

# FLASHPOINT

ROYAL AIR FORCE & DEFENCE FIRE SERVICES ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



## Inside this issue

Armed Forces Memorial • RAF Coningsby Reunion • The Last Parade • Hornet Crash  
Huntington Fire Station visit • Terry Wright's RAF Service • RAF Wyton



# Brief History Of The Association

## Formation of the Association



The formation of the Royal Air Force & Defence Fire Services Association took place at Shoreham Airport in East Sussex, on the 13th May 1995, when ex-service personnel got together to remedy the fact, that there wasn't an organisation relating to the trade of firefighter when most other trades had one of their own many years ago? On that day, those founder members turned up from all over the country, and went on to form the inaugural committee of the Association and elected the Officers and Committee and Area Coordinators to cover the U.K.

Since, many changes have taken place as the Association established itself over the intervening years and, with its formation, old comrades, past and present, now have a better chance of finding each other again, renewing old friendships and making new ones.

## Brief History of the RAF Fire and Rescue Service



driven by M.T.

A School of Firefighting and Rescue was then established on an RAF Balloon Unit, north of the City of Hull, as RAF Sutton-on-Hull, until its closure in 1959. The School then moved to RAF Catterick, North Yorkshire and later, to RAF Manston in Kent, as the Central Training Establishment, (CTE), then the Fire Services Central Training Establishment (FSCTE).

The Trade of Fireman was first introduced in 1943 within Trade Group 9, to train personnel in Aircraft Crash Rescue and Firefighting techniques and included an Advanced Trade in Air Traffic Control. Prior, personnel on general and aircraft handling duties were used to carry out fire fighting responsibilities; with vehicles

The Association publishes Flashpoint magazine 3 times per year with updates, information, news, articles, anecdotes, photos, and stories, mainly supplied by the members.

Association membership is made up of ex and serving firefighters and includes those personnel who made up the Air Force, Army and Royal Navy\* Fire Service Departments, which has become the Defence Fire and Rescue Service.

***"Together we are the Royal Air Force and Defence Fire Services Association!"***

Associate Membership is open to ex and serving personnel having a minimum of three months service with the Civilian Aviation Authority (CAA) Licensed Aerodrome Fire Services.

\* 1987, Royal Navy founded the Aircraft Handlers Association and Website: [www.chockheads.org.uk/](http://www.chockheads.org.uk/)

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## Brief History of the Defence Fire and Rescue Service



The Air Ministry Fire Service, (AMFS), became the Air Force Department Fire Service, (AFDFS), with a badge change, then the Defence Fire Services, (DFS), with another badge change and, now is the Defence Fire and Rescue Service, (DF&RS).

The early 1960's also saw the gradual civilianisation of certain Stations starting with Flying Training Command. Many personnel recruited were ex RAF, Navy and Army, and formed an experienced nucleus for the change over.

Many recruits hadn't experienced service camaraderie before; although it developed by nature of the job itself. This is no reflection on those individuals whatsoever, or on their abilities as fire fighters, it was just a complete change in the way things were done when previously manned by Regular Volunteers and National Service personnel.

Some of those early recruits went on to become Senior Officers, Training School Commandants at Manston, and Command Fire Officers throughout the RAF and DFS, both home and abroad.

Like the RAF Fire and Rescue Service, reviews are ongoing and the future is unsure. Hopefully it will remain a viable force.

# Who To Contact - Officers and Committee

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**Co-ordinator Vacancies - East Yorkshire - Midlands, Scotland (1), South East and other areas as necessary.** It's not too arduous, just a matter of keeping in touch, and promoting the Association when able to do so. If you can help, please contact a Committee member.

Message from Association Treasurer Mike Shenton and from Association membership Secretary John Hanley re Increase in Association subscriptions.

John and Mike have asked to remind members that all standing Order mandates should be sent to Mike and not to John as some members have done

The Chairman of the RAF Sylt Association very kindly included a full page article in the last edition of their newsletter; it is only right therefore that we reciprocate their kind gesture and mention their Association in Flashpoint. See page 9.

## HOW TO JOIN

For more information about the Royal Air Force & Defence Fire Services Association and to request an application form contact :-

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**or Visit our website at - www.rafanddfsса.co.uk**



Front Cover: RAF Coningsby MFV2

# Flashpoint Editorial Summer 2011

In the absence of any volunteers to take on the role of Flashpoint Editor Steve Harrison and myself have volunteered to co edit the Summer 2011 edition of Flashpoint and we hope you enjoy this edition. Steve and I go back many years and have many things in common not least a great fondness for our old trade and the men and women past and present who have served as RAF Fire fighters. Steve and I both joined up in 1965 Steve at the RAF Careers Office in Hull me at the RAF Careers office in Liverpool. Both of us went through Swinderby and Catterick and first served together in 1968 at that desert Island in the sun Masirah. We often get together at reunions with other ex RAF Masirah crew mates and these are wonderful joyous occasions when we pull up a bucket of sand switch on the fan and reminisce about those halcyon days of our youth. After a few years without any contact Steve and I met up again at RAF Catterick when as young and enthusiastic SAC's we completed our Advanced Course together. After another few years apart we met up again this time at RAF Laarbruch we were now young Corporals

happily married and both of us with two young children. Life now was fairly hectic but very enjoyable. On completion of our Germany tours we went separate ways again only to meet up again not this time in a warm climate or even a green and pleasant land no this time we were to serve together for six months at that bleak windswept and barren land that is the Falkland Island. Steve and I were the two fire crew chiefs at RAF Stanley during the later part of 1984. There it is a little potted history of your two co editors of Flashpoint. As well as our relatively long connection with the RAF Fire Service (nearly fifty years between us) we share many other interests including a love of books and writing the odd bits of our own verse that we turn out every now and again. Enjoy the rest of Flashpoint and if you have any interesting tales to tell or come across any interesting articles that you think may appeal to our members please share them with us

Every good wish

*Steve Harrison and George Edwards Co  
Editors of Flashpoint*

## Letters to the editor

On reading the Spring 2011 edition of Flashpoint I was very surprised to read about the crash on the 11 July 1958; I was part of the crash crew.

I remember the pilot had been given permission to do a fast run over the airfield, we were about to change over crews for lunch. As the Javelin came over the airfield at speed it went up into clouds and I heard two bangs then Air Traffic told us to get going as the aircraft was about to crash.

I jumped into the Mk 5 and Geoff Varley drove off. I saw the javelin falling to ground in a falling leaf pattern. By now Geoff was rushing the airfield as by now the aircraft had hit the ground and was in flames. We were trying to contain the fire and what was left of the Javelin when the Aden cannon rounds started to cook off and one hitting the side of the Gas Truck.

I remember taking hold of the gas hose and cooling off the ammo box; I was then instructed to take the DP1 back to camp and refill with water and standby at the section. Like Geoff Varley after 4 and a half years as a RAF fireman that was the only experience of an aircraft fatality.

I think I am right in saying that about a week later another Javelin went off the runway and into some trees and Geoff Varley was the Mk 6 driver at that time

*Ralph Beer ex SAC member 718*

## Remembrance Day Parade

The Cenotaph Remembrance Day Parade takes place this year on Sunday 13 November. Our Association Parade Marshal Ron Brown tells me that he still has tickets left for those keen to participate in this unique occasion. Further details can be obtained from Ron tel 07833 631 963. Alan Gilchrist will be leading our contingent this year



## NEMESIS

My days of youth are over my torch of light burnt out what used to be my sex appeal is now my water spout. Time was when of its own accord t'would from my trousers spring but now I've got a full-time job to find the blinking thing. It used to be amazing the way it would behave as early every morning it stood and watched me shave but as old age encroaches it fair gives me the blues to see it hang its withered head and watch me clean my shoes.

Overheard at a reunion "Steve remember that stuff they were supposed to put in our tea at Masirah way back in 1968 to dampen our ardour well I think its finally starting to work"

# ARMED FORCES MEMORIAL

This is the first national memorial dedicated to the men and women of the United Kingdom Armed Forces (Regular and Reserve) killed on duty or as a result of terrorist action since the Second World War. The Memorial is located at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas in Staffordshire

The start date is 1 January 1948, which follows on directly from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which commemorates those who died up to 31 December 1947. The one exception is for those members of HM Armed Forces killed in Palestine who are included on the Memorial.

The Armed Forces Memorial was dedicated on Friday 12th October 2007. The ceremony was attended by HM The Queen, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, HRH The Prince of Wales and HRH The Duchess of Cornwall. The Service of Dedication was led by His Grace The Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Memorial is not a traditional war memorial that only remembers those killed in conflict. It also recognises the many servicemen and women who have given their lives while on duty and those killed by terrorist action. The Memorial also helps to raise awareness of the invaluable contribution made by the Armed Forces throughout the world.

Included on the list of names on the memorial is that of ex RAF Fireman S.A.C. Alan Ledson who was killed when a 60 Squadron Venom hit the ATC land rover he was driving on 25th April 1957 he had an electrician J/T Peter Arundel as passenger as they were checking runway lighting. Both names are on the wall at the National Arboretum under the year 1957. Alan is interred at the Kranji Military Cemetery in Singapore. Ron Brown very kindly forwarded the information about Alan. Ron served with Alan at Tengah; in fact Ron tells me that Alan was his best mate in Tengah consequently he was devastated when he heard the news of his mate's death. Alan was born in Liverpool and brought up in a Liverpool Children's Home. A few years ago at Ron's request I put an article in the Liverpool Echo seeking information about any possible relatives of Alan's. Ron wanted to pass on what information he had about Alan to his family. Sadly no contact was made and it is highly likely that Alan has no relatives.

## A PICTURE FROM MY PAST



In June 2011 I bought a unframed water colour from an auction house in Lincoln on the basis that there was something hauntingly familiar about it.

When I got the painting home, I thought to myself "I am sure that this from the Falkland Islands" and I was certain that in my photographs was one of some wrecked boats that looked similar and sure enough there was a photo. When I studied them both it was without a doubt that they were the same boats, the water colours perspective was from the causeway in the photograph.

The other strange thing was that the painting was dated 1984 the very year that I did my detachment to RAF Stanley. As for the artist he is David C Bell a well known marine and aviation artist whose work I am familiar with as I have two prints of Humber Ferries and two artists proof's of some Hull steam trawlers.

When I did a little more research I discovered that he had been commissioned by the Ministry to produce several commemorative paintings. I should imagine that they will be hanging in the buildings of the MOD.

I am quite sure that all of you lads that served at Stanley must have walked or drove past them numerous times. ***Can you remember them?***

The area in which the boats lay is called 'The Canache' which is east of Stanley Harbour and south of 'Whalebone Cove' and also the area that the 'Coastel's were anchored.

The painting has been framed and now hangs in my home and alongside it the photograph I took and I still find it remarkable that I discovered it and it was painted in 1984 the very year in which I took the photograph.

Steve Harrison



# RAF CONINGSBY FIRE SERVICE REUNION APRIL 2011

The weekend of 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2011 was to be an occasion that would not be forgotten for a long time for some 24 ex and serving fire fighters

They came from far and wide with family and friends to be a part of this reunion which had been organised by our Association Chairman Gordon Smith and really the weekend started for many on the Friday night at Woodall Spa where many stayed at the local B&B's, guest houses and hotels and a few got together for a beer or two!!! Joined by W.O. Steve Bowden who is in charge of the Fire Section at Coningsby. The banter would ensue about expanding waistlines and receding hairlines, which we all know is standard for any reunion! For many this would be the first contact with former friends and colleagues since those heady days of the late 70's and early 80's

On the Saturday morning at RAF Coningsby we were blessed with good weather and Gordon Smith was there to make sure everyone was booked in with the appropriate passes. This all went quite smoothly and soon a convoy of cars was making its way to the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF) for a conducted tour and buffet lunch which Gordon had organised as part of the day.

After a while when everyone was gathered together and late arrivals turned up and there was that recognition of faces and catching up with each other, after a while Gordon gave a short address about the day and informing us about those who could not attend and we had a moments silence to remember those fire fighters who had passed on from that time.

After a safety briefing from the BBMF staff, we were split up into two groups and then started a very interesting tour



One of our guides at the BBMF Eric Knowles imparting his knowledge



Sgt Steve Parsons explaining the workings and kit of the MFV2

of the BBMF hanger. We were shown all the varied Mk's of Spitfire and Hurricanes different types of engines and told some funny stories and amazing fact and figures, of course there was the famous Lancaster Bomber. For the ex Coningsby lads being in the hanger brought back memories of incidents etc.

So it was from the BBMF to the Fire Section. On Arrival we were greeted and welcomed by the Watch manager Sgt Steve Parsons. As we looked around the section there were comments on how it had changed and what was here or what was there. When we were in the kitchen I heard a remark from one of the lads to the other, 'I remember you cooking a meal and it was the worst meal I had ever tasted!'

Steve Parsons then proceeded to show us around the latest generation of crash vehicles the MFV2. This was quite different type of truck for some of the lads who had left the service some time ago and when Mk9's were the last truck they had seen. The kit that the MFV2 carries has certainly moved on and I think there was a wish that it had been around in their day. Although I am sure lots of 'old' fire-fighters look back with some romance about the character and nuances of the previous generation of fire trucks I know which I would have preferred.

There were lots of interest and plenty of questions that Steve had to answer. He then told us that he would organise a demonstration of production on the move which turned out a lot slicker than it used to be with the older generation of trucks.

After the demo it was back to the section for a brew and to complete the demolition of the sandwiches. It happened to be Grand National day and the duty crew had organised a sweep so there was a delving in the pockets and the sweep total swelled

considerably. It created a great atmosphere and it was like a time warp and all the lads who had served there all those years ago became one giant crew alongside those young lads now serving.

All too soon the visit had to come to an end but it was agreed to carry on with the reunion and in true fire fighters style it was off to the pub! The Castle in Coningsby village was the recipient of some extra revenue!

Steve Harrison  
(co-ed and roving reporter)

*Co-eds note: Although I was never at Coningsby and was invited to do a job it was a great day out for me, as apart from a first visit to the BBMF I got to meet up with a few lads who I had not seen since my RAF days.*

*Not all those who attended this reunion are RAF&DFS Association members but I think a few are to join which will keep the Association alive.*

*I would like to, on behalf of everyone at the reunion to say a big Thank You to all at the BBMF for a great day not forgetting Gordon Smith for organising it and a big thank you to W.O Steve Bowden, Sgt Steve Parsons and all the lads of the duty crew. Also I would say if anyone has not paid a visit to the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight put it on your wish list.*



*All those that attended the reunion (names listed below but not in that order in the photo)*

Graeme Bebbington, Ivan Simcox,  
Brian Peterson, Rois Lorenze,  
Dave Lilley, Geordie Dingle,  
John Cleminson, John O'Connor,  
George Edwards, Bob Wilding,  
Tony Meade, Steve Carlson,  
Leigh Craig, Pete Thompson,  
Paul Bell, Gordon Smith, Dave Lucock,  
Ray Hunt, Paul Harvey, Geoff Brown,  
Steve Jackson, Rob Hookway,  
Trevor Jones, Colin Murphy.

# Letter to Editor

Hello George,

I thought your article on Burtonwood was excellent, as you remarked, with the huge numbers of US military in Lancashire, it was bound to have an effect ( such as the numerous G I brides).

From being a young lad (brought up in Euxton nr, Chorley Lancashire)) I have always seemed to have some contact or other with our "American Cousins"! Washington Hall, near my home was an American camp during the latter part of WW2 (now the Lancashire FB training centre), and there were constant convoys of US military vehicles heading to and from Burtonwood along the A49 (before the M6). The wanton destruction of equipment seems to be the "norm" with the US Military, as this same procedure had been carried at RAF Sculthorpe in Norfolk when the yanks pulled out of there. When I was at West Raynham I was lucky to be allocated a surplus AMQ bungalow there, living alongside the depleted USAF contingent. A master Sergeant told me one day, that he had seen millions of dollars worth of gear buried in a tip near by, rather than sell it off, and that this procedure is followed worldwide where ever the US pull out! This seems a great waste, but I suppose there is good reason for it!

It's been sad to see Burtonwood slowly disappear after closure in 1994, but with the end of the cold war that has speeded up this process. West Raynham has virtually gone, with the development of a new housing estate, but at least I was lucky to attend the closure ceremony, with Allan Brooke, and a few other ex RAF mates!

Nice to hear your Grandson got a pat on the back for his assistance in producing the last Flashpoint", kids these days seem to be born to use IT, my granddaughters have no problem at all sending emails, the youngest,aged 3, is a boffin with a Nintendo DS !

Regards Andy G

## RAF Waddington 5-a-side



*A photograph taken in 1979 at RAF Waddington of the Garth Furmage organised annual Lincolnshire RAF Fire Sections five a side football competition sorry I cant name all the players but I recognise Tony Meade Louie Lucock and yours truly George Edwards ( that's me with the garish seventies tie)*

## Some people's idea of a RAF Fireman



*Does he look familiar, he does to me but I'm saying nothing. GE - Co-Ed*

# The Last Parade



Left to right: Allan Gilchrist, Ron Brown, Mike Clapton, Brian Ford, Dan Gurney

**I**t would seem that today's repatriation was the last to pass through Wootton Bassett unless another of our servicemen is killed before the end of August.

To mark the occasion, the Royal Air Force, Fire and Defence Association's Standard was paraded for the first time. The proud Standard Bearer was Mike Clapton supported by Ron Brown, Allan Gilchrist, Dan Gurney and yours truly, Brian Ford.

The "Wootton Basseteers" are proud of the fact that the Association has been represented at all repatriations over the last three or more years.

When asked ,Why? We will all give the same answer, "We can do nothing for the dead in the hearse, we go to show our sympathy for the families and show respect for those servicemen that have given their lives for their country, we are not demonstrating against the conflict, for the town is non political.

Whether you agree with our servicemen serving in these conflicts, or not, they are

there, carrying out their duty and the least we can do is to show our deep respect for those who tragically give their lives.

There have been some deeply moving moments; for me the Fijian soldier whose entire regimental choir sang hymns for an hour in those beautiful deep, sonorous harmonies that seems to be synonymous with the south sea islanders, the sound of families crying together and the dignity of a young wife who had requested that the hearse should not be decked with flowers but merely stepped out, alone and stood with her head bowed, with one hand resting on the glass window of the hearse.

Then there have been the friendships that have been forged among the members of all the forces that attend and the towns' folk that always appear so glad to welcome us into their community. The many British Legion "Bikers" that form up with "Steve" who conducts the families to the most advantageous position and protects them from the unwelcome attention of the media in the "Cross Keys" where families retire, after the ceremony for refreshments

provided by the landlady.

Today, after the "dismiss" the father of the deceased young officer came to the war memorial to thank us for attending and as he was shaking our hands. One of our group said "It wasn't a duty, it was a privilege".

*Brian and The "Basseteers"*



Since Steve and I took over joint editorship of Flashpoint we have been on the lookout for articles / photos that may be of interest to our members. At a recent visit to my local RAFA club a good friend of mine Eric Barton passed me this poem and straight away I thought this is worthy of inclusion in the next edition of Flashpoint. Eric is ex RAF and served for six years as a ground wireless mechanic. I hope you find the poem interesting I certainly did and all credit to Eric Sykes for putting pen to paper and reminding us all that without the man (and women these days) on the ground there would be no Royal Air Force.

George Edwards (co editor)

Eric Barton explains that from November 1953 to December 1954, the last year of my RAF service, I was posted to RAF Sylt, (pronounced "Silt" by us and "Zoolt" by the Germans), which is an island in the North Sea right opposite the border between Germany and Denmark. In fact, the border curves around the north of the island. All who served there loved it and ten years ago we formed 'The RAF Sylt Association' now with over 200 members. We hold a reunion each year in October at various locations.

When the Allies took over the airfield at Sylt from the Germans, three of the first personnel to land there were **Dennis Norden, Eric Sykes and Bill Frazer** (The Army Game/Bootsy and Snudge). Dennis and Eric agreed to be our Patrons, but sadly Bill passed away many years ago. One of our members found a poem on the internet written by Eric Sykes and I think it's well worthwhile sharing it with you, so here it is;

### Three Cheers for the Man on the Ground By Flight Mechanic E Sykes 1942

Wherever you walk you will hear people talk  
of the men who go up in the air.  
Of the daredevil way they go into the fray;  
Facing death without turning a hair.

They'll raise a big cheer and buy lots of beer  
for the pilot who's come home on leave.  
But they don't give a jigger for a flight mech or rigger  
with nothing but props on his sleeve.

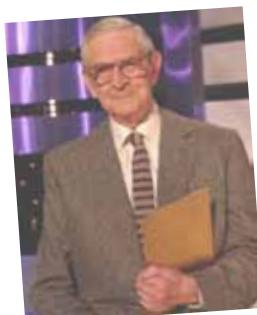
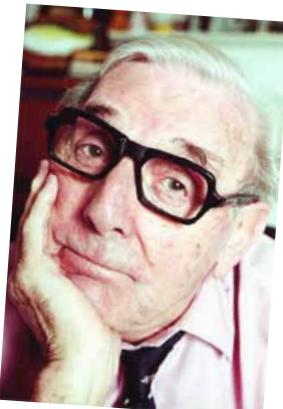
They just say "Nice day" - and then turn away  
with never a mention of praise  
for the poor bloody erk, who does all the work  
and just orders his own beer - and pays.

They've never been told of the hours in the cold  
that he spends sealing Germany's fate.  
How he works on a kite 'til all hours of the night  
and he turns up next morning at eight.

He gets no rake-off for working 'til take-off,  
or helping the aircrew prepare,  
but whenever there's trouble - it's "Quick, on the double",  
the man on the ground must be there.

Each flying crew could confirm it as true,  
that they know what this man's realty worth.  
They know that he's part of the RAF's heart  
even though he stays close to the earth.

He doesn't want glory but please tell his story  
spread a little of his fame around.  
He's just one of few- so give him his due,  
and "Three Cheers For The Man On The Ground".



## RAF SYLT ASSOCIATION

The Association was formed in 2002 to provide information and contact links for long lost friends, to hold reunions at regular intervals and to advise on visits to Sylt. It has established a historical library system of DVDs, photographs and script and is actively involved in the exchange of historical and related material. Membership is open to Royal Air Force personnel, irrespective of rank, who served as permanent staff at Royal Air Force Sylt during its operational period from 1945 to 1961, from which date it was handed over to the German Air Force. The Association also welcomes personnel who served at the satellite station, RAF Schleswigland,



from 1945 to 1958. Membership is also open to those who were civilian staff on either unit during those periods.

The Association is entirely self supporting and relies on annual subscriptions to cover its running costs. Subscription Rates are currently £10.00 per annum for Single or Joint Membership. Members receive newsletters, have access to the archives and regularly exchange photographic and other material relating to their time on the island. Some the experiences of the former serving personnel from the station have been gathered together into three books entitled 'The Sylt Archives' volumes 1, 2 and 3. These stories along with their accompanying photographs provide a humorous and nostalgic look back at those unforgettable times.

If you served at RAF Sylt or RAF Schleswigland and wish to join the association or make contact the website is [www.raf-sylt.co.uk](http://www.raf-sylt.co.uk) or you can make contact via the Chairman:

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# Warrant Officer Stephen Bowden QGM



**W**arrant Officer Stephen Bowden from the RAF has been awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal for actions in Afghanistan over 16 and 17 May 2010. Being one of the first to arrive at the scene of a massive fire at Camp Leatherneck (adjacent to Camp Bastion), Warrant Officer Bowden immediately recognised the severity of the situation and, without hesitation, assumed command of the incident:

"All I could see was a big black cloud of smoke, and I thought we're going to have to go into that," he said. However, the situation worsened some forty minutes later, as a catastrophic dust storm took hold, with gusting winds exceeding 60 knots driving the fire and reducing visibility down to metres. This combination of dust storm and inferno generated a grave threat to WO Bowden and his team's lives, but, with a display of incredible awareness of the situation, WO Bowden decided to remain and fight the fire, only withdrawing his team at the last safe moment: "The fire was about the size of two football pitches, and I knew there was welding gear in there, which meant gas cylinders, and we were concerned that embers were blowing in the direction of Camp Bastion," said WO Bowden. "It was the most serious incident I've attended in 35 years' service."

Showing no fear, WO Bowden was the last to withdraw from the fire, spending considerable time and exposure to personal danger in accounting for all his men.

Leading from the front, WO Bowden brought his team back to tackle the inferno, halting it on the opposite side of the street

to the bulk fuel installation containing over one-and-a-half-million gallons of fuel. Despite regular explosions and the knowledge that there were more gas cylinders in the area, WO Bowden led his team deep into the heart of the blaze to push the flames back and relieve the pressure on the threatened fuel installation. Despite suffering disabling smoke injuries to his eyes, and in some pain, WO Bowden remained at his post throughout the night and well into the next afternoon to oversee the successful culmination of the fire. His citation concluded:

"There is no doubt that Bowden's courageous and unselfish efforts in leading his team of brave fire-fighters were fundamental in minimising injury and preventing loss of life in this incident."

What a truly marvellous achievement Steve and an act of sheer professionalism that make all RAF Fire-fighters (ex and serving) so proud of you and your team.

*Steve Harrison & George Edwards  
Flashpoint editors.*

## RAF West Raynham

Hello George,

I have just discovered this photo, while going through some stuff stored in a cupboard, I have scanned it and included it as an attachment with this, and I hope you may be able to use it in a future edition of Flashpoint.

It was taken outside the Fire Section at RAF West Raynham during the Closure ceremony on the 1st June 1994. It shows (L to R) "Spike" Hatcher, Allan Brooke and myself (SAC's in 1970), in front of the "crash line" which was on loan from RAF Marham for the day (cover for fly pasts).

I recall it was a lovely sunny day, and although it was sad

to see the end of the RAF at this location, it was great to meet up with other "old comrades" whom we had served alongside in the early 1970's when the airfield was operational with 85 & 100 (Canberra) squadrons, not forgetting 41sqd. Bloodhound (SAM).

There is a tale about the RAF ensign that mysteriously went AWOL (from the CO's staff car) shortly after the ceremony, I heard that some weeks after it was on display at a RAFA branch located somewhere in the Midlands!

The latest from West Raynham is that the MOD have sold off the site to a developer, and an



housing estate is being built after the old buildings are demolished. There are several links on the internet, with lots of photos taken just before the

bulldozers moved in. (Living TV also did a "ghost watch" there a year or so ago).

*Bye for now, Andy Gaskell  
328*

# RAFDFSA Shop

Those of you unable to attend reunions should be aware that we have a range of RAFDFSA and CRASH goods for sale, which are also available by mail order via us and the Association website shown at the bottom of each page. We look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the reunions.

Regards and best wishes Allan and Marilyn

Contact details: - Allan and Marilyn Brooke  
20 Chestnut Grove, Farndon, Newark, Nottinghamshire NG24 3TW  
Tel: 01636 688 680  
No personal callers please.

Email: allana.brooke@ntlworld.com or marilyn.brooke@ntlworld.com

Note:- For Mail Order - All items will be subject to postage and packaging, which will be calculated per individual order. A customer will be informed of the cost and, when payment is received, the order will be despatched.

Cheques & Postal Orders made payable to RAF&DFSA Shop Account.

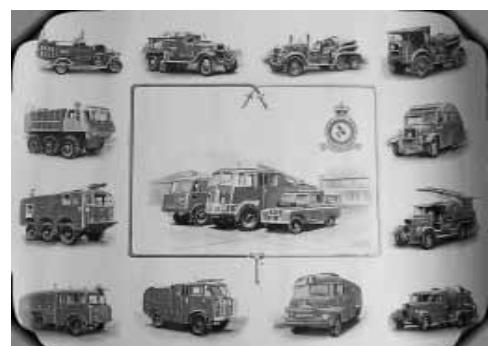
## STOCK AND PRICE LIST @ WINTER/SPRING 2010

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| BASE BALL CAP . . . . .                       | £9.50  |
| KNITTED HAT . . . . .                         | £7.50  |
| RUGBY SHIRT . . . . .                         | £17.00 |
| SHORT SLEEVEDPOLO SHIRT . . . . .             | £12.00 |
| LONG SLEEVED POLO SHIRT . . . . .             | £14.50 |
| SHORT SLEEVED T SHIRT . . . . .               | £6.50  |
| LONG SLEEVED T SHIRT . . . . .                | £10.50 |
| WHITE SHORT SLEEVED SHIRT . . . . .           | £12.50 |
| SWEATSHIRT . . . . .                          | £13.50 |
| FLEECE JACKET . . . . .                       | £20.00 |
| FLEECE BODY WARMER . . . . .                  | £19.00 |
| ASSOCIATION TIE . . . . .                     | £9.00  |
| BLAZER BADGE . . . . .                        | £12.50 |
| PATCH BADGE . . . . .                         | £3.50  |
| CAP BADGE . . . . .                           | £8.00  |
| LAPEL BADGE – ALL TYPES . . . . .             | £3.00  |
| FIREMAN KEYRING . . . . .                     | £3.50  |
| CLOTH KEYRING . . . . .                       | £3.50  |
| RED ARROW FRIDGE MAGNET . . . . .             | £3.00  |
| LEATHER BOOK MARK . . . . .                   | £1.00  |
| PRESENTATION PEN . . . . .                    | £3.50  |
| PRESENTATION PAPER KNIFE . . . . .            | £2.50  |
| CUFF LINKS . . . . .                          | £5.50  |
| ASSOCIATION CAR STICKER . . . . .             | £1.00  |
| FIRE SCHOOL STICKER . . . . .                 | £0.50  |
| DOCUMENT BAG . . . . .                        | £8.50  |
| NYLON BAG . . . . .                           | £6.50  |
| WASH BAG . . . . .                            | £11.50 |
| RIPPER WALLET . . . . .                       | £8.50  |
| ASSOCIATION MUG . . . . .                     | £4.00  |
| FIRE ENGINE COASTER . . . . .                 | £1.50  |
| RAF FIRE CARDS . . . . .                      | £2.00  |
| FIRE ENGINE PRINT . . . . .                   | £5.00  |
| FIREMAN PRINT . . . . .                       | £2.50  |
| NOVELTY TOYS AND WHITE METAL MODELS AS PRICED |        |
| ASSOCIATION SHIELDS AS PRICED                 |        |

**CONTACT US TO SEE WHAT WE HAVE IN STOCK?** Other novelty items will change over a period of time so it is best to either contact us to see what we have in stock, or come to the Association reunions or one of the shows where we are selling, (no list of dates and venues yet)?

\*The New design Print above right depicts vehicles from 1960's to present day. From top left clockwise - Mk10, Mk11a Tacr1, Tac-T, Tacr2, Major and Mini Angus Bedford Domestics, Queen's Squadron TQF Scania, Falklands Bv206 tracked vehicle, Mk7, Mk8, and Mk9, with MFV and RIV in the centre.

\*\*The Print bottom right depicts vehicles from 1940 to 1960. From Top left clockwise: 30 Cwt Crossley, Fordson, Crossley 6 x 4, Crossley PE 1, Crossley (Streamline), 1944 Fordson Monitor Conversion, 1945 Fordson Monitor, Bedford Domestic, 600 gallon, Thornycroft MK5A, & Dual Purpose Tender MK 2 (DP2), Alvis Pyrene MK6, Alvis Stalwart, Centre: Left to right: Dual Purpose Tender MK1, (DP1), Thornycroft MK5 and ACRT, (Aircraft Crash Rescue Truck).



# A Time for Change



The cold New Year's Day of 1969 signaled the end of Bomber Command as we knew it and became Strike Command. Four young Firemen who occupied a room at RAF Wittering were unaware of the changes that would send them off in differing directions, and the challenges they would have to face in the future. It took some months before most of these airmen had left for other postings, but for me, I remained – it was like a ghost town. However, with the arrival of the new Harrier Jump Jets the camp once again became active, but never to be the same when the Victors had filled the dispersals! New firemen arrived, replacing those that had already left or eventually posted like me to Sharjah some 18 months later. This was the beginning of the link between Harrier's and RAF Wittering.

Many years later in October 2010, two of these 'lads' who shared that small room, met again in Australia! Doug Carstairs and his wife were on a holiday tour of Australia and we (my wife and I) had arranged to meet up with them whilst they were in Melbourne, where we have lived for the past 29 years. We had only made contact with Doug and

Margaret a few months before on the internet and here we were meeting again after more than 42 years, exchanging memories and our hopes for the future and tales of the past along with both our wives - who, by the way, were also stationed at RAF Wittering as air force personnel during this time.

Some weeks later with Christmas cards fresh in my hand, I learned of the Harriers final flight and by strange coincidence just about the time of Doug's visit here in Australia - the Harriers end was profound! There had been something about Wittering with its bomber heritage of Lancaster's, Valiant's, and Victors. *The first atomic bomb to be dropped from an aircraft was in 1956 in South Australia from a Valiant based in at RAF Wittering. It had been a new era then, but now with the new Harrier aircraft creating a future for RAF Wittering - another new era, another new story had begun.*

New Year 2011 then arrived and with it Ted Stott for a visit from the UK. Ted was one of the four young men, and the only one I had stayed in contact with over the years. In fact, he is part of our family as godparent to our son all those

years ago when my family were billeted at Middleton St George (now Teeside Airport). Ted has visited us many times over the years in the UK and here in Australia. Once again we spoke of times long past and those people we would like to catch up with and were grateful to organizations like the FAA that has helped us contact some of those people. There are still a few more 'oldies' that we would like to get in touch with again, so please, if you were at RAF Wittering, and you remember any of us, we would love to hear from you.

The four airmen that became friends were Doug Carstairs, Ted Stott, Bob Potter and 'Spud' Maurice Tainton. Today only three have managed to meet up (not at the same time) but I would like to find 'Spud' before I too become 'scrap'. Spud, if you're out there mate or anyone knows where he can be found, please get in touch.

Later this year I am catching up with another fireman I knew all those years ago - Dick Parker, (along with his wife) who are also coming to Australia for a visit and will be staying with my wife and I during their visit. Dick Parker, Bob Feather and I were at basic training together at RAF Catterick... but that's another story!

The farewell of one amazing plane is sad, for in this new shrinking world where almost everything is made in Asia – England showed its true prowess in engineering ability. I was there at the start of this piece of aeronautical history and I am honoured to have shared time with this unique aircraft and those lads I met along the way.

Bob Potter

Email :- lorainepotter@hollygatehouse.com.au



Doug Carstairs, Bob Potter, Loraine Potter & Margaret Carstairs, near Bob's Home in Melbourne, Australia, 2010.

# Photos Phantomtastic!



*Left to right: Ivan Symcox, Phil Thompson, Dave Lucock, Tony Meade, Brian Peterson, Geoff Brown George Edwards*

In January 1980 the photograph above appeared in the RAF Coningsby Station Magazine (The Coningsby Phantom) along with a feature about the Coningsby Fire Section. In April this year all those appearing in the photograph got back together at RAF Coningsby Fire Section for a mini reunion and another photo call. The reunion was organised by Association Chairman Gordon Smith who although not on the photo in 1980 was very much part of that crew but he was on a short detachment to Cyprus.

In addition to the seven ex RAF Firemen pictured in the photo another fourteen ex RAF Coningsby Firemen circa 1970 attended the reunion. Steve Harrison also attended the reunion in his capacity as co editor of Flashpoint. Always on the lookout for a good story Steve very kindly took the photos and has completed the Coningsby article on page 6.



*April 2011. What are the chances of this happening to often, the same line up 31 years later! Left to right: Ivan Symcox, Phil Thompson, Dave Lucock, Tony Meade, Brian Peterson, Geoff Brown, George Edwards*

## Kenneth Green

I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland on the 10<sup>th</sup> February 1943. After leaving school at the age of fourteen I had a number of jobs which included serving an apprenticeship as a plumber, however, my ambition was to join the armed forces as my father (who was listed as missing in action after the Dunkirk evacuation and was later found in a hospital in Kent) and my brothers served in the army, my mother however, steered me to the Royal Air Force.

I enlisted in January 1961 and arrived at RAF Bridgenorth for "square bashing" where my drill Sergeant singled me out for 'special Treatment'. After the passing out parade he summoned me to his side where he informed me why he had subjected me for special treatment. Apparently he also went to my school in Tullyhogus, Cookstown and that I wasn't going to let the side down.

I was posted to Catterick for fire and rescue training, after completing my training I was posted to RAF Horsham, St Faith near Norwich. I have many fond memories of this station, where I and colleagues went to the Mecca dance hall in Norwich City where we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Sadly the station closed and I was posted to RAF Scampton for approximately two years.

I resided in a little village called Scothern outside Lincoln and travelled to and from base on a NSU Quickly, which I bought for four pounds, selling it on for five pounds when I was posted to RAF Changi, Singapore where I served for two and a half years, residing in the famous Opera estate.

On returning to the UK, I was posted to RAF Ballykelly in Londonderry. Having completed my nine years of regular service I was demobbed in 1970, prior to demob I undertook a pre-release course with the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade, having attained a good education standard in the RAF and being self disciplined, I was recruited into the full time brigade in Northern Ireland.

I was shortly promoted to leading Fireman, serving in various stations in Belfast.

After completing the Station Officers examination and the Institute of Fire Engineers, I was transferred to the Brigade Training Centre as an instructor. During that time I attended various courses at the Fire Service College at Morton in Marsh, following which I was promoted to Station Officer.

Later I served throughout Northern Ireland as an ADO experiencing many incidents in a civil disorder situation. In 1985 I was appointed as Brigade Training Centre Commandant, where I completed the remainder of my thirty years service.

After retiring from the Fire service, I now enjoy walking my Springer Spaniel dog along the shoreline of the quiet seaside town of Whitehead.

In conclusion, my pride and loyalty remains to this day with the Royal Air Force.

# Hornet Crash – Kuala Lumpur 1954



One day the royal army service corps (RASC) had been ferrying some rubbish across the airfield to where it would be burned that evening after flying had ceased for the day. Like us they had been instructed what to do when driving a vehicle in an aircraft movement area. They could not go anywhere until they got a green from the tower, or they should stay where they were if they got a red. We, on the other hand, had radios, so were in direct contact with the controller at all times.

Later that same day we had a visit by none other than HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, with an escort of two DH Hornets. The first Hornet landed and taxied in, then a Hastings carrying HRH followed by the second Hornet.

There was much shaking of hands and flashing of cameras before they all went off with a police escort to Kuala Lumpur (KL). About an hour and a half later HRH returned, to be greeted with more handshaking and saluting prior to boarding the Hastings. The two Hornets fired up their engines immediately and one moved

off to the end of the runway, did a quick run up, then took off. Those Merlin engines would soon overheat in that climate.

The Hastings then taxied out, turned into wind and after running his four engines up was away shortly afterwards.

The second Hornet now taxied out, opened up and started to roll. It was at that precise moment a three-ton army truck that had been standing patiently on the grass awaiting permission to cross the runway decided he had waited long enough. We, the crash crew, had been watching the comings and goings and so at that dreadful moment the shock of what was about to happen froze us.

The Hornet, a fast and powerful twin-engine aircraft from the same stable as the Mosquito (and like the Mosquito made mostly of wood) was about one third of the way down the runway and gaining speed fast; his tail had just lifted. The three-ton Bedford was just about into third gear and half way across the runway. The pilot, seeing the inevitable, had

about one and a half seconds to do something. He did the only thing he could; pushed both throttles through the gate and pulled back on the stick. The twin Merlins screamed as the props clawed for air, and the aircraft actually left the ground by a couple of feet, but tail down, nose up, and still travelling horizontally. The base of the engines and nose struck the side of the truck and it rolled over two or three times, coming to rest on its side in the grass at the side of



*De Havilland Hornet Mk III as used in Malaya during 1950's*

the runway. The soldiers were scattered along the ground. The Hornet smacked down into the ground losing its undercarriage in the process, before careering across the grass out of control. It eventually dropped astride a large monsoon ditch and smashed both wings off just outboard of the engines. The

fuselage just forward of the fin broke off and folded forward; the top of the rudder digging into the top of the fuselage. The whole of the aircraft nose was smashed open giving access to the pilot.

Being already manned up for a Royal Flight, we were quick off the mark, but the thought of a fully fuelled aircraft – and a wooden one at that – with trapped aircrew and in that climate was the sort of nightmare every RAF Fireman dreaded but never mentioned. Seconds later we slid to a halt amidst a cloud of dust to find the navigator already climbing out of the top of the hatch. The pilot, however, was trapped by his legs.

Why it never caught fire I will never know; the monsoon ditch, in which I was standing trying to free the pilot's legs had three or four inches of high octane aviation fuel in it. We dare not cut any wires for fear of sparks; it would only need one and we would have been done for as well as the pilot. It took a frantic seven or eight minutes to free him, pulling and tugging at cables, splintered wood, and torn metal with the ever present fear of a sudden inferno. The thought of running from a burning airframe about to explode to save our own skin was a nightmare we all pushed to the back of our mind. There would always be self recrimination:

What could I have done?

What should I have done?

Fortunately I was spared that, and the pilot was taken off with his navigator to Station Sick Quarters for a check-up. They got away with it; the driver of the truck wasn't so lucky.

I knew the army lads vaguely, having seen them in the NAAFI and around camp from time to time, so when one of them

came over to me and asked if I had seen his mate I thought it was an odd time to enquire about someone's whereabouts. I looked at him questioningly, and on seeing my puzzlement pointed towards the truck lying on its side:

"He was driving it"

On investigation the cab was found to be empty.

"How many were in the truck?" I asked.

"Four" he replied, "there are three of us here now, but we have no idea where Jock is."

Then I wondered 'Is he under the truck...or...?'

So I went back to where I was standing when trying to disentangle the pilot's legs from the aircraft. Lying down on the sloping edge of the monsoon ditch, I peered under the wing between the starboard engine and the fuselage. There was a low moan and a slight movement and that is where I spotted him.

I did not attempt to move him but called over the MO who had arrived in the second ambulance. He, assisted by two medical orderlies gently retrieved the casualty and placed him on a stretcher covered in engine oil and fuel. If that plane had caught fire he would have died without us even knowing he was there.. As it was, he died before he reached hospital; a terrible waste of life for a really silly and avoidable mistake.

Over the years I have often wondered what the consequences might have been had he tried to cross the runway when the Hastings and HRH were on their take-off run.

*Alan Alsop late Association Chairman*

## THE ICONIC HARRIER

**I**t could be said that the Harrier was a Fireman's aircraft! With its unusual flying capabilities and its range of operating theatres it seemed to lend itself to 'pranging'. With its recent demise because of government cutbacks we the co-ed team thought we could pay tribute to this great aircraft in the next edition of Flashpoint.



But to do this we would need your experiences with the Harrier, was you at any of the trials or experiments, did you serve with them in the 'Field' or on a Carrier? If you have any stories please send via email or post if hand written.

## Blessed are the fire-fighters

### Did you know that the Fire-fighters Patron Saint is Saint Florian?

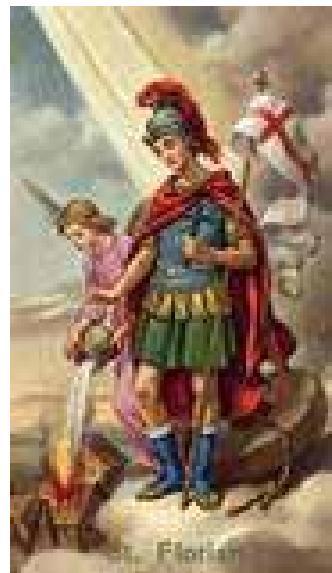
For cutes throughout time fire has always been a threat and ancient Rome was no different. Over a period of time special units or cohorts were formed called Vigils which patrolled at night, apart from arresting drunks and burglars and looking out for runaway slaves they were the fire fighters. Distinctive in their green tunics they were also equipped with a hand operated piston pump and buckets. These fire fighters belonged to the 'Equestrian Class' and had their own doctor, medical staff and Chaplin. Like any army as time went by there was a period of reforming and Florian was deemed to be a good officer and became a Captain rising quickly to General

Generals were often assigned to govern remote regions of the Empire, and Florian was assigned chief administrator of Noricum, in the Austrian/Bavarian region of his birth. Florian had the power to enforce

the law and collect taxes.

The Roman Emperor at the time was Decius and he persecuted Christians and was enforcing the worship of the old gods and goddesses. Those who would not renounce their Christian beliefs were burned at the stake, crucified or tortured to death. By 284AD Florian had become a Christian and rumours came about that he was not enforcing its anti Christian laws. Although he was told to carry out these punishments he refused direct orders to execute Christians.

What happened next was inevitable; he was beaten with clubs and spikes, flayed and thrown on to a burning pyre. Fearing Florian may become a martyr it was commanded that a millstone was tied around his neck and he was thrown in to the river Enns not far from the Danube. So there he drowned, it is said that his body laid there a while guarded by an eagle



until his body was recovered by a woman called Valeria and was given a Christian burial at Lenz. This was 304AD and his feast day is 4<sup>th</sup> May.

Saint Florian is a major Patron Saint of Austria and Poland and he is also patron of the Fire Service in Austria and there are several Churches bearing his name.

# Above and Beyond the Call of Duty



The deeds of the flying lads of WWII are well documented, but the exploits and courage of the ordinary airmen not so much. Dave Kirk (our webmaster) has collected together some awards that were made to airmen during that war while carrying out fire-fighting duties. Although it is intended to include a chapter just on awards made to firemen in the forthcoming RAF Fire Service book this is just one of many extraordinary feats with which to whet your appetite.

## GEORGE MEDAL

Awarded to

**1125669 SERGEANT CONRAD CANNAN**  
R.A.F Volunteer Reserve

His Citation reads;

This airman, who is employed in the Fire Section, has shown exceptional fortitude when performing exacting and dangerous work attending crashed aircraft. On a recent occasion he took charge of the crash tender when a Halifax aircraft, carrying one large H.E. Bomb, failed to gain height when taking off and crashed in a ploughed field outside the airfield boundary. The bomb did not detonate on the impact but the aircraft burst into flames. The crash tender quickly reached the scene, followed by the ambulance. Three of the crew of seven had been thrown clear and were safe. Incendiary bombs started to detonate but Sergeant Cannan and two other airmen went into the fire area and helped to safety 2 of the crew who were trying to extricate themselves. Flames on their clothing were extinguished and the two rescued airmen were handed over to the staff of the ambulance. As one of the crew was still missing Sergeant Cannan returned to search the wreckage. Eventually he found the pilot, who had been thrown out of the bomber, partially hidden in a furrow in the field. He was stunned and Sergeant Cannan carried him 20 yards from the fire where he was assisted by a medical orderly. Sergeant Cannan displayed great courage, working in the full knowledge that a major explosion from the bomb might occur at any moment.

(London Gazette – 26 May 1944)

Here is a poem for computer buffs that was sent by Ron Brown to George Edwards and other Association members. We ‘silver surfers’ do try and most of us get by but sometimes it all goes wrong, so, be aware before you press that return key!

*“We do not stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.”*

*The computer swallowed grandpa.*

*Yes, honestly it’s true!*

*He pressed ‘control and ‘enter’ and disappeared from view.*

*It devoured him completely; the thought just makes me squirm.*

*He must have caught a virus or been eaten by a worm.*

*I’ve searched through the recycle bin  
and files of every kind;  
I’ve even used the Internet,  
but nothing did I find.*

*In desperation, I asked Jeeves  
my searches to refine.*

*The reply from him was negative,  
not a thing was found ‘online..’*

*So, if inside your ‘Inbox,’  
my Grandpa you should see,  
please <Copy, Scan> and <Paste>  
him  
and send him back to me.*

# Association members visit to Huntingdon Fire Station

To coincide with the recent Reunion at Huntingdon, 18 – 20 March 2011, a visit to Huntingdon Fire Station was arranged for members by Area Co-ordinator Howard Harper. 7 members took up the offer of the visit on Saturday, 19 March.

We arrived at the Fire Station at 1400 hours, to be greeted by Chris Pike (Crew Manager) and Blue Watch. After signing in, we were given a quick safety brief by Chris, who then informed us that Blue Watch was at our disposal. He then asked what we would like to do first, and the general consensus was to look over one of the two Scania fire appliances on station. The first appliance was duly moved onto the forecourt, and a group photograph was taken. The appliance was then returned to the bay, and the doors closed in order to avoid the street noise. The contents of every locker were viewed, and members who had only been used to Airport fire vehicles expressed their amazement on the amount of equipment carried on the appliances.

Also on station were four other front-line fire appliances. These were looked over and before it departed on a fire prevention visit, the rescue tender was photographed on the forecourt. After having checked the appliances out, and a station tour, our members then adjourned to the mess to have a general chat with the crew, and that well known fire service institution, ‘a cuppa’. We were fortunate enough that a retained fire fighter was on station that was able to explain the purpose of the three ‘new dimension’ fire appliances

Members then took photographs of the ‘new dimension’ appliances and the training school Scania, which was being used to train retained personnel.

Members attending expressed their thanks to both Chris Pike and Blue Watch for their hospitality.

## Fire Station Facts:

The fire station was opened in February 1965. It is a five drive-through bay station, with a watch room, station office, Station Manager’s office, locker room, lecture room, mess, kitchen and dormitories. Also housed on the site is the Brigade training centre, breathing apparatus training building, (Fire house) and the area management offices. The station manning is dual manning.

Whole time – a total of 40 personnel, on four watches – Red, White, Blue and Green, each with a Watch Manager, 2 Crew Managers and 7 Fire Fighters, who operate 24/7. The whole time crew man the first pump and the rescue tender.

Retained Personnel – a total of 18 personnel, with a Watch Manager, 3 Crew Managers and 14 Fire Fighters. Retained personnel man the second pump, the water/foam unit and the ICU (control vehicle). Retained personnel train on a Monday and Wednesday evening.



Association Members attending:- Geoff Varley, David Frost, Frank Newman, Terry Wright, Phil Bickell, Jim Hansford and Howard Harper (Cambridge and Suffolk Area Co-ordinator).

## NOTE:

Nigel Burgess (Station Manager) and Dave Crowe, Senior Instructor (*see story in the Spring Flashpoint*) are both members of the Association.

## Appliances:

KX58 LWM Scania P270 Pump Ladder

Y724 WVA MAN Rescue Vehicle

KX53 FJZ Scania P94D-260 Pump Ladder

L140 VCE Mercedes Benz Water/Foam Tender

R615 TAV Mercedes Benz ICU

KP54 CWZ Scania P94D-260 Pump Ladder (Training School)

Also held on station are the following:-

WX54 VMJ MAN-TGA 6 x 2 Prime Mover carries a double hose box module containing 2 km of 150mm hose.

WX54 VKO MAN-TGA 6 x 2 Prime Mover carries a submersible pump unit and 1 km of 150 mm hose.

WX54 VSZ MAN-TGA 6 x 2 Prime Mover carries an MDDU (Mass Decontamination and Disrobing Unit).

## Incidents:

In recent months station personnel have attended several road traffic collisions on the A14 trunk road, one of the most serious was a chemical tanker incident which closed the road for most of the day. Another incident involved a lorry fire with a trailer containing duck down (feathers). The incident scene resembled a winter scene.

*Story by: Howard Harper  
Cambridge & Suffolk Area Co-ordinator.*

# OBITUARIES

## Warrant Officer Ronald John (Smokey) Fairhurst

**R**on enlisted at the Bolton recruiting office in 1940 and after recruit training at Padgate he was selected for training as a wireless Operator/ Air Gunner. During training he was involved in a flying accident, which affected his eyesight, bringing it below aircrew standard and he was posted, to RAF Pershore.

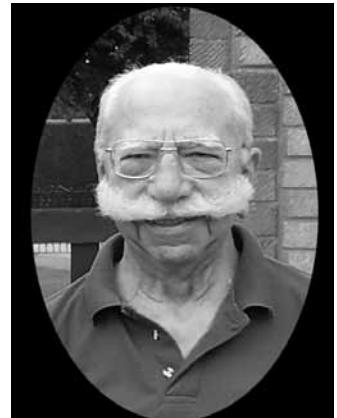
In those far off days there was no formal 'Fire Section' fire cover was provided by a 6 man 'Fire Piquet'. They received about 4 hours training from an SNCO who had been on a short fire course which I believe was at R.A.F Cranwell. The fire piquet was changed weekly, so it was quite a haphazard affair (although it ensured everyone on the Unit knew how to set up a hydrant and run out a line of hose) in the end the "powers that be" recognised that a permanent full time fire section was required to meet the flying commitment, so it happened, and as I had been in the Auxiliary Fire Service before joining the Royal Air Force, I became a member of our newly formed Fire Section. I spent 3½ happy years at Pershore, during which time I attended a formal fire course at RAF Weeton and became an Aircraft handler / Fireman, a now recognised trade in trade group 5. In September 1942, I was involved in a rather bad incident and I finished up in the Queen Victoria Hospital at East Grinstead for nearly six months amongst the legendary Mc Indoors 'guinea pigs!!'. This was quite an experience for a fireman to see the terrible disfigurements that crash fires had had on some of the aircrew in some of the incidents we had to deal with.

On return to Pershore I was promoted to Corporal. . Many incidents happened in the

following months, to mention just a couple of the less serious ones. We were called out to a village outside the unit; a 'Tiger Moth' had crash landed, finishing upside down in a pub yard. We arrived to find the pilot hanging upside down in his harness, complaining bitterly that he was soaked in octane and that his cigarettes were ruined! However we cut him free and after he had been carted away, the landlord of the pub invited us in for a drink and the customers came good! I think it was very good thing there was no such thing as breathalysing in those days. Lots of incidents took place some rather serious, too many really, but that is how it happened in those days. So we worked hard and played hard. Gracing the local village halls with our skills at performing the 'light fantastic' (maybe not always light but always fantastic!) And generally raising hell amongst the local communities and the local young ladies, but we were young and none of us knew where we would be or what we would be doing in the next week's time. After Pershore I was posted to RAF Valley. I arrived at RAF Valley, to be really thrown in at the deep end. Instead of just being in charge of a 5 man crew I was suddenly i/c of a full Fire Section, with all that entails. I stood on my head for awhile, but I must have got something right along the way for after three months I was wheeled into the Group Captains office and marched out proudly with a third tape!!

The war had progressed and the "D-day" invasion of the 'Fortress Europa' had begun, and the action at Valley heated up. We were one of the Atlantic Ferry Terminals for the U.S.A.A.F. and the aircraft poured in. You name them we

got them; they were serviced, refuelled and then passed on to the operational stations around the UK. It was while at Valley I was first given the name of "Smokey" this was by the Yanks, after a cartoon in one of the American comic strips at the time, 'Smokey Stover' the Fire Chief. And it appears to have stuck to me ever since. I was really settling in at Valley and getting things organised when I was posted to Air Head Quarters Sierra Leone. After Sierra Leone there came many more postings incidents and experiences until finally my last posting RAF Fairford for the last 18 months of service was a really enjoyable ending to my 35 years service. On my retirement from the RAF I joined Hawker Siddley Aviation as Chief Fire Officer based at Bitteswell in Leicestershire. When British Aerospace was formed I stayed with them as Chief Fire Officer until 1983 and decided that I had been attached to the end of a telephone 24/7 for long enough and finally hung up my boots and retired gracefully and moved back to Lincolnshire. After a long



and happy career in the Royal Air Force I can truthfully say I would do it all over again. This information is just a brief extract from the wonderful story Smokey submitted for the RAF Fire Service book that is in the process of production. Sadly Smokey passed away on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011. I never had the pleasure of serving with Smokey but I knew of him and his reputation as a kind caring and professional RAF Fire Warrant Officer. (GE Co. editor). Smokey was a much liked and well respected RAF Fireman truly one of the old school. Many of us have reason to be grateful to him. A tremendous character with an enormous sense of fun. I for one will miss old mutton chops at future reunions (Brian Ford)

## Corporal Pete Bolland

**I**t is with deep regret that I have to inform you of the passing of Pete Bolland PB as he was known to all of us who served with him at RAF Conningsby Fire Section; Pete was a top man a good friend who enjoyed the odd pint of beer; people like Pete are few and our thoughts are with his family at this sad time submitted by Gordon Smith I had the great pleasure of working with Pete along with Gordon at Conningsby and my condolences also go out to Pete's family and his many friends who will be missing him dearly. Pete also served at Cranwell, Bawdsey Manor and Germany (ge)

**Larry La Prise;** the well known song writer who had a massive hit with the song The Hokey Cokey passed away earlier this year aged 95; Larry's song will be very familiar to members and was sung with great gusto at many a Fire section 'Do'. The most traumatic part for his family and the undertaker was getting him in to the coffin. They put his left leg in and then the trouble started. (Thanks to Brian Ford for this cracker).

## Warrant Officer Ron Shearn M.B.E.

**W**arrant Officer Ronald Cuthbert Shearn born on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 1921 in the village of Midsomer Norton, Somerset. Ron's father was a coal miner and he and others will have lived through the poverty of the 1920/30s. Ron completed his education in the mid 1930s and he admitted to academic subject's average, cricket and football good. He started his working life in a glove making factory and later with a book publishers, with a starting wage of ten shillings (50p) per week. In 1941 he volunteered for the RAF, induction training at Penarth, square bashing at Bridlington then on to 15ETS Carlisle where he found himself to be a U/T ground gunner the badge on the sleeve G.G. brought many comments-'Good God' 'Girl Guide' for reasons that he never really understood!! When the RAF Regiment was formed in February 1942, he was informed that even though he was an RAF Gunner he was not to become a member of the Regiment, but that he was to undergo instructor training with the Army, and on completion of the course he was promoted to Corporal as a weapons instructor after only 10 months service. Not everything went to plan, he was marching a squad of basics along the seafront in Douglas on the Isle of Man when he saw a lady approaching. When she was quite close he started to say "good morning" but she began to hit him with a rather heavy umbrella. Whilst he was warding off the blows she was saying "Don't shout at those poor boys!" He learned the first lesson in being an instructor, expect the unexpected!! Posted now to Pembroke Dock in South Wales with the flying boats, one of his first jobs was to attach small barrage balloons to fishing smacks before they set sail. At his first attempt the boat moved away

from the quay and Ron missed the hook. Off went the balloon into the pale blue yonder, as he would say that it would become the first UFO!! After just over a year he was informed that he was being remustered to the trade of Aerodrome fireman and would be in charge of a fire crew. Protesting that he knew nothing about fire fighting he was told "that's your problem get on with it". He was posted to RAF Kelstern that had many crashes on and off the airfield as the Lancaster's arrived back, often damaged, from raids over enemy territory. The sights, sounds and smells were overpowering and overwhelming. One particular incident was to have an effect upon the rest of his career. Three Lancaster's returning at night crashed on the airfield inside half an hour, two caught fire and all had casualties. He had the greatest respect and admiration for his fire crews but was deeply saddened when he could hear a trapped young lad calling for his mother, the boy was dead when they got to him. Ron said that that incident remained fixed in his mind forever. He was determined from then on that fire-fighters under his control would have the best possible training. In early 1961, now with the rank of Warrant Officer, he moved to RAF Catterick. The majority of fire-fighters had moved in from Sutton upon Hull and seemed to consider him an intruder. However, he soon made his mark with his gentle persuasion and determination to improve the accommodation and the teaching methods; this in his words was highly successful mainly because of the high standards and enthusiasm shown by his instructors, supporting staff, his colleagues in Trade Standards and other technical departments on the unit. It would be true to say that Ron's efforts to improve training

methods will still be having an impact on the training of our fire-fighters in Afghanistan, Iraq and other areas of conflict. His main endeavour was to instil a feeling of pride and professionalism in the basic students that passed through the school, his reasoning being that those on more senior courses would mostly be already motivated and knew what the RAF expected. He realised that he was getting near to retirement when he became the Senior Warrant Officer over the Fire Squadron and the Regiment. Like others, he received his M.B.E. and found it very pleasing. He said at the time "I am a Royalist and Britain is my country right or wrong". In his memoirs he wrote "I certainly do not put myself among the top bracket of WOs or SNCOs-far from it, the only claim I have is, no-one has a greater love for our Fire/Rescue Service". That gentle of gentlemen Warrant Officer Ron Shearn M.B.E. passed away quietly in the Abbey Care Home, Scorton, North Yorkshire, and was buried with his wife of over 60 years Muriel, in the Catterick Village Cemetery after a fitting service at St Anne's Church Catterick, attended by family, friends and colleagues from the RAF. The cortège left his home in Brough Meadows, and proceeded through the gates of former RAF Catterick to the West Hanger, pausing outside of his old office. The route through camp was lined by members of the Army Logistics Corps with the Commanding Officer leading the salute in his honour. As Ron would have said, "**ALL'S WELL AT THE PUMP**" This obituary is written as a tribute to this wonderful man. The majority of the script is taken from his memoir, "**THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE IN THE RAF**". This will be published in total at some stage in a book being written about the RAF Fire Services. It is because there are so many people



mentioned with affection by Ron in that publication that I have chosen not to mention any in case I miss some. You know who you are and how you interacted with Ron so please read the book when it comes out, it makes fascinating reading about times that can never be repeated. Many thanks to John Goupillot who compiled and submitted this article. I must say I was very moved when I read of Mr Shearn's send off by personnel from the Royal Logistics Corps and I shall make sure a copy of this edition is sent off to the Officer Commanding. (ge).

Gentleman Ron Shearn was a much respected RAF Fireman and I know that many of those who knew him will be feeling the same sense of sadness as I feel (Ron Brown)

My father, Walter (Wal) Lilley, sadly passed away a couple of years ago. He served in the Fire Section from the early 50's until 1967. Places he was stationed at included: Sandwich, Tangmere, Thorney Island, Sharjah, St Mawgan, with North Front Gibraltar being his final posting. I suspect a number of his peers are no longer with us, but it would be greatly appreciated if anyone who knew him could get in contact - I would particularly love to see any photographs in which he appeared. Thank you. Mel Lilley mel\_lilley2005@yahoo.co.uk

May all our recently departed colleagues who have moved on to their final postings rest in peace. George & Steve; Flashpoint Co-editors

# Terry Wright's RAF service [June 1952 to June 1956]



*Austin Co<sup>2</sup> Gas Truck*

The year 1952 I registered for national service on my birthday April 5th after passing my medical I finally received my call up papers to report to the RAF recruiting office on London Rd Leicester on June 23rd at 9am. Arriving there along with about ten other new recruits. From there we proceeded to walk to the railway station which was only a few yards from the recruiting office. We were put on the train and off we went to RAF Cardington, during the few days there we were kitted out with uniforms etc and were allotted our square bashing station I went to RAF West Kirby on Churchill squadron under Cpl Hooker a right b???????. you could cut your throat on the creases in his trousers anyone who served on Churchill squadron around this era will remember him like the song Unforgettable but not for the same reasons .I remember one day during rifle drill the guy in front of me while doing present arms dropped his rifle Cpl Hooker marched up to him trust his face right up to his face and bellowed what have you done laddie to which the guy replied I've dropped my gun corporal GUN he bellowed what do you think you are a bloody cowboy he then made him keep running around the square with his rifle held over his head. In spite of all the bull etc we had some laughs for the eight weeks we were there. We all had to go to see the careers officer I had originally joined up to be MT driver mechanic but was told this was a five year engagement and I at the time was reluctant to sign for any longer for what I had seen so far but I met some great mates several of them I still am in touch with 54 years after leaving the RAF. After all the square bashing and the inoculations, the next step to Sutton on Hull for trade training. The 1945 Monitor was the foam tender we trained on (the MKV not yet at Sutton)also the Austin co2 Gas Truck, The Bedford water Bowser and Austin Domestic plus all the trailer pump drills and relays. I remember also the smoke chamber, the training tower and lowering myself down on my own quick release knot and the davy life line. One day visiting Hull fire station to see the control room, vehicles and slide down the brass pole (now I understand banned by health and safety) I passed out at Sutton a/c one and was posted to my first



*Bedford Water Bowser*

permanent station Duxford (Cambs) along with a national serviceman Clifford Hare the nco i/c section (temporary) was Cpl. Eddie Hardwicke as the Flt Sergeant had been posted overseas. Eddie was in line for his sergeant's stripes as he was a regular and had been in the RAF during the war years. I had been there about six months when one night I was duty fireman driver along with another LAC. I was about 10 30 pm and the phone rang it was Eddie who with his mate a CPL armourer were in Duxford village in the pub he sounded p????? Come and pick us up at the crash gate near the village he said. I replied sorry I cannot leave the section only in emergency, he replied get your arse down here pronto I am ordering you. As I at the time was LAC I thought I had better obey him although I knew I should not leave the section he could be alright one day and another day a right (b?????? So off I went they both were waiting for me at the crash gate and as I stopped in the Jeep he told me he was driving and told me to get in the back of the jeep the canvas top was in the down position and I climbed in after arguing with him about him driving as he had consumed a few bevvies, He told me to do as I was effing told and he got behind the wheel his mate in the passenger seat .He drove off like the clappers the opposite direction to the section along the peri track when he arrived at the bend to cross over the runway he turned the steering wheel sharply to the right and misjudged the turn and hit an small embankment with the wheel locked over the jeep went up in the air and threw me out I went skidding along getting friction burns on my hands ,arms and legs also losing one of my shoes. The jeep was upside down with Eddie and his mate underneath Eddie was screaming get to sick quarters and get an ambulance his mate was silent I thought he was dead. However I ran the width of the airfield losing my other shoe as I ran and my socks, I arrived at sick quarters out of breath and got the medic on duty out of bed and told him of the situation. We got in the ambulance and proceeded to the scene of the crash. When we arrived both Eddie and his mate were sitting at the side of the upturned jeep smoking a fag he apologised to me and



*Luqa Crash Crew 2009*

I said you could have killed us all. Next day I had to report to the fire officer he said Why? Did you leave the section as you were on duty? I replied sir I have been

in the RAF only a few months and I was given an order from the nco/i/c the section whether it was illegal or not he told me he was ORDERING me to fetch him. The fire officer said When you go in front of the CO on your charge tell him what you told me you were obeying an order from the nco i/c the section that I did and my charges were scrubbed .Eddie got a severe reprimand and his promotion deferred indefinitely and his mate got a severe reprimand for being an illegal passenger in an RAF vehicle The jeep was a write off and a large photo of it was displayed in the fire section office with a notice under it DONT LET THIS HAPPEN TO YOU.I was going to RAF ELY hospital for treatment to my friction burns for several weeks, Eddie was admitted there for treatment on his arm and cuts on his head. When he came out he was posted overseas his mate only had minor injuries. The only air disaster at Duxford during my time there happened when I was home on leave when two meteors collided over the airfield during a display for a visiting dignitary Marshall Tito they both crashed about two miles apart both pilots were killed..I was at Duxford until July 1953 when I was posted to RAF Watnall (Notts) Watnall was not an aerodrome just a domestic site with underground operation rooms. There were just two of us on the section both LACs. It was a cushy number just maintaining the extinguishers around camp and the underground ops rooms another job we got to do was mow the sports field using the Austin Domestic towing the mowing machine I had only been there six weeks when a phone call from the orderly room clerk informing me I was on PWRs for overseas. I was to report to the M.O. for a medical the next day. Having passed my medical I was given two weeks embarkation leave but after seven days was recalled and was on my way to RAF Lytham St Annes to be kitted out with my overseas gear and to have my inoculations and vaccinations. Also to see the films warning us about contacting V.D. some of the films were enough to

put you off sex for life. We were told our destination was M.E.A.F and we would be travelling to RAF Hendon prior to flying out to Fayed in Egypt, the next day. We set off to Stanstead the next morning driving through one of the dreaded London smog visibility was down to a few feet it cleared as we left London and we arrived at Stanstead to be ushered into a large Nilsson hut that served as a departure LOUNGE? Outside two York aircraft were parked one of them revving up one of its engines that kept spluttering cutting out and backfiring I said to one of the lads I hope that's not our aircraft and he said so do I it sounds a bit ropey and as most of us had never flown before we were a bit nervous anyway. After a while a sergeant came into the Lounge and told us the aircraft was u/s and we were going back to Hendon for another night. The next day we set off for Stanstead again this time clear visibility we went into the same LOUNGE until we were told to board the York. We taxied to the runway and lumbered down the runway and slowly started to climb just clearing the hedge at the end of the runway, we had only been airborne a short time when we could see the white cliffs of Dover below us after crossing the channel we got a flight bulletin from the captain saying if we looked through the port side windows we would see the Eiffel Tower. We went over the alps then over the Mediterranean and on to RAF Luqa where we landed to refuel and have a meal, total flying time about six hours We took off bound for Fayid over the Med. Flying over Libya then Egypt as we flew over the desert we saw winding its way through the desert a camel train, About five hours after leaving Luqa we landed at Fayid where we boarded a Bedford Q.L. and set off for El Hambra the transit camp where we spent ten days awaiting a posting .We were billeted in tents with a brick surround we were told to check our boots each morning in case any scorpions had crawled into them. Each morning after breakfast we paraded on the square while postings were read out in alphabetical order. There were three of us aerodrome firemen Ted Deacon, Pat Delaney and myself On the day our postings came through their names came up early as they began with the letter D their posting RAF Luqa I was hoping I would get the same but I had to wait awhile as my name began with W. However when it came up I to was lucky and got Luqa.I did a guard duty while at El Hambra I was patrolling the M.T. compound we were issued with a 303 rifle and 25 rounds of ammo 5 in the breach and 20 in a bandana over your shoulder the guard commander instructed us to challenge any one approaching you at night with Halt who goes there friend or foe and if no reply after the count of five (or sooner) to shoot

the b?????? In the legs so he could not run off. We could hear shots being fired in the hills near the camp so we were a bit on edge. The Arabs were often breaking into the camp in spite of an eight foot high double fence surrounding the camp A lot of them worked on camp doing labouring jobs and they were thoroughly searched on arrival and departure. The day arrived for us to fly to Malta we boarded a Valletta that had seen better days and had been airbourne a short time when one of the crew came into the cabin and told us to look below as we were over the place where the battle of El Alermain was fought lots of burnt out lorries and tanks were still there eight years after the war had ended (As the price of scrap metal increased these were cleared up).We landed first at RAF El Adam to drop off a couple of men then on to RAF Benina to drop off then to RAF IDRISI then the last hop over to RAF Luqa we arrived in the late evening and was put into transit site in a nisson hut over night, we could hear explosions going off quite near to us and asked what it was about to be told its the locals

celebrating the villages patron saint. when they let off fireworks etc.The next morning we reported to the fire section and met Flt Sgt. McDonald nco i/c the section a nd Cpl Ken Lawrence who was in charge of admin on the section The ft. sergeant instructed one of the LAC drivers to run us round to the sick quarters ,clothing store etc to book in camp. We went in one of the water bowsers as it was going to refuel anyway. The SAC who booked me in was an old schoolmate who I had not seen since we left school in April 1949 he lived in the next village to me .As we were on the way back to the section we had to stop at the runway to let a Sea venom take off I was standing on the platform to the rear of the cab and was watching it go down the runway it just lifted off then banked to the right then dipped and his wing tip hit the ground cart wheeling over the grass the crash crew were deployed the Cpl i/c being Phill Bickell his no 2 Jimmy Christon they were on the crash scene in minutes .They cut the harness off the pilot and helped him into the ambulance while the rest of the crew cooled off the aircraft it did not catch fire. The pilot had a badly cut leg and he died on the way to hospital .At Luqa the crash crew worked 24 hours on 24 off that was six hours on the line then six hours on standby at the section .Domestic crew worked days filling extinguishers etc and flarepath duties (laying out gooseneck flares and glim lamps for night flying as in those days not all the airfield had permanent lighting.)The goosenecks if it were windy often blew over spilling the parafin and setting fire to the surrounding

grass which we used to beat out so not to waste water.using the beaters made out of old hoses cut in to lengths about a yard long and fastened to a handle. Some of the emergencies we attended A beaufighter landed and undercarriage colapsed making a belly flop no fire pilot uninjured just shook up A .Hermes fully loaded with army personell going back to UK having done their overseas tour landed OK but when lowering front wheel it colapsed leaving it careering up the runway arse in the air pulled off runway onto grass deployed the escape chute and the squadires sliding down and running like the clapers away from the aircraft while the crash crew cooled off the nose end with co2 A USAF Neptune had been on target practice over the Med.and returned to Luqa with an engine on fire it landed OK and was diverted on to the grass for the crash crew to deal with it but on the way out to it the wing caught fire quickly spreading to the fuselarge and some live ammo was going off so ATC said abandon it so it was left to burn out as it was a write off.A Valletta (La Vallette) belonging to Com.light was doing circuit and bumps after engine repair after about three cincuits it crashed on take off near to Farsons brewary Ken Leverett was the MkV driver that attended (He was an SAC then stayed in the RAF finished up a W/O at Brize Norton still lives near there at Carterton) Ken married a Maltese girl Pauline in 1954 Phill Bickell was his best man In 2004 Phill myself and our wives celebrated his golden wedding with them in the sergeants mess at Brize Norton There was one killed on the Valletta he paniced and undone his seat belt and was fatally injured. In March 1954 I sat my SAC exam and passed along with Ted Deacon and then I was MkV Driver on Phill Bickells crew.I went home on leave at the end of July with SAC Peter Colclough we managed to get a lift on one of 37 squadrons Mk2 Shakletons going to St Eval in Cornwall we just had to get a return ticket with BEA from London airport we had to get that before we could get our passes signed. It cost then £21 one way.Pete like myself intended to go on the police force after demob so we both were going to sit our entrance exams while on leave which we both did and passed them.I was home about five weeks 30 days leave plus a 48 hr pass and two days travaling time.It flew by and it was soon time to meet up with Pete at London airport .We were to land first at Nice in France then Rome where we changed aircraft from an Elizabethan to a Viking We landed at Luqa and was walking to the billit by the section there were a few of the lads outside doing various jobs and one shouted over to me Ken Lawrence(Cpl) want to speak to you I went over to the office and both Ken and Cheifly McDonald were there



Terry Wright Mk V at Luqa

and said to me congratulations Cpl Wright while

you were on leave your tapes come through from records but you are to go on attachment to AHQ Valletta but you will still live at Luqa and commute there daily. What a cushy number it was my job was to see all the fire extinguishers in the various offices in Valletta and the underground operation rooms were maintained I had an LAC under me to help repainting and refilling them I started 7am and finished 1 pm Monday to Friday every weekend off I was there until January 1955. then I went on attachment with the LAC Johnny Wilson who had been with me at AHQ to RAF TA KALI now spelt TA QUALI. This station had been RAAF and they were moving out and the RAF taking it over the CO sent for me and said the whole camp needed sprucing up as it had become run down and I was responsible to get the fire section sorted as I was i/c the section the only other RAF on the section was LAC Wilson but there were eight Maltese civilian laborers that the Aussies had taught to operate the vehicles a 1945 monitor ,Austin gas truck, bedford water bowser and a land rover also a trailer pump. I set the laborers on repainting the vehicles and the extinguishers, then the waste ground to the rear of the section we made into a flower garden planting geraniums and other flowers also one of the Maltese was a skilled brickie so I got him to build a fish pond using the big blocks

that were lying around the airfield. The CO came to inspect it when we were finished and was quite chuffed with things. The reason we could get stuck in to the work was there was no flying as the only aircraft there at the time were u/s ones or ones that had pranged. Shortly after two squadrons of Vampires flew in one of them first day landed and the brakes failed causing him to overshoot the end of the runway and crashing through a low wall partly into a field we got to it and helped the pilot out he was just shook up but no injuries of any note. The RAF soon had posted in new personnel for the section so I returned to Luqa my attachment over to complete my overseas tour it was now Sept. 1955 At luqa I resumed shifts on crash crew several new guys had arrived while I was away on attachment Jan. 1956 It was my turn to do admin work at the section on days finishing at one pm it was a bit boring as I was stuck in the office most days doing paper work like the daily occurrence book and ordering stores etc. Now and then for a change if one of the Cpl's on crash wanted relieving to play football or any other reason I would if free stand in for them on the crash line. On February 18th a Saturday morning I was standing in on the crash line for one of the Cpl's a York aircraft of Scottish Airlines landed and taxied by the crash line to park up at the side of the airfield buffet behind the crash line it was fully loaded with 50 passengers and 5 crew it had flew in from Habania

in Iraq via Fayid in Egypt stopping at Luqa to refuel and to get a meal in the buffet.(as we did on the way out there) As the passengers disembarked they walked by us to the buffet and we were joking with them saying you lucky sods going home and things like that .While they were in the buffet the Cpl I was standing in for came back to relieve me and I went back to the billet the time about 12 15pm.I got in the billit and was changing into my civies to go to Valletta when one of the section lads rushed in saying the York call sign GANSY had crashed on take off it had climbed to about 1000 ft. with one engine emitting a lot of smoke the engineer in the panic feathered the wrong engine inner port instead of inner starboard engine the aircraft then went into a dive and crashed onto rocks near to Zurrieq .I returned to the section as the standby crew had replaced the crash crew on the crash line the wreckage and bodies were strewn over a wide area fortunately it missed the nearby houses of Nigret close to Zurrieq.village there were no survivors fifty four men and one woman on board (the air hostess).That was the worst loss of lives in Malta's aviation history and still is I



Terry Wright and Jonny Wilson  
Ta Kali

understand. On April 19th I was to have returned to the uk having completed my overseas tour as we were about to board the Viking to come home at the last minute along with Ted Deacon and Pat Delaney I had to give up my seat for someone going home on compassionate leave disappointed I watched the aircraft take off as I stood talking to the duty crash crew and did not know when I would be going home I thought I would walk over to the shackleton squadrons

and see if any were going to the UK in the next day or so and discovered one was going to St Eval the next day and told me I could have a lift as I walked back by the crash line the Cpl i/c said to me Tez that Viking you should have gone on is returning with engine trouble we have got to standby as its coming in on one engine so I stayed until it landed it was OK and I saw my two mates disembark they got away that day after a repair job. I was back in the transit hut for my last night ( I HOPED?) When I had breakfast the next morning I walked over to the crash line to same cheerio the lads as it was a changed crew from the day before they told me the night before while I was in transit sleeping four of the lads who had been out on the beer nicked one of the water bowsers and went joy riding round the perimeter track then over turning it going round a bend near the petrol pumps. Three of them standing on the platform at the rear of the cab were killed outright the driver Jock Taylor survived with a broken back. So my overseas tour ended with a sad note but looking back I would not have missed it for anything and I met and worked with some great mates many of them I am still in touch with 54 years on .Many years later (1984) I went to Malta on holiday and went to the military crematory at Imtarfa near to Ta Kali to see if my three mates were buried there I asked the caretaker there and he said what year so I told him 1956 and they were there LAC

Roy Cook ,LAC Dennis Gallen and Lac (jock) Mc Hardie April 20th 1956 .I have been back to Malta many times since and I e mail a friend who works at The Malta International Airport (LUQA) on the fire section now name Victor Vella.I also e mail a retired school teacher who was a boy of eleven when the York crashed near to Zurrieq where he lived at that time. His name Joseph Vella no relation to Vic.

Terry Wright

# RAF Wyton and a Mk6 Reunion

In 2005 I visited the Waddington Airshow, not to far a journey as I was living in Lincoln at the time and I came across Steve Shirley's display of crash vehicles and saw a Mk6 which, during my service was one of my favourites, the other was the Mk11. Anyway I saw the registration 23AG56 which seemed to ring a bell, I was sure that I drove it at RAF Wyton were I served from 1973 to 1975. So I had a good climb over it explaining the nuances of foam production(yawn) to Liz my wife and thinking about the good old days when I served with John Mathieson, Graham Bones, John Hanley, 'Wilf' Pickles, Dave Angus, John Arnold, and Ben Dulson to name a few.

Well I returned home and I had a look at the photos and sure enough I had one of 23AG 56 stood alongside 23AG46.

I remember during that period we arranged an exchange visit with our American cousins at Alconbury and when they came to us at Wyton I took some of them for a ride in the Mk 6. At Wyton we were fortunate in the fact we had a rough course to take the Mk6 over. Obviously I wanted to show the lads the manoeuvrability and the cross country capabilities of our trucks compared to the lumbering big machines of theirs. They were very impressed and even more so when I took them on the rough course, on part of that course there was a bit of a hill, small but steep. When we went up all you could see was sky and when we came down all you could see was the ground, all you could hear was the American usual expletives, 'Goddam' and 'Holy S\*\*t' and the like. They really enjoyed that.

Equally we really enjoyed the visit to them and were equally impressed with their kit as well.

Steve Harrison



23 AG 56 at Waddington Airshow 2005



23AG 56 AT RAF Wyton 1973

## Some Mk6 facts:



A Mk6 On RAF Catterick Rough Course

The Mk6 crash truck was built on an Alvis Salamander fighting vehicle chassis, with a Rolls Royce B81 engine, 8 cylinders in line, 237bhp @4,000rpm. The foam producing equipment was similar to that of the Mk5A. Other equipment was added such as a built in co2 fire extinguisher system for the truck and a BCF fire extinguishing system for aircraft fire fighting

### Dimensions:

|                     |              |                      |          |
|---------------------|--------------|----------------------|----------|
| Length .....        | 19ft 6inches | Turning circle ..... | 50ft.    |
| Width.....          | 8ft 6inches  | Weight.....          | 13tons   |
| Ground clearance    | 1ft 6inches  | Fording depth.....   | 30inches |
| Overall height..... | 10ft 2in.    |                      |          |

### Maximum Speeds

|                            |       |                       |       |
|----------------------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> gear ..... | 5mph  | 4 <sup>th</sup> ..... | 33mph |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> .....      | 11mph | 5 <sup>th</sup> ..... | 53mph |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> .....      | 29mph |                       |       |

With its pre select gearbox theoretically it could go as fast backwards as it could forward.

### DID ANY ONE TRY IT?

|                                  |                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Water tank capacity .....        | 700 gallons (3,182 litres)           |
| Compound tank capacity.....      | 110 gallons (500 litres)             |
| Pump unit; Coventry climax ..... | 350-500 gpm                          |
| Air blower capacity.....         | 800 cubic ft @10 lbs/in <sup>2</sup> |

### Foam Production; and duration without replenishment.

|  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| One handline                                       | 1,600 gpm.....6 minutes |
| Monitor (single jet)                               | 2,500gpm.....4 minutes  |
| Two handlines                                      | 3,200gpm.....3 minutes  |
| Monitor (single jet) and one handline              | 4,000gpm....2.5minutes  |
| Monitor & two handlines or<br>Monitor (double jet) | 5,000gpm....1.8 minutes |

A Mk 6 story; there was once a RAF fireman who made a complaint about a Corporal using foul and abusive language the Corporal was duly reprimanded but the complainant was subsequently roped to the crash bar on the front of the Mk 6 and driven over the station rough course; a very scary experience in anyone's book. The Mk 6 was a marvellous and unique Fire Vehicle much loved and admired by MK 6 drivers ( except when you experienced a false neutral) and those early morning Daily Inspection runs around the rough course were always exhilarating although now suffering with an arthritic back and hands I doubt very much I would find a trip round a rough course exhilarating more like backbreaking

# Steve Shirley's vehicle collection



A selection of Steve Shirley's vehicle collection on display at RAF Scampton Open Day

Steve Shirley's collection of vehicles include

## Vehicles at Manston

- Dennis F109 Pump Escape ex London Fire Brigade
- Austin K4 60' Turntable Ladder ex National Fire Service
- TACR2a ex RAF Queens Flight
- Bedford MK 8 Crash Tender
- Thorneycroft MK5a Crash Tender (Under Restoration)
- Forward Control Landrover ex RAF (under restoration)
- Bedford TM Crash Tender ex MOD

## Vehicles at Scampton

- 2 x Mk10e Crash Tenders ex RAF
- Fordson WOT1 (One of only three survivors)
- 4 x Green Goddesses (Op Fresco, Auxiliary Fire Service, Army Fire Service and a one off prototype)
- Ford Transit A Type ex KODAK Film Company
- Volvo FL6/14 ex Lincolnshire Fire Service
- TACR1 ex RAF (1<sup>st</sup> TACR ever built!)
- MK6 ex RAF Waddington
- MK7 ex RAF (under restoration)
- MK9 ex RAF Northolt
- MK11 ex DFS Lynham
- Volvo FL6/14 ex ASU Wittering
- DP1a ex RAF (under restoration)
- Thorneycroft G46 ex RAF
- Dennis DS ex Hertfordshire
- Dennis RS ex Kent Fire Brigade
- Dennis D Type ex East Sussex
- Bedford TK HCB Angus ex Army
- Bedford Domestic ex RAF CTE
- Bedford Refueller/Fire Appliance ex Queens Flight (owned privately)
- Chubb Spearhead ex Biggin Hill (one of only eleven made)

## Off Site

- MK9 ex RAF Coltishall
- TACR2 ex RAF (Redhill Aerodrome).

If you would like to visit Steve's collection or offer help whether that be financial or with your labour his contact details are on page 3; seems to me that Steve has done a marvellous job gathering and preserving our vehicle and trade heritage. (GE)