



# FLASHPOINT

ROYAL AIR FORCE & DEFENCE FIRE SERVICES ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



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

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Vacant

Hello to all our readers and I hope you are all well. It has been a busy couple of months trying to get content in and sorted for this issue. One minute I have nothing then boom, loads of emails lol. Probably due to my rant at the AGM about how content is always lacking. Off the top of my head there are over 400 members in the Association and each one of us must have at least one story to tell. I understand that some folks don't have access to Laptops, PC's etc but we all have pen and paper. Send them to me and I will type them out. Our dear brother Fred Bickham always sends me a story and a photo or two in the post for every edition.

It was a very important AGM this year in that a new Chairman and Deputy Chairman had to be voted in. I won't say too much as our new Chairman Steve Shirley talks about it later. So welcome to Steve as Chairman and my good friend Don Pape as his Deputy.

As many of you know I suffer with Complex PTSD, Bipolar and Borderline Personality Disorder. Something that I have been struggling with for quite some time now. I get support locally from the Cumbria Mental Health Team and Help for Heroes. Obviously, the help I get from Help for Heroes is outstanding

and I don't know where I would be if it wasn't for them and my Case Manager, Steve Strefford, himself a Veteran but of the Royal Corps of Signals. I would not bad mouth the NHS Mental Support, but it is far superior delivered by those that understand and get us.

I was encouraged to get a dog as a means of support. My sister's cleaner tipped up one day with a wash basket full of six fur babies. Border Collie Pups from working parents. Anyhow I said can I have that one and Sharon said yes. I have had him since the 17th of September, and he hasn't left my side. Steve suggested that I get him registered as an emotional support dog which we are in the process of doing. He is a little life saver. He already knows when I'm not at my best and will jump on the sofa next to me and put his chin on my leg and look at me, priceless unconditional love.

I named him Florian after patron saint, which I thought rather apt and as a lasting memory of our fallen brothers.

A big thank you must go to Silverfox, Deputy Editor for his content but more so for his encouragement and support both for the Flashpoint and on a personal level. Cheers Steve you are a gem.



Right enough of my clap trap and on with the magazine. Happy Xmas and New Year to you all and your loved ones, stay safe

*Cheers  
Reggie and Florian  
Editor*

## STEVE SHIRLEY

*For those members who do not know Steve very well, here is background in his own words.*

I joined the RAF on the 3rd of Jan 1983 and completed Basic Training at RAF Swindon before completing Trade Training at RAF Catterick.

I went on to serve for 36 ½ years retiring as a Warrant Officer, Station Fire Officer at RAF Waddington.

During my service career I was posted to RAF Odiham, RAF Saxavord, RAF Marham, RAF Waddington, RAF Bruggen, RAF Scampton, RAF Manston (MODFSCTE as an Instructor), RAF Northolt, RAF Waddington, RAF Odiham, RAF Cottesmore, DFRMO Area Office Chilwell, RAF Coningsby, DFRMO Area Office Chilwell, RAF Waddington.

I have also been detached to the MPA-Falkland Islands, RAF Decimomannu-Sardinia, Basra Air Base- Iraq, RAF St Mawgan, RAF Wittering & RAF Kinloss.

During the National Fire Strikes (OP Fresco) I was deployed to Essex and then to Sheffield where I became deputy Commander for South Yorkshire. I also served at RAF Wittering during the 2013 Fire Disputes (Op FRESCO)

When I retired from regular service, I then served for two years as a reservist at RAF Waddington as the Establishment Fire Focal Point before joining the Civil Service. I now work as the Fire Safety Officer at RAF Digby.

I was awarded the MBE in The Queens New Year's Honours list 31st December 2004 and I have 1 x AOC 38 Group Commendations and 2 x Falkland Islands Certificate of Merit presented by The Commander British Forces South Atlantic Islands. In 2019 I received a Special recognition Award from the Trade in recognition for all that I had done during my career. This was presented at

the 75th Anniversary Dinner held at the Union Jack Club in London.

In addition to the above, I have served as Chairman of The British Fire Services Association and am still a serving member of the Governing Council. In recognition of my work for the BFSA I received The Meritorious Service Decoration.

I am also Chairman and Founder of the Museum of RAF Firefighting and serve as a committee member of the Fire Heritage Network UK.

I believe that I have a lot to offer the Association and feel that the time is now right to put myself forward for the position of Chairman so that I can lead the Association and enable it not only to survive but grow into an all-encompassing group that will appeal to all ranks and generations of our profession.

# Your New Chairman's Address - Steve Shirley



I must begin by saying how proud and honoured I am to have been elected Chairman at the recent AGM. To all those that voted for me Thank You. The position of Vice Chairman has also been filled and I welcome the chance to work alongside Don Pape and the rest of the Committee as we try to take the Association onwards and upwards.

I have included, for publication, my C.V. that was sent in when I put myself forward for the position. For those of you who don't know me, hopefully, it will provide some background to my service history and underline the fact that I am very passionate about not only being an ex-RAF Firefighter, but also how keen I am to preserve its history, ensuring that its exploits are never forgotten and most importantly appreciated by a wider audience for years to come.

My wife Kim and I attended the AGM which was held at the Citrus Hotel on the 19th – 21st November. It was great to meet up with people, some of whom I hadn't seen for the best part of 25 years.

I must say a special thank you to Sarah Fletcher of SF Events and the rest of the Committee for organising such a brilliant event.

It might surprise you to discover, that for someone so passionate about the RAF Fire Service, this was the first Association AGM that I had attended! Why, you might ask? Well, there are several reasons.

I am a very busy man and unfortunately as I belong to several other organisations

quite often there would be a clash on the calendar. I felt that as I had a more leading role in the other organisations, the Association could tick along without me being there and I'd catch up on events later. I also didn't want to get involved in the politics that had almost brought about the downfall of the Association previously. The other thing stopping me was the fact that I didn't know what to expect and if I'd enjoy it or not!

Well, after sitting in the bar chatting to everyone that weekend, I soon discovered that I wasn't alone in some of my thoughts and worries.

The first observation is that there is a considerable amount of passion out there. However, as I have discovered with my involvement of trying to establish the Museum of RAF Firefighting, passion is a precious commodity that keeps us going when times are tough, but passion alone won't save the day, we need involvement from more members of the Association. At the Museum I have an army of volunteers who share my thoughts and worries. They also provide the manpower to take things forward as some of the tasks involved are far in excess of one man's capabilities. Without my volunteers at the Museum, we wouldn't have survived all our setbacks and kept the resilience needed to tackle each new problem as it raised its ugly head!

Where is this leading, I hear you ask? Well, I was quite happy to let the Association tick over thinking that the committee could do all the work and that the Association would simply survive because we were all passionate and loved being firefighters. This is far from the truth, the small committee that we have cannot do all the work, they need help. We need volunteers to step forward and take on some extra responsibility if we want the Association to survive.

The demographic at the AGM was a revelation. The youngest member attending was 54. The oldest 85! We really need to start appealing to the younger firefighters that are currently serving. The big question is how? People who join the RAF these days, in general, are not planning on a long career. They simply see it as a steppingstone to other careers within the public services. Not many people join today thinking about the wonderful pension and the prospect of being promoted to Warrant Officer!

Can we generate the same passion for the trade today that we all still have now?

The formality of the AGM also came up on more than one occasion during my various discussions throughout the weekend and that is also something that I think we need to look at. Talking to one person who reached the rank of Cpl, he told me that because he had never experienced life in the mess, he was very apprehensive about attending a formal dinner. Sometimes it is just the wording that puts people off. I didn't think the 2021 AGM was particularly formal, in fact, I thought we set the tone just right. We began by getting everybody together for a photograph. Everyone was included except poor Sarah who took the photograph.

The venue was very well laid out with a seating plan & tastefully decorated surroundings. The tables were laid out for us with name cards in place. These name cards also had our food choices on them to avoid confusion should it occur with the staff that were waiting on us. The food that we had was truly outstanding. Grace was said before we ate, and a loyal toast was made for the Queen. The staff saw to our every need, and they were rewarded with a round of applause and a whip round at the end of the dinner which clearly demonstrated our gratitude for the way that they looked after us.

After the meal we were entertained by singer Sarah Dennis who sang her heart out for well over an hour with a break for the raffle in between. Sarah is the daughter of a civilian firefighter and she stunned us all with a recital of the Fireman's Prayer off by heart, followed by her rendition of Pie Jesu. It was very hard to tell if there was a dry eye in the house as she really moved us with her amazing and very fitting tribute to our proud profession. The raffle raised £242 which was donated to the Museum. After the event, we adjourned to the bar where discussions continued well into the small hours.

It was great to talk to so many people and get such differing opinions of what's good and what's not so good. I'm pleased to say that no one said things were bad! It's true, I've already got a lot of things to think about and I certainly don't have all the answers, that's for sure, but with the support of the committee and the members I'm confident that we can take things forward and see the Association flourish. I would love to see many more members

of the DFS attend as we are a bit one sided at present.

