

ROYAL AIR FORCE LOCKING APPRENTICES ASSOCIATION



NEWS LETTER

Ser 2 Nov 93

Welcome

Welcome to our second News Letter. As promised, we are keeping to a quarterly format so you can expect the third one to arrive around the end of February 94. This means that this News Letter is the Christmas edition and therefore it is a pleasure to wish all readers a very Merry Christmas.

Enclosed, most of you will find your lapel badge. To those who do not receive it, please bear with us; it is still in manufacture and we will try hard to catch up on the backlog as quickly as possible.

On the matter of postage, you will realise a mail shot to 200 or so people is never 100% certain and there may still be some who have yet to receive their miniature wheel and constitution. So, if you hear of any complaints from friends that they are still awaiting a delivery, please ask them to call the Secretary so he can take prompt action over the matter.

Remaining on the topic of administration, many of you will be unaware that we have had a delivery of ties from the manufacturers and that Doug Reid is eager to turn his cache of cardboard boxes into cash funds. So far he has sold about half our initial order and to make things simple for you to acquire one of these very desirable ties an order form is enclosed.

So, now that we have a uniform all members will, in future when meeting together, be expected to wear it. By this we mean that members will wear their ties, display their name tag on the right lapel and the miniature wheel on the left. Defaulters will be disciplined accordingly. The current going rate is you buy the Chairman a pint!

OPEN LETTER FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear All

Last Wednesday evening, I was quietly minding my own business, thinking of nothing in particular, when the telephone rang and I heard the voice of conscience, (I mean Charles Hart). Yes, I had promised a piece for the News Letter - was it that time already? Of course I could get it in the mail for Monday at the latest!

Which brings me nicely to an obvious point; we do need interesting short articles, fact or fiction for the News Letter preferably on 3.5 disc in WP 5.1 to Charles Hart in good time for the quarterly Letters. So get a grip and burst into type, there must be lots of untold funny (or serious) stories crying out for publicity.

You will be pleased to know that at the social function held last month, I was able to announce a significant increase in new members, from 108 in June to 194 as I write. Keep trawling, spreading the word and badgering those you know haven't joined. (I notice the SROs at Brampton recently contained the Membership Secretary's advert for the RAFLAA so other Units should be following suit shortly). I must say that it is pleasing to see the Association grow, I would be very happy if we could have a membership in the order of 2000 by 1995. (That's about 10% of the apprentice throughput at Locking).

More fall out from the social evening. Several of the ladies commented on the provision of miniature apprentice wheels for members and wished not to be left out. Suggestions ranged from brooches and earrings to scarves (or is it squares?). The RAF Cranwell Apprentice Association has a fairly wide range of ladies jewellery based on the Apprentice Wheel, in gold or gold on silver. I will enquire if they can assist in the supply of these items so we can keep on the right side of our most avid supporters! We had so much success with the design of the tie, I feel we should ask Neil to have another go and produce designs for a silk scarf, if we have any budding designers out there please don't hesitate to send your ideas to Chas, Doug or me. We will let you know how things are progressing in the next News Letter.

Finally, and I hope we're not too early, Pat and I would like to wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and of course a good New Year. My personal thanks to all of you who responded to the idea of the RAFLAA and made 1993 a success. See you next year.

Joe

MEMBERSHIP NOTES

Members will be pleased to read from the above that we now have a membership of just over 200. In fact,

as we go to press, we have 206. We are still looking at a target of 250 by the AGM in June and, at the present rate, we should make this number. To assist you our desire for greater membership we include a membership application which we hope you will pass on to a friend.

A few letters have been received from members requesting that we print a list of the names and addresses of everyone in the News Letter. This matter was discussed at some length at the October Committee Meeting where it was finally agreed that we would publish only a list of names.

The reasons for not providing address information were three- fold. Firstly, we are not registered under the Data Protection Act. To do so would be expensive and provided that we do not use our database information for gain we do not have to register.

However, if we published all the information on the Membership List we might find ourselves in trouble. Therefore, it was felt that we should avoid the risk. Secondly, there may be members who wish their addresses to remain private and this desire must be given due regard. And thirdly, for reasons of security, especially for members who are still serving and have nominated Service addresses. It is also for this reason that members' ranks are not included on the database.

You will find the list of members at the back of the News Letter printed both by entry and alphabetically. Should any member wish to contact other members, we will be pleased to act as a post box and pass on any communication.

THE OCTOBER DINNER DANCE

Our second Dinner/Dance was held on 23 October when 73 gathered at the Dancescene location on a reasonably mild weekend for the time of year.

George Ring again looked after the organisation of the evening which went along very smoothly and those who attended had a very pleasant evening.

Of particular interest to some was the opportunity to view a video of pieces of film that were destined for the scrap at RAF Locking when the old technical cinema was dismantled some years ago. The video showed scenes at both Cranwell and Locking and appeared to have been taken by members of the Apprentice Photographic Club in the years around 1951 to 1953.

Scenes of apprentice life in the Cranwell Barrack Blocks were interspersed with passing out parades, and either church or Armistice parades through Sleaford led of course by the pipe band.

At Locking a Station Sports day was featured together with an Open Day of the period with sideshows and an

air Display. The Committee discussed at the October Meeting whether the video could be commercially viable and it was decided to get advice on editing and perhaps adding a commentary with music. If the costs of production mean that it can be retailed at a reasonable cost to members, then we will go ahead with this intention.

For those Members interested, the video will be shown again at the AGM.

THIRD COMMITTEE MEETING

The 3rd Committee Meeting, held on the afternoon preceding the October Dinner Dance, was informed by Joe Holroyd that he had approached Air Commodore Martin Palmer, 91st Entry, inviting him to become the Association's President. Joe said that the Air Commodore had agreed in principle but there was still a question of how long he would be prepared to serve. The Chairman had now formerly written to the Air Commodore and we await a favourable reply.

The Meeting heard heartening reports from the Membership Secretary and the Treasurer. Neil Castle informed the Meeting that the membership as of that day was 194 with 3 more applications in the pipeline. George Ring reported that the bank current and high interest accounts together contained a healthy £1170 to which was added a further £95 that evening from the sale of raffle tickets. Doug Reid said that he had sold £318 worth of ties and to this sum he added a further £108 by selling ties that evening. So 6 months after forming, the Committee are pleased to report that the affairs of the Association are in good order and that prospects are getting better all the time.

Next, the Committee discussed the arrangements for the next AGM. We can now confirm that it will be held on the 18 June 1994. It is intended to hold it at RAF Locking to the same format as our inaugural meeting last June. Subject to the approval of the new Station Commander, it will take place on the morning of the Flowerdown Fair (FF94) in 3(T) Block. The facility would be available from about 9.30am with the AGM taking place in the Theatre at around 11 o'clock.

On the social front, the Committee decided that the next social event would be a dinner dance on the evening of the AGM and that we would identify an informal meeting point for the Friday evening preceding the AGM. Should there be sufficient support, a luncheon would be arranged on the Sunday at a convenient location before members departed for home.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

On the 12 November, the Association was represented at the war memorial in Grove Park Weston-super-Mare by the Secretary and Treasurer. A wreath was

laid alongside some 20 others including one from RAF Locking.

FEEDBACK

My plea in the last News Letter for feedback has so far produced little reaction although I am pleased to include an article by John Smith of the 71st Entry. He has written an account of what it was like when the first entry of Apprentices arrived at Locking. Hopefully, his initiative will stir the thoughts of more of you and prove a catalyst in providing a stream of the written stuff which will increase the readability of this Letter.

Currently, our priority is to keep the production cost of these sheets to the absolute minimum; however, the first sheet, being devoid of photographs, suffered the lack. Hopefully, the ones in this issue will make it more interesting and more presentable.

VULCAN MEMORIAL FLIGHT SUPPORTERS CLUB

Some of you will be interested to know about the recently formed Vulcan Memorial Flight Supporters Club. This organisation actively supports and preserves Vulcan B2 Bomber XL426 (G-VJET).

The aircraft is maintained at Southend Airport and it has the potential for many years of flying at air displays both in the UK and overseas. A recent survey has shown that there are no major obstacles in restoring the aircraft to display flying but of course it will require a very large amount of cash to achieve it.

The Club carries out all year round preservation work but there is much left to do to restore her to flight and the members are actively seeking commercial backing through sponsorship. If you are a Vulcan enthusiast then the project is for you. For more information write to:

The Membership Secretary
VMFSC
25 Earls Hall Avenue
Southend-on-Sea
Essex SS2 6PB

THREAT TO AXE RAF LOCKING

We enclose a petition from Councillor Peter Bryant, of Woodspring District Council. Peter is ex-89th Entry and one of the founder members of the LAA. Both RAF Locking and Weston-super-Mare lie within the boundary of Woodspring and last year Peter was the Town Mayor.

Recently, the RAF Ground Training Review took place and the results of this study were announced in Parliament in November 1992. In essence the Government accepted the recommendations to centre

all RAF Engineering Training at RAF Cosford whilst concentrating Administrative Training at RAF Halton. However, RAF Locking was to continue as the Base for TG3 and TG11 training subject to further review.

The "further review" has now taken place and it is highly probable that RAF Locking's days are numbered. Without doubt, its closure would severely disadvantage the local community, already an area of high unemployment. Peter has had so many letters from local people asking him to do something about the threat that he has taken the initiative to start a petition. In this enterprise, he is aiming at a support in excess of 30 000 signatures from both local people and others who have had a previous association with RAF Locking. He is therefore seeking your support and the Committee wish him the best in this enterprise which could influence a marginal decision.

If you feel that you can support the petition please send your signature back to him at the address indicated or, better still, let him have a letter of support.

AIR DEFENCE BATTLE COMMAND AND CONTROL MUSEUM

Many of you will be interested to learn of the Air Defence Battle Command and Control Museum currently being established at RAF Neatishead.

The Museum is possibly unique, in that a large part of it will be dedicated to the development and use of both airborne and ground based radar in battle management. The Museum covers the period 1935 - 1990 and charts the evolution of Air Defence Battle Command and Control, Radar, the Fighter Control Branch, Engineering and Surface to Air Missiles.

The Museum is to be housed in the original "Happidrome" at RAF Neatishead and will hold Charitable Trust status. Although the RAF Museum and the Air Historical Branch has helped tremendously, specific information and exhibits are still required on individual CH/CHL Units, the Rotor System, the Linesman System and all overseas Radar Operations.

The Museum has generated a great deal of interest within the RAF and publicly. It is hoped that the Museum will be opened to the public by the Summer of 1994 and Service personnel will probably be able to view the exhibits by the end of this year. If you feel that you can offer a contribution in anyway, please write to the ADBCC Museum Project Officer, RAF Neatishead, Norwich, Norfolk NR12 8YB.

WANTED

The Committee seeks an Honorary Auditor to give their final annual balance sheet the necessary seal of approval. If there are any suitably qualified members who would like to provide this service to the

Association, would they please get in touch with the Secretary.

THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE PLATE

A few members have asked about the 70th Anniversary Commemorative Plate which was conceived by Sqn Ldr David Taylor RAF(Retd) ex 56th entry Cranwell. The Plate which commemorates 70 years of Apprentice training is of fine china and bears the crests of the No 1 School of Technical Training and No 1 Radio School separated by a figure of an apprentice in 1930s uniform. At the top and bottom is respectively the RAF cap badge and the apprentice wheel. The plate is signed on the reverse side by Air Chf Mshl Sir Michael Armitage, Patron of the Halton Apprentice Association and Air Mshl Sir Eric Dunn, Life President of the Cranwell Apprentice Association. Each plate is serial numbered. David Taylor still has a few left. They retail at £25 and if you want to know more, drop him a line at:

Squadron Leader D Taylor RAF (Retd)
RAF Cranwell Apprentice Association LO
Ministry of Defence (DD Sy 3A)
Metropole Building
Northumberland Avenue
London

FINALLY

Before passing you over to John, may I on behalf of the Committee thank you all for the support you have given the Association over the past half year. Please remember that it is an amenity which must be of use to its members. So please let us know what more the Association should be doing for you.

PRIMUS IN LOCKING

By Ex-AA John Smith 71st Entry.

It was a wet, miserable April day in 1952 as we drew into Weston super-Mare main railway Station, enroute to RAF Locking to join the 71st Entry of Apprentices. Ten of us had travelled up by steam train (the carriages had separate compartments then) from Portsmouth, Gosport and the Isle of Wight area (fugitives from the Naval press gang). Passing by Southampton docks there had been a dozen passenger liners berthed. Transatlantic air travel was still very much in its infancy.

Winston Churchill was Prime Minister. The Conservatives had won the 1951 General Election and ended 6 years of Labour control. This sort of thing was above our heads. The Korean War was in the news. The terrorist offensive in Malaya was going on

and there were rumblings of civil unrest in the Canal zