



# FLASHPOINT

ROYAL AIR FORCE & DEFENCE FIRE SERVICES ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



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**DENNIS McCANN. BEM • MUSEUM NEWS • RAF WEST RAYNHAM  
FIRE COMPETITIONS • THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE WITH THE RAF  
EL-ADEM 1958-59**

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

# Who To Contact - Officers and Committee

## Patron

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

## President

Vacant

## Vice – President

Ron Brown Member 294

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

Tel: 01793 496307

Email: [brown026@virginmedia.com](mailto:brown026@virginmedia.com)

## Chairman

Neil Slade Member 934

9 Brooke Court, Pontefract, West Yorkshire, WF8 3SH

Tel: 07825 655023

Email: [crashmarksix@sky.com](mailto:crashmarksix@sky.com)

## Vice- Chairman

Howard Harper Member 682

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

Tel: 01223 292298

## General Secretary

Mike Clapton Member 704

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

Tel: 01285 655314

Email: [fire.bucket@btinternet.com](mailto:fire.bucket@btinternet.com)

## Treasurer

Trevor Hayes

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

Tel: 01923 331975

Email: [trevor.hayes425@gmail.com](mailto:trevor.hayes425@gmail.com)

## Membership Secretary

Brian Jones

4 Bluebell Close, Pakefield, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR33  
7EH

Tel: 01502 567524 / 07772247295

Email: [813jones@talktalk.net](mailto:813jones@talktalk.net)

## Flashpoint Editor

Steve Harrison

58 Gospelgate, Louth, Lincolnshire, LN11 9JZ

Tel: 01507 355740 / 07949043568

Email [steve.harrison@firemuseum.uk](mailto:steve.harrison@firemuseum.uk)

## FRONT PAGE

8 Museum volunteers & 8 visitor's all 16 ex RAF Fire-fighters at the museum at the August open day weekend. A nostalgic day for these guys, so much so that they stayed most of the day. It was pleasure for us to see those smiling faces and exchange a few memories with each other.

## AREA CO-ORDINATORS

The Co-Ordinators Committee Member

Vacant

### Lincolnshire

Steve Harrison

58 Gospel Gate, Louth, Lincolnshire, LN11 9JZ

Tel: 01507 355740

Email: [steve.harrison@firemuseum.uk](mailto:steve.harrison@firemuseum.uk)

### Cornwall, Devon & Somerset

Terry Mortimore

32 Newbridge, Truro, Cornwall, TR1 3LX

Tel:

Email: [terry\\_mortimore@yahoo.com](mailto:terry_mortimore@yahoo.com)

### North West & Wales

Vacant

### North

Robert Atkinson Member 108

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

Tel: 0191 4148176

### Norfolk

### RAF

Steve Shirley MBE Grad I Fire E

16 Rutland Way, Scampton, Lincoln, LN1 2UJ

Tel: 07912 658402

Email: [steve.shirley@firemuseum.uk](mailto:steve.shirley@firemuseum.uk)

### South

John Hurl

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

Tel: 01242 522503

### London

"Jess" Jessup

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

Tel: 0208 2187499

### Scotland

Alec Robertson

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

Tel: 01738 710487

### Cambridge & Suffolk

Vacant

### Northern Ireland

Kenneth Green

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

Tel: 01960 372595

### Essex

Ben Zaccardelli

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

Tel: 01708 443593 Mobile: 07702271537

Email: [bennie3@btopenworld.com](mailto:bennie3@btopenworld.com)

So here I am again as editor of Flashpoint. The reason is that Reg Metcalfe has resigned and one of the main reasons he said was a lack of support from the membership in the form of articles he has received (two in total).

At this point I would like to thank Reg for stepping up when he did and keeping the Flashpoint alive and I am sure we all wish him well in all his ventures. I said in my editorial back in 2016 that I did not want to be the last editor of Flashpoint, the way things are going this may be the case. So why am I here again I hear you ask? Well it was quite a discussion point at the museum and Steve Shirley poised the question "why don't we do it as a project" So I am here as the lead with the support of Steve and the museum volunteers and our very own Dave Kirk who I may had has sent a cracking article about RAF west Raynham. As I have mentioned previously that the library is a great resource to enable us to produce articles, so let's hope we can achieve that without any input from the membership, albeit I personally received some feedback from Geoff Varley and James Lamb on fire competitions and this was turned into an article which appears in this edition, also some more El-Adem pictures from Fred Bickham.

The original concept of the Flashpoint was a platform for members to share their experiences and to keep in touch and through the magazine find out lost friends. However times have changed and now ex fire-fighters keep in touch through social media, mainly Facebook,

where apart from our own page there are about three RAF Fire Service pages where they share images and post small snippets of information and it's also a quick and easy way to find lost friends, which I have done myself. Although a magazine can be produced looking at vehicles, equipment and history but for me it's the personnel experiences which I find the most interesting and we can only get that mainly from members. So dig deep lads and lasses and send something and I would welcome anything from serving personnel who manage to read a copy of the magazine.

Although I have tried in the past to get non members and serving firefighters to contribute and failed I was delighted to read SAC Charlotte Lord's story from the Falkland's, how refreshing, thanks Charlotte. But how do we attract younger members? Maybe the stuffy image of the association puts them off with formal dinners and it's considered to be an 'Old Man's Club' a much more relaxed format could be the answer. Having said that getting dressed up once a year is no great shakes!! When groups visit the museum we always try and recruit, having an advertising poster and membership forms to hand but not many take up the offer but we have recruited a few. Many of the young lads who served together at a particular station come to visit the museum stay at a hotel together have a few beers and a meal and then visit the museum the next day and they are happy with that. Maybe as they get older they may join who knows? So maybe the association has to



look inwards at itself and try something different, it's a challenge that is for sure and with no single answer. *This I may add is my personnel opinion for what it's worth and not from the museum team.* Also I will point out that apart from my rant I still believe in the concept of the association and I hope it continues for many years.

On a final note I will just mention the loss of our President Dennis McCann, he was my Warrant Officer at RAF Laarbruch and he along with my crew chief Terry Tait both supported me when my wife Liz was very ill in many ways, it something you don't forget and I am sad at their passing. There is a tribute from his wife Pauline in this edition, thank you Pauline it must have been difficult.

*Steve Harrison*

## WEB REPORT

It's been a while since I wrote a Web report, however, the rafanddfs.co.uk site has continued to grow at a steady rate, and I am always looking for ways to improve it. The Home Page now has the above picture which was originally sent me by Smudge Smith from Leeming, with the Mk9 added in the background, and metallic version of our crest top left. The rest of the pages have a simpler heading with gold lettering on a smoky background as shown below.

The web site now has over 50 pages containing more than 20,000 files, most of which are images of people, places, and vehicles associated with military fire services. Although Facebook seems to have become a more popular means for staying in touch and sharing memories, I continue to get the odd email from folk looking for information about firefighters and vehicles from all over the world, and being able to help with these enquiries is always rewarding. Have past editions of

Flashpoint is available to download and read in PDF format has proven useful in this area.

The Facebook Page is still popular and our group now has 1344 members. It is also a useful place for me to acquire new images and other input for the site, though I do always prefer high quality scans sent as file attachments by email where possible. Being a relatively large site, something like 1.3 Gigabytes, the hosting cost is now quite expensive, and over the years I've always been on the lookout for sponsors willing to share the cost in exchange for a bit of free advertising space. If anyone knows of any fire related companies willing to do this, please get in touch.

In the meantime I would like to invite Flashpoint readers to explore the site and send your feedback and input to [webmaster@rafanddfs.co.uk](mailto:webmaster@rafanddfs.co.uk).

Dave Kirk Webmaster

Dear Sir,

RE: Obituary Mr B. Josling – RAF Leeming

I would be very grateful if you add my condolences to that of Tony Eaton to Bernie Josling.

I served at RAF Leeming four years and got to know Bernie quite well, he was a dedicated person, quiet and unassuming but totally honest and reliable.

I had served in the Royal Air force at RAF Leeming for approximately three years and enjoyed my time at the base and liked the area, eventually moving there.

I owe Tony Eaton a debt of gratitude because it was Tony who tipped me off about the RAF Fire Services at RAF Leeming being civilianised and to cut a long story short I transferred from the A.M.W.D. at RAF Leeming into the A.F.D.S. and was eventually posted to the Ballistic Missile Early Warning Station at RAF Fylingdales.

I went on to complete twenty five years in The MOD until retiring from RAF Lyneham on health grounds in 1986 by which time I had served whole heartedly and enjoyed the service way of life. I joined the RAF & DFSA thirteen years ago, one of my latter decisions.

*Ray Preston (member 804)*

## And in the Morning We Shall Remember Them

*Fire-fighter's who serve and have served the crown.*

*Have sat in hostile foreign places,*

*With tired, lined, black, sooty faces,*

*Often wet with tears or sweat,*

*Reeling from the violent forces they have met.*

*With flame and smoke they are greeted,*

*With courage and determination it has been defeated.*

*No guns required for the 'Shout', Just hose and water for the rout*

We have lost quite a few of ex and serving fire-fighters over the last year listed are the ones we have lost in 2019 including members and non members.

Derek (Jim) Jew, Dennis McCann, John Savage, Darren Land, Ronald Gill, Les Fisher, Terry Tait, Keith Maw,, Brian Kenyon, Paul Bell, Larry Moulton, Ken Leverett, Robert Dickinson, Chris Davies, Alan Gritsham and Barry Thompson.

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome to our new members who have joined the Association, hopefully you may have a few stories of your experiences while serving that you can share with us in future Flashpoints.

1116 Martin John

1117 William Smith

1118 Carl Jones

1119 Mick Scatched

1120 Keith Dee

1121 Paul Fleet

1122 Brynn Williams

1123 Timothy Gates

1124 Val Moss

1125 Iain Norris

1126 Danny Foster

1127 Scott Hudson

1128 Michael Sudds

1129 John Brailsford

1130 Chris Birch

1131 Karen Faulkner

1132 Keith Martin

1133 Graeme Patterson

1134 Graham Mellor

1135 John Rowe

1136 Keith Thomas

1137 Ian Mitchell

1138 Tim Alderman

1139 Ajamal (Jim) Khan

1140 Cledwyn Williams



## SURPRISE DONATION TO THE MUSEUM

A combination of events at the Odiham Fire Show which was held in August led to a donation for the museum.

George Illingworth was displaying his Meccano models at this event who had attended one of our open days (see museum story) next to him was a lady, June Medhurst who was selling some wooden fire trucks, George recognising them as RAF struck up a conversation

with her. She explained that her late father John Davey who was an ex RAF fire fighter and had made the models over a number of years. Not knowing what to do with them she decided she would try and sell them, George went on to explain the museums existence and maybe she would like to donate them, at the time Nigel Bayes one of volunteers who was at the show displaying his 1955 Dennis F8 was

walking past and George explained the situation to Nigel. So a quick phone call to Steve Shirley and the deal was done and June decided to make the kind donation.

The models included a Forward Control Landrover, Reef Rescue Stalwart, TACR1, ACRT and Mk6, unfortunately there was a MK9 but that had already been sold.

# Membership No 7. W.O Dennis McCann. BEM (Retired)



**From Pauline McCann:  
Membership No 7. W.O  
Dennis McCann. BEM  
(Retired)**

**(Association President of the  
RAF and DFSA).**

It is with overwhelming sadness that after a year of declining health that Dennis has died on 18th January 2019. Dennis died of Pulmonary Fibrosis. Dennis was so much loved by everyone who knew him. He was a true gentleman: kind, compassionate, trustworthy, a good sense of humour and always had a good word for everyone, always smiling and a peacemaker: a good family man.

Dennis was born in Manchester in 1933- he was the youngest of 7 children born to William McCann – a Policeman and Helen Gleason- a Tailoress. William had served in The Grenadier Guards 1906-1914 when he left to pursue a Police career and was recalled 1914-1918. After the war he resumed his Police career once more. Dennis aged 6yrs and his sister Dorothea were evacuated to Canada in 1939 to his Uncle and Aunt. His Uncle was in the



*Dennis and Dorothea on their return to Manchester in 1945. Dennis was 12 yrs old.*

Canadian Mounted Police. Uncle John and Aunt Hazel had a Daughter Nola who has always been like a Sister to Dennis. After the war Dennis reluctantly returned to England with Dorothea in 1945. In 1940 Dennis's Father Bill had died and family life was not a happy one.

In 1950 Dennis joined the RAF as a Firefighter. He was stationed at : West Kirby, Sutton on Hull, Bircham Newton, Suez Canal, Yatesbury, South Cerney, Tripoli, Old Sarum, Chivenor, Seleta, Quanton (Malaya), Northolt, Borneo, North Coates, Sharja, Strubby (Awarded BEM), Laarbruch, Abbingdon, Gan (for a year), Abbingdon, Laarbruch, and Demob in 1980.

Dennis married Joan Kennard in 1955 Joan was in the WRAF. Their Son David was born in 1964

Dennis and his first wife Joan ran a NAAFI club complex in Wildenwrath until 1992; when they came back to England. Dennis was one of the founder members of the RAF and DFSA in 1995 after answering an advert placed by the late John Arthur. Dennis started as Secretary and to date he is President of the Association and has enormously enjoyed every reunion seeing old and new friends.

Whilst at Laarbruch Dennis developed a love of the Mosel and built his beloved Cabin there in Landkern. Many of his



*Dennis at West Kirby in 1950*



*Egypt 1951-54*



*Dennis at Strubby 1967*



*Sharjah 1968*



*Gan 1974*

friends followed and did the same resulting in a group of English cabins where many English and German friendships have been made over 39 years. Dennis's Wife Joan sadly died in 1998 they had been married 43yrs. Throughout Dennis's life he has regularly visited Canada to see his extended family and to further explore the Country he loved.

Dennis visited his widowed sister Dorothea and met Pauline also a widow who lived next door. Dorothea got Pauline to cook the dinner and in 2005 Dennis and Pauline were married in a RC. Church in Kelowna, Canada with all his Canadian family involved and David and Amy and many old school friends from The Prairies present etc. Dennis and Pauline have greatly enjoyed their years together and

feel blessed to have found such happiness together: enjoying many holidays. At home they enjoyed sharing hobbies together: Dennis making his model Fire Engines and lots of DIY, Pauline making things with paints and paper and sewing and gardening together. Trips to London Theatres, Norfolk Broads, Kent. As Dennis struggled with his health they spent increasing time at Brightlingsea which always lifts your spirits.

Dennis has always been very proud of all his family's achievements especially of his son David who joined the Police like Dennis's Father before him. David spent 30 years in the Met Police. Dennis has been pleased to see David and Amy become good parents to Natalia - encouraging her skills to develop. Natalia and Dennis have



enjoyed each others company and shared some happy times-it has been good to see that Natalia has a natural caring and gentle personality especially when someone is not well. Dennis has enjoyed continued very close contact with all his Canadian Family and with Niece Jane and Ashley's family. Thank you to those who were able to attend Dennis's funeral and for all your condolences. All the best to you all and "Thank You" for your friendship. Look after yourselves and your Association.

God Bless You Dennis until we meet again- RIP You will always be in my heart- Pauline



Meeting at Shoreham Airport the beginning of The RAF and DFSA- 1995 –Dennis on far right.



*Reunions*



*Dennis receiving Pingat Jasa Malaysia Medal 2005*



*Dennis in Nov 2018*



*Tenerife Jan 2018*



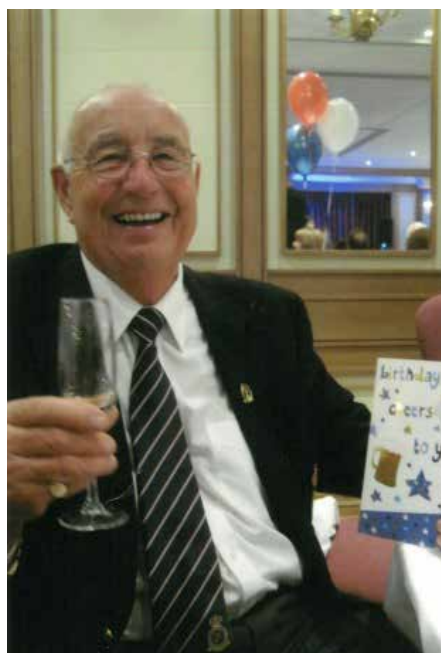
*Tiger Moth Flight at 80*



*Dennis's much loved Cabin in Germany.*



*Cruising*



*Cheers –Dennis at 80*



*David Amy and Natalia*





As reported in the spring edition of Flashpoint we have moved into our temporary home in Scunthorpe and since that move we have been very busy preparing for open days, shows and private visits. This is in order to raise the profile of the museum and to show what an amazing collection we have and also to raise funds. All this is in addition to the background work of trying to locate a new home for the collection and the continuing restoration and the general upkeep of the fleet.