Let's hope next year sees a return to a near normal world, the establishment of the Memorial at the Arboretum, a well-attended AGM, a full turnout on the Remembrance Parade in London and some positive news on the long-term future of the Museum of RAF Firefighting.

In conclusion, I would like to say to everyone that we really enjoyed the AGM and can't wait for the next one!

I'd like to close by wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Stay safe and I look forward to 2022 with a great deal of excitement for things to come.

## A Warm Welcome to New Members

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

777 Paul Ferguson re-joining  
512 R Cook re-joining  
1158 Peter (Dixie) Dean  
1159 Steve Pickston  
1160 Peter Thompson  
1161 Matthew Browning  
1662 Derek Stanton

1163 John Frankland  
1164 Allan Bull  
1165 Phillip Parker  
1167 Mick Ripley  
1167 Ashley Davies  
1168 Graham Hawpson.



## Pat and Trevor Hayes RAFA Citation

On Friday 26th November, Pat and I were presented with the RAFA National Presidential Certificate -RAFA's highest award-that we were awarded in June 2020. Due to Covid that year, RAFA were unable to make the presentation at the 2020 National Conference as it was cancelled.

The presentation was made in the RAFA club at RAF Halton, Buckinghamshire by RAFA National President, Air Marshal Sir Baz North.

*The Citation reads: -*

“Without Mr and Mrs Hayes’ unstinting commitment and leadership and exceptional professionalism in all they do, Abbots and Kings Langley Branch would have closed many years ago. They have worked tirelessly throughout the years and continuously put the needs of others before their own.

Since 2010 they have raised more than £70,000 for the Wings Appeal. For more than 15 years they have planned and executed the annual Battle of Britain Parade and Service in Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire. Working with the local authorities, they ensure both go off without a hitch. Several local RAF Air Cadet squadrons, veterans and other youth groups take part and are always led by a band, something the Hayes’ always manage to arrange - even though bands are getting fewer and further between.

Pat and Trevor also play an active part in representing the RAFA at the Hemel Hempstead School Annual Remembrance Day service.

During the year they arrange very successful visits to places of interest such as museums and RAF stations and organise and host an annual garden party at their home which is routinely attended by up to 100 guests and is the highlight of the social calendar.

They also arrange fish and chip suppers and other branch activities to give members the chance to come together in the spirit of friendship and support.

Until recently, Pat Hayes was a very active Honorary Welfare Officer, covering Watford, Hemel Hempstead and the surrounding areas. Members of the previous SE&E Area Welfare Team considered Pat's work to be exemplary and many veterans and



their families have benefited directly from her diligence and dedication.

Their nomination said: “They are a very caring and active selfless couple, at the centre of their community and branch and are RAFA to the core. Undoubtedly, without them the Abbots and Kings Langley Branch would cease to exist and many veterans and beneficiaries currently and, in the future, would suffer”.

Without doubt, Pat and Trevor Hayes are very dedicated and great ambassadors for our work and each rightly deserving of the award of a National Presidential Certificate”.

I am sure we would all like to congratulate Pat and Trev on receipt of this justly deserved award. They have been absolute stalwarts for both RAFA and the Association

*Well done, Reg (Ed)*

## 1100752 Sergeant JAMES SIDNEY DEWHURST

### Royal Air Force

Within 12 hours of Italy declaring war on Britain on 10 June 1940, the first of 3,340 air raids on Malta took place. These increased in ferocity once the Germans joined in the raids from January 1941 and continued the onslaught throughout 1942. The initial heroic resistance to these attacks was provided by Gladiator aircraft, three of which were christened, Faith, Hope and Charity. They were augmented and eventually replaced by Hurricanes, and later still by Spitfires.

Malta operated throughout this period under siege conditions with many acts of bravery performed by the service and civilian population. The majority of exploits were connected with air raids, either directly during the attacks, or dealing with the aftermaths. THE most notable recognition was the award of the George Cross to the Island of Malta

For his bravery during attacks against the RAF fighter station at Hal Far Sergeant Dewhurst won the Military Medal, the only RAF Fire Fighter to receive this award. His citation reads:

Sergeant Dewhurst has on many occasions displayed great bravery and indifference to danger during enemy bombing raids. While in charge of the fire fighting party, he has been responsible for saving many aircraft from destruction during continuous bombing. On one occasion in March 1942, he saved the crew of a burning aircraft. Some days later, he extinguished the flames of a burning aircraft in circumstances of considerable danger. Sergeant Dewhurst has always displayed outstanding devotion to duty. One month later on 21 May 1942 Sergeant Dewhurst was killed during an air raid at 0400 hours on RAF Hal Far. The early morning raid hit the barracks area, also killing Aircraftman 1st Class W.L. King, and seriously injuring two Leading Aircraftmen. Both Sergeant Dewhurst and AC1 King were buried together in a collected grave No 100 in the Capuccini Naval Cemetery, Kalkara, Malta.

James Sidney Dewhurst was born at Middlesbrough on 30 March 1916. He enlisted in the Raf on June 17, 1940, as an Aircrafthand/General Duties, and served at RAF Wattisham after recruit training. He was posted to Malta on 15 September 1942 and served at RAF Hal Far from 28 September until his death on 21 May 1942.



## OBITUARIES

Once again more of our firefighting comrades have passed over. Our thoughts and prayers are with their loved ones

*"Time like an ever flowing stream bears all it's sons away"*



216 Graham Lawes passed away 14th May

1115 Finbar (Barry) Nolan 28th August

699 William (Jim) Buns 17th August

853 Arthur Bassett 13th August

236 Douglas Elmore 10th August

1108 Derek Leavis July 2021

107 Martin King October 2021

Tom Masterton October 2021

Trevor Box

David Johnson

Eric Heaney 1st December

# Gerry Schofield Part 2, The Royal Air Force years 1967-1990

Thinking back to days long gone, I could never have imagined the direction my life would take when I entered the RAF Recruitment Office in Wrexham in 1967. Then I was a single 22-year-old, drifting from job to job, with no academic qualifications and certainly no clear plan of where my future lay. Today, sitting on the balcony of my apartment in Malaysia where, with my second wife Angelene, we sit out the UK winter, I look back on a 22-year career in the RAF Fire Services, an education, both formal and informal, along the way and travel to many parts of the world. On leaving the RAF in 1989, I achieved a Post Graduate Diploma in Careers Guidance from a leading Scottish university followed by an enjoyable 18-year career in career guidance work in the NE of Scotland.

I owe a huge debt to the RAF for the way it shaped my life and gave me many opportunities to succeed. This part of my story is about three very important events during my service career that made me the person I am today. These are my posting to RAF Changi in the Far East in 1969; using the RAF Education facilities to educate myself and finally; my posting to the RAF Careers Information Service.

During my service years, I also spend time at RAF Wittering, Waddington, Gutersloh (in Germany), Kinloss (3 times) and RAF Mount Pleasant, Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic. I will have something to say about most of these postings, but my story really revolves around the "big three" turning points in my life

## Where it all started

Before we get to that, let me tell you about how the whole RAF thing got started. I can't remember the day I decided to join the Royal Air Force, but I can certainly remember the time and where I was. I was in the Carnarvon, a local Wrexham boozer located on Bridge Street; it must have been before 3pm because that's when the pub closed for the afternoon. Opposite was the Royal Air Force Careers Office. If I had not been in that pub on that day, my life would have turned out very different. Why? Because I had come to a crossroads, (a tipping point you might say,) in my life and my future turned out to be on the opposite side of the road.

I was 22 years old, had left school 7 years earlier with no qualifications and no clear idea what to do in life, except find a job

and keep it. In fact in the intervening years, I had had many jobs, starting with FW Woolworths as a stockroom worker at age 15 getting the princely sum of £3.10 shillings per week. When my dad suffered his first heart attack, the family needed more money, so I left to work in a number of factories on the local industrial estate. At the time of my drinking session in the Carnarvon, I had left factory work and was on my second sales rep' job. The first was with Betterware Ltd, selling brushes and polishes etc out of a suitcase calling door to door. No salary, only commission on what I sold, no sale, no pay, as simple as that.

My second sales job was with a company called S & U. I supplied various household goods to customers in the Merseyside area from the back of my van. They paid for the goods via a regular sum each week; the amount depended on what they bought. I learnt a lot about life and human behaviour from those sales jobs, but that is another story. See part 1 for more detailed information. I was still a single man (although with a long-time girlfriend), my dad had died four years earlier when I was 18yrs old, I had responsibilities for my mum and younger brother but career wise, I was going nowhere! Anyway, over a pint or three, thinking about the meaning of life (as you do), I looked out the bar window and there was a possible answer; the RAF. Why not I thought, go on Schofield, pop across and see what they can offer you. So, I did.

Finishing my beer, I walked across the road and on meeting a recruiting Sgt announced that I was thinking of joining up. "You have come to right place lad" he replied, "what trade?" Trade, trade, what on earth is he talking about? When he explained, I had to admit I had no idea; I had not given it a thought. "What about Fireman" he said? Now remember, I had no academic qualifications, but I did have the first aid certificate I had proudly gained from one of my factory jobs. "Ideal for the fire trade, applying first aid to rescued pilots and other aircrew etc" he said. I also had a driving licence and was a member of the Auxiliary Fire Service. This information and my selection test result sealed my fate, Fireman it was. I didn't realise that you could have up to three career choices, until I was a RAF recruiter myself many years later. What I found out subsequently, was that the fire trade was undermanned at the time, and I was destined to help make up the numbers.

I remember going home to break the news. My mum cried and my girlfriend Mary was concerned and wondered if we would ever get married! She said something about that's what happens when you go drinking in the afternoon! Anyway, the die was cast. I passed the medical and the interview (that was a laugh) and soon signed the next 9 years of my life away. When I told some of my former factory mates over a few beers at the Horse and Jockey pub (or the thatched roof as it was popularly known) they thought I was mad. "You have signed up for 9 years, a lifetime!" was the general opinion. "But you lot have been in the factory for 10 years and more" I replied. "We are all going to have to work until we are 65, you are looking back on years already worked, I am looking forward, it amounts to the same thing" I think there was a collective "whatever" and "smart arse" and I bought a round in celebration. What I had got myself into I didn't know, but I would soon find out.

## Training Camps

Just to be clear to avoid disappointing any unsuspecting ex fireman reader, this tale of mine will not be about the various marks of fire vehicles, length of hoses, crash or domestic fire incidents attended, EWS (Emergency Water Storage) tanks or even crash gates. This part of my story is about some of the people and places I encountered during my 22-year service and what came next.

First up was basic training at RAF Swinderby in Lincolnshire. Except for camping holidays in Devon with my old friend Geg Winsper, I had never lived outside Wrexham, so Lincoln was a great adventure. Little did I know that many years later I would be the other side of the world, down in the South Atlantic, still for now Lincolnshire would do as a first step into the great unknown?

It seemed to me that the whole purpose of basic training is to break you down and then rebuild you to fit the requirements of the RAF. The weeks that followed were full of early morning inspections, bed packs, parade ground drill, cross country running, classroom work to pass tests, learning how to shoot a .303 rifle, general spit and polish etc. Following the pass out parade and the powers that be, deciding that they had done the best they could, I was now Leading Aircraftsman (LAC) Schofield. It was a proud day for my mum.

The next stage was trade training at RAF Catterick in Yorkshire. I enjoyed Catterick as it's a great part of the country. Here the task was to make me a competent fireman. There was a lot to learn, from the different crash and domestic fire vehicles I would be working with in the future, to the various fuels, eg AVTAG, AVTUR etc I needed to be aware of. I had to know how to enter a smoke-filled room with a breathing apparatus on my back, how to remove unconscious people from life threatening situations and how to affect a rescue by reaching the cockpit or cabin of a burning aircraft. Knowing the various marks of ejection seats was vital. Different aircraft both UK and NATO had different configurations of seats and I needed to know how to make each of them safe to prevent premature ejection with the pilot still in the seat. I had to know the types of armaments the different fighter aircraft carried. Some of this information I learnt at Catterick, the rest I learnt via experiences and continuation training sessions at the different air bases I was posted to over the following 21 years.

Years later when I was a Sargent crew commander in charge of a crash crew at RAF Kinloss, I remember a conversation with a very new airman fresh from his trade training at Catterick. He asked me if the incoming Nimrod was likely to crash as he was looking forward to his first prang and so put into practice all that he had learnt in training! I replied that it was very unlikely and that being a fireman was very much like a student who had just heard his final exam had been postponed. It would happen, but not just now, but keep studying the student was told. "How so", my young airman asked? "Well", I replied, "firemen have to learn and retain lots of vital information on all aspects of both crash and domestic firefighting, but rarely get to use that knowledge". "That's because modern aircraft are built to very high standards of safety". "However, we are here just in case we are needed, either because of a technical fault or human error". "That being the case, just like the school student, we have to keep our theory knowledge up to date and our practical firefighting skills as sharp as possible, just in case of an aircraft incident, but not today lad, not today, especially as it's nearly 5pm, the night crew are coming on and I want to go home".

There are no second chances when you are faced with an aircraft fire. The primary

role of the instructors at the Fire School at RAF Catterick was all about making sure you knew the risks and through constant practice reduce these risks to the minimum. My instructor was Sgt Bob Plumb, quite a character. A big strong guy with an easy smile, a ladies' man I would say. He was well suited to the task of training basic recruits because he had the personality for it, and he trained us well. He was firm but very fair and had a great sense of humour. I remember on one occasion we were down at the training area and Bob was demonstrating how to hold a fully charged (and heavy) water hose with one hand using his mid body as a counterweight. Suddenly the hose burst, and Bob got completely soaked. End of lesson. I met up again with Bob during my detachment in the Falkland Islands in 1982, at that point he had become a Warrant Officer and I was a Sgt. Soon I was considered ready for front line fire duties and with my new rank of Senior Aircraftsman (SAC) I was posted to RAF Wittering, again in Lincolnshire. In the meantime, Mary and I had married at our local St Anne's Catholic church in Wrexham in February 1968.

### **RAF Wittering**

I was at Wittering for approximately 18 months. We never saw much of the local countryside, especially during the winter months because of the near permanent fog. There were many days and weeks when the fog would lift about 11am for flying to start, only for it to return a few hours later and Air Traffic Control would again have to close the runway. Mary and I managed to find our first accommodation in part of a farmhouse many miles away from the camp. It was a bit isolated, especially for Mary, with public transport non-existent, however it was our first home, and the farm owners were very friendly. It wasn't too long before I was allocated one of the recently built married quarters on base. That made a big difference to both of us. I had less travelling and Mary, who was a qualified nurse (both children and general); found a job at Peterborough hospital.

I soon settled into the routine of working on an important airfield. Those were the days when the Cold War was at its height, with the RAF flying large Vulcan and Victor bomber aircraft. These provided the UK's nuclear deterrent response before the Royal Navy took over. I remember well the QRA (Quick Readiness Action) standby drill with aircrew ready to get their

aircraft into the air at a moments' notice. RAF firemen had to be ready 24/7 to deal with any fire emergencies that might occur.

If a fire broke out on an aircraft with a nuclear bomb on board, we knew we had to fight the fire at all costs. We had regular exercises and practices to ensure we were up to the task. It was during my tour at Wittering (1968/9) that Bomber and Fighter Commands were disbanded and replaced by the new Strike Command. The change coincided with the replacement of the V Bomber Force with the STOL (short take-off and landing) Harrier jump jet aircraft. I will never forget seeing my first Harrier suddenly stop in mid-flight, hover over a landing spot and brought down to land vertically. Amazing

My other memories of Wittering included the day I was challenged by a SNCO outside one of the hangers. He had been sent out to speak to me, by an officer who had been observing me servicing the nearby hydrants. I had fallen under suspicion because the officer thought I was working too hard to be a genuine airman. Once I explained I was quickly finishing the job to get off to lunch, he let me go.

Mary often complained that I had no hobbies. I solved that after reading an article in the station magazine about how to brew your own lager beer! I got a baby birco boiler from stores, hops and sugar, yeast and empty bottles from Stamford (the local town) and got started. When Mary arrived home from her shift at the hospital, I was in full production mode. The downstairs windows in the married quarter were completely steamed up and a wonderful aroma of boiling hops filled the house. Mary was not impressed! I went on to produce many successful brews of beer and so, was quite popular with several of the lads on the section, I wonder why? On one occasion after a bottle or two of the golden amber (golden unless you disturbed and drank the sediment at the bottom of the bottle), a local police patrol picked up one of my drinking buddies in the early hours of the morning. He was stopped walking up the nearby A1 in a northerly direction, and miles away from camp. Later he said he remembered leaving my house to walk home, and then nothing until the next day, not even being stopped by the police.

We were not long in our married quarter when I was posted to RAF Changi in Singapore. When I first heard about the posting, I must confess I was not at all

sure where in the world Singapore was! However, that was soon put right and our thoughts then turned to returning our married quarter back to the RAF, or as it was called “marching out”. Anyone reading this and has been through the process will know the fear marching out of a quarter entailed. The Families Officer (FO) seemed to be a breed apart. I believe leaving a married quarter is very different today so for those who don’t know, the process went something like this. You are allocated a quarter based on the number of points you have accrued and the FO, or one of his minions, “marches” you in. This entails both of you checking off an inventory of all the items in the quarter, from beds to spoons and everything in between. You then sign in blood (I jest but only just) to the effect that everything is there, serviceable and in good condition. This included the condition of the walls, doors, furniture and carpets. You are now responsible for every item in the house, and it had better be in the same condition when you leave (march out), or else!

The married quarter we had in Maltby Close was one of a brand-new build and so filled with new furniture etc, all the occupants felt the pressure to hand them back as we had found them. The problem was that as you lived in a place, items can get lost and wear and tear can occur, but that is not allowed in the FO’s world. I am generalising of course, I am sure there must have been some human Family Officers out there, but I never met one.

At Wittering the FO was a particular swine and his reputation spread throughout the quarters. One of our neighbours in the Close had a particular problem. Like us she and her husband were in their first quarter and like us wanted to keep the standard high. She called to see me one day (her husband was away on a long-term detachment), worried that her lounge smelt and had no idea where the smell was coming from. Closer inspection of the lounge carpet identified it as the culprit, it was rotting. What had happened was that fearful of the FO finding fault, she

regularly lifted the carpet to mop the lino underneath, however she failed to allow the lino to dry properly before putting the carpet back in place. As a result, water seeped into the carpet and over time started the rotting process. Our neighbour freaked out when she learnt the truth because she knew the consequences, her husband would have to pay for the damaged carpet and a new one, a huge expense on our military salary.

When I was due to be “marched out”, the FO refused to take our married quarter back because the place where we kept the coal (the coal shed) was black with coal dust and it wasn’t of course when we marched in! Would you believe it! Before I was allowed to hand the quarter over, I had to remove what coal was still in the coal shed and whitewash it out, can you believe that! The fact that the new occupants could have used the coal and would also dirty the place didn’t seem to register with the FO.

## Let us start at the very beginning, a very good place to start.

April 69, and a huge start of a completely different way of life. Signed on for 9 years and thought “give it a go” and see what happens. Looked at the other services to start with to see what they offer. Army, seemed to be mostly MOD Civvies, Navy, you had to train for 3 different roles, deck handler, ATC, and Fireman, So RAF it was, and looking back had no regrets.

Being in the Air Cadets to start with marching was easy, putting on the shirt collars was easy, ironing was easy, bed packs were a sinch but bulling up boots, well we all had to do it. Regiment boots were magic with the built-in toe caps whereas the other trades had to get rid of the pimples. Once I got the hang of it, no worries maties, had the best boots in the flight, without too much spit !!!

As you all know Swinderby was a case of marching, shooting, more bull and more marching.

The camp out was a hoot, map reading was ok, food was ok but some of the bivouacs that were built wouldn’t have stopped fog getting in so we were lucky the weather was kind to us.

We eventually ended up smart as carrots and ended up being the support flight for the next passing out parade therefore an extra special bull night was the order for the next day’s inspection. We all did extra polishing and pressing except one particular scouse git (Baxter) who thought he would pop over to Spitalgate for the evening. Of course, he looked like a piece of crap. Sgt in charge of our flight, Sgt Fagg, took one look at him and just said “I’m sure you gentlemen can deal with him this evening” Wow, poor bastard, we slung him in a cold bath, threw vim, fairy liquid, bleach, Daz and then scrubbed him with a yard broom. With that Sgt Fagg appears in the doorway to find out what the commotion

was, and we said that “ he was just having a bath Sarg”. So, in a booming voice “ I like to see a smart clean airman, now clean up the mess Baxter”

Passing out day was amazing to see this fine body of raw recruits march out smarter than the bees’ knees. Being the tallest in the flight I was right marker and led our flight out of Swinderby to be told that our next Station would be easier??? Lovely day with all the families there and my dad asked the C.O. if he thought we should bring back national service. His answer was “NO WAY, we have enough trouble with the blokes who want to join up”.

So Catterick here we go and more reports to come.

*Rick (Lurch) Armstrong 840*

# 45 Monitor “saved” by the Museum of RAF Firefighting



*The first outing at Lincsfest*

Earlier this year, I received an email from a Mr Richard Taylor of the 493rd Bomb Group Museum, in Debach, Suffolk asking if I'd be interested in obtaining what is believed to be, the last surviving example of a Fordson WOT1 a1, 45 Monitor? Surely, this was an offer too good to refuse!

Richard explained that he had purchased the vehicle some 18 years ago to add to his collection at the Museum. He had a new restoration project in the pipeline and as he needed the space and some money to carry out his new challenge, it was time to let the 45 Monitor go. Richard told me that there had been considerable interest in this vehicle from collectors in America, but he didn't want to see it go over the pond. Given its unique place in the history of RAF Firefighting he felt it only right that we should be offered first refusal.

I couldn't afford it on my own, and after discussing the subject with the Museum Trustees and Volunteers it was decided that the Museum couldn't afford it either as we needed to have every penny in the bank just in case, we had to start paying storage fees or indeed, had to move the

collection again. We couldn't apply for a bank loan either, so the decision was made to finance the purchase of the vehicle by asking volunteers to donate their own money into the project. I'm pleased to say we had a fantastic response from our own team, but it wasn't enough to complete the deal and transport the vehicle back to Lincolnshire. At this point we launched an appeal on various social media platforms to see if other people could help. We had a good response, and the purchase price was finally reached. The deal was completed, and the vehicle was moved back to Lincolnshire in time to be unveiled at Lincsfest, a show held at the Lincolnshire Showground just a stone's throw from RAF Scampton. It was placed alongside my WOT1 and several other Museum

Vehicles to form a brilliant display. We'd done it, we'd saved a unique piece of history and here was, back where it should be, safely in the hands of another Museum!

The vehicle is essentially complete and having been inside on display, it is in remarkable condition. Although it didn't travel many miles in the hands of its former owner, the vehicle was maintained

in excellent mechanical condition. It came with a full document archive which in itself will blow your mind away!

It appears from these records, that the vehicle left Fords at Dagenham on the 3/7/45 and was issued to 232MU at White City. From here it went to Sun Engineering in October 1945. It then went to various companies to be fitted out before being issue to RAF West Malling in Kent on the 13/11/46. It went through various modifications whilst in service before being demobbed in 1951. It then went on duty with the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough.

The vehicle was issued with the RAF registration number 185375 which later became 01AG94. At Farnborough it received the civilian registration LYN 48 on the 26/6/51. On the 18/9/57 it was transferred to Weston Airways Ltd, Weston Airport, Weston-Super-Mare. The vehicle remained in service until December 1976!

The vehicle lay derelict in a field at East Harptree, near Bristol belonging to Maurice Weeks, a well know collector of military vehicles. Here the vehicle was discovered in 1985 by Don & Joan

Willmott who immediately fell in love with her. Despite their interest, it was another 3 years before Mr Weeks was finally persuaded to part with her. After such a long time in the open, the vehicle was in a very sorry state and Don began the restoration immediately. He finally finished her in 1994! The vehicle was sold to Richard Taylor in 2004. Sadly, the registration number was sold on and according to the DLVA now sits on a Landrover!

The vehicle is now housed within our

storage facility safely under cover. Although registered for the road, we will not be taking it far until it has had a full mechanical inspection by our team. The vehicle currently sports a variety of quite perished, slightly different tread, tyres which will all need replacing before we venture far!

I must say a massive thank you to all of the Museum Volunteers and those people who dug deep into their own pockets to ensure that this vehicle went to its spiritual home. We couldn't have done it without you.

The exciting prospects just keep getting better. We now have a WOT1, Wot 1 a1, Bedford Water Bowser and an Austin k6 Gas Truck. What a crash line photograph that would make once they're all back in pristine condition!

*Steve Shirley MBE  
Chairman/Founder  
Museum of RAF Firefighting*

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

I was bright eyed and busy tailed when I arrived at the Fire Section at RAF Wittering, 17 years old to be precise.

After passing my TATS I eventually became a driver and the proud owner of an Austin 1100 4 door. I was one of the only guys on the section to own a car so was often taxi-ing my fellow firemen (we were fireman then, not quite so PC) here, there and everywhere.

One such boozy Saturday night in the Bowling Alley at Wittering springs to mind and I was reminded of this by Martin Keighley at the recent re-union!!

After playing bowls and having par-taken in much drinking of ale, we decided to go to the Bop at the A1 Club on the camp, now this is such a long way that we decided that I should drive the 500 metres or so!!! We piled into my green Austin, I say piled because we reckon there was 11 or 13 of us!!! It was a 4 door don't forget, so the more the merrier!! It was a tight squeeze and some interesting positions never to be repeated.

En route to the A1 Club, the comment about the RAF Police following was uttered, no problem says I, I'll put my foot down and they'll not catch us!!! We evaded the long arm of the law and arrived at the Club, nearly via the steps leading up to the front doors. We continued to enjoy the music and everything else that goes on at the Bop.

At closing time, I decided that the car

should be parked back at the Barrack Block ready for shift the next day. I duly managed to get the car pointed in the right direction and headed home, for some bizarre reason via the Married Quarters???

Now Parker Road at Wittering has a very tight bend and whilst transiting and turning the steering wheel, I knocked the door handle, the door opened and I fell out onto the road. I did have the Three Degrees playing on the cassette and when will I see you again was ringing in my ears as my car was now hurtling to one of the Married Quarters front door!!! Yes, the car smashed straight into the front door and knocked it down the corridor into the kitchen!!! I thought this isn't going to make the Boss happy but my main thought; as with all good fireman was how to get out of it!!!

I hobbled over to the car now embedded in the door frame and realising that the house was empty decided to drive away!!! If I got to one of the married guy's houses round the corner it would be fine and I could deny all knowledge. Well, the car started surprisingly and I drove it to a colleague's house, woke them up and explained the situation, at this point I didn't realise that there was a crack in the oil sump and a trail of oil from the site of impact to this colleague's house was actually quite discriminating evidence!!! The fact that we pushed it into his garage didn't really help either!! Still, they gave me a Bacardi and coke to

steady my nerves (Great move). I settled down on the settee for the night.

So, can you believe that someone actually reported this incident to the RAF Police and the duty Snco Policeman arrived in the early hours, he followed the oil slick and found out whose garage it was, first and only time I came across RAF Police detective work to be honest!! He was told that I had a Bacardi and coke to steady my nerves and was coming to report the incident on the Sunday morning, quick thinking but realising the s\*\*t was going to hit the fan. I did report to the RAF Police office prior to the Sgt knocking off, to be fair, he knew the gen and told me this was a very, very lucky escape however; Administrative Action was unavoidable and to get out of his office!!! A good copper, he certainly did me a favour.

Anyway, the system eventually caught up with me and I was charged £153 and some pence. I asked my 11 or 13 friends to help pay the fine as that was a lot of money in those days, in good team spirit, they told me to F\*\*\* off, well, you would wouldn't you???

*Cheers  
Stevie.B. - 413*

I was then posted to RAF Machrihanish several years later, only two of us singlies had cars then, don't ask me how many I had in my car going across the Goss Moor!!!!





# Gordon Smudge Smith Part One



*Basic Course BR2/79, me front row second right.  
Back row Left to Right. Bev Bevan, Tim Hunt, Ade Speak, Davy Stenhouse, Tony Donaldson (RIP), Sgt Ken Yogi Blair Instructor (RIP).  
Front row Left to Right. Ian Tosh Smedley (RIP), Wayne Lewis, Ian Pithers, Phil Smith, Pete Davis, Gordon Smith, Tam Smith.  
Missing Cpl Graeme aka Bill Smith Instructor.*

H8179929 Sgt Gordon Smith RAF Fire Service 1979-2003, DFS (DFR) Ops 2004-2015, 2015-2020 Fire Safety (FSC North) April 2020-October 2020 Capita Fire safety practitioner, December 2020 to present MOD Civil Servant as the Establishment Fire Focal Point RAF Leeming.

My service commenced on the 6th of February a spring morning in 1979, when I left my parents' home in Redcar Teesside to start the journey down to Newark and onto the RAF recruitment training centre at RAF Swinderby. Little did I know the path it would send me down for most of my life.

In 1979 recruit training (Square bashing) as it was known lasted 6 weeks, for those who survived a pass out parade awaited and a week's leave. I had travelled with a school pal Michael Richards, who by the time we arrived at the main gates of RAF

Swinderby had had enough of the RAF, I never saw him again, and I never have to this day...

So, 6 weeks, you were put into flights, I was in 5 Flight we were accommodated in Gibson Block on the middle floor. You received a haircut a short one., a service number H 8 1 7 9 9 2 9 , that you had to memorise very quickly as all you were was a

number, our DI staff, a Sgt Crew and a Cpl Boyskel boy they could shout, but it was all part of the basic training all recruits had to endure, at this point I must stress that RAF Swinderby was for male recruits only, the female members of the RAF, WRAF's were trained elsewhere. Most days started with a bout of PT, that meant a run around the perimeter track whatever

the weather was, and we had snow and lots of it. You learnt how to march as a flight, for some this was a real challenge, but since I had spent the previous 4 years as an Army Cadet, I found it quite easy, of course I did not let on to the DI staff

that i was a cadet. At some point we were bussed over to RAF Coningsby to go on a air experience flight, this was the first time I had flown in a aircraft, it was a VC10, little did I know that I would be seeing RAF Coningsby again. As the weeks progressed the flights were pitched against each

other for various award cups, we had a good flight and swept the table which annoyed the other flights no end. My parents came down with a good family friend for the pass out parade, he filmed it so somewhere there is some cine film of the event, it was the first time I had seen my parents for 6 weeks, but by then I had got used to been away from home, and let's



face it that was why I joined in the first place. So, recruit training done, a week's leave and then off to the RAF Fire Service training school at Catterick.

You arrived at Catterick, which as well as been the RAF Fire Service training unit it was also the RAF Regiment (Rock Apes) training Depot. At the guard room the potential firemen were separated from the potential rock apes, we walked to our barrack block, they ran, in fact I soon learnt that basic rock apes ran everywhere, we didn't. The following day we met our instructors, a Sgt Ken Yogi Blair (RIP) and a Cpl Bill Smith (RIP), on our basic course we also had 3 Smith's, an English one me, a Welsh one Phil, and a Scottish one Tam, what's the chance of that.

At that time the basic Fireman's course lasted 8 weeks, the trade then was not open to females, that would change quite a few years latter though. Learning to be a fire-fighter took a lot of classroom work, but also a lot of practical work, including a swimming test and an assault course test in full fire kit against the clock.

I found the practical side of the training most enjoyable, as I was doing things I had never done before, learning about fire pumps, what they could do and what

they could not do, life in the block had its moments as we were sharing it with the fire school support staff, a great bunch of lads who had served in some of the far flung corners of the RAF's empire and had a few tales to tell, of course the RAF regiment resented us been on there Depot as they called it, but as we were driven from the hangar to the burning ground, you would pass the basis gunners running around the airfield, I thought glad I didn't join that mob..

I had to learn about and how to use the air forces front line fire vehicles, these included domestic vehicles, Trailer pumps, the Mini and Major Angus's, Crash vehicles the TACR 1 & 2, the Mk 7,8,9 still parked in the hangar, but not used by us were the following Mk5, 5A, Mk6, Bedford Miles, Austin Gas Truck and the WOT 1.

Training progressed and before we knew, it was trade exam time, where the trade standard testing team took us through our tests on all aspects of the equipment and vehicles, this I had to pass and pass I did. We were told our postings, I had applied for RAF Hullavingdon, but as it was a domestic unit and at that time you had to go to a flying unit for your first posting I

said I was not bothered as it would all be new to me anyway.

So, I was posted to the Fire Section at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire as a LAC Fireman, I had visited RAF Coningsby during my recruit training at Swinderby, for an air experience flight in a VC10. By chance a FT1 promotion course was going on at Catterick and a SAC from Coningsby was on it, he gave the low down on how to get to the unit as the nearest rail station was 15 miles away.

We went straight from Catterick to our new postings, those of us who were posted south all got on the same train from Darlington and got off at various locations down the line.

So, I arrived at Sleaford, about 15 miles from Coningsby, where MT picked me up and took me to Coningsby, the first night was spent in transit accommodation, for those who have experienced this it's like been in prison, the following morning and in my number one's it was off to find SHQ and then the fire section.

The Fire section was run by a Flt Sgt George Masterson, a Sgt Len Wilds signed my arrivals chit as it was the last thing he signed in his RAF career, he left the



*My first State 1, I was still a LAC.....*

section and I never saw him again, other Sgt's there during my time were Jim (Taff the Fire) Jones, Al (Sticky) Stamp, Geordie Dingle, George Edwards (RIP), Trevor Jones and Chris Pownell, Mick King... Cpl's Geoff Brown, Larry Dunnite, Andy Waterworth, Bob Wilding (RIP) Ralph Taylor (RIP) Trevor (Suction) Line but to name a few. As a spoon, probationary fireman, you were the new guy, tea boy etc. I was taken around the station by one of the firemen, who also told me I would be accommodated in Gloucester Block, this is where all the singerly (single firemen) lived, I was shown to a single room, great I thought having spent the basic recruitment and trade training in 12 or 24-man rooms. I soon began to settle in and once on a crew you get into a routine, although I had a lot to learn, Coningsby was a fast jet station with 2 squadrons of Phantom F4 aircraft (29 Sqn & 228 OCU / 64 Sqn) as well as the BBMF (Battle of Brittan Memorial Flight). I was on a 9-man crew, manning a TACR 1, Mk8, Mk9, we worked a shift pattern, a mixture of days, nights and days off, Coningsby fire section like others ran with fire piquet's on nights and

weekends, (these were trained by the fire section) and came from other sections on the unit, mainly cooks or flight line meck's (Lineys), some of these did fire piquet on a regular basis, one (Martin Harding aka Lippy) even had his own crash kit. As I was only a LAC (Leading Aircraftsman) I had to learn all sorts to pass my TAT's (Trade ability tests) so I could get promoted to be a SAC (Senior Aircraftsman) and get a pay rise. I attended my first aircraft crash in September 1979, a Lightning with no nose wheel, I was still a LAC sitting on the back of the TACR 1, more state 1's would follow during my 4 years that I would spend at Coningsby....

Now the cold war was still on, so we had to practice at playing war, the station alert siren would sound followed by TACEVAL, TACEVAL, TACEVAL all station personnel report to work....war games were fun and sometimes boring, once we were in the village pub and the siren went off, we didn't hear it but the land lord did, he just turned the juke box up a bit and carried on serving, several hours later when we staggered up the road we found

the main gate on lockdown, bollocking time for us then....

