fire. Plutarch (40-120 AD) refers to perpetual lamp wicks in use at the time, probably shreds of asbestos, for such threads were woven into shrouds for ancient cremations as they usefully kept the ashes intact. Pliny over 1,800 years ago describes these as “linum vivum” the funeral dress of kings. It is interesting that a substance capable of quenching fire should bear the name once applied to fire believed to be unquenchable.

Crude asbestos comes from various parts of the world in the following proportions, the figures are based on peacetime calculations: 78% Canada, 9.4% Rhodesia, 5.6% Russia, 4% Union of South Africa, 1.7% Cyprus, balance from Italy and U.S.A. The substance is classed as

mineral, not so much a single mineral as a peculiar assumed by several minerals (varieties of hornblends or serpentine) occurring in fibrous form in long slender crystals side by side. Its colour varies from white, yellow to greenish white, possessing a glossy or silky lustre.



## Many Uses

The chief constituents are silica magnesium, lime, and oxide of iron.

Crude material after mining is crushed between rollers with a double movement, so that the fibres are well divided, crushing is followed by screening, combining, spinning, and weaving into cloth which, besides making fire proof coverings, can be used for filtering corrosive acids which it is proof. The first modern experiments of asbestos weaving were made in Italy. Powdered asbestos mixed with plastics is easily moulded into various shapes to make the elements of gas fires. It can also be made into fire resisting paint, which will render wood fireproof to a certain extent. This

paint has limitations, excessive heat causing it to peel and allowing the wood to smoulder. Asbestos goes into many things including theatre drop curtains, brake linings, fire blankets, conveyer belts dealing with hot products, steam packing gland linings pipe and boiler lagging, high temperature furnace linings and a type of boarding for fire proofing walls and ceilings.

Asbestos  $Ca Si O_3$   $2Mg Si O_3$  as the chemist knows it, has such a high melting point as to render it in effect incombustible. An oxy-acetylene flame, 3,000° Centigrade about half of the temperature of the sun which is 5,600° or the electric arc, 3,500° Centigrade, would do no more than cause it to glow white hot. Such is the nature of this truly wonderful substance with so long a history.

So, it was a wonderful substance back in the day, and it’s just one in a long list of supposedly “Safe” substances that we have been exposed to over the years.

*Images from the Museum of RAF Firefighting.*



# Graduation of Trade Group 7 Fire Fighters

## Graduation of Trade Group 7 Fire Fighters by the Defence Fire Training Unit (DFTU)

On 21 October 21, Pat and myself were invited by our good friend, Sqn Ldr Dean Gibson, to attend the graduation ceremony of Trainee Fire Fighter (TFF) course 01/21. This had been generated from a discussion had between Dean and Tim Quinton an ex-RAF Firefighter, now working as a course designer for the FSC.



RAF Trade Group 7 Fire Service now train out of the Fire Service College, Moreton in Marsh, Gloucestershire. This move from the old training school (DFTDC Manston) was made when Defence outsourced the provision of fire service responsibilities to Capita Fire and Rescue.

After an early start we arrived at the FSC at approx. 8.30 being met by Tim, who after a brief introduction guided us to the restaurant for coffees. A fabulously modern facility that provides the Staff and Trainees on all courses the ability to maintain a balanced diet in a fantastic environment.

Suitably refreshed, Tim took us to the DFTU Management Offices, where we were introduced to the senior members of the training staff including;

Officer Commanding (OC) Defence Fire Training Unit, Sqn Ldr Phil Haines,

Executive Officer (XO) Flt Lt Nicola Mackay,

WO Dave Price Chief Instructor (CI) who is also a member of the Association.

Throughout the day I had the opportunity to meet with a number of Association members, discussing how the training has progressed, techniques now employed and the innovations that are being made at the DFTU. After a visit to the fire station, which was specifically designed for the TFF and Defence courses, we were introduced to the two main working fire tenders of today; the MPRV “Multi-Purpose Response Vehicle” and the Oshkosh Striker (HRET) with the High Reach Extending Turret, truly amazing vehicles. At the time of our visit these vehicles were in service at RAF Brize Norton, Northolt and Odiham, with plans to deliver and train on the vehicles across the world.

Entering the vehicle bays, which would be used for the speeches, awards, and the presentations, we had more coffee and met the many excited families of the graduating fire fighters, who had travelled from all over the UK. Some sitting quietly reading the glossy programme that had been provided and awaiting a brief provided by XO on what the day would include.

Waiting outside the bays were two coaches ready to take us all on our tour of the airfield, and the “incident Ground” which is used for training of all fire fighters attending the FSC. The training area had many purpose designed fire training facilities; however, I expected to see areas for many old aircraft and airfield-based fire training exercises. But the design of the FSC had thought of every fire / accident possibility to allow for really effective training.

Other facilities that we saw included a multi vehicle motorway on Britain’s shortest motorway the M96 at just 496mts long. There were fuel lorry accidents and

cars crushed by lorries and buses. Further around the site there was an exercise train accident using the level crossing which had a car wedged into the front of a real full-sized train some 50 metres down the track. A shopping centre, high rise buildings and domestic dwellings completed the tour of a site designed for training of the highest standard, which had several fire Authorities carrying out practical exercises.

The tour ended at a covered seating area set to give the guests the best view of their loved ones demonstrating the skills gained on the drill yard and towers.

WO Dave Price gave a comprehensive explanation to the families on what they were about to witness from the graduating course. As with all good military set-ups a little poetic license was used to ensure the Striker’s were in place, closely followed by the calling of the duty course to attend a simulated incident involving the towers accessed by using short extension to the first storey and 10.5m ladders to the second





storey, pumping from both MPRV's and supplementing from the hydrants around the drill yard. The demonstration was completed with the "Knock off – Make up" order being given and with the same efficiency the crews made up and restowed the equipment on the appliances.

The Reviewing Officer (RO) Group Captain Duncan Mark Smith BA(Hons) PGCE RAF, was asked to step forward to take the salute. Once in position the Lead trainer Cpl Hazel Sellars and Sgt Ben Blakemore as second trainer, marched to the edge of the drill yard, halting and awaited the course, which doubled from the vehicles and formed smartly to attention next to the staff. Cpl Sellars reported that the drill was complete and was given permission by the RO to dismiss the crews.

Once more we were back in the coaches, proceeding to the aircraft fire demonstration area made up of a multi-sim hot fire trainer encompassing an A330 cabin and the tail of a C17 styled platform. The area also had Tornado and Lynx airframes used during the course to account for a multitude of platforms operated in Defence.

No seats this time, we stood well back behind waist high barriers and awaited the demo.

Once again WO Dave Price gave a clear description to the families of what was about to happen and what they were to witness, ending by saying that you may feel a little heat this time. A bit of an understatement!

The first fire the families witnessed was the port engine. Fuel was pumped in and ignited. As a result of the heat generated, everyone took a further two or three steps backwards.

Immediately, 2 Striker Vehicles approached from the left with two tones and flashing lights.

Two Striker foam tenders racing towards the aircraft with high reaching extending arms being raised 30ft and extended and at the same time foam being directed towards the aircraft engine. Simultaneously, two MPRV's approached from the rear of the aircraft. After a short time, the engine fire died down and seemed to be under control when a large amount of flames started to appear around the wheels. The atmosphere created by the families was fantastic, seeing the incident develop and the precision that the crews operated in

close proximity to the airframe.

With both the trainers standing by and overseeing the proceedings, trainees with foam lines from the two MPRV's approached from the rear of the aircraft and with foam lines now from both front and rear, attacked the fire around the wheels. At the same time rescuers from the MPRV entered the rear of the aircraft and began to evacuate the passengers.

When the fires were all out and the scene was safe, the crews "knocked off" and cleared lines from the reviewing area prior to forming for the final exercise parade in front of the RO, Cpl Sellars reported the exercise satisfactorily completed and again the RO complemented and thanked

The parade was dismissed by Gp Capt Smith.

Both of these demonstrations ended with very loud and animated applause from the trainees' families who were clearly very proud of their children who were now fully qualified RAF Fire Fighters and promoted to LAC's.

I believe the families were so proud that their sons and daughters could achieve such high standards in only a few weeks and were totally blown away by what they had just witnessed of their children.

Once again, we were directed to the coaches and were driven back to the crash bays, where fresh supplies of hot tea, coffee and biscuits were waiting, very much needed! The guests took their seats in the bay awaiting the next phase of the ceremony. The students were marched into the bay by their trainers and paraded in front of their families and guests, now in their dry fire-fighting PPE.





Many of you that served at RAF Luqa during the time it was a RAF Station might wonder what happened to the Crash Trucks that were left behind or handed over to the Malta Government Those Mk7s Tacr's and DP's.

Well, this should give you some joy, after the withdrawal the Malta Armed forces took over the Airfield firefighting duties Many of which were our old colleagues that we served with on crews, who served in, RAF Malta Local enlisted personnel. Until the recruitment of personnel to take on the role of Airport firefighters under the ICAO regulations, and fully trained to undertake that role we young men carried out.

Armed Forces Malta set up a Task Force a Splinter Regiment to undertake the roles security, Marine and Helicopter Flight and Fire section. Amongst its role included search and rescue, Until the Firefighting role was handed over to Malta International Airport.

This is just a update of Malta Fire section and after we elderly Firefighters remember how it was.

Photos and information provided by Francis Ray Gregory and the Panther with a Javelin By me from 2010 visit.

*From Bob Ewing member 321*



The Reviewing Officer arrived followed by the OC. WO Dave Price brought the room to 'attention' as they entered and as the bell in the bays was rung by FS Matthew John. Taking his position on the dais, Cpl Sellars marched forward and addressed the RO for the graduation of the course members and awarding of certificates to each course member.

As each was called out in turn, stepping forward, saluting the Group Captain, receiving their certificates and postings, followed by an individual photograph, saluting, and returned to the other course members.

Two further awards were presented by the Group Captain,

The First was, The Robson Academy of Resilience best in PT award, in Memory of Air Vice Marshal Adam Henry Robson CB OBE MC & Bar, PhD and is awarded to the trainee who has demonstrated a high standard of physical and mental resilience, as well as always encouraging fellow peers to perform to the same high standard.

This award was presented to LAC Jaimie Self.

The second was the Warrant Officer Ewen Garwood Memorial Axe, who was a former Chief Instructor at the previous fire training school at DFTDC Manston. This is awarded to the trainee who has demonstrated the qualities, determination, loyalty and professionalism that Ewen held dearest as both a fire fighter and as a member of the Royal Air Force.

This Memorial Axe was awarded to LAC Grace Chaplin.

After a further speech by the Group Captain and a blessing by the padre, a formal photograph was taken of the course members, course trainers, Group Captain D Smith, OC DFTU Sqn Ldr P Haines, Executive Officer Flt Lt Nicola Mackay and Chief Instructor WO Dave Price .

The graduates were then dismissed and, for the first time in 14 weeks, were allowed to greet and hug their parents/family members. There were huge smiles, pats on the back and a few emotional tears, but it was a joy to witness, and you could feel the pride in every corner of the room.

For the final time the coaches arrived and transported families and guests to the Four Shires Restaurant where the new graduates marched very smartly in their No 1 dress,

led by the Axe winner LAC Chaplin. Moving into the restaurant we were provided with a fantastic plated afternoon tea, awaiting the graduating course who were being given final instructions on the proceedings.

We wish all graduates the best of luck in their new roles and know they have had the very best training possible which will help keep them safe in their chosen lifetime career. They may now realise that they are capable of far more than they ever thought possible.

The Trainers were Course Lead Cpl Hazel Sellars and Sgt Ben Blakemore.

The graduates of TFF course 01/21 were.

LAC Taylor Antell, LAC Georgia Atkinson, LAC Ben Bushby, LAC Grace Chaplin, LAC Euan Griffiths,

LAC Lewis Jackson, LAC George Johnson, LAC Ryan Latham, LAC Jamie Nunn, LAC Tyler Robinson,

LAC Katie Segrave, LAC Jaimie Self, LAC Ryan Swaine, LAC Ryan Terry, and LAC Mathew Williams

### Footnote:

It was wonderful to witness the pride of the instructors, the trainees, and their families after working so hard and being apart for 14 weeks. It's amazing to see the high standard of achievement that can be gained in such a relatively short time.

It was very different to when I was training in Sutton on Hull in August 1959 where there was no graduation ceremony. There was just a list with names on the wall, a train ticket out and a fly past from a squadron of Hull seagulls!! How things have changed, and, may I add, for the better.

### To finish.

The Defence Fire Training Unit "DFTU" Trade Group 7 has 3+ courses per year subject to Defence requirements with an average of 14-16 recruits in each, making close to 50 new recruits per year at the Defence Fire Training Unit, Moreton-in-Marsh

RAF TG7 has approximately 520 and reducing personnel at present.

*Trevor Hayes  
Treasurer*





*This is the Task Force with the former RAF Crash Trucks which they used to perform their duties with.*



*The Mk7's during the RAF time were 26 AG 70, 26 AG 80, 26 AG 90 and 26AG92, also a DPII and DPIII a TACR I with 2x Crash Ambulances were handed over to the Task Force.*



*The Fire section is still as we knew it now with a twin apex roof due to a Tornado removing the old single apex roof. The watch room is now a purpose-built concrete unit as opposed to the old railway carriage back in the 60/70 era.*



*The buildings as we knew them still are used today the CFO office was the former Flt Lt Oic section the W.O.s office is used also for administration*



*The locker room is used as a gym training area. Today the Fire section are using Panther appliances and presently upgrading to newer versions*

# Kenneth Hird's Story (revisited)

*While I was sorting out archives in the museum library a random piece of A4 paper fell out of a book, and it was Ken's short story which I suspect had been in a Flashpoint some time ago but could not find it. On reading it I found it interesting as it was set in the wartime period, and it mentioned postings unknown to me and also, he served with Fire Floats. Ken was the only one of two veterans that I have come across that has talked about fire floats, the other was Peter Kinglake (see his story in Flashpoint Winter 2018) So, I have added some more information and images. I hope Ken doesn't mind, although he is a lapsed member of the association, if he is still with us and you are in touch with him it would be nice if he sees this revisited story.*

*Steve Harrison*

Ken reported to Padgate on the 29TH of June 1942 to start his service in the RAF. He was posted to Blackpool for square bashing on 3rd July 1942. Walney Island, which is an island at the western end of Morecombe Bay was the next posting for Ken for one year, from October 1942 to October 1943.

The Walney Airfield construction started in 1940. The airfield was designated as an Air Gunnery School and became operational in October 1941 and became the home of 10 Air Gunnery School



*Walney Airfield*

and which had 10 Westland Lysander aircraft for towing target drogues and 2 Boulton and Paul Defiants for instructor and pupils to have airborne practice. By December there were 17 Defiants and there was sufficient barrack space for 100 officers, 140 sergeants and 1,200 airmen.

He was then posted to the Isle of Islay in the Hebrides During World War II, the RAF built an airfield at Glenegedale which later became the civil airport for Islay. There was also an RAF Coastal Command flying boat base at Bowmore from 13 March 1941 using Loch Indaal. In 1944 an RCAF 422 Squadron Sunderland flying boats crew were rescued after their aircraft landed off Bowmore but broke from her moorings in a gale and sank. There was

an RAF Chain Home radar station at Saligo Bay and RAF Chain Home Low station at Kilchiaran.

Ken was only there for six months, then he was sent down to RAF Calshot where he started as a firefighter. Calshot became primarily responsible for the repair, maintenance and modification of RAF flying boats, concentrating on the maintenance of Short Sunderland's. The station also continued to provide marine craft maintenance, and to train boat crews. His "Crash Tender" was of course a Fire Float, a converted sea plane tender with a Coventry Climax pump and a roof mounted monitor.

Ken goes on to explain. "On the 5th of June 1944 you couldn't see Southampton Water for boats of all shapes and sizes. The next morning, 6th of June every boat had disappeared, and we found out that D-Day has started." On D-Day 2 he was called out on the fire float to pump out a (LCT) Landing Craft Tank which had been shelled."

From Calshot Ken was sent to Raf Sutton on Hull to carry out his firefighter's course and on his return the Fire Officer told him his results, which were 72% Written 69% Oral and

82.5% Practical, overall, 75% which was a grade A pass with credit.

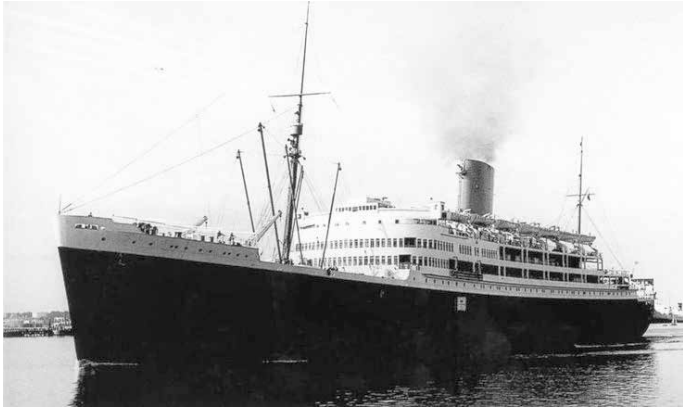
After he came down back to earth after his successful course Ken was posted overseas, after getting kitted out at Blackpool he was then bound for Liverpool to catch a ship to Australia.

The ship which he embarked on was the RMS Andes

Andes was built in 1939 and was used as



*This image is from a Fire Float at RAF Calshot*



*RMS Andes*

a troopship throughout the war. She was converted to a cruise ship in 1959 and received a white hull. She was scrapped in 1971.

Ken goes to say “Going through the Panama Canal was a sight worth seeing, the small engines pulling ocean liners through the locks was fantastic. On arrival in Australia, we entered Sydney Harbour and the first thing that stood out was Sydney Harbour Bridge, which was nicknamed “The Coat Hanger”

Ken was then transported to Bradfield Park to get his posting. At first, he was



*The Abuklarion magazine from 1944*

posted to Townsville, North Queensland, which was a 900-mile journey by train which took 5 days and joined the Fire Section at Garbut RAAF station. After 8 weeks he was on the move again to RAAF Camden the crash tender was the 45 Monitor.

Camden was originally a private airstrip, the area that was to become Camden Aerodrome was utilised by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and other Allied air forces during World War II. Camden airfield hosted Nos. 4, 15, 21,

32 and 78 RAAF Squadrons at various stages during the war. In addition the Central Flying School operated between 1940 and 1942, and a British transport unit, No. 243 Squadron RAF, was based at Camden during the latter part of World War II. Camden was also the No.13 Operational Base. By 1946 the airfield had been returned to its civil status.

While he was there at Camden ken was part of a crew which was sent up the east coast by air taking in Brisbane, Townsville, and Port Moresby to instruct RAAF personnel in firefighting. While Ken was in Australia, he covered about five and half thousand miles.

So, from Camden Ken received what would be his last posting and that was to RAF Aboukir in Egypt.

RAF Aboukir is a former Royal Air Force base located 6.6 miles (10.6 km) northwest of Kafr El-Dawar and 7.2 miles (11.6 km) east of Alexandria, Egypt. Between 1916 and 1947 a number of units and squadrons were based there, including the central depot for RAF Middle East until 12 November 1939.

So, Ken was only at RAF Aboukir for six months before he returned to Blighty for demob

*Original story from 1768126 Leading Aircraftman Kenneth Hird.*



45 Monitor at Butterworth

# The Fireman

The day arrived. 10th March 1958. I received an invitation from the Queen. Well, perhaps not an invitation, more of a summons. And she had not selected me personally, I was just one of thousands who were called up for National Service. The Second World War had only ended twelve years earlier, and Britain was still engaging in a system of conscription. Young fit men were required to perform military duty for 2 years. Perhaps only meeting half the requirements, I knew that the second would not be long in coming!

At the time I was working as an apprentice gas fitter, living with my parents on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. So, with newly trimmed hair, my best suit, and my sandwiches, off I set, saying Goodbye to my fellow gas fitters, my parents and my sweetheart.

It was an eclectic bunch of young men who arrived at RAF Wilmslow, some confident & cocky, others shy and nervous. I was somewhere in the middle! I had eight delightful weeks at Wilmslow enjoying the charismatic virtues of the drill instructor. Or not. It was hell. The square bashing soon knocked us all into shape and boys became men.

I am not sure how or why, but I was selected to be a fireman. During the 1950's the Royal Air Force had expanded enormously, with many new jet fighters being introduced. The accident rate was dreadful, so I guess they needed plenty of shiny suited brave heroes to clear up the mess. Anyway, off I went to RAF Sutton on Hull to learn how to squirt water. And lay foam' And enter smoking buildings, plus a host of other skills related to being an RAF Fireman. Eight weeks later I was passed as fit to perform my duties and received my first posting, RAF St Mawgan in Cornwall.

I arrived at my new station as a "fireman" and then started to learn all about the role. I soon learnt about the different crash tenders, being on a crew, and life in the big wide world.

St Mawgan was home to the Avro Shackleton, a derivative of the famous Second World War bomber, the Lancaster, a large 4 engine maritime reconnaissance aircraft. 42, 201 & 206 Squadrons were based on the airfield, and kept us firemen chaps with plenty of practice. Engine fires seemed to be quite popular.

Around this time the "Shacks" were converting to the newer Mk3 versions. The major difference being that the aircraft was no longer a "tail-dragger" but sported a brand-new shiny nose wheel. It was

not long before the Mk3's resembled the Mk2, but instead of sitting on their tails they would end up sitting forlornly on their noses. Again, this kept us in business. Once the teething problems had been resolved it was a tremendous aircraft and I remember them with great fondness.

Not long after arriving at the base I was summoned to the boss's office. So, it was with some trepidation that I went along, remembering to give my boots a little buff on the backs of my calf just before entering. As I left, I recall that I had learnt that a Gooseneck was not the long bit between a birds head and body, but was in fact a form of airfield lighting, and I was to acquaint myself with one soonest. I reverted to the Manual of Service Firefighting, Air Publication 957. Ah, so that's what it looks like!

The RAF then kindly taught me to drive, and it was not long before I gained my 1629 Airfield driving permit. Things were really looking up.

That's when I discovered my newly acquired driving skills and knowledge of "Goosenecks" were brought together. I was to be part of a team who would get to know the goosenecks intimately. We would prepare the gooseneck lights by checking the wicks & filling them with paraffin. These would be taken out and placed on each side of the runway, if I recall, there were 25 per side. These would be lit and allow the Shacks to practice their night flying. At dawn we would have to extinguish each one and bring it back to the workshops in preparation for the following night. One always had a faint



*Gooseneck paraffin lamp*



*Here is me standing next to 40,000 rivets flying in formation, the Avro Shackleton. This is WR977, an MR3 at the Newark Air museum, with tri-cycle undercarriage.*

whiff of paraffin for a few days, and would always ensure people stood well back when lighting up a cigarette in the pub!

I also had a mild distraction at this time; I got married. My childhood sweetheart Ann moved down from the Isle of Sheppey (she is helping me write this today, after all these years). Needless to say I then had to find somewhere for us to live, and we settled in the Newquay area.

The RAF must have been happy with my driving skills, I had not crashed anything so far, and so they allowed me to play with the big toys - I learnt to drive a fire engine! Starting with the DP1 & DP 2, I would eventually be converted to drive the Mark 5 & 5A Foam Trucks and finally the impressive 6 wheeled Mk 6 & Mk6A. I also drove the Bedford Green Goddess which was an interesting experience!

By now Ann & I had become proud parents, Keith being born in the May of 1960. I remember him being quite vocal in those early months.

After a brief spell at RAF El Adam, I was posted to RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus which was fantastic place for Ann and my young son. We lived in Limassol and soon started to enjoy the warm weather and the great social life that the Mediterranean Island had to offer. The surrounding sea and visits to the Troodos Mountains being our favourite aspects.

So far, I had been lucky, and the worst incidents I had seen were the occasional nose wheel issue or engine fire. That was all to change. On 26th October 1961 two aircraft carried out a night time practice intercept and unfortunately collided. The Canberra, a B2 WD995 of 32 Squadron, was hit in the rear by a Javelin FAW9, XH906 of 25 Squadron, and blew up over the salt flats at Ladies Mile Beach, two and a half miles north of Akrotiri. The three crew of the Canberra were killed as was the Javelin pilot.



*An Alvis Mk 6 crash tender during a visit to the Museum of RAF Fire Fighting. 23 AG 56 is an old friend of mine and I last sat in this seat when the Beatles still around!*

Things returned to normal with many flights in and out of the base. With Cyprus being under the jurisdiction of British rule and the strategic position of the island, Akrotiri was an ideal staging post for transiting aircraft out to the Gulf, Arabia and Far East. As a result, we would see many V Bombers, either the mighty delta winged Vulcan or the beautiful crescent winged Victor. Then in the summer of 1962 tragedy struck again.

On 6th June 1962 a 10 Squadron Victor turned onto the runway to start its takeoff run. The weather was extremely hot and as XA929 barrelled along the runway it was clear to those in the tower that something dreadful was being witnessed. The aircraft failed to achieve sufficient flying speed and crashed into the overshoot area; breaking up and being enveloped in a huge fire ball as it did. Of the six on board only the co-pilot managed to eject, but the aircraft was too low, and like his other crew members he perished in the crash. It was an awful day.

To a certain extent the RAF training helped



*Mk5A stuck in the mud*

me to cope with these tragedies, but it is one's companions who are there to help with the healing process. One of these guys was Dutchy Holland, and he and I still keep in touch to this day.

We returned to the UK in 1963, at a time when the situation in Cyprus was starting to become unstable, and I found myself once again back at St Mawgan. Then

two years later I was posted to the middle east again, this time to RAF Salalah in the Sultanate of Oman. From what my son tells me Salalah is now a beautiful resort but in 1965 it was just sand and huts. When it rained it sure rained, and during one such deluge I managed to get a fire tender stuck in deep mud, much to the amusement of my crew.

The posting to Salalah was unaccompanied, and during the 12 months I was overseas Ann and Keith stayed firstly with my parents in Bath, and then with Ann's parents on Sheppey. When I returned, we were posted to RAF Stradishall in Suffolk, where young navigators learnt their trade in Dominies.

The two awful incidents I witnessed in Cyprus had had a profound effect on me, and were never really spoken about, even to this day. After careful consideration, even whilst I knew that the job was so important, I felt that I could not continue, and so it was with great reluctance that I decided to remuster into another trade

group, and from 1969 I was no longer a fireman.

I remustered into the Central Disciplinary Duties branch for the last years of my career, serving at RAF Oakington and RAF Marham. When my son joined up in 1980 he was promptly posted to Marham, and was there until

1985 when he joined the VC10 simulators at Brize Norton.

I am a proud member of the Royal Air Force and Defence Fire Services Association, and have managed to keep in touch with many colleagues from the days gone past. The Flashpoint magazine is always of great interest to me, and I have even submitted a few articles. In 1980 I was demobbed and we settled back onto the Isle of Sheppey which is where we still live now. Ann and I celebrated our 60th wedding anniversary just 3 years ago, and last year my little boy hit the big six oh. He lives in France with his wife Jo, and spent many years working in Dubai. As for me, well I still remember my service days with great affection. The guys I worked with, the places I visited and above all the comradeship which we all enjoyed.



A few years ago I was asked if I would lay the wreath at our local Remembrance Sunday parade. I was honoured to be asked and carried out this duty for a number of years. By 2018 however, I had handed over this duty to my successor, and was a spectator myself at that year's parade when I was approached by a lady. She politely asked me to move slightly to one side so that she could see her son, an Air Cadet, who was marching in the parade. "Of course," I replied. We got chatting and I mentioned my RAF career, to which she asked if I would mind giving a talk to the local cadets. I was delighted.

I thoroughly enjoyed my hour or so with the cadets, they were enthusiastic and showed a lot of interest. Remembering my paraffin smelly days, I just had to get a picture of the old Gooseneck out and I asked them if they knew what it was. Just like me when I walked into the boss's office all those years ago, they had no idea.

*Alan Dawes  
Member No 1102*

# When I was a Lad at RAF Machrihanish!!!

I was posted to RAF Machrihanish in early 81, my sister thought I was going to Outer Mongolia, not the west coast of Scotland!!!

I had to delay my departure from Wittering to complete my Admin and Org Exam, so I travelled up on a Thursday and duly arrived early on the Friday. Sgt Terry Bradley told me that I wasn't needed until the following Monday!!!! Cheers for that I thought!!!

I quickly got my accommodation sorted and thought what to do for the rest of the weekend now I had time on my hands. Gordon (Gorgeous) Ball, Spud Pye, Eddie Fitzgerald, Ian (Yanto) Cormack to name a few of my fellow singlies introduced themselves and we quickly spent the weekend on the beer.

Now, Machrihanish was a rare old place and to be fair not the busiest of Stations but quite a lot of differing things going on, what with our American (Sshh) Colleagues and varying exercises every now and again.

Phil Cane, Al Stamp and Terry Bradley were the Snco's running the show until Warrant Officer Paddy Mc Gragh came in. Dave Gore, Bill McKay and Chris Sheldrake were some of the Cpl's. Jim Currie and Chalky White came along as Sgt's later as did WO Baldwin. Bob Halliday, Andy Slater, Bob Sims, Shaun Boland, Davie Stenhouse, Frank Engall, Ray Jones, Al Terry, Chris Mison, Terry Clent, Steve Houghland, Greg Allen, Adrian Speak, Dave Gillan to name but a few of the guys.

The Clansman Club on the Station was the place to be on a Saturday night for the weekly Bop and the influx of local girls. The empty transit block opposite used to have the fire extinguishers checked on a very regular Friday basis and the doors were left unlocked for the weekend, it was a long time before the powers to be realised what was going on and shut down this initiative!!! You will be aware that several of our colleagues have married local Campbeltown girls over the years, not sure that the unofficial knocking shop had anything to do with that though, perhaps it was just loooove!!

Val Sims (Bobs wife) used to run the Clansman and on several occasions the

Fireman helped out, well, when the club was in arrears due to all the free drinks we were giving the girls, that was another initiative quickly shut down.

After one such Bop night, (not sure if it was the balloon dance one which several of our colleagues took part in, the RAF Police investigated that one, they were left deflated when they couldn't identify the C\*\*ks, - Culprits!!! ) it was decided that we should go onto another party in the town of Campbeltown. This was an idea that quickly grew legs and as I was one of only a couple of car owners yours truly was nominated as the Taxi. So, four blokes and four local girls piled into my souped up Skoda and off we went to carry on the evening. I have to say that we arrived and had a good time and then drove back to the Camp safely. Yes, I had learnt my lesson from RAF Wittering!!! On the drinking side anyway, the car was still rather over loaded even with five less passengers!!!!

During one extremely busy shift in the bays, making mortars out of the water gas cylinders and managing to make at least four holes in the ceiling. (How did we manage to prat about like that in the bays you may well ask??? The bays were across the road from the section and with the doors closed no one could see what we were up to!!! The sliding door from the section used to squeal and we had knocked out a brick in the bay wall so could peer out when we heard the squeal!!! We would then appear busy when the Cpl or Crew Commander came into the bays!!!) Anyway, it was decided that the Families Club should be our next port of call to unwind from the stress and strains of a hectic tour of duty. I think it was a Sunday lunch time session and then back to the Mess for T and a kip prior to finishing off in the Clansman Club. When it was time to leave the Families Club, us three singlies that were left, found a bike outside the club and decided it would be quicker to hi-jack this mode of transport enabling us to get to T on time. Well, as you can imagine, we crashed the damn thing and fell about laughing as you do. We made sure we were all still in one piece which thankfully we were. The bike however was very much knackered, so we left it and scarpered off for T. Sgt Phil Cane was not happy, someone had not only nicked his bike but had written it off on the Married Patch.

I'm not sure if he actually knew who the culprits were or not!!!!??

The WO knew that I liked to mess around with cars and asked me to give his car a service prior to him going on leave, we could always use OMD 80 for the oil change couldn't we?? I had his Opel on a jack and the front wheel off to inspect the brake discs for wear, bloody jack failed and the car fell onto the floor - PANIC!!! I ran across to the MT hangar ( I am of course one of the drivers on shift!!! Who cares at this point??? ) and re - located a ford escort jack to lift up the Warrants car. The service was duly finished and the Warrant went away on leave unaware of the dent in the floor of his car, Phew!!

Paul McCartney of Beatles and Wings fame often flew into Machrihanish as he had a property locally. He would offer seats back to London on his private jet, very generous and would have been great if we actually knew when he was coming and we could take him up on his offer, still, it's the thought that counts. After getting his autograph, we followed his beaten up green land rover round the ring road in our Mk 7, for some reason they stopped rather quickly and I just managed to get the 7 round it without smashing into the back end. I have wondered what he would have called the song if I had driven into him??

Anyway, it couldn't have been all fun, we clearly did some duties as I was selected for my FT 1 course. How do you practice giving four man drills when you are the Instructor, Ahh yes, the Warrant Officer and SNCO would become part of the line up!!! I am not sure how you tell the Warrant that he keeps messing up so best to put him at the end of the line, that way he never makes it into the actual drill team!!! People always said I should have gone into Politics.

I successfully passed my FT 1 course with the help of the great Garth Furrage and Tommy Farrell. I was then posted to RAF Binbrook with some shiney tapes on my shoulders, now there's a Station with some stories to tell!!!

*Cheers  
Stevie.B.  
413*

# Spot the difference