The current position remains the same and we will have to move in December. North

Lincolnshire Council are working with us in order to keep us in North Lincolnshire as they realise what an asset it would be from a tourism point of view to retain us in the area. So we have to remain positive and carry on with the development of the museum, finish our current projects and explore more funding streams.

It is pleasing that we now have a patron for the Museum, Air Vice-Marshal Ian Duguid OBE who is AOC 11 Group. This coup was carried out by Steve Shirley whilst at the RAF Fire Service's 75th Anniversary dinner at the Union Jack Club. The AVM clearly has an admiration for fire-fighters, as his friend was saved from a Harrier GR3 crash in 1992.

We set some dates for our open days and the first of these happened over the Easter period on the Saturday and Monday. We set up two marquees within the display area one as a shop and one as a refreshment area which contained some lovely homemade cakes baked by Maureen, there were activities for the children which included dressing up, using a hosereel from the Dennis Sabre, colouring posters and there was of course the ride on Trumpton fire engine. Another attraction was some superb Meccano models made by George Illingworth. We were also supported by 3 Units of the ATC Cadets who came

from Scunthorpe, Gainsborough and Immingham. They assembled their band to give the visitors some stirring music and carried out a marching display. They also assisted us by acting as marshals inside the main display area.

So despite the advertising, the question was, would we get five or fifty people? There was

no way of telling. So we opened the doors with baited breath and to our surprise and delight we attracted over 400 people over the two days and they spent well in the shop and in the refreshment marquee. The response of the visitors to what was on offer was very encouraging, apart from local visitors there several ex RAF fire-fighters among them our very own Dave Kirk who took the image which appears as the header for these article and which was used on our new advert (thanks Dave). Also our friends on Facebook made the journey to see us as well. We were graced by the presence of the Mayor of North Lincolnshire and the local MP.

So we deemed the open days a great success as well as all the positive feedback it created interest from some individuals to organise a group visit from their various clubs, and as a result we hosted further visits from a local Freemason's Lodge, Royal British Legion (Leeds branch) and a two local camera clubs on the lookout for that special shot! The second one day event resulted in nearly 100 people attending and the visitors on this occasion were equally impressed with the collection and the whole experience, the comments in the visitor's book on all the open days reflected this. The visitors came from far and wide including Australia, Germany, Spain, The Isle of Man, Northern Island, Northumberland, Liverpool, Derby, Nottingham, Norfolk, Sheffield, Chesterfield, Leeds, Stamford, Birkenhead, Leicestershire, Northampton, Whitby, Hull, Darlington, Berkshire, Wiltshire and of course Lincolnshire.

Many useful contacts were made from these open days! One major one was a rep from the Scunthorpe branch of Scania Trucks. He visited over the Easter period and during that visit, he took a great interest in our Queens Flight Scania, we explained that it wasn't roadworthy because it needed a new exhaust. At this point, Mathew Riess and his friend, Richard Kirk (Hull Branch), said maybe we could help you with that and true to





their word a new exhaust (Worth £500!) was brought to the museum as a donation. This has been duly fitted. What a result! Also, a couple who visited, owned a Shelvoke and Drewry /Carmichael Type B Water Tender, which they had purchased a few years ago but due circumstances hadn't been able to do any restoration work on it and to cut a long story short offered it as a donation to the museum. Although it is not "core collection" it is a unique vehicle. Built in 1976 it was a product of a Special Vehicle Division (SPV) that was established to manufacture fire engines for local authorities and airport fire services. This vehicle served with Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Service, and later saw service at Eggborough Power Station in Yorkshire. It was sold again and moved

to Santa Pod race track. Although Serena and her partner Gary, have donated the vehicle to the museum, they still want to be involved in its upkeep. We hope, therefore, to have gained two new volunteers!

Another donation was a Reynolds Broughton RB44. It is a multipurpose appliance by Mountain Range for use of the Army Air Corps on its airfields but it had a second capability for domestic fire-fighting at barracks and storage depots and 4 were also purchased for use in the RAF Fire Service. The RB44 on display spent most of its service at the Army Air Corp at Middle Wallop (Hampshire) with the military registration of 00 KD 87 and also saw service in Bosnia and was being prepared for use in Kosovo. Apparently whilst the appliance was waiting on the

dockside at Marchwood, in freezing weather, someone had forgotten to drain the pipe work of water, this froze causing damage that resulted in a cancelled shipment that led to its disposal. It was then purchased from MOD auctions and spent the rest of its service at North Weald Airfield and re-registered B854 FHK. 20 years ago, Eddie Simmons and Steve Bracknell, the driving force behind the North Weald Fire Rescue Volunteers made a promise to Steve Shirley that when that vehicle came to the end of its working life, they would donate it to him for his collection. Nice to see that there is still such a thing as a "gentlemen's word is his bond"!

We attended the Lincolnshire County Show as guests of the Lincolnshire



Agricultural Society. 5 vehicles were put on display. We attended the Armed Forces Day in Scunthorpe where we mounted a display of 6 vehicles. Ex-Military and Fire Service veterans, who are of course, museum volunteers, were proud to man the display. These veterans had a total of over 200 years' service between them!

We introduced ourselves to various military organisations and representatives from ex-servicemen's groups keen to team up with the museum. We also talked at length to the Lord Lieutenant and the Mayor of North Lincolnshire. Highlight of the day however went to Andrew Brown whose Grandfather, James Esmond Brown a RAF Fireman had been awarded the BEM for bravery during WW2. Andrew, who lives in Scunthorpe, visited the museum the following day where we were able to show him documents relating to the incident that he had never seen before. Andrew is keen to re-visit the museum

with his father and hopes to put copies of the original medal paperwork together with the extract from the London Gazette on display thus keeping his Grandfathers memory alive. We sent two vehicles to the ERF show at the Newark Showground. As a result of this appearance, we were invited to display 2 x vehicles at the Centenary Celebrations for Cummins Engines in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. We hosted a small Force Development visit from the Fire Section, RAF Waddington. We hosted a Committee Meeting for the Fire Heritage Network UK. Everyone attending was very impressed and agreed that our current facility had the possibility of being regarded as the National Fire Museum.

There is still a long way to go to convince the council to let us stay but we remain committed and have formulated a strategy package for our next meeting with them. We have a great deal of support from the fire community country wide. So we keep

working hard.

Thanks to the members who have visited us, it was great to see you all and to see the smiling faces as you made a trip down memory lane and for you to tell us volunteers your memories and small anecdotes of your time in the service. That's what makes volunteering worthwhile.

Finally we would like to thank you all for your support both moral and to those that have made personal financial contributions and have made a standing order contributions to help keep the dream alive. The money from the open days was a real boost and we have another open day coming up as we go to print. If are considering starting a standing order the details for the bank are;

Sort Code: 60-13-15 Account number: 53037545.

*Steve's Shirley and Harrison*

## FLYING THROUGH FIRE FIDO – THE FOGBUSTER OF WORLD WAR TWO

A book that, I hope will stir the memories of a certain generation who were involved at some time with this unique innovation and equally educate those of us that were not.

This book is a very detailed publication with pictures and diagrams that takes you from its conception into its development. It covers its operational use on the following stations: Hartfordbridge/Blackbushe, Bradwell Bay, Carnaby, Downham Market, Fiskerton, Foulsham, Graveley, Ludford Magna, Manston, Melbourne, Metheringham, St Eval, Sturgate, Tuddenham, Woodbridge Epiney and The Aleutians.

There are quotes from both aircrew and ground crew, a surprise in the chapter about Sturgate is observations from a RAF Firefighter Donald Sinclair.