Now bear in mind that I was only just turned 17 when I arrived at Coningsby, and this was my first encounter with the Air Force Department Fire Service (AFDFS), these were civilian firemen employed by the MOD, 111 Sqn (Triple 1) was on bolthole to Coningsby, so some of the civilian firemen from RAF Leuchars came with them, a great bunch of lads, mainly Jock's, sorry Scottish but they enjoyed a beer as much as the next man so this meant that I could find out where the local pubs were, Coningsby village and Tattersall village had 7 pubs between them, The Castle Inn in Coningsby was where the Fire section drank, George and Jess were the landlord and landlady, I spent many a night and weekend in there, all the fire section leaving do's etc were spent in there, I celebrated my 18th in there, when Jess asked what the celebration was and I told her it was my 18th, she replied but you have been coming in here for ages, yes I replied but know I am coming in legally... so she gave me a pint to celebrate with.



*Coningsby Fire Section early 1980's*

*Back Row L-R Flt Sgt George Masterson, SAC Frank Porter, Steve Carlson, Dave Lilly, Nobby Clark, Derri Dunne, Tony Meade, Sgt Geordie Dingle, SAC Tony Burgess, Cpl's Bob Wilding (RIP), Geoff Brown, Trevor Line.*

*Front Row L-R Sgt John O'Connor, Cpl Ralph Taylor (RIP), SAC Louie Lucock, Del Fisher, Jim Stokes, Geordie Martin, Ray Hunt, Kenny Dowdeswell.*

*Missing SAC John Cleminson, Gordon Smith (Det Cyprus)*

I was detached to sunny Cyprus on an APC (Armament Practice Camp), I went with SAC Geordie Cleminson, this was my first trip out of the country, but it would not be my last... We travelled to Cyprus in style, in the back of a C130 Hercules, an enjoyable experience, but not to everybody's taste. Well 6 weeks in Cyprus was great, the firemen stationed at Akrotiri showed us around on our day's off, Mick Lee, Ian the Hobbit Calvert, Jed Ruddy but to name a few, the W.O was Ken Crouch, or the screaming skull as he was affectionately known, the other SNCO I remember was Jan Metters, he would go off on a FP visit and come back with the Land Rover full of oranges.

It was soon time to return to the UK not knowing if or when I would see Cyprus again. Little did I know but I would on more than 1 occasion.

Back to life on the fire section, which never had a dull moment, we played football at the weekends, against the fire section from RAF Binbrook, they would come to us or we would go to them there was always time for a beer afterwards. We would on crew find some way to annoy the duty crew chief or the Flt Sgt, I had my fair share of bollocking's, all part of the learning process, I learnt that no other section messed with the firemen, as when a A/C crashes we had to go and sort it out, and during my 4 years at Coningsby I saw a few crashes Lightning, Phantom's and even a Spitfire.

I was lucky to go to RAF St Athan twice, the first time for my lights (Car test) and the second time for my HGV. Whilst on my first visit, I like many others were introduced to the delightful VC, now VC does not stand for Victoria Cross it stands for Valley Commandoes... as many will testify to once met never forgot, and in some cases you deserved a VC at the end of it.....So it's on a weekend back at Coningsby I had met a WAAF, she was a steward, a few had tried to, but it took a fireman to score, but while I was back on my driving course a Snowdrop (RAFP) station fed moved in, so that was that, but on my return he was walking around with his arm in a sling and sporting a black eye, some of my mates, not firemen but FLM's made sure that he knew you don't piss on a fireman cheers lad's.

In late 81 over the new year period I was at a house party hosted by Mick Plant,

Mick was a RAFP Station fed, but he was a good guy and he got on very well with all whom he met, so back to the party, it was a memorable event for one thing and another, I ended up drunk, wearing only a shirt, the attending members of the WRAF had strung the rest of my cloths in a tree outside, so they sat me down on a sofa next to a girl who would eventually become my wife, that's how I met Lindsay, and 35 odd years later we are still married... Now Lindsay told me later, that when she arrived at Coningsby the WRAF Flt Sgt, Jan Ball had instructed all the girls NOT to be seen with, get to know, or go drinking with any member of the FIRE Section, as they are a bunch of animals, granted we did have a reputation.

Whilst on my second visit to St Athan on my HGV driving course, it's 1982 and a little British enclave called the Falkland Islands was invaded by the Argies, the small Royal Marine Commando detachment was soon outnumbered and forced to surrender, so the Argies had thought that was that, but no, the Iron Lady (Maggie Thatcher) and the British Military had other ideas, so a task force set sail and the rest, well that's history now, but let's just say the Falklands are and will always be British Sovereign territory. Meanwhile I was on the old ERS scheme, Emergency Reinforcement so I thought any time I would be recalled and shipped off down south, that's South Atlantic, I was keeping in touch with Lindsay as she worked in Commcen in case she heard anything, but no so back on my driving course, I passed my (OLD) HGV Class 2 and back to Coningsby.

Now in the early 80's if you were going out with a female member of the RAF who lived in the WRAF Blk and you got caught in there it was a stoning offence, and the Station Fed's (RAFP) liked nothing better than catching a fireman out of bounds as it was referred to, now to a fireman it was a game, a game that we were better at that the RAFP's were, so I never got caught, likewise the RAFP shared our block with us, well they had to live somewhere, and Lindsay was never caught in my room either, as a dog handler who lived next to me left his room key above his door, since he was on shift the station fed's would never think to look in there, so finally Lindsay moved out with 2 other girls into a bungalow as close to the camp as they could get, just to rub the Air Forces nose in it, thankfully times have changed.....

## THE WARRANT OFFICER AND HIS MORNING CUP OF COFFEE

Picture yourself at RAF Wyton, sometime during the mid-eighties.....

It was around 8.30hrs and I was on tea duties and most of the crew were finishing off their daily vehicle and equipment cleaning; Corporal Mick Penfold and SAC Robbie Parker had just sat down for their break.

WO Ted Firmager came in, said good morning, then down and began to read his daily paper.

"Do you want a coffee mate?" I asked him.

In the corner of my eye I could see Mick Penfold sinking down in his seat and hiding behind his paper. Robbie Parker looked in shock and quickly left the room.

"I beg your pardon Boland" came a rather shocked, and definitely annoyed, reply from WO Firmager.

I repeated "Do you want a coffee mate?"

I could see the tension on our Warrant Officer's face and knew I had only a nano-second to follow up.....

"In your coffee sir" I said with feigned innocence, ".....do you want a coffee-mate?"

I then proceeded to wiggle a sachet of 'Coffeemate' creamer at WO Firmager, being careful not to break into any form of smile or 'un-seriousness.'

"Oh, very good Boland, you got me, well done"

"So do you want one sir?"

"Don't push it Boland, milk will be fine"

Postscript:

Those who knew me knew I used to play tricks on our boss. He was on the toilet once and I let loose a bunch of billiard balls onto the hard tiles scaring (pardon the pun) the crap out of him.

During his subsequent protest I pretended that I was cleaning them and had accidentally dropped them.

I actually had a tremendous amount of respect for Ted and some years ago I went to his funeral to pay that respect.

God Bless You Sir and thank you for putting up with me.....enjoy your coffee.

*Shaun Boland*

# Fred Bickham RAF Topcliffe 1955-1958

Firstly, I have to say a huge thank you to Fred as he always sends me a small humorous story with a photo. So, Fred my dear friend, thank you from myself and Steve my fantastic deputy.

Why don't the Civvie Fire Brigade like to use Foam, could somebody tell me?

We were on duty one Sunday and the Airfield was closed so we were just on Domestic cover. We saw a lot of black smoke not far from the airfield.

Off we went to see Flt Lt Miles who was our Honorary Fire Officer, to get permission to go and investigate the situation, to which he allowed us to go.

When we got there, it was on a Farm and involved a Tractor and a 400 Gallon Fuel Tank which were both involved in Fire. We were just about to start producing Foam when the Civvies turned up and said "no foam just damp down around the fire".

It was when the tank exploded, they said "Use Foam". The Mk5 didn't have much water left but just enough to put out the Fire.

After the incident the farmer said to us that he wished he had never called the civvie brigade and gave us £20.

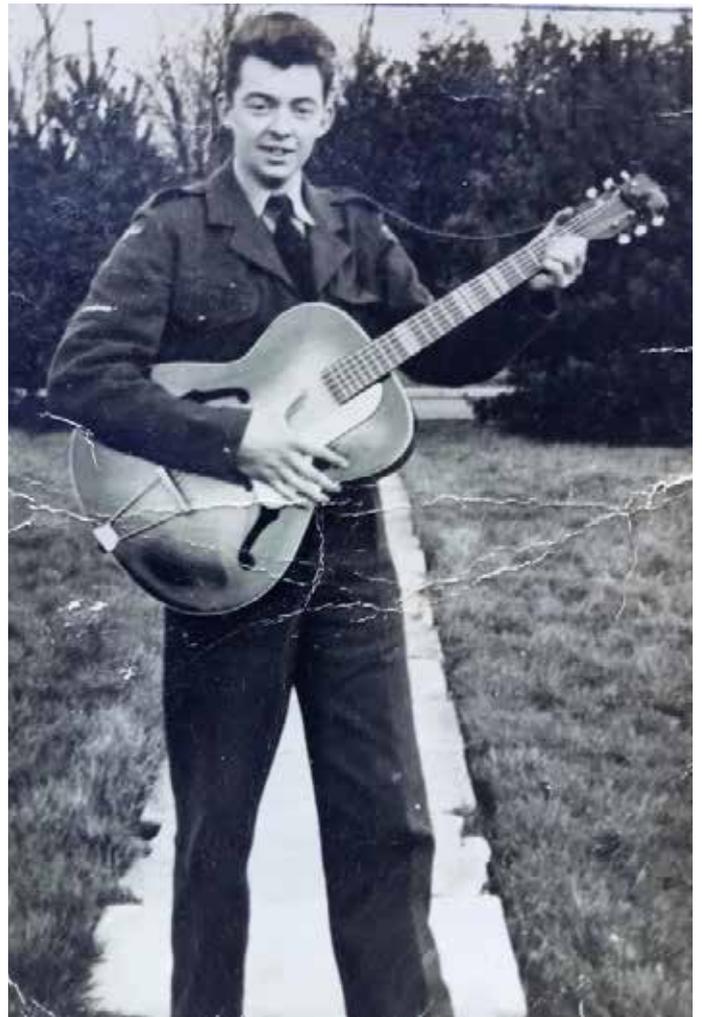
One night Flt Lt Miles took us to the Local pub and £20 in 1957 bought a lot of Newcastle Brown Ale. It was the worst hangover I have ever had

*A young Lac Fred Bickham in the RAF Topcliffe Fire Section Skiffle Group. We were called "The Dying Embers"*

*I spoke to Fred this week and had a good chat and a laugh as we always do and he told me that at the time this picture was taken he was 18 years old. I was - 7 lol.*

*Cheers Fred for all your help.*

Reg



## DONATION TO THE MUSEUM

Veteran "Brummie" Yates who was at the AGM decided to donate his very own leather jerkin which he wore back in the days of his early service to the Museum of RAF Firefighting. Here he is passing it over to our new Chairman Steve Shirley. Well done "Brummie"



# What did the RAF do for me?

I started my career as a fireman in Edinburgh in 1965 as a part time fire-fighter.

I joined the RAF in 1966 in the Fire and Crash Rescue Service. After basic training at Swinderby I was posted to RAF Catterick to train as an airfield fireman. Following my training at Catterick I was immediately sent to RAF St Athan to train as a fireman/driver. I was then sent back to Catterick to carry out rough terrain driving training for fire appliances. In April of 1967 I was finally given my first true posting, to RAF Wittering.

At that time Wittering had Victor bombers on site and was a part of the V Force nuclear deterrent element. Back then Wittering had a large number of fire appliances on site. Some were for airfield crash rescue, some were for domestic duties but the largest number, all DP2's, were for HTP (High Test Peroxide) duties which involved one appliance being required to escort one Victor bomber whenever it was loaded up with a Blue Steel missile and its nuclear pod before going onto the QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) pad, or on standby for takeoff, for exercises etc. HTP being the rocket fuel for the missile and highly volatile it required a fire tender capable of holding at least 1000 gallons of water to dilute the 250 gallons of HTP by a ratio of 4-1 should it have gone "hot" and needed to be offloaded onto the ground wherever on the airfield that the aircraft happened to be, hence the requirement for a DP2, which held 1000 gallons of water.

Once sent up onto the airfield to follow a V bomber with missile you were effectively there until the bomber took off or until it was sent back down to have the missile offloaded. A sleeping bag came in handy as did a flask and some sandwiches.

It was at Wittering that I met my future wife Marion. She lived in the village and we are still together 54 years later.

In 1968 I was posted to RAF Sharjah Middle East Air Force as it was then. Sharjah is just 10 miles from Dubai and

in those days it was just a small town on the edge of a large salt plain and lots of sand. I spent a year in Sharjah. Whilst I was there the runway was extended and the old goose neck runway flares were replaced by electric runway lighting allowing larger aircraft such as the VC10 to land there.

I re-visited Sharjah a few years ago and it would be difficult now to note where Sharjah ends and Dubai begins as it is so built up I returned to the UK in 1969 and spent my last two years in the RAF at RAF Coningsby. Coningsby by then was the OCU (Officer Conversion unit) for the Phantom II. Apart from a detachment to the Army base at Dhekalia barracks in Cyprus to cover paratrooper exercises I stayed at Coningsby until my demob in 1971.

I consider myself to have been fortunate in that my five years in the RAF were all spent at Operational airfields but at that time I also felt that it was time that I moved on to pastures new.

In 1971 I came to Luton with my family and joined Luton Airport Crash Rescue section. I had the choice of Heathrow or Luton, but I chose Luton. It was a bit of a gamble but in hind sight I think it was the right choice as I later changed my Fire Service career again. I was lucky to serve at the Airport at a time when air travel was changing. We had Britannia Airways, Monarch and the famous (or infamous) Court Line flying from Luton and I was present when the first wide bodied Tri-Star of Court Line arrived at the airport.

In 1974 I left the Airport and joined Bedfordshire Fire Service. I joined as a fireman and spent almost 16 years in Bedfordshire serving mainly at Luton Fire Station.

During that time I moved up through the ranks eventually becoming a Station Officer/Watch Commander at Luton.

Whilst at Luton I still had dealings with the Airport from time to time having to turn out from Luton to any emergencies as they occurred and later I spent some time as a Specialist Fire

Prevention Officer, and was responsible for inspections at a number of the Airport buildings.

In 1990 I left Bedfordshire for London Fire Brigade on promotion to Station Commander. I spent the next 12 years in London serving at Paddington, Holloway, and Manchester Square and later at The Brigade Training Centre in Southwark where I helped to train future Station Commanders.

Whilst in London I attended a number of large incidents including IRA bombings such as Bishops gate in 1993 and The Southall Rail crash in 1997. In total I spent about 37 years serving in various Fire Services and across some countries.

I retired from London Fire Brigade in 2002

## So "What did the RAF do for me"?

The RAF confirmed in my mind what I wanted to do as a career for most of the rest of my working life and formulated my early experiences to confirm that. It is 50 years this year since I left the RAF but I still remember those days as they were yesterday and I am grateful for the experience and for those long gone friends who helped me along the way.

*By Dave McBain, member 627*

# Service Memorial Update

All Members,

It's been a little whilst since our last update, however with the pandemic it's fair to say there is fairly good reason for the delay however as things start to get back to being a bit more normal, it's time for an update and we have some great news.

Just prior to the first wave of COVID, we had got to a position where costing had been firmed up, we looked to have the funds in place to proceed and a lot of work/visits were undertaken to get things moving. Then everything paused due to reasons I'm sure you'll understand, life stood still for pretty much 18 months. It was considered last year to potentially continue however due to the fact that the demographic for the memorial was most likely a high % of vulnerable people the decision was made to postpone the build until we were more certain of how we could get the memorial built and unveiled properly.

The funds as I type stand at around £25,000. I'm sure Trevor will provide the accurate figure but importantly the funds are strong. Despite the knock on from the pandemic driving general costs and labour to increase, which is as I'm sure you recognise is widespread, we have recently had quotes rehashed and although there is a marginal increase its not significant and we were all pleasantly surprised that there is little foreseeable impact on the project pressing forward.

There is a meeting upcoming with the Ops

Mgr at the NMA to confirm arrangements and the formal submission of plans will follow shortly afterwards. From here, the plans will need to be formally approved at the next NMA committee meeting, we have informally had plans accepted previously and have adjusted to meet some NMA guidelines so don't envisage any issues here. The anticipation is that the memorial will be built in Spring 2022, with a formal unveiling and dedication taking place which of course we will advertise when dates and arrangements are firmed up.

We recently visited the Bronze Foundry that has been commissioned to create one of the key features of the memorial, a bronze fire helmet to get the ball rolling on its creation. A helmet was provided for them to take the mould and we got a tour of the foundry to see the various stages that will take place to create the piece which was a great experience and to see the quality of their work was also reassuring. The deposit was paid with full payment due on completion, so the ball is well and truly moving. This piece should be completed before Christmas all going well.

Some of the other key features will be developed over the coming weeks and an artist (who is also working on these) will be putting together an artist's impression which once approved by the NMA will be shared with you all on social media and also within flashpoint.

As for the memorial itself, a proposed site

within the NMA for our memorial has been identified and agreed with the NMA as briefed in an earlier update.

It's a great spot, right next to the stunning RAF Association memorial, and if you have been here the site, we have been looking at is within the RAF part of the NMA, to the right hand side of the image on the right, just down a slope with some of the other RAF trade and squadron memorials.

The images below, are a few different views of the proposed plot and the bench currently occupying the site would be relocated by the NMA. We aren't guaranteed this spot, but there is nobody else looking at this site at present and its being unofficially held for us and as the RAF Association memorial is one of the spectacular memorials, it would provide a good reference point for visitors trying to find ours.

Position in relation to RAF Association looking towards it, away from it and left and right. Bench to be relocated.

It's been a long road to get here, and I must point out that Pat and Trevor have put a significant effort in as well as all those who have helped fundraise so please raise a glass for them tonight. As some of you may be aware, I have now retired from the RAF for a new role in the Heritage Insurance sector, but I can assure you my desire to build this memorial is still as strong as ever and we will get this built in the new year, of that I can assure you.





I would have loved to have spoken to you in person tonight, but pre-existing plans mean I'm tied up elsewhere, but I wish you all a great weekend, I thank you for your patience to date and look forward to meeting you all at the dedication/unveiling early in 2022 and if I don't update again before have a great Christmas and New Year.

*Warmest Regards  
Steve*

*S Pickston  
Warrant Officer TG7 Fire (Retired)*



# Key Brereton's Adventures Part 2

Divulje Barracks was very close to a small town called Trogir. It was a very beautiful and relaxing place with features dating back to the old Otterman Empire, narrow streets leading to open squares. Weekends were amazing, going into the town, sitting in the squares watching all the people enjoying the sun and hospitality. This is where I was introduced to a liquor called Kushkivac (think this was a brand name). You added skimmed milk and it tasted like banana milk shake. Very moreish..... Trogir was also where we used to go on a day off regularly for a bit of down time, even got into jet skiing..... war is hell!!! Due to working 24 on 24 off, evenings at work were devoted to going to the Gym, watching TV or catching up on admin from the day. Fridays though you could always guarantee there was a party kicking off somewhere on the base, if not with the Brits, another host country was putting on a bash (The best by far were the Dutch!!!!) One Friday I remember the Dutch were having a bar-b-que at their compound. The RAF Police who were on duty that night drove round to the Dutch compound to see what was on and radioed through to let us know and see if we wanted anything. Radio messages as follows: - (to the best of my memory!!!!)

'Fire control white cap message'

'White cap fire control send your message'

'Fire control white cap do you want anything from the BBQ?'

'What's on offer over'

'Fire control white cap burgers, hot dogs, ribs, steaks'

As soon as the message had ended from the RAFP, Jason Fletcher immediately grabbed a radio and transmitted 'And your mother'

After a short chuckle we radioed back to the RAP with our order and thought that was the end of it.....or so I thought. About a minute after we got a call from the Duty Ops officer who wanted to see the Fire Crew Commander and Duty I/C RAFP immediately. As the section was just a stone throw from the ops room me and i/c RAFP went over expecting some military issue that we were required for. As we both went into the ops room there stood a very irate Duty Ops Officer.

'I cannot believe what I have just heard over the radio, people talking about bar-b-ques, burgers, sausages, steaks, beans and

someone's Mother!! Like a complete arse I pointed out there were no beans to which the Ops Officer asked the RAFP to leave and I remained to get a further bollockin' Sometimes you just have to shut the F\*\*k up and take the hit.

The Ops room was the scene of another great memory. As we were on the banks of the Adriatic, at nights and weekends people from the base used to do water sports from the ramp of the base. As we were 24 manned everyone would sign out and then back in with us as a safety measure. 1 night coming to the end of the cut off time to account for everyone, 1 name had not signed back in from windsurfing on the sea.

So, first part of the process was to report to Ops and they would then try to contact the individual as they may have forgot, which happened regular. During this, Sopyy (I/C Fire) just popped in on his way back from the gym to his accommodation, and I let him know we had 1 potential missing person and reported it to ops. After a few minutes Ops contacted us, they could not get hold of this person, no-one knew where they were. At this point we had got our supply of binoculars and were starting to scour the immediate area adjacent to the base to see if we could see anything. Light was also fading fast, and as we could not see anything concerns starting to escalate. Next step was to search the camp just in case he had come ashore but this again failed to resolve the issue. We then moved into a search and rescue mode, with a chinook lifting off to scour the bay, boats to send people out to look for this missing person. About another 20 minutes went by and still nothing. In the Ops room meantime, all the senior staff



*The Birdman of Divulje*

were assembled with representatives (from our NATO partners) around the main table with maps and mugs of tea ready for a long night to find this missing person. Now, the 'Missing Person' had in fact come ashore and not signed back in. I cannot remember why he wasn't found on the base search but when he got back to the Officers mess, it was deserted as all and sundry were at the Ops building. So, when he asks the mess duty staff where everyone is, they say there is a missing person reported. He immediately thinks he needs to get to Ops to help with the search. He goes into the main briefing room as everyone was stood around the table deciding on courses of action, pops his head through the crowd and asks 'What's going on?'. The place fell silent for a while as people started to comprehend who was asking the question. I was never told what happened after that, needless to say this guy spent a lot more time on duty and dry land than enjoying the water sports. I remember running into this guy a few weeks later when we had a weekend function on the main ramp to

the hangar, he was still on duty! The event (one of numerous) was another excuse to make something out of anything you could find, dress up in ridiculous clothing then throw yourself off the pier. We joined up with the RAFP and Medics. We made a cardboard ambulance (registration number M1 NGE) which was driven by a medic and a RAFP, then I would follow them into the sea dressed as a birdman.....why I don't know and cannot remember the rationale behind it but I thought I looked pretty good.....dropped like a stone though so never made it very far!! Note the Queens Flight Scania in the photo, it is the same one that now resides in the Museum of RAF Firefighting which I was reunited with a few years ago when I started to volunteer for the Museum...small world!

There were many great characters I was detached with aside from the lads on the watch. I remember a guy I used to play Rugby with in RAF Germany who was an engineer, he got detached out there and I met up with him again for a short while. A real monster of a bloke from the Outer Hebrides called 'Orky' (Can't remember his real name). Played prop, and a very good prop at that. Went for a walk across the mountains one week with him and a group from the base, never felt such pain in my legs after that walk, 20 odd miles I think we did. Once had to tell him off cos he kept on picking on this RAF Copper and was squeezing his neck until his eye's watered, the copper asked me to have a word with him cos I knew him.... funny conversation. Think Orky went and squeezed his neck again straight away....

There were many more things that happened over the 4 months I did out in Croatia, I have just scratched the surface really. Ramp riding on a Chinook, Jet skiing on days off, no gun signs on the door to Mackey Dees in Split, buying hooky gear from the market in Split.

The one thing that made the tour, and made it a memory for a lifetime were the lads on the watch, and the section. It was the best 4 months I ever had in the RAF, nothing ever came close to topping that tour. The main stay of my watch in the time I was there, Jason Fletcher, Neil Bulbeck and Ray O'Hare made the tour for me, with their humour, professionalism, camaraderie and above all, good old messing about. The last photo I have put into this piece is when we all went to the National Park in KRKA for a day out.

We were Kings then, as we always will be because of what we did and the trade in which we served. I went on several other detachments in my time in the RAF Fire Service, all enjoyable with memories to fill a book several times over. I will always remember the people I served with both at home and on detachments, made lifelong friends and proud of the job I did, as we all did, and still do.

I miss being a RAF Firefighter every single day, and I thank everyone who I ever served with or know from the trade, for making it the very best 23 years..... all brothers of another Mother.

*Kev Brereton*



*Jason Fletcher, Neil Bulbeck and Ray O'Hare*

## THE DOOSH KNOT

RAF Wyton - sometime in the early eighties

Trade training is an important aspect for RAF firemen and on-going training on your section was a requisite.

There was a variety of training from First aid to ladder drills. Pump drills to BA drills.

I really took to anything first aid or rescue orientated. (Years later I managed to get a First aid instructors' course out of WO Brian Leech. Normally this was for Corporals, but I put my case forward that I had been heavily involved in Cas-fake (casualty fake) scenarios with Sgt Ray Brighton and could be the nominated teacher on my crew - so I got the course!)

Anyhow, back to the early '80's.....

One afternoon Cpl Brian Peterson had the crew assemble in the rest room for some rescue knot training. We went through all the clove hitches, sheep shanks, bowlines etc. and tested them out on each other or anchored equipment such as branches and crash axes etc.

Brian had noticed I was quiet and engrossed, which was a rare sight to behold.

"What are making there Boland?" he enquired.

"It's a 'Doosh' knot Corporal" I answered.

I had tied a large knot, similar to a barrel knot, at the end of the rope.

"A Doosh knot? quizzed Brian "Never heard of that, what's it for?"

With that I proceeded to swing the rope and clunk Brian on the head saying "Doosh!"

"You use it to 'Doosh' someone on the head..... Corporal"

Suffice to say I spent the rest of the days tea-break washing and squeegeeing the whole of the crash bays.

*Shaun Boland*

# Fire training at RAF Leeming

