

Group Captain

GK Mossman C.B.E

GK Mossman
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Appendix 1 **Family History – J.E. Mossman - 1st World War**

Appendix 2 – Some Memories of Bewcastle

- Introduction

The family history compiled by my Grandfather, his book Three hundred miles in Norway and my Father's account of his experiences in the First World War detail interesting events in their lives. There are so many things which I would like to know about the life and times of both my Grandfather and Father.

Did Grandfather, who was born on 7 March 1840, go to sea with his uncles, two of whom Ralph and Thomas were masters of their own ships (Thomas eventually sailed to Hawaii where he settled), or did he serve his time in the family silk dying and carpet making business? Where did he go to school and what did he do between leaving school and taking a degree in metaphysics at Edinburgh University at the age of 27? I know he was a Presbyterian minister in Peterhead in 1870 that he then went to Unst in the Shetlands and thence to Bewcastle in 1881. He married Catherine Goodfellow in 1894 and died in 1910.

My father Joseph Ewart Mossman was born in the Manse at the Know Bewcastle on 11 June 1895. He served in the Tank Corps in the First World War, qualified as a chemist in 1922, married my mother Mary Jane Bousfield on 7th June 1924. They were both 28 and subsequently had three children, myself, brother Ian Christopher and sister Shirley. Father was an accomplished fisherman and a keen golfer and gardener. Unfortunately so much is missing, what was life like for them in this country between 1840 and 1970 ?

Recollections of conversations with my parents provided a few examples of life in Cumberland in the first quarter of the 20th century. Father lived at Bewcastle until he was ten. He described a happy life as a boy, roaming the wild country round Bewcastle on foot or riding his pony. His father taught him to fish and tickle trout and he became very knowledgeable about the countryside and wild life.

Bewcastle was more populated at the turn of the century than it is now. There were many small sheep farms and large families. Nearly everyone went to church on Sunday, the children of the Manse, morning and evening service and Sunday school in the afternoon. When the boys came out of morning service, if the weather was good they would practice Cumberland wrestling beside the church. Bewcastle was and still is quite remote. The pony and trap was the normal form of transport. Winters were possibly more severe than they are today. People stocked food, potatoes, flour and oats, dried and bottled fruit, made jam, salted meat and herring.

After Grandfather died in 1910 granny moved to Brampton, father went to Brampton grammar school. Subsequently he was apprenticed to the chemist Thomas Ridley in Carlisle, it was at this time that he met my mother Mary Jane Bousfield. Her father was a guard on the London Midland and Scottish Railway. The family came from Kirkby Stephen where Great Grandfather had owned the brewery. He died when the family were young, he fell down the stairs possibly as a result of over indulging in his own product. His wife moved to Carlisle with her young family, I remember mother saying that in some way a lawyer had misappropriated the family business.

Father left Thomas Ridleys in 1915 before he had qualified and volunteered for the Royal Army Medical Corps. He went to France in 1916 but he said he did not like being shot at without being able to shoot back so he volunteered for the Tank Corps at Christmas 1916. Following the war he qualified as a chemist and worked as a technical rep/ commercial traveller for Burroughs Welcome and subsequently British Drug Houses. The First World War undoubtedly had a great influence on his life as it did on most of his generation who survived. He was a heavy smoker, liked his beer, lived life to the full and hated the Germans. He left little on record of his views but he did write a most interesting account of his experiences in the 14/18 war. He never talked about the war and his account was written in response to a remark I made a few months before he died. A copy is included in appendix A.

It is because I know so little about the lives and times of father and grandfather that I have decided to outline my memories of my life in the second half of the 20th Century. The length and detail of my reminiscences will be dependent on my memory and my ability to increase my typing speed.

Chapter 1 - Early Days

I was born in a nursing home at Mapperly Nottingham on 10 October 1927. My mother had twin boys some time previously, they died at birth. My earliest clear memory to which I can put a date is the birth of my brother Ian on 2 August 1929. We lived at 5 Bennet Rd Mapperly, a semi-detached house. I have clear memories of my father coming home on his motor bike. After Ian's birth the bike was replaced by a fabric bodied Austin 7 saloon.

There was little traffic in the early thirties, a few slow lorries and cars and still quite a lot of horses and carts for delivering heavy loads such as coal. In Nottingham the public generally travelled by tram, there were extensive tram networks in most large cities, inexpensive travel and pollution free. Trains and buses served rural areas, in the mid thirties trolley buses started to replace the trams.

We seldom travelled by train once we had the car, but I think it is fair to say that the majority of the population travelled by train. The railway system was very extensive and efficient, it served all but the most remote places. Trains ran to schedule, people travelling on holiday would send their heavy luggage in advance with the complete assurance that it would be waiting for them at their destination. Items handed in at a station for transport by passenger train, would be delivered to the door invariably within 24 hours, how different from today.

My memories of my early childhood are chiefly of playing in the garden, climbing an apple tree at the bottom of the garden, and going for walks with mother, Ian in a pram and Rex our Airedale dog. Rex was a splendid dog, he used to collect the mail from the front door and take it to dad, either at the breakfast table or to the bedroom. Every evening he used to go to the local newsagent about half a mile away to collect the paper, in the summer if the fridge was running, he would not pick up the paper until he had been given an ice cream. The old dog hated cats and was a menace if he saw one when he was out for walk, but he ignored them if he had a paper in his mouth. He was an excellent guard dog and once caught a burglar in my parents' bedroom while they were out. When they returned the terrified burglar was cowering in a corner of the bedroom with Rex standing over him. On another occasion mother left Ian in the pram outside the Post Office, when she came out of the Post Office she found that the pram had rolled down a slope, Rex was hanging onto the wheel to stop the pram rolling into the road.

Once we had our car we started to move around more as a family, regular visits to Granny, quite an expedition up the Great North road as the A1 was called from Nottingham to Brampton, and holidays at Sandilands near Skegness. Here mother and father became friendly with the mother and sister of Albert Ball VC, fighter pilot in World War 1. On our first holiday mother lost her engagement ring in the sand in front of the beach hut. A year later she was sitting sifting the sand through her fingers when she found her ring.

Possibly I should mention something about our weekly routine. Monday was always wash day, and of course this was before washing machines. The clothes were boiled in a large gas boiler then transferred to the poss tub where they were agitated with a posser, a large copper bell something like a large inverted colander mounted on a pole with a t-piece handle which was moved vigorously up and down in the tub. Particularly dirty washing was rubbed on

ridged scrubbing board of either glass or galvanized ridged metal. The washing was then put through a mangle which had large wooden rollers. I used to enjoy helping by turning the mangle.

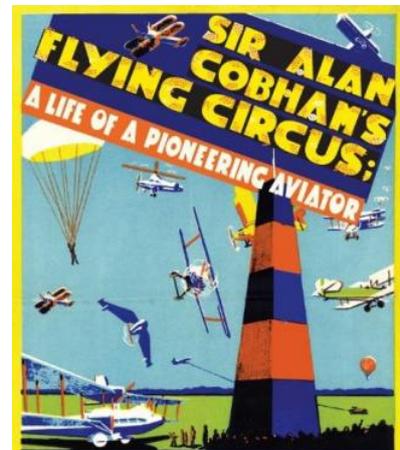
Tuesday was baking day, mother served an apprenticeship with a baker, subsequently she set up her own bakers shop with her sister Pat in Nelson St Denton Holme Carlisle. She sold the business when she got married in 1924. At home she always made the bread and baked scones and a large variety of cakes and particularly good shortbread. She usually baked twice per week. Our meals were of the pattern favoured in the North of England, a large breakfast, a mid day meal called dinner ,then tea, bread and jam sandwiches and lots of cakes, in the evening supper was a snack of beans or sardines on toast or scrambled egg, cocoa, ovaltine or a glass of milk.

Wednesday was usually mothers shopping day for household requirements, we walked up to the local store she placed and paid for her order which was then delivered by an errand boy.

Thursday was never very special. Friday was the second baking day in preparation for the weekend and we always had fish for our main meal.

On Saturday we nearly always went out either for a walk or in the motor bike and sidecar and subsequently in the car. On Sunday Dad played golf mother cooked the Sunday dinner, usually a roast of beef, mutton or pork or occasionally chicken. In the evening mother usually went to church and dad baby sat.

By the time I was five I was already mad about aeroplanes. I remember spending a day with Dad at Sir Alan Cobham's Flying Circus when it visited Mapperly Plains, an open area near where we lived. I am not sure what all the aircraft were but I do recall a Bristol Fighter a DH 4 a converted Handley Page Bomber and a Cievera auto-giro. There were not many aircraft about in those days but they usually flew at about two thousand feet and I would run into the garden to see them. Shortly after I was five Dad took me to see my first film Hells Angels, fighter aircraft in WW 1.



One of dad's hobbies was making wireless sets as they were called, they were powered by wet batteries and you listened through earphones. In about 1932 He built his first super hetrodyne which worked from the mains and had a loudspeaker and gramophone, very advanced for those times. Dad made wireless sets for granny and many of his farmer friends around Brampton and Bewcastle. Children's hour was my programme, uncle Mac who played the part of Larry the lamb in Toytown was my favourite.

Chapter 2 - Schooldays

I started school at Mapperly when I was five. The school was about three-quarters of a mile from home and there was only one minor road to cross. After the first week I walked to school by myself as did all the other children. It was a good school and I made quite rapid progress learning to read and write,

In 1932 we moved to Sutton Coldfield, I think the house at Mapperly sold for about £250, it was a three bedroom semi with a good garden and a large shed for a garage. Mother and father were delighted because they made a small profit on the sale. We moved to a new four bedroom detached house with a large garden and garage. This was what would be called a new development today. The builder was making a fresh start at the end of the depression. I believe the choice of location was influenced by the proximity of Moor Hall Golf Club which had recently opened. The house cost £999; I think Dad earned about £1000 per year and British Drug Houses provided a new car each year so we were quite well off. When mother was expecting Shirley we had a living in maid who stayed for about two years. .

The Royal Borough of Sutton Coldfield was a pleasant relatively self contained town at the time. Well known for its large natural park, which had been a royal hunting park in the time of Henry VIII. It had a grammar school founded by Bishop Vesey in 1540, more of that later. Markets were held weekly next to the Royal Hotel, sheep and cattle were driven along the roads from farms up to six miles away, little traffic on the roads!

Initially I went to school near Walmley about two miles from home, I walked and took lunch with me. I had few friends at that school and none lived in my direction, most of the route was along country lanes, now housing estates. Several interesting ponds lay on the way, with newts and small fish, in the spring frog spawn and many bird's nests were to be found. Occasionally I would get a ride part of the way on the farmer's milk float. Milk was measured from the churn into containers provided by the recipient, the farmer started to use bottles in about 1938.

I did not get on well at the school, we all had to stand up and sing solo, this was a disaster for me, I could not sing and I was very shy there-after I hated the school. Teaching methods were very different from Mapperly and progress was nil so it was decided that I would go to a private school in Sutton Coldfield run by a Baptist minister called Mr Keys. The school was good, I made several good friends and eventually passed the entrance exam to Bishop Vesey's Junior School at the age of nine. It was at Key's school I met John Slater who has been a lifelong friend.

The school was about two and a half miles from home on good days I would walk on bad days I would catch a bus about 200 yds from home the ticket was three half old pence.. In summer I took lunch in the winter I had lunch in Pattinsons' café. In the winter it was dark when we came out of school and I would go home by bus. Whilst waiting for the bus I have vivid memories of the Ansel's steam driven brewers drays driving past with sparks flying from their fire boxes.

Just before Christmas 1933 I recall going with mother to place her groceries order for her Christmas cakes. Butter was cut from a large barrel , patted with wooden pats like oblong table tennis bats with a pattern carved on them, it was then weighed and wrapped . Sugar, flour, dried fruit, tea, coffee were all kept in bulk measured out weighed and wrapped. The order was subsequently delivered by a delivery boy who had a basket in a square frame on the front of the handlebars of his bike. Most shops had delivery boys to deliver the heavier orders which the purchaser did not wish to carry. The delivery boys always seemed to be a cheery lot frequently whistling or singing as they rode their bikes if they were lucky they would get a half penny tip. I cannot remember the prices of many things but I do recall getting cigarettes for Dad on Sundays, he would give me a shilling, five P today, the shilling would produce twenty Players cigarettes from a slot machine, one half penny change was inside the cellophane wrapper and this would buy me two gob stoppers and a packet of sherbet with a liquorice tube like a straw to draw the sherbet through. I do remember that petrol was the same price as twenty cigarettes eleven pence halfpenny a gallon.

In 1935 we went on our summer holiday to a village called Llanystumdwy, the home of Lloyd George near Cricketh . We used to go to a beach at a place called Afonwen,. When King George V and Queen Mary visited Wales that summer we saw them when the royal train stopped at Afonwen station. I remember the silver jubilee clearly, we all had jubilee mugs, all the buildings and private houses were decorated with flags, there was a school holiday and we listened to a description of the parade in London on the radio and I think the next day a description of the Royal Review of the fleet at Spithead.

In 1935 John Slater moved into a new house in Moor Hall Drive, just across the field from our house. John his brother Jim, Ian and myself spent many hours in the woods between our houses, every tree which could be climbed was and the rest were attempted. I remember that on one occasion Jim got stuck half way up a large tree and we had we had great difficulty in getting him down safely.

In 1937 John and I passed the entrance exam to Bishop Vasey's Junior School. We walked to school about a mile and a half, there were no buses. Sometimes we would walk home for lunch rather than take sandwiches. In the Junior School we played football and cricket, were taught to raise our caps to grown-ups and stand to attention when the national anthem was played. In summer we wore Boaters in place of caps , these frequently got damaged as they lent themselves to skimming. When not at school we spent a lot of time roaming the fields and woods and exploring Sutton Park.



In 1938 I got my first bicycle, John Slater had one a few months earlier, this greatly increased our radius of action, and greatly reduced the time taken to get to and from school. We got to know every corner of Sutton Park and made quite frequent visits to Castle Bromwich to watch the aircraft, Aero Tutors and Hawker Harts of 605 County of Warwick Auxiliary Squadron. The Harts were replaced by Gladiators which were a delight to watch, the Civil Air Guard scheme was set up to produce more trained pilots, they flew Tiger Moths and there were many interesting circuits and bumps. Midland Airways flew a regular service from Croydon to Castle Bromwich and thence to Manchester they operated DH Rapides and flew in almost any weather, if the weather was bad they followed the railway lines often they could

be seen following the line past the school.

In 1938 we had our first holiday in Cornwall. A very long journey by car. We stayed with a Mrs Prynne at St Merryn. I had my first introduction to surfing at Tryarnon Bay and clotted cream from Padstow. Padstow was a busy little port and fishing town quite a number of coastal tramp steamers visited the port with bulk items such as coal. But the main use of the port was for fishing the most important catch being lobsters. We went out with a fisherman



Dad had met in the pub, it was an all day trip from 6am to 6 pm we must have pulled in hundreds of lobster pots and certainly got a lot of lobsters, some of them very large. I particularly remember that many of the pots were very close to the cliffs, there was a large swell running and we seemed to rise up and down the cliffs which you could almost touch. There were not many holiday-makers in Padstow it did not cater for the tourist trade at that time. Most of the fishing boats took their catches to a large shed or to a large fish shop right beside the harbour, it is a gift shop now. When they cleaned the fish all the guts were simply thrown into the road and the seagulls soon cleaned up. Most of the fish was sent to London by train which ran to Padstow before the war.

We all loved Tryarnon particularly the surfing and walks along the cliffs where we found many button mushrooms, and the rock pools seemed to be full of fish and crabs. We all got very brown there are a few photo's of our Cornish holidays in the old album.

We always went to Brampton to stay with Granny at Easter. On our visit at Easter 1939, the Graff Zeplin flew over at about 2000 feet, it seemed huge and moved slowly with a heavy beat from its diesel engines. This was the time that the Germans flew over a large part of Northern England and Scotland taking pictures.

In June John and I passed the entrance exam to the senior school. In late July we went to Cornwall again, by this time everyone was very conscious of the likelihood of war but we had our holiday anyway and I suppose it was our last real family holiday.

There were lots of indications of preparations for war. Sunderland flying boats were doing a regular patrol along the coast. There was a ship in Padstow harbour which carried a radio controlled Tiger Moth float plane. This was catapulted from the ship and it was fired at by Anti -Aircraft gunners at practice camp on the cliffs south of Tryarnon. You could see the bursts trailing way behind the drone aircraft, they never seemed to get much better, possibly they aimed off behind to preserve the drone. Whenever I saw AA fired at German aircraft I never saw a shell burst in front of an aircraft.

During the holiday we went to the Navy day at Plymouth, most of the ships which we visited were sunk during the war, the largest ship we went on was the aircraft carrier HMS Furious which was sunk in the Western approaches. My engineer officer at 280 Signals Unit in 1970, Tom Welding, was an RAF SNCO serving on the ship at the time and he was one of a very few survivors.

By mid August Dad thought that war would start at any time, like most people at the time he envisaged heavy air raids within days of war starting, so he decided to take us all to Granny's at Brampton. We stayed a couple of days in Sutton to drop off our surf boards and collect some winter clothes. We had been at Brampton about four days when war was declared on Sunday 3rd Sept, we had been to church with Granny and we heard when we got home. Dad went back to Sutton to work we stayed in Brampton for about two weeks then it was decided that I should go back to Bishop Vesey's, mother Shirley and myself returned by train petrol was by now in short supply. Ian stayed at Granny's and went to Brampton Grammar for about six months before he returned home.

Back for my first term in the senior school I found that trenches had been dug round the playing fields for use as air raid shelters. Within the year reinforced concrete shelters were built closer to the school. I can only recall us having to go into them on two occasions; nearly all the air raids on the midlands took place at night when we were at home.

School continued much as usual, in the senior school we played rugger rather than soccer, there were air raid drills and we had to carry gas masks to school. The younger masters, with the exception of Bill Hudspith went into the armed forces and were replaced by teachers who had retired. They were good with the exception of the Chemistry master, a retired industrial chemist who undoubtedly was brilliant but he could not impart his knowledge. We thought at the time that Bill Hudspith was unfit for military service and it was not until his death in 2000 it was revealed that he had parachuted into France on many occasions and had been awarded the Croix De Guerre. His absence from school was usually explained by sickness or Home Guard exercises.

My memories of the first winter of the war were of the extremely cold weather, all the lakes in the park were frozen sufficiently for skating for about two months. War introduced petrol rationing with reduced traffic to buses and very few cars, the blackout, and reducing rations, particularly sweets.

I think it was early in January 1940 that Nigel Talamo appeared in my class. Nigel's father, had been sent by Vickers to organise production of Spitfires at the Castle Bromwich shadow factory which up until that time was only managing to produce two or three Spitfires a month. Nigel, John and I became close friends.

In about June 1940 a Tiger moth circled Moor Hall golf course obviously looking for somewhere to land, John, Jim, Ian and I ran across the golf course to see if it could land despite all the obstacles which had been placed on the fairways to stop German aircraft landing. He landed successfully, it turned out that he was on a solo cross country, it was a misty morning and he was lost. Nigel turned up and took us back to his home, The Old Farm, where I met his family. Mike his elder brother I already knew at school, brother John who seemed very quiet, and his two sisters Viv and Sal, all very jolly. Mrs Talamo made us welcome, thereafter I spent a lot of time at the old farm swimming in the lake in the



summer, fishing, skating in the winter, playing hide and seek, french cricket etc. The warm and friendly atmosphere attracted many youngsters and we had a happy childhood and adolescence despite the war.

I saw little of Mr Talamo he was always at work, but in August at the height of the Battle of Britain he took Ni and myself to Castle Bromwich one Sunday morning. First we went to the flight line hangers at the far side of the airfield where the Spitfires were prepared for testing and dispatch. Shortly after our arrival six Spitfires flew in they were battle damaged and had come in for urgent repairs and modifications. I was amazed to see that three of the ferry pilots were women. Ni and I got into trouble for climbing into the cockpits because the guns were loaded.



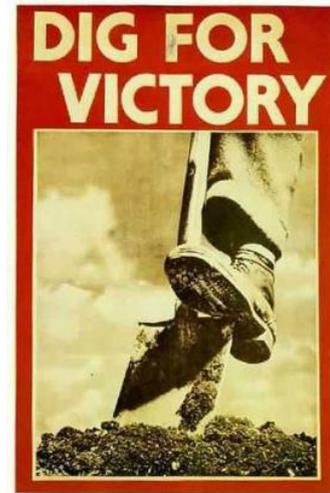
After our visit to the flights Mr Talamo took us round the factory, a huge place which he had completely reorganised to facilitate mass production from three Spitfires in March to twelve in June and eventually two hundred per month, an incredible achievement. I was particularly interested in the new self sealing fuel tanks which were being fitted the tanks were built up with layers of doped fabric and chammy leather and some form of rubber.

Mr Talamo explained the construction of the main spar of the Spitfire which was unique to the aircraft and the secret of it's slim and strong wing. The main spar was basically aluminium sheet rolled like a Swiss roll, the machine used to make it was German. I remember being surprised how many American and German machine tools were in the factory.

The summer of 1940 was beautiful, after the fall of France everyone followed the reports of the Battle of Britain and were very aware of the danger of invasion. The Local Defence Volunteers, Later the Home Guard, was formed, dad joined immediately as did John's father Joe Slater. By October night bombing started, repeated heavy raids took place on Birmingham Coventry and all the major cities. I remember standing on top of our shelter in the garden watching the huge fires and explosions when Coventry was devastated and on many occasions when Birmingham was the target.

The peculiar de-synchronised drone of the German bomber engines was instantly recognisable. Very few bombs fell near where we lived, the nearest being about 400 yards away at Ashfurlong and some about three quarters of a mile away at Weeford cross roads. We used to look for pieces of bomb some of the boys at school had complete incendiary bombs. By this time we were hearing about old boys who had been killed one, brother of Donald Ayres a boy in my class, he was one of the few survivors of a Blenheim squadron involved in covering the retreat from Belgium, and was awarded the DFC. He was then posted to photographic reconnaissance flying Spitfires and was lost over Brest.

I cannot remember when rationing was brought in, I think it started early in 1940 and became progressively more severe, fats, meat, sugar and sweets were in short supply, bread was made from a standard wholemeal flour and was never in short supply. Everyone was encouraged to grow their own vegetables “Dig for Victory” every one who had room kept chickens and sometimes a pig. There was not a lot of food but I do not remember being hungry, subsequently it has been said that the population has never been fitter, a balanced diet. Clothes were rationed and petrol was in very short supply. Fruit such as oranges and bananas did not get into the shops but there was always plenty of fish and milk. Every school child got one third of a pint of milk each day at school.



In the autumn all pupils over eleven were sent potato picking for a week to ten days. They also went to help with the harvest during the summer holidays.

In 1941 Mr Talamo left Vickers, he was involved with the distribution of machine tools to war industries then he went to China in 1942 as first secretary of the trade delegation at the embassy.

Throughout the war there was a great deal of aerial activity, most of the air raids took place at night and their frequency and intensity were greatly reduced by 1943. As our own bomber offensive built up we could see and hear our bombers setting off in the late evening, then after the USAF arrived 1943 we could see large formations of Fortresses and Liberators forming up in the mornings and returning in the evenings often in broken formation. Spitfires from Castle Bromwich were tested all day and every day, sometimes in awful weather. Alex Henshaw was the chief test pilot. By 1943 Lancasters were also being produced at Castle Bromwich and on several occasions I saw Henshaw loop a Lancaster and roll off the top of a loop



At the time of the invasion of Europe hundreds of aircraft towing gliders filled the sky. It was about this time that I saw a Lancaster at about 2000ft making a strange noise. I subsequently found that this was a test bed for one of the first jet engines.

When the Americans came into the war they set up their Base Post Office in Sutton Coldfield suddenly there were hundreds of Americans who were billeted in any house which had spare bedrooms. Talamos had two. Black men were a novelty I had only seen one black man before the Americans arrived. Their trucks were also a revelation, huge engines and tyres and very fast compared with the British army vehicles, then there was the all purpose Jeep.

At school we played rugger cricket and athletics, the school managed to keep up fixtures with surrounding schools, we travelled by public transport, usually trains. We had a good rugby

team, I played for the first 15 for my last four years at school, three of the team subsequently played for England. In my last year I played for Mosley RUFC, we played Bath, Sale, Northampton, Coventry, it was unusual for a schoolboy to play for the club but many of their regulars were away in the forces. Cricket was not my strong point but in athletics I won the Victor Ludorum and gained the school record for the 220 yds and 440 yds, 23 secs and 55.4 respectively. Slow by today's standards but a grass track and no idea of how to train did not help.

We did not have any family holidays during the war. A lot of my leisure time was spent at the Old Farm, swimming in the lake in the summer or skating in the winter. Building and flying model aircraft on the golf course. We also did a lot of cycling. In the summer months a large group of teenagers would frequently cycle to Tamworth for a day out at the swimming pool. The only traffic was the occasional lorry and the hourly bus. I cycled to Sheffield several times to visit Uncle George and Auntie Pat. In 1944 together with two school friends, David Wilson and Derek Slade, I cycled to Carlisle, through Dumfries and Galloway to Stranraer then through Ayr to Glasgow, over Rest and Be Thankful to Furnace where we were eaten by midges, then back. We carried tents with us, food was the biggest problem, rationing did not permit very much, I think we lived on milk porridge and dried eggs.

The Wilsons were a remarkable family, Grandfather a brilliant mathematician went mad and ended up in an asylum. Father was in charge of research and development at GEC, amongst his many inventions was the cathode ray oscilloscope from which the radar tube and television tube were developed. Father was very much in the forefront of the development of airborne interception radar, no one least of all the family knew about this until after the war. David's elder brother, always known as Tommy Willy Sammy was a navigator in the RAF where he was involved the operation of the early airborne radar, it was not until after the war that father and son became aware of their mutual involvement. GEC used to send a chauffeur driven car to collect Mr Wilson every morning, he would only use the car if he was going to be late for work, otherwise he chose to ride to work on a rusty old fixed wheel bike. He had great difficulty in convincing any new security guards at GEC that he was Dr Wilson because he usually forgot his identity card. David was also brilliant, top in all science subjects at school, became a Doctor of science and emigrated to the States.

It was also in 1944 that I got my driving licence, it was difficult with petrol rationing to get any chance to drive. I was lucky because Dad had a petrol allowance for his work and I used to drive him during school holidays. On a couple of occasions I drove Viv back to boarding school with Mrs Talamo who did not like driving by herself. There were no driving tests during the war, you were simply issued with a provisional driving licence and there was no retrospective testing after the war, they simply issued you with a full licence after you had held a provisional licence for a year. Therefore I have never taken a driving test

Early in 1945 I applied to join the RAF as aircrew, by that time Nigel and John Slater who were slightly older than me had joined the Army and gone off to India. The RAF accepted my application but together with thousands of budding aircrew we were put on hold because there was an excess of aircrew in the pipeline. In July 1945 I received a letter stating that the RAF was planning to start training regular RAF officers again at the RAF College Cranwell. Together with about three thousand others I applied. There followed a series of medicals and aircrew selection tests at RAF Bridgenorth. Officer selection tests at Framewood Manor and

finally a Civil Service Selection Board in London in June 1946. This last interview was a relic of the method of selection for Cranwell before the war. All my contemporaries at school had been called up for National Service by this time.

To my surprise and delight, I was selected together with sixty others to form the first two post war Cranwell entries. I have often wondered how I managed to get selected. On reflection I have come to the conclusion that the Framewood Manor selection Board were all young very experienced officers who had survived the war, those they selected were very fit, got on well with others and were not afraid of speaking their minds. We were to find that many of those on the selection board became the staff at the college.

The successful entrants were split into two courses, No 45 Entry which comprised those who were already in the RAF prior to selection, they did a slightly abbreviated course which lasted two years and No 47 Entry which was the first full post war course of two and a half years.

Chapter 3 - The Royal Air Force - 1947

It was snowing hard and nearly dark when we arrived at Sleaford station. I had travelled that day from Sutton Coldfield via Birmingham Newark and Grantham. At that time all service personnel being moved around the country were issued with railway warrants and it was possible to get almost anywhere by rail.

Looking around as I got off the train I saw about thirty bods of my age group in civilian clothes.

I was to get to know most of them in the next two and a half years and three of them were to become close friends.



We were met by RAF three ton trucks and transported to RAF Cranwell about three and a half miles away. Here we were off loaded at a Barrack Block in the Radio and Electrical Apprentices Wing. We were met by an RAF Regiment Corporal who told us where our beds were and how to find the cook house. We were told that was to be our last day in civilian clothes for the next three months. The next day new were to get our uniform and be sworn in, thereafter we would have to obey his orders. His name was Van de Plank and he took a great deal of pleasure in ordering us about.

Next day we were sworn in, given our Air Force Number, mine was 607021 we then had a full medical, a vaccination and a series of jabs, then we were marched to stores to draw our

kit. First a kit bag, then vests, pants, pyjamas, socks, shirts, shoes, drill boots, airman's uniform, battledress, forage cap, flat hat, great coat, PT shoes, and shorts. Then another kit bag for flying clothing, Sidcote outer flying suit, padded inner, flying boots and socks, gauntlet gloves and silk inners, flying helmet, oxygen mask, goggles and sunglasses. Finally a white flash to wear on our forage caps and a white band for our flat hats. These signified that we were aircrew cadets, apprentices wore a green or yellow flash.

The winter of 1947 was very cold and the snow was very deep, many parts of the country was cut off by snow drifts. Heating in the barrack blocks was inadequate, some of the chaps slept on the heating pipes but we always managed to clear enough snow from the parade ground for the inevitable square bashing which we did every morning for the first couple of months.



Flight Sergeant Masters, the drill Sergeant, was a stickler for turn out and insisted on a very high standard of drill. We marched everywhere. Cranwell is a large base and our syllabus of instruction took us to several separate locations. In the first two months we did PT daily, hard sessions, obviously to get us fit. The Chief PTI was known as Chang, a very hard man, if you were slow or having trouble with your press ups you had to do an extra twenty. There was a splendid heated pool next to the gym, Chang asked all those who could not swim to step forward. He lined them up at the deep end and ordered them to jump in and not to get out until they got to the shallow end. I don't think anyone ever had to be dragged out, they soon learned to swim. The same applied to diving boards, we soon learned that you never told Chang that you could not do anything.

The commandant was Air Vice Marshal Richard Atcherley, always known as Batchy. He had an identical twin, David also an AVM, they were bachelors and had been wild as cadets in the twenties and had not changed much. David was AOC 12 group and frequently visited his brother at Cranwell. Batchy was an excellent pilot and flew anything he could get his hands

on. He had a Spitfire Mk IX which he flew every morning before the airfield opened. He would start the Spitfire between two hangers and take off to the South regardless of the wind direction, he usually did a slow roll immediately after take off and was inverted before the wheels were fully retracted. This is a very difficult manoeuvre in a Spitfire because it was



necessary to change hands to operate the undercarriage lever, which was on the right side of the cockpit, and could only be operated by the right hand. A session of aerobatics usually followed with Schneider Trophy turns round the college tower. He had been a member of

the Schneider Trophy team flying the Supermarine S6b in which he gained the 1000 kilometre closed circuit record. Batchy was also famous for a crazy flying display he did in the USA in 1931. The Spitfire was later to be replaced by a Vampire.

There was a museum of German aircraft at Cranwell, amongst the collection was a Meschermitt ME 108 a very smooth three- seater communication aircraft rather like the ME 109 fighter. Batchy got the 108 out of the museum and used it as his private run about. He used to go and visit his mother near York, landing at a disused airfield, he took Stew McPherson with him on a couple of occasions. Stew's parents lived near York.

The weather stayed very cold with deep snow. We did our cross country runs on deeply rutted roads, even Chang decided that the snow on the airfield and countryside was too deep for running. The discipline was strict, the food adequate, we ate in the apprentices mess and we could always top up in the NAAF. We worked hard from 7AM to 6PM then we had to get our kit ready for the following day, polishing boots, pressing uniforms blanching webbing and cleaning brasses. After that the room had to be cleaned and the floor polished, bathrooms and toilets were cleaned in the morning after breakfast and before parade. On Sundays we attended Church Parade, once again a full inspection then march to church. I think it was our third Church Parade, still deep snow, we were halted in front of the C OF E church, the customary order was given, "Fall out Roman Catholics Jews and Other Denominations". Sharp as ever F Sgt Masters shouted Cadet Pledger "have you changed your religion?" , "yes Sun Worshiper F.Sgt".

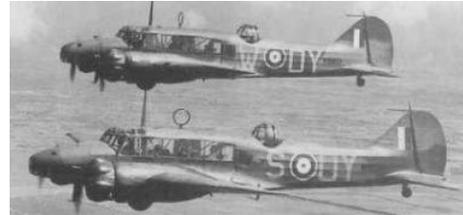
Apart from drill and PT the syllabus included practical work in the Apprentices workshops, basic fitting, filing a perfect cube, bending metal, riveting, soldering, turning and milling. It was here that I first learned to use a lathe. We also did practical woodwork, then jointing and patching for wooden aircraft, fabric patching and doping, basic radio, wiring and soldering. Then we moved on to practical application, airframe repairs, engine maintenance stripping and assembly of the Gypsy Queen from the Tiger. This instruction was given by the SNCO's who taught the subjects in depth to the apprentices over a period of two years, we were simply given a short resume. During our six months in the apprentices' wing nevertheless it was valuable.

In addition to this practical work there was maths aerodynamics, aero-engines and we were introduced to basic navigation and map reading which we were supposed to put into practice twice per week in familiarisation training in Ansons but the airfield was closed by snow for the first three months.

By now we were getting to know one another pretty well. I struck up particular friendships with Denis Mc Afee, Ian Meredith and Bob Price. Ian and Denis were complete opposites, Dennis was brilliant, nicknamed the book, he looked about fifteen and had a great sense of humour, Ian known as bleary because he always had the best hangover, was a Rhodesian. Ian's father was an Air Marshal and had been Officer Commanding the Rhodesian air training scheme during the war. Ian looked about twenty five was a superb athlete and rugger player who always made himself out to be slow. He would say I am just a dim Kaffer, not true he was as sharp as a tack. For some strange reason I was known as baldy, I suppose my hair was showing the first signs of thinning.

There followed some of the happiest times of my life, good friends, good sport, doing what I had always wanted to do, learn to fly and no responsibilities. We were paid next to nothing, two shillings per day for the first six months then fourteen shillings plus two shillings flying pay once we became Flight Cadets and moved from the Apprentices Wing to the College.

At the end of the first two months the snow began to clear and we had our first air experience in Mk1 Ansons My first flight was on 1st March 1947 the Mk 1 had a retractable undercarriage which had to be wound up with a big crank handle, 175 turns, hard work. There were five cadets in each aircraft, we had to draw up flight plans, mark our maps for a cross country, then map read while the pilot flew the headings which we gave him. Occasionally some of the chaps were air sick, fortunately I never had that problem. The flights were to the South and East over Lincolnshire which was extensively flooded after the thaw, this did not help map reading but it was interesting to pick out the villages most of them were on higher ground.



We had two weeks leave for Easter on return it was back to drill, arms drill and preparation for ceremonial drill. Ground school continued with practical training and regular navigation flights in the Ansons. We had missed the rucker season due to the snow, now we had a beautiful spring and splendid summer, athletics and cricket were the order of the day. I ended up representing Training Command in the RAF athletics championships at Uxbridge. McDonald Bailey won the sprints, I managed a reasonable second.

At the end of our six months in the Apprentices' Wing we went on summer vacation for a month, on return we became Flight Cadets and moved into the College. The College is a splendid building, we had individual rooms and a batman to look after our rooms and uniforms. Our lives as flight cadets were greatly changed. The College mess was good, food much better. We now dined in four nights per week and there were guest nights about once per month. Over the next two years many VIP guests attended and they usually gave a talk in the College Hall after dinner. Those I clearly recall were Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, Tedder, Mountbatten, Professor RV Jones and Frank Whittle.

We now started our pilot training in earnest, the summer of 1947 was fantastic and this carried on into a beautiful autumn. We started our flying on the DH82A the Tiger Moth, of wood and canvas construction it was the last biplane in use for training. The smell of dope and aviation fuel remains with me to this day.



The tiger was also the last aircraft in general service to be started by hand swinging the propeller. The drill was to shout SWITCHES OFF accompanied by a thumbs down sign, fuel on, throttle closed, suck in, the airman turned the prop three or four times, the airman then shouted CONTACT` you set one third throttle held the stick hard back called CONTACT, pushed the first magneto switch up and gave the thumbs up sign, the airman swung the prop,

when the engine fired you switched the second mag on.

I was most fortunate in that I had a very experienced instructor. Warrant Officer Dave Ross had about 2000 instructional hours on Tigers. There were still many SNCO pilots in the RAF at this time, they had no other duties other than flying and they were truly professionals. Under Dave Ross's tuition I made good progress. His early advice to trim the aircraft to fly hands off whenever possible, to hold the stick lightly and above all to look out all the time, all very obvious but always pointed out quietly at the appropriate moment. His advice on landing, not to consciously look for the ground but to look ahead and when you were aware of the ground in your peripheral vision, it is time to round out and feel for the ground.

Before going solo we had to learn what happened when you stalled the aircraft and how to recover with the minimum loss of height, how to spin and recover, but most of the time was spent in take off flying the circuit and doing glide approach and landings, forced landings and what to do if the engine failed after take



off, all this had to be covered before first solo. I was the first on my course to go solo after 7 hours and 25 minutes. The feeling of freedom when you went solo was very special and the relief at getting it down on the ground in one piece was great.

The Tiger had an intercom which permitted normal conversation between instructor and student, but no radio, so all instructions from air traffic were by visual signal. You taxied out to the take off point signified by a caravan painted in black and white chequers, there was a Perspex dome in the top of the caravan from which the duty controller gave instructions with an Aldis lamp. Green. Cleared to take off or land, red hold your position or do not land. The aldis was supplemented by a red or green Verery flare if the controller thought the aldis had not been seen.

Supervised solo followed, we went to Digby or Wellingore, old wartime grass fields where the instructor got out and watched our circuits and bumps. After this stage we proceeded to aerobatics, loops, barrel rolls, slow rolls, stall turns, rolls off the top of a loop, practice forced landings, stalls and spins all of which were regularly practiced dual and solo.

Taxying the Tiger in strong winds was difficult because there were no brakes and the aircraft wanted to weathercock into wind. At wind speeds over twenty Knots we had to have an airman holding each wing tip to take us out to the take off point and help us back to dispersal after landing. Cross wind landings were not easy, you crabbed along the line of the runway then kicked straight just before touch down, this called for good judgement in such a light aircraft which quickly picked up drift.

By October it became very cold flying the Tiger and we required all our flying clothing, silk underclothes then padded flying suit then canvas Sidcote outer, thick woollen socks flying boots, silk gloves and leather gauntlets. There was no heating in the Tiger.

By now we had progressed to cross countries, usually they took in two turning points and lasted about two hours. On one cross country I flew into a snow storm and had to descend and turn back, eventually I found a railway line which I followed to Lincoln and thence back to Cranwell. Following railway lines, known as Bradshawing after the all embracing railway timetable, was an accepted way of finding your position if lost. If you got lost and could not find your way back to base, the procedure was to carry out a precautionary landing in a suitable field, phone Cranwell and wait for your instructor to come and fly you back. You were not allowed to take off and return solo.

One of our course, Charlie Scott always got lost on solo cross countries. As soon as he took off, his instructor used to sit by the 'phone and wait for the inevitable call. On one occasion he found Charlie in the corner of a field sound asleep with the blind flying hood pulled over the rear cockpit. On another occasion, lost as usual, he landed at a large airfield, taxied to the caravan, climbing out he asked where he was, finding that he was at Waddington just up the road from Cranwell, he asked the airman in the caravan not to tell anyone he had landed there and took off for Cranwell. Waddington reported the incident and Charlie's instructor found after a detailed de-briefing that on cross country flights Charlie took off steered an accurate compass course but did not look at the ground until he reached his estimated time of arrival. Any change of wind direction or inaccuracy in heading or airspeed resulted in his inability to recognise his position. It transpired that Charlie thought that continuous checking of position and amendment of flight plan was cheating.

Ground studies continued in College lecture rooms additional studies, War Studies current affairs and statistics are those I remember. Drill and PT still featured largely on the syllabus, drill was carried out on the parade ground in front of the college. On Saturday mornings there was a full cadet wing parade with inspection usually by the Commandant. One Saturday Batchy stopped in front of a cadet and pointed out that he was wearing a shirt frayed by the buckle of his braces, the Warrant Officer took out his notebook to record the cadet's name then Batchy laughed and said I have the same problem and showed the cadet his frayed shirt. The notebook disappeared rapidly.

On another Saturday morning we were preparing for the Commandant's parade when the Hall Porter announced over the College Tannoy that the parade was cancelled. About fifteen minutes later Batchy arrived to find that there was no parade, he stormed into the Hall Porters office demanding an explanation for the absence of the Cadet Wing. But I cancelled the parade on your instructions sir, you came in here about an hour ago and said that you had decided to go hunting, you were dressed for hunting Sir. After a short pause Batchy laughed and said I am sorry Mr Green that must have been my twin brother having one of his little jokes, never mind I will get even with him.

As the term progressed rugger featured largely in our sporting activities. Although there were only sixty to choose from we had an excellent team and won most of our games against RAF Stations Colleges and Lincolnshire Police.

The staff at the college were all experienced officers who had distinguished themselves in the war. The Commandant Air Vice Marshal RLR Atcherley, Batchy was an ex Cranwell Cadet, he was renowned in the RAF for his flying ability, his sense of humour and general disregard of petty regulations. The Deputy Commandant Group Captain John Peel. Battle of Britain pilot, also ex Cranwell and rather correct. The Cadet Wing was divided into three Squadrons, A,B and C, Bleary, Denis McAfee, Bob Price and myself were in B Sqn. A Squadron Commander was Dicky Dyer, a complete nutter, he had flown Liberators on long distance bombing raids in the Far East, Squadron Leader Steventon commanded B Sqn, a very much decorated reconnaissance pilot who brought back the first pictures of V weapons at Peenamund. Squadron Leader Bob Weighill, had been on Mustangs, he was captain of the RAF rugby team and also played for England

Life at the College followed a routine: Colour hoisting parade followed by drill, then lectures and flying alternating mornings and afternoons, sport was on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. In the evening on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday we Dined In, formal dinner followed by the Loyal Toast. Fridays were frequently reserved for a Guest Night. The Commandant, Director of Studies, Group Captain Fulton, Squadron Commanders and deputies, a fair proportion of flying instructors and ground school staff always attended. The College band was always in attendance at Guest Nights, they played in the Minstrels Gallery. A wide variety of music was played, hits from shows in London, marches, music from films, the Lincolnshire Poacher was the favourite, and was played with great gusto. After the Port was passed round and the Loyal Toast was made, toasts were drunk to the heads of state of all nations represented, the band always rose to the occasion, there were some unusual national anthems. Many noted dignitaries and VIP's attended as guests. Some of these gave presentations in the College Theatre after dinner.

Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands was a frequent visitor, I think he was a personal friend of Batchy, he flew himself in a RCAF Mitchel.

Earl Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, gave a presentation on the partition of India and how India and Pakistan gained their independence. I was not impressed. What a splendid job he had done in difficult circumstances was the whole tenor of the presentation. There was no mention of the appalling death toll, over two million people died, this had a lifelong effect on Nigel who was present during partition and witnessed the results of some terrible massacres. I often wonder if partition had not been so rushed, apparently at Mountbatten's instigation, that the resettlement of Sikhs, Hindus and Moslems could have been carried out with less loss of life.

Air Marshal Tedder, who had been No2 to Eisenhower for Operation Overlord, the invasion of Europe, gave an excellent description of how the desert air force developed its methods of supporting the 8th Army, and how once air superiority had been achieved the army could rely on close air support. The destruction of the enemy's ability to supply his troops in North Africa was also detailed. He went on to describe how the lessons learned in the desert were applied to the formation of the 2nd Tactical Air Force for the invasion of Europe and how close cooperation with the army enabled forward troops to call for close air support which was supplied almost immediately from so called Cab Ranks. Tedder had a nice sense of humour and was much less self-opinionated than Mountbatten.

General Montgomery gave an excellent presentation on the invasion of Europe and the conquest of Germany. Once again it was rather egoistical but quite witty, a facet of his character which does not feature in his biographies. The most interesting feature of the presentation was the credit Monty gave to the intelligence which was made available to him. This was long before Enigma and the breaking of the German codes became public knowledge.

Air Commodore Frank Whittle, later to be knighted gave a most interesting lecture on the development of the jet engine and its future. Whittle was a Cranwell Cadet in 1928 when he wrote a thesis proposing a gas turbine as a form of aircraft propulsion, his paper was the basis of the jet engine. There was little interest initially, when he finally got backing to develop his project in 1939 he was under great pressure to get results. It was known at that time that the Germans were experimenting with a gas turbine using an axial flow compressor, whilst the axial flow compressor was more efficient and more suitable for long term development he decided to opt for the centrifugal compressor because there was a wealth of experience with this type of compressor which was used to supercharge piston engines. The compressor was more robust and facilitated more rapid development of a reliable first generation jet engine.

He then showed a film of the first flight of the Gloster E 28/39 which took place at Cranwell in May 1941. Whittle went on to look into the future stating that the turbo prop was not the answer to long distance passenger flight, he explained that a gas turbine with an axial flow compressor with a further turbine to drive a ducted fan which would produce economical power and make less noise. He went on to say that using this form of propulsion air travel would become cheap and affordable by a large proportion of the world's population. This was 1948, some 20 years before these engines were to be installed in air liners and revolutionise air travel.



Professor RV Jones gave probably the most interesting talk. He had been responsible for finding from the wreckage of German bombers the secret of their beam riding device which gave them the ability to bomb very accurately. He developed a method of bending the beams which destroyed the accuracy of the early night bombing raids. He went on to explain how Commando raids on German radars in Brittany were made at his request in order to determine their method of operation and devise jamming devices. He explained how window or chaff was devised and the effect it had when first used. He also talked about German passive homing devices and the dangers of emitting any signals when over enemy territory. IFF, H2S, active tail warning radar all emitted signals which could be homed onto. I am not sure that these lessons have been fully appreciated even today. I remembered and applied some of them years later when Commanding No 280 Signals Unit in Cyprus.

There were many more guest speakers but non of them made sufficient impression for me to remember them fifty eight years later.

We were told just after Christmas that His Majesty King George VI would present a Royal Standard to the College during the summer term. Preparation for this event involved a great deal of ceremonial drill. We had three weeks leave for Christmas, Bleary spent Christmas

with us and joined me in the Boxing Day charity rugby match and the celebration in the Three Tuns afterwards

By the end of the winter term I had completed 32 hours on Tiger Moths, on return from leave we moved onto instrument flying which was practiced by pulling a large canvas cover over the rear cockpit. The Tiger had only a limited instrument panel: air speed indicator (ASI), Altimeter, rate of climb and descent indicator (RCDI), and direction indicator (DI) this was a gyro which was set on the correct heading by reference to the compass and finally the turn and slip indicator. There was no artificial horizon, the wings were kept level by reference to the turn and slip and the DI, if you were turning to the right the right wing was down. Climb and descent was controlled by reference to the RCDI and the altimeter. We did not do night flying on Tigers. Additional new exercises were low flying and formation flying, low flying was great, we used to race the train from Sleaford to Boston, if there was a strong head wind the train won. Some mornings after take off from Cranwell we would find a complete cover of fog over the low lying fens to the South East of Sleaford, smoke and steam from the old steam trains would break through the fog and mark the position of the railway lines, this aid disappeared with the introduction of diesel engines.

Formation flying without RT required clear hand signals, we started in pairs and quickly learned the need to fly smoothly and anticipate manoeuvres in order to allow time for hand signals. I enjoyed formation flying once I mastered the need to anticipate power requirements when joining up and changing formation.

During the Easter term we visited Sandhurst for the first time. We competed against Sandhurst and Dartmouth at tennis, squash, fencing and athletics. I cannot remember the results but I am pretty sure that Sandhurst were the overall winners, this was not really surprising because there were about 1500 cadets at Sandhurst about 130 at Dartmouth and just 90 of us, Sandhurst was a huge place, very impersonal compared with Cranwell.

After the sporting events we attended a guest night. The dinner was very formal, after dinner the usual mess games developed. The Sandhurst Commandant, a General condescended to watch, Batches joined in then he challenged the General to a game of "are you there Moriarty", the General really had no option. The two Commandants took off their tunics and took up positions on the floor, blindfolded and lashing out at one another with rolled up newspapers. The Sandhurst cadets could not believe their eyes. I recall vividly, the General's bright red braces and Batches's bright blue ones

At the end of the Easter term I had my final handling test on the Tiger, this covered all we had been taught, engine failure after take off, stalling, spinning, aerobatics, forced landing in a field, circuits, glide approach and landing, engine assisted approach and landing, wheeler landing and finally a short field landing. I had completed 62 hours on the Tiger, 31 of these solo.

On 2nd April we flew by Dakota to Salon in the south of France to play rugger against our French equivalent Le Ecole de L'air. This was the first time I had been outside the UK. We were met by Ecole staff and a reporter from French radio. Flight Lieutenant Bird Officer i/c rugger was interviewed and introduced on French radio as Flt Lt Oiseau, we were asked to sing a song for listeners. I cannot remember what we sang we certainly did not know any

rugby songs which were fit for broadcasting. We were then introduced to a group of French cadets who we were led to believe were their rugby team, they showed us to our rooms and arranged to take us out. That night we had a great party, we were plied with drink mostly brandy and ouzo which we had never tasted before, beer our normal tippie did not seem to be available. Some time after midnight we staggered off to bed very much the worse for wear.

Next morning we had to attend the first post war graduation parade, this was a grand occasion, a large saluting base had been erected on the parade ground for Senior Officers and VIPs. The French Cadets were paraded right across the drill square and we were positioned immediately behind the centre squadron in front the saluting base and about twenty paces from it. After the inspection and before the march past the reviewing dignity, who was the French Minister for Air gave a long address. His wife, a very smart young woman stood about one pace behind him and to his left. As the speech went on my attention turned to the wife, she was wearing a suit with a long skirt, this was the latest fashion, the New Look. Next time I glanced back I thought that skirt is really long, then it fell around her ankles and she was left standing in a very brief pair of black frilly knickers. Some of the senior officers wives dashed forward and stood round her while she hitched up her skirt. The Minister continued with his speech completely oblivious to the little show his wife had put on.

After the parade and march past I began to wonder if I had imagined the whole affair but Stew Macpherson who had been standing next to me and Bleary Meredith confirmed that I had not been dreaming.

In the afternoon still very much the worse for wear from the previous night, we played rucker against the Ecole de l'Air, none of whom had been drinking with us the previous night. I remember that we were desperate for a drink of water, thoroughly dehydrated after the ouzo, all we were offered was very sweet grape juice. I think we were winning 22-0 at this stage. In the second half the previous night started to catch up with us. The French scored twice, the Ref seemed to think that a long second half was definitely to their advantage, however we managed to survive the longest second half I have ever played. It was a hard fought game, we won, I think the final score was 22-12.

In the evening we went to the graduation ball, excellent food and lots more to drink. Next morning we were shown round the college their training facilities and their aircraft, they trained on a pre-war Morane Seulnier, a high wing monoplane with an un-cowled radial engine, after that they advanced onto Ansons or a more advanced low wing mono-plane. By mid morning it was into the Dakota and back to Cranwell. We flew low level all the way and had a splendid view of France.

When we returned from Easter break we were woken by the high pitched scream of a DH Vampire, Batchy had got this in place of his Spitfire, he still performed low level aerobatics with as much zest and zeal.

The summer term brought our move onto Harvards, I had a new instructor, P1 Kefford, P1 was an aircrew rank equivalent to Flight Sergeant . Kefford was another very experienced instructor he flew the Harvard very smoothly and accurately, did not have very much to say but was very good at correcting my mistakes with little fuss.



The Harvard 11B is an American aircraft bought in numbers in 1939, it was an excellent advanced trainer because it was not easy to fly well. Of all metal construction it had a retractable undercarriage and flaps, the engine was a 550 Horse Power Pratt and Whitney radial air cooled, with variable pitch propeller. Like all American aircraft it had a large cockpit built for the average American six foot bod to feel comfortable. I had some difficulty in reaching some of the more remote switches and the brakes which were toe pedal brakes on the rudder bar, short people such as myself found difficulty in applying brake if you were applying full rudder, this situation could arise in cross wind landings.

The pre flight check walk around the aircraft followed the pattern which was by now second nature with the Tiger: general condition of the aircraft, pitot head cover and control locks removed, chocks in place and a new feature, the starter trolley plugged in. Getting into the Harvard for the first time you were aware of a large and quite complicated aircraft. Starting was straight forward, call for power from the trolley, thumbs down, switches off, fuel on reserve tank, mixture rich, carb air cold, pitch fully fine, throttle about an inch open, work the hand wobble fuel pump to make fuel available for priming the engine, operate the kigas priming pump, indicate mag switch on, thumb up, depress the starter switch which energised the starter which spun up a flywheel. After about fifteen seconds the energising switch was raised, this connected the flywheel through a clutch to the engine which would turn over two or three times normally it would fire and run with the help of one or two primes. If you over primed a large flame would emerge from the exhaust on the starboard side of the cockpit and you could feel the heat. The first impression once the engine was running was the power. The trolley was waved away and the engine was allowed to warm up, mags checked for dead cut, oil temps and pressures checked and fuel changed to right tank, wave away the chocks and taxi out to the take off point. The Harvard had a steerable tail wheel connected to the rudders, if you applied too much rudder the tail wheel unlocked and a lot of brake was required to prevent a ground loop. The large engine obscured the view in front and it was necessary to weave left and right to ensure that you did not taxi into anything.

Before take off the fuel was selected to left tank and the engine run up, at 2000 revs the CSU was exercised by selecting coarse pitch then returning the lever to fully fine, the engine was run up to zero boost and the magnetos checked, finally with stick hard back power checked +4 lb boost and 2,200 rpm. If all was satisfactory pre take off checks were completed, obtain clearance to enter the runway, visual check that there was no aircraft on finals, Kefford insisted that we should never trust Air Traffic, then line up and take off, as the power came on the aircraft tended to swing to the right, once off the ground, brake the wheels, UC up

select climbing revs and power, trim for the climb and UC lights out. As altitude increased the mixture was weakened manually, and carburettor heating when necessary.

The exercises were really a repeat of those we had done on the Tiger but of course the Harvard responded very differently, for instance the stall on the Tiger was quite gentle, the nose dropped and recovery could be effected with little loss of height. When the Harvard stalled the right wing dropped viciously and considerable height was lost in recovery. This characteristic was very relevant when landing. Spinning to the right was also quite interesting, the aircraft would wind up into a rapid spin, to recover full opposite rudder and stick fully forward, after about a turn and a half the spin stopped, the wings were levelled and the aircraft pulled out of the dive, a considerable amount of height was required to practice spinning. Quite a few Harvards were lost due to spinning over the years, Alan Black, Lord Tedder's step son, who was on No48 Entry and his instructor were killed while practicing spinning in 1948.

The Harvard was more demanding when flying circuits and bumps, variable pitch propeller multiple fuel tanks, mixture control, carburettor air heating, retractable undercarriage and flaps were all new features which were covered in pre take off, down wind and finals checks. Flaps reduced the stalling speed, hence the landing speed and resulted in a steeper approach. The aim as with the Tiger was to make a three point landing but a little more care was required, if you held off too high or bounced, the right wing tended to drop, a burst of throttle and hard left rudder were required to correct the wing drop, as soon as the wheels were on the ground a touch of right brake was required to prevent a ground loop. Damaged wing tips were a common feature when students were converting to the Harvard.

I went solo on the Harvard in seven and a half hours almost the same time as my first solo in the Tiger and once again I was the first of 47 Entry to solo. Supervised solo followed, we would go to Syerstone or Barkstone Heath, do a couple of circuits, Kefford would climb out and I would be left to do solo circuits and bumps. Cranwell and Syerstone were grass fields which enabled the landing direction to be more or less into wind but Barkstone had runways with the inevitable result that the runways were not always into wind. Cross wind landings in the Harvard were tricky, you crabbed the aircraft to maintain your approach line with the runway, then kicked the aircraft straight just before touch down, very easy to get it wrong and touch down with drift, then there was a fight to stay on the runway and keep the wing tips off the ground. If the cross wind was very bad you did a wheels landing only allowing the tail wheel to drop when the speed was right down.

Practice ceremonial parades were a regular feature of life during this term in preparation for the Royal visit on 6th July 1948 when His Majesty King George VI presented the Royal Colour to the College. Unfortunately I bruised my heel badly in June whilst long jumping, I was unable to march so I was a spectator for the parade. This was the first Kings Colour to be presented to the RAF and it was a great occasion, The Air Force Board Commanders in Chief of all Commands and every Old Cranwellian who could get there attended. Queen Elizabeth and the two Princesses accompanied the King, also Group Captain Peter Townsend, Equerry to the King, Old Cranwellian.

After the parade a formal luncheon was held in College Hall this was attended by the Royal family, official guests and all the cadets.

It was during this term that most of us got cars or motor bikes. Those who did not have wheels got lifts in cars or as pillion passengers. Denis MacAfee never learned to drive and usually had a lift with me. I had a 350 cc Velocette, this made the journey home much easier at the end of term, it also gave us the freedom to visit the local pubs on Saturday nights. Wellingore, Caythorpe and Grantham were popular, after several pints there was a race back to College to catch the bar before it closed. There was no breathalyser, I am sure we would have failed the modern drink driving laws. Despite the alcohol no one ever crashed their car or motorbike.



One of our entry, Johnny Palmer was an exceptional pianist, if he did not know a tune he only had to hear a few bars whistled or hummed and he would extemporise. Whatever pub we visited with Johnny, he would play 'till closing time. Needless to say he was very popular with landlords and I don't think he ever had to buy a beer.

I spent most of the summer holiday at home, apart from a trip to the White City for one day to see the mile in the Olympic Games. I cannot remember how much it cost I caught a train to White City there was no problem getting in I simply went to the ticket office and bought a ticket as if I was going to a football match. Bleary stayed for about two weeks we spent our time swimming, playing golf and drinking in the Three Tuns with John Slater and Ni.

At the start of the autumn term we did a lot of instrument flying in preparation for night flying. For IF we used a system called two stage amber. Amber screens were put up in the front cockpit which both the student and instructor could see through. If the student put on blue goggles he could not see out and had to fly on instruments, it was a good system, The Harvard had an artificial horizon which made life a lot easier than the limited flying instruments on the Tiger. Like every aspect of flying the secret was trim, set power, select the required attitude on the AH then trim the aircraft to fly hands off. If you rolled more than 80 degrees the AH toppled and you had to recover using primary instruments, level the wings and get the aircraft straight and level. The AH took about four minutes to re-erect. All the basic exercises, climbing, turning, descending stalling and straight and level had to be done on instruments. Finally there was recovery from unusual positions, spiral dive and spin.

Our instrument flying progressed to Standard beam approaches. A radio beam was aligned with the main runway the station morse ident code CP in the case of Cranwell was transmitted at regular intervals if you were on the beam you received a steady note through your headset, if north of the beam you heard dashes which merged into the steady note as you got closer to the beam, to the south of the beam you heard dots. About two miles from the runway there was an outer marker beacon which sounded like a fog horn, at the runway threshold there was an inner marker which gave continuous high speed blips. After getting clearance from Air Traffic you could join the beam descending to 1000ft over the outer marker then set up a rate of descent to cross the inner marker at 200 ft, thus permitting you to get into the airfield in bad weather.

By early October we started night flying. Cranwell only had a grass runway so night flying

was carried out using a gooseneck flare path. The gooseneck was a metal container like a squashed watering can with a wick in the nozzle and it was filled with paraffin. Two lines of these were laid out to mark the runway. The taxiway to and from the runway was marked by red and green glim lamps, a small battery operated lamp. Taking off at night was not easy, as you taxied onto the runway you could see the whole flare path but once you lined up for take off the engine obscured all but the goosenecks close to you as the aircraft accelerated you kept straight by making the flares appear simultaneously from either side of the engine cowling. If they did not a touch of rudder to get straight, once the tail wheel was up you had a better view of the runway, immediately you left the ground you established a rate of climb and settled down on instruments, then raised the wheels and climbed straight ahead to 800 ft, then a climbing turn through 90 degrees or slightly less if there was a strong head wind. At 1000 ft level out and turn through 90 degrees at this stage you looked out to see the runway and confirm that you were in a good down wind position carryout the down wind vital actions. Once the end of the runway was behind the wing tip throttle back and commence a descending turn onto the cross wind leg, check UC down, two green lights pitch fully fine then continue to descend and turn to line up with the runway full flap. With full flap you had a reasonable view of the runway on finals but as you crossed the threshold and rounded out into the three point attitude the flare path disappeared behind the engine cowling and as on take off you kept straight by making the flares appear simultaneously from either side of the cowling, this was not easy because the aircraft was prone to swinging.

Once you got used to the view of the flare path on the approach and landing it all fell into place and you found that night flying was not all that different from day flying. I took one and a half hours to go solo. We were then taken to Barkstone Heath to fly from the runways where there was modern airfield lighting with electric lights and glide path indicators which were positioned at the runway threshold and showed two red lights if you were too low going to red green then two greens if on the correct approach path, if you were too high they showed amber.

We also started formation flying on the Harvard, here the weight and inertia of the aircraft called for more anticipation when joining up and changing formation but the basic principles of formation flying applied and there was the luxury of R/T which made it much easier to communicate your intentions but hand signals were always used in the event of R/T problems.

Towards the end of November the Central Flying School visited Cranwell to assess the instructors and students, I was programmed to fly with one of the CFS examiners. After about twenty minutes oil poured back from the engine completely obscuring the windscreen, the instructor took control, declared an emergency and we returned to Cranwell, where the engine seized just after touch down. We found that the leak was caused by a broken oil seal on the propeller constant speed unit, this was operated by oil from the engine and this was pumped out through the broken seal. If we had selected coarse pitch we could have stopped the leak. I subsequently flew some 750 hours on Harvards and this was the only major unserviceability I ever had, it was a remarkably reliable aircraft.

There was a lot of ceremonial drill towards the end of term in preparation for the graduation parade of No 46 Entry following the parade there was a graduation ball. I invited Ni and John Slater Ni got in touch and asked if Viv could come as well and of course I invited her. When

they arrived for the ball I found that the jolly school girl had become a beautiful young woman, she looked stunning in her blue ball gown.

I had grown out of my shyness in male company, but I was always ill at ease in female company, I had little conversation and being tone deaf I was a hopeless dancer. However with Viv I felt at ease, I knew all her family and with our childhood background, playing hide and seek, swimming in the lake in summer and skating in the winter we soon became very close and I fell in love with her.



After the ball we went on Christmas leave, Bleary came for Christmas and played in the Boxing day charity rugger game. We went to a couple of dances and Viv went with me, from then on we wrote to one another regularly.

When we returned for the Spring term Batchy had been posted on loan to the Pakistan Air Force as Chief of Air Staff. We missed his light hearted extrovert approach and his fantastic early morning aerobatic displays. The new commandant was Air Vice Marshal George Beamish, a very large bachelor with little sense of humour. George Beamish was one of four brothers who joined the air force, a fanatical rugby player and ex Leicester Tiger he had been capped 26 times for Ireland. I don't think he ever flew himself while he was Commandant but he never missed a rugby match.

We played Sandhurst away in February. Sandhurst had a very strong team, Shuttleworth and Hardy their half backs were playing for the army. We had 150 cadets to select from as opposed to the 1500 at Sandhurst who were confident of winning. It was a very hard match which we won, I think the score was 20- 16 the first time Cranwell had beaten Sandhurst for 20 years. When he came to congratulate us after the match , George Beamish could not hold back the tears of joy, this was the only time I ever saw him show any emotion.

Our coach returned to Cranwell via Picadilly where we had a great deal to drink, arriving back at the College at three AM we were met by cadets and some staff who had a lot of beer lined up for us, I got to bed about four AM.

At 9AM I was due to fly, Kefford insisted on a dual trip, I could scarcely climb into the cockpit, we did a prolonged session of aerobatics and to Kefford's surprise I felt very much better when we got back

This term we did much more applied flying, formation flying, night cross countries, low level cross countries, air to air attacks using cine cameras and dive bombing. The Harvard had a reflector gunsight and cine camera mounted in the wing we practiced high quarter attacks allowing deflection as we closed on the target. The films were assessed by the next day. The Harvard had bomb racks which carried eight bombs, we used smoke bombs on a range near Newark. The procedure was to fly towards the target at three thousand feet, you lined up the target so that it tracked down the side of the engine cowling, when the target disappeared

under the leading edge of the wing, throttle fully back select coarse pitch then pull up into a wing over as the nose dropped line up the target in the centre of the gunsight then drop the bomb and pull out of the dive which should have been 60 degrees. As you climbed away you looked over your shoulder to see where the bomb had dropped. When you first started there didn't seem to be time to get the target in the middle of the sight before you had to pull out of the dive. However after the first two or three bombs it all seemed to get easier and I really enjoyed the dive bombing. We were starting to get quite confident and the flying was great.

Before the Easter break we visited the aircraft carrier HMS *Thesius*. We took the night train from Grantham via Edinburgh and Inverness arriving at Invergordon in time for breakfast on *Thesius*. We were shown our accommodation, then we were



split into groups and shown round the ship. In the afternoon we were given a full briefing on deck operations accompanied by a graphic film of aircraft crashes on the deck. This was before the introduction of the angled deck and mirror landing system. Take off used the full deck, if there was insufficient wind over the deck or the aircraft were heavily loaded they were catapulted. When aircraft were recovered, a barrier of steel wires was raised half way down the deck and a series of arrestor wires were raised between the crash barrier and the touch down point. The arrestor hook below the tail engaged the wire which stopped the aircraft before it hit the barrier. Once the aircraft had stopped sailors disengaged the hook, the barrier was dropped and the aircraft taxied over the barrier which was raised ready for the next aircraft which landed in rapid succession. The ideal landing engaged the second or third wire, the last wire was known as the Christ Almighty Wire. The aircraft were guided on their approach by a batsman who stood on a platform on the port side opposite the touch down point. The batsman held two bats like large table tennis bats which were used to signal the necessary correction to the approach. Once the aircraft was lined up with the deck on the final part of the approach the pilot lost sight of the deck and relied on the batsman's signal to cut power or go round again. The batsman was a trained pilot and he was responsible for the safe landing of every aircraft.

In the evening there was a dance in Invergordon which many of the crew attended. We went along, the band were quite good but when they took a break for drinks Johnny Palmer took over on the piano and Johnny Lovell borrowed a trumpet, they were great and when the band returned the sailors would not let them take over the piano and Johnny Palmer played on for a long time.

Next day we sailed down Chromarty firth into the Morray Firth, some Sea Furies flew off then five or six Fireflies from their training base joined the circuit for their first attempts at deck landings. We were allowed to watch from the island which gave us a perfect view of proceedings. There were no accidents which we were told was unusual, but there were three Christ Almighty Wires and the batsman certainly earned his keep. One aircraft never did manage to land and after three very dangerous looking attempts he was waved off and told to return to base. *Thesius* returned to Chromarty Firth in the evening and we caught the night train back to Cranwell and then proceeded on Easter break.

The summer term our final term at Cranwell. Now it was time to order our Officers uniforms from the military tailors who came to the College once a week, Moss Bros, Gieves ,Burberry and Bates the hatters were represented. I chose Gieves for my uniform and Bates for my No one hat, We received a uniform allowance when we were commissioned and of course the military tailors were looking for long term customers.

Flying this term was programmed to complete our training and test our ability. The programmes of dive bombing, low level bombing, aircraft versus aircraft quarter attacks were completed and each was tested. The Instrument flying test involved an instrument take off, the satisfactory completion of a series of climbing and descending turns, recovery from unusual positions and finally a Standard Beam Approach. Night flying included a night cross country and a diversion and landing at Coningsby. Finally towards the end of term we were allocated a few general handling sorties to brush up on aerobatics forced landings, short take offs and landings prior to final handling tests. I thought that my final handling test went reasonably well, but two days later I found myself programmed to fly with the Wing Commander who usually flew with those being considered for suspension. I asked Kefford why I was flying with the CFI, he claimed not to know but told me not to worry. The trip seemed to go quite well and the Wg Cdr was quite complementary about my flying. Next day I was called into his office, he told me that I was one of the four cadets considered to be the best on the course and that having flown with all four he had decided that that I would be awarded the Groves Memorial Trophy which was awarded to the best pilot on the course. This came as a great surprise to me because whilst I knew that I was doing quite well I had no means of knowing how I compared with everyone else. Kefford was delighted and admitted that he knew why I had to fly with the Wg Cdr but thought it best not to tell me, how right he was.

Quite a lot of time was spent on the parade ground in preparation for our graduation parade, also final exams for all our ground school subjects. Fittings for our new uniforms were completed and we took delivery of the uniforms which we wore for the first time on graduation day. A couple of days before graduation the NCO instructors threw a party for their students at a pub in a village near Sleaford, a lot of beer was drunk and for the first time Keffor told me what he thought of my flying and expressed his delight that I had won the Groves Memorial Trophy, he was really responsible for my progress and I told him so and thanked him, That was the last time I saw Kefford, I never did get to know his Christian name he was always Keff to everyone.

My total flying hours on graduation were 108 hours dual, 102 hours solo and 16 hours night flying and I was assessed as above the average

The reviewing officer for our graduation parade was Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Trenchard, known as the Father of the RAF as he formed the RAF from the Royal Flying Corps at the end of WW 1 and had been responsible for setting up the College at Cranwell.

We graduated on the 27 July 1949, Mum, Dad, Shirley, Ni , Jean and Viv came to the parade and the ball in the evening. I do not remember much about the parade other than receiving my wings and the Groves Memorial Trophy, when I examined the winners names engraved on the plinth, I found that Batchy had won it in 1924. Immediately after the parade a formation

aerobatic team, from Horsham St Faith near Norwich, gave a splendid display, little did I know that I would be flying Meteors in four months time. The ball in the evening was excellent and I think everyone enjoyed it, I know Viv and I did.

I do not recall much about the five weeks I spent at home prior to going to my next stage of training, Viv was a trainee nurse at Birmingham General Hospital, we went out together whenever she had some time off which was not very often.

Chapter 4 - Thorney Island No 63 Squadron

I was due to report to the Spitfire OCU at Chivenor at the end of August. However, towards the end of August, I received a letter from Air Ministry, informing me that my posting to Chivenor was cancelled and detaching me with effect from 13 September to No 63 Squadron Thorney Island, pending posting to a Meteor Advanced Flying School. I had no idea where Thorney Island was but the first



class railway warrant accompanying the letter was from Sutton Coldfield to Havant via Waterloo. Arriving at Havant station I was met by RAF transport, about four miles from the station we crossed a causeway, the road ran past the domestic site and right across the main runway where traffic lights operated from Air Traffic Control ensured that vehicles were stopped to allow aircraft to take off and land.. The officer's mess and officer's married quarters were situated on the South side of the airfield amongst some trees near the sea. I booked into the mess and was delighted to find Denis Mc Afee who had just arrived, we changed into uniform and got a lift back across the airfield to Station Headquarters. Having booked in and filled up all the arrival forms we were told to report to 63 Sqn.

When we got to the Sqn Hangar there was only one Warrant Officer pilot in the Sqn offices. He told us that the Sqn had gone off on a sortie at 1500 hrs and should have landed at 1555. They had homed above 8/8 cloud cover to overhead Thorney and commenced a snake descent, ATC had lost contact with them and they were overdue. Later in the evening it transpired that the Squadron had landed at three disused airfields in Normandy. Next day we learned that the squadron had descended from overhead in a Southerly direction then turned in-bound , when they broke cloud at three thousand feet instead of being over the sea they were over countryside it became obvious that they were over France and as they were running short of fuel they landed on three disused wartime airfields. It was subsequently found that an un-forecast jet stream of 150 kts had been blowing from the north.

When the CO Sqn Ldr Roy Morant interviewed us he said that our Meteor conversion course was due to start on 1st November and he hoped we would be posted to 63 when we had qualified on Meteors. In the meantime we were to make ourselves useful, scrounge whatever flying we could on the Station Flight Oxford and he would try to fix a trip for us in the

Squadron Meteor 7.

The Thorney wing was one of three wings in Southern Sector, Tangmere, two Meteor Sqns, Odiham two Vampire Sqns and Thorney three Meteor Sqns: 56, 222 and 63. We attended aircrew briefings, learned how to do daily and pre flight inspections and watched the aircraft taking off and landing. We became used to the smell of burning kerosene, like hundreds of primus stoves, so different from the smell of high octane fuel.

Thorney Island was rightly known as the country club of the Royal Air Force it was in a delightful situation; sailing dinghies were tied up at a jetty within a stone's throw of the front door of the mess, squash and tennis courts were also in the mess grounds. I played a lot of rugby whilst I was at Thorney, although Thorney was in Fighter Command we were only attached and were still on the strength of Training Command so I played for Training Command in the command championships which we won at the end of November. I had a trial for the RAF team immediately after the Command finals. Most mornings I went for a training run on the airfield before breakfast, there were loads of lovely mushrooms on the airfield which I dropped off in the mess kitchen on my way for a shower, there were always plenty of mushrooms to go with everyone's bacon and egg.

Denis and I got several trips in the Oxford to Tangmere, Hurn, Odiham and then at the beginning of October I got my first trip in a Meteor with Tim McElhaw who was subsequently to be my best man. The trip was a revelation, this was the first time I used oxygen, we lined up on the runway, no vibration, huge acceleration and rate of climb, before I got my bearings we were passing 20,000ft, we went on to 40,000 where with no cloud cover we could see across the Isle of Wight right along the south coast to Cornwall. We flew around, did some aerobatics, here the G forces were very much higher than I had previously experienced, but the power and aileron control made aerobatics easy once you got used to the large amount of sky required to carry out maneuvers in the vertical plane. We flew to overhead Thorney at about 25000ft Tim throttled back. Put out the air brakes and in about two minutes we were down wind to land.



Chapter 5 - No 203 AFS Driffield

After the usual train journey via Waterloo, Kings Cross and York, Denis and I arrived at Driffield on 11th October. The airfield seemed very busy, Meteors and Vampires taking off and landing. We found that our accommodation was in wooden huts next to the Mess, we had individual rooms but they were cold and the bedding damp. Each room had a stove which we lit immediately and spread the bedding out to air. In the mess that evening we found all our colleagues from Cranwell who had been selected for fighters: Bob Price, Bruce George, Clive Francis, Lionel Taylor, Nigel Bain, Johnny Lovell.

The first two weeks were ground school, explanations of how the jet engine worked and how to get any range from the fuel available you had to fly at high altitude. Problems arising from high altitude flying, need for oxygen, affect of rapid change of altitude on ears, sinus and gut. We were put in a decompression chamber to learn at first hand the effect of lack of oxygen and we were to discover that you could easily pass out from lack of oxygen without realizing, any feeling of drowsiness or lack of concentration, first check your oxygen supply and connections and if still in doubt select emergency oxygen. When oxygen was switched off some could go as high as 30,000ft without passing out, some passed out at 15,000. We were to learn that the Meteor V11 was not pressurized but the Meteor 1V was; thus the effects of altitude were exacerbated in the Mk V11 and high altitude flying was more tiring as a result. Cockpit heating was poor in the Mk V11 and not much better in the MKIV fortunately you were never at altitude for very long but it was long enough to have trouble with ice on the canopy and windscreen when joining the circuit and landing

There were lectures on the aircraft hydraulic and fuel systems and emergencies, starting and relighting the engines asymmetric flying, safety speeds and critical speeds, in the event of fuel shortage you flamed out one engine and made the fuel for that engine available to the live engine by pulling up a balance cock which connected the two tanks.

Abandoning the aircraft involved jettisoning the canopy reducing speed rolling the aircraft inverted and dropping out, ejection seats were not yet available and chances of bailing out were not good.

The AFS had been set up at Driffield to convert pilots to jet aircraft. The instructors were a mixed bunch, all were experienced instructors but few had much experience of jet aircraft, my first instructor had been on Oxfords and had recently completed the jet conversion course at Driffield

Driffield had a good 2,000 yd runway and about twenty miles away on the coast at Carnaby was a huge wartime emergency runway, over 3,000 yds long and 200 yds wide, it was the ideal bolt hole if you could not get into Driffield. Those responsible for controlling flying at Driffield and particularly Air Traffic Control were not geared up to handling Jet aircraft with limited endurance and the difficulties of carrying out circuits in conditions of low cloud and poor visibility. The Meteor had no navigation aids and the only means of finding your way back to base if you could not see the ground was to call for a steer from the VHF homer. This was a manual homer operated by an airman, it was slow and depended very much on the

skill of the operator, who if he was not on the ball could easily give you a reciprocal bearing. This system was later replaced by CRDF which gave an instant bearing on a cathode ray tube. The normal method of recovery was to request a QGH, a high level controlled descent run by air traffic approach control, you were homed to overhead at 25000 to 30,000 ft then turned onto an outbound safety lane and told to make a rapid descent, throttles closed air brakes out, speed 250 kts this produced a rate of descent of about 10,000ft per min, you then turned inbound for the airfield at half your starting height plus 2,000ft, hopefully you should reach 1500 ft about three miles from the airfield allowing you to join the circuit and land.. At that time the Meteor had only one eight channel vhf box, if you lost RT you had a problem

The Meteor was basically a simple aircraft, all manual controls, hydraulics for the undercarriage flaps and airbrakes, pneumatic brakes and the artificial horizon and DI were suction driven. The two engines were Rolls Royce Derwent 3000 lbs thrust and very thirsty.

The engines were easy to start, LP cocks on, HP cocks off throttles closed, booster pumps on trolley ac plugged in and external power on. Press the starter button for port engine, the engine wound up, the HP cock was slowly opened, the igniters sparked and the engine fired up, a close watch was kept on the Jet Pipe Temperatures {JPT's}, the revs should slowly increase if the JPT,s rose too rapidly and a deep rumbling came from the engine the opening of the HP cock had to be checked, the engine settled down to idling RPM and JPT's, check the turbine bearing oil pressure, flight instruments erected, air brakes and flaps for operation wave away the chocks move forward, check the brakes, which were pneumatic. The Meteor had a nose wheel the view from the cockpit was excellent and taxiing with the help of brakes was easy

We started converting to the Meteor on 1st November, my first instructor had recently converted from Oxfords, he was not happy on the Meteor and did not inspire confidence. The weather was normal for that time of the year, lots of rain and low cloud. The first trip was general familiarization, climb to 30000 ft, high speed run to M.79 the controls went stiff and the aircraft juddered a bit like a stall, air brakes out to recover we then homed to overhead followed by a controlled descent breaking cloud at 2500 we eventually saw the bright sodium lights down either side of the runway, two or three circuits and roller landings illustrated that a much larger circuit was needed than with the Harvard, also that there was a considerable delay between opening the throttle and getting thrust from the engine, until you got used to this there was a tendency to make unnecessarily large throttle movements.

On my third sortie I was shown asymmetric circuits and an overshoot on one engine the instructor applied full power on the live engine, retracted the undercarriage and flaps, I noticed that he had left the air brakes out, as we flew past Drifffield church spire with lots of puffing from the back I said that I was impressed that we were managing to hold height with the air brakes out, there was a muttered oath from the back the air brakes popped in and we started climbing. When practicing single engine landings with an instructor, one engine was throttled back and the appropriate rudder trim applied, having flown the circuit and touched down the instructor wound the trim off then you opened both throttles and took off again, known as a roller landing.

I did not have much trouble with flying the Meteor the only real problems were shortage of fuel and the need to fly quite large circuits, the best piece of advice my instructor gave me

was if the visibility was bad, to watch out for the large garage roof painted black and white when flying down wind, complete down wind vital actions and once level with the garage start a descending turn towards the runway heading about three quarters of the way round the turn onto the runway heading the runway sodium lights should show up.

After three hours and thirty five minutes I was sent solo in the Mk V11, I had taken off and was climbing to 30.000 when the tower told me to return to base and land, I did a controlled descent when I got back to Driffield there was patchy low cloud at 600 feet and my instructors advice about the garage was very valuable, I managed to land off my first approach. Four days



later I did my first solo in the Meteor 1V single seater. The Mk 1V was much nicer to fly having a pressurized cockpit and a better heating system. Those students who were destined for vampire Squadrons did all their solo flying on the vampire Mk 111, the majority of Vampire Squadrons were overseas with the exception of two Squadrons at Odiham.

Next there were several asymmetric flying exercises, a dual exercise to establish critical speeds on one then practice single engine overshoots finishing with a single engine landing, when practicing solo the engine was always throttled back rather than flamed out..

I was sent off to repeat this exercise solo in a MK 1V and was very lucky not to kill myself. I did an approach with the starboard engine throttled back with the intention of overshooting on the port engine. When I reached the point to overshoot I opened up full power on the port engine and full port rudder trim was wound on to counter the live engine after selecting full power on the port engine the aircraft started to swing violently to port, I remember seeing the airman dive out of the runway caravan, the port wing went down and came very close to the grass, by this time I realized that I had almost full power on the Starboard engine, which I throttled back sufficiently to regain directional control, by this time I was pointing straight at the control tower which I passed over with about twenty feet to spare. I was told to land immediately, I told the tower that I would carry out a further circuit to work out what had gone wrong. I quickly realized that the cuff of my battle dress had caught on the starboard throttle, when I selected full power on the port engine, hence totally unexpected power from the starboard engine. The particular Mk 1V I was flying had very little throttle friction. The enquiry into my incident resulted in a very rapid issue of flying suits to all students

The whole emphasis on the practice of single engine flying on Meteors resulted in a significant number of fatal accidents. The Derwent engine was extremely reliable and I never knew of anyone who had to do a single engine landing due to engine failure, only occasionally failure to re-light an engine necessitated a single engine landing.

After my incident I was allocated a new instructor, Joe Blythe who had done a tour on a

Meteor Squadron, he was excellent and I thoroughly enjoyed the remainder of the course which included a lot of instrument flying, two high level cross countries and quite a lot of formation flying.

One of our course was killed in an unfortunate accident. He had taken off in a Meteor 1V to do a high level cross country, shortly after take off he went into low cloud, Air Traffic asked him to check that his ventral tank was switched on and fuel transferring, the Meteor dived out of the low cloud into the ground. It was concluded that the pilot had leant forward to check the ventral tank, a few seconds distraction could have caused disorientation with fatal results. It was standard procedure at Driffield to request a ventral tank check after a student had forgotten to switch his tank on. A little more consideration on the part of air traffic may have made all the difference

The weather during our time at Driffield was pretty poor, you were nearly always short of fuel when you arrived back in the circuit, 40 gallons of fuel were required for each engine to complete an overshoot and landing. In all I did 18 hours and 10 minutes dual and 10 hours and 25 minutes solo. Whilst at Driffield Bruce George and I played Rugger for Flying Training Command in the inter command final which we won, We also played in a trial for the RAF rugby team. We completed the course on 7 December and were posted to No 226 Operational Conversion Unit Stradishall.

Chapter 6 - No 226 Operational Conversion Unit Stradishall.

After a rather tedious train journey via York and Cambridge we arrived at Haverhill, about twenty miles due East of Cambridge, we were met by RAF transport, it was a pitch black night and the journey seemed to go on for ever. Stradishall was a remote airfield in the middle of the Suffolk countryside, it is now a prison and was much like one then if you did not have your own transport.



Shortly after our arrival at Stradishall Bruce George and I were selected to play for the RAF against The Club Sportife de Lyons. This was a charity match to raise funds to build a monument to the Maquis who had been killed in the region, many of them helping RAF aircrew to escape. This was a very big occasion in the south of France and we played in a large stadium in Lyon filled to capacity. We found that most of the French national team had been borrowed for the occasion. I found myself marking Permathious the French right wing threequarter. It was a very hard game which they won, I cannot remember the score but it was very close. Fifty five years later James came across the memorial which was built from the proceeds of the match.

Stradishall was a difficult airfield to find, situated in open countryside with no distinguishing features near it, in addition the homer was poor, slow and occasionally gave reciprocal bearings, the weather was pretty bad throughout our time there. One member of our course got lost and ran out of fuel, he put the Meteor down on one of the huge unplowed stubble fields, ended up in a stack of straw and walked away without a scratch.

One member of our course was Jo, a Dutch man, the RCAF had Meteors. The press at that time were making a great fuss about a Panda in London zoo which was starving because it would only eat bamboo shoots which were not available. Jo was reading the paper at breakfast one morning, when the waiter asked him what he wanted for breakfast he replied, I cannot make a decision like that until I find out how the poor bloody Panda is.



We started flying when the weather became suitable on 19 December, after a solo sector recce most of our flying was pairs doing cine attacks, high and level quarter attacks, then we did cine attacks on a towed drogue in preparation for air to air firing but we never did the air to air firing because the weather kept us grounded for much of the time. We went home for Christmas, bus to London train home.

A great Christmas, Bleary stayed with us, he had just graduated from Cranwell and of course we all played in the Boxing day rugby game and drank too much beer. Ni and Jean Viv and I went to the usual Christmas dances. This was the last time I saw Bleary. We went back to Stradishall immediately after Christmas, there was a big New Year Ball but it was quite impossible for Viv to get across. Denis and I propped up the bar, poor old Denis drank sherry all evening, I thought he was going to die next morning, his batman insisted that he drank a bloody Mary with a raw egg and he made an immediate recovery.

The New Year brought more poor weather, the Wing Commander Flying expressed his displeasure in his usual fashion. Wing Commander Mackenzie was a great character known throughout the Air Force as stuttering Mac he had the most awful stutter. He had been shot down in 1940 in a sweep over France, taken prisoner, he decided to work repatriation by developing a stutter. He convinced the Germans that the stutter was the result of being shot down, having decided that he would be no use to the RAF he was repatriated. Once he got home Mac simply could not get rid of his stutter, the only words which flowed freely were swear words, when Mac got on the RT the air turned blue,

Early in January Bruce George and myself were selected to play for the RAF against Swansea, Stuttering Mac a rugby fanatic made sure that we got time off and transport to Haverhill. WE traveled to London on the Friday, stayed in the RAF Club then met up with the team at Paddington for the train to Swansea. It was a great game, I scored the winning try

and when we ran off the field shortly after, a few empty beer bottles came in my direction.

On the return journey I got into conversation with Eric Rossiter a Sergeant armourer who played wing forward, he told me he had a Riley 9 which he had stripped down to rebuild, his wife had recently had a baby and he had decided to sell the car, I bought it for £47 and having rebuilt it with the help of Ni and Mike it lasted me for 8 years The Riley known as the Heap, registration NV 317 was initially rebuilt as an open four seater. It had a crash gear box, overhead valves, a magneto, gravity feed fuel system and a thermo siphon cooling system



by 1952 it had developed a hood and side-screens then after Philippa was born I bought a fabric bodied saloon Riley 9 HOB 221 and installed the Heap's engine . It lasted us until 1957 when we replaced it with a new Morris minor traveler. Viv sold HOB to a drunk for £45.

The weather did not improve in January flying, we practiced cine attacks then snow closed the airfield and on 17 January it was decided that we should go to our squadrons. I did a total of 1.30 dual and 5.30 solo.

Chapter 7 - 63 Squadron - Thorney Island

Denis and I went on leave and reported to 63 Sqn at Thorney Island on 13 February where we immediately started flying with the Squadron. Thorney was a great fighter base, easy to find, just East of the Isle of Wight. It had a good homer and an excellent senior air traffic control officer, Firey Phillips, who frequently controlled the recovery of 30 Meteors after an exercise. Denis and I were introduced to



interceptions under the control of the Sector Operations Centre at Sopley, air to ground firing at Chesil Bank, Ground Controlled Approaches at Hurn. Lots of formation flying, battle formation and operating as no two or four in Squadron formations. The runways were a little shorter than we had been used to at Driffield and Stradishall, 1,800 yds but the approaches were completely unobstructed, over mud flats when the tide was out. We did our first night flying on Meteors at the end of February, the airfield lighting and approach lights were good and there was no problem.

I played a couple of games of rugby for the RAF against London Welsh and the Harlequins and was due to play against the Army on a Saturday at the beginning of March, unfortunately I got my collar bone badly broken in a station cup game on the Wednesday before the big match, this had the added disadvantage of putting me off flying for a month.

By April I had recovered and was back flying. We all had to climb to 40,000 feet over the Channel and fire our guns, there was no obvious difference from firing the guns at low level and we were a little mystified. Two weeks later the CinC Air Marshal Sir Basil Embry visited Thorney, he came into the crew room and had a chat with all of us. As he was leaving he turned to one of the Sergeant Pilots and asked him when he last fired his guns at 40,000 ft!

One day a pair of us were returning to Thorney after a high level exercise, approaching the Isle of Wight we saw the Queen Elizabeth steaming towards Southampton, we gave it a high speed fly past. Towards the end of the month we were involved in a large air defence exercise, in which we were held on readiness then scrambled under the control of Sopley to intercept raids from France. They turned out to be Dutch and Belgian Meteors, on another occasion I was vectored onto two Hornets flying very low and fast.

In the middle of April we were told that the Wing was to move, 56 and 63 Squadron to Waterbeach near Cambridge and 222 Sqn to Leuchars near St Andrews. A large farewell Ball was held early in May, Viv and Denis's sister Pat came, they stayed in a hotel in Havant as did most of the girl friends, it was a splendid night. The next morning Viv and I caught a train to London where we spent the day seeing the sights, then Viv caught the train back to Birmingham and I returned to Thorney. It was about this time that I received a letter from Bleary telling me that he had completed his jet conversion course at Driffield and been posted to a Vampire squadron in Malta.

Chapter 8 – 63 Squadron - Waterbeach

On 10 May 1950 the Squadron moved to Waterbeach, we were very sorry to leave Thorney. Waterbeach was about six miles North of Cambridge on the Ely road. The station commander Group Captain Micky Mount DSO DFC was an ex Battle of Britain pilot who had shot down several aircraft. Micky, a charming man who everyone respected, had a bad stutter which could be rather awkward when he was taking a parade but it never seemed to bother him when he was on the RT.



The station had been built immediately prior to the war in the middle of Chivers fruit orchards. It had been a bomber station during the war then it was taken over by transport command, their Dakotas being heavily involved in the Berlin airlift. With flat countryside good line features, from the wash large drainage ditches and railway lines, Ely Cathedral a prominent landmark all helped to make Waterbeach relatively easy to find in bad weather. There was a good 2,000yd runway, the Ely road ran across the end of the runway with a large deep ditch between the runway and the road. Several meteors ended up in the ditch during my time at Waterbeach. There was good airfield lighting, but the approach lighting was the old drem funnel satisfactory for an aircraft doing a long straight approach where a series of lights formed a funnel leading to the airfield, if however you were doing a tight circuit in bad visibility the funnel lights were more confusing than helpful. A single line of lights leading to the runway with a series of cross bars forming a series of T s were the replacement for the funnel but they were not installed during my time at Waterbeach,

During our first eight months a large construction programme took place building operational readiness platforms at both ends of the main runway. These allowed ten aircraft to hold readiness at the end of the runway with unobstructed access for a rapid take off. The aircraft were plugged into telebrief allowing the sector operations centre to talk to pilots on cockpit readiness and scramble them. Large concrete servicing areas were built in front of the squadron hangars, where the aircraft were lined up for normal flying. All this construction work took place whilst both squadrons were operating full time.

Soon after we arrived the squadrons were issued with the new Land Rover, they were used for Squadron transport and replaced the bicycle and the old tractor for towing aircraft from the hanger to the ASP and the ORP. We worked a five and a half day week, Saturday morning was make do and mend, aircraft cleaning, compass swings and air tests, every fourth weekend was a long weekend starting at four o'clock on Friday. Although it was only about 100 miles from Waterbeach to Sutton. It was an awful journey by train. Ben Benfield's parents lived near Shrewsbury and he dropped me off at home a couple of times.

We found during May that The American Strategic Air Command were deploying a number of B 29 Squadrons to the UK, Lakenheath, Mildenhall, Upper Heyford, Duxford, to name a few. We frequently took part in interception exercises with the B 29 s usually at 40,000 ft.

We favoured head on attacks which were tricky, with the high closing speeds and the problem of high speed stalls if you were too ham fisted on the break away .,

We did a lot of formation flying, take offs and landings, and high level battle formation, finger fours and crossover turns. Take off in pairs increased the rate at which large numbers could be scrambled. The first pair held down, the next pair pulled up through the slipstream and so on. Pairs landing were not difficult for single pairs but when pairs were landing at ten second intervals slipstream or jet wash from the pair in front made the final part of the landing quite exciting.

In June a GCA, ground controlled approach radar was deployed to Waterbeach. The chief controller who had been at Gatow controlling during the Berlin air lift. Dicky Rogers was an ace controller. I got to know Dicky well and developed implicit faith in his directions, the break off limit was 250 ft and half a mile when his instruction was look ahead for the runway and land but he would continue to talk you down if you requested and he would talk you right down to the ground.

After a hard days flying it was great to go out to the local pubs on summer evenings The village of Waterbridge was a small agricultural, village which had a good pub by the river, The Bridge at Fenditon. Cambridge which we got to know well was a beautiful place with a fabulous selection of pubs both in the city and in the local countryside. Tim McElhaw made what he called the social diary, this was a list of pubs one for each day of the month, the idea being that the named pub would be the meeting place for all those members of the Squadron who wanted to go out for a drink. Only six of the eighteen pilots were married so there were always several keen to go out for a drink on the long summer evenings, the Ferry at Fenditton was one of our favorites. Several of the bachelors had cars so there was always sufficient transport. We often ended up at the Bridge, the Cambridge Ely railway line ran close to the pub and there was a level crossing on the road back through the village to the base. The last train from Cambridge passed through the level crossing just after closing time, so the gates were usually closed when we left the pub. The cars would line up right across the road then when the gates opened it was a race back to the mess. About 400 yds from the gates the road turned right into the village and the village bobby who was used to stand on the corner and waved us on if the road was clear.

One evening when we were leaving the Bridge Mike Beeching spotted a steam roller parked in a side road near the level crossing, the fire had been banked down for the night. Beeching stoked the boiler then, when he had a good head of steam, he drove the roller back to Waterbeach and rolled the lawn in front of the mess. Not content with this he proceeded to roll the Station Commanders lawn. Micky Mount came out of his quarter and told Mike Beeching “ take that thing back and report to my office in the morning.”

It was probably mid May when Exercise Fabulous was brought in, secret at the time, four aircraft were required to be available for immediate scramble from half an hour before sunrise to half an hour after sunrise. Pilots had to be at cockpit readiness, guns were armed and cocked. The same applied at the end of the day, half an hour before sunset to half an hour after sunset. Fabulous was not too demanding, it involved 63 Squadron one week in eight, as there being eight fighter squadrons in our sector. We were scrambled from time when the Sector Operations Centre had an aircraft which it could not positively identify. One evening

two of us were scrambled and vectored onto an aircraft at about 10,000 ft, we identified it as a B29 and were told to close in and report the tail number. As we closed the aircraft dived into cloud and as it was getting dark we were recalled to base. When we were debriefed we learned that the Russians were believed to be using their version of the B29, the Tu4, to do reconnaissance, possibly monitoring our control channels or even over-flying some of the B29 bases, The Tu4 was a straight copy of the B29 but the engines were Russian Ash 73 which produced the same power as the American Wright Cyclone engines. The Russians decided to copy the B29 in 1945 and the first one flew in 1947. I saw a Tu4 when I visited the Russian Air Force museum at Monino with Fiona some 50 years later

The UK Air Defence System had run down since the end of the war. In view of a new threat from Russia identification procedures were tightened up and the Rotor Plan was implemented. The radar ground environment was completely rebuilt new Master Radar Stations were built with T80 radars control facilities were put in underground bunkers with their own standby power supplies, air filtration plants, ground to air radio facilities were improved and tele-brief direct from the controller to wing ops at the fighter base and crews in the cockpit.



Fighter Command was a large organization at this time. There were a total of 6338 aircraft, 21 regular day fighter squadrons, 12 Auxiliary Squadrons equipped with Meteors and 12 Night fighter squadrons equipped with Meteors, I think there were also three Vampire day fighter squadrons and one or two Venom night fighter Squadrons.

The ground crew on 63 were a good bunch, the airmen were mostly national service. The NCOs were nearly all ex apprentices, engines, airframe, radio, instruments and armourers, the salt of the earth. Many of them were Geordies or Glaswegians, who had joined the RAF as boy apprentices in the 30s after the depression, excellent tradesmen, what they could not repair they could make from basics. Chiefy Doig was the SNCO in charge, day to day he was the scruffiest looking bloke in an oily battle dress, but he had his finger on the pulse and would work all night to have a full complement of aircraft serviceable for the next day. It was difficult to recognize Chiefy when he turned out immaculate for a Saturday morning parade, he had wings and a DFM. After completing his apprentice training Chiefy had volunteered for aircrew, he went onto fighters and had been shot down over France in 1943 when he was flying one of the new Westland Whirlwinds, he spent the rest of the war in a prison of war camp. When he was repatriated he reverted to his original trade of engine fitter. The advantages of having an ex pilot running aircraft servicing and maintenance were great “ground tested and found serviceable” was not acceptable to Chiefy Doig

We did regular air to ground gunnery training about two days every month. The range was at Holbeach on the southern shores of the Wash. The Meteor packed a good punch with its four twenty mm cannons in the nose, it was a stable platform and our air to ground scores were quite good.

We had a summer ball in July, Viv managed to make it after a terrible train journey from Birmingham via Bletchly, Denis went into Cambridge to meet her because I was flying in the afternoon. The ball was a great success and I think Viv thought it was worth the journey.

At the beginning of August the CO Sqn Ldr Roy Morant was posted and he was replaced by Major James O Tyler the first American exchange officer to command an RAF squadron. He had a large American car and introduced the Squadron to popcorn. He had flown over Europe in Mustangs during the war and shot down several German aircraft. Without any navigational aids in the Meteor he had quite a lot of trouble finding his way around. He was said to have called for a steer to base before he got the wheels up.



I had a couple of weeks leave at the beginning of August, Ben who was going home for a long weekend gave me a lift home. I saw Viv whenever she got any time off from nursing but most of my leave was spent getting the heap on the road. Mike and Ni helped me. We built an ash frame and doors which were attached to the scuttle. The frame was covered with light gauge aluminium, the result was a reasonably neat open four seater. There was no hood or side screens at that time but we did make a tonneau cover. The heap went well and we just got it finished in time for me to take it back to Waterbeach at the end of my leave. I insured the car comprehensive, for £ 12-13s-10d.

In the afternoon of 28th August I was briefed to fly as number two to Ben Benfield to do cine quarter attacks. As we taxied out a very black cloud over Oakington looked rather menacing. We did a formation take off and climbed to the North East, as we were passing over Lakenheath at about 20,000ft, air traffic told us to return to base immediately. Turning back towards base the weather looked awful and I suggested to Ben that we should divert to Lakenheath. Unfortunately Ben asked Waterbeach air traffic for permission to divert instead of telling them that we were diverting. Air traffic said negative, return to base immediately.. Ben put me into line astern, air brakes out and dived towards Ely Cathedral which we could see clearly, from Ely we followed the Cam at low level towards Naterbeach, by now we were down to 800ft just below the cloud it was almost black and the rain was torrential. It was impossible to see anything in front but looking down we could see that we were right over the airfield. Ben turned down wind he was close to the runway in order to keep it in sight, I pulled out about 200yds outside Ben. I could not see the runway, when Ben turned finals towards the runway I turned as well, he kept tightening his turn then he realized that he would

not get lined up so he called overshooting as I was inside him I kept turning and descending, at about 300ft I saw a blurr of sodiums which had to be the runway, the landing was rather heavy, initially the aircraft aquaplaned then heavy braking to avoid the ditch at the end of the runway, I think the depth of water on the runway helped to slow me down. As I cleared the runway I heard Ben asking the caravan to fire flares to help him find the runway, I saw the glow of the flare then there was a large flesh, Ben had flown into the ground whilst trying to line up with the runway.

Writing about this some fifty six years later has brought it back as if it was yesterday. Undoubtedly we should never been recalled into a vicious line squall, had we popped our air brakes over Lakenheath we could descend at 20,000 ft/min and could have been on the ground in four minutes. Had I not used Ben to displace myself far enough away from the runway in order to allow room for the turn onto finals I would never have got lined up with the runway, I don't know to this day how I managed to land safely.

In September as part of the build up of US forces a Squadron of F 84s arrived and were based with us until their own base was completed.. Rather short of power compared with the Meteor, they staggered off the ground with a full fuel load and took ages to climb to height, however they had a much better range and endurance than the Meteor. They crossed the Atlantic refueling in Greenland and Iceland.

One of the flight commanders, Frank Easley had a Staffordshire Bull Terrier called Winston he hated cats and killed any he came across. One of the SNCO aircrew, Pete Boniface teased Winstone regularly, he would roll up a newspaper and hoot through it. Winston would take a flying leap at the paper and tear it to pieces.

We had a major autumn exercise in September Exercise Emperor. Large marquees were put up near the end of the runways and we lived in these when brought to ten minutes alert. Winston was always brought to the marquee. If we were scrambled Frank would tie him up, when we returned Winston was always missing having chewed through the lead or rope. Pete Boniface solved the problem, he untied a guy rope shook it and gave the loose end to Winston who immediately grabbed the rope and tried to pull the marquee down. We were scrambled and when we returned thirty five minutes later Winston was still pulling away at the rope. There-after Winston was always secured in this way. My log book shows that we were scrambled six times over a period of seven days I cannot remember what we intercepted, possibly B50's and B29s

Denis McAfee was detached to Leconfield at the beginning of October to do the Pilot Attack Instructors course (PAI). The course which involved gunnery on Meteors and Vampires, lasted about six weeks. I think it was on about the 13 October that we heard that Denis had been killed in a Vampire. All I heard was that he flicked into the ground when pulling up from an air to ground attack. Denis was a good pilot but the only high performance aircraft he had ever flown was the Meteor which was very forgiving, when pulling out you could pull as hard as you liked and if you were inducing a high speed stall it simply juddered and you eased off the pull. I found some five years later that if you high speed stalled the Vampire it flicked and I think this must have happened to Denis. He should have been properly briefed before he was sent off in the Vampire and I can only presume that he was not warned of this characteristic of the Vampire. Denis's death was a great blow to me as we had been close

friends since we joined the Air Force and I knew his family well. I went to the funeral at Leconfield, it was a very distressing occasion. Mr McAfee wrote to me afterwards thanking me for my support though I am not sure who was supporting who

On October 24th Tommy Thompson the Wing Commander Flying led the wing, to West Malling where we refueled took off and then joined up with Odiam Vampire wing and several other Meteor wings for a fly past over Buckingham Palace for the King's birthday. The Waterbeach wing leading the fly past. Wing Commander J W Thompson DSO DFC and Bar AFC, always known as Tommy had flown Hurricanes in France at the start of the war. He flew Spitfires in the Battle of Britain, then operated over France as a Wing Leader before going to Malta as Wing leader at Luqa, Takali and Hal Far he had shot down eight German aircraft. and shared in the destruction of several more. Tommy a keen rugger player had played for the RAF before the war was very supportive of my need to get off to play rugger. A great character, Tommy made sure that he always led the Wing on any big Exercise, he also aimed to get more flying hours each month than any other pilot on the wing, anyone getting more hours than Tommy ended up as his Adjutant next month which severely limited his flying for the month.

In November we had another fatal accident. An inexperienced NCO pilot who joined the squadron in August. I cannot remember his name, a Brit whose family lived in Peru. He crashed into the ground East of Ely. We was doing a QGH through thick cloud and either lost control whilst doing a descending turn or miss read his altimeter. When doing a QGH you descended at about 20,000 ft /min the altimeter unwound at a tremendous rate, the tens of thousands were indicated by a small needle which was easy to miss read with the result that you could be at 0 ft instead of 10,000ft, the altimeters were subsequently modified to give a digital read out for 10s of thousands of feet.

It was in November that I became aware of Jet streams. Len Smith and I were briefed to do quarter attacks at 40,000ft. Shortly after we settled down at 40,000 ft we ran into extreme turbulence, it was so bad that our heads were being banged on the canopies, our voices sounded strange on the R/T as we were being shaken about so much. After two attacks I called for a steer from Waterbeach, to my surprise the bearing was 345 when I had expected it to be 180. I decided to descend to get out of the turbulence and we got clear of it at 15,000 ft, still homing at 25,000 ft we were getting short of fuel. When we eventually reached Waterbeach we just had enough fuel to land.. The met office decided that the jet stream must have been 150 knots from the North West and we must have been blown well over the Channel.

Now that I had the heap I was able to get home for long weekends and Viv usually managed to get some time off from the hospital. Leaving Waterbeach on a Friday evening I would see probably two or three cars and the odd lorry between Cambridge and Huntingdon. It is nose to tail cars today. Between Huntingdon and Lutterworth there was scarcely any traffic, then there were always some vehicles on the A5 but by today's standards the roads were empty. I clearly recall driving back to Waterbeach late one night in the winter and the only cars I saw were in Cambridge.

In December we started to re-equip with Meteor 8s, I went to the MU at Llandow to collect

one of the first. The Mk 8 was a great improvement on the Mk 4 in that it had an ejection seat which for the first time gave the pilot a reasonable chance of getting out of the aircraft in the event of an emergency. The Mk 8 also had a modified tail which gave it higher critical Mach number of .8 and larger air intakes improved the thrust.

There was a really good Christmas Ball in the Mess which Viv managed to get to after an awful railway journey from Birmingham via Bletchley to Cambridge. There was a week's leave for Christmas which I can remember little about except that Viv was on duty at the hospital on Christmas Day.

I think that it was at the end of December that we had another fatal accident. Another NCO Pilot, George Baldwin, a Canadian and a much liked and capable member of the Squadron. He had been on a night cross country. On descending he must have iced up badly. He was cleared to land from a GCA about three quarters of the way down the runway he ran into the back of a 56 Sqn aircraft which had obviously stopped short because he was iced up and could not see the turn off. The impact caused George, who would have had his hand on the throttles, to push the throttles open the result was that George's aircraft with the 56 aircraft on top of him ran forward into the ditch at the end of the runway where it burst into flames. George was trapped in the wreckage and there was no way of getting him out. The 56 aircraft was thrown across the ditch and ended up on the Ely road. The crash crews got the pilot out of his aircraft apparently uninjured. He was put in an ambulance and sent to Ely Hospital, unfortunately the driver got lost and took over an hour to do the twenty minute journey. The pilot died of shock shortly after reaching the hospital. It was said that had he been given a cup of tea in the station medical section he may have survived.

I was on GCA immediately behind George when the accident happened, Dicky Rodgers put me in a holding pattern while ATC checked the runway for wreckage. As I was short of fuel, Dicky made them hurry and when they cleared me to continue my approach they said I was cleared to land with caution and to look out for wreckage on the runway which was a joke because I was badly iced up and could see nothing in the dark but a few runway lights and the huge fire at the end of the runway.

It transpired that the 56 pilot had stopped short of the end of the runway presumably because he was badly iced up and did not want to run into the ditch. ATC cleared George to land without checking that the 56 pilot had cleared the runway. Another Air Traffic Controlled accident.

Chapter 9 - Ferry To Singapore

I did more flying hours in December and January than Tommy Thompson so I qualified for the Flying Wing Adj job in February. At the end of the first week I was packing up at midday on the Saturday morning when a signal arrived from Fighter Command asking for volunteers to ferry Meteor 8s to Singapore. Volunteers had to be current on the aircraft, be able to carry out pre and post flight checks, and do daily inspections, they also had to have current jabs for yellow fever, cholera, jaundice, and TABT. Brian Galletly a pilot on 56 Sqn was in the office, I showed him the signal and said what a shame that we could not get the jabs in time to tell Fighter Command on Monday morning that we were qualified. Brian suggested that he phone his girlfriend who was a sister at Ely RAF hospital. He caught her just as she was going off duty, she agreed that she would fix the jabs if we could get there before 1300. We piled into the heap and made it with five minutes to spare.

At the Monday morning met briefing I gave Tommy the signals which had come in over the weekend. When he read out the request for volunteers he said what a shame no one will be able to get the necessary jabs in time. When Brian and I told him that we had the necessary jabs he raised his eyebrows, then asked me to signal our names to Command. When we returned to his office he asked how we had been able to arrange the jabs at such short notice at midday on a Saturday, when we told him he laughed and said full marks for initiative

I had a session with Chiefy Doig in the afternoon, he briefed me on simple faults and their rectification, how to adjust undercarriage door micro switches which gave trouble and how to ensure that the ventral tank was secure when it was fitted. As there was a history of ventral tanks falling off Meteors because they had not been correctly fitted

We found that the aircraft which were to be ferried had been bought by the Australian government from No 77 Sqn RAAF in Korea which was changing its Mustangs for Meteors. We were to ferry the aircraft from Chivenor to Singapore where a decision would be made either to load the Meteors onto an aircraft carrier or for us to ferry them all the way to Korea.

On the Tuesday Command told us to report to the Overseas Ferry Unit at Chivenor. On the Wednesday Brian and I went to stores and drew some KD; pretty awful but there was no time to go to one of the military tailors, we were told that we could get some decent KD run up in Changi village when we got to Singapore. We caught the train from Cambridge to Barnstable. When we reported to the OFU we found that ten aircraft were to be ferried by five OFU pilots and five squadron pilots who were to fly as number two to the OFU pilots who had no experience on Meteors, to which they had recently converted, but lots of experience of the route to Singapore.

I was paired up With Flight Sergeant Williams a very experienced OFU pilot who had ferried Mosquitos, Brigands and Hornets to Singapore but he had only converted to Meteors the previous week. He welcomed me and said that he hoped that if we had any minor technical troubles on the route I would be able to offer advice. He said that all our staging posts until we reached India had a small detachment of RAF technicians but it was very unlikely that any of them would have seen a Meteor before. He also asked if I would agree to

him helping to fill out my claims form on return, he explained that the claims were complicated and that if the Squadron pilots failed to claim their due it could set a precedent

The Meteors we were to ferry were the latest Mk 8s with larger engine intakes giving more power, spring tabs on the ailerons giving a higher rate of roll and they had two under wing tanks for the ferry.

On 22 February we were briefed for our first leg from Chivenor to Istres near Marsailles. Flight Sergeant Williams had a wet start on his starboard engine and he signaled me to shut down. We watched the eight take off and as pre briefed we were to catch them when we could, hopefully at Fayid in the canal Zone where the ferry was scheduled to spend a day for servicing.

I find that the date of my departure from Chivenor is incorrect, my log book indicates that we night stopped in Istres, this also is incorrect, I can recall making up my log book from the authorization book on return to Chivenor and we must have failed to note our delayed departure.

25 February Leg one Chivenor to Istres 1 hour 40 minutes. Williams' aircraft was finally made serviceable late on 24 Feb and we took off early on 25. I found the aircraft accelerated a little more slowly with the extra fuel load in the under wing tanks. Once airborne they made no noticeable difference to handling. The trip to Istres was uneventful for me the first time I had flown an aircraft to a destination outside the UK. Istres, the French equivalent to Farnborough is a very large airfield with huge runways where we saw some interesting aircraft including a four engined Languedoc with an experimental supersonic ram jet attached piggy back for launch at high altitude.



Leg two Istres to El Ouina 1hour 35 minutes After a good lunch with rather too much red wine we took off on leg two. El Ouina where we landed was the main airport for Tunis. It was a short trip from the airport into the town, but the squalor of the corrugated iron and wooden box shanty town we passed through was an eye opener. In the town the smells of open sewers and bustle of the Arab population were completely new to me. We stayed that night in a three star hotel and arranged to take off early the following day with the intention of completing the next two legs and catching up with the eight at Fayid.

26 February Leg three El Ouina to Castle Benito 50 minutes. Castle Benito now Tripoli airport, was built by Mussolini for the Italian Air force. A good airfield with long runways and excellent stone built accommodation. We went for a quick breakfast, on return to pre flight our aircraft I found a large pool of hydraulic fluid under the ventral tank of my aircraft.

It was obvious that the ventral tank would have to be dropped to find the source of the leak. The Sergeant Airframe fitter who had no experience of Meteors explained that they had no means of pumping the fuel out of the tank which had been filled, he wanted me to fly the aircraft to burn off the fuel. I told him that I would not fly the aircraft because here was every possibility that even if I left the wheels down the flaps would not work. F. Sgt Williams agreed with me. We now had the problem of how to drain the tank which could not be dropped onto a bomb trolley when full. I suggested that the only solution was to take the drain plug out of the tank. The Sergeant finally agreed that this was the only solution, it was decided to tow the aircraft to a remote part of the airfield when it got dark and drain the tank into the sand. Once we got the Meteor back to the RAF detachment's servicing dispersal a bomb trolley were positioned under the tank and the jettison lever was operated dropping the tank.

When the panels were removed the Sergeant soon found the source of the leak was a faulty joint where a nipple had pulled off the hydraulic pipe under pressure. The Sergeant said that he would work on the snag through the night. Williams and I arranged an early call and went to bed. Next morning we found that the fault had been repaired, the hydraulics bled and refilled and the ventral was positioned ready for fitting. The sergeant explained that he had finished the job at about 2 am and managed a few hours sleep. He was satisfied with the repair but would not fit the tank which was secured by a bomb release and he was not sure how to determine that it was secure. This was one of the items which Chiefy Doig had covered I told him that I was prepared to ensure that the tank was fitted correctly and sign the F 700 to that effect. He was delighted and said that he would then sign the aircraft as serviceable. The ventral was filled and we set off on our next leg.

28 Feb Castel Benito to El Adem 1 hour 40minutes. I took off with fingers crossed, if the ventral was going to come off it would happen during take off, Williams kept a check on the tank as we took off and climbed to altitude, all was well. As we leveled off at 40,000 feet the Mediterranean and the North African coast and the Sahara were spread out in front of us. After an hour and twenty minutes we could see Bengazi and commenced a descent into El Adem, which was an RAF base with good runways surrounded by desert. We left our aircraft to be refueled and went to the Met office to check the weather and winds for the next leg to the Canal Zone. Outside the Met office a large piece of sand had been roped off and there was a large sign , KEEP OFF THE GRASS. Outside Station Headquarters was a glass case which contained a beautifully polished and painted lawn mower. El Adem was a staging post which was the base for the RAF desert Rescue team, equipped with Land Rovers (I was to find in 1961 that my navigator Jock Shields commanded the Desert Rescue Team at the time we passed through El Adem). We filed our flight plans in Air Traffic and took off for Fayid at about mid day.

28 Feb El Adem to Fayid 1 hour 10 minutes. Once again we had a fantastic view of North Africa and then the Nile delta, the Nile with agricultural land spreading out into the desert and beyond the Suez canal and the Red Sea. We landed at Fayid a large RAF base, here we were directed to a dispersal near the perimeter. On arrival we were told that the eight had left the previous morning. We planned an early departure the next day to catch up with the ferry. When I got out of my aircraft I asked the Flight Sergeant in charge of the servicing if my aircraft was safe so close to the security fence; " Don't worry sir this dispersal is patrolled by an armed guards and them wogs know they will be shot if they come over the wire " We ate

and slept in the transit mess a rather miserable assortment of huts.

1 March Fayid to Mafraq 40 minutes . We were meant to dog leg to the South round Israel but Williams said it would save some time if we went straight over Israel and they would never get near us with their Spitfires so we over-flew Israel at 40,000 feet, landing at Mafraq in Jordan. It was an undulating sand runway difficult to pick out from the desert. We taxied to a dispersal and were greeted by four RAF ground crew and a very smart Jordanian Officer of the Desert Legion, a force raised by Glub Pasha for King Abdullah of Jordan. Glub was an ex British army officer highly regarded by the King. Some of the Arab Legion rode up on camels to look at our aircraft, they looked very smart wearing their red and white chequered shamaags

1 March Mafraq to Habbaniya 1 hour 10 minutes Habbaniya in Iraq was about 60 miles West of Bagdad , a large RAF base it had been No 4 Flying Training School before and during the war and the scene of heavy fighting during an uprising in 1941 when Rashid Ali, with the help of the German Air Force, attempted to throw the British out of Iraq. The rebellion was defeated .

It was a good flight to Hab, Williams pointed out two oil pipelines to me then we saw the Euphrates and the vegetation which followed its course. After landing we were directed to a dispersal and parked next to the other eight Meteors which we had last seen at Chivenor. The base was neat and tidy and I was impressed by the irrigation system which watered flower beds all over the camp. We were taken to the transit mess where we found the other ferry pilots. Everyone was drinking Pimms which cost six pence per glass and very nice too.

2 March Habanya to Bahrien Island 1 hour 50 minutes. Williams and I were the last pair to take off, there was 8/8ths cloud cover, we went into cloud at about 10,000ft and were still in cloud at 40,000. I stayed with Williams but we never saw the other pairs until we descended to Bahrien. There was quite a lot of chatter on the R/T, as this was our first time with the other aircraft I did not know if this was normal. There were repeated requests for one aircraft to check in and these were not answered. There was quite a lot of turbulence and my throttles iced up so I was forced to keep position with my air brakes. Fortunately the cloud was not very thick and my throttles freed up as we descended. When we landed at Bahrien it was obvious that one of our aircraft was missing, it was declared overdue and a search and rescue operation was mounted. The pilot was from 245 Sqn at Horsham St Faith, I cannot remember his name. No one ever knew for sure what happened to him, no trace of his aircraft has ever been found so it is most likely that it crashed into the Persian Gulf possibly due to the pilot becoming unconscious due to anoxia.

Bahrien was extremely humid, there were fans in the mess this was before air conditioners. I mentioned that the mess walls must have been white-washed that morning because they were still wet. I was told that they had been done two days previously and that they would not dry until the humidity dropped.

2 March Bahrein to Sharjah 50 minutes. Several aircraft had trouble starting because the trolley acs would not produce sufficient current due to the temperature. We eventually started and took off in pairs, we were last as usual. Once again there was complete cloud

cover and we leveled off between two layers of cloud at 30,000. When we started to descend we ran into the most extreme turbulence I have ever experienced, my head banged against the canopy several times. We did not have bone domes at that time and you could see the short stubby wings on the Meteor flexing. We broke cloud over the sea with the desert in front of us, there was a creek with a few dhows, a small group of buildings and slightly to the South the airfield, a long sand runway with a small white fort and a few wooden huts beside it. Fifty three years later Viv and I visited Sharjah with Mike and Sue, the fort was still there surrounded by roads and high rise buildings, the creek was now a busy port with ocean going ships unloading cargo at the dockside.

When we staged through Sharjah, oil had just been discovered in the area, we night stopped sleeping in wooden huts which were incredibly hot, not even any fans. The next morning the sheik and his retinue turned up to see our aircraft and watch us take off. After take off we turned back and did a high speed low level pass for the benefit of the sheik.

3 March Sharjah to Mauripur, (Karachi) 1 hour 40 minutes. Flying at 40,000 ft with no cloud cover we had a fantastic view of the south of Iran and Baluchistan. The mountains of the moon, a most inhospitable region, half way along the coast was an emergency strip, Jiwani, this was manned by a small RAF detachment, we called them and they were most disappointed that we were not landing there. We descended and joined the circuit at Mauripur, as I turned down wind Williams warned me to look out for vultures, he had just missed one. Looking out to my starboard I saw two of the birds they were large and could cause a lot of damage if you hit one.

At Mauripur we were met by the RAAF ground crew who would accompany us for the rest of the trip to Singapore. After seeing us off they would follow in their Dakota to our next staging post. It took them about five times longer to complete the stages. I cannot recall where we stayed in Karachi but I do remember going out into a bazaar in the town in the evening. The multitude of shops and stalls were new to me and the rug shops were particularly appealing. Some of the OFU pilots had bought a case of gin each in Castle Genito for five shillings a bottle and they traded them for some very nice rugs. Gin was worth a lot in the bazaar because there was prohibition, Pakistan being a Moslem country.

4 March Mauripur to Palam Delhi 1 hour 35 minutes, What a vast country, the Himalayas out on our port side, then parched land as far as you could see, some large rivers particularly the Ganges where there was some vegetation but generally once away from the foothills the countryside looked like desert from 40,000ft.

One of the OFU pilots, a New Zealander, did not like the bureaucratic attitude of the Indian customs. When asked if he had any weapons he said yes four 20mm cannon, this caused us endless problems because the officials wanted to remove them and lock them up in bonded store. Finally we cleared customs and immigration and an Indian Air Force officer who was very friendly ran us to the mess and arranged for us to go and see the Taj Mahal, which proved to be very impressive and beautiful. We had our evening meal in the Indian Air Force Officers Mess. I think we all had curry of one sort or another. The Aussie pilot of the Dakota asked for a really hot curry, when he took his first mouthful he choked then grabbed a glass of water which he poured down exclaiming "Jesus Christ!" Tears were pouring down his face and one of the chaps sitting opposite him swore that steam came out of his ears. After

the meal we went to the bar and met some of the IAF officers, several of whom said that things were much better when the Brits were there.

5 March Palam to Barrakpore (Calcutta) 1 hour 55 minutes The next morning having filed flight plans we were sitting in our cockpits waiting to get clearance to start up. It was very hot, eventually it became obvious that we were held for an IAF formation, finally it arrived in the circuit and we were given start up clearance. Blue section called finals, Blue 2 made a terrible landing, New Zealand pipes up on the R/T "Kangaroo Blue 2 you are clear to hop left at the next intersection". Palam ATC were not amused and kept us waiting with engines running for five minutes before clearing us for take off, by this time I was soaked in perspiration.

This was the longest leg of the ferry. Miles and miles of central India with the Himalayas on our Port side. Someone said I can see Everest, I looked but was not sure which was Everest. After an hour it became extremely cold and my flying suit started to freeze to me where it was in shadow. Then a crack started on the left half way up my windscreen and slowly spread across. It was not a very comfortable experience to watch this but it was very thick bullet proof glass and I was pretty sure that it would remain structurally sound. When we were about 60 miles from Calcutta the ferry leader called Calcutta approach for clearance to descend to ten thousand feet. Calcutta said negative, the ferry leader called again stating that we were short of fuel and asking why we could not descend. Approach control again said negative there was conflicting traffic at three thousand feet, the ferry leader replied that he was commencing to descend, approach control said we were not to descend Kiwi piped up, belt up you old char wallah, I am not a char wallah I am the senior air traffic controller. Ferry leader shut up Kiwi. Calcutta this is RAFFAIR leader we are a formation of nine jets en route Delhi to Calcutta flying at Flight level 40, forty thousand feet, we are descending to flight level 10 ten thousand feet as you have no traffic above three thousand feet, Calcutta replied sorry I did not realize you were so high.

As we reached 10,000 feet there was an awful smell in the cockpit and I was icing up badly. I depressurized, the smell got worse and worse and as we got closer to the ground I realized that the smell was Calcutta. After landing, we were marshaled into a dispersal and shut down, then officious looking bods handed us spray canisters which they set off and indicated that we were to close the canopy, the aim being to fumigate the cockpit, Calcutta needed fumigating not our aircraft. Eventually we were collected by the embassy staff and driven to the Great Eastern Hotel in Calcutta.

Calcutta was the worst city I have ever had the misfortune to visit, the shanty town slums on the way from the airport then as we got into the city the crumbling buildings, filth everywhere, cows wandering in the roads, beetle nut juice stained the pavements red, beggars dead dogs, and at least two dead bodies lying on the pavement and the smell.

We checked into the hotel, several of us decided to have a shower then meet up in the bar before taking a look round. I locked my bedroom door threw my kit on the bed, put my camera on the bedside table and went for a shower. When I came out of the shower I noticed immediately that my camera had gone. The bedroom door was still locked, unfortunately I had not bolted it and obviously the thief had a pass key. I was furious the camera was old, a Contessa which Dad had taken from a dead German in WW1 but it took excellent pictures

and the film in it had some snaps of the ferry and the Taj Mahal. I went to reception and reported the loss, they asked if I had bolted the door and when I told them I had locked the door but not bolted it they just shrugged their shoulders. I met four of the boys in the bar and we went out for a look around but after about one hundred yards of picking our way along the filthy pavements and fighting off the attentions of beggars we gave up and returned to the bar where we spent the rest of the evening. We were joined by the Aussie pilot of the Dakota whose opening remark was “strewth this place must be the arse hole of the empire”, we all agreed.

Next morning we returned to Mauripur. We took a different route past a large monument of Queen Victoria and past a park all of which must have been rather grand in the days of the Raj but now they were all dilapidated and run down, crowds of people and cows wandering on the road. Arriving back at the aircraft the Australian engineer officer asked me if I was prepared to carry on with the cracked windscreen. He agreed with me that it did not pose a great risk and I told him that provided that the engines started and the wheels came up I had no desire to linger longer in Calcutta. When we cleared health and immigration we were each handed a printed form which listed deaths in the city during the last month due to smallpox, typhoid and cholera, I cannot remember the figures but they totaled several thousand and at the bottom of the form it stated State of Health of the city NORMAL I carried the form in my wallet for years until it disintegrated.

6th March Mauripur to Mingladong (Rangoon) 1hour 35 minutes. We climbed out over the Ganges delta and left the smell behind. My starboard rev counter failed on this leg, oil pressure and jet pipe temperature indicated that the engine was functioning correctly. As we let down towards Don Muang we saw the Irrawaddy delta and jungle, Rangoon was a medium sized city and the Pagodas were clearly visible as we joined the circuit. The runway was short with psp at the end which was very slippery due to recent rain, we all just managed to stop.

Rangoon was a great improvement on Calcutta, the old colonial buildings were in reasonable condition the people were jolly and friendly there were many monks in saffron robes. Many of the women seemed to paint their faces white and a lot smoked cigars. We stayed in a good hotel and we had an excellent curry

7th March Mingladon to Don Muang (Bangkok) 50 minutes The Australian Dakota carried a limited selection of spares but no rev counter, I opted to fly without the starboard rev counter. A short trip, Don Muang was a joint civil and military airfield with good runways. We were met by the military attaché and driven into Bangkok, it was a country road through paddy fields with little traffic other than bullock carts. When I visited Bangkok with Viv in 2001 the journey from the airfield was unrecognizable, nose to tail traffic and built up all the way. We stayed in a good hotel and in the evening we looked round the City,

8th March Don Muang to Butterworth Penang 1hour 35 minutes. We had a good view of the Malay peninsular and Penang Island with large cumulous clouds down the spine of the country. Butterworth was on the mainland opposite Penang, it was an RAF base with helicopters, Hornets Valettas and visiting Brigands from Singapore. These aircraft were providing support for the troops fighting the communist terrorists. A quick turn round and we were on our way.

8th March Butterworth to Seletar 50 minutes The final leg, we did not see much of Malaya, it was covered by large cumulous nimbus clouds. There were heavy afternoon thunder storms over Singapore, fortunately the weather cleared as we entered the circuit. Wet psp again made braking difficult but we all managed to slide to a .stop before the end of the runway. We were met by a large group of people. I cannot remember who they were other than a couple of senior RAAF officers. We were told that it had been decided that we would not fly on to Korea, the Meteors would be shipped on an aircraft carrier and the unserviceabilities made good. We were taken to Changi to wait for an aircraft home.

9th March I was told that I would return home on a Hastings flying casualties home from Korea. It was due to leave Singapore on the 12 th March. I contacted Stew Macpherson who was flying Brigands from Tenga. Stew met me in the afternoon. He was extremely lucky to be alive, a week previously he had returned to base on one engine, down wind the prop had run away on the good engine, which fell out of the wing. Stew told his nav to bail out then abandoned the aircraft giving his nav time to get out. Stew got out at about 500 ft and his chute opened just before his feet hit the ground. He was then horrified to find that his nav had got stuck in the exit hatch and been killed. We went for a swim at Changi Officers pool. Next day Stew met me in the afternoon and we had a look around Singapore and on my final night he took me out for a meal.

Next day I got onto the Hastings, there were quite a lot of casualties with RAF nurses to look after them. There were no seats only stretchers, I found an empty one and made myself comfortable, not for long, I spent a large part of the flight on the Elsan, something I had eaten the night before. One of the medics found me some kaolin-morph which eventually had the desired effect. We landed at Negombo, Ceylon, Mauripur, Habbaniya, El Adem, Castle Beneto and finally Lyneham., a total flight time of 38 hours and 50 minutes. The trip out comprised 16 legs and a total flight time of 20 hours and 25 minutes.

We went back to Chivenor to make up our log books and put in our travel claims. The OFU pilots made out all the claims which we simply had to sign. When I went to collect my claim I was amazed and almost told the accounts officer that I was only collecting my claim, not everyone else's.

The ferry trip was a great experience, it gave me the opportunity to see a little bit of the middle and far East and left me with the firm knowledge that I never wanted to see Calcutta again.

On my return to Waterbeach I found that Bleary had been killed in Cyprus on 13 February. This came as a great shock, of all the members of 47 Entry, Bleary was the last I expected to get killed. The RAF lost a good pilot, a good officer, an excellent all round sportsman and I lost a good friend. I heard some time later from his father that Bleary's Vampire Squadron had been on detachment from Malta to Akrotiri for armament practice camp. Bleary was doing air to air firing against a towed target which he destroyed, some of the debris went into his engine intake which stopped the engine. Bleary force landed on a beach and hit a rock which killed him immediately.

Back on the Squadron we were involved in several Wing Exercises. Tommy always led the

wing. Micky Mount the station commander flew as my No 2, and on one occasion he took off with his air brakes out. Shortly after take off I could see that he could not keep up with me, rather than call him on the R/T I throttled back and gave him a visual signal. When we got back into the crew room, Micky thanked me for not broadcasting that he had forgotten his airbrakes. There-after if he came to fly with the squadron he always asked to fly as my No2.

The Station Commanders parade was held monthly on a Saturday morning on the short runway. The station was paraded by wings, airman carrying rifles. Prior to the colour hoisting the parade was brought to attention by the Station Commander, the parade was ordered to slope arms then general salute, present arms, the bugler then sounded his bugle and the colour was hoisted. The April parade was rather different, Winston who had escaped from the officers mess, joined the parade, when the bugler started to sound his bugle, Winston jumped up, grabbed the lanyard and ran off across the parade ground with the bugle clanking behind him. A flabbergasted Micky Mount stood the parade at ease from the present, then dismissed the parade.

After the parade Frank Easley was ordered to report to the Station Commander's office. Whilst Frank was receiving a severe dressing down about controlling his dog, he saw to his horror Winston running past Station HQ with the Station Commanders very dead cat dangling from his jaws, fortunately for Frank Micky Mount did not see this

April was largely taken up with rapid take off and landing trials. Fighter Command wanted to find out how quickly a Wing could get airborne and also how quickly it could be recovered. First of all we practiced as a squadron, taking off in pairs at ten second intervals, the first pair held down low after take off, the second pair pulled up high through the slipstream of the first pair, the next held down and so on. This was normal take off procedure but rather closer spacing. Jet-wash gave a bit of a rough ride but it was never dangerous. Pairs landing at ten second intervals was a lot more exciting. When landing in formation you are entirely dependent on your leader and if he makes a good approach and landing it is perfectly straight forward but if he is landing ten seconds behind the pair in front he has to make a well judged approach and keep changes in power to the minimum. If however the pair in front have misjudged their approach and put on power in the final stages of the approach, the pair behind get a very rough ride going through the jet wash and it is particularly difficult for the No 2 to maintain formation in turbulent conditions at low speed. On occasions you would end up with full aileron control and rudder, and if that was not enough you popped the air brakes, slammed it on the ground and hoped for the best,

After the first rapid landing trials at Waterbeach, this involved 63 and 56 Squadrons a total of 24 aircraft. The take off went well all 24 aircraft airborne in two minutes we then flew battle formation, climbing to 30,000 ft, recovering in finger fours line astern the wing broke down wind and landed in pairs, not all pairs managed ten second separation and one number two of 56 Sqn hit so much slipstream that his port wing tip hit the runway and he swung off to port coming to rest in 63 Sqn dispersal. The pilot was unhurt and the aircraft was not badly damaged. This was the only accident in four rapid landing trials which was a tribute to all those participating.

May Rapid landing trial at Boscombe Down the home of the Royal Aeronautical Establishment where aircraft are tested and accepted for the RAF. Boscombe had a 3,000yd

runway, double the normal width. Here we took off in fours and landed in pairs, left right at five second intervals. The landings went well though the spacing was a little larger than planned.

21 May Rapid landing trial at Carnaby which was a large wartime runway built for the recovery of badly damaged bombers; it was 3,000 yds long and 200yds wide. The runway was marked out to simulate two parallel runways with a sterile centre part. Two wings , Horsham St Faith and Waterbeach wings went to Carnaby. The Waterbeach wing was allocated the left runway and Horsham the right. The result 48 aircraft airborne in two minutes. Recovering Waterbeach wing flew left hand circuits and Horsham right hand circuits all went well though it was a bit fraught when one or two pairs drifted across the centre line when lining up on finals and crossed over the flight line of aircraft lining up on the other runway.

24 May the Wing deployed to Biggin Hill in preparation for a Fly Past over Hyde Park. Someone had booked tickets for the entire wing at the Windmill Theater. It was a great show with many of the well known comedians, Terry Thomas, Jimmy Edwards and of course the nude girls for which the Windmill was famous.

25 May Rehearsal for the flypast. All the fighter wings were involved, the northern wings had been re-deployed to southern airfields, we took off from Biggin and slotted in behind the Vampire wing from Odiham which were just taking off as we approached Odiham, meanwhile Meteor wings from West Malling, North Weald , Wattisham joined behind us. I have no idea how many aircraft were involved but it was a large proportion of Fighter Command.

26 May The fly-past took place over Hyde Park on the occasion of the presentation of a colour by Her Majesty The Queen

28 May Further Rapid Landing Trial Waterbeach, This was the last of these trials, I never heard the official view of the trials. We got very good at pairs landing with a minimum spacing between pairs and it certainly proved that a wing could be got off the ground and recovered very quickly.

7 June King's Birthday fly past, we flew in vics of four I was in the box position in the leading four of the Waterbeach Wing so I had a splendid view as we flew up the Mall and over Buckingham Palace.

I had two weeks leave at the beginning of August. Viv and I decided to go to Cornwall. Mum had no objections to us going away together so I booked us into separate hotels at Port Gaverne. I drove home to collect Viv, we set off early in the morning in thick fog which cleared when we reached Stow on the Wold, thereafter the weather was splendid and we had a good journey. Port Gaverne was a lovely little place and we met some nice people who knew the local area and introduced us to the pubs . We had some great evenings. One particular evening at St Teeth where an old farmer



had far too much to drink, his friends brought his horse into the bar, lifted the old boy into the saddle, led the horse out gave it a slap on the rump and it trotted off. We were assured that this was a regular occurrence and the horse always got him home.

It was a memorable holiday, the first time we had been together for more than a few days, we were very happy and talked for the first time about getting married.

Back at Waterbeach we were doing a lot of Squadron formation flying. Whilst I was on leave it was decided to start a Squadron formation aerobatic team with a view to it displaying at the Battle of Britain air display.

On 23 August Tommy took the wing to Beauvechamps, Brussels. We were met by many senior officers of the Belgian Air Force. Tommy was treated like a long lost brother and we were taken into Brussels for a civil reception in the town hall in the Grand Place. Beer flowed like water, we ended up eating and drinking in the many restaurants round the Grand Place. I cannot remember where we spent the night. Next day we took off from Beauvechamps, flew to overhead Paris then turned North West to simulate a raid on Southern Sector and we were intercepted by the southern Sector fighter squadrons. It was many years later when I read Tommy's obituary in the Daily Telegraph that I found Tommy had led No350 Belgian Spitfire Squadron in 1941 when they had participated in many raids on France and the low countries. Many German aircraft had been shot down, hence the great reception in Brussels on 23 Aug 1951.

A tragic accident occurred on Battle of Britain day when the formation aerobatic team had a mid air collision at the top of a barrel roll over the airfield. The number three, Robin Pavey, lost position and dropped down colliding with the number four, Len Smith. Both of the aircraft crashed onto the airfield, Robin did not get out of his aircraft and was killed. Len had an amazing escape; after the impact his aircraft lost its tail, Len jettisoned the canopy, operated the ejection seat. When the seat stabilised on its small parachute, he undid his harness dropped off the seat pulled his rip cord and his chute opened about two hundred feet from the ground. This was the lowest successful ejection at that time, the Martin Baker seat was modified subsequently to make the operation fully automatic from the time the seat was fired until the pilots chute opened. Len was unhurt but a month later he collapsed and was diagnosed as calcium deficient which was caused by delayed shock. Robin Pavey was a relatively inexperienced ex Cranwell cadet. I was not involved with the aerobatic team but I do not recall seeing them doing many practices at low level and this may have had a bearing on the accident.

Towards the end of September I asked Viv to marry me and I asked Mum's permission. Viv was nineteen. Mum said that she would be happy for us to get married but that I must write to Viv's father in China for his permission. I wrote to Mr Talamo on 3rd October and received the following reply:



c/o British Consulate General

33 Chungshan Road
Shanghai
24 October 1951

My Dear Keith,

Your letter of the third of October reached me today. Being the first letter of its kind I have received, I am in the same predicament as yourself and well appreciate the difficulty of expressing just what one feels. However I sincerely wish both Vivien and yourself every happiness and good fortune for the future in the decision you have made. I think you are well suited to each other, which come what may, is all that matters.

It is nearly seven years since I saw you both, so I can only remember you as boy and girl. My wife has written to me from time to time giving accounts of the excellent progress you have made in the RAF, and of Vivien's endeavors with nursing, so I have a fair idea of your combined outlook.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that any advice my wife may have to you both after full consideration and in a Christian spirit; it would, naturally, have my approval. Of course my wife and I are the parents only on one side and I assume that you have the blessing of your own father and mother in this very serious venture. Will you kindly convey my sincere respects and good wishes to them both.

Once again wishing you both every Happiness.
Edward Talamo

After receiving the letter from Viv's father we agreed with Mum and my parents to make the official announcement of our engagement. Mum asked us not to get married until Mr Talamo got back from China, at that time we had no idea when he would get home

Flying went on at Waterbeach with big Wing scrambles and interceptions of streams of B 50s. Exercise Fabulous was a continuing commitment as was air to ground. American F86s arrived at Sheperds Grove near Bury St Edmonds and we had some dog fights with them. I went home on the long weekends in October and November to see Viv.

In December we had the Waterbeach Christmas Ball, Viv managed to make it following the

awful rail journey via Bletchley. It was a splendid ball and I drove Viv home the next day to start my Christmas leave. We had a great Christmas and we agreed to Mum's request that we delay our wedding until Viv's father got back from China though we did not know at that time when this would be.

On return from leave I learned that I was to be posted to The Central Flying School on 1st February to be trained as a flying instructor {QFI}. January was the usual round of flying though I see from my Log Book that we did some night formation flying which was something different. I did a total of 31 hours and 52 minutes in January. We were scrambled from Fabulous standby on my last sortie on 63 Squadron. We failed to intercept anything. In all I did 414 hours and 40 minutes flying on Meteors with an average sortie length of 40 minutes. On completion of my tour I was assessed as an above the average fighter pilot.

Chapter 10 - Central Flying School 1952 - 1957

At the beginning of February 1952 I started the CFS course. The first part of the course was held at South Cerney near Cirencester. It was a pre-war grass airfield with a large officer's mess like Thorney Island and all the necessary administrative buildings and lecture halls.

We started with a detachment to Pembray on the Gower Peninsular. Traveling in three ton trucks with all the necessary equipment to live under canvas. Arriving early in the afternoon, tents had to be erected and five of us had to cook an evening meal for the thirty bods on the course. Drift wood was collected from the beach to make fires for cooking. Leadership training was the aim of the course, the directing staff assessed the students for leadership and initiative. Each day we did long marches, cross country runs, map reading day and night, built rope bridges over gullies and so on. I recall that I was in charge of cooking Sunday lunch, roast leg of lamb, the gravy was a great success. Steamed pudding and custard made by one of my team, also went down well

I think it was while we were at Pembray that we heard that King George VI had died. Back at South Cerney we started the course proper. Lecture techniques were hammered into us Theory of flight, pre flight and post flight briefing, finally flying the Prentice a horrible primary trainer, under powered, sluggish and unresponsive. The aircraft was made by Percival to meet an air force requirement for side by side seating for instructor and pupil. The Balliol, piston and jet provost and the Vampire T11 also fell into this category. The Prentice which was meant to replace the Tiger Moth was a total disaster.

In all I did 18 hours on the Prentice learning how to teach the basic exercises required to teach a student to fly. We would do a dual sortie with an instructor then repeat the exercise with another student sharing the sortie each taking a turn to practice teaching techniques. We completed this stage of the course by the end of February when we were posted to Little Rissington.



At Little Rissington the advanced stage of the course was carried out on Meteors and Harvards. Having come from a Meteor squadron I expected to go onto Meteors but I was told that they wanted me to go onto Harvards because Cranwell wanted some ex cadets with jet experience to return to Cranwell as instructors. I now had to learn to fly the Harvard from the back seat and of course to sort out students bad landings, not easy but even more difficult at night. I enjoyed the course and it had the added advantage that Rissington was only about fifty miles from Sutton and I was able to get home to see Viv most weekends...I did 49 hours and 15 minutes flying on Harvards and graduated as a B1 instructor. I was posted to Cranwell on 21st May.

Whilst on the CFS course I had a trip in a De Havilland Vampire, known in the RAF as the "screaming kiddy car" because of the high pitched noise made by the DH Goblin which had a

single sided centrifugal compressor. It was a delightful, light with well balanced controls, it carried four twenty mm cannons. Though it had a slower rate of climb than the Meteor it had a much better range. Landing was rather disconcerting the short undercarriage resulted in the impression that you had forgotten to put the wheels down

RAF College Cranwell

It was rather strange being back at Cranwell just a little under three years since I graduated. Most of the instructors were very much older than myself and I suppose I had more in common with the cadets than my fellow instructors.



My Flight Commander Tim Wood took a great delight in allocating the tallest cadets to me so that he could say “here come the long and short of it”. I had to carry extra cushions to ensure that I could get enough rudder on if the student dropped a wing on landing. I was allocated five students at various stages of training and got a great deal of satisfaction from the job. As I was single and trying to save in order to get married, I volunteered for any extra flying. All the other instructors were married and were only too keen for someone to take on last flights of the day or a bit of their night flying. I was soon doing between 48 and 50 hours instructing a month. At weekends I was usually free to go home. The Cadets went on leave in August and the staff also went on leave for two weeks then spent the rest of the month preparing for the new course

I was allocated two new students in September, they had completed their basic training on Prentices and I had to convert them onto Harvards. It was very satisfying to get them off solo, my other students all made good progress. One student, who flew well in daylight simply could not line up the aircraft with the runway at night, after a third failed attempt I said “you’re flying as if you can see two runways and cannot decide which one to line up on”. He replied that is exactly what is happening. We landed and I told him to report to the doc next morning. The medics found he had a weak muscle in his left eye and when he concentrated on the runway lights his left eye broke lock and produced double vision. He went away had operation and when he returned he had no further trouble.

I think it was early in September we heard that Viv,s father had finally got clearance to leave China. We started to make plans to get married and I applied to the Commanding Officer of RAF Cranwell for permission to get married, this was required at that time. I had to go for an interview with him, he asked me how long we had known one another, whether we had our parents blessing, what Viv did and what her father’s employment was.

I had another amusing incident with a rather over confident student on a night cross country. The standard briefing in the event of an engine failure at night was not to attempt a forced

landing but to bail out. The student took off and settled down on the first leg. I noticed that he was not checking his fuel level but said nothing, thinking that he would get a fright and change fuel tanks when the fuel warning light came on. Eventually the warning light came on, shortly after the engine cut out. Before I could say anything, he disconnected the intercom, opened the hood, took off his safety harness and started to climb out of the cockpit. With visions of arriving back at Cranwell without my student, I changed tanks built up fuel pressure with the wobble pump and the engine picked up. The student who was half way out of the cockpit, got back, re-connected his intercom and strapped in. His fuel checks were meticulous thereafter. My account when I got back to the instructors crew room caused great hilarity.

I averaged about 55 hours instructional flying per month in September and October.

Wedding plans went ahead, Tim McElhaw agreed to be my best man, Sal, Shirley and Fritty White were to be Viv's bridesmaids. When Viv's father arrived home he decided that our wedding would be a big occasion. The date was fixed for 29th November and the reception in the Town Hall I found a flat at Wellingore Hall near Cranwell where we could live after we were married. I had saved two hundred pounds by the time we were married, not much by today's standards.



We were married in the parish church in Sutton Coldfield, and at the reception in the Town Hall for a large number of guests the Champaign flowed like water. Our wedding was also Viv's father's home coming party. A bitterly cold day, it rained then froze and snowed, most of the guests had trouble getting home and several crashed their cars.



When we left the reception it was nearly dark, we set off in the Heap for Moreton in the Marsh. The roads were terrible but there was scarcely any traffic. Shortly after we got on the Foss Way we were going quite slowly down a hill when the Heap slid sideways. I had time to tell Viv that there was a narrow bridge at the bottom of the hill and there was no way that we could cross the bridge sideways, at the last minute the Heap straightened out and we got over the bridge. Finally we reached the Manor House Hotel Moreton in The Marsh where we spent our first night together.

Next morning we woke to find a complete covering of snow and we made our way to Stroud. Viv developed a dreadful cold, so after a day in Cheltenham and a day in Oxford we decided to go home where we collected up all our wedding presents and moved into our flat at Wellingore.

After Christmas we settled down in our flat, Viv became friendly with Helen Faucett the wife of Angus Faucett an engineer at Cranwell who lived in the next flat. I think Viv was a bit

bored and lonely when I was away at work and we bought a Scotty puppy, Bonny from Gamston kennels. One of the bedrooms in the flat was very spooky, Bonny would bark at the bedroom and if the door was opened she turned round and ran away. On one occasion Paddy and Patty Whight and their two children came to stay. During the night the fireplace was thrown across the room and a bedside lamp was unplugged and thrown across the room, the room was always un-naturally cold and we stopped using it.

There was a Meteor 7 at Cranwell, it was little used because very few of the QFIs were jet qualified, I got permission to fly the Mk 7 and gave each of my students a familiarization trip which was quite popular.



In April one of my students Peter Goodall was killed in a night flying accident at Barkston Heath. Goodall was making good progress but he should never have been sent solo in deteriorating weather conditions. I

was programmed to fly the late details after 10 pm and I arrived at Barkstone to find that flying was cancelled, that an aircraft was missing, and not responding to calls from the tower, the pilot was Goodall. I found that he had been recalled because of low cloud. He had called "down wind" then silence. We eventually found the aircraft crashed into some trees on the cross wind leg. He had obviously forgotten that Barkston was three hundred feet higher than Cranwell and descended looking for the runway lights. The accident should never have happened Goodall should never have been sent solo in deteriorating weather conditions and when low cloud did roll in he should have been sent back to Cranwell.

I was given the awful job of escorting the coffin from Grantham station to Basingstoke and attending the funeral. His parents knew that I was his instructor and I could not tell them what had happened because the accident was still the subject of a board of enquiry. Fortunately another of my students was Goodall's friend and he told the parents.

It was about this time that Viv discovered that she was pregnant, this did not stop her horse riding with Helen until one day her horse bolted on the main Lincoln road. Fortunately the horse galloped straight back to it's stable Viv was a little more cautious after that.

Cranwell was due for a visit from the CFS Examining unit in June and I decided to apply to upgrade my instructor's category to A2. My re-cat. trip went like a dream, I could do nothing wrong. After it was announced that that I had got my A2 the head of the Examining Unit told me that he would be strongly recommending that I be posted to CFS on the staff at the end of my tour at Cranwell. I had been told that I would do only one tour as a QFI before returning to a Squadron, I pointed this out but said that I was prepared to go to CFS for a full tour if I was short toured at Cranwell and posted to CFS immediately. My posting to Little Rissington came through on 3rd July 1953.

We left Cranwell, Viv went to stay with Mum. I reported for duty at CFS and started to look for somewhere to live. Eventually I found a little cottage at Bourton on the Hill about two miles from Moreton in the Marsh and about nine miles from Rissington. We soon settled

down in the cottage which was about half way up the hill and tucked in behind the main road. The previous occupant had kept pigs in the garden and we found it would grow anything. It was a friendly little village with a Post Office and shop, a farm near the Post office sold milk, they simply filled your milk jug from the churn. The farmer let me keep the heap in his barn. There was a very good pub at the top of the hill, everyone drank draught cider at two pence farthing per pint about one new penny, there was nearly a riot in the village when the price of a pint was increased by a farthing. Four or five pints was as much as the average person could manage so two people could have a night out for a shilling.

An old retired gardener from Seizencote Hall and his wife used to come into the pub every Saturday night, the old boy used to drink pints of cider and his wife drank Stout. The old man had a weak bladder and had to visit the loo frequently, every time he went out his wife finished off her glass of stout refilled it then drank it down to the level it had been by the time her husband returned, he would go out six or seven times and she would have six or seven glasses and he thought she had only had one.

We were happy in the cottage, the villagers were very friendly, and we were the only non locals. We could have bought the cottage for £ 200, not so today. The village is full of retired people from Birmingham and the cottage would cost about £180000 There were good walks, it was lovely countryside and not too far from Sutton. We went to Port Gavern in August and had another great holiday.

There were several interesting members of staff, particularly Arthur Kell DFC and Bar and Bill Vesely DFC in particular. Arthur had many interesting stories to tell, he had been on 617 Squadron. On three occasions he had flown missions to bomb the Tirpitz. On the first cloud rolled in as they were running in to bomb and they flew on to Russia where there was low cloud and the Lancasters flew around until they found somewhere to land. After about a week they were able to refuel and return to Scampton. On his second attempt the "Tall Boy" 22000 lb bomb hung up, he was unable to jettison it, they returned to Shetland where Arthur declared the hung up bomb. The airfield was evacuated and Arthur made what he believed to be his smoothest landing. On his third attempt he was one of two who hit or near missed the Tirpitz which sank.

Arthur completed three full tours with the same crew. On his last trip at the start of the bombing run he carried out the normal routine, bomb doors open then asked the flight engineer to check that the doors were open. The engineer who would normally put his head into a Perspex blister to see the bomb doors, said "they will be open skip, they always are" at that moment a shell removed the blister. After the war Arthur flew Lancastrians for Qantas for four years then he rejoined the RAF and became a QFI.

Bill Vesley was a Czech, he had been in the Czech aerobatic team before the war. When the Germans invaded he escaped and joined the French air force. Then after the fall of France he made his way to England where he joined the RAF. He fought with Czech fighter Squadrons becoming a Wing Commander. After the war he returned to Czechoslovakia where he was a Colonel in the Czech Air Force. When the Russians took over he escaped again to England, joined the RAF and became an instructor at CFS. Bill was an ace aerobatic pilot and he taught me how to do a turn whilst continuously rolling in a Harvard in order to keep the engine running, under negative "G" the priming pump used for starting the engine had to be

operated whenever there was negative “G”. This was a very tricky maneuver. Bill said very little about his previous experiences but he certainly hated the Germans and Russians.

I used to enjoy the journey home from Rissington on bright frosty moonlight nights the view over the Cotswolds was fantastic. One wet evening I called at the garage in Stow on The Wold for petrol, an old man walking past stopped and said “Is that a 1929 Riley 9,” when I confirmed that it was he said “That was the last model to have a crash gear box do you find if you drive at 70 for over 15 minutes the oil pressure rises? I told him that I never drove it at more than 70. He said it was designed to run at over 70 all day but they never found an explanation for the increase in oil pressure. He asked if I ever had any trouble with the car, I told him it was a great little car, he said he was pleased I liked it, then he walked off. The garage man asked if I knew who the man was, I replied that I hadn’t a clue but that he knew a lot about Rileys, he should do he replied that is Victor Riley.



I became friendly with Dick Levente an engineer officer responsible for second line servicing. One of the old school he always asked to go on air tests if the aircraft had been in for major servicing. Dick was a Riley enthusiast, he had a Riley saloon and he persuaded me to change the Heap NV317 for a fabric bodied saloon, HOB 211, the Heap’s engine was in excellent condition because I had the engine re sleeved and fully overhauled, so we swapped engines and sold the heap. The saloon was much more suitable for a baby.

Dick Levent was a remarkable person, an Austrian Jew, he escaped from Austria when the Germans invaded and made his way to England where he joined the RAF. He became a flight engineer on Lancasters, was shot down and became a prisoner of war. Terrified that the Germans would discover his true identity he persuaded another POW to break his leg with a sledge hammer. The break was so bad that the Germans repatriated him. Back in the UK his leg was re-broken and pinned with steel plates but he always walked with a bad limp. After the war he volunteered to work as a labourer in East Germany where he obtained work on the new airfields which the Russians were building. Dick brought back the first good pictures of the new Mig 15s taken on an East German airfield. On return he was given a permanent commission in the Engineering Branch.

Viv attended Moreton in the Marsh Hospital for pre-natal checks, she had a very good doctor and Philippa was born on 5th December. I took some sherry and gin and we had a little celebration with the staff on 9th December Viv’s 22nd Birthday. When Viv was discharged from the hospital we walked out and forgot Philippa, realizing, Viv dashed back and collected the carry cot. We went home to the Old Farm for Christmas, Philippa, the first Grandchild was the center of attention.

In January Flash Kendal the flight commander of the Vampire flight asked me if I would like

to transfer to the Vampire Flight. I had done a couple of trips with him in the T11 and he felt that I would be the right person to replace him. Flash was an exceptional aerobatic pilot, the high point of his display was to fly down the runway at 300 feet turn upside down and do an outside loop, a short pause at the top to allow the negative “G” trap to fill then burnt to continue the outside loop ending at three hundred feet inverted. Flash taught me a lot about low level aerobatics and display techniques but I never attempted the outside loop.

The Vampire flight Comprised three Vampire Vs, and a two seat T11 which were used to give course students a little jet familiarization. I was told by Wing Commander Dodd, the CFI, that he agreed with Flash that I was the right person for the job. He said that we would be getting five T11s and three QFIs in April and it was intended to run a course of six students on Vampires instead of Harvards. There was no instructor’s manual for the T11 so my first task would be to write a manual which covered all the training exercises required to convert a Harvard pilot onto a T11.

In the meantime we had to decide how to deal with the spinning exercise which presented a problem. The early T11s had one blind flying panel, this was replaced by two panels and the control column, or stick, on the modified T11 was cranked to the right to permit a clear vision of the compass. The standard spin recovery procedure had always been taught, “apply full opposite rudder and keeping the stick upright push it steadily forward until the spinning stops”. There was a fatal spinning accident at Valley on a T11 which failed to recover from a spin to the left. Together with one of the Examining wing instructors Flash and I carried out a series of spins to the left, recovering with the stick held upright. This resulted in the application of in-spin aileron which delayed recovery for three or more turns. Moving the stick to the aileron neutral position produced a normal recovery. Obviously we needed to re-write spin recovery procedure for the T11 this could not be done without the agreement of Boscombe down who were responsible for writing the pilots notes for all aircraft. We flew down to Boscombe and after a long meeting it was agreed the standard spin recovery procedure would be “full opposite rudder, keeping ailerons neutral push the stick steadily forward till the spinning stops”.

It was agreed that when spinning was taught on the T11, instructors should demonstrate the effect of in spin aileron. This exercise required a lot of height, we would enter the spin at 30,000ft and recover at about 15000 to 20,000 ft. We were sent to Valley and Oakington where the T11 was in operation and checked out the instructors.



On 12 Feb Frank Dodd led six Meteors from the Meteor Squadron to Malta for five days. I went with them to demonstrate the new spinning sequence to the RAAF Vampire Squadron based at Takali Cyprus. We took off singly in thick fog, it was only possible to see one runway light ahead, our nearest diversion was Dijon, a little bit fraught. However the trip went off well, we landed at Istres on the way out. On the way back the Mistral was blowing so we had to land at Tunis. On the last leg Rissington was fogged in and we had to divert to Tangmere. There was no ‘phone in the cottage and no way of letting Viv know that I was delayed.

At the end of February we received the latest T11 delivered from De Havillands, it had ejection seats, a new high energy engine relight system, improved cabin demisting and a full hood. De Havilland were keen to sell the aircraft abroad and the Air ministry agreed that De Havilland should send interested parties to CFS.

The garden at the cottage was very good, we planted a bed of wallflowers in the autumn. When returning from night flying in the spring I could smell their scent as I approached the cottage, it was fantastic. The garden produced excellent vegetables and the sweet peas grew like a hedge. Viv got to know many of the villagers and frequently took Philippa into Moreton in the Marsh in her pram about three miles.

In April I flew with French and Italian Air Force officers who wanted to evaluate the T11. They both asked for a demonstration of our spinning sequence and engine relighting. I flamed out the engine at 10,000 ft over Rissington where there was a good chance of pulling off a “dead stick landing if it failed to relight. It was a strange sensation very quiet, the engine re-lit perfectly.

Flash was posted to Sabers in Germany at the end of April and I became the Flight Commander. One of my first jobs was to collect a new T11 from the DH factory at Christchurch. On the way back to Rissy I turned the aircraft upside down, the amount of rubbish I collected off the canopy was unbelievable, it even included a small socket set. I complained to DH and they assured me that a closer check would be made before the aircraft left the factory.

A few sorties later in this aircraft the elevators jammed when I was returning to base, the stick would not pull back, each time I moved it forward backward movement was further restricted. I set up a descent, holding the stick hard back reduced speed and carried out a circuit, the undercarriage produced a nose down movement, lowering flap produced a nose up reaction on the Vampire so I controlled the approach by progressively lowering flap, and adjusting power, crossing the runway threshold it was impossible to round out and the aircraft thumped onto the runway. Flt Sgt Baxey the excellent NCO in charge of servicing, stripped down the aircraft and found a spanner which had been riveted into the tail boom.

In the next few weeks, despite the best efforts of Sgt Baxey, who found a lot of loose items, usually rivets, split pins and nuts and bolt. I had throttles jam three quarters open, air brakes stick open and restricted aileron movement, all these incidents were caused by loose items left in the aircraft during construction at Christchurch.

Sgt Baxey was very scruffy but an excellent tradesman, he was posted, at very short notice towards the end of my tour as Flight Commander. When I told him on a Friday that he had to report to Abingdon on the following Monday he went very pale and said “I cannot go sir, it’s me trains. I have model railway tracks all over my married quarter, I have knocked holes in the walls between rooms upstairs and downstairs and I have built a funicular railway up the stairs, it will cost me a fortune if I don’t have time to put the quarter right.” I managed to get his posting delayed by a week and gave him a week’s leave.

In May I had my first trip in a Dragonfly helicopter, it was some ten years later that I learned to fly helicopters.



In mid May were asked to carry out trials on a new electrical artificial horizon, it was installed in one of our new T11s. The A/H was a great improvement on the old suction driven instrument, it provided complete freedom of Roll and only toppled if you pulled the aircraft through more than 90 degrees of pitch. If it did topple there was a fast erection button which restored the horizon to full operation in 30 seconds. The A/H was eventually adopted for all aircraft.

In June Captain Larson of the Royal Swedish Air Force visited to evaluate the T11. We did several sorties, he was a very nice chap and was very keen for us to visit him in Sweden. He kept in touch until I retired from the RAF but we never did get to visit him.

During my first three months as flight commander I spent most of my time demonstrating the spinning sequence to instructors from Valley and Oakington. At the end of July I had a trip in a visiting DH Venom, with a configuration similar to the Vampire, an improved wing and a DH Ghost engine, much more powerful than the Goblin. It was much faster and had a higher rate of climb, I got up to 50,000 ft, it was a very maneuverable aircraft with light and balanced controls.

During the last two weeks we went to Fowey for our summer holiday with Mum, Mike and Laine who was on her first visit to the UK. It was another splendid summer holiday with good weather.

In August the first full course of students arrived and we put into practice the instructional syllabus which I wrote in March. This syllabus was used with little alteration until the T11 went out of service. One of the new students was Major Mahmood of the Iraqi Air Force. He was a poor pilot, when I told him that I had doubts about his ability to become a flying instructor, he told me that if he failed the course he would be shot when he returned home. He seemed unable to anticipate the need for power when undershooting on the approach, when I told him he said that I did not give him time so I said that on the next approach I would put my hands in my pockets. There was a steep valley in undershoot to the 23 Runway at Little Rissington. On the next approach I put my hands in my pockets and let him get on with it. We dropped down into the valley, eventually when we were looking up at the runway threshold I told him to put on power, there was no response, I made to grab the throttle but could not get my clenched fist out of my pocket. Eventually I got full power on and we climbed up to the runway threshold and even the Major admitted that he should have put the power on sooner.

In September I did the Vampire low level aerobatics display for Battle of Britain day. In October, the Wing Commander in charge of the CFS Examining Wing asked me to join his team for a week to visit the Vampire AFS at Oakington. The visit went off well. On return to Rissington the Wing commander asked me to join his team because I knew more about the T11 than any of his team. I decided against this course of action because it would involve me in another two years in flying training which would take me away from the front line for too long. In retrospect I think this was a mistake but at that stage in my flying career it was not

easy to see into the future.

In October we were allocated a new married quarter at Little Rissington, it was a great improvement on the little cottage at Bourton on the Hill and close to work. On the down side Viv did not drive and we were a long way from any shops other than the NAAFI. It was about this time that Viv found that she was pregnant. Philippa was becoming very active and learning to speak now that she had her own bedroom we did not disturb her when we went to bed, this was always a problem when we lived in the cottage.

It was about this time that I was offered the opportunity to fly the Commandant's Spitfire to the Maintenance Unit at Kemble where it was to be scrapped. Nigel Kemp who flew Spitfires in the Battle of Britain and flew this Spitfire from time to time gave me a good briefing, I Settled myself into the cockpit, the view from the cockpit was similar to that from the back seat of the Harvard. I started the engine and warmed it up but when I checked the right magneto, the engine cut it, picked up when I switched the mag on, trying again produced the same result, the chiefy responsible for servicing the aircraft signaled me to cut the engine. After checking he found that the mag was U/S and because there were no spare mags in stores the aircraft would be taken to Kemble by road. This was my one and only chance to fly a Spitfire, so near.

We went home to The Old Farm for Christmas, Philippa surprised everyone with her walking and talking.

Back at Rissington I had a whole range of foreign students, an Indonesian, Lt Wattimena was a natural pilot, he quickly learned instructional techniques but there was little I could teach him about flying. He had been taught to fly by the Japanese at the end of the war. His aerobatics were excellent and he won the aerobatics prize for his course. He was undoubtedly the best natural pilot I ever instructed.

Mike was born at Moreton in The Marsh Hospital on 5th May. There was no maternity leave in those days, but I managed to get a few days leave. In June we rented a caravan in the sand dunes on a beach near Tenby the weather was very hot. Mike a very new baby was no problem but Philippa simply would not go to sleep. It was not much of a holiday for Viv but it made a change. On return to Rissington I was told that I had been posted to the Directorate of Personnel in the Air Ministry (DP1c) This was a great blow to me as I had hoped to be posted as a Flight Commander on a Hunter Squadron. When I queried the posting I was told that it was a good career posting.

As my swan song we put drop tanks on two of the T11s and took them to Malta for a weekend. We flew to Istres via Lyneham to clear customs then direct to Luqa, on return there was a jet stream from the North West and we had to return via Tunis, Marignan and Lyneham to clear customs.

When I left Rissington I had completed 383 hours on T11s, I had been flying continuously for eight years and I think I was at the peak of my flying ability. I enjoyed the instructing role and I believe I was quite good at it. Subsequently I did quite a lot more flying and we were encouraged to keep in practice whilst in ground postings, I had a gap of five years before I was returned to full time flying.

Chapter 11 - Air Ministry London

My first job was to find somewhere to live, there were no married quarters for Air Ministry personnel. Enquiries to the Air Ministry administration unit produced a long list of properties available for letting. The properties were scattered all over the London area. It was left to me to go and find a suitable house. After looking at houses in different parts of London I decided that I should look for a house in the Reading area, there was a good train service to Waterloo, and it was a reasonable journey through the Cotswolds to Sutton, this was before motorways. Eventually I found a house Piepowder, Soldiers Rise Crowthorne near Wokingham. It was a bungalow with a reasonable little garden in very flat countryside surrounded by silver birch trees and scrub. There was a railway line at the bottom of the garden and we subsequently discovered that it was rather too close to Broadhurst for comfort. It also had a septic tank which needed emptying rather frequently. Soldiers Rise was an unmade road about three hundred yards long with about six bungalows down one side.

I became a commuter, taking HOB about two miles to Wokingham station where there was a good train service to Waterloo then about one mile over Waterloo Bridge and up Kingsway to Theobalds Rd. I usually walked which was quicker but if it was raining I could take the bus or tube which were very crowded, it never ceased to amaze me that when I walked I saw the same people every day. By the time I got home in the evening Viv had bathed Pip and Mike and got them to bed.

My new job was a complete change in life style. I worked in an office in Adastral House. We wore civilian clothes and were supposed to wear bowler hats though I never did. I was responsible for posting all pilots, NCOs Pilot Officers, Flying Officers and Flight Lieutenants in Flying Training Command, Fighter Command and associated rolls overseas, My colleague in the office, Basil D'Olivera, was responsible for Transport Command; Bomber Command and Coastal Command. We had to write all the posting notices for all personnel changing commands or roles.



Personnel staff at commands were responsible for internal postings within commands after clearing them with us. We had to interview all those returning from overseas and post them, and we were responsible for issuing posting notices for all those posted overseas. It was a demanding job without all the niggling little jobs like finding suitable personal assistants for senior officers and posting PAs at the end of their tours.

My Boss was Wing Commander Mavor, always known as Duke he had flown bombers until 1944 when he developed tuberculosis. He lost his flying category and was invalided out of the service. He studied law and was called to the Bar, then cleared of TB he regained a full medical category and rejoined the General Duties Branch. A very clever and astute man, he

eventually became Commander in Chief of Flying Training Command. Duke had never been in a jet aircraft and was very keen to fly one so I arranged to take him to Rissington and in October and gave him six dual sorties in a T11 and another four sorties the following April. I always got on well with Duke he was a good boss who always backed my judgment when Commands disputed postings, these disputes usually arose when senior officers PAs did not like their postings.

When taking over the job my predecessor Roy Bowie briefed me that one of my biggest problems would be filling the posts of Officer Commanding remote detachments such as Masirah, Sharjah, Slalah Ghan, Jiwani, as these were one year unaccompanied postings. A roster was kept of those due for an overseas posting and the procedure was to pick the person at the top of the list and post him. This usually raised all sorts of objections from commands. My first attempt to fill the post at Masirah resulted in requests from the officer's



Station Commander, Doctor, Padre and wife for the posting to be cancelled. As the post had to be filled within two weeks I decided to send a signal to all home stations asking for volunteers. Duke, who kept a close check on all outgoing signals from his department, called me into his office and asked me if I had been briefed on the procedure for filling these posts? I told him of my present difficulties and that I believed I would get volunteers, he said he had his doubts but to go ahead. I had ten volunteers and these posts were filled by volunteers thereafter.

We were also responsible for interviewing ex-aircrew who had been re-engaged in the General Duties Branch. Amongst these were two Poles aged about thirty five who had been awarded permanent commissions in the General Duties Branch. In order to decide what refresher flying they required, my first question was when did they last fly? To my amazement they replied that they were in full flying practice and had flown last week. It transpired that they had been flying Yorks, the passenger version of the Lancaster and I was told that I could contact them at RAF Abingdon. Subsequently discrete enquiries revealed that the Yorks which were painted a drab colour and carried no markings, operated out of Abingdon. The fuselage carried numerous extra fuel tanks and the aircraft would go away for seven to ten days. I believe they used to refuel in Cyprus and fly into remote parts of the Soviet Union. Like Dick Levent their Permanent Commissions were awarded for services rendered when the job was finished. I posted them to a communications flight for which they were delighted.

At Air Ministry we worked a six and a half day week, one weekend in four was a long weekend. We worked from nine to six and had an hour off for lunch. At lunch time Basil and myself often went to the market in Leather Lane, on wet days we frequently went to the British Museum and I got to know my way round the museum. Usually we dropped into a

pub for a beer and a sausage. On a couple of Fridays Duke took us to the bar in the cellars under the courts of appeal where they had really good draught Bass; judges and barristers called in for a Bass at lunch time.

During the week Viv walked miles with Phillipa and Mike in the pram and Bonny often taking them to Crowthorn to do her shopping or to watch the boys at Wellington College playing rugby or cricket. At weekends we went shopping in Wokingham, a nice little town or occasionally we went into Reading. We went home for Christmas, on New Years Eve Viv invited all the occupants of the six houses in Soldiers Rise to New Years Eve drinks. They all turned up and we had a good evening, to our surprise although they had all lived in the lane for years they did not know one another.

There were very hard frosts in January, the pond at the end of Soldiers Rise froze over and we joined many people on the ice. We enjoyed the skating but Viv who was expecting Fiona fell quite heavily, fortunately there were no ill effects. Fiona was born at Battle Hospital Reading on 8th June 1956. Following Fiona's arrival we bought our first fridge and washing machine which were now essential. The garden at Piepowder was quite pleasant and the children had a great time in the summer playing in their paddling pool. Mum and Dad came to visit us on one occasion. When they came to leave Dad's car keys were missing, Dad clearly recalled putting them down on the hall table. Viv came to the conclusion that Mike had picked them up and hidden them. Eventually he was persuaded to go and find them. He had pushed them up the exhaust pipe of Dad's car, we would never have found them if Mike had forgotten where he hid them. We went Sand Banks near Pool for our summer holiday, Mum and Sal joined us.

I managed some flying while I was at Air Ministry; there were Ansons and Chipmunks at Hendon which were available for us to fly. Basil D'Olivera who had done a tour in Transport Command instructed me on airways flying and we took an Anson to Jersey a couple of times and on another occasion we went to Prestwick and then round the Western Isles. I also went back to CFS on several occasions and managed to get four trips in the Hunters which were based at Kemble. The Hunter was the first swept wing aircraft I had flown. It had power controls which were very light sensitive and well balanced, the aircraft was a delight to fly.

My first trip in a Hunter was quite exciting, I drove from Wokingham to Kemble on a frosty foggy morning arriving at about ten in the morning, the fog was forecast to clear after midday. It started to clear about four o'clock. I had spent the day reading pilots notes and getting used to the cockpit layout and was ready to go as soon as I got clearance. I soon got used to the power controls and climbed to 40,000 ft, steering down the Bristol Channel I lowered the nose and went supersonic for the first time. There was a change of trim and slight juddering but the Mach meter was the only real indication. After I had been airborne about fifteen minutes I was recalled because the weather was deteriorating. When I got back to Kemble the cloud base was about five hundred feet and it was starting to get dark, not the best weather for a first trip in a new type but all went well. I had another trip the following day and two more sorties the following autumn, a real pilot's aircraft, I think the Hunter was the best aircraft I ever flew.

Work was fairly routine, enlivened occasionally by interesting people we interviewed when they returned from overseas. One of these was Ray Hannah who had completed a tour on

Venoms in Germany. He persuaded us to send him to the Overseas Ferry Unit. Subsequently he set up the The Red Arrows aerobatic team which is a lasting memorial to his vision and ability.

Our lunch time wanderings took us to some interesting places in Holborn, shops, markets and small engineering workshops. On other occasions we would do Oxford St and Regents St. As the end of my second year in the job approached, I started to think about my next posting, an exchange posting to a USAF training school in Alabama looked interesting. But eventually we decided that it might not be the best thing with three small children. Canberra night interditors in Germany were a new role which seemed interesting and Germany was a good posting financially. I arranged a trip on Canberras at Bassingbourn and decided to go for it. The personnel department was undergoing a big change to the Air Secretary's Department. Basil and I were to be replaced by four Squadron Leaders, someone had decided that we had been overworked.

Basil got his posting to Comets which were just coming into service with Transport Command. I was set to go when to my amazement I was promoted to Squadron Leader. Bob Price and myself were the first from our entry to be promoted to Squadron Leader. Duke must have been pleased with my work because he must have given me a special recommendation. The bad news was that I was now posted to the long General Duties guided weapons course, guided weapons were considered to be the weapons of the future and the course was supposed to be a career posting. This in effect meant that I was grounded for another three years and it was to influence the rest of my career in the RAF.

Whilst at Air Ministry I flew a total of 103.30 hours on the following types:

Anson	12
Chipmunk	15
VampireT11	58
Balliol	2.30
Hunter	2.30
Meteor	10
Canberra	3.30
Provost	1.00

I reported to the technical college at Henlow on 5 May 1957 to start the GW course.

There were twenty pilots and navigators, Flight Lieutenants and Squadron Leaders on the course. Up to that time the Engineering Branch had been involved with guided weapons but Officers of the General Duties Branch, who would be responsible for the operational use of these weapons, had little or no knowledge of them, hence the course.

There were a good bunch of people on the course; David Craig eventually became Chief of Air Staff; and several became Group Captains; we were all surprised that we had been selected and wondered what the future held.

The Course at Henlow lasted four months, subjects were servo mechanisms, guidance, control, radar, radio, propulsion, warheads, current projects and development and visits to companies developing guided weapons, Bristols, De Havillands, GEC, Fairy, Marcomi. We

worked from Monday to Friday mid-day so I was able to get home each weekend Viv was kept busy with the children, but the evenings must have been a bit lonely. We did not have a television. We completed the Henlow course at the beginning of August and reported to the College of Air Warfare at Manby where we learned about the history and application of guided missiles ; German, Russian and American applications. British surface to air, air to air and air to ground weapons. Manby was a long way from Wokingham and I did not manage to get home every weekend.

The course finished on 30th September and I was posted to Guided Weapons Plans at Headquarters Fighter Command at Bentley Priory.

Chapter 12 -Headquarters Fighter Command at Bentley Priory

I was posted to HQ Fighter Command on completion of the long GW course on 14 Oct 1957. Bentley Priory was a large house with extensive grounds in a lovely location near Bushey Heath overlooking Harrow on the Hill. Lord Dowding chose the location for his Headquarters in 1937 and had a large underground control room constructed, the necessary communications installed to Sector Operations Centers and through them to the newly built radar stations and the fighter bases. The Battle of Britain was directed from here. The control room still existed, suitably modified to control the new Master Radar Stations built under the Rotor Scheme.



My job was Guided Weapons Plans. I had to advise the Air plans department on deployment of surface to air missiles and keep them up to date on the development and trials of air to air missiles. More of this later.

My first job was to find somewhere to live. It was a long way to Wokingham. A large build of new married quarters was nearing completion at Bushy Heath. As a stop gap we rented a house near Bovington, it was about 20 miles from work and rather remote from shops. We decided that we had to have a new car HOB with its crash gear box was totally unsuitable for Viv to learn to drive. A Morris Minor Traveller seemed most suited to our needs. As we had very little money, hire purchase was the only solution, the first and last time we resorted to it. My job required a lot of traveling which greatly helped to pay off the hire purchase. Daddy's wood car as it was known to the children, was an excellent vehicle, well suited to the family and easy for Viv to learn to drive.

We moved into a new married quarter at Bushy Heath early in 1958. Shops were accessible at Bushey Heath but it was a long push up hill with the pram and three children. Viv had driving lessons at a driving school in Harrow, a very busy and difficult place to learn, but she passed her test first time which was great. We had some good neighbours in the married quarters and with the mess at Bentley Priory we had a reasonable social life. The M1 was just completed between Watford and Coventry which made the journey to Sutton very much better, and we were able to visit the Old Farm more frequently.

In June we decided to go camping in Scotland we went early because Viv was expecting James in November. We spent the first night at Cuddy's Burn near Bewcastle, the midges were bad when we woke, but it did not rain. We packed a dry tent and set off for Scotland, by the time we got to Glen Coe it was pouring, as we crossed the Balahoulish ferry it was starting to get dark and we decided to try to find accommodation. Seeing a small pub at Duror I stopped and asked the lady who came to the door if she had any rooms for two adults and three children? She replied "and what would your names be?" I told her and she said

that they had rooms and would be pleased to accommodate us. We had a comfortable night and a good breakfast and decided to forget camping and stayed there for a further four nights. The landlord and his wife, Mr and Mrs Cameron were nice people and they made us most welcome. When we got to know them I asked Mrs Cameron why she asked our name before she said that she had rooms, Oh she said if your name had been Campbell there would have been no rooms. The Camerons and all the locals talked about the 45 as if they were discussing 1945 not 1745.

We explored the local area, the roads were still little more than lanes, a trip to Mallaig via Fort William took all day. A virtually unmade road with passing places was wild and beautiful, but 25 to 30 mph was as fast as you could drive. Mallaig was a busy fishing port, the fish being taken by train to Fort William and the South. We had picnics every day, making fires from the drift wood on the beaches. In the evening we had high tea at the pub then I joined Mr Cameron in the bar, ladies did not go in the bar, Viv and Mrs Cameron had their drinks in the lounge. The bar was always full of locals including the village policeman. Mr Cameron closed the bar promptly at ten o'clock, we went through into the lounge and had a cup of tea with the ladies then, Mr Cameron asked me if I would like another drink in the bar? I agreed and to my amazement the bar was still full of locals including the policeman. Mr Cameron re-opened the bar and drink flowed until well after midnight. When I asked about this I was told that they always obeyed the closing time but there was nothing to say it should not re-open.

One evening a villager came into the bar, gave a slip of paper to Mr Cameron and announced that we would drink his fish. When he caught the salmon he took it to the village station and sent it to Glasgow. The station master gave him a receipt for the salmon, and this was cashed by Mr Cameron. We thoroughly enjoyed our stay at Durer which was much better than camping. The bill for the five days was 16-10s. Bed and breakfast for all of us was 13-00 and high teas 3-10s. I still have the receipt.

My work involved the deployment of Bloodhound 11 surface to air guided missiles. The RAF was responsible for the nuclear deterrent. Defence of the bases to ensure that the V bombers could get airborne in the event of nuclear war was the responsibility of Fighter Command using fighter aircraft for early interceptions and guided missile for close defence to intercept any enemy aircraft which penetrated the fighter defences. Together with air plans at air ministry I was responsible for drawing up plans for deployment and for surveying the suitability of proposed bases. Where possible the bases should be deployed on land owned by the Ministry Of Defence. There were numerous disused airfields around the V Force bases. A squadron Leader from MOD and myself surveyed all suitably disused airfields. This took about six months and involved a great deal of driving which helped to pay off the higher purchase on the Wood Car. Finally our proposals were approved and the surface to air missiles deployed.

Intelligence showed that the Soviet bombers were capable of producing severe electronic jamming which required considerable modification and improvement to the ground radars and air defence tactics. I was involved in frequent visits to the Royal Radar Establishment at Malvern to discuss our requirements and possible solutions to the problem. I also visited the guided weapons trials range at Aberporth and the Guided Weapons Trials Unit at Valley. I used an Anson from the Bovingdon communications for these visits. I got checked out and

instrument rated on the Anson so I was able to fly myself. I also took six staff officers to a wedding at St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. This trip proved to be interesting, you had to be careful on the MXX Anson when carrying a full load of passengers to ensure that the Center of Gravity did not get too far back when landing. I briefed the passengers to ensure that the rear seat was empty when we landed. Four of the passengers moved down the back to play poker. When we joined the circuit at Turnhouse I told the Navigator to ensure that the passengers were seated and strapped in for landing. I noticed on finals that we seemed tail heavy, after selecting full flap for landing and as the speed dropped off I had the stick right forward and the nose was still coming up slowly, the tail wheel touched first followed by the main wheels. If I had lowered full flap any earlier we would have stalled on the approach. Needless to say there was no problem on the return journey.

There were a number of Meteors kept at Bovington for staff officers to keep themselves in flying practice. I got out of the office whenever I could and flew Marks 7, 8 and XIV, the night fighter version which was new to me.

James was born on the 6th of November 1958. We went home to the Old Farm as usual for Christmas, quite a crowd of us now but the children loved to go to see granny and Mum took it all in her stride. In 1959 we arranged to go to Cornwall for our summer holidays with Ni, Jean and their children. We rented a house at Pentire Glaze about three miles north of Polzeath. This was my first trip back to North Cornwall since 1939 and I think it was the first time for Ni, Jean and Viv. Nothing had changed much, the splendid beaches, the surfing, and the Cornish cream were as good as ever. The clotted cream was still made by pouring cream into big trays, heating it until a crust formed on the top of the trays. This crust was taken off and sold as clotted cream. This method of making clotted cream is no longer permitted for some crazy reasons of hygiene with the result that the lovely flavour of clotted cream has been lost. It was a splendid holiday with scorching weather, we surfed two or three times each day and stayed in the surf until we were exhausted. No wet suits then. Ni and I would go out to the pub in the evening and buy a large jug of beer which we took home.

We made some friends at Bushey, particularly Peter and Roz Knapton and Gerry and Joan Eaton. Pete Knapton was previously Assistant Air Attaché in Moscow where he met Roz a wild Australian girl who had been the Australian Daily Mirror reporter in Moscow. Pete was a fluent Russian speaker. When the Russians sent aircraft to land in the UK they had to carry an RAF Officer on the flight deck. Pete regularly got this job. On one occasion they sent a Tupelov 104 to the Toronto air show via Heathrow, Pete also got that job. This was the first time that the Russians had landed an aircraft in North America. Apparently there was a huge party after the Toronto air show, Pete claimed the Russians only sobered up on the way back when they found themselves short of fuel over Ireland. They landed at Heathrow with all the fuel warning lights on.

Viv and Roz got on well, Roz had coffee parties which ended with crème de menthe frappe's following these coffee parties. I arrived home for lunch to find Viv drunk in charge of stove.

Gerry Eaton was a fluent French speaker, his father was on the war graves commission between the wars and Gerry went to school in France. When the French sent a fighter squadron over to Wattisham for a week's visit, Gerry was the natural choice to meet and look after them. When the station commander introduced Gerry to the squadron he overheard one

of the French pilots remark, "I don't suppose he can speak any French, these Brits never can". Gerry said afterwards that he decided not to disappoint them so he spent five days showing them round a radar station, Fighter Command Headquarters and a visit to London speaking terrible broken English. The conclusion of the visit was a Dining in Night at Bently Priory. After the dinner and toasts the French Squadron Commander gave a speech thanking the Commander in Chief for the hospitality and finished off by thanking Gerry for looking after them. Gerry replied on behalf of the mess in perfect French. First of all he explained why he had feigned an inability to speak French, he went on to explain that he had gone to a village school close to their base and only returned to England when the war started. The French were highly amused and insisted on buying Gerry drinks in the bar afterwards.

A large house with a lot of land behind our married quarters was sold to a developer, who built good quality houses. They were detached four bedroom properties with four bedrooms, a decent size garden and garage; the price was 4,000. When mum and Dad came to visit us Dad said that we should buy one and offered to lend us the 1000 deposit which was necessary at that time. We considered the proposal but I expected to be posted within six months and we decided that it would be too much of a worry. Those houses must be worth more than 80,000 today.

Back in the office early in August Wally Cadwallader, a New Zealander, walked in and said you played rugby for the RAF didn't you when did you last play? I said yes but that was eight years ago and I have not played at all for the last two years. He said "right, I want you out tomorrow evening and three nights per week before the season starts for training. I have discovered that there is a lot of talent here and I have promised the C in C that the Headquarters team will win the RAF station shield competition this year". This was the start of the best rugby season I ever played. I thought I had received good coaching at Cranwell, but coaching New Zealand style was something different. Wally got us really fit before the season started, we then played a few friendly fixtures with local teams. Three quarters tactics, scissors, dummy scissors, short kick ahead, long kick to the wing were practiced again and again. The forwards were taken in hand and made to run and pass the ball in short sharp bursts. Wally's de-briefing after these games was an eye opener. He very quickly picked up every-ones strengths and weaknesses and allowed for them when briefing before the kick off.

Before the first round of the Station Shield he found out who we would be playing. He went and watched the opposition before we were due to play them then decided on a game plan for the match. This went on for each round. By the time we reached the final we won all our games by never less than 20 clear points. The final was against Headquarters Bomber Command at High Wycombe. The CinC of Bomber Command, Bing Cross, was president of RAF Rugby and convinced that his team would win. Before the game Wally told us that they were a very good team and we could expect them to mark and tackle the moment we got the ball. He instructed the fly-half to kick the ball ahead to touch every time we got the ball and he was to do this until Wally took his hat off, then the ball was to be passed out to me I was to do a scissors with our other center. The kicking ahead went on till just before half time, the opposition three quarters had started to hang back when Wally removed his hat. I did the scissors passed the ball back to the fly-half who scored. When Wally put his hat back on the fly half was to kick for the corner flag and I was to go for the corner flag. It worked and I

scored, we were 14 points clear by half time.

At half time Wally said that the opposition would be concentrating on the three quarters, when we got the ball the scrum half and fly half were to pass the ball back to the forwards who put their training into practice and scored two splendid tries. Bomber Command HQ scored one try and a penalty. The CinC of Fighter Command, Tom Pike, was delighted with the victory and invited us all for drinks at his residence the following evening. At the drinks party Tom Pike asked me when I was due for posting and what I wanted to do next, I told him that I wanted to go back to a flying job. The next day I was told that I would be posted to the first night fighter squadron to be equipped with Firestreak air to air missiles.

Whilst at HQFC, I completed 67 hours on Ansons, 43 hours on Meteors and 3 hours on Chipmunks.

On 1st May I was posted to No 197 All Weather Refresher Course at Strubby. Hardly necessary as I was in flying practice on the Meteor. The course at Strubby Nr Manby in Lincolnshire was on Meteor 7s and 8s. I completed a total of 24 hours the only incident was Oxygen failure on a high level cross country. After about half an hour at 40,000 ft, I felt drowsy, a check indicated that oxygen appeared to be flowing still feeling that something was wrong I selected emergency Oxygen and descended. I soon realized that indeed I had indeed been anoxic. On return to Strubby the aircraft was checked and it was found that the economizer diaphragm had ruptured which resulted in a total lack of Oxygen, although the indicator showed that all was well I completed the course on 6th July.

There was a nice break before I was due to go to the Night Fighter Operational Conversion Unit on 14th August, so we arranged another holiday in Cornwall with Ni and Jean. It was a long journey to Cornwall, there were no motorways and towns such as Oxford, Bath, and Exeter were often congested so we made up a bed in the back of the car and set off at about 11pm. The children slept and we had a good journey. This was another great family holiday. We rented a large house, Four Winds, at Polzeath on the North side of the bay. Ni marched the children down to the beach each morning and built the most elaborate sand castles. The children had a great time, Philippa learned to swim in the very cold tidal rock pool, and surfing was the order of the day for the adults. The weather was splendid and we were very brown by the time we went home.

The course at No 228 OCU Leeming commenced on 14 August. There were 20 on the course, ten pilots and ten navigators. We started with two weeks ground school during this time we had to decide who we were going to crew with. Ivan Symmonds decided that he wanted to crew with me, he seemed pleasant and switched on so I agreed. Ivan had done a tour on Canberras in Singapore and been involved in a crash on take off in which his pilot had been killed and he was quite fussy about who he flew with. I was fortunate because Ivan proved to be an excellent Nav/Rad.

The ground school was thorough and it needed to be because the Javelin was quite a complicated aircraft. It had hydraulic power controls, supplied by three hydraulic pumps which provided some redundancy, all services were hydraulically operated. Brakes were operated by toe pedals on the rudder, they were fierce, and it took a little time to learn to taxi the aircraft. The power controls were very sensitive, they also took a little while to get used

to. Starting was achieved by firing a large cordite cartridge.

Two designs were built to meet the requirement for a new night fighter to replace the Meteor, the Gloster Javelin and the De Havilland Vixen. There is little doubt that the Vixen was the better aircraft, it was fully aerobatic and had a superior performance. It is difficult to understand why the Javelin was chosen, possibly because De Havilland had plenty of orders for the Comet and Trident and Glosters depended on the Javelin order. The Javelin was not a good aircraft, aerodynamically it was a compromise, stall warnings were fitted, if the aircraft was allowed to stall there was insufficient elevator control to recover. If you got into a spin it was almost impossible to recover, looping was prohibited because of the danger of stalling at the top of the loop. There was a yaw damper to improve stability and vortex generators on the outer wings to improve aileron sensitivity. Auto trim in the pitching plane to safeguard against rapid change in trim when accelerating to climbing speed. It was a big aircraft, weighing about 19 tons. It had a reasonable performance, two large engines Sapphires giving 8000 lbs thrust gave a good rate of climb and it would go supersonic in a dive. The best features were excellent air brakes, essential when attempting to get visual recognition at night. The cockpit layout, which was excellent, and it was a good aircraft on instruments, excellent for instrument approaches and it virtually landed itself, the large delta wing gave a cushioning effect as it came close to the ground.

There was a large Airborne Interception radar (AI) in the nose this was operated by the Nav/Rad who also had a navigation aid (G). I flew two dual sorties in the Javelin T3 and then my first trip in the MK V with Ivan. We soon got used to the MK V then there was a lot of hard work learning to operate the aircraft .

Night interceptions required the pilot and navigator to work together as a team. Each had to have complete confidence in the other. The aircraft was controlled by ground radar until the Nav/Rad identified the target on his AI from that point the Nav/Rad gave instructions to the pilot to finalize the interception. We had to reach a standard where we could complete the interception at night or in cloud. First we practiced the procedure in daylight. Ivan gave me directions to bring us in behind the target. All Ivan's instructions were derived from his radar. I had to follow his instructions accurately, keeping an eye on the target aircraft thereby developing confidence in his ability and correcting him as necessary. The difficult part of the interception was the final stage where we obviously had to have a significant overtaking speed until we reached a separation of about 300 yards and slightly below. When Ivan called "speed back", air brakes out and throttle back, as our speeds coincided, Ivan instructed "hold that speed", ideally he should leave us with a small overtaking speed, allowing us to float in below and behind the target. Once we could do this in daylight we then had to carry out interceptions in cloud or at night with no lights on the target aircraft.

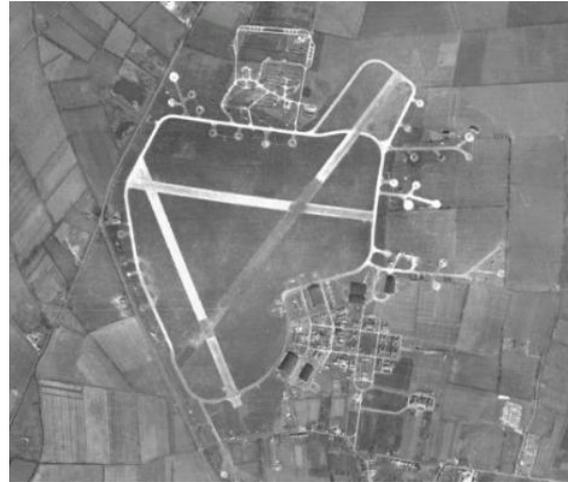
Night interceptions were quite a challenge. Once Ivan had got us to within 100 yards of the target it was my job to see it and this was very much dependant on light conditions. Bright moonlight was usually helpful but pitch black nights could be very difficult, if the target was slightly higher than us it could be seen against the stars. My night vision was quite good and once I got used to looking slightly to one side I usually saw the target quickly.

At the end of the course we were followed by a staff crew in a chase aircraft. They were responsible for assessing our interception technique by listening to our inter com which was

transmitted, and following our interception and our ability to follow the target when it evaded. We were assessed as the top crew on the course and were the only ones to be assessed as above average. We flew a total of 36 hours day and 26 night on the course. At the end of the course we were posted to No 25 Squadron at Waterbeach.

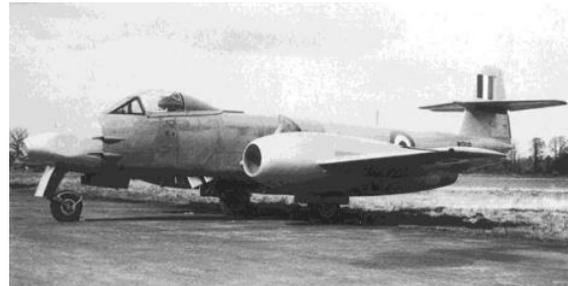
Chapter 13 – 25 Squadron - Waterbeach

I was posted as senior Flight Commander. We were met by the Squadron Commander, Jimmy Walton a Navigator who made it clear that I would crew with him and that Ivan would crew with another pilot. I had to make the best of things, but I did not hit it off with Jimmy. He was very set in his ways as a Nav/Rad and as far as I was concerned was not in the same league as Ivan. Jimmy Walton was a showman, he had his initials painted in large letters on the tail fin of our aircraft J H W.



25 Squadron is a famous Squadron formed initially at Montrose in 1917 between the wars. It was equipped with Bristol Blenheims, followed by Beaufighters, the first really successful AI equipped night fighter. This was followed by Mosquitos of varying Marks. After the war they flew Meteors followed by Javelin. When I arrived on the Squadron they were just replacing the Mk 7s with Mk 9s.

I arrived at Waterbeach on 5th December 1960. It was strange to be back at Waterbeach, married and with a young family. We were allocated my predecessor's ex-officio married quarter which was in an awful condition, and it took Viv about two weeks to get it clean. Philippa, Mike and Fiona went to the village school and were soon on Christmas holidays.



We stayed at Waterbeach for Christmas because the Squadron was on Quick Reaction Alert which required one crew to be at cockpit readiness from dusk to dawn.

Flying kit was cumbersome, most of the year we wore immersion suits, G suits and pressure waistcoats which were necessary if operating above 40,000 ft. The cockpit was pressurized but if the cabin pressure failed you would not survive without a pressure waistcoat.

My first job was to convert to the Mk 9 which was quite an advance on the Mk5; it was much heavier, 43,165lbs take off weight, had larger engines, two Sapphires of 11,000 lbs thrust each and re-heat added an additional 1,300lbs. It did 610 kts at sea level and .93 Mach at 55,000 ft. It had the latest Martin Baker 0/0 ejection seats which made it possible to eject at ground level with no forward speed. It carried four firestreak infra red passive homing weapons and four 30mm Aden cannons. The engine starters used a small cartridge to ignite avpin, a rocket fuel, to drive a small gas turbine which spun up the engine, this produced a rapid start. However the avpin was a horrid substance and the starter was prone to causing a small fire in the starter bay, for this reason the ground crew usually left a panel off in order to get a fire extinguisher into action quickly. Once successfully started they buttoned up the panel. From pressing the starter buttons we could be taxiing in 30 seconds. The engines

produced a lot of thrust at idle revs, once the aircraft was rolling brakes had to be used to keep the speed down. The brakes were efficient anti skid disk brakes. On take off acceleration was rapid, the nose wheel was raised at 170 knots and the aircraft flew off at 180. After take off the speed was built up rapidly to 380 kts then you climbed, I cannot remember how long it took to get to 20000ft. If you were in a hurry selection of re heat got the aircraft to 45,000ft very quickly. 50,000 ft was the altitude where we intercepted the Vulcans and Victors. Getting down was even quicker, the air brakes allowed the aircraft to descend nearly vertically. Approach speed was 150 kts the aircraft trimmed out beautifully. If it was raining the windscreen could be cleared with an excellent rain dispersal device which provided a blast of air tapped from the engines. Landing speed was 135 kts over the hedge. Waterbeach had a 2000 yd runway which was a bit short, once safely down we flamed out one engine to reduce the residual thrust. Frequently when the aircraft got into dispersal the brake pads were nearly red hot and smoking. At night you could see the brake disks glowing.

One afternoon in March I was taking off on the 05 runway with the sun behind me, as I rotated for take off the starboard engine fire warning flashed. This could have been caused by the sun glinting on the light, if there was an engine fire the light should have stayed on. There was no indication of fire from the jet pipe temperatures or engine revs but I had a hunch so flamed the engine out and operated the fire extinguisher. We then flew around on one engine to get the aircraft down to landing weight. Back at the squadron I explained to the engineer officer what had happened. He was not happy saying that the starboard engine would have to be taken out and that I was not justified in operating the fire extinguisher because the fire warning light did not stay on. I told him that I would stay and see what was found. About an hour later the engineer officer said you'd better come and look at this. The turbine casing had split and flames had torched through the crack, burnt through the fire warning wiring and was torching onto the hydraulic pipe which operated the tail plane. If I had not flamed out the engine the hydraulic pipe would have lasted about another thirty seconds, followed by a major fire and total loss of control. Subsequently the fire warning system was modified to ensure that a failure resulted in the light staying on, the hydraulic pipes were also re-routed. Dad told me that acting on a hunch saved his life in the first world war, it certainly did in my case.

I was supervising Squadron flying one morning when Rupert Clarke the station commander telephoned and asked if he could have an aircraft and navigator to do a bit of general handling. I told him that an aircraft would be ready in half an hour. When I went into the crew room to find a navigator there wasn't one in sight and I couldn't think where they had gone. Eventually I got a navigator from Wing Headquarters in time for the station commander. That evening Ivan told me that all the navs had been hiding in the flying lockers. The Station Commander was in the Navigators black book. Apparently some weeks previously on a descent he broke cloud at 9,000 ft inverted. The word soon got round the Nav's ' union, and they were very reluctant to fly with him.

25 Squadron had a role to deploy to Cyprus in the event of problems in the Middle East. It was important that I should be familiar with the route should a deployment be ordered so Jimmy Walton arranged for two aircraft to go to Cyprus in June. We went via Orange, Luqa, El Adem to Nicosia where we stayed for the weekend. We hired a car and visited Kyrenia which was a pleasant little port on the North coast of Cyprus. This was the first time that the

squadron had taken Mk 9s to Cyprus. Previous deployments had been in M7s which had a longer range, the Mk9 had the same amount of fuel but re-heat with its attendant intakes for cooling increased the drag considerably and the leg from Luqa to Orange was a bit tight. We had to flame out one engine and glide the last 100 miles, not desirable when leading a squadron. We decided that in future we would route from Orange to El Adem via Pisa rather than Luqa. The Mk9 was rightly called the drag master.

Our role was to defend the deterrent, the threat was believed to be two hundred Russian bombers flying at heights between 40 and 50,000 ft using heavy jamming of ground radars and AIs and therefore most of our training was high level interceptions on occasions with jamming. There were flypasts for the Queens birthday when we joined the Wattisham wing of Lightnings and flew up the Mall and over the palace.

In August we heard that 25 Sqn was to move to Leuchars. In October, we heard that we were to deploy to Cyprus in October. I found that we could get a temporary married at Leuchars and on 6th September I drove Viv and the children to Leuchars, Pip Mike and Fiona were able to get started at their new schools for the new term. I left the car with Viv and got a lift back to Waterbeach.

Back at Waterbeach we had Battle of Britain fly pasts. We took the squadron to Gaydon near Warwick on 11Sept, night stopped, left the aircraft on display until mid afternoon when we took off. We formed up and flew past in three boxes of four, then we over flew St Athan, Colerne, Chivenor and finally Waterbeach.

On 20 September I popped up to Leuchars to see how Viv was settling in, Mike and Fiona had got into the village school and Pip had got into the Madras Academy in St Andrews. The teaching was of a very high standard and it gave Pip a very good start, particularly in writing and composition. Viv liked Leuchars and I was looking forward to getting there. On 26 September the whole Squadron deployed to Leuchars for two days to take part in a big exercise. We scrambled from Leuchars and intercepted Vulcans and Victors North of the Shetlands. I was surprised how far we traveled before we coasted out over Cape Wrath.

Back to Waterbeach after the Exercise then on 18thOct we deployed to Cyprus. To simplify turn rounds at the staging posts we flew in pairs at ten minute intervals. We led off the first pair with Rupert Clarke as our number two, he had asked to come with us. There was thick cloud on our descent into Orange, I saw that Rupert was having trouble forming on us. Looking out Jimmy Walton said the Station Commander is in front of us. I said yes I am forming on him, it is safer that way, he will not hit us. When we broke cloud I pulled in front of him, he took up his position and nothing was ever said. We night stopped at Pisa where refueling was very slow. Next day we flew in pairs to El Adem where we gathered in order to fly as a Squadron formation to Akrotiri. All the taxiways and dispersals had just been resurfaced. Unfortunately the refueling bowsers could not pump at the required refueling pressure with the result that the fuelling shut off valve closed slowly and gallons of fuel were spilt under each aircraft. When we taxied out of the dispersal the new tarmac rolled up like Swiss rolls, not a popular move. Arriving at Akrotiri we did a Squadron fly past, then broke and did a stream landing.

We were met by our ground crew who had been flown out from Waterbeach by Transport

Command Britannias. Shortly after our arrival we were briefed for an air defence exercise. The attacking bombers would operate at low and high level. The airfield was the target for the bombers by day and night. Jimmy asked that the airfield be closed for take off and landing when it was under attack, unfortunately this request was refused with fatal consequences. On the first night of the exercise Canberras attacked at 300 feet over the sea; intercepting at night at 300 feet was not easy, we had radio altimeters which were very accurate but if the aircraft was banked the radio altimeter ceased to work and the artificial horizon became the key instrument to avoid flying into the sea. Unfortunately one of our less experienced crews chased a Canberra over the airfield and hit another Canberra which was in the circuit. The Canberra crew were killed, our crew John Morris the pilot and his nav John Lloyd bailed out. His 'chute opened just before his feet hit the ground and he landed in the wreckage. John Morris's ejection seat was about half way up the rail when the aircraft hit the ground and he was killed instantly Viv had the awful job of accompanying the Station Commander at Leuchars to break the news to Mrs Morris.

On the second night of the exercise we were scrambled to intercept Vulcans at 50,000 ft. Using reheat we intercepted two Vulcans, got Firestreak acquisition on them and were back in dispersal in twenty minutes. Once the exercise was over we carried out routine training flying and spent quite a lot of time swimming off the cliffs at Cape Gata.

The return from Akrotiri was spread over three days. The majority of the Squadron aircraft left Akrotiri on 12th Nov. With Jimmy Walton I led the last pair of barely serviceable aircraft. Leaving at dawn on 14th Nov our route was via El Adem, Luqa, Pisa and Waterbeach arriving in the evening after a very long day to drop off the Boss and clear customs. Next day picking up my new Nav, Jock Shields, we staged through Middleton St George to drop off our Firestreaks. Middleton would only handle two aircraft at a time and they took forever to handle our missiles. I was the last to land at Leuchars at about 2200hours. We were met by the Station Commander Group Captain Davis and the new boss Wing Commander PGK Williamson a pilot. PGK had been on Beaufighters during the war and had been awarded the DFC. An extrovert showman type he arrived at Leuchars in his Piaggio amphibian, complete with large family, they had flown from Naples, their previous posting. The Piaggio was the subject of a long running dispute with customs who attempted charge duty on it. PGK told them to put it into bonded store. I don't know the final outcome the dispute was ongoing when I left the squadron.

Jock Shields had crewed with PGK on the refresher course at Leeming. When PGK took over 25 Sqn he re-crewed with the senior Nav Phil Hyson and Jock became my Nav. Jock was an experienced Nav Rad who had been on Beaufighters and Mosquitoes during the war. Prior to the Leeming course he had done a tour in charge of the desert rescue unit at El Adem. He had completed many expeditions into the Sahara and discovered some large caves with ancient paintings of animals. He was an excellent radar operator and we worked well as a crew on interceptions.

I found that Viv had moved into a permanent married quarter, the children had settled down in their new schools and we all liked Leuchars (Viv and the children moved there in anticipation of a posting I was expecting. There were great walks on Tentsmuir beach where hundreds of geese roosted in the winter. In the spring terns and eider duck nested on the shores of the estuary on the south side of the airfield. St Andrews on the south side of the

estuary was a lovely city, wide streets with little traffic, the shops were good and shop keepers were very friendly and helpful and a particularly good cake shop. Viv had found the fish market at Pittenweem where bidding for what she thought were some fish on display she found that she had bought a whole box. Fish was very cheap. At Leuchars the search and rescue helicopter crew had an arrangement with the local lobster fishermen to put lobster pots in places which were inaccessible to the locals and we could buy lobsters from the chopper crews for two shillings.

I enjoyed flying from Leuchars, the visibility was exceptional. The sea was very cold even in summer, and we always wore immersion suits. Fantastic displays of Northern Lights were seen when night flying and occasionally St Elmos fire would surround the nose cone and cockpit. Bell Rock lighthouse was just outside the three mile limit and on the extended centerline of the main runway was an almost permanent anchorage for a Russian spy trawler. Frequently when returning from a night flying sortie we would do a night speed low flying pass over the trawler and select re-heat to wake them up.

In February PGK decided that he should become familiar with the route to Cyprus should he have to move the Squadron there at short notice and asked me to lead the pair. We cleared customs at Manston, refueled at Orange and night stopped at Pisa where we got involved with a bunch of American aircrew. When I left the bar Jock was still drinking with the Americans. Next morning Jock told me that the leaning tower was a con. He and the two Americans had been to look at the tower, rather the worse for wear, they had not realized that tower was leaning towards them. Jock was pretty hung over and shortly after take off for Malta he fell asleep. He woke up on the descent into Malta asking where we were. I told him that we were just joining the circuit at Luqa, no thanks to him and that navs were just commissioned ballast. From Luqa via El Adem to Nicosia where we spent the weekend. On the return trip all four of us bought cases of Chateau Neuf at Orange which we stowed in the empty ammunition bays.

Shortly after our return from Cyprus I was in charge of night flying when I was called to Air Traffic Control. John Galley the Nav in one of a pair of our aircraft which were briefed to do practice night interceptions, had called to say that he thought that his pilot Pete Godwin was anoxic. He said that they were at 40,000 feet and that Pete was not answering him. I told John Galley to continue to tell us what was happening and instructed Bill Akister the pilot of the other aircraft, to intercept and shadow Pete Goodwin. The pair were about 100 miles East of Leuchars and I put the ASR helicopter on stand by and instructed air traffic to keep them in the picture. John Galley reported that they were climbing slowly and the speed was dropping off, this was confirmed by Bill Akister who said that they were going too slowly for him to stay close. Then they started to descend and the speed built up. After a long slow descent to 10,000ft, Pete Goodwin came round, we told him to check his oxygen tube, it had become disconnected or he had never connected it. I instructed them to return to Leuchars and not to climb above 10,000. I went down to dispersal to meet the crews, Pete Goodwin was completely oblivious to everything which had happened and John Galley was very shaken. When John came to work next day his hair, which had been black, had gone completely white overnight.

Early in March a visiting Hunter attempting to land on the short runway overshot and ended up in the mud in the estuary. It was vital that the Hunter should be pulled out of the mud

before it was covered by the tide. The heavy towing equipment available on the station failed to move the Hunter, then the Senior Engineering Officer remembered that the seven dwarfs had a steam traction engine. The seven dwarfs had a garage near Guard Bridge on the way into St Andrews. I am not sure that there were really seven dwarfs. I saw four of them together on one occasion. They were excellent mechanics and very pro RAF. The only problem with them was that if you opened an account with them, it was very difficult to get a bill from them. When people were posted and they finally got a bill, it usually was far short of the amount which was owed, book keeping was not one of their strong points, The S Eng O got in his car and went down and explained the problem to the dwarfs who immediately agreed to fire up the traction engine. About an hour later they arrived on the scene and pulled the Hunter out of the mud with little difficulty. The Station Commander who turned out to watch the operation, asked the head dwarf to let him have a bill for salvaging the aircraft. A month later the Dwarfs were told that they must present a bill so that the Station could claim salvage for them. The next morning one of the dwarfs arrived at station headquarters with a bill which read to salvage one aircraft fifteen shillings. When asked how they arrived at the fifteen shillings, they explained that it was the cost of coal to operate the traction engine. When it was explained to them that a fair price for the salvage operation would be about 1,000, they were horrified and said that they could not accept more than the price of the coal.

At the end of April the hours of darkness were becoming very limited at 40,000ft and I suggested to Bill Akister that we should take our fishing rods and try fishing the estuary when we had finished night flying. We had a splendid morning, I caught four large sea trout and Bill caught five. When we got home at about seven we laid the fish out on the lawn in front of my quarter and photographed them. Several people going to work stopped to admire the fish, the word spread round the quarters like wild fire with the result that the wives dashed off to buy rods and tackle and by afternoon there were about twenty people fishing. During the rest of my time at Leuchars I caught many sea trout in the estuary and in a large pool which formed off the end of the runway when the tide went out.

About the end of April one of the pilots on 29 Sqn told us that his Kerry Blue had a litter of pups and asked if we would like one, once we saw them we simply had to have one and we called her Tammy, she got on well with Bonny who was nine,

On the 25th May the Squadron was detached to Gutersloh for twelve weeks and during our absence the Luchars' runways were repaired. We flew to Gutersloh in formation, did a fly past then broke down wind to land, as we were going down wind Jock said "do you see those woods parallel with the runway? I was in the first Mosquito to land here in 1945, we found hundreds of dead slave labourers in those woods they had been shot by the Gestapo."

We held dusk to dawn Quick Reaction Alert {QRA} throughout our detachment, this was shared by flights rotating on Fridays when at the end of a week of nights there was a big party in the bar. The Russians were considered to pose a night time threat to the air corridors in and out of Berlin, we were never scrambled. Detachments were always a great boost to Squadron morale, we took on the locals at everything, mess games, darts, hockey, cricket, golf. I remember there was a large fish pond at the Gutersloh Officers Mess, it was full of carp, one of which was a monster which had eluded the locals for many years. A couple of enterprising fishermen on the Squadron caught many of the carp including, the monster, and returned them with a 25 Sqn. tag.

Early in July I was called back to Group HQ for an interview, with a view to a posting to Command the All Weather Fighter Combat Unit (AWFCU) at West Raynham . I was told that Leeming was to close and there would be a need to convert some pilots to the Javelin. As I was a Qualified Flight Instructor (QFI) , I had been chosen to turn the AWFCU into a Javelin conversion unit, and I was to take up my post at West Raynham on 28th July. I was dined out in the mess at Gutersloh then back to Leuchars to collect the family, fortunately Philippa, Mike and Fiona were on school holidays and we were able to move straight into an Ex-Officio married quarter at West Raynham which was situated near Fakenham in North Norfolk.

West Raynham was the home of the Central Fighter Establishment which comprised the Day Fighter Leaders School, the All Weather Fighter Combat School, also The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight of three Spitfires, one Hurricane and a Lancaster, and additionally a Squadron of Mk 8 Javelins.

Chapter 14 - West Raynham

West Raynham was about 12 miles South of the coast, very rural, we often went to the beach at weekends vast open beaches, miles of golden sand, few people, we loved it and Tammy ran for miles chasing Oyster Catchers. We settled into our married quarter and Pip Mike and Fiona started at the local school at the end of August.

My job was to convert the All Weather Fighter Combat School into a Javelin Operational Conversion Unit. Like Leeming but on a very much smaller scale, we had six Mk 5 Javelins and four very experienced crews. The course was to last two months and we were to train five crews per course. My first job was to sort out a training programme with my senior Nav/Rad Mick Walters. We were ready for our first course by the beginning of September, the crews arrived and we did the first exercise when I received a phone call from Fighter Command to tell me that several Javelin Squadrons were to be disbanded with the result that my unit was no longer required and would be disbanded. In due course I would have to dispose of the aircraft and arrange for postings of air and ground crew including myself. I notified the Commandant of CFE, Air Commodore Crowley Milling who assured me that he and his staff would do all they could to assist.



We were told to take our aircraft to the MU at High Ercall, near Shrewsbury. On September Mick Walters and I climbed into one of our Javelins, we did the normal start up checks and I pressed the starter button for the port engine. Instead of the usual controlled burn of the starter cartridge there was an explosion, fire warning lights came on and there was a lot of smoke. I told Mick to get out, then I pressed the fire extinguisher button, shut off the high and low pressure cocks, shut down all power, undid my safety harness, climbed out of the cockpit, climbed down the ladder and checked that the ground crew had got the fire out in the engine bay. When I turned round Mick Walters was standing next to me offering me a cup of coffee. I learned that the cartridge had exploded in the starter which was right under Mick's seat. The ground crew said that Mick abandoned the rear cockpit as if he had been blown out, he jumped off the trailing edge of the wing and ran like hell for the crew room. Looking back he realized that I was still in the cockpit so he grabbed a cup of coffee and met me at the foot of the ladder. The aircraft was a write off and we ferried the remaining aircraft to Shrewsbury.

The personnel staff at Command enquired about preferences for posting and most of my crews got postings of their choice to Squadrons but in my case the Air Ministry wanted to send me to command a Thor ballistic missile unit in East Anglia. The Long GW course had come back to haunt me. I complained that I had been short toured on 25 Squadron with the promise of another flying tour and requested that I be returned to 25 Sqn. or found another flying tour. I was called to an interview at Air Ministry where I was told that I could volunteer for a post on loan to the Royal Malaysian Air Force at Kuala Lumpur, I would be Officer Commanding Flying at Kuala Lumpur. Having agreed in principle I was sent for an

interview at the Malaysian High Commission where the job was explained to me. It was to be a three year accompanied tour, the RMAF had been formed since independence and was expanding, we would get an ex officio quarter on the base, pay was slightly better than in the RAF and as it was a new post it would be for me to coordinate and supervise the RMAF operations and I would have a free hand.

It was a flying post, Better than commanding a ballistic missile site, Viv agreed that it would be an ideal time to take the children overseas before they had to go to secondary school and we both thought that Malaya would be a great adventure for us all. I accepted the secondment and was notified that we would leave for Malaya on the P&O liner Chusan sailing from Southampton on 15 December.

About the middle of September the OC. 85 Squadron told me that he was short and could I help him out of crews for the forth-coming Autumn exercise 85 had Mk 8 Javelins, similar to the Mk 9s, as I was the only pilot on my unit who had flown Mk 9s I said that Mick and I would help out. We had a couple of familiarization trips before the exercise. Once the exercise started we found that we were on readiness in the late night periods when there was little chance of a scramble. Finally on the last night of the exercise Mick and I were one of the alert crews, the weather forecast was bad, there was thick fog and the only diversions were Coltishall and Middleton St George. Quite late in the evening we were brought to cockpit readiness & shortly after we were scrambled in thick fog with Coltishall as our recovery airfield. This was my first night trip in the Mk 8 which had a shorter nose than the Mk 9, when Mick started to scan with the Mk22 AI the aircraft developed a lateral shimmy which I found could be cured with the auto-stabilization which we never bothered to use on the longer nosed Mk9. We were vectored onto a Victor at 50,000ft on which we got a Firestreak acquisition. Two more interceptions, one involving a tail chase left us rather short of fuel. Having planned to divert to Coltishall we found to our dismay that it was closing due to fog and that only Middleton was open where the Javelin force was queuing for a landing slot. Not having sufficient fuel, we asked what West Raynham was like. We were told that the fog was thinning and that we could try an approach. With just sufficient fuel for one approach we decided to have a try. We had a good GCA breaking cloud at 200ft. I followed the centre line lights until I saw the first of the runway lights through the murk. Quite a night and my last trip in an operational fighter.

It was confirmed that I was to go to the RMAF and arrangements were made for me to renew my instructors category on the Piston Provost at Manby and CFS.

Chapter 15 - Royal Malaysian Airforce

When we arrived at Southampton and boarded the P& O liner Chusan it was snowing, the start of a very severe winter which we missed. The Chusan was a huge liner doing a return cruise to Hong Kong carrying many rich passengers doing the complete voyage and avoiding the winter. We were first class passengers and soon decided that it was a once in a lifetime trip, we might as well make the most of it and spent the car.

The first night out we hit a bad storm in the Bay of Biscay. Viv and the children were very sea sick as were most of the passengers. When I went to breakfast I found that only one table was occupied. After looking at the menu I ordered kippers, when they arrived most of the people at the table left and I noticed two of the cooks looking out of the serving hatch. The waiter said "I have just won a bet, the cooks bet that you would never eat the kippers".

After a rough crossing we dropped anchor at Gibraltar. We decided not go ashore but enjoyed the sunshine on the deck and watched the ships coming and going. Sailing down the Med we settled down to the ship's routine. Viv and I were seated on the Staff Captain's table with an interesting group of people including a tea planter and his wife from Ceylon, and the wife of a Major who was traveling out with her four children to join her husband in Malaya, she was Humphrey Littleton's sister, a very jolly girl.

We spent the mornings on deck, usually with the children who eat in the nursery where there was regular entertainment for them. The Med, became rough but everyone was getting their sea legs and it was not nearly so bad as the Bay of Biscay.

Early one morning we found that we were anchored at the port Said awaiting our turn to go through the Suez canal. Trips were arranged for passengers to go ashore and visit the pyramids and re-join the ship at Suez. We were told to lock our cabins and ensure that the portholes were closed; hundreds of small boats came alongside selling all sorts of rubbish. Eventually we got under way. We were on deck when Philippa turned to me, "is this the Sewage canal daddy?" An old deck hand standing near by said you are absolutely right lassie. The trip through the canal, with a pause in the Bitter lakes to allow the North bound ships to pass, was most interesting, we saw our first camels and I was surprised to see a lot of Egyptian Air Force activity including several Tu 16s. It was a strange feeling sailing through the desert in a large liner. We anchored at Suez and re embarked the passengers who had been to see the pyramids and ancient monuments.

Once we reached the Red Sea the swimming pools were filled and we spent a lot of time at the pool with the children who loved to swim. James spent most of the time under water, coming up for the odd gasp of air.

The trip down the Red sea like the rest of the voyage was spent round the swimming pool, playing deck games and eating. There was a big Christmas party for the children and elaborate celebrations for the passengers, I cannot remember exactly where we were on Christmas day possibly just out of the Red sea into the Indian ocean. We stopped for a short time at Aden where we went ashore and bought a food mixer and a cine camera. Thereafter a

long voyage to Bombay where we docked. I was amazed to see that all the huge cranes on the dock were made by Cowan and Sheldon of Carlisle.

Philippa and I went ashore for a look around, it was very hot dirty and smelly, we were pestered by beggars and soon returned to the ship where Viv decided to have a look round with one of the passengers while I looked after the children. We watched her walk down the gang plank then quickly she turned round and came back, her purse had been stolen before she stepped onto the dock.

I recall that there was a very long swell on the leg to Colombo. I think that it was on this part of the voyage when we celebrated New Year 1963. Amongst the New Year's honours announced by the Captain was my Queens Commendation for Valuable Services in the air on 25 Sqn. This was the signal for big celebrations on the Staff Captains table and the Champagne flowed.

We docked at Colombo and all went ashore. The tea planter family, who left the ship at Colombo, told us where to go. The zoo was splendid and the children particularly enjoyed the performing elephants. We visited the jewelry shops near the harbour and finally met the planter family at the Mount Lavinia hotel where we drank sun-downers and watched the sunset. The streets in Colombo were full of potholes the buses were old and dilapidated, the cars were old Morris Oxfords and Minors made in Ceylon

We sailed from Colombo to Penang, our destination. We were met there by John Williams, an RAF Squadron Leader on loan to the RMAF, who commanded the Twin Pioneer Squadron. We disembarked and made our way to Butterworth where John loaded us onto a Twin Pioneer and flew us to Kuala Lumpur. The afternoon thunder storms were in full swing and we had a rather bumpy ride to Kuala Lumpur where we were met and taken to temporary accommodation near Pudu jail. Next day I was taken to a tailor in KL and kitted out in RMAF uniform green cotton trousers and shirt and a funny black velvet oval shaped called a Sunkoh. I then visited the Ministry of Defense to meet the Chief of Air Staff, a seconded RAF Air Commodore and then on to the RMAF base at Kuala Lumpur air field which was shared with civilian airlines..

To my surprise and delight I found that the seconded doctor was Bill Russel who had been the station doctor at Leuchars. Bill became a family friend and his parents spent our first Christmas with us. Bill, who had been at KL for about three months,



helped me find a car, I bought a Ford Taunus the same as Bill. Bill, a bachelor, lived in the Malayan officer's mess, where the food tended to be curry, curry and curry so he frequently joined us for dinner or when we went out for a meal.

Malaya, as it was at that time, comprised the nine Malay states each of which was ruled by a Sultan, each of whom in turn became Agong or King every five years. The Prime Minister was Tunku Abdul Rahman and his deputy Tun Razak both were charming men very pro-British and they took a keen interest in the progress of the RMAF aircrew.

When I arrived the RMAF comprised; a Squadron of Twin Pioneers, which were used for troop carrying and supply dropping; a flight of single Pioneers, used for operations into short jungle strips: a communications flight of two Doves; one Heron and a twin engine Cessna, used primarily for carrying VIP's round the country and occasionally to Borneo; finally a flying training squadron of piston Provosts which were working hard to train Malaysian pilots.

The operations room was the vital key to operations. All flights tasked by the Ministry of Defence, and all local and training flying were recorded in the Ops room which was responsible for keeping a track and record of all flights. Aircraft notified their position every half hour, prior to landing at jungle strips, and again immediately after take-off. Communication was by VHF relays and HF radio. The Ops room task of keeping track of aircraft was vital, if an aircraft came down in the jungle it would be a needle in a haystack operation even with the Ops room's record of the last known position of a missing aircraft. The Ops room was responsible for initiating overdue action when an aircraft was out of contact for more than thirty minutes, this occurred quite frequently due to bad communications often caused by afternoon thunder storms.

The OC Ops, Slim Key, was also responsible for maintaining rudimentary fire appliances and the provision of five gallon flimsy petrol containers, when required, at remote jungle strips.

I was responsible for overall control of all flying operations, and because our main base was a civilian airfield I introduced myself to the Director of Civil Aviation and the senior air traffic control officer. They were very friendly and helpful and explained that a new international airport was being built at Subang to the West of KL once the new airport was completed the present airport would become an RMAF airfield.

My first job was to assess flying safety, write flying orders, and generally coordinate operations. In order to do this effectively I checked out on all the aircraft and took part in their operations to gain an insight into what they were doing and find out what their problems and requirements were.

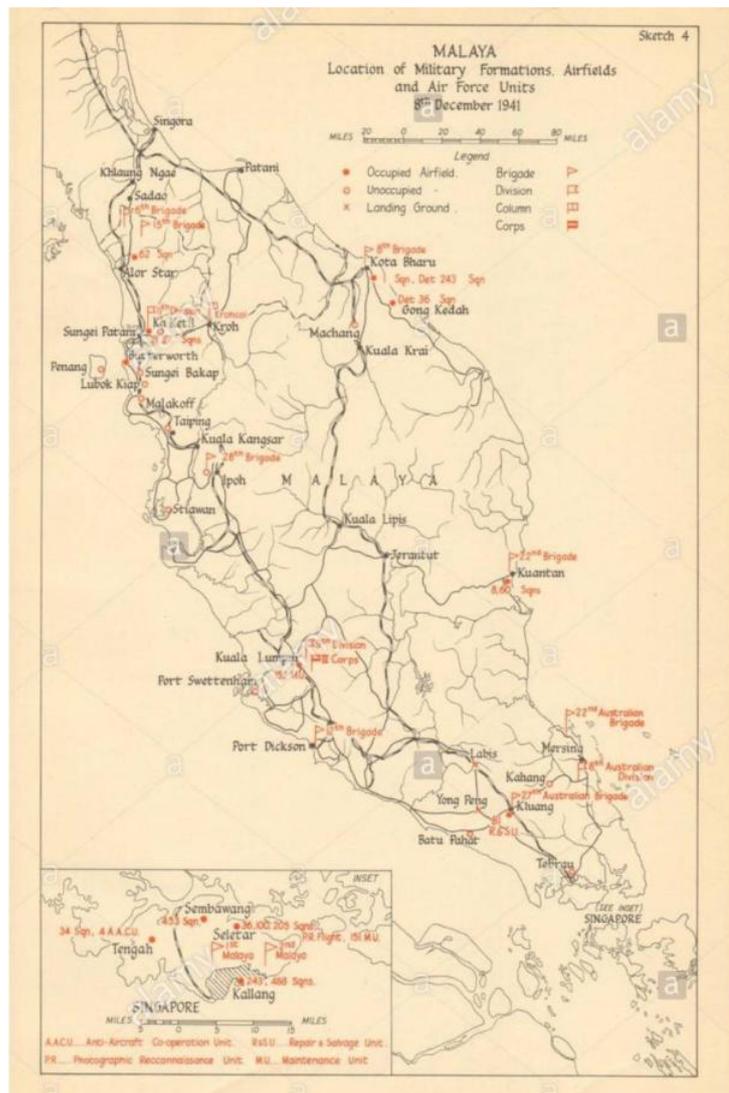
The flying training squadron was simple, I had refreshed and got my QFI category on Piston Provosts at Manby, and I flew with all of the students, carried out on Provosts. We were supposed to produce three Malayan pilots for every Chinese and Indian pilot but it did not quite work out that way. The failure rate amongst Indians and Chinese was much lower than the Malays. We found that we could turn most Chinese into average pilots, Indians good to average but Malays tended to be very good or terrible. Once they had completed their basic training the best pilots went onto Single Pioneers the remainder onto Twin Pioneers as second pilots until they developed sufficiently to become first pilots. Kuala Lumpur airfield which was a civil airfield with regular flights by civilian air liners was not really suitable for a flying training school and I immediately supported the OC Flight Training School in his request for a separate base for the training school, which was eventually moved to its own base at Alor

Star in the North of Malaya.

I started by converting to the Single Pioneer, built by Scottish Aviation, in common with the Provost and Twin Pioneer it had an Alvis Leonides radial engine. The single Pioneer which carried four troops was capable of operating from very short strips, with full flaps and slots out and plenty of power it could be dragged in at 19 kts and would stop in 100 yds. I got checked out into the short jungle strips at Forts Legap and Chabai. Legap was at the end of a steep valley with a mountain at the end, once committed to land it was not possible to overshoot. After landing, take off was in the reverse direction regardless of the wind.

Flying over the jungle was a new experience, mountains, valleys and rivers were the main navigational features. The mornings usually started clear and sunny, the cloud built up during the afternoon, by four to five large thunder storms would develop and it was better to be on the ground before the storms started.

The forts, which were manned by the police field force, were built during the emergency across the main routes by which the Communist Terrorists (CTs) moved from the Thai border into Malaya. There was also a concerted effort to get the aborigines to report the presence of CTs. Frequently the aborigines built small villages near the forts. We flew supplies and replacement police into the forts. As part of the hearts and minds operation we took rice for the aborigines. Occasionally we took Dr Ian Bolton who had gained the trust and respect of the aborigines. Several strips had been built close to aboriginal villages Slim Key had placed fire extinguishers and basic equipment at these strips, on one occasion I saw two aborigines standing beside the fire extinguishers wearing loin cloths, fireman's gloves and helmets. Doc Bolton had built a hospital in the jungle off the Bentong road, East of KL. Seriously ill aborigines, male, female or child, together with their families were flown from the forts into KL, then taken by ambulance to the hospital. Food was provided for them to cook. As the men got fitter they were encouraged to find and produce their own food until they were able to go home.



The police force in Malaya was the same size as the army, all police were trained soldiers and were rotated from normal police duties to field force duties thus reducing the possibility of a military coup. It was rare for an aircrew member of the RMAF to get more than a caution for speeding because the Field Force were dependant on the RMAF for supplies when they were on jungle duties.

Having become familiar with the Single Pioneer, and starting to find my way round the forts, I converted to the Twin Pioneer. This carried about 14 people, or one and a half tons of freight for landing or air dropping. A useful aircraft for the job, with full flap and plenty of engine it would approach at about 45 to 50 kts and needed about 200 yds to land. It was quite easy to fly though it had a poor single engine performance. It was the work horse of the RMAF at that time, we had about five Malaysian first pilots, nine second pilots and about nine seconded RAF pilots. The RAF pilots were phased out as the Malaysian pilots progressed to first pilot. A seconded Qualified Flight Instructor (QFI) was responsible for converting the newly qualified pilots to the Twin Pioneer.

I flew the Twin Pioneer into many of the forts and small town strips. The most interesting fort was Tapong beside a river in the jungle on the Tai border. I was shown a network of underground tunnels which had been constructed by the CTs. If aircraft arrived at Tapong late in the afternoon they would night stop. This continued until one night when there was a full moon an elephant did not like the reflection from the aircraft, charged it and wrote it off. On one occasion I arranged to be dropped off at Tapong and had a magnificent trip down the river to Grik in a canoe with an outboard motor. The river ran through deep jungle and we shot five large rapids. We saw two elephants on the river bank, numerous Hornbills, Lyre Birds and butterflies in profusion.

Soon after our arrival in Malaya we started to collect butterflies rather than spend the weekends sitting round the swimming pool. We went into the jungle, went up logging trails, minor roads and frequently up Bentong Hill where we found many jungle paths. After a while we took rotten prawns to attract the butterflies and over the three years we assembled a good collection including a previously un-recorded species. Jimmy Hislop, who I will refer to later had caught a male of the species and when he saw our female, he arranged for the pair to be sent to the British Museum where it was named *Ypthima Dohertyi Mossmani*.

Jimmy showed us how to dry, preserve and display our butterflies, and I made a number of teak boxes to store them. One of our chief quarries was the female Raja Brook Birdwing. Early in our collecting days we caught the male, a large brilliant green and black butterfly, they were quite common along the streams in the lower jungle, but we were unable to find the female, larger than the male with a faded green and white wing. In our third year we realized that the Brookiyanas bred high in the hills, after mating the males descended into the valleys. We eventually caught our female on a Lantana bush on Bentong Hill during our last few months in Malaya.

I mentioned Jimmy Hislop, I cannot remember how we met but he became a great friend. We have a book "A Company of Animals" which tells part of his story. Briefly Jimmy was a trainee rubber planter near Kota Baru when the Japanese invaded, he escaped to Singapore,

with some Australian troops, then to Indonesia in a small boat then to Ceylon where he joined the Gurkhas. Subsequently he parachuted back into Malaya with force 136, trained and fought with the Communist Gorilla forces against the Japs. After the war he returned initially as a planter. When the emergency broke out he was targeted by the CTs because with his knowledge of their methods of operation. He was a threat to them. He survived, became the chief game warden of the King George V national park, a stock broker and sometime MI 6 agent. He occasionally spent weekends with us. An accomplished piper he played in the garden of our quarter in the evenings. All the Malay airmen used to appear and sit around in the darkness listening to Jimmy's pipes. We had a good married quarter, it stood on its own overlooking the airfield and had a reasonable garden

I persuaded Jimmy to run a jungle survival course for our aircrew, it was very successful and we had a couple of repeats. Jimmy was an able linguist, he spoke fluent Malay, Hokien, Mandarin, Tamil, Gurkali, Urdu, Patahan and Indonesian which he said was like Malay with a Scottish accent. He also spoke several aborigine dialects,

Occasionally we went butterflying with Jimmy and he showed us an interesting jungle trail at the top of Bentong Hill. One day Viv took the children along the path and they played their usual game of running ahead then jumping out, after Mike and Fiona did this Viv heard a deep noise and movement of the undergrowth. She got the children back to the car as fast as she could. When Jimmy visited that night Viv told him, and he went back with Viv the next morning, as soon as he got to the spot he said he could smell elephants, after looking in the jungle where the children had been he found the tracks of three adults and a baby elephant. He said it was the first time for many years that elephants had been in that vicinity and that Viv had been very lucky that the elephants had not charged.

Jimmy introduced me to Bob Wilkinson who ran the police field force (PFF) jungle warfare training school which was on the edge of the jungle at Sunghai Prai about 10 miles South East of the airfield. Bob lived at the school which was situated beside some hot sulphur springs. Married to a Malay girl he was the only Brit at the school. He was an expert in jungle warfare having survived some pretty awful incidents during the emergency.

Bob loved his beer and once we got our helicopters I used to take him a few crates of Tiger beer quite frequently. One Sunday he asked Viv and the children to come for the day. He took us all out into the jungle where the PFF were trained. We took a couple of rifles which we shot at targets, he showed us how to make a bamboo basher which the PFF were taught to make for shelter. Then he took us fishing, throwing a small stick of dynamite into a large pool in the river he told the children to collect the stunned fish. Walking along the river bank we came to a deep pool he told Mike that a vine hanging from a tree into the river was an Aborigine food store and asked him to pull the vine out of the water. Attached to the end was a case of Tiger beer which was cool and refreshing. Returning to the PFF camp we had a swim in the hot springs, slightly sulphurous they were very refreshing

Life in the RMAF was good, I was well paid, better than the RAF, we had an armor, who lived in did the cleaning, washing and some of the cooking. We had a good social life, eating out quite often. The children went to school from 0900 to 1300. Viv played a lot of tennis in the mornings then usually spent the afternoons at the swimming pool with the children who learned to swim like fish. I usually went to work at 0700 and got home about 1300 if I was

not flying. If flying I usually got back no later than 1800 but if the squadrons were night flying I had a long day.

Our first trip to the seaside was to Port Dixon on the West coast we were not very impressed and caught Dengue fever from sand flies a very nasty fever like flu. Thereafter we had many splendid holidays the best of them on the East coast.

It was probably at the end of February that we became aware of preparations for the joining of Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei, and British North Borneo in a federation of states to be called Malaysia. Meetings of heads of states were held in Kuala Lumpur with Duncan Sands the UK foreign minister. Despite extreme pressure from Duncan Sands, the Sultan of Brunei refused to join and subsequently employed Gurkhas for his defence force, the loss of the oil rich Sultanate was a blow to the plans for Malaysia.

Realizing that the air force would have to carry heads of state to East Malaysia or Sabah as it was to be called, Mike Norman, OC the communications flight, and I decided to take a Dove to have a look at the airfields which we would be called upon to visit. At the beginning of May we flew from KL to Singapore then to Kuching, capital of Sarawak where we night stopped. There was a small RAF detachment, a good airfield used regularly by civil air lines, BOAC, Malayan Airways and Borneo airways who used a civil version of the Twin Pioneer. There were paddy fields round Kuching and rivers with jungle right down to the waters edge. From there we went to Sibu, the second town of Sarawak and a reasonable airfield. Next stop was Brunai where we night stopped again. A rising instigated by the Indonesians had taken place in November 1962, the Sultan had requested help from the UK and the rising was put down by British troops and Gurkhas. The oil fields and the Gold dome of the Sultan's Palace were immediately obvious navigation aids. Once again an RAF detachment and a good airfield, quite a lot of British troops who had been responsible for putting down the rising.

From Brunai we went on to Labuan Island, where we night stopped. It was a short hop, again a good runway and small RAF detachment. Quite a number of Shell engineers and families lived here. There was a huge war cemetery near the airfield, the Japs had marched thousands of prisoners through the jungle from Kuching. Hundreds had died on the march and many more in the POW camp. The remains of all the British and Commonwealth deceased, which could be found, had been buried by the war graves commission at Labuan, many of those who died were Australians. There were 3908 war graves in the Military cemetery.

Again a relatively short trip to Jesselton, where we night stopped. Jesselton or as it is now called Kota Kinablu, was the capital of British North Borneo a pleasant city and good airfield dominated by Mount Kinabalu, 13,600 ft. Our route so far had taken us primarily over sea or close to the coast, the majority of the country we had crossed was jungle with large rivers, however the route to our next destination was past Kinabalu then over two hundred miles of primary jungle much of which appeared to be on a high plateau. This area was un-mapped, even large rivers were not shown on our map. Our destination Tawau was on the East coast, close to the sea. The runway of crushed coral was about 1,000 yds long and ended on the sea shore. Borneo airways were the main users, we took a look around the airfield had a chat with the Borneo Airways employee who came out to see us, there was no air traffic control.

Next we headed north for about 100 miles over the eastern tip of Borneo to Sandakan, Here there was a reasonable runway, with rudimentary air traffic control. Sandakan was a larger town than Tawau and was famous for its cultured pearls and sea food. After a quick look round the town we flew back over the feature less jungle until we saw Kinablu and on to Jesselton for another night stop. Next day we returned home to Kuala Lumpur via Kuching, It had been a very interesting trip which proved to be very useful when we started to operate in Sabah. I found the Dove to be a delightful little communications aircraft which could carry eight passengers. It had a pleasant well laid out cockpit similar to the Vampire T11 with light well balanced controls which I found in all De Haviland aircraft.

It was at about this time that Bill Russell suggested that a change of air would do us all good, so we decided to go to the East coast for a few days. Bill took us in his car and we left at about mid day. It was just getting dark when we arrived at Quantan and we were fortunate to get into a hotel in the town. Next morning we had a quick breakfast and headed straight for Champerdak beach, lovely sand and surf, the children couldn't wait to change they just dived in. This was the start of a splendid holiday, the first of about five which we spent on the East coast. We usually booked a government rest house just North of Quantan, there were many of these rest houses, a relic of Colonial government, they were easy to book and in-expensive. After driving about thirty miles North of Quantan we found a fabulous beach at a place called Kuala Cherrating. The beach was about half a mile from the main road, you drove into a sort of park of coconut palms and Cyprus which went down to the shore, the beach was about three miles long; ideal for swimming and plenty of shade from the trees. There were tracks where the turtles had come up the beach and holes which they had dug to lay their eggs, on one occasion we found some eggs. The beach was deserted and I think that only once did we see anyone else on the beach. When we went to the beach after dark the phosphoresce was incredible.

Traveling North on the East coast there were three large rivers to cross and there were no bridges at that time, only ferries. These were a sort of pontoon pulled across the river by wires. The power was provided by old lorries which had one rear wheel jacked up and the tire removed, the wire was wound round the wheel which pulled the ferry across. A similar wire paid out from a lorry on the near bank. Quite a lot of traffic used the ferry including large logging lorries, the whole thing was rather unstable and primitive and there were frequent break downs and delays. I remember on one occasion we watched some children in a small dug out canoe paddling round the ferry.

On one holiday we went to Tregganu and right on up to Kota Bahru where we visited the beach of passionate love, rather a disappointment. Kuala Cheratting was our favourite where we based ourselves for three holidays. On the West coast we went to Pangkor which was good but there were more people and no surf which we frequently got on the East coast. Frasers Hill and the Cameron Highlands provided a cooler temperature and good butterflies, which made a nice change for a weekend. On one occasion we went with the president of the Bank Negara (the national bank) and his family staying in the banks rest house. I think it was on this trip that we found the Mossmanaii. I cannot recall how we came to know the president, I think Bill Russell may have introduced us he was certainly with us when the President took us to a Chinese restaurant or Chinese new year, a great honour. Yow Keys was opened specially for our party. The food was fantastic.

It about this time that Nicky Varanand flew into KL in a Caravelle, a relatively new French passenger plane. I had known Nicky in my bachelor days when after a game of rugger I frequently stayed in the RAF club before returning to Waterbeach on Sunday morning. Nicky who was on Mosquitos at West Malling spent most weekends in the club. He was a Siamese prince who together with two brothers were sent to the UK before the war because they were in direct line of succession to the Thai throne and their presence in Thailand could easily provoke a coup. I became quite friendly with Nicky who would drive me to Kings Cross in his custom built Bentley on Sunday mornings. The Bentley had a very low roof and Nicky used to say “you are one of the few people I take in this car who have sufficient head room”. Nicky’s visit was to offer me the job of training captain in a new airline he was setting up in Bangkok. It was a tempting offer, the pay would have been good and his company would have paid for the children’s schooling in the UK. After talking it over with Viv, we decided to stay in the RAF

So many things happened during my tour in the RMAF that I find it necessary to refer to my log book to keep events in a sensible order, without this record of my flying I would not be able to recall many of the events.

At the end of June we did a fly past for the Agong’s birthday, four Provosts, three single Pioneers, three twin Pioneers, two Doves and a Herron. I flew one of the Provosts. In July the Malaysian army engineers built a run on the island of Lankawi off the North West coast of Malaya. John Williams and I took a Twin Pioneer in for the first landing. The island was flat and they had felled a lot of coconut palms to make an 800 yard runway. Most of the population turned out to watch us land, we stopped engines met the local chiefs and congratulated the engineers on their work. When we came to leave we had great difficulty in persuading the people to keep clear of the propellers and the runway. Lankawi became a routine destination for members of the government, particularly the Tunku who had family connections on the island.

In August a number of VIPs including Duncan Sands the UK Foreign Secretary, Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore, senior officials from British North Borneo, Sarawak and the Sultan of Brunai flew into KL to attend a meeting to obtain agreement for the future of these countries. The UK governments intention was for these former colonies and protectorates to become the federation of Malaysia. The Sultan of Brunai refused to join the federation, he had no intention of losing control of the huge oil revenues and undertook to provide for security by recruiting a force of Gurkahs. This was a set back for the federation plans but they went ahead without Brunai and Malaysia was declared on 16th September 1963.

Squadron Leader Hazelden the chief test pilot of Handley Page arrived at the beginning of September in a company Dart Herald to demonstrate the aircraft and the way it could be operated in Malaysia. Five Dart Heralds had been bought to provide transport for the Malaysian armed forces throughout Malaysia. Three RAF and two RAAF crews were seconded to operate the Heralds, they converted onto the aircraft in the UK and flew them out in November and December

The Dart Herald built by Handley Page as a private venture was intended as a Dakota replacement. It had a high wing two Rolls Royce turbo prop engines, a cloud collision radar,

most useful for avoiding large thunder storms, and it cruised at 15 to 20,000ft. It had an excellent short field performance and carried fifty passengers. There was a large rear door suitable for loading passengers and freight without specialized ground equipment. Easy to maintain and operate it was in my opinion far superior to the Avro 746 operated by the RAF. The problem was that Sir Fredrick Handley Page refused to amalgamate the company with a consortium of Avro and English Electric and the government refused to purchase the Herald for the RAF.

Sqn.Ldr Hazelden converted me to the Herald and I did my first solo on 21st of September, thereafter I did a series of lifts of Malayan troops from Kuala Lumpur via Changi and Kuching to Sibul with Hazelden in the company Herald.

Shortly after Malaysia was set up, the Indonesians started causing trouble on the borders of Sarawak and Borneo, hence the troop lift mentioned above. In October we flew 200 Gurkhas from Kuala Lumpur to Sibul, we also deployed a detachment of Twin Pioneers to Labuan for operations in Sarawak and Borneo.

Towards the end of October the first three of twelve Alouette helicopters were delivered, Nine RAF, one Army air corps and one New Zealand Air Force officer were seconded to operate the helicopters. Early in November I had my first dual trip in the Alouette.

In January I visited the Twin Pioneer detachment in Labuan, to see how they were getting on. The Indonesians were now making incursions across the border, British, Gurkha and Malaysian troops were engaged with dealing with these incursions. The Twin Pioneers were tasked with assisting the RAF who were supporting these troops.

Our detachment of four twin Pioneers had one seconded pilot the remainder being Malaysian. I flew with all the Malaysian crews who were doing a good job. The maps were pretty useless, the strips difficult to find and treacherous if wet. The aircraft were tasked by a joint Army, RAF organization. The biggest problem was ensuring that junior RMAF pilots did not allow themselves to be pressurized to carry weights in excess of their operating limits. Senior army officers would get onto an aircraft and order a pilot to fill empty seats, which if they were carrying freight would put the aircraft above its maximum take off weight.

The most interesting trip which I did was from Jeselton to Sepulot with P/O Huang I let Huang fly to Sepulot, all we had was a cross on a map near the Indonesian border. We were told that the strip was beside a large river and there were no other strips in the area; there was no river shown on the map. Our passengers were four SAS troops and two civilians, some boxes of ammunition, trip flares and rations. The SAS were carrying large back packs with four pairs of jungle boots tied on each one. We estimated that that we should take about forty minutes on a heading of 120, after about forty five minutes we saw a large river running across our track, we turned and followed the river in a South East direction, after ten minutes we decided to turn round and retrace our track. Some fifteen minutes later we found the strip, we landed and parked the aircraft and walked along a path towards some heavily sandbagged huts. One of the SAS troops pointed out a well concealed trip wire across the path which we stepped over. We were met by an officer and about a dozen troops cleaning their weapons round a machine gun post. We left the SAS and two civilians both of whom were carrying weapons. I remember one of them was called Noon, when I mentioned this to

Jimmy some time later, he said “that’s funny he is supposed to be in Vietnam”. The return trip to Jesselton took fifty minutes. I did ten hours flying in the six days I spent with the detachment.

In February I converted to the Alouette and did my first solo on 8th February after 3.15 hours dual. Before going solo I had to master engine off landings which were not easy. The Alouette was an excellent small helicopter, light, powerful, reliable and advanced for its time. It could carry six passengers and had a useful range. Having gone solo I had to learn to operate the helicopter. Height above sea level and temperature had a considerable effect on performance. After coming to the hover you could see by the amount of power required whether you could operate at the height and forecast temperature at your destination. By the end of May I was cleared to operate into and out of jungle clearings and for night flying.

By January the Herald squadron were operating regular services twice per week from KL via Changi to Kuching, Sibuluan, Jesselton and Tawau. At the beginning of May I took one of the schedules, amongst the troops we picked up at Tawau were the five SAS I had dropped at Sepulot in January, I asked one of them how they had got from Sepulot to Tawau, walked he responded.

Early in August the Indonesians dropped paratroops in central Malaya, they were quickly rounded up and posed no threat but there was now a possibility that the Indonesians could drop more paratroops or send landing parties across the Java Straights. We mounted sea searches with Twin Pioneers from dusk to dawn

The threat of a para drop on RMAF KL was serious, a small group of paras could do a lot of damage to our aircraft, the majority of them being on the airfield every night. After discussion with the Squadron commanders I wrote a dispersal plan which would be implemented on receipt of intelligence warnings, we also planned night stops and detachments to reduce the number of aircraft at KL.

We all carried .38 automatics and Armelite rifles when operating in Borneo and practiced on the range on Saturday mornings. Blossom the wife of Sammy Welch a Single Pioneer pilot, joined us whenever she could. Blossom was a police special branch officer and personal bodyguard to the Tunku’s wife. Blossom a pretty 5ft Chinese was an excellent shot and usually won the kitty for pistol competitions. Her favorite trick was to fire her weapon from her handbag held at waist height. We all got quite good with regular practice

Pip, Mike Fi and James were becoming excellent swimmers, their hair turning a greenish blond due to prolonged exposure to Chlorine. Pip trained regularly with Ivan Myall, the son of an RAF Flight Sergeant who competed in the 1968 Olympics. After returning to the UK Philippa was head hunted for the Ladies Olympic back stroke, but her school advised against the proposal and Pip agreed. Viv and her friend played tennis nearly every morning with off duty Malayan airmen, they hit the ball as hard as the men and played in the Malayan ladies tennis finals.

About eight o’clock in the evening on 11th October Doug Bryan ‘phoned me and asked me if I would go to Kuching with him immediately. The Chief of Police had asked him to take a Herald to Kuching immediately to bring fifteen political prisoners to KL. Doug could not get

a crew together quickly as they all lived off base. We took off at 2100 hours with fifteen Malayan police and flew directly to Kuching arriving at 0130. The police passengers went to Kuching jail and returned with fifteen prisoners each handcuffed to a policeman, we took off at 0300 arriving at KL at 0630. The prisoners were taken to Pudu jail. Later we discovered that the Kuching authorities had got wind of an attempt to make a mass break out.

Chapter 16 - Patrington

We spent Christmas 1965 at the Old Farm, just like old times. I bought a second hand Morris Minor Traveller and we went down to Tiverton to visit Mum and Dad in their new bungalow; they seemed happy there. Dad had joined the Conservative club and was still playing golf and fishing. Mike, Fiona and James started school at Meer Green primary. Mike had passed his Murray House exam in Malaya so he was filling in time before starting at secondary school, Philippa returned to Sutton Girls High, a day school. Faced with the problem of the likelihood of frequent moves we decided to try to get the children into boarding schools once they had completed primary school.

Shortly after Christmas it was announced that the Master Radar Station at Neatishead had been destroyed by a fire. Within a couple of days I received a telegram from the RMAF which said “Congratulations, How did you manage it?” It transpired that an airman had lit a fire in the paint store at the bottom of the building, the duty controller failed to switch off the air conditioning when the fire alarm sounded with the result that smoke was rapidly circulated throughout the building resulting in numerous indications of fire. Before the seat of the fire was located the place was an inferno, everyone was evacuated and the building was gutted. In retrospect this was very fortunate for me, my posting to Neatishead was cancelled and I was posted to Patrington. I think reported for duty about the middle of May and we moved into a married quarter in July.



I

Fiona and James came to Patrington, Fiona went to the Easington comprehensive and James to the village primary school. Mike became a boarder at Bishop Vesey's Grammar School. Philippa became a boarder at Bath Girls High, a Girls Public School Trust School which Norman Rose, who we met in Malaya, spoke very highly of.



We left Bonny and Tammy with Mum when we went to Malaya, we found when we returned that Bonny had died, Tammy was fine and she came with us to Patrington.

Patrington a pretty little Yorkshire village North East of Hull was about three miles from the Master Radar Station, in flat open country close to the sea. I was Chief Controller Guided Missiles, responsible for giving firing instructions to the Blood Hound 2 weapon sites positioned to protect the V Force bases in Norfolk; a nothing job. Fortunately the Wing Commander Operations, Tiger Shaw, took me under his wing and gave me a good insight into the operation of a Master Radar Station which was to be invaluable in my next posting. Tiger an ex General Duty pilot who had flown flying boats before the war, was one of the few survivors of a Blenheim squadron which operated in Greece during the German invasion, he flew Mitchels and Baltimores throughout the North African and Italian campaign, and was

transferred to the Fighter Control Branch after the war, he had been involved with the development of the Rotor Plan. One of the old school he did not suffer fools gladly and I got on very well with him.

The Master Radar Station (MRS) was built of reinforced concrete deep underground. It had filtration and air conditioning, a control room with a large photographic display unit which projected a picture of the radar on to a large screen about ten feet in diameter which the chief controllers were positioned round and control cabins on a lower floor for close control of individual fighters by fighter controllers. There were land line communications to HQFC, adjacent MRSs and the fighter stations for which we were responsible, Binbrook and Leconfield, and additionally Coltishall because Neatishead was out of action. Radio communications were VHF,UHF and HF. The radar was a Type 80 S Band radar and there were two height finders.

The MRS was responsible for identifying responses which appeared on the radar screen, all friendly flights were flight planned and notified, anything which could not be identified the Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) fighters were scrambled to identify. only happened once during my time at Patrington when two Russian TU 104s identified by Binbrook Lightnings.



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Every day training involved practice interceptions by Lightnings and Javelins. Also there were air defence exercises involving V Force bombers and fighter bombers from the continent.

The first intercept computer was installed at Patrington for trials, it was useful as an aid for controllers but did not replace the fighter controller. Recording of the interceptions was made by mounting a 35mm camera on a stand in front of the radar display and making a time exposure of the interception. The developed film showed the series of blips representing the tracks of the target and interceptor.

Clay pigeon shooting was very popular at Patrington, this sport was encouraged on all RAF stations, particularly on Fighter stations where the pilots ability to assess deflection was vital. Shot guns were held in the armory on all stations and were available for anyone who needed a gun to go on a shoot.

When we were posted to Patrington we envisaged a quiet existence in a rural part of south Yorkshire, how wrong we were. Patrington officer's mess was very much the local farmers country club. Many of the farmers were honorary members of the mess. The farms were large mostly arable and prosperous. We got to know the farmers and were invited to many of their parties. Bobby Herd and his wife Gwen were our particular friends, their farm close to the MRS was a large basically arable farm mostly wheat , barley and potatoes, but they did keep a few beef cattle. Bobby enjoyed shooting and frequently invited a selection of farmers and members of the Officers Mess to shoots on his farm, and general walks across the farm where pheasants, partridge and rabbits abounded. There was a large wood on Bobby's land with a clearing in the middle where the pigeons came back to roost at dusk this provided

great sport. At dusk the pigeons dropped in very quickly and a fleeting shot was all that was possible. Pigeon and duck shoots from hides were organized in the autumn and winter months.

Bill Todd one of the fighter controllers, Tiger and myself were always invited to Bobby's shoots. The duck shoots were special, Bobby had made a large pond on his land, built four hides and spread old potatoes and corn round the pond with the result that large numbers of duck would fly in from the Humber to feed. Bobby would only allow shooting on three nights of the month by the light of the full moon. He put a bottle of whisky in each hide and if the birds arrived late you were probably seeing double. Each hide was allowed two brace of birds. It was very difficult shooting, made slightly easier if the moon was shining through thin stratus cloud which silhouetted the birds. When we had finished we went back to the kitchen for hot chocolate and more whisky.

Gwen Herd and Bill Todd were very keen on the horse races and often took Viv to York and Thirsk for the meetings. Whoever came away with the highest winnings bought dinner on the way home. Gwen was also keen on antique sales and Viv frequently went with her, there were many bargains at that time, Viv got our little fusee wall clock at a sale at Driffield for £5.

In July 1966 Mum 'phoned to say that dad was very ill. I drove down to Tiverton and by the time I got there dad had received a blood transfusion and was very much better however, he was diagnosed as having leukemia, his bone marrow was not making red corpuscles with the result that he would require regular transfusions. In the long term his immune system would fail and he was given two years to live.

In September 1966 I was sent out to Singapore to advise on the control of Bloodhound 2 which had been deployed to provide additional defence against Indonesian aircraft which were a potential threat. I went to Singapore on a Transport Command Comet. Our last refueling stop was Gan where I knew that Bill Russell was the senior medical officer. We had a chat and a quick beer in the officers mess bar. It was strange to get off the Comet at Changi, an RMAF Herald was parked next to us in the dispersal. Singapore was making great strides in development, clearing slum housing and tidying up the island generally.

Returning to Patrington there was the usual round of parties, Tiger would often suggest that we go up to the mess for a beer. One Sunday evening Tiger and I were the sole occupants of the bar and Tiger was recalling a flying incident when the station commander Dudley Ford walked in. Listening to the end of Tiger's story he interrupted saying "you are a bullshitter Shaw, in fact you are the biggest bullshitter in the air force". Tiger put down his tankard, wiped the froth off his mustache and said "till I met you sir I always thought I was." The barman who was drying a glass, dropped it, I snorted a mouthful of beer all over the bar and Dudley Ford walked out. Tiger turned to me and said he usually found the right rejoinder too late but not this time.

The beaches near Patrington were miles of sand when the tide was out we often took Tammy for walks, she loved to run into the sea and she ran for miles. The cliffs were hard clay, easily eroded and many fields were lost to the sea every year.

At the beginning of the Autumn term Mike started at Bishop Veseys' Suttun Coldfield and Philippa started at Bath Girls High

In late autumn Bobby Herd suggested we should go cod fishing. Bobby had a boat with a small outboard motor which he towed down to the beach with his Landrover. The sea was flat calm. As we launched the boat Bobby asked me if I could swim, when I answered in the affirmative he said that's good as we are one lifejacket short. We went to a buoy about two miles out which marked a wreck where Bobby claimed that there were plenty of cod. Casts were made up with three hooks with feathers about a foot apart, and a lead weight at the end of the cast which was thrown over the side and lowered with a jiggling motion. Within minutes we were catching large cod sometimes two at a time. After about an hour the fog rolled in, and as the boat was getting low in the water with the weight of cod, I suggested we stopped fishing. First the engine would not start but we got it going by taking the plug out and heating it with a cigarette lighter. Then there was a discussion about which direction to head, fortunately I had taken a small pocket compass. Once we reached the beach the boat was so heavy with fish that we had to carry the cod to the Landrover before we could get the boat onto its trailer.

Getting rid of the fish was more trouble than catching it; we gave it to the officers', sergeants' and airman's messes, married quarters and finally the old peoples homes in Patrington village. When Bobby got home with three large cod Gwen had cooked him fish fingers for his supper.

We went to Tiverton before Christmas to see Mum and Dad. Dad was on good form, he took me to the conservative club where we had a few beers, putting the change from his round in the fruit machine and won the jackpot in his normal manner. We collected Phillipa from school in Bath then went on to spend Christmas with Mum at the Old Farm.

Back at Patrington work was rather boring, I visited the Bloodhound sites which we controlled and on Wednesdays I played rugger for the station team, this was the last season I played rugger.

I think it was Easter when we collected Philippa from school and visited Mum and Dad. We arrived as England scored the winning goal, defeating Germany 4—2 in the football world cup, Dad was over the moon, he still hated the Germans

I cannot remember how we spent our summer holidays, I think we went home to the Old Farm and spent time on the beaches near Patrington. Philippa and Mike had to be collected and taken back to school and we used the trip to Bath to go and see Mum and Dad.

In September David Kirkwood, one of the Mess honorary members, invited the shooting crowd together with their wives to a party at his farm. He was a tenant farmer on a huge farm which was crown property to the North of the Humber When we arrived he put us all onto two large farm trailers with straw bales to sit on and took us round the farm describing what crops he had grown that year, what the yield and the profit margin was and what he planned to grow next year. I found it very interesting and the farmers in the party had many questions. After the conducted tour we went into the house for a splendid buffet supper and lots of drink. David Kirkwood together with another farmer had just set up a factory to make

frozen chips and potato crisps, he explained that he was tired of getting poor prices for his main crop of potatoes and had now created a sure market for himself and local farmers.

He also had a large pig farm which he showed to us. He explained that the price for pigs fluctuated widely, he produced graphs of pig prices and explained that he aimed reduce production to coincide with low prices and peak when prices were high. I was impressed with his planning and could see why he was so successful.

Early in November I was notified that I would be promoted to Wing Commander and posted in January to an administrative job with the responsibility for reviewing and determining establishments. I would be working from the Ministry of Defence in Whitehall. I would have to find somewhere to live in the London area. Not the sort of job to suit me but it was promotion at last. I started to look for somewhere to live in the London area. We had a farewell party packed to move to London, then, just before Christmas my posting was changed, I was to take command of No280 Signals Unit in Cyprus. We re-packed our possessions, sent some into storage and some to Cyprus. We then marched out of our married quarters and went home to the Old Farm for Christmas

Chapter 17 - No. 280 Signals Unit Cyprus

I arrived at Akrotiri early in January 1968. It was bitterly cold, there was a heavy snow fall on Troodos and a cold North-Easterly wind. I was told to report directly to the Commander in Chief, Air Marshal Smallwood, always known as Splinters. He told me that he had sacked my predecessor because he was completely dis-satisfied with the performance of 280 Signals Unit (280SU). Intelligence information indicated that Turkish and Egyptian aircraft had been entering Cyprus airspace without any report or reaction from 280 SU. He said he wanted me to sort out the unit and he expected me to get rid of anyone who did not come up to scratch. I was responsible directly to him for the air defence of Cyprus and I should not hesitate to contact him directly.



Akrotiri was a large base there were two resident Canberra squadrons, No 56 Lightning Squadron, an Argosy medium transport Squadron, an air sea rescue helicopter flight and airsea rescue launches based at Limmassol. In addition Akrotiri was a busy staging post for RAF aircraft on route to the Far East and Australia. Towards the end of 1968 the Canberras were replaced by Vulcans which had a nuclear deterrent role.

No 280 SU comprised a main control room, an S Band radar and height finders at Cape Gata on the South side of Akrotiri airfield, there were about 200 personnel both male and female, food and accommodation. Motor Transport [MT] were provided by RAF Akrotiri, married quarters were at Akrotiri but the majority of married personnel lived out in



Limassol. At Troodos there was a Type 84 L Band radar and height finders situated in radomes at 6,400ft on top of the mountain. There were four powerful diesel generators, one was sufficient for all needs but a second was kept running continuously in order to provide a no break of supply. Communication with Cape Gata was by line of sight micro-wave link and there were ground to air communications at both sites.

There were about 200 men at Troodos, under the command of a Squadron Leader, the unit had its own cook house, messes and accommodation and an MT section of three tonners, Land Rovers snow ploughs and snow blowers which were essential in winter. Unmarried personnel lived in barrack blocks and married personnel lived in the village of Platres. Both units were manned 24 hours per day on a three watch system.



As my predecessor had been sacked, there was no traditional hand over and my first task was to find out how the place operated and what was wrong. My tour at Patrington was invaluable as I had a clear knowledge of how the unit should perform.

On my first day I found that I had a personal assistant, Jenny, I cannot remember her surname, she was the wife of a Canberra pilot at Akrotiri. Prior to her marriage Jenny had been the PA to the head of Smiths Books in London. She told me that she would go through all the incoming mail each day, draft replies and draw my attention to any urgent mail which she could not answer. She took short hand, I had never dictated before and my attempts were very slow, Jenny told me to relax and just think out loud she would draft appropriately. Thanks to Jenny I was able to spend the minimum amount of time on administration and concentrate on running operations.

Flight plans for all aircraft entering Cyprus airspace were notified by the air traffic control centre at Nicosia, all aircraft which originated behind the Iron curtain were nominated "Z" and we had to keep a close check on them to ensure that they did not deviate from their flight planned track. Fighters operating from Akrotiri were not flight planned and were our responsibility. We also had a responsibility for reporting any unknown tracks and "Z" entering Turkish airspace from our airspace, this was done by a direct line to the Turkish Air Defence Center at Eskishier

I spent the first 48 hours introducing myself to all personnel and observing how the watches operated. The unit was scruffy and the toilets filthy, those responsible for producing an identified picture of all tracks in radar cover were not really motivated nor aware of the importance of their task particularly during the night and times of little activity.

There were three Squadron leaders at Akrotiri, Eddy Cappuccitti a Glasgow Italian, his parents had settled in Glasgow before the first world war. Eddy was the senior Operations officer, intelligent and he knew his job, but unfortunately his wife had left him early in his tour and his mind was not on the job. Arthur ? was the second Squadron Leader, he was on his last tour and certainly not a ball of fire. However he knew his job and was reliable. The senior engineer officer Squadron Leader Tom Welding was also due to retire at the end of his tour, he was excellent, he had a wealth of knowledge and experience and reacted quickly and positively to any ideas I had or suggestions I made. Tom was one of a small number of survivors from an aircraft carrier which was sunk in the western approaches by a German

submarine, he had been seconded to the Royal Navy.

I visited Troodos and met the CO an Irish Squadron Leader Paddy ? and key staff who were responsible for maintaining the radar, communications equipment and generators which provided all power. Troodos was also a popular place for members of the public and service personnel on leave, large pine forests, cool in the summer and great for skiing in the winter.

My next visits were to the Bloodhound 2 squadron at Episkopi and No 56 Lightning Squadron at Akrotiri which were deployed for the air defence of the bases at Episkopi, Akrotiri and Famagusta, 280 SU was responsible for controlling them. No 56 Squadron was commanded by Colin Bidy who had been the other Flight Commander when I was serving on 25 Squadron. I listened carefully to the criticisms made by Colin and his Flight Commanders and requested that they notify me immediately of any problems they had with 280 in the future. Over the three years I commanded 280 we developed a close working relationship with the Lightning and Bloodhound Squadrons.

Viv and James joined me towards the end of January, Viv had moved out of our married quarters, got Fiona into Bath Girls High with Philippa, sold the car and left Bonny and Tammy with Mum. We had a very nice married quarter, a bungalow, close to the officers' mess, it had a garden with a vine which produced a good crop of grapes. 280 SU and the beach were about half a mile down the road which ran past our quarter.

At the beach we had a hut about twenty yards from the sea, power was available from the security lights, we had a fridge and plenty of cold beer. The Army Signals Unit installed a telephone which allowed me to meet a ten minutes availability from the beach hut should the quick reaction alert Lightning be scrambled to intercept and identify unknown tracks, more about this later.

I bought a second hand Peugeot 404, which proved to be a good car, petrol was five shillings per gallon. During our three years in Cyprus we visited most of the island which was divided after the Turkish invasion in 1972. Many have criticized the Turks for invading Cyprus but in my opinion the invasion was justified, the Greeks treatment of the Turks while we were there was terrible.

Early in February Splinters Smallwood asked me to visit him and report on the state of 280, he asked me what I had been doing and why I had not got rid of anyone. I told him I had been driving square pegs into square holes and that while there were some poor officers all they really needed was motivation and pride in the unit and I knew that I could provide that. I suggested that he give me a couple of weeks then make an impromptu visit, this would help me to convince personnel of the importance he placed in the unit and at the same time let him see what was going on. He was surprised and agreed to the suggestion.

At Patrington we had a Photographic Display Unit [PDU] which provided a permanent record of events, there was no PDU at 280 and no means of installing one. However I recalled that when special interception trials were taking place a thirty five mm camera was mounted on a stand in front of a controller's console. The camera was put on a long exposure which resulted in a film showing a trace of the interception. I asked Tom Welding if he could rig up a similar installation. He had this sorted out in a couple of days and it produced good

results when we recorded practice interceptions. I arranged that in future any interceptions for identification of unknown tracks by the QRA aircraft should be recorded in this manner.

One morning early in February I was watching operations in the main control room when an un-identified track appeared on the screen, this was quickly identified as friendly. I asked for its identity and was told that it was an Olympic Airways flight from Malta to Nicosia which was ten minutes early. I said that it was highly unlikely that a scheduled flight would be ten minutes early and ordered the QRA Lightning to scramble, explaining that if it indeed proved to be the scheduled flight it would be a good exercise. After about nine minutes with the QRA Lightning under close control another track appeared which was obviously the scheduled Olympic Airways flight. The fighter controller ran a copy book interception and the unknown track was identified as a TU 104 carrying Egyptian markings. The Lightning pilot took a good photo of the TU104, shortly after which the aircraft turned south towards Egypt. Our photographic record of the interception was good. I decided to use this incident to motivate the operations watches by setting up a display in the briefing room to illustrate each successful interception by the QRA aircraft. A picture of the radar trace of the interception, a photo, of the intercepted aircraft were displayed together with the name of the airman or airwoman who first recorded the unknown track and the name of the fighter controller who controlled the interception. This display produced a full record of successful interceptions by the QRA aircraft and provided motivation and a source of pride for the watch-keepers and fighter controllers. Over the years this display provided a record of our "raison d'être" and was always a source of interest to visiting dignitaries.

One morning early in March Splinters arrived and asked to look around. He spoke to the duty watch, congratulated them on the interception of the Tu 104 and emphasized the importance of the job they were doing. He told me that he was very pleased with his visit and to keep up the good work.

One very wet and cold night we were sitting beside a lovely log fire when a very wet and bedraggled cat fell down the chimney; he was in a sorry state. Viv gave him a bowl of milk, I was keen to throw him out, but James and Viv felt sorry for him so we became the reluctant owners of our one and only BFC. He was called Big Fat Cat because that is what he became. He was the greediest animal I have ever come across, he would howl for his food and continue to yowl while he was eating. I think he fathered most of the kittens in the district. At our farewell party when asked what was going to happen to BFC we said he would have to be put down, we were not going to walk away and leave him to join the numerous Bundu cats. The enquirer said we couldn't put him down, she would have him. His departure was a pantomime, he was put in a basket, he howled and all the cats in the adjoining houses howled as he departed. We were told that poor old BFC came to a miserable end, he got his head stuck in a half opened tin and cut his throat.

Now that the watches were really looking closely at the radar picture they noticed tracks which occasionally crossed over from Turkey, flew round over Cyprus, and returned to Turkey. Obviously by the intermittent nature of the tracks they were at low level. I issued instructions that any such track was to be intercepted and identified. 56 Squadron were briefed and the first scramble resulted in the interception of two Turkish F84s. After receiving our report Splinters called me and asked if I thought that this activity had occurred previously? I told him that this was quite likely and explained that little attention had been

paid to the Turkish border because it was expected that the Turks would notify us. Splinters asked me to arrange a visit to Eskisihir and he notified the General responsible for Turkish Air Defence why I was visiting.

My visit to the Turkish Air Defence HQ was both interesting and productive. The General was friendly and it transpired that he had trained at 19 FTS Cranwell during the war, had flown Spitfires and was very pro British. When he learned that I had trained at Cranwell he got onto the subject of pubs which we both knew. The General expressed surprise that we had managed to intercept the F84s and asked why we had intercepted them. I explained that they were unknown tracks to us and that if they notified us that they were coming there would have been no need for us to intercept, he agreed that in future they would notify us.

About Easter time I received a letter from Mum saying that Dad was not well, the regular blood transfusions were affecting his immune system and he was becoming vulnerable to colds. He told the doctor that he did not want any more blood transfusions in the knowledge that it was only a matter of time before he developed an infection with fatal consequences.

The type 84 radar at Troodos, due to its altitude, gave very good low level cover out to about 120 miles. In early May I began to realize that low level cover was getting much better, this was caused by a phenomenon called ducting, when temperature inversions formed below Troodos, the radar signals from the lower lobes of the radar transmission pattern were deflected by the inversion producing extended low level coverage. On some occasions we detected second or third trace returns with the result that it was possible to see ships coming into the Med from the Suez Canal. It had been the practice to treat these long range returns as clutter and ignore them but I felt that if they were recorded and studied it may be possible to make use of them, and indeed this proved to be the case. For instance a Russian signals intelligence trawler frequently anchored off the end of the pan handle, we were able to see when this occurred and monitor its position.

Towards the end of July Pip, Mike and Fiona flew out to Nicosia by BEA Comet, the RAF paid for two flights per year. The first time they came their aircraft was delayed overnight in Athens. We were very worried but we need not have bothered, BEA looked after them well and to them it was just another adventure. Cyprus was a great place for their summer holidays, lazy days at the beach hut, frequent Kebabs in Limassol in the evenings.

On 11 August I received a signal to say that Dad had died. I had been expecting the news but it still came as a shock. I got an indulgence flight in an RAF Comet to Lyneham. I have no idea how I got home presumably by train to Tiverton. Ian was already there and had arranged the funeral. I found that Dad had left a letter for me to say that he wished to be cremated and for his ashes to be scattered in his father's church yard at Bewcastle. He also left a short story about his experiences in the First World War, this was in response to my last conversation with him when I said it would be nice if he put something on paper for the benefit of his grand children.

After the funeral we called Aurea who made arrangements for a short service at the church at the Know. Mum, Ian and I drove up to Bewcastle in Dad's car, we stayed in the night in a hotel at Brampton, then out to Bewcastle the next day. I was amazed at the number of people who came to the service, the church was full, farmers had come from miles around and many

of them had kind things to say about dad. I have no recollection of the journey back to Tiverton. Ian made arrangements to get probate and Aunt Jean came to stay with Mum for a while.

I got a flight back to Cyprus where I found that Pip, Mike, Fiona and James were excelling at swimming, they had made a good start in Malaya, now they won every event they entered in the Akrotiri children's swimming sports. The fact that Viv and I came last in the parents race caused great hilarity.

We went up to Troodos, stopping at a village just below Platres for the most beautiful peaches picked straight from the tree. During the holidays we visited Paphos which at that time was a small fishing village with a few tavernas along the quayside, the only thing of note was a Greek boy who rode a small motor bike with a pelican riding on the pillion seat. There was a stony beach to the West of Paphos and near it some beautiful mosaics had been uncovered. At the beginning of September Pip, Mike and Fiona flew home, James returned to school at Akrotiri.

The CENTO Treaty organization comprised the UK, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan and the members participated in exercises and liaison visits from time to time. During my time at 280 we had visits from the Turkish, Iraq and Iranian Air Force personnel, and I visited Turkey and Iran on several reciprocal visits. The Iranian Air Force had American ground radars and fighter aircraft. I visited Tehran twice and Tabriz once. On my first visit to Tehran I was met from the RAF Argosy by an Iranian Air Force Colonel who was driving his own Land Rover. The traffic in Tehran was terrible, particularly the taxis, the Colonel said you will see that they treat my Land Rover with respect because I have modified the bumpers; when we reached the hotel where I was staying he showed me that he had welded railway lines onto the front and rear bumpers which extended about three inches beyond the normal bumper. The Iranian Air Force flew me to Tabriz to visit one of their main radar stations.

After I had looked round his site the CO of Tabriz, a colonel took me to the famous carpet bazaar, this was a great experience it was a large building in the shape of a wagon wheel. The rim contained numerous stalls where ordinary rugs were on sale, lots of people were milling around haggling over prices and drinking numerous glasses of tea with no milk and a slice of lemon. The spokes of the wheel, I think there were six, contained stalls of high quality rugs. Finally the hub comprised about six stalls of the most exquisite rugs, mostly silk. The Colonel told me to look through the rugs, if I wanted one I was to let him know without making it obvious, I chose a rug and he sent me away while he bargained. When he called me back I could not believe the price. I bought the rug which I eventually gave to Mike and Sue. When I got back to Cyprus the customs would not believe the receipt for the rug and wanted to charge me duty on a valuation three times the amount I paid. I refused to pay and told them to put the rug into bonded store until I returned to the UK, eventually they handed the rug back and told me to go.

I found the Iranian Air Force officers to be pleasant people, slightly arrogant but capable and efficient, they were extremely loyal to the Shah. When the Shah was deposed and the Ayatollahs took over, all the senior officers were shot, hence the poor showing of the Iranian Air force when Iraq invaded. The Iranian army had the same problem

By the autumn the airmen and SNCOs, responsible for monitoring the radar and producing an identified picture, had become much more observant and able to identify the cluttered picture caused by ducting. We were scrambling the QRA aircraft more frequently with interesting results. In addition to the regular TU 104s on two occasions we intercepted Beriev BE 12s Russian twin turbo prop amphibians which were used for anti submarine operations, they carried Egyptian markings, this was the first time that intelligence were aware that these aircraft were in Egypt. On another occasion we intercepted two aircraft which emerged from Lebanon flying towards Nicosia without a flight plan. We notified the type and markings to Nicosia ATCC who asked us to direct them to land at Nicosia. The QRA aircraft shepherded the aircraft into Nicosia where a large quantity of cocaine was found by customs.

There was a lot of traffic between Egypt and Russia chiefly Antanov 12s, they flew due north from Egypt to approximately 50 miles South of Akrotiri then due East to clear Cyprus when they turned North over Turkey and on to Moscow, these Zombie flights were flight planned and we monitored them closely to ensure that they did not deviate from flight plan and fly over Akrotiri.

There were frequent visits by 51 Squadron Comets, these were specially modified aircraft which carried specialized signals monitoring equipment. They carried out flights close to Syria, the Lebanon Israel and Egypt to provide intelligence on radars and communications. We were required to give these flights special surveillance and warn them if any aircraft were attempting to intercept them. Eddy Cappuccitti or myself had to be present in the Ops room whenever they flew operations. When not flying their crews spent a lot of time at our beech hut.

Interceptions of Tu 104s carrying Egyptian markings started to occur more frequently, both by day and night; 51 Sqn confirmed that these aircraft were flown by Russian speaking crews. These flights kept our operators on their toes and gave 56 Squadron some welcome exercise. After a while we noticed that TU104s heading towards Cyprus would turn away when the scrambled Lightning checked in on our control frequency. To confirm this I devised a minimum R/T scramble. The Lightning was fully briefed on telebrief given a scramble vector and control frequency. We cleared take off with air traffic control. The Lightning checked in on the control frequency by giving one click on his transmit button, this was acknowledged by the controller with three clicks, thereafter one click required the fighter to turn five degrees left, two clicks five degrees right. When the Lightning was within twenty miles of the target he was given a code word to turn on his radar and he completed the interception. The TU 104s did not turn away until the Lightning switched on his radar.

The next move was to carry out a simulated scramble, the Troodos transmitters were used to simulate the transmissions from the QRA aircraft and when the controller notified the range of the target as 60 miles, it turned away in a Southerly direction.

Viv got an indulgence flight home to spend Christmas with Mum. Pip, Mike and Fiona. James stayed with me and we went to Troodos for Christmas but had to return to Akrotiri because intelligence indicated that five Motor Torpedo Boats [MTBs] which had been built in France for the Israelis had left Marseilles and were en route for Israel. They were expected to reach the Cyprus area on Boxing day and there was great interest at HQNEAF, could we

detect and track the boats? HQ NEAF did not wish to attract attention by sending an aircraft to search for them. In the evening of 26th we detected three responses which appeared to be travelling at about fifteen knots. As it got dark they increased their speed to about 40 knots with the obvious intention of reaching Israel before daylight. About midnight one of the tracks stopped, the sea was rough and it was not possible to be certain of its position by morning. Shortly after dawn we intercepted a TU 104 at about 1000ft 60 miles South of Cyprus. He appeared to be looking for the MTBs, about mid morning we detected a track quite close to the last recorded position of the missing MTB. Subsequently we learnt from intelligence that one boat had broken down, the other four had travelled in pairs which only showed as one on our radar.

Cyprus was beautiful in the spring, wild flowers were everywhere, particularly anemones, the scent from the blossom, almond and orange was overpowering. With spring came the birds which had wintered in Africa and were now returning to Europe. Slow moving clutter on our radar screens were caused by the birds, flocks of large birds such as cranes, flamingos, geese and ducks were quite distinct, the smaller birds such as were swallows scarcely showed. The flocks of cranes flying over Akrotiri were an amazing sight, the flamingoes when they arrived settled on the salt lake to the North of the airfield where they spent the summer. The smaller birds were accompanied by birds of prey, bee eaters, auriols wrynecks were amongst the smaller birds. In the autumn the reverse process took place, the cranes would circle in the thermals from the salt flats until they reached three or four thousand feet when they set off south for Africa.

Mum came out for a short holiday at Easter, she really enjoyed seeing where we lived. We took her to some of the villages on the way to Troodos, Phapos, Episkopi and of course to the beech hut. Unfortunately she was not very well and had trouble keeping food down, nevertheless she enjoyed being with us and the children. After she got home I received a letter from Mum's doctor telling me that she had stomach cancer and there was nothing which could be done.

Shortly after Easter Viv went to the famous festival at Baalbek, in Lebanon, with one of the Red Cross nurses, Pegotty Jess. It was a music festival held by the light of the full moon in the Roman theatre. They went via Beirut and took a taxi to the festival, which they said it was an unforgettable experience.

Early in May the Americans detached a U2 to Akrotiri for a couple of months, it was given a hanger where it was out of sight when on the ground. When it took off it climbed very rapidly and was almost out of sight before it got beyond the boundary of the base. On return it would glide in and land without any fuss. We were required to give the U2 surveillance and make a call if anything was getting near it. This never happened because it operated at about 60,000ft and any aircraft which appeared to take an interest were 10 or 15000 below it. The U2 flew over Syria and the Lebanon and over the Suez Canal and Egypt until it disappeared from our cover.

Every year Akrotiri offered parachute jumps using time expired chutes. In July I put my name down together with ten others. Towards the end of July, after a short briefing which explained that the main chute would be deployed by a static line, if the chute failed to open we were to pull the rip cord on the reserve chute on our chest. The drop was into the sea. We

had to release the parachute harness just prior to entering the water, once in the water and clear of the chute we inflated our May Wests and waited to be picked up by the Air Sea Rescue Launch. We were dropped from a Whirlwind helicopter, this was my only parachute jump, a great experience, but the time drifting down was all too short. I had no trouble getting out of the harness but would not want to do it in a high wind

The children came out at the end of July for their summer holidays which they spent in all the usual seaside activities, schnorkling, swimming, water skiing, trips around the island and kebabs in Limasol. Early in August I heard that Mum had died and I got another indulgence flight to Lyneham. When I got home to 2 Rayer Rd Tiverton Ian was there and had made arrangements for the funeral. Once again we took Mum's ashes to Bewcastle, I have no recollection of the journey. When we got back we had to sort out the bungalow, put it on the market and decide what to do with the contents. All the items which I had were put into store pending my return, some items were sent to Shirley and Ian had the rest. We had an offer for the property and sold some of the items of furniture to the purchaser. Unfortunately everything was done in a hurry, I had to get back to Cyprus and Ian had a farm to run. My only regret is that we overlooked a secret drawer in the chest of drawers which we sold to the purchaser, it is only recently that I recalled the drawer which contained all Dads letters from France and a telegram from the War Office notifying that Dad had been killed. This occurred because dad was the sole survivor from a tank, they fought the tanks stripped to the waist. When the tank was knocked out he grabbed a tunic and got out, he ended up in an American field hospital with the wrong identity tags, eventually Mum received a letter from the field hospital telling her that dad was not badly injured.

When I arrived back in Cyprus I found that a Russian Antonov AN12, four engine turbo prop, similar to a Hercules, had crashed about forty miles South East of Akrotiri. The personnel on watch were monitoring the Zombie to ensure that it did not deviate from its flight planned track, when it disappeared from the radar display shortly after turning East. They alerted the rescue services, wreckage and bodies were found in the sea in the position we notified. Some of the wreckage which was recovered by an air sea rescue launch showed signs of an explosion. The bodies and wreckage which were salvaged were handed over to the Russians. We never heard how many passengers had been on the aircraft or who they were, the AN 12 carried 100 passengers. The aircraft was undoubtedly sabotaged but for what reason and by whom is still a mystery. The Russians had large military and civil delegations in Egypt. There were usually two flights each week in support of these delegations and they continued after the incident.



During the summer holidays we usually had a barbeque at the beach hut on Sundays. Keith Hepburn, OC one of the Vulcan Squadrons, Brian Coote, OC the RAF Regiment responsible for base security and Brian Cooper OC Admin and their respective families joined and a good party ensued which usually went on until sun-downers. Brian Coote who ran the diving club and taught me to Squaba dive. Akrotiri was an ideal place, the sea was warm and clear and

there were many pieces of Roman pottery in the sea round Akrotiri and interesting fish. Diving which provides freedom of movement in three planes and breathing into the face mask had some parallels with flying. My final qualifying dive to 100 feet was interesting, the isoclines which were clearly visible gave a remarkable change of water temperature, you could have half of your body in water noticeably of a different temperature from the other half, the dividing line looked like a mirror. Ascending required pauses to allow for re-compression.

At the beginning of the school term we went to a parent teachers meeting at James' school. I complained to the head teacher about James' lack of progress with reading and writing and asked him what chance James had of passing his 11plus exam. The head said that we would have to reconcile ourselves that James was not intelligent and that he had no chance of passing the 11plus. I told him that James was just as intelligent as his brother and sisters and that the problem was that he had no respect for his teacher and that he only went to school to fight and play football, what he required was a male teacher he could respect. Next evening James came home with the news that he had a new teacher who had been a Prisoner of War and that he had been in the great escape. He had given James a copy of *The Great Escape* which James had to read to us each evening without help, then read the same text to his teacher the next day. The target was to read the first chapter in two weeks and the whole book by the end of term; James completed the book, his writing developed and thanks to his dedicated teacher he passed the 11plus

In late autumn Keith Hepburn's Vulcan squadron visited Iran as part of a CENTO exercise. I went with them, my first and only trip in a Vulcan. We landed at a military base near Tehran. I visited the Iranian Air Defence HQ where I met General Isfandiari, the C in C of the Iranian air defence forces, he was a charming man. In common with all the senior Air Force and Army officers, he was shot when the revolution took place.

During our tour in Cyprus we visited the Roman ruins at Salamis near Famagusta and Curium near Kyrenia. The ruins at Salamis were beautiful, largely damaged by an earthquake in the second century AD. To me the amphitheater was the most remarkable, a semi circle of 50 rows of stone seats capable of seating



15,000 people. The acoustics were amazing, it was possible to hear words spoken on the central stage at any point in the amphitheater. There was a similar amphitheatre at Curium, slightly smaller with 25 rows of seats, where we went to two orchestral concerts and a

performance of Macbeth. Curium was built on top of the cliffs looking South over the sea. The performances which we attended were held at night by the light of a full moon. The setting was un-forgettable with the moon shining over the sea, and the muted sound of the sea, and the tinkling of the bells on the goats and sheep.

Whilst walking in the bundu to the West of Akrotiri we found a beautiful mosaic and walking on the cliff tops to the South of the airfield we often found Roman copper coins which showed up after heavy rain

In the winter skiing on Troodos was excellent there were no ski lifts but the slopes and the snow were good but rather a lot of trees to crash into. I tried to learn to ski too late in life and never spent enough time learning but James was good. An Austrian on the UN peace corps who was an exceptional skier said that James was a natural and if he could teach him regularly he could become an Olympic skier. It was about this time that I traded in my Peugeot 404 for the new 504, I think it cost just under £1000 in Cyprus and the Royal Navy shipped it home free of charge.

Early one morning I was called to the Ops Room to be told that we were being Tactically Evaluated (TACEVAL) by a team of examiners from UK. They had organized a series of raids by aircraft from Malta many of them were radar Jamming Canberras from No 360Sqn. The TACEVAL lasted 24 hours and we received an above average assessment.

Mike came to stay with us in the spring when the Red Arrows arrived to give a display to visiting CENTO senior officers. The leader of the Red Arrows was Ray Hannah, I knew Ray having posted him to the Overseas Ferry Unit in 1954 when I was in DP1c Air Ministry. Ray offered me a trip in the back of his No2's aircraft. The Arrows were flying Folland Gnats, a great little aircraft. The CENTO officers were to watch the display from the top of the cliffs at Episkopi. Ray's briefing was simple and practical the team could obviously fly the standard display in their sleep. The briefing emphasized any deviation from the standard display. Ray decided that the show would start with the team approaching the cliffs at low level over the sea he would then call for smoke and pull up into a loop, thereafter the display would run parallel to the cliffs the spectators would be looking down on parts of the display.

I thoroughly enjoyed my ride, the R/T was minimal, short sharp calls for changes of formation and the formation flying was superb. At the end of the display we looped into cloud, Ray called "getting dark" then as we broke cloud he called for smoke and we dropped down over the sea when he called for smoke off. I had arranged for Mike to watch the display from the cliffs, he said that we appeared to climb out of the sea at the start and dive back in at the finish, he said that the show was exceptional.

Easter and summer holidays were great times for the children, swimming water skiing, diving kebab parties in Limassol, a camping holiday on the panhandle and in particular a donkey ride to Bellapais monastery to the North East of Kyrenia. which Keith Hepburn, Brian Cooper, Brian Coote and families, together with another eight families from Akrotiri, did with us. Some locals at Kyrenia organized picnics at the monastery. It was about a four mile trek on a winding path up steep hills. We rode on donkeys and the picnic together with a lot of wine was also transported on the donkeys. When we got to the monastery there was a

grassy clearing where the locals set up a barbeque, we all drank rather a lot of wine with the result that the ride back down the hill was quite hilarious and painless. Auntie Bessy who was staying with us wanted to come with us, I thought the ride would be too much for her and we left her in Kyrenia. I have often wondered whether we should have let her come along.

On August Bank Holiday Saturday we were having a barbeque at the beach hut when I was called to the control room because the QRA Lightning had been scrambled to identify a track heading North towards Akrotiri. We intercepted a Tu 104 about 50 miles South at 500ft and it turned away South, we recalled the Lightning then shortly after the Tu104 turned North again towards Akrotiri; they had never done this before. We scrambled another Lightning and intercepted it about 20 miles South, it turned away again the Lightning turned for base then the Tu 104 turned back towards Akrotiri, we intercepted it again about 10 miles South. I warned 56 Sqn that the Russians seemed to be trying to see how we could respond on a holiday and to be ready for more scrambles. The Lightning was instructed to fly alongside waggle his wings and indicate that the 104 should turn. It then turned parallel to the coast. I instructed the Lightning to stay with him and indicate that he should turn South, the 104 then headed in a generally southerly direction doing occasional S turns. I scrambled another Lightning to join the first and they escorted the 104 out to 100 miles. We followed him on radar until he crossed the Egyptian coast. There was little doubt that the Russians were trying to find out our readiness on a holiday Saturday

O Level results came in August Philippa had been promised a bottle of Champagne for every A, she had six and a very happy party ensued at the beech hut.

Early in September in response to Russian Navy activity and a coup in the Lebanon the 6th Fleet moved into the Eastern Mediterranean. Initially we saw quite a lot of activity 150 miles South East of us and it appeared that aircraft were intercepting notified airline movements. We realized that the activity must be related to the 6th Fleet and that Tu 104s from Egypt would start to take an interest. As expected an un-notified track appeared from Egypt heading in a North Westerly direction. We scrambled the QRA Lightning and intercepted a Tu 104 with Egyptian markings, we instructed the Lightning to stay with the Tu 104 which appeared to be heading in the direction of our estimated position of the 6th Fleet. Shortly after a US Navy F4 intercepted the 104 and the three aircraft flew over the 6th Fleet. Shortly after the QRA Lightning landed I received a 'phone call from Splinters to say that USS Saratoga would send an aircraft to Akrotiri the following morning to take me out to the Saratoga where the Captain wished to discuss our radar cover and possible cooperation.

The next morning a twin engine amphibian picked me up from Akrotiri and flew South west for about 45 minutes until we reached Saratoga. She was a huge ship, I had been on HMS Thesius in 1949, but she was tiny in comparison. Saratoga was 33,000 tons had a crew of 2,000 and carried 81 aircraft. It was the first time that I had landed on a carrier. We came in on the angled deck, hooked up on an arrester wire and were marshaled to a waiting area where I was met by a Lieutenant Commander who whisked me up to the bridge to meet Captain W.H. O'Neil. The view from the bridge was impressive, there were three escorting destroyers, a helicopter flying close to the ship for crash rescue and fighter aircraft were landing at about 20 second intervals. The Captain was interested to know the extent of our radar cover and how we had managed to intercept the TU 104 before his fighters.

I explained the extent of our cover and the effect of anoprop (Anomalous propagation). I pointed out that we were aware that his fighters were intercepting notified civilian air traffic and offered to cross tell our identified picture and to draw their attention to unidentified tracks. The captain agreed to open up H/F communications with 280 SU and said that they would intercept our identified tracks for one day to confirm the accuracy of our identified picture. I was then shown round their Operations room and saw the extent of their radar cover, then a trip to watch a briefing of fighter crews and see them catapulted off. Aircraft were taking off and recovering throughout my visit. Finally we were catapulted off on our return to Akrotiri. The engines were run up to full power then a huge kick in the back and we were airborne. During their time in the Eastern Med we built up a very good working relationship with Saratoga warning them of unidentified tracks on several occasions. When they left the Eastern Mediterranean in the middle of October they sent a signal to us copied to Splinters thanking us for the excellent service which allowed Saratoga to hold its QRA aircraft on the catapult rather than holding standing patrols.

Early in November I was told that my replacement would arrive early in December and that I would be posted to the Air Warfare College at Manby. This was good news because I had not been to Staff College and further promotion was not possible until I had attended a staff course. I thoroughly enjoyed my tour in command of 260 signals unit, it was great to be my own boss.

We had the usual round of farewell parties and eventually flew home in a Britannia. Unknown to me, Viv had arranged with the Senior Air Movements Officer, our next door neighbor, to send all our kit home by Britannia, rather than the usual sea passage. The Britannia usually had plenty of space for freight. Half way across the Channel the aircraft captain announced that we had been diverted to Gatwick because Lyneham was fogged in. This was when Viv told me that all our deep sea baggage was on the Britannia. When we went to collect our baggage James and I started to load bags onto trolleys. A Cockney porter said "hey Mate you only have to unload your own bags," when I said they were all ours he said "Cor it must have cost you a fortune in excess baggage." We got all our bags onto four trolleys, eventually we got to customs where the customs officer said "is all that yours," when I replied in the affirmative and said that I was returning after three years in Cyprus, he said "Off you go. I think you have got enough trouble." By this time it was late and we were put up in a hotel for the night.

Next morning I hired a van and we set off for Lyneham where our car was waiting in a customs compound, new number plates had been arranged by the importers we simply had to sign customs forms and we were on our way to the Old Farm; Viv took James in the car and I drove the van.

Arriving home just before Christmas we went down to Bath to collect the girls, then off to Reading to collect Mike. Tammy was Mum's dog now, she had scared off a chap who was pestering mum to let him dig her garden. Mum who had become very deaf relied on Tam to take her to the 'phone when it rang. We had a great Christmas at the Old Farm.



On New Year's Eve I received a letter telling me that I had been awarded the OBE for my work at 280 Signals Unit, this came as a very pleasant surprise. Splinters had congratulated me at my farewell interview. The OBE was the gilt on the gingerbread.



After Christmas we took Pip, Fi and Mike back to school James started at the Meer Green primary school

Chapter 18 - Air Warfare Course Manby - 1971 - 73

I think I arrived at Manby at the beginning of February to start the Air Warfare Course which lasted five months. Viv stayed at the Old Farm and I travelled home most weekends. There were about 25 officers on the course, RAF, USAF, RCAF, RAAF, Royal Navy, Group Captains, Wing Commanders and equivalent ranks.

The Air Warfare Course studied the history of air warfare, progressing to current planning and future developments. The cold war was still very much alive, the Warsaw pact and North Vietnam were the potential enemy. All aspects of air defence, bombing, ground attack, maritime operations, photographic reconnaissance, electronic warfare and associated weapons of NATO and the Warsaw Pact were studied. Pilots and navigators representing all of the specialisations were present on the course and were expected to contribute in the discussions.

Lectures were given on weapon developments in NATO and the Warsaw Pact and extensive lectures on Nuclear weapons and planning were given. The course included visits to NATO Headquarters in Brussels and American, Canadian and RAF bases in Germany. After an extensive tour of the bases, visits to the Squadrons and briefings, the visit usually concluded with a Guest Night in the Officers Mess. Similar Visits to the Southern flank of NATO, Naples, Izmir in Turkey and Malta. The course members were carried in Avro 748 aircraft of the Communications Squadron based at Northholt.

There were some interesting people on the course, two Americans who had done a tour in Vietnam and had been shot at by Russian Surface to Air Missiles They had been on a Wild Weasel squadron which was responsible for jamming air defence radars and SAM. They had a healthy respect for light anti aircraft fire.

Erik Bennet who had been the Air Attaché in Jordan, he had been flying King Hussein in a Dove when they were bounced by two Israeli fighters. Erik turned inside them and dived into a narrow waddy and worked his way inland. The Israelis were unable to shoot at him and eventually withdrew short of fuel. Hussein gave Erik a Ferrari for saving his life, the car a brilliant yellow was waiting for Erik when he got back to the UK. He used to drive down to London most weekends, the car became known as the time machine.



There were frequent dining in nights at Manby and several cocktail parties. Quite a lot of time was spent in the bar where we all got to know one another well and there was a good informal exchange of information.

The course finished at the end of June. I was surprised to find that I had been posted to the directing staff. There was an ex- officio quarter which went with the job and we lost no time moving in. It was one of the old pre-war quarters with a solid fuel Aga. The country was very flat but there were miles of sandy beaches. Louth which was some six miles away was a pleasant little market town. The children soon joined us for the summer holiday. Now that Tammy had become mum's dog we had to find another dog, we wanted a Scotty but were unable to find one and eventually found a Cairn puppy, Wolley. She loved to run on the beach and was a great little dog. I don't think we went away for the summer holidays but spent our time on the local beaches. Our furniture arrived from store including items of Mum and Dad's which had been in store in Tiverton. The old grandfather clock by Sanderson of Wigton would not go and I was advised to take it to an old farmer, Roy Sargisson, who lived at Mumby near Alford about twenty miles away. This visit was the start of my interest in clocks and I will say more about this later.

My job on the directing staff was to supervise the students on the course, recommend and implement changes to the course, meet visiting lecturers and write letters of thanks afterwards. Arrange transport for visits abroad and accompany these visits. There was a rather hectic social life, arrival parties cocktail parties dining in nights and end of course parties. The tours of 2nd Tactical Air Force in Germany were hectic and the Mediterranean tours when we visited Naples, Izmir, Crete, and Malta even more so. Naples was chaotic we were driven round in Italian Air Force buses , the drivers used their horn constantly and quite deliberately forced cars out of the way; this was the only way we could make progress. We stayed in hotels and went out in the evening. There was usually someone on the course who knew a good restaurant and we had some excellent food. It was advisable to stay in groups of four or five and beware of pick pockets.

Our visits to Izmir were always enjoyable, a lovely city with a splendid bazaar. It was on one of these visits that I found my Lantern clock There were quite a lot of early English clock movements with verge escapements, the practice of converting verge to anchor escapements, had not spread from England to Turkey. There had been a good market for English clocks in Turkey in the 16th and 17th centuries as every Mosque had a grandfather clock to provide accurate time.

I think it was early in September when we attended an investiture at Buckingham Palace. Viv, Philippa and Mike came to see me receive the Order of the British Empire from the Queen. I was surprised how small the Queen was, she said a few words but I really cannot remember what she said. We went for a good meal in Soho afterwards then back to Manby,

I spent eighteen months on the directing staff which covered three Air Warfare Courses, the usual round of parties and visits have not left any lasting memories apart from a visit to Malta in November 1971. The senior student on the course was Group Captain Tommy Blackham a very pleasant rather quiet officer. We were standing in the bar at RAF Luqa with the station commander having a few beers after dinner, a German crew from a maritime reconnaissance squadron of Atlantiques was also in the group, the conversation got round to Dom Mintov the

Prime Minister Of Malta who was being particularly awkward at the time; the German senior officer , a Colonel said “the trouble with you Brits is that you are too soft, we Germans would soon sort out the problem”. Tommy Blackham said typical bloody Kraut, then he took off his wrist watch and rolled up his sleeve and showed the German a number tattooed on his wrist saying the Gestapo tattooed that on my wrist in Dachau, the camp commandant looked and sounded just like you then he turned and left the bar. The original party stopper. None of us had any idea that Tommy had been in Dachau, it transpired that he had been shot down when dropping supplies to the Machie. He joined up with them and fought with them for a couple of weeks then he was taken prisoner, the Machie he was with were shot but when the Germans found he was a Brit he was handed over to the Gestapo who after interrogation put him in Dachau. Twice he was put in a gas chamber but they turned water on rather than gas. In an attempt to break him, fortunately for Tommy the Americans liberated the concentration camp. After the war Tommy was the only RAF officer to give evidence at the Nuremberg war trial.

At Manby I had a lot of trouble with my back, reluctant to go to the Doc in case I lost my medical category. I put up with it until it got so bad I could scarcely walk when I heard that there was an old lady who lived in a remote farm about ten miles away who was very good with joints and discs. I ‘phoned her and asked if I could make an appointment. She told me she did not have appointments, she started seeing people at two PM and I was to come round and take my turn. When I got to the house I joined a queue of about ten cars. It was very reassuring to watch, people got out of their cars and hobbled up to the front door, when they left the house the majority walked with a spring in their step and some looked as if they wanted to jump over the gate. When my turn came the lady’s husband answered the door and showed me into a room where I was introduced to his wife. She asked me what was wrong, she told me should not guarantee to cure me but if I had no objections she would run her fingers down my spine and let me know her opinion. She quickly told me that I had a lumber disc out of place and said she could put it back if I so wished. I was told to stand between a pair of parallel bars she ran her fingers down my back then told me that the disc was back and I could put the weight on my feet. To my amazement there was no pain and I had not felt the disc go back. She then said that something must have caused the problem. I recalled that I had hurt my knee at Christmas time just before my disc started to give trouble. She felt my knee and told me a bone was out of place, a sharp pain and a click and she said that it was fixed. She then said that the disc had been out for a long time and it was most likely to come out again, should this happen I was to go back and see her immediately. When I asked how much I owed her she said that she did not charge but if I would like to buy some eggs she had plenty because her husband ran a chicken farm, needless to say I bought two dozen eggs. About two days later the disc popped out when I was getting out of the car, I returned for further treatment, the same procedure put the disc back in place, she then said she would attempt to lock the disc in place by massage and manipulation. There was no pain and after about five minutes she said the disc should not give any more trouble, if I massaged my back each night with camphorated oil for the next couple of weeks and took care when getting in and out of the car. Whilst my back was being massaged I noticed a collection of dolls in national costumes, so on my next visit to the Mediterranean I bought a Turkish and Italian doll which she was overjoyed to add to her collection.

At half term Fiona developed acute appendicitis. She was whisked into the RAF hospital at Nocton Hall where the appendix was taken out in the nick of time. She made a good recovery

and went back to school. At that time the RAF had an excellent medical branch with first class hospitals at Nocton Hall, Eley, Halton, Wroughton Cyprus, Singapore and Germany and a rehabilitation centre at Headley Court. There were RAF doctors on every station and at least one doctor on every flying station who had completed the aviation medical course at Farnborough. The Royal Navy and Army had similar medical branches and hospitals. All these have been closed down and the armed forces are now obliged to rely on the national health service. Service personnel are treated in National Health hospitals including the injured from wars in Iraq and Afganistan where they are placed in wards with civilians, a totally unsatisfactory state of affairs. Fortunately the rehabilitation centre at Headley court has been retrained and has done splendid service providing rehab to troops seriously injured in Iraq and Afganistan

At Easter we decided to go to the North West of Scotland. We drove to Fort William along the road to the isles to Strontian then and along the Ardnamurchan peninsula to Kilchoan. We tried to find a bed and breakfast. Eventually we rented a caravan beside Loch from Mary Jane Scott. The first morning we looked out over the Loch we saw two otters playing amongst the seaweed just off the shore. The weather was splendid , there was an abundance of wild flowers which suited Philippa who was collecting them for a project and we had a great time fishing swimming and visiting Sana sands. There were few visitors and the locals were very friendly. It was rather a long way but well worth the effort.

We decided to go to Kilchoan again for our summer holidays, this time we rented a small bungalow from Mrs Scott. We became friendly with Donald who was the local road man. He told us that there was a Ceilidh at a village hall about two miles from the village, everyone went, there was a fiddle and accordion band and highland dancing carried on all night. The party was still in full swing when we went home after midnight. Donald danced the night away in his wellies. The next morning I went to the post office to find it closed, when I asked what time it would open I was told “mebbies tomorrow the Ceilidh is still going strong”. We usually went to local hotel, the Kilchoan Arms in the evening. They stopped serving drinks after hours when they received a ‘phone call from Strontian that the policeman had left in the direction of Kilchoan. This allowed half an hour for people to finish their drinks before he arrived. Unfortunately the weather was poor for our holiday, little sunshine and mostly low cloud.

While we were at Kilchoan Pip and Mike received their A Level results. They were excellent, Pip was accepted to read Horticulture at Reading and Mike was to return to school to take a scholarship for Cambridge. Unfortunately Pip developed glandular fever and had to take a gap year in order to recover. Mike passed his scholarship and went for interview at Cambridge where he was offered a scholarship to read Chemistry. When he told them he wanted to read engineering they suggested that he should return to school to improve his maths if he were to be awarded a scholarship in engineering. He replied that he had already been offered a place at Bristol to do engineering and that he now intended to accept Bristol’s offer.

Having lived in ex-officio married quarters for the last eleven years and we were becoming increasingly concerned that we did not own a house, most of my contemporaries owned their own homes. After considering a number of properties around Manby we bought an old farm house at Strubby it was called Hill House, built on the only slight rise in very flat

Lincolnshire countryside, it cost £9000. It was quite a large house with large downstairs rooms and four bedrooms. We stripped the wallpaper from the walls and painted them white. Viv found a second hand Aga which we installed in the kitchen. A larder just outside the kitchen flooded to a depth of about one inch from time to time. Eventually we realised that the flooding took place after we drained the bath and we found that the waste pipe to the septic tank was cracked. I replaced the pipe without any trouble.

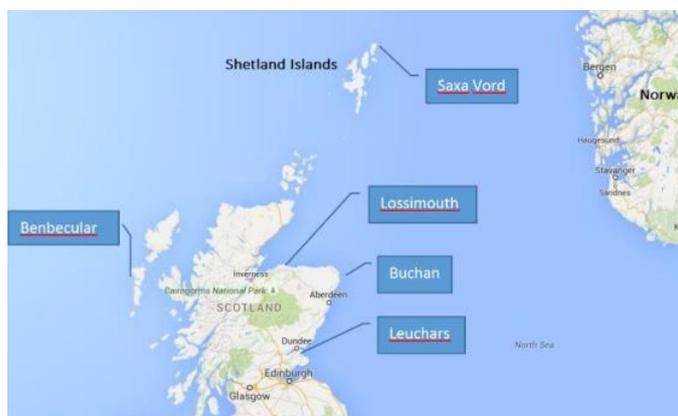
We were happy with the house and settling in when, shortly after Christmas, I was told that I was to be promoted to Group Captain and posted to command RAF Buchan, this came as a shock because we had only been in the house for three months, but it was great to be promoted after just two tours as a Wing Commander.

I was due at Buchan early in January and had to go to Bemtly Priory, now HQ No 11 Group for a briefing. Strike Command had absorbed Bomber, Fighter and Coastal Commands, which were now Groups within Strike Command. I was briefed by Air Marshal Bob Freer, AOC briefings followed from the heads of branches: Operations, Administration, Engineering, Supply, all told me of any problems they had with Buchan. Generally they seemed happy with Buchan but it was obvious that they did not really appreciate the remoteness of the outstations at Benbecula and Saxa Vord.

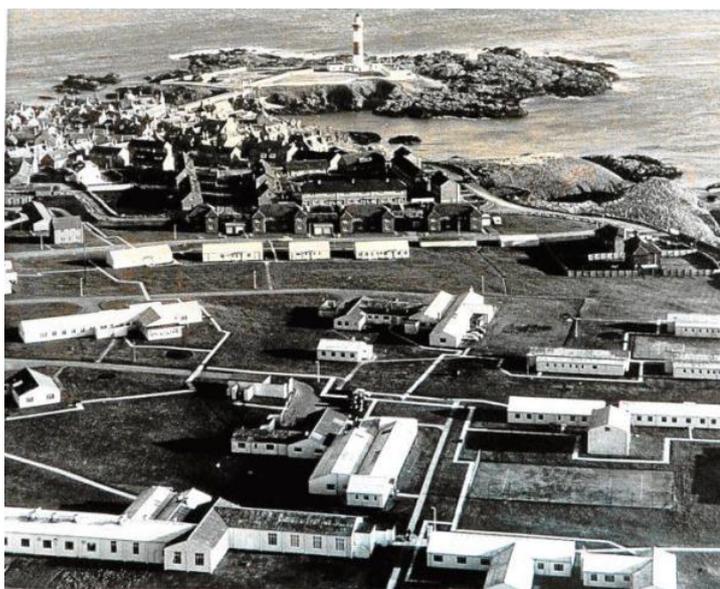
I was due to take command of Buchan on 10 January so Viv was left with the task of putting the house on the market, taking Mike James and Fiona back to school and arranging for the movers to take our belongings to Buchan.

Chapter 19 - RAF Buchan 1973 - 1974

I set off for Buchan early on a Saturday morning, it was a long way from Manby. I left the Peugeot 404 for Viv and took the old Ford Anglia we had got as a second car. North of Stirling the roads were poor and progress was slow. There were many long lorries carrying huge pipes which I subsequently found were to be installed to bring the oil and gas ashore from the Forties Field which was just being developed. Eventually I reached Aberdeen, which was extremely busy with the new oil developments. RAF Buchan was a further 25 miles North near the tiny port of Boddam close to Peterhead.



Buchan was a conglomeration of wooden huts with a few brick built married quarters, the officers mess another wooden structure. It was just getting dark when I parked the old Ford in the space marked CO, a young WRAF officer dashed out of the mess and told me that it was not advisable to park in the CO's space, I thanked her and moved the car. On the Monday when she saw me in uniform she apologised, I told her she was quite right I should not have parked an old banger in the CO's slot.



On the Monday morning I found that I was taking over from Bill Kelly who had commanded No56 Squadron at Akrotiri when I was in Cyprus. I knew I was taking over from someone called Kelly but I had no idea it was Bill who told me that he had thoroughly enjoyed his time at Buchan but that his family had not liked living so far North and a long way from their friends. The best piece of advice Bill gave was to arrange to call on the Provost of Peterhead. I did this immediately I took command and was invited to call. The Provost, a charming man told me how much the people of Peterhead appreciated the importance of the base and that the airmen caused no trouble in the town. A bottle of Malt Whisky was produced and half a tumbler of neat whisky was poured for me. We had a long chat, he told me not to hesitate to get in touch if I had any problems at the base and that he would be inviting me to the annual Burns night.

Our married quarter was close to the Officers mess and over looking the cliffs and the sea. In a North Easterly gale the spray and spume would blow over the house. We were close to Boddam a small fishing village where the locals had a distinctive accent and their dialect included many unusual words. We had a Danish exchange officer at Buchan who found that the locals could understand him when he spoke Danish to them and he could understand their dialect. There was a lighthouse on the point at the entrance to the harbour, when the sea fog "Haar" drifted in, which was a frequent occurrence, the fog horn locally known as the Buchan Coo, would sound its mournful note.

My job at Buchan was similar in many ways to that at 280 SU. Buchan, the most Northerly MRS was responsible for the air defence of the Northern and North Western approaches to the UK. The technical site at Buchan was on top of a hill about two miles south of the domestic site, it had a Type 80 radar and associated height finders, the control room was deep underground in common with all Rotor plan sites. There were also satellite radars at Saxa Vord on Unst the most Northerly of the Shetland islands and at Benbecular on South Uist. There were direct lines to these two satellites, also to the American radars in Iceland, the Danish radars on the Faroes and the Norwegian radars on the North Cape and down the West coast of Norway. Thus Soviet aircraft flying round the North Cape into the North Atlantic were tracked and where necessary intercepted. Bears flew frequently to Cuba and Bears and Badgers flew into the North Atlantic to shadow NATO exercises. We were responsible for controlling the Phantoms at Leuchars, No 43 and N0111 Squadrons. There were frequent air defence exercises, V bombers and NATO aircraft were the targets and there were several exercises where we had to provide air defence for Naval forces in the North sea and North Western Approaches. Russian aircraft kept the Quick Response Alert [QRA] aircraft busy. Frequently we had to scramble tankers if it appeared that the Soviet aircraft were trying to probe by turning away then coming back again and again.



Civil passenger aircraft from the Warsaw Pact countries, "Zombies", required close attention. They would file flight plans then drift off course in order to fly over sensitive locations such as Faslane, Rosyth and Leuchars. When this occurred we would scramble the QRA and escort them away, details of these incidents were forwarded to Strike Command and complaints were made through the Foreign Office to the country of origin of the Zombie.

Unlike 280 SU which was parented by Akrotiri, Buchan was self-contained. It had its own administration, technical, supply and Motor Transport sections, additionally we were the parent station for Saxa Vord and Benbecula and their commanding officers were responsible to me. I visited these sites about once every two months, the distances were considerable. When No 11 Group communications aircraft were available they would pick me up at Dyce and fly direct to Benbecular or Saxa Vord where we landed on small strips close to the sites. The alternative was to fly from Dyce to Glasgow by BEA and catch a Logan Air Islander to Benbecular. To get to Shetland, BEA from Dyce to Sumburgh then Logan Air Islander to Saxa Vord.

The operations site was manned continuously on a three watch basis. Thus one third of the operations were on stand down, it was difficult to get to know everyone and to ensure that everyone got to know what was going on we used to say that if you wanted to keep a secret, publish it in station standing orders. On the other hand if you wanted to get the word round quickly tell the wives club and ask them to keep it to themselves. To overcome the problem I put a "What's on Board" at the entrance to the operations block where all operations personnel could read it when they came on duty.

On the 25th January I went to the Burns Night supper as the guest of the Provost. I was shown to a seat on the Provosts table, a bottle of Malt whiskey was placed on the table in front of each guest. Everybody who was anybody in Peterhead was there: the Chief Constable, The Governor of Peterhead prison, the Harbour Master, Ken Smith managing director of Cleveland twist drill factory and an honouree member of our mess, Louis Gordon, another honouree member, numerous trawler owners and captains and local dignitaries. It was a great evening, excellent speeches, The haggis was piped in and the Provost made the address to the Haggis, excellent recitations of Burns and numerous stories and jokes followed. The party broke up at about 2AM and I was pleased that I had followed the Provosts' advice and taken my driver.

I did a lot of travelling whilst I commanded Buchan, Shortly after taking command I did my first visit to Saxa Vord, taking a BEA Viscount from Dyce to Sumburgh then a Logan Air Islander to a short strip close to the base at Saxa Vord. The Technical site was on the most Northerly tip of Unst, a wild place with an inlet on the westerly side of the site overlooking the Island of Muckle Flugga which housed the most Northerly lighthouse of the British Isles.

At Saxa there was a T80 Radar, the only T80 which was housed in a Radome. Originally sited on top of the cliff, the complete dish was blown into the sea during a particularly violent storm, it was replaced inside a radome.



The technical site was very exposed on the top of the cliff, during extreme gales it was impossible for watch changes to take place because vehicles could not drive from the domestic site without being blown off the road. There were large generators at the technical site where we generated our own power. The domestic site was about two miles away at the South end of the inlet, and slightly more sheltered. There were a few hamlets on the island, crofting was the main occupation, rearing the hardy Shetland sheep, fishing, growing oats and a few vegetables. The island was wind swept and there were scarcely any trees.

The locals were very friendly and well travelled, many had relatives in Canada, Australia and particularly New Zealand. Most of the cars on the island were un-taxed, in fact I think only the taxi had a road fund licence. There were no police, occasionally the Sergeant from Lerwick would visit, when he boarded the ferry, the skipper would radio that he was aboard and the word was passed around, cars were jacked up, wheels taken off and the cars given a liberal coating of dust. The Sergeant was well aware of the situation and on one occasion putting his hand on the bonnet of a car commented that it was remarkably warm for the time

of year. At the turn of the century Unst had been a centre of activity during the herring season. A fleet of trawlers and itinerant workers descended on the island. The fish were brought ashore, gutted and salted and packed into barrels for export all over Europe and particularly to Russia and the Baltic states.

My next visit was to Benbecular on South Uist, here we had a site beside an old wartime airfield which was still used by Logan Air for inter island flights. The site was very flat and from the air the whole island looked like a wet sponge. As in Shetland, crofting was the main occupation, in addition quite a lot of tweed was woven using wool from the indigenous sheep. The radar was effective and the personnel seemed to enjoy the island life particularly the fishing.

Subsequently I visited all the radar stations with which we exchanged information and reported movements of Russian aircraft. We had a Danish exchange officer at Buchan and he arranged for me to visit the Faroes, where the Danish CO made me most welcome and showed me round the island. The brightly painted wooden houses and the lovely Faroes knitted jerseys left a lasting impression; I brought a jersey back for Viv. The radar on Faroes was important in providing radar cover of the Iceland Faroes gap, the lines to Buchan were in continuous use and vital for tracking Russian aircraft transiting to the North Atlantic. I also visited the Danish Air Force headquarters in Copenhagen and their major Sector Operations Centre in Heligoland the Danish Air Force were very pro RAF.

My next visits were to the Royal Norwegian Air Force, to their SOC near Oslo and then to a radar station at Bodo which is in North Norway and once again directly connected to Buchan providing Radar cover between Norway and the Faroes. It was extremely cold and there was a lot of snow on the ground but all the roads and the runways were cleared. The Norwegian CO was most hospitable and took me back to his house for the night. His house was warm and he explained to me that they did not have any trouble with frozen pipes because all the plumbing was installed on interior walls. He subsequently visited me at Buchan. The RCAF was very pro RAF, they hated the Germans and were very grateful for our role in freeing their country.

There were regular joint maritime exercises whilst I was at Buchan, these took the form of exercises by NATO ships in the North Sea and Western Approaches. Our role was to provide reporting to ships, intercept NATO aircraft simulating enemy attacks, also scrambling the QRA to intercept Russian aircraft which invariably shadowed these exercises. The exercises were always followed by a large exercise debrief at the Joint Maritime Operational Training School [JMOTS] at Turnhouse, another long drive.

Buchan was a long way from other RAF bases, Leuchars (100 miles), and Lossiemouth (145 miles), we thought nothing of going to a cocktail party at these bases. Viv would take Fiona and James to school at Bath and Reading stopping over with mum at the Old Farm, a round journey of hundreds of miles.

The next Master Radar Station to the south of us was Boulmer, this was commanded by Erik Bennet, the owner of the Ferrarie presented to him by King Hussein of Jordan. Erik invited me to a guest night at Boulmer. I sat next to Mr Hardy of the fishing rod firm, during the course of the evening I mentioned that James was tying his own flies and he suggested that I

call into his factory next morning to have a look round. After an interesting conducted tour Mr Hardy gave a nice little fly rod for James.

Fishing was good at Buchan, I used to fish in the river Ugi and its estuary at Peterhead. One evening in June just as it was getting dark I caught an eleven pound Salmon on a fly. I hooked the fish then the line went slack and I thought that I had lost it until I realised that it was swimming towards me, it put up a great fight and I had a lot of trouble getting it into my net. It was possible to fish the dusk and dawn rises within about two hours as it scarcely got dark in June. There was also good sea trout fishing in the river Ython about ten miles South of Buchan where I caught a lot of Sea Trout. It was a beautiful estuary with hundreds of Eider ducks. Once the young ducklings could get about, their parents would leave them with an aunty while they went looking for food. One aunty would look after about twenty ducklings, unfortunately the Black Backed Gulls took this opportunity to pounce on the ducklings and the aunties had a difficult job protecting them. Sometimes I would be fishing five or six yards from the bank with twenty or thirty ducklings and a couple of aunties swimming all round me.

In mid June we were invited to the Saxa Vord mid-summer ball. The Senior Air Staff Officer from No 11 Group and his wife were also invited, they picked us up at Dyce in a Comms Flight Dove. It was a great party followed by six holes of golf starting at mid-night on the station golf course. It was light enough to play, or read a paper.

Due to her glandular fever Philippa had a gap year she worked at the Spittal of Glenshee hotel then went grouse beating. Mike went back to school to take a Cambridge scholarship, however having accepted Bristol's offer he left school and returned home to Peterhead where he worked for a local chap ,Ken Cow ,stone polishing.

The annual AOC's inspection went off well Air Vice Marshal Bob Freer was the AOC. I knew Bob Freer from Cranwell days, he was a flying instructor when I was a cadet. Viv took Lady Freer to the wives club and a coffee party with the officer's wives which was the normal procedure on AOC's inspections. In the afternoon Viv asked her if she would like to go for a walk on the cliffs to watch the sea birds. This was a great success, much better than the usual tea parties.

At the beginning of September James and Fiona went back to school at Reading and Bath respectively. Towards the end of September Philippa went to Reading university to study horticulture and Mike went to Bristol to study mechanical engineering.

Early in October I discovered that Professor RV Jones an expert on radar and countermeasures, who had given an excellent lecture when I was a cadet at Cranwell, was a professor at Aberdeen university where he was the head of the electronics department. He had discovered the German blind bombing equipment in a crashed He 111 and developed a method of bending the beam which was the basis of the equipment, thus causing the bombs to be dropped in open countryside. I got in touch with Professor Jones and invited him to a Guest Night. He offered to say a few words after dinner which I readily accepted. In the event he gave a very interesting talk about air defence radars and the development of

countermeasures. He told us that in order to develop countermeasures against German radars it was decided to make a commando raid on a German radar station at Bruneval. There was some doubt that photographs of the electronics would provide sufficient information so an RAF technician Flight Sgt Reid was attached to the raiding party. He went in in paratroops uniform; the paratroops were dropped close to the site on top of the cliffs. The raid was completely successful. The paras together with equipment which Reid had dismantled was evacuated by six landing ships. When Reid got back he was told that if he had been captured the Commandos had been instructed to shoot him because his knowledge of our radars and countermeasures were too valuable to risk. The raid revealed a great deal of information about the German radar system and this knowledge was invaluable in developing improved countermeasures. I sent my car to collect the Professor and take him home afterwards which was very much appreciated.

Buchan played an important part in the autumn NATO exercise which involved NATO Air Forces and Navies. Buchan's role was to provide early warning of exercise attacks and to control defending fighters. In addition we had to track and respond to Russian aircraft snooping round the exercise area. This was at a time when the Royal Navy was pressing hard for new carriers and doing its best to discredit the RAF. Our transmissions to the fleet were by HF throughout the exercise. The RN ships complained that they were having difficulty receiving our messages, fortunately I signaled the US and Dutch ships and asked if they were receiving our messages, they replied in the affirmative. After the exercise the debriefing was held in Oslo we were flown over from Dyce. At the debrief the RN Admiral Lygo was most scathing about Buchan's role saying that our messages were unreadable and that the exercise had been over flown by Russian aircraft and what had the RAF been doing. I got up and said that I was rather mystified by the Admiral's comments, we had intercepted all the Russian aircraft which approached the exercise and notified to this effect. I had signals from US and Dutch participants stating that they were more than satisfied with information and that it seemed to me that possibly the Royal Navy's problems may lie a little closer to home, this raised a good laugh from the audience. I was told afterwards by our RN liaison officer that the Admiral was furious, the RAF delegation at the debrief were overjoyed.

We had a good Christmas but New year or Hogmanay was the big holiday in Aberdeenshire. The entire fishing fleet returned to harbour for New Year and a week of drinking and parties followed. Mike went out on New Years evening with a fisherman friend he had met stone polishing. He returned three days later and has never been able to drink whiskey since. We had a good party in the mess. I drove into Peterhead on New Years day, it was like a ghost town, abandoned cars, front doors standing open, a few stray dogs but not a soul in sight at 11am. We had been invited to visit several houses at New Year, what we did not know was that the invitation was for any time during the week. On 8th January the fishing fleet sailed again. The next day there were headlines in the Buchan Observer, "Mystery, Buchan Trawler Runs Aground on Rattray Head" there were accompanying pictures of a trawler high and dry on a sand bank. A policeman had walked out to the trawler and found the engine running and the crew asleep in their bunks. It transpired that when the trawler cleared the harbour mouth, the skipper had set 345 degrees on the auto pilot gone to bed.

One of our fighter controllers was a Pole Zanir Zmitrovitz, always known as ZZ. He had flown Mosquitoes on 25 Sqn becoming a fighter controller in the early 60s. When the Russians invaded Poland all of ZZ's family were deported to Siberia, but when the Germans

invaded Russia the Russians released the Poles to fight the Germans. The poles released from the gulag where ZZs family had been held decided to walk South West eventually reaching Persia where the British embassy arranged for them to go to Egypt where ZZs father and two brothers joined the Polish Brigade of the 8th Army. His sister became an army nurse and ZZ went to the UK for pilot training. After the war he decided not to return to Communist Poland and became a loyal British citizen as did all the Poles I met in the RAF. ZZ was a great character, guaranteed to make some humorous interjections when I was speaking at a dining in night.

Burns Night was another splendid occasion, speeches recitation, singing and stories were of a high order and an awful lot of whisky was drunk. All of Peterhead notables and many trawler skippers attended.

Our American exchange officer asked if he could bring the US Air Attaché and his wife to Buchan and see some of Scotland. I suggested that we should arrange to take him to some distilleries and I arranged to take him and the exchange officer and their wives to Kildrummy castle which was run as an exclusive hotel by one of our honoree members. Harry Glover laid on an excellent meal and arranged for a piper to play his pipes on the battlements after dinner. This went down very well with the Americans

Early in the spring Bessy and Rose came to stay for a few days. It transpired that grandfather had been a minister in Peterhead in 1874 and they wished to find out if there were any records. I made enquiries with the editor of the Buchan Press and Journal with the result that they printed a quote from their 1874 paper recording a presentation of a desk to grandfather when he left Peterhead to become a minister in Unst. The newspaper headline was “ A Hundred Years of Mossmans” I regret that I did not attempt to find Grandfather’s church when on one of my visits to Unst.

We decided to spend a long weekend at Saxa Vord and asked Molly Smith the wife of honourary member and ex Lancaster pilot Ken Smith if she would like to come with us. We went on the night ferry from Aberdeen to Lerwick then by bus and ferry to Yell. Half way across Yell the bus stopped and we had to transfer to another bus, both buses had the name Murray on the front. It transpired that when father died he left the company to his two sons; the sons would not agree to working together so one ran the service for the South side of the island and the other the North.

We stayed in the officers’ mess and spent three great days walking along the cliffs watching the Gannets, Puffins, Guillemots, and Arctic Squas or Bonxies which dive bombed us whenever we approached their nests. There were thousands of sea birds the cliffs were very steep and the country wild, we never saw another person on our walks and we were very fortunate to see a pair of otters.

Molly told us that she had been a nursing sister in Queen Alexandra’s Nursing Service and that she had been one of a small number of survivors when a hospital ship was torpedoed at night during the North African Landings. The survivors were picked up by a destroyer, covered in oil they were taken down to the engine room to warm and clean up, the sailors in the engine room were horrified to find when they stripped Molly’s clothes off to find she was a woman.

We were invited to a Royal garden party at Holyrood Palace at the end of June, it was a lovely day, the Queen and Duke and Princess Anne were present. The tea and buns were good and we met a lot of people from all walks of life, everyone seemed very talkative. Navy Army and RAF were in uniform and of course there were many in highland dress, including the Queen's bodyguard the Royal Archers a very colourful crowd.

Pip and Mike had long vacations from University and James and Fiona had long summer holidays. Mike went back to stone polishing, Philippa went to work at Cross and Blackwell canning factory, a pretty awful job, and Fiona went to work at the Cruden Bay hotel, I think James spent a lot of time fishing. It was about this time that we got a Scotty puppy, one of the Aberdeenshire large variety, she was a naughty little pup and I called her turpitude, this eventually became Tirpitz or turps, she was a real character.

In September the station was subjected to a Tactical Evaluation which went off very well, the Tac Eval team had got the TA SAS to undertake a raid on the technical site but we were warned by the local farmers that strangers were taking an interest in the site and we were able to stop their raid.

In November Bob Freer the AOC called to say that the MOD were considering me for a posting as Air Attaché to our Embassy in Warsaw, he went on to say that he did not think it was a very good posting and he would oppose it unless I wanted to go, I agreed with him and heard no more about it.

All the family were home for Christmas and New Year. Everyone went swimming at Cruden Bay on boxing day, very cold but they seemed to enjoy it. This time we followed up all the invitations we received to visit over New Year. People were delighted to see us, they kept open house over new year week. We were met with tumblers of whisky and it was not easy to get away.

I think it was early in February that I was to be posted to the Ministry of Defence Air in the post of Deputy Director of Air Defence Operations. There was no escape from a desk job in London

A round of farewell parties for all our friends, honorary members and officers went off well and we departed for Northwood.

I enjoyed my tour in command of Buchan, the station was remote, but the location was good, people either loved or hated it. I had a good bunch of officers, senior NCOs and airmen and I believe we worked together well as a team. The same applied to the remote detachments at Saxa Vord and Benbecular

Chapter 20 Ministry of Defence 1975 - 77

We were allocated quarters at Northwood, 22 Altair Way, a four bedroom detached house, half a mile from the station. The journey on the Bakerloo line changing at Baker Street for Trafalgar Square. My office was in the main MOD building on the second floor overlooking the Cenotaph. The hours were 0930 to 1800 with one hour off for lunch, a five day week.



My boss was the Director of Operations Air Defence an Air Commodore who was responsible to the Vice chief of Air Staff. One Wing Commander and four Squadron Leaders worked for me. We were responsible for air defence fighters and their associated weapons. At that time Lightnings and Phantoms, this included development, modifications and day to day operations. Accidents caused by technical failure were of immediate concern, in consultation with the engineers we had to decide whether to ground aircraft or impose special flying instructions (SFIs) until such time that the fault was cleared or suitable modifications introduced. We were also responsible for Airborne Early Warning. At that time Shackletons carrying a search radar originally designed for the Royal Navy.

Additionally I was responsible for the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Policy for all flying displays, including the Red Arrows. Detailed planning of programmes for these displays was handled by a civil servant who worked for me. Finally I found that I was the chairman of a NATO working group on Air Defence which involved a week in Brussels once every five weeks.

Our particular responsibility was air defence operations, particularly the question of Soviet aircraft approaching the UK. On several occasions I had to be available in the House of Commons in case the minister could not answer supplementary questions.

Aircraft fatigue life was a particular concern with the Phantom. We had to limit the amount of high fatigue work such as air combat to ensure that the aircraft could continue in service until replaced by the Tornado fighter. Phantom accidents also presented a problem. We had purchased a limited number of Phantoms, modified them by installing Rolls Royce engines therefore there were no easy replacements. The Lightning was also scheduled to go out of service in three years time.

Electronic countermeasures were developed from the American experience in Vietnam countering soviet radars and surface to air missiles. We together with the Operational requirements department supported the development of electronic countermeasures for the Tornado. At the same time we supported a joint venture with the Americans to set up an Electronics Countermeasures range at Spadeadam. Some fifteen years later I visited the range where a number of soviet radars surveillance and SAM radars were set up to provide regular training for the RAF, USAF and NATO air forces.

The USAF brought a Squadron of F5s to Norfolk where they operated using Soviet tactics to provide air combat training. We were asked to provide radar surveillance for these exercises over the North Sea. The treasury wanted to charge the Americans for this service but I pointed out that the value of this type of training far exceeded the value of the surveillance service and if we charged we would be the losers. The result was that we had access to this facility at no cost to ourselves.

I went in to work one morning to find that my OBE had been raised to CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. This, which was in recognition of my tour at Buchan, came as a pleasant surprise and it made it possible for us to take Fiona and James to the investiture, Mike and Philippa having attended the Palace when I was awarded the OBE.



Airborne early warning was a problem as the Shackletons were a very tired stop gap. The Operational Requirements Department had a project to put an AEW radar into the Nimrod. This was an extremely expensive project which was making little progress. I suggested that we should look hard at the American AWACS system which was already up and running; my suggestion was dismissed out of hand but a couple of years after I retired the Nimrod was dropped and we bought AWACS.

The amount of paper which crossed my desk during the three years I was there was incredible. All departments submitting policy papers to the Air Force Board passed them to us for comment. It was easy to sign them off but I always commented on anything which I felt strongly about. These comments were passed to the originating department through the Assistant Chief of Air Staff Operations who usually supported my observations. He was AVM David Craig who became Chief of Air Staff and then Chief of the Defence Staff. Many of the subjects had long term implications. The policy for recruiting and commissioning were under review, proposals were being made to do away with all short service commissions. I felt this was crazy, we needed a wide spectrum to select from; those with potential and ability would most likely wish to stay on, or go to civil airways; those with little potential, we could more easily get rid of. Flying training was proving to be a problem. The C in C Flying Training Command was saying that there are no bad students, only bad instructors, this was rubbish but the end result was a reluctance to suspend students with resultant problems at the operational training units and an increasing accident record.

The Air Force Board had introduced a policy of giving accelerated promotion to university graduates to encourage their recruitment with the result that officers authorising flying in many cases had insufficient experience; they were known to the rest of the air force as the "green shield boys." The Chief of Air Staff, concerned about the accident rate was taking a hard line on any lack in supervision of flying which made life very difficult for Squadron and Flight commanders when lumbered with too many inexperienced officers with artificial seniority.

As chairman of a NATO tri service group on air defence I had to attend meetings at NATO headquarters in Brussels for one week every two months. I flew from Heath Row to Beauvechamps, the same airfield I had visited with 63 Squadron in 1951. I had been booked into a hotel near the Grand Platz which was easy to find and not too far from NATO HQ.

When I got there I found that the working group were required to produce a plan for the integration of friendly aircraft, fighter aircraft, SAM and AA Guns. The working group had been attempting to produce this plan for nearly two years. I met the working group which comprised a USAF Bird Colonel and Colonels representing Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, Turkey and Canada. I suggested that the deputy chairman, the USAF rep, chaired the meeting for the first day while I listened and familiarized myself with previous minutes.

The proceedings were slow, long winded and disjointed because everything was translated into the national language all those reps whose first language was not English were required to listen to interpreters whose grasp of technical subjects was minimal and hence their ability to interpret was limited. At the end of the day I suggested that we should go out for a meal, the Belgian rep. agreed to book a table at a restaurant in the Grand Place. We had a very good evening and I found that everyone spoke very good English.

The next morning at the start of our meeting I suggested that as they all seemed to speak and understand English we should dispense with the interpreters and carry on with our discussions; the interpreters only being required when we were finalizing papers. This was agreed and it made a dramatic improvement to our progress.

The reps were a friendly lot the Dane had a particularly well developed sense of humour. The American who was a full blood American Indian was very clever, always slow to get into an argument and express his views, but the most valuable member of the group and the final paper we produced was largely written by me with his assistance. After prolonged discussions on a particular point with the German disagreeing with the Norwegian, the Dane piped up, "now what does big chief Sitting Bull think ?" This got a good laugh but nevertheless it became an accepted way of settling points of dispute. I found the German and Dutch reps to be very inflexible and uncompromising, but we usually managed to reach agreement in the long run. At the end of my first week when we broke up at mid day on the Friday I suggested that in future we should make a regular arrangement to dine at a restaurant in the Grand Place on Thursday nights. The Belgian rep choosing the venue and making the arrangement. This was well received and the Belgian offered to take me to a good shop to buy some Belgian chocolates; they were excellent and I always bought a box on my way to the airport

Brussels was an interesting city with an excellent transport system, trams which ran below the surface in the center of the city and on the roads in the suburbs. The standard of driving was awful, there were no driving tests at that time and pedestrian crossings were referred to as killing zones. The eating places in and around the Grand Platz were excellent. Many people seemed to go out for their evening meal, large families including children. I particularly remember one trip back from Brussels when I got into conversation with a Dutch man. As we walked into terminal two he looked round and said "I think our pilot has made a gross navigational error this place looks more like Delhi international than London". He was quite right there was scarcely a white face, all those sweeping the floor looked like Indians and even the immigration officers looked like Pakistanis or Indians.

After about ten meetings over a period of about two years we finally produced a plan which was acceptable without reservation by all the NATO nations represented. I received a letter

from the head of the NATO plans division congratulating the working group on producing a plan which was acceptable to all, this was “ without precedent”.

Lunch time at MOD gave me an opportunity to explore London. When I had visitors we would usually go into a pub for beer and sausages, otherwise I would go for a walk in one of the parks if the weather was good. If the weather was bad I usually went to the National Gallery, a short walk across Trafalgar Square, or explore second hand book shops on Charring Cross Road. Soho and Covent Garden were also interesting places to explore and I found some good tool shops up Tottenham Court Rd. During my second year I visited Roy Sargisson in Lincolnshire and started to make a grandfather clock. Thereafter I made frequent visits to Clerkenwell to look in the numerous clock and watch suppliers. I found Garner and Marney, who were also barometer specialists, to be particularly good and I bought a number of barometer tubes from them before I retired. Old Marney had a greenish yellow complexion caused by Mercury poisoning. I also made several visits to find veneers in Shoreditch where most of the veneer merchants were to be found. The selection of veneers was amazing. I found Crispins to be the best and I bought some good burr walnut and rosewood veneers which I have used on all the clocks I have made. There are still some good veneers in my workshop which I doubt I will ever use.

When the F4s or Phantoms were purchased from the States we bought a small number of Sidewinder Aim 5 infra red guided missiles. The quantity was totally insufficient should we ever fight even a limited war and Strike Command were demanding that adequate war reserves be provisioned. My predecessor had written several papers for the Air Force Board requesting the purchase of adequate stocks of Sidewinders but these requests were turned down by the treasury. I was asked to produce a further paper for submission by the Air Force Board to the Treasury. I studied the previous submissions and could not see how I could improve them. The Phantoms were assigned to SACEUR and to my delight I found that SACEUR required war reserves of weapon sufficient to fight a fifteen day war. I went to see a senior civil servant in the secretariat. He was very helpful and offered to draft a suitable submission to the Air Force Board if I provided him with the full facts. I did this and suggested that AIM 9L the latest Sidewinder be purchased. The submission was approved by the Treasury and AIM9Ls accounted for most of the Argentinian aircraft destroyed in the Falklands war.

I had received several requests from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight to reduce the amount of display flying which they were being asked to perform because of concern about limited engine life. Enquiries revealed that despite the thousands of Merlin and Griffon engines produced during the war we had no spare engines and were dependant on Rolls Royce to refurbish engines from the Memorial Flight. There were hundreds of engines in stores at the end of the war but once all Merlin engine aircraft were withdrawn from the front line the supply



organization scrapped or sold off all engines which were considered to be surplus to requirements. Unfortunately they seemed unaware that three Spitfires, one Hurricane and one Lancaster requiring Merlins were still in use in the Memorial flight. I found that the Spanish Air Force re-engined its ME109s with Merlins when they could no longer get Mercedes Benz engines. Further enquiries revealed that the Spanish were getting rid of their Me109s and all their spare engines. I arranged for the engineering branch to send an engineering officer to examine the engines and if they were in good condition to make a bid for them. The engineer found that the engines were in perfect condition in their packing cases which had never been opened before he examined them. A successful bid was made for the engines which provided sufficient spare engines to ensure the continued availability of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight aircraft.

Mike graduated from Bristol University in 1976 with a BSc in mechanical, unfortunately I was not able to attend his graduation because I was at NATO meeting in Brussels. Philippa also graduated from Reading with a BSc in Horticulture. I was able to attend her graduation.

We were very conscious of the fact that we did not own a house. Most of my contemporaries had their own homes, my postings, and the need to live in ex-officio quarters had not helped. The price of properties was increasing, my gratuity as a Group Captain of £10,000 which would have bought a good house five years previously would now fall far short of that required for a reasonable family home. Viv started to look at properties round London then in expanding circles round London until we were looking as far away as Devon, Yorkshire and Cumbria where we found properties which we felt that we could afford. Eventually by July 1977 we decided to buy Hill House, Hunsonby: we paid £18,250 which left us with a mortgage of £8,000. A lot of work was required on the house but at least we had a home whenever I retired from the RAF.

Towards the end of 1976 I received a memo from the Vice Chief of Air Staff which stated that the Foreign Office wanted us to accept a request from the Russians to send a Lightning squadron to Moscow for an exchange visit with a Russian fighter squadron. We were asked to look into the practicality and implications of such a visit. To send a Lightning Squadron to Moscow would have required in flight refuelling. In addition much of the equipment in the Lightning was of a sensitive nature, in particular the AI radar. Strike Command were opposed to the visit but the foreign office were pressurizing the Chief of Air Staff to authorize the visit in the interests of détente.



Enquiries revealed that the French Air Force had completed a similar exchange the previous summer. I 'phoned our Air Attaché in Paris and asked him if there was a report on the visit and if so could he obtain a copy for me. He responded the next day saying that he had obtained a copy of the report but it was classified and I would have to visit him in Paris if I wished to read the report, and he invited Viv and myself to spend a weekend in Paris with him and his wife. We flew to Paris on the Thursday. The Air Attaché's wife showed Viv

round Paris on the Friday and I visited the embassy read the classified report which was most interesting.

The French had sent a Squadron of their latest Mirages to Moscow. On arrival at a military base they were met by senior Russian Air Force Officers and whisked off to a formal reception in Moscow where the Vodka flowed like water. When they came to check into their hotel the French Squadron commander realized that he had left his passport in his aircraft. His escorting officer arranged transport back to his aircraft where he found Russian technicians working on his aircraft photographing radios and the AI which had been removed. It was obvious that the aircraft was being subjected to a detailed examination. Throughout their visit the French were accompanied by French speaking Russians purporting to be fighter pilots, but the French were of the opinion that they were intelligence officers. When the reciprocal visit by the Russians some three weeks later the French were surprised to find that the Russians had a squadron of semi obsolescent Migs. The report recommended that any further requests for exchange visits should be firmly refused.

I summarized the report and recommended that we should notify the Foreign Office that we should turn down the visit. The Chief of Air Staff would not oppose the government's wishes and we were told to proceed with planning for the visit. Strike Command and the intelligence branch were strongly opposed to the visit, and it occurred to me that the Lightnings were assigned to NATO thus SACEUR should be notified of our intentions. I sent a memo to VCAS to this effect. Subsequently I was notified that SACEUR did not approve of the visit which was cancelled.

I think that it was July 77 that Erik Bennet came into my office, he was at that time seconded to the Sultan of Oman's Air Force as Commander in Chief. Erik asked me if I would be prepared to go on contract to SOAF as a Wing Commander to oversee the installation of an integrated air defence system which was to be installed by British Aircraft Corporation. I told him I would think about it, I was disillusioned with the air force and could retire prematurely at 50 after 30 years service.

We took possession of Hill House on 27 August 1977, the house and three acres cost £18,250 and the rates were £62.50 per year. The property was habitable but required a lot of work to bring it up to an acceptable standard

Early in September I applied for an interview with the Air Secretary to find out what was proposed for my future if I stayed in the service until retiring age of fifty five. It appeared that I was likely to be posted to another tour in MOD which did not fill me with enthusiasm. The financial situation was poor, inflation rife, our pay was frozen by Denis Healey the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As a Group Captain of five years seniority I was entitled to two automatic increases in pay which were frozen, the prospect of a relatively large tax free income in Oman decided me and I applied to PVR.

It was about this time that I received a memo from VCAS saying that that the Minister for Air James Welbeloved wanted the squadron badge displayed on the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Lancaster changed from No 44 Rhodesia Squadron. VCAS asked for my comments. I responded that 44 Squadron badge was on the Lancaster because Rhodesia had given the funds which purchased the first Lancaster Squadron and the aircraft also carried the letters of

Sqn Ldr Nettleton's aircraft in which he won the VC for leading the raid on the Augsburg ball bearing factory. I added that I thought it was only in the Soviet Union that history was rewritten for political reasons. VCAS liked my comment and sent it directly to the Minister. About two weeks later I was called to the Minister's office, he told me that he did not like my attitude and that it would not do my career any good, by this time I had decided to PVR and was delighted to tell the minister that his threats did not worry me.

When it became known that I was retiring Air Marshal Bob Freer C in C 18 Group (Coastal Command) who lived at Northwood invited Viv and me round to dinner in an attempt to persuade me not to retire. He said that when I was CO at Buchan he had specially recommended me for promotion. I thanked him for his advice but told him as a result of my tour in MOD I had become disillusioned and no longer wished to serve.

I was offered a two weeks resettlement course run by the army; we were shown how to lay concrete, lay bricks, plaster, decorate, plumbing and rewiring, all very useful. I took two weeks leave in November to refurbish the bathroom and prepare the kitchen to receive an AGA. We finally moved out of married quarters in December and moved into Hill House where the AGA was installed in time for Christmas. I subsequently discovered that if I had delayed my retirement until April my pension would have been £4000 per year greater.

Chapter 21 - Sultan of Oman's Airforce 1978 - 79

Early in 1978 I signed a contract with Airwork to work for the Sultan of Oman's Air Force. I think it was Feb 1978 when I left Viv and James and flew from Heathrow to Muscat in a Gulf Air Tri Star. Tourists could not visit Oman at that time, visas were only available to those working for the Sultan

I was met at Seeb, Muscat airport, and taken to HQ SOAF where I was issued with a uniform, flying clothing and a Toyota car. The accommodation at Seeb was good, I had a self-contained flat close to the mess and bar; there was no restriction on the consumption of Alcohol except during Ramadan.

I was commissioned in SOAF as a Wing Commander to oversee the installation and commissioning of the Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) which had been purchased from British Aerospace. The system comprised two air defence radars, a communications system, Rapier surface to air guided weapons, and 27 Jaguar fighter bombers. The Jaguars were to be deployed at Thumrait as were the Rapiers and one Marconi radar. Air Work together with BAC were responsible for installation and commissioning IADS.



SOAF also had a squadron of Hunters at Thumrait, a squadron of jet Provosts /Strikemasters at Masirah which was the flying training school. A squadron of Short Skyvans and three Britain Norman Islanders were based at Seeb Bell. Helicopters were based at Seeb and Salalah.

Initially I visited the radar and Rapier at Thumrait, the communication system was in process of installation and worked well when completed.

I found Oman to be a most interesting country. The people were friendly, the gentlemen of the Arab world. They accepted European ways and there was no sign of extremism. Oman has a great history, they were great sailors and explorers trading with China in the fourteenth century and bringing goods and slaves from East Africa. There were many ex slaves who had become free men, some even in positions in the government.

To the North is Mussandom a rocky peninsula, with little habitation, to the South is a fertile plain once cultivated by the Persians who engineered and installed an extensive irrigation system which took water from the Jebel Akhdar an extensive mountain range which rises to the West. The water was distributed through a system of canals called Fallages; usually enclosed to reduce evaporation. When the fallages crossed valleys, rather than building aqueducts the Persians built a form of U tube, quarrying down the valley cliff tunnelling under the valley then quarrying up the far cliff to a point a little lower than the entry point. A

fantastic piece of irrigation engineering. To the south lies the Empty Quarter, a huge arid desert. To the south of this is the Dhofar where hills facing the South catch the South West monsoon resulting in another fertile plain running down to the Arabian sea and the airfield and town of Salalah. Off the coast North East of Salalah is the island of Masirah which was a staging post for the Imperial Airways flying boat route to Australia.

Airwork serviced all SOAF aircraft. Aircrew were either ex RAF like myself or seconded from the RAF. The first Omani pilots were due to graduate from flying training at Masirah about six months after I arrived.

SOAF aircraft flew regularly to Thumrait Salalah and Masirah from Seeb, the airfield for Muscat. Many short strips near small towns and villages, were visited regularly by Skyvans, Islanders and helicopters.

Thumrait, which was the base for the Hunters and was to become the base for the Jaguars, was half way between Seeb and Salalah on the edge of the Empty Quarter and had a good 3000 yard runway and good dispersals. Water was obtained from a very deep bore hole, considerable treatment was required to make it potable. There was a large excess of water which formed an oasis which migratory birds soon discovered and it became a great place for bird watching.

I suggested that hardened aircraft shelters should be built at the dispersals to provide security against air and ground attack and provide a better working environment for servicing. Erik Bennet agreed and shelters were built by a German company.

Accommodation at Thumrait was excellent and the Officers mess had a good swimming pool, the air temperature was usually above 40 C and the water warm, but when you got out of the pool the air was so dry that the evaporation caused you to shiver till you dried off ,

There had been a lot of trouble in South Oman where dissident tribesmen supported by Chinese communists. The SAS and the Sultans' armed forces, together with some Iranian army sent over by the Shah, had put down the rebellion by the time I arrived though on one occasion a group of Airwork workers, having gone to a beach for a barbeque and swim, were ambushed by the Addou and several were killed.

A routine trip in a Short Skyvan to a number of strips revealed that the locals frequently used SOAF aircraft to transport their goats to market. A trip by helicopter to the Jebel Akhdar revealed numerous irrigation channels and extensive cultivation of citrus fruit, peaches, nuts and peppers in the precipitous valleys of the Jebel.

Appendix 1 - Family History – J.E. Mossman - 1st World War

A LITTLE STORY OF THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918

What Did You Do In The Great War Daddy

January 1968

I should substitute Granddad for Daddy for it was not until after my illness last January that I gave much thought to my experiences in World War I. They may be of some interest to my Grand Children.

I joined the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1915 about a year after the commencement of the war. I was not allowed to 'join up' until I had done three years of my apprenticeship as a Pharmacist.

I was sent to R.A.M.C. Barracks Aldershot and did my training there mostly "square-bashing" (drill) and classes on First Aid and stretcher bearing. It was not a very happy time for me as the life was rough and totally different to anything I had imagined or been used to. However I had several leaves back to Carlisle during this period.

In March 1916 I was put on draft for France and one morning found myself marching behind a military band playing "You'd be far better of in a Home". How appropriate! We entrained for Southampton and next day sailed for Rouen via La Havre, the first time I had been abroad. I enjoyed the sail up the Seine and on arrival at Rouen we marched about four miles to the Race Course and to No. 9 General Hospital. I was detailed as assistant dispenser to Sgt. Tait MPS who was in charge of the Dispensary, a fairly large wooden building. The Hospital was under canvas, huge marquees for the most part. I enjoyed my work and play here and spent a lot of my time rowing on the Seine and finding delightful little café's on the islands, which dotted the Seine above Rouen. I also had plenty of time to explore the town and went to the top of the Cathedral spire which was a hair-raising experience.

In July I was posted to No. 76 Field Ambulance as Dispenser. I was sorry to leave Jock Tait, my canny Scotch boss, and move up the line behind the Somme battlefield where I heard my first guns firing in anger and saw Very lights and tracer bullets in the night sky. Rather disturbing and frightening. Soon I was moved up to the line and was posted to a forward First Aid Post. My job as Dispenser was finished pro-term and I found I was only needed as such when the F.A. was on rest.

This was my first experience of being under fire. Shell and Mortar fire with occasional machine gun fire to liven things up. Our First Aid Post was at the ruins of a village, Ovillers-la-Boisselle, in front of Albert. My weeks there allowed me to settle down to continuous shell fire (ours and theirs). It was a desolate spot, but we had the advantage of being able to sleep in a deep German dug-out in comparative safety, but the slaughter that was going on

just in front of us was disturbing to say the least and we had hundreds of British Tommies and the odd wounded German prisoner through our Post during the few weeks I was there.

We came out on rest and had a thirty five kilometre march from Hqs. back of the line. Here I set up my dispensary for about three weeks whilst new replacements came to the F.A.

In Nov. 1916 we moved to Pont du Nieppe which was just across the river bridge from Armentieres (of mademoiselle fame) and then back up the line to water logged trenches and rat-infested dugouts. It was about now that I got fed-up with the R.A.M.C. I wasn't cut out to attend wounded soldiers and rows at HQ's with a disgusting regular QMS who had appeared from England. I applied for a transfer to the Heavy Branch Machine Gun Corps, as my pal said who went with me "IT sounded a long way back" I arrived at Bermicourt near St Pol after Christmas 1916 and found I'd joined what was to become the Tank Corps.

We were a rag tag lot drawn from every regiment of the British Army, but I was to learn what real soldiering meant. I was introduced to all sorts of weapons, Rifle, Lewis Gun, Hotchkiss Gun and 6 pounder naval Gun. I took a great interest in this and quickly became proficient in their use.

The winter of 1916/17 was one of the coldest ever experienced in N. France. We billeted in farm out buildings, barns etc. and being a new unit our food was woefully scarce and poor and we had to supplement what little we had as rations with eggs and chips (ouefs and pomme de terre fritzy) from the local villagers who made a fortune out of us.

At this time I had two friends, Jim Roberts, a carpenter by trade and, Tom Oakley, who was an officers batman. Roberts did odd jobs in his spare time for the local farmers and occasionally got himself invited out for a meal I usually was included. Oakley was given the job of batman to Lord Rodney (Scots Greys) who came as Battalion Adjutant. He had his own caravan in which he lived and did not mix with the Battalion Officers. He was all that was wrong with the old Regular Army. He was never seen again after 'A' Battalion went into action. Rodney spent all his time wining and dining at the bases; he had his car and chauffeur and came back the worse for wear most nights. He used to take the morning parade each day turned out in the most immaculate Cavalry uniform by my pal Oakley. Oakley always had pockets full of Francs, these were obtained when he put the Noble Lord (dead drunk) to bed each night. Consequently Roberts, Oakley and self had "bags of dough" to spend in the local estaminet on Rum and Cognac during that bitter winter. It was due to the Noble Lord that one of my company for some slight misdemeanour was tied to a wagon wheel for punishment. This was the first and last time I saw this barbaric punishment, it was done away with shortly afterwards, but it had the effect on me to make me hate all the class distinction, snobbery and so called superiority that was rampant amongst the Regular Army Officers of the Old Army. I have never got over that distaste when one considers that Lord Rodney was a creature of charity given to him (£3000 per annum) in

gratitude for what his ancestor, Admiral Rodney, had done 100 years before. I was pleased to read after the war that Lord Rodney had his pension taken from him. He wasn't fit to lick the boots of the Officers and men of 'A' Battalion Tank Corps and he was only one of many Regular Officers who got "cushy" jobs on the Staff and did no fighting whatsoever and that included many of the Generals. Shades of Montgomery and his staff in War II How different!

I have digressed to mention all this as it had a profound effect on my attitude to the ordinary Tommy who was a volunteer like myself. This no doubt explains my preference even now to the "spit and sawdust" rather than the Saloon Bar.

After three months of intensive training we had our new tanks. I was one of the crew of Tank A, Section A, Company A, A battalion. My tank commander was Lt. Duncan who was to be killed in the Battle of Cambrai. We did a small action in support of Vimy Ridge and then left Bermicourt for the Ypres Salient. Our tank was taken up beyond Ypres among the 18pounder Batteries at a place named "China Walk" (Don't ask me I don't know). We were stationed under canvas some ten miles behind the front at Mont-des-Cats. It was a wet but pleasant summer among the hop fields of Flanders broken by guard duty at China Walk to service the tanks. Incidentally all the tanks were given a name usually the choice of the Tank Commander. Mine was Abdul-ben-Ahmed. On one occasion when doing guard duty up the line we were cleaning our machine guns sitting outside the tank when a salvo of Whizy Bangs landed right among the crew. Fortunately I had just gone in the tank for more guns and escaped, but we lost 5 men killed and wounded and had to have a replacement crew.

In September we went into action in the Battle of Passchendaele, most of our tanks were bogged down and took no part, but we managed to reach our objective and return to China Walk. No sleep for two nights then back to base camp to sleep it off.

In October we again went into action at Inverness Copse still on Passchendaele Ridge, we gained our objective, but had a tank knocked out by artillery fire. Lt. Duncan, Roberts and self were unhurt and Roberts and self trudged back to China Walk, three miles, under shrapnel fire. We eventually got back to base camp and slept the clock round (again no sleep for two nights previous).

I was awakened the following afternoon and told I was first on the list for leave (I had been 8th the previous day.) I got a lift to Poperinge, had a snack in Tubby Claytons Toc H and next day was back in Blighty, my first leave home from France after 19 months. I came back in the uniform I had been wearing when in action, but we were "deloused" before entraining at Poperinge. I must have looked a scarecrow, but was soon in 'civvies' that I'd almost grown out of. Ten glorious days of leave and back to the Battalion, now waiting behind the Somme and preparing for the great Tank battle of Cambrai. My crew was Lt. Duncan, (Driver: Browning) (Roberts) (Self 6 pdr.

Gunner starboard side. Corp. Stower, Mitchell, Scott, Port side. I should mention that the 6 pounder gun was a shortened Naval gun with telescopic sights and when properly calibrated a joy to fire. Very accurate and deadly up to 1000 yards. We were allowed to use our own judgement and pick targets. A gunnery school had been opened at Merlemont Plage a few miles south of Paris Plage and there I spent ten days cruising around the sand dunes and firing at targets with live ammunition, this was a welcome break in the usual training routine and was as good as a holiday.

It was soon time to move the tanks up to Havrincourt Wood in the Cambrai sector. The attack was to be made across the Hindenburg Line, this line was where the Germans withdrew after the Somme Battle. It was a formidable obstacle, there lines of trenches too wide and deep to permit a tank to cross. However large bundles of sticks – named fascines were compacted and each weighed two tons. These were placed on the cabin (forward) on the tank and could be released and rolled into the trench, the tank then went across the trench on the fascine. Over three hundred tanks took part in the Battle of Cambrai and the ground was dry and hard with rolling countryside rather like Cambridgeshire. We left our railhead after disembarking the tanks and made for a coppice near the village of Villers Rush about one mile from our front line and about two miles from the Hindenburg Line. This was all done at night and the tanks were safely camouflaged before morning, as this was a surprise attack. We spent two days servicing the tanks and guns and on the night of 19th/20th November we moved the tanks along tapes that had been previously laid into position for zero hour, 6am on the 20th. This was a long and tedious job as the tanks moved very slowly so that the enemy were not alerted.

Our crew was the usual one except that Capt. Wain the Company Commander rode in the first tank No. 1 Section. At 5.55hrs the artillery opened up with an intense barrage and at 6.00 hrs. we were off across No Mans Land. Our tanks went through the immense wire entanglements and crushed them flat; the supporting infantry had no trouble in following. We crossed the first line. The Germans were taken completely by surprise and hundreds of prisoners were taken by the infantry. At the second line we had to wait as No.2 tank had got stuck. Lt. Duncan got out of the tank to help and unfortunately got killed. After clearing No. 2 tank we followed across and very soon had followed No. 3 tank across the 3rd line and we were in open country. We rolled along at top speed of 5 mph and I was able to pick out several targets for my 6-pounder gun. We were eventually halted by intense machine gun fire from the front and took shelter in a sunken road while a reconnaissance was made. The fire came from a trench about 200 yards long and we made a frontal attack crossing the trench and using our "grape shot" shells to pepper the trench. As we were turning to attack the trench again from the rear we were hit by an enemy shell and had to abandon tank. I was fired at by German soldiers as I left the tank, but fortunately he missed both Roberts and myself. We only had revolvers and made a dash for the trench. Capt. Wain was already there with Corp. Stower having got out of the port side. We were the only survivors. The Germans were in the long grass at the rear of the trench and they were being encouraged to rush us by a

German NCO who was in the trench. I persuaded (pursued?) him down the dug out in the trench. In the meantime Capt. Wain was on the parados (rear wall of the trench) and throwing enemy stick bombs he had picked up into the long grass. He was killed by an enemy bullet through the head and was later posthumously awarded the V.C. Roberts and self then got a German machine gun and fired it into the long grass to stop the enemy rushing us, Corp. Stower was rather badly wounded and took no part. We were eventually relieved by some infantry of the Newfoundland Regiment and I made a report to their Officer. We were helped down the line and Corp. Stower was carried by some RAMC, both Roberts and self had quite a few superficial wounds and all we wore was a pair of shorts and a shirt, this was in November. We eventually got to the Field Ambulance Station and went by ambulance to a CCS (Casualty Clearing Station) this was manned by Americans. Eventually I finished up in Central France in an American Hospital clad in a large blanket with a hole cut in the centre for my head. I was well cared for here and the American Italian cook seemed to specialise in macaroni dishes. It was a welcome change from bully beef and crusts.

I took the opportunity of sending home a field post card to say I was wounded, but OK. These cards had all the vital information printed on them (except "I have been killed") and one just stuck out the bits that didn't apply. Some days before this card was delivered Mary (my fiancée) received a letter to say I had been killed -this was from some bod in the Durham Light Infantry who had found my tunic beside one of the dead tank crew – and I was buried in a "nice grave" as he put it. Luckily Mary did not open this letter until she received the reassuring news that I was wounded. She had a feeling she must not open it as it was addressed to me, what luck! When I was discharged from this hospital I returned to the Tank Depot at Le Treport and I joined the 10th Battalion just new from England. Most crews were provided with a member who had seen action and we did some training there. I became very friendly with a Danish Jon Wan – correct name Aafee Lakke. His father was a Major in the Danish Army and young Jon had run away to sea in 1912, deserted his ship in Algiers and joined the French Foreign Legion. When the war broke out he deserted the Legion, stowed away on a British ship and found himself in Court in Bristol. He was told if he joined the Army he would escape reprisals. So he joined the Gloucester Regiment and got the Military Medal and Bar during the Somme battle. He eventually transferred to the Tanks and was in 'C' Battalion until wounded at Cambrai. He was a character and if annoyed had the habit of pulling out a large seaman's spring knife.

After some training at Le Treport with plenty of time off to visit the cafes and estaminets on the quayside where we had marvellous meals of seafood, we moved up the line again back to the old Somme Battlefield and we were near Havrincourt Wood and all billeted in mission huts on a secondary road. Our tanks were dispersed in various coppices about a mile away. This would be in January 1918 and we were there until the German attack and breakthrough on March 21st. On the morning of the 21st at dawn the enemy started a large-scale bombardment and shelled our camp and the coppices. A 5.9 shell demolished the Officers Mess and wounding and demoralising a number of

Officers. We found that several of our tanks had been hit, however as our tank was OK we moved up the line and were met by hundreds of our retreating infantry. We eventually joined in this retreat after contacting the enemy for a short time. We retreated through Achet-le-Grand which incidentally was the depot for Officers food and drink. This place which had been abandoned was raided and looted by our troops and the job completed by the Germans the next day. I'd never seen so much Whiskey and hams before and the 51st Highland Division who had just done two days continuous fighting and retreating took full advantage of their good luck. We eventually moved further back and rested two days. On the third day, Easter Sunday, we were put into attack to recapture the ridge above Achet-le-Petit. We had a replacement Officer Lt. S. in charge and unfortunately being quite new to the job in hand thought the ½ gallon of Rum (that each Tank carried) was especially there for his benefit and I personally had to restrain him and read him the riot act. When I returned to my Battalion about two weeks later I was asked to make a report and was told he had been sent down the line with dyspepsia. To return to this attack we were knocked out by mortars about ½ mile from our objective, but had time to get four Lewis Guns and box of drums (ammunition) and retreated down the hill to a sunken road, which was held by the Berkshire Regiment. A very large Brass Hat the first I'd ever seen in the front line. He was I gathered General Ironside. On seeing the condition of Lt. S. he ordered him back to Headquarters and said he could do with our Lewis Guns and ammo. I and the remainder of the crew were to fight with them for 10 days during the rest of the retreat and eventually we made our way back to our Battalion.

We went out on rest and awaited replacement of tanks and men. I had a very happy time that spring. We were a long way back and were able to live off the land so to speak. I will give one instance when four of us with the connivance of the company cook dined off duck, new potatoes and green peas at 1am.

We eventually went up in support of the line that is to say behind the 18 pounder batteries, but in front of the heavier stuff again on the same ground we finished with in April. We took part in a few experimental day and night raids and the bulk of the crews slept in old German dug-outs, but I preferred to sleep in the open by the tanks, it was lousey and airless in those old dug-outs and I had now reached the philosophy that if one had your name on it, that was that, dug-out or no. The summer nights were marvellous, usually with a touch of early morning mist that made the groundsheet and blanket a necessity.

The big push came in August 8th 1918 when we were to roll the Germans back. Our personal objective was the tank we had lost at Achet-le-Petit, it was still there as air photos showed. We attacked in the thick morning mist and when it lifted we were right on top of a battery of German Field Guns, luckily they were firing in a different direction and at about 500 yards provided excellent target practice. The attack was called off before we reached our objective and whilst we were crossing a ridge on the skyline we received a direct hit on the port side, which burst in the engine and set us on fire. Three

of the crew were killed and I got a superficial wound in my right shoulder. I endeavoured to put out the fire with a Pyrene extinguisher, but we had to abandon the tank. I made my way back to a First Aid Post to have my shoulder attended to and whilst there collapsed due to the Pyrene fumes. In fact the first thing I knew about it was when I found myself in a Red Cross Train attended by British nurses. We eventually made Rouen and to my great surprise I was admitted to No.10 General Hospital on the Race Course. The hospital I had left two years before to join a Field Ambulance on the Somme. Owing to my right lung being affected (I still have the weakness) I was sent to Convalescent Camp) on the hill above Trouville on the Normandy Coast. There I spent the month of August and had delightful times at Deauville and Trouville, bathing, shrimping and playing tennis. My main memory of that place was my terrific appetite, I never could get enough to eat, but we did find a friendly farmers wife near the camp who used to feed (my friend and I) on lovely chicken dinners. Very cheap they were and wholesome. You may think I was fond of my victuals, well that is so, memories linger on, but it must be remembered that a soldier in the 1914 was fed the bare necessities, bread, bully beef and Machonochie's stew (tins) and tea. The quantities provided depended on the ideas of too many Quartermasters and others. We were of course able to buy from the canteen if we were out of the line and if we had any money. After a payday we usually bought porridge oats and condensed milk after loading up with cigarettes. I have mentioned rest periods in this account. This was merely rest from the line and shellfire. These periods were usually full of hard work and discipline and getting ready for further fighting. Food was usually more plentiful at these times.

I eventually found my way back to the Battalion via Le Treport, they were advancing a bit each day and forcing the Germans back. The end of the war was getting nearer. I was sent home on 10 days leave in September and had a grand time; my mother and sisters gave me a great welcome. I spent lots of my time boating on Talkin Tarn with them and Mary.

I was held up about a week at Folkestone owing to German submarines in The Channel and had great difficulty finding my Battalion which was now constantly on the move in the St Quentin area. The Germans put up a good rear-guard action, their tactics were to withdraw at night and leave well concealed and positioned machine gun posts and it was our job to winkle out these places and allow the infantry to move in; nevertheless the infantry did suffer many casualties in those last weeks of the war. We were at that time supporting the Manchester Regiment (the old regiment of Captain Wain of Cambrai fame). After many days of misses and near misses we eventually finished up at the little town of Landrecies not far from Mons where the war started for Britain in 1914. It was during the period before arriving in Landrecies that one morning when mopping up a machine gun post we captured a live parrot in his cage. He had been the property of a German Officer. He was taken over by a character in my tank named Darkie Garman. He sent home for birdseed. Garman was the Brown and Anchor and he and his chum used to visit American Army units in the neighbourhood and he was reputed to send loads of money home. He did not make his fortune however

as several years after the war I met him in Derby where he was digging drains for the corporation. He told me the parrot lived several years after he got home.

November 11th 1918 11a.m was Armistice Day and we made what whoopee we could in Landrecies and we lit an immense bonfire that night of empty ammunition boxes. I moved down the line after this and was demobilised on January 13th 1919 at Prees Heath in Shropshire. On looking back to 50 years ago I suppose I was very lucky to get back; many of my friends never returned. Settling down to civilian life was a bit of a problem, but the three and a half years of soldiering made one adaptable.

J.E. Mossman

Appendix 2 - Some Memories of Bewcastle

I have never lived in Bewcastle and therefore I am not well qualified to write about it, but I do have a few memories which are possibly worth a mention.

My connection with Bewcastle is through my family. My grandfather the Rev. George Chape Mossman was the Presbyterian minister at the Knowe from 1880 to 1910. I will say no more about his work there because I believe it will be included in a book which is being written by Mike Jackson. Grandfather was not a native of Bewcastle, he came from Berwick on Tweed where his family had owned and run a silk dying and carpet making business for three generations. Before arriving in Bewcastle, grandfather had been a minister in Peterhead and on the island of Unst in Shetland, strangely exactly one hundred years later whilst serving in the R.A.F. I was responsible for radar stations in the same locations. Grandfather was a keen fisherman and travelled to his native Berwick, Shannon and Norway for the Salmon fishing.

Grandmother was Catherine Goodfellow from Whintingstown. The Goodfellows have featured in several journals and Aurea knows very much more about the family than myself. There were four children of the manse Joseph Ewart, my father, Elizabeth, Catherine and Rose. Catherine died in Brampton at the age of 16 and is buried in Bewcastle church yard as are her mother and father. Joseph and Elizabeth's ashes were scattered in the grounds of their father's church at the Knowe and Rose who will be 100 this year lives in Canada.

I was born and brought up in the midlands, each year we would visit Granny who moved to Brampton when Grandfather died in 1910, and we would always take Granny to visit family and friends in Bewcastle, so I have many memories of the area up until 1939 when I was 12 years old. The war stopped our visits. Thereafter I was in the Royal Air Force and except for the occasional visit to see Jo and Aurea Telford at Holmhead I did not visit Bewcastle until my father revived my interest when he requested that his ashes be scattered in the grounds of his father's church at the Knowe. The church was filled for the service I was amazed that so many friends and relatives remembered him.

Now to childhood memories, in the early thirties the journey from Brampton to Bewcastle was over poor roads and involved opening many gates which my brother and I enjoyed. When father, got to Bewcastle he frequently reminisced. I recall that he and his sister used to go to school in Newcastleton. Grandfather would take them by trap on the Monday morning, they stopped with their Aunt Isobella Modral in Newcastleton during the week. On Friday after school they would walk from Newcastleton across Kershope Burn to the top of the bank where they were met, old Jackie the pony could not make it up the hill with all three on board.

There must have been many more people living in the Bewcastle area before the first world war; more sheep farms and much larger families. Dad used to say that there was always a large congregation at Church services and after the service on a Sunday morning many of the boys would practice their Cumberland wrestling beside the Church. He recalled hard winters when they were cut off by snow, but larders were well stocked with barrels of

salt herring, hams, lamb, bacon, jam, bottled fruit, eggs preserved in isinglass, home made wine, honey, Grandfather kept bees, mushroom puree one of Granny's specialities, which was made by salting layers of mushrooms in a stone jar with a tap on the bottom, turn the tap after a couple of weeks and a mushroom flavoured liquid poured forth. The basics ,flour, potatoes, salt, dried fruit and vegetables were all produced or ordered well in advance and held in larger quantities than today.

We never visited Bewcastle without fishing rods, Dad was an accomplished fisherman, taught by his father, but he always maintained that the most skilful form of trout fishing was clear water worming. A very small red worm was threaded on a tiny hook with very light tackle, cast up stream and allowed to carry down stream with the current. The streams and rivers were crystal clear and brown trout abounded, we never went home without enough trout for breakfast.

Once we walked up to Christenbury Craggs to see the wild goats; there was a big herd and one huge billy with large horns. What happened to the goats? I have heard it said that they died off as the result of a hard winter but I find that difficult to accept as they survived many hard winters in the 1800s and also 1947 which I believe was the hardest last century. I have also heard that the forestry were responsible for their demise! Talking of forestry, the only fir trees I remember before the war were on Kershope bank where I believe they were planted after the first world war.

Dad and his sisters spent their early childhood walking over the area bounded by Kershope burn, Christenbury and the Flatt. They were very knowledgeable about wild life and good at fishing both with rod and "tickling" also finding bird nests. I remember Curlew, Golden Plover, Peewits, Snipe in large numbers and above all Skylarks, not so today.

One Easter we took Granny to visit her brother and family at Whintingstown, Aurea was there. I remember particularly the peat fire which was never allowed to go out, also a large cheese press outside the front door. One summer we visited a farm, I cannot remember which one but it was a lovely day and we all helped with the hay which had been gathered into pikes. These were winched onto two wheeled horse drawn bogies and taken back to the farm, where the hay was forked into the barn, this will be familiar to the older Bewcastle folk but my grandchildren have no idea that hay was made like that.

I was interested to read the article about chippy Routledge in the June issue. I inherited a Cumberland dresser which belonged to Granny, I was told it was made by chippy Routledge at Oakshawford. I am not sure which generation made the dresser it was probably made in about 1800. The Routledges were fine cabinet makers; there are still many dressers, chests of drawers and linen presses of similar style in the farm houses around Bewcastle. They are all beautifully proportioned and well made from good quality oak. Possibly one of your readers can enlarge a little more upon this family of craftsmen.

Since retiring from the Royal Air Force we have settled at Hunsonby near Penrith and my wife and I visit Bewcastle from time to time. We have walked up to Christenbury from the Flatt a couple of times and found a stone on which my father carved his initials and those of his sisters in 1907. On our last visit the blaeberrys were ripe and there were plenty for the picking around the crags. On one of our walks we came quite close to a fox and a deer but

birds were very few in number compared with my memories of the open moors before the war and alas no Christenbury goats.

G.K. Mossman