His first comments are: "When I arrived the FIDO installation was at a stage of near a stage of completion, but had not been given any test burns. Flying activities in those days consisted mainly of Hemswell Lancaster's doing circuits and bumps. Sturgate not yet being operational. Sitting on the crash tender one could look towards the Hemswell ridge and see operational aircraft taking

off and landing"

He goes on to say: "My first experience of FIDO was when we called out on a practice exercise to the large storage tanks for the fuel system and had to set up a curtain of water in between the tanks. On full burn FIDO could consume thousands of gallons per minute of raw petrol, so you can imagine the intense heat given off.

After the system had been given several test burns it was decided that crash tenders would stand by not only at the Control Tower but also at the end of the runway when the FIDO system was used operationally to bring aircraft in"

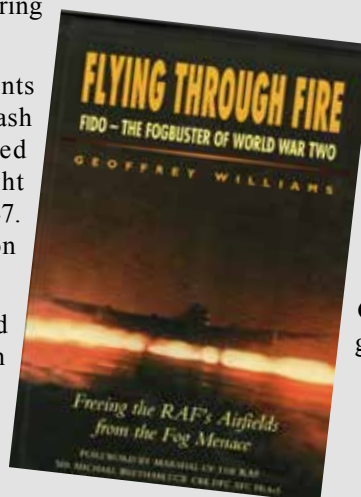
Donald's final comments are: The FIDO and crash crews were summoned when the order to light FIDO was given at 19.47. Donald Sinclair was on duty:

"The whole of the airfield was bound in fog when we took up station. All we could hear was the engine of the fire tender

ticking over, the distance words of the NCOs in charge of FIDO crews and bird calls from disturbed inhabitants of neighbouring hedges. Gradually, a flicker of flame began at the near end of the runway on both sides and spread along all of its length until disappearing into the thick murk of the fog. These flames were the initial heat up of FIDO. After ten minutes or so the whole system was turned on and with a massive roar, flames shot up on either side of the runway to a height of several feet, lifting the fog as if by magic. One could see the full length of the runway as if looking down a massive tunnel.

I think this is a book worth obtaining which you can get off the internet for less than a fiver including p&p, although new it cost £16.99, the ISBN number is, 1-85627-900-6. Thanks to the author Geoffrey Williams for a great book.

*Steve Harrison*





Situated slap bang in the middle of rural Norfolk, West Raynham must be one of the most isolated RAF stations in England. I was posted there as an 18 year-old sprog, fresh out of training, in early 1973 and look back on the experience with fondness. As with most places in East Anglia, it was a

long journey getting there, changing trains at Doncaster, Peterborough and Ely before being picked up at Kings Lynn for another hour's drive to the Camp. At that time there were two Canberra squadrons operating out of West Raynham, 85 and 100, and we had the Bloodhound Support Unit which occupied a site on the far side of the airfield as well as one of the hangars. During flying hours we had a seven man crew on duty, manning an ACRT, Mk 7 and two DP1As with monitors fitted for the missile site. We also had a brand new Mk8 which we brought on the line for heavy-lift movements when missiles were flown out to Germany, or for Royal Flights, as Sandringham is close by. When the airfield closed we went down to a crew of two SACs and a Fire Piquet, which usually involved hours playing cribbage, especially as we were always short of manpower and often spent 80+ hours on duty. Buses ran two days a week; Kings Lynn on Saturdays and Fakenham on Thursdays, to fit in with their respective market days. However, the pubs were open all day on market day so it wasn't all bad.

Though not one of the most famous airfields used by the RAF, West Raynham has a rich history. It was constructed in 1939 and like most in the East of England was used as a Bomber Command base during war. In 1946 it became a fighter station and was home to several formations flying Meteors, Vampires, Venoms, Hunters and Javelins.

**The Day We Lost 6 Aircraft.** On 8 February 1956 eight Hunter F1s departed RAF West Raynham at 10:50 to carry out an exercise at 45,000 feet in the local area. Due to the expected bad weather later in the day, the aircraft were scheduled to return to West

Raynham overhead by 11:15. By 11:00 the weather at West Raynham had deteriorated with poor visibility, and the aircraft were told to divert to nearby RAF Marham for a visual approach.

The visibility suddenly reduced but due to the close proximity of the aircraft to each other it was not possible to complete ground controlled approaches. In the following confusion and with only 10 minutes of fuel remaining, only two aircraft landed successfully.

- WT629 descended to 600 feet, but, unable to see the ground, he climbed away to 4,000 feet (1,200 m) and ejected with the aircraft crashing into a field 2 miles northwest of Swaffham.
- WT639 descended to 600 feet, but, unable to see the ground, he climbed away. The pilot ejected when the engine flamed out. The aircraft crashed into a forest 2 1/2 miles southwest of Swaffham.
- WW633 descended to 500 feet, but, unable to see the ground, he climbed away. The pilot ejected when the engine flamed out. The aircraft crashed into a field 3 1/2 miles northwest of Swaffham.

- WW639 descended to 250 feet, but, unable to see the ground, he climbed away. The pilot ejected when fuel was exhausted. The aircraft crashed 3 miles south of Swaffham.

- WW635 crashed 4 1/2 miles northwest of Swaffham, pilot killed.

- WW603 belly-landed following engine flame-out just east of the airfield, pilot unhurt.

### Kestrel Trials

On 15 October 1964, the Tri-partite Evaluation Squadron (TES) was formed at RAF West Raynham, staffed by a diverse mix of military test pilots from Britain, the United States and West Germany. The personnel comprising the squadron were highly experienced pilots; prior to flying the Kestrel, each received a week's ground training at Bristol's in-house facility and a week's ground instruction at Dunsfold prior to a three-hour flight conversion instructed by Bill Bedford. The purpose of the squadron was to evaluate the suitability of V/STOL aircraft for field operations, compare competing styles and methods of taking off/landing, develop normal



*Hunter over West Raynham – note old crash bays facing the main runway*



*Kestrels on the flight line at West Raynham*

flight operating procedures, perform instrument flight assessments, conduct night flight operations, and explore jet-borne manoeuvring throughout the Kestrel's flight envelope. The trials proved a great success leading to the introduction of the Harrier into RAF service later that decade. One of the most innovative designs in aviation history.

### **Tower Bridge Incident**

On 4 April 1968 No1 Fighter Squadron had just returned from a busy exercise in Gibraltar to their base at RAF West Raynham and had then been sent to RAF Tangmere in Sussex to provide a flypast for a station event. Whilst on the ground and chatting with RAF personnel and their families, Flt Lt Pollock was horrified to realise that most didn't even appear to know that the RAF's 50th anniversary was being marked.

The next morning, as he prepared to depart with the rest of 1 Squadron for the home base, he decided that he'd do something to focus attention on the Royal Air Force and its 50th anniversary. He'd obviously need a map to safely navigate his way to his chosen target and found just the man in flight ops. Wobbles aside, Alan was strapped into his Hawker Hunter jet ready for the flight home. However, shortly after take-off, he used Morse Code to let the other three aircraft know that he'd lost visual contact with them and would make his own way back. It was at this point that he set a new course for the very centre of London and the Houses of Parliament. By this stage, Alan was flying the Hunter so low that people looking out of the sixth-

floor windows at the Ministry of Defence building had to look down, not up, to see it! A quick wing-waggle by way of a salute over the RAF memorial near Whitehall, and it was time to head back down the Thames and home. The jet passed low and fast over Hungerford, Waterloo and Blackfriars bridges, and then Alan looked up and saw the majestic site of Tower Bridge ahead. At the speed he was flying, he only had seconds to decide whether or not to fly between the car deck and upper span. He decided to fly straight through it!

After a quick beat up of the airbases at Wattisham, Lakenhall and Mildenhall, it was time to land back at RAF West Raynham to face the music...

The top brass weren't exactly overjoyed at Alan's efforts but also weren't too sure what to do with him. It was Alan's own suggestion that maybe they ought to start

by arresting him, which they promptly did.

In the aftermath, Alan received hundreds of letters of support from the public, his fellow RAF colleagues and even a barrel of beer from the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) airline, the predecessor of British Airways. He was eventually given a medical discharge from the RAF instead of a court-martial, possibly to prevent him having the opportunity to publicly explain that his actions were due to cuts to the Air Force and the lack of RAF 50th celebrations. He then went on to a successful business career and remains one of only five people to fly under Tower Bridge and the only one to ever do it in a jet - a number which is highly unlikely to ever increase.

### **West Raynham Ghosts**

West Raynham may also be remembered as one of the most haunted camps, the following being some examples of sightings:

- In the Officer's Mess there are reports of a ghost that date back to the 80's and 90's. The ghost is believed to be a Polish pilot, who was shot down during World War 2, his ghost has been seen in the dining room, walking towards the kitchen and through walls. The ghost is most often seen in room number 7 in the Officer's Mess this room is icy cold all year round. The ghost was seen by an American Officers wife staying at the Mess while doing laundry, the ghost past through her and then through the wall to room 7.
- In the armoury there are reports of a shadowy figure being seen hanging from the rafters in the social club



*The Hawker Hunter incident of 1968 painted by aviation artist Michael Rondot*

section of the area adjacent to the main building. This is believed to be the spirit of a mechanic who committed suicide.

- The chapel is home to a particularly nasty and angry ghost, it is often described as a black shadow. The entity has been known to chase after visitors who have sneaked on to the base. It has been suggested that this is the spirit of someone who was murdered on the base.
- It has been reported by ghost hunters that the bathroom in the guard's building can suddenly become very cold dropping in temperature by up to 10 degrees. The sounds of footsteps have been heard in the building.
- The control room and the nearby fire station have had reports of ghosts and paranormal activity. It is said that a particularly active poltergeist is present in the control room with witnesses having objects thrown at them. Mysterious lights have been seen in the fire station at night.
- It is said that the base headquarters at RAF West Raynham are the centre of a dark presence. Security guards do not visit this area alone because of the numerous sightings of a dark figure, walking the corridors.
- In the sergeant's mess visitors have reported feeling the presence of a ghostly figure. A green coloured ghost has been seen in the bar area of the mess. The bar area and boiler room have both been reported as sites of paranormal activity via social networking sites.
- It is widely believed that the hanger building is haunted Hanger 3, in particular, is rumoured to have been the scene of a secret military experiment that may have made use of British psychics during the war.
- The hospital houses a number of decontamination stages. Visitors to the building have reportedly heard screams or felt intense pain whilst visiting these areas.

Flying came to an end in 1976, when 100 Sqn departed for Marham with their Canberras, and 85 Sqn disbanded as a flying Squadron before reforming as a Bloodhound surface-to-air (SAM) missile unit taking over the Bloodhound Support Unit site. The camp was also occupied by the RAF Regiment as base for Rapier SAM

squadrons and associated training before being closed in 1994. However, the story doesn't end there; the main reason for starting this item was to highlight the work done by Jon and Shell Booty following their purchase of the Control Tower and Fire Section in 2016. Although written in the third party, the following is Jon's own account of their adventurous project:

Jon and Shell purchased the tower in November 2016, following a lengthy planning and conveyancing process, made difficult due to the building being grade 2 listed and still under the terms of an MOD overage. The main motivations for buying the building were saving an obviously uncared for historical military building, the fantastic art deco design features, providing a new challenge in life, and obviously, somewhere unique to live. Their plans were to initially have their home within the tower, and later down the line, see if the building can earn its keep into their retirement.

Jon's parents served in the RAF and were stationed in West Raynham, living in AMQs in 1978/9 when Jon was 9. Jon later went on to join the Army, much to his parent's disappointment!

Shell has grown up in the local area and has gained an appreciation of the local aviation history as well as a love for the architecture of the Expansion Period stations which are prevalent in East Anglia. Jon and Shell have always realised that this was a place which held many fond memories for those who served here. They have always encouraged former servicemen to get in touch and visit to share the history of the station.

In order to engage in this heritage outreach, Jon and Shell created a Facebook page for the tower which became an instant success and has been a godsend for recruiting helpers

and visitors to the site. The page currently has 780 likes and 826 people following it. The building had deteriorated into an awful state since being vacated by the RAF in 1994. It had been badly vandalised and suffered from many structural problems due to the neglect. The Fire Section had been used as a workshop and again was uncared for with all the windows boarded up. No water was available to the building, all the electrics, leadwork and plumbing had been stolen, rain poured in everywhere, and less than 20% of the glass remained intact.

That was 2½ years ago. Since then, through sheer determination and financial acrobatics, Jon and Shell have managed to do the following:

- Rebuild Local Control
- Strip out the entire building of 30 plus tonnes of rotten drylining, asbestos, wood, spalled concrete and steel
- Reglaze and refurbish all windows
- Wash the exterior of the building
- Replace all external doors
- Recover the roofs
- Recast the balcony
- Replace rain water goods,
- Restore power to the building,



*HCB Angus Domestic in front of refurbished Crash Bays*

- Drill a borehole for water and clean out all drains
  - Restore the grass landscape and restore the signal square and day mark,
  - Repair the crash bay doors and repaint the interior of the fire section,
  - Issue the section an HCB Angus domestic truck and dummy fireman
- ... and finally work a full time job each!

The crash bays have been the venue of several RAF West Raynham Association reunions and the tower is visited by

the local ATC Squadron. The venue is due to be opened up for tours as part of Heritage Open Days in September. It will be a long time until the building is fit to call habitable, however, so Jon and Shell live at the tower whilst they renovate it. Getting to know former ATC and Fire Section staff and knowing how much support they give, really encourages the couple and the task of putting the place back together is always a pleasure. They have asked us to pass on



their appreciation to all those RAF&DFSA members who follow their progress and give their support. The doors are always open to you all. The crash bays should still look familiar to those who served there, having been repainted in the same colours. However, Lazy Way is no more, the airfield has been covered by a solar farm and both the dartboard and volleyball net have gone!

For those on Facebook, make sure you check out, like and follow the West Raynham Control Tower Page and above all please contact Jon and Shell via the Tower's Facebook Page to arrange a visit if you are passing. You won't be disappointed.

*Dave Kirk Mem No 414*



*Aerial shot of camp during 100 & 85 Sqn Canberra days. Note BHSU at the far side of the runway*

# RAF STRADISHALL FIRE COMPETITIONS

It was a great delight to have a response to the article I reproduced in the last edition of Flashpoint about fire competitions within the RAF Fire Service. Geoff Varley sent some information and images about his experiences while at RAF Wattisham in 1957 when he took part in a Fighter Command Competition. Not only that, but I had mentioned about vehicle registrations and that we try to keep records at the museum he sent me a list of registrations of the vehicles he had driven and operated between the period of 1956 to 1960, amazing, thanks Geoff.

How many of us have posed in front of the vehicle covering the number plate? If I had known what I would be doing now I would have told the lads to stand either side of the plate.

I also had a telephone call from Jim Lamb (member 492) and he told me he was at RAF Cranwell when they had won the shield mentioned in the article. Although he went on to say he wasn't in the team that year but was on the team in 1954 when RAF Hullavington won it and Cranwell suffered a burst hose during the drills which he thought cost them. I had a great conversation with Jim in which he explained that he had enjoyed his fire fighting days the RAF wasn't for him and he left after completing his nation service and continued with his profession as an upholsterer and ended up running his own business. Jim sent me some images of the competition and his note books from his fire course, certificate of service book and a certificate of merit which he won while completing his fire course at RAF Sutton of Hull, all these will be put in library at the museum. So thanks very much Jim for a

bit more of our trade history preserved. Jim went on to say that the Fire Section went to RAF Kenley and carried out competitions on the hose cart, big pump and small pump and they won the Coventry Climax Trophy for the big pump but were beaten by a civilian team on the small pump by 3/5th of a second and Hullavington won the Crash rescue.

As a point in our Fire Service history, reproduced below is Jim Lamb's certificate of merit and it is signed by Wing Commander Eyres who was the OC when our iconic flaming sword crest was presented.

Thanks to Geoff and Jim for all the images and information. It is important that our history is preserved and if you have any images of vehicles, competitions, incident or any bits and pieces that are stuck in the loft or drawers and you don't want to hang on to them please contact me. They will be stored in the library with your name attached also they will be digitally recorded as well.



*A young Geoff Varley with the certificate*

Trawling the FB pages for images, as I do for the museum records, I found that David Bantock had posted these images which appear on page 18 on the association page about RAF Stradishall circa 1959 when they took part in the Fighter Command Trophy.

As a final note Ron Brown mentioned on the same post on Facebook that RAF Tengah won both light and heavy trailer pump competition in 1957, he also proudly states he was a member of the light pump crew.

Thanks again for your input guys it builds up a good archive for our history and if anyone has any more stories and images about these competitions then please send them to me. Thanks

*Steve Harrison*



*W.O. 'Wily' Williams receiving congratulations on Winning the competition*



*Some practise before the completion at Wattisham*





*1954 Cranwell crew on the fire competition*



# RAF STRADISHALL FIRE COMPETITIONS



*WO D. Hilditch receiving the shield*



*Water supply from a DP connected to MK5A*



*The two images above are during target practise and nozzle changing*



*Wing Commander Eyres with the crest artwork.*



*This final image shows the crew L to R David Bantock, Teddy Fenton the next two unknown and on the end Arthur Rodwell.*

# THE UPS AND DOWNS OF LIFE WITH THE RAF (PART 1)

If you carried out your fire training at RAF Catterick in the 1960's then Warrant Officer Ron Shearn will be a very familiar name. He among others was instrumental in the advancement of our trade. His story is very interesting (and long) so I have divided it into two parts. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have (ED)

Quite a few people in all walks of life write a "self write-up" often quite interesting. However, as one becomes well advanced in years and at a time when memories might be rather suspect, the truth on occasions is perhaps liable to become embellished – often to make things appear more in our favour. I will endeavour to avoid that, and will certainly try not to bore anyone with all the stations I have served on or all the things I have done, right or wrong.

Without doubt I was born a "West Country Hick" in December 1921. I lived in a small village in Somerset between Bath and Wells. People of my vintage will have seen and perhaps lived through the poverty of the 1920/30's.

I endeavour to visit my village of Midsomer Norton (now a through town), once a year. During my school days (certainly the happiest days of my life), so many children would stay away from school because they lacked a shirt or had no shoes. Many of my friends at that time often had cardboard inside their shoes because the leather sole had been completely worn through. When one has seen and lived through those times it remains vivid in the memory.

If ever I could earn one old penny it was often spent in the cake shop buying the ends of cake that could not be sold. One of the highlights was to obtain two old pence for the Saturday morning cinema. As children we expected very little; that's how life was. But if we expected we also had few worries. The main thing was keeping out of trouble. As we got older it was then that we had some idea of the struggle parents had.

I completed schooling in the mid 1930's: academic subject's average, cricket and football good. The main employment in Midsomer Norton was coal mining, some farming and a little light industry. I started work with a glove making company called Dents. My starting wage was ten shillings (50p) a week. I also spent a year with book publisher.

At the beginning of 1940 my father died just a few days after his fiftieth birthday; the result of working in the coal mines. No likelihood then of compensation. Later I volunteered for the RAF.

I joined in 1941 not knowing what to



*The image above which was supplied to me from Dave Kirk shows Flight Sergeant Ron Shearn giving encouragement to the branchman. This was at RAF Stradishall in 1959 during an AOC's visit. Image David Bantock*

expect. I was sent first to Penarth. My mind is a complete blank in respect of that short stay except for one sergeant whose topic centred on that of girls; and he seemed quite an expert to someone from the "sticks". It was most enlightening! I assume I must have slipped into the system, because it was then on to Bridlington for Initial Training. From what I recall, I enjoyed those few weeks, especially being accommodated in a private house.

The two main things I remember about my stay at "Brid" were inoculations and seeing a rather nice girl. However her mother gave me the "evil eye". Then it was on to 15EFTS Carlisle where I found myself to be a u/t ground gunner. I had a life most varied, interesting and enjoyable before our Fire/Crash Rescue Service was formed. It was quite physical. However when one is young it is rather nice to be tested. I must say my time there covered various subjects; field craft, guns, rifles, drill unarmed combat etc.

The early ground gunner wore a fairly large badge on the sleeve with the letters G.G. It brought many comments – "Good God", Girl Guides etc., for whatever reason I never understood! I spent some time on short detachments to nearby places such as Gretna Green, Longtown, Kirkpatrick, Fleming and Annan. Overall I found it most interesting and enjoyable. When young it is so easy to make friends.

From December 1941 into January 1942 things were becoming "more real" as we were preparing for overseas. However, things changed in February 42. It was no longer ground gunner or gunner – it was now Royal Air Force Regiment. Some days later I was told that I would not become a member of the Regiment, and that my fate would be revealed to me in the next week or so. I was extremely disappointed. I had had a very good year; I was quite well trained, had many friends, and as such, felt part of the flight. When they moved out, I had a pang of regret. I believe they had rather a rough time. After about a year I received a letter from one of those friends. He said "I am in South Africa and have no intention of returning". I remember a few names of my time at 15FFTS; however, one stands out – Cpl Chapman, who carried out duties as an instructor. It wasn't until much later that I realised how good he was.

After a week or so, I was informed that I was to undergo a course with the Army. My immediate thought was that I was being transferred to the Army, probably to join the Infantry. From what I can recall, I enjoyed the training. Only one person stands out clearly – an exceptionally good instructor named Sgt. Horne. At the end of the course I found myself a qualified Cpl Instructor and I had been in the services 10 months.

I now found myself at No.1 Regiment

a school at Butlin's Holiday Camp in Filey, North Yorkshire, construction was almost completed. On reflection, it was an ideal place to carry out training. The camp had plenty of ready made chalet accommodation, a large area for training, on and off camp too. I spent many months there and also at No.5 Regt School, Ronaldsway, Douglas, Isle of Man. (There is a small plaque in remembrance of the No.5 Regt School at the entrance area of the airport).

I have very many memories of my terms both Filey and Douglas. One incident:- a course of very young basics enjoyed hearing most, happened in Douglas. I was marching this particular course along the sea front at Douglas when I saw a lady approaching. When she was quite close I started to say "Good Morning" but she began to hit me around the head with a rather heavy umbrella. I had trouble warding off these blows. All the while she kept saying, "don't shout at those poor boys!" At first the course didn't know what to do, but they soon fell about laughing!

When the numbers fell I was informed that I was moving on. I do not in any way regret my time as a G.G., or carrying out instructional duties at both No.1 and No.5 Regt Schools. I thoroughly enjoyed my time, made many friends and felt extremely fit. I am sure those months were most beneficial and were of help in my time ahead. It certainly helped me to understand some of the problems of other trades. In short, I'm pleased that I was given the opportunity to serve as I had done.

I was informed that I was now a W.T.I. Weapon Training Instructor. Over the following months I was sent to quite a few stations. No one had ever heard of a W.T.I. - it was treated as a joke. One of the stations was manned entirely by WAAF; it was a barrage Balloon Unit. I can only assume that someone at Postings had a sense of humour. It was quite some time before I could 'escape' from there, relatively intact.

It was at Puckle Church I met for the first time, an 'old time SWO'. I was left with no illusions as to who ran the station and what he would do to me if I caused any problems. He ruled the camp with a rod of iron. Once, after a lecture, he asked me what I did; I told him I was a W.T.I "what the so and so is a W.T.I.?" he asked. I told him the initials stood for "Weapon Training Instructor" "never heard of it -be on your

way and remember my words," he said. Just as I was walking away, he called me back. He asked me my trade again, so I again said, "weapon Training Instructor" to which he replied, "Report to my room tonight at 1900 hours, you can start training". I was out of the door before he could finish his sentence - I was away! I kept clear of him until, a few weeks later he found me. We had a pleasant short chat; he was going overseas within a few days. I thought 'he is human after all'. I had a very high regard for the 'old time SWO's' - they were certainly powerful.

My next posting was to Pembroke Dock, working on the docks. One of my first jobs was to attach a small barrage balloon to fishing smacks before they set sail. I won't forget my first attempt. A number of these balloons were held down along the quayside. Being hooked to a full sandbag held them down. It was a case of unhooking the barrage balloon from the sandbag and taking it to a fishing smack alongside. I carried the barrage balloon to the vessel and was in the act of attaching the balloon when there was a slight swell and the fishing boat moved away from the quayside. I missed the hook and away went the balloon, skywards. For several minutes there were shouts and roars (mainly of laughter). Life continued on for some weeks, carrying out various jobs. The time I spent there was most enjoyable. I thought too, after only a short time in the RAF what a C.V. I would have!

Then out of the blue, I was told I was on my way. By this time I had carried out a variety of jobs. On reflection, I had enjoyed everything I had done, and perhaps it helped me to understand, and appreciate what other trades had to do. I was informed that I was being re-mustered to Aerodrome Fireman. I was now an ACH/FF and would be in charge of a fire crew. It was here that I made the point that I had no knowledge of fire fighting. The only response I received back was to the effect-- that's your problem! After a few days I was on my way to an airfield (Kelstern) nearing completion. When I arrived a number of firemen and a Fire/Gas officer were already there. I soon sensed that his knowledge of fire was very similar to mine. However, I had a couple of weeks or so before the station was operational. Several of the airmen had some knowledge, so it was a case of listening, looking, checking and reading, to ensure that I knew what to do. Time came; the station was operational, the aircraft, Lancaster's. I have no intention of

writing about the number of incidents or crashes I (and the crew) attended, both on and off the airfield. With advancing years (myself included), I'm often sceptical of numbers and figures quoted. I think the truth gets slightly twisted.

In respect to the Fire vehicles and equipment of the 1940's and today, it is obvious there is no comparison. Much has been said and written about the 'old times', however, I speak with much affection to the vehicles and equipment we had at that time. I remember so vividly the magnificent way so many crews got the very best from both vehicles and equipment, wearing clothing that gave little or no protection.

For several years the drivers were, M.T. Drivers and that was a lottery. In the weeks and months ahead, it was a case of on duty, off duty. Often there were many days free of incidents. Off camp crashes at night brought additional problems such as lighting. At the time there was of course the 'black-out'. It is difficult to blame the drivers driving off the airfield during the hours of darkness, however, I remember responding to 'off-camp' crashes on two occasions at night, 'finishing up' in a ditch! How little incidents remain with us for many years, such as whilst sitting in a small caravan 'rest hut', in walked a pilot and said, "Perhaps you would like to know I've just crashed my fighter aircraft on your airfield".

The waiting for an aircraft to return from a night mission was very tiring and I was always apprehensive. It was also difficult during very cold weather trying to keep warm and prevent the foam pumps from 'freezing up'. Probably the highlight of the waiting period was a trip to the mess to obtain dry rations, and see what little extra we could get. It was important to keep well in with the catering staff. In those early days incidents were quite regular, both on and off the airfield. Very many 'call outs' had nothing to do with aircraft. I'll only speak my own thoughts when dealing with serious incidents involving aircraft, and I speak in the main in respect of large aircraft. The sights and smells can be almost overpowering and overwhelming. I won't dwell too much on this, but it was very much 'part and parcel' of the life at that time. When thinking back how some men did so wonderfully well, many deserved some recognition but 'missed out'. The spirit of the men was extremely high and what some did and went through, gave me a very proud feeling to be a

participant in those years. I'm sure that it was around that time I considered the most important aspect in any organisation to be the men, (only my thoughts). Many I know will disagree. It is no good having the best of equipment if we haven't the right, and motivated, men to use the same.

I noted the reaction of the crew when the job had been completed. Some would become very quiet and withdrawn, others would continue to talk and talk, some liked to show bravado, others to make jokes of all sorts. It was when they did not talk that I became rather concerned and on a few occasions suggested a visit to S.S.Q. There was only one occasion when I found myself affected. Three Lancaster returning at night from operations, crashed on the airfield inside half an hour. One did not take fire, the other two did, with casualties. How well or how badly we did I cannot recall, but I do remember the tremendous effort put in by the crew. When dealing with large aircraft that seems to be completely on fire it is difficult to know where to start, and any thought of rescue is probably out of the question. However, there was one crew member that had survived, but was trapped inside. It was impossible to get near. For several minutes he called out one word "Mother, Mother", then silence. I don't think I allowed it to show, but I felt it deeply. I tried to imagine in some small way, the effect it would have on his mother. The incident still remains fixed in my mind today.

Eventually the number of bombing raids started to slow down, and then completely stop. There seemed to be a strange and unreal atmosphere in my opinion. I thought the aircrews were pushed to one side and it took many months for all to be discharged. Several came to me and 'helped out'. I had, and still have the highest regard for the aircrew. There was a lot of glamour spoken around those years in respect to aircrew, the reason quite obvious. However there was no glamour when you saw the dreadful injuries sustained by so many.

I was discharged as a FLT/Sgt., in late 1946. I was offered the opportunity, as were many, to sign for further time. My last station was Tarrant Rushton in Dorset.

1946, now a civilian, it had been planned that I would move to the USA to join an uncle who wanted me to join in his business there. However, I did not go. My brother, discharged from the Army, took my place and is still there as I write. I tried hard to settle into civilian life, but found it

most difficult. Many had the opportunity to extend their service-perhaps I should have done so.

I was accepted back in the RAF, later that year. I was posted to Calshot as Sergeant. It was only a very small station but one I found most interesting. There were a number of sea planes, and therefore we had a Fire Launch and quite a few marine craft. I was able to visit the VOSPER Works to see the production of a number of marine craft. Also, I found time to see a number of different Fire Launches. It was not a busy station, but I found it interesting. Later in 1949, I moved to Aden, Steamer Point. I don't think the staff were pleased to see me. Like it or not things had to change and they did. It was a most interesting time, but certainly not a busy one. In the main it was a case of Fire Prevention, checking and testing vehicles and equipment.

A most infuriating thing and a regular occurrence was the stealing of the brass caps from the soda Acid extinguishers. We tried a number of ways to prevent this, even fixing a grub screw to the top of the extinguisher. I managed to catch one local and took him to court; however, we were fighting a losing battle. It is easy to guess what they wanted the brass for. I am sure that in many ways we underestimated the Arabs. Many for whatever reason had no liking for the place. Not me! When things were going quite smoothly I then took advantage of the sun, sand and sea-and cricket. To enable safe swimming there was shark proof netting. Often it was rather nice to sit and enjoy the sunshine. It was quite hot, but ideal for cricket. Of course Section V Section and the Command V Civilians (a mix of British and Indian). I managed to visit the A.P.L. (Camel Corp) under the pretext of carrying out a fire inspection, anyway, it wasn't long before someone decided that I shouldn't be there and I was sent quickly on my way. However it was worth the effort, the Camel Corp was most impressive.

I so well remember the bowl of salt tablets that were always on the Mess dining tables. I dread to think of many times I took a handful of these tablets. We had quite a number of both on and off Camp incidents, but nothing large enough to comment on. My main worry was in respect to the large wooden structures. I certainly haven't forgotten my time at Ryan, Salalah and Masirah. It was with some reluctance that I left Aden and the sunshine. I like to think that I left the fire section running fairly smoothly.

On return to the UK (now a FLT/Sgt.) I moved to Andover. The stay was very short however, and I soon moved to North Weald. I spent several happy years there. It was a rather popular station, probably due to its close proximity to London. The tube ran from Epping straight into London. In my off duty time I took advantage of being able to see 'top line' sporting events. The only disadvantage to being so close to London, my wife Muriel enjoyed shopping. She and her friend (The SWO's wife) also took advantage (much to my dismay) of the ease of getting to Oxford Street.

A most interesting person there (I believe as C.O.) was Wing Cdr Al Deere. He held quite a war record. There was a book entitled 'Nine Lives' Deere' written of his time as a Battle of Britain fighter Pilot, I think its now out of print. When in his company I thought "what a tremendous presence" he had.

During my time at North Weald one incident could certainly have caused problems. Quite a lot of petrol (It was thought many gallons) had been spilt in the M.T. Bays and had caught fire. It was an interesting few minutes that followed. However, it was dealt with. I was never too sure what happened and why so much fuel had been spilt over such a large area. After speaking with all concerned, it appeared the petrol was being used for cleaning purposes-it was just a couple of days before A.O.C.'s inspection. Fortunately the numbers of other incidents was about average and were dealt with without too much difficulty.

In the mid 1950's a Command Fire Officer whom I knew quite well, came to see me one evening. He asked whether I had ever considered transferring to the Air Force Department, Fire Service. It was then he said that in the fairly near future the RAF Fire Service and the RAF Regiment would combine. This took me by surprise. Over cups of coffee supplied by my wife Muriel, we spoke for quite some time- I wanted two or three days to consider what he had said. Even so, no matter how long it took to give him an answer, I knew what it would be- I would remain in the RAF. I felt the service had been good to me. Still, on occasions, I did think "if only....."

My next move was to Thornaby in North Yorkshire. I was rather fortunate, instead of travelling by rail; Wing Commander Flying Wing took me by air. It was not a very large or busy station but it was a

popular one. Most flying was done at the weekend (weekend flyers). The aircraft, helicopters, and I think, Venoms. There were a few incidents, but none that presented any great difficulty in dealing with. I did some competition work, which was quite successful; however, to attain a very high standard, much training time was required.

Interpretation of the rules played a very important part (what one could get away with). Two of my friends were extremely good and well matched John Arthur and Bill (Taff) Williams; I found it a pleasure to watch their teams in action. Bill died shortly after leaving the RAF – he was a no-nonsense practical fireman, very strong in argument, and he certainly had leadership qualities. I was at Catterick when he died. His widow, Dorothy, wanted me to have his medals, to be kept at Catterick; it was a splendid gesture, however, I did not take them. I did explain that as I would not be at Catterick all the time, I wasn't sure what would happen to them when I was not there. I suggested she hold on to them – Bill had earned them. We kept in touch for several years, but unfortunately, no longer. I was very saddened when John Arthur died; we had been friends for many years, long before we left the RAF. For many years we were in touch monthly by telephone and whenever he travelled home to Scotland he would always call in for a couple of hours. Yes I miss him, like Bill, he was extremely good at competition work. Another of his very strong points was suggesting modifications to vehicles and equipment. I was often with him on these occasions, my input was very limited, but John I found quite amazing. As he got older he still had a very retentive memory, particularly for facts and figures. These two men were personal friends and I was saddened when I knew that they had both died.

Anyway, to continue, I moved from Thornaby to Stradishall and was there for twelve/eighteen months. Two things 'stand out' during my time there. Firstly, it was my first contact with National Service personnel. They (at least the ones I had) brought in a breath of spring air to the section. I found them all very willing, and most interesting to talk to. One, whose name I remember well, Paul Ketteringham was outstanding. We kept in touch for some time, but due to the moving around, contact was lost - the fault was mine. The second thing I remember rather vividly was the few weeks in a service hospital;

I think it was at Ely. It was there I met up with Sgt. McCoy for the first time; he was recovering from a rather serious operation. I had had surgery on my throat and had to have someone near me for twenty-four hours. Pat did what was required and stayed nearby. He came to see me at Catterick quite a long time ago. What a delightful person he was, and now I have lost touch with him.

Then it was on to Tengah Singapore. There was still some travel by sea, a delightful couple of weeks on board ship. At Tengah there was quite a mix of staff. It took several weeks to organize things. Often change is not welcome, however, in my opinion, things improved and ran quite smoothly. To see to a lot of paperwork, I selected a Malay lad - what a gem he was! There were a few incidents on and off the airfield. I think the aircraft was a Canberra; it had crashed into a swamp and there were problems. I went into the swamp myself, much to the delight of the crew. Many will remember one A.F.D. George Butcher A.F.D.S. It would be very difficult to forget him; he weighed around twenty-two stones. It would have been around 1958/59, on a particular day I was on the roof of the Fire section, training in carrying 'down drift drills'. Suddenly a head appeared at the top of the ladder - it was George. he stood with me while we carried on with the drill. Whenever I was with him I always heard two or three jokes. It wasn't long before we had finished and there George and myself remaining on the roof. Then it struck me - he is going to ask me to carry him down the ladder! I'm sure I broke out in a cold sweat, and then knew what I would have said, "sorry George, it's every man for himself". However he said, "Come on I'll carry you" and he did. On the way down, someone said "drop him". When we did we reached ground I asked "who said drop him?" Everyone said I did. All I could say was, "Oh alright" - or perhaps, "Pump drill this afternoon" I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Singapore and much I could write about. I like to think that I left the Section in quite good order, but I always had the feeling that at times we were rather disappointed; perhaps it was the mix of staff. Once again, the single thing that pleased the staff most was winning the inter section soccer cup. It was with some reluctance that I left Singapore; the return was by ship. Some years later a few of the staff called to see me.

I believe that it was at this time we docked at Aden for a few hours. I made for the

village to see a couple of shopkeepers. They had good memories. It took me by surprise, both kept saying the British would leave Aden in less than ten years- they were proved right!

I moved into Leuchars. I was taking over from George Smith; he was then a FLT/ Sgt. and it was a W.O. post. This was the second time I had taken over from him. We met up again some years later at Catterick when he was involved in Trade Testing. George showed no facial expressions when conducting Trade Testing, however, he was, I am sure, very fair with his marking. George died quite some time ago, as did his wife Ann, They had one daughter, Shirley, is still in touch.

I was at Leuchars for about a year, living in a hiring at Newport on Tay, which is only a short distance from Dundee. I am not sure why, but I never felt completely settled. The staff was quite good and coped with all incidents. For the first few months I clashed rather badly with the Fire Officer, However, after some time we became quite good friends. Someone came to the section every few weeks collecting insurance from a number of the staff, he had been a one armed golf champion and we always had a chat. On one occasion football was the topic of the day and in particular Dundee and Dundee United. I happened to say I preferred Dundee United - Oh how wrong I was! I had the wrong team and for the remainder of my time there he only spoke asking permission to talk to the staff. It was rather a shame, as I quite liked him.

Somehow I became involved with the Air Training Corps. Preparing them for a drill competition, I enjoyed it because they tried so hard. Much to my dismay we came second, and I felt that I had let them down. There was good liaison with the local Fire Brigade. Before I left, the chief gave me a brass helmet, which I left behind. However, after about a year, out of the blue, I was to move to the Fire School at Catterick. It was early 1961. This was something I had never considered. I always thought along the lines 'some people talk, others do'. At that time I felt I'll soon find out! There were two splendid instructors I recall - Cpl Chapman (ground gunner) 1942, and Sgt. Home, Army 1942.

Part 2 in the next edition.

*As recalled by Ron Shearn*

# IMAGES FRED BICKHAM El-Adem 1958-59

Here are some more images from Fred from his days at RAF El-Adem; his last images can be seen in the 2018 autumn edition of Flashpoint. Thanks again Fred.



*Mk 5A Crash (22 AG 49): The fireman that spent 56 days in the Marine Barracks in Cyprus for the MK5A crash was not driving it. He was in the Airmen's Mess storeroom at the time and the Head Cook was driving it. But one month after coming out of detention he was promoted to Corporal, so it all ended well!*



*Yorkie Senior guarding the fire section from air attack.*



*Ariel shot of El-Adem Camp, RAF answer to Butlin's in the desert*



*This fire started on night in the hut of H.Q. staff, it was next to the Fire Section so we didn't have far to go.*



*RAF Scampton Museum visit:  
L to R George Ingham, Barry Hall, Ray Wright, Stan Redman, Fred Bickham, Yorkie Senior.  
The Five on the right were all at El-Adem together.*



*Tobruk beach: A day out for some of the Fire Section.*

**Back row:** LtoR Cpl's, Deering, Middlemass and Gallagher, Len Bushell, Fred Bickham

**Front row:** L to R Taff Rideway Roy Blackmore, Stan Redman



*Fire Section football team when W.O. J Carey became I/C of the section he was very keen to get us playing, as his brother was Jonny Carey who played for Manchester City and England. **Back row:** L to R Fred Bickham, Ted Fuller, Lofty Bayliss, Little Jock, Smudge Smith and Stan Readman.*

**Front row:** L to R Mac Lowson, Len Bushell, Cpl's Gallagher, Meredith and Jock Donald.

TO - DAVID - HIS 21ST

# **FORCES RADIO SHARJAH**

*See the notes*

*→ DAVE*

*[Signature]*

*by [Signature]*

*[Signature]*

*DICKY  
DRB*



**RADIO PROGRAMME**

**APRIL, 1969**

Front cover of Radio Sharjah Radio programme, the programme was donated to the museum by Dave McBane (member 627). This will back a few memories to those lads who did the tour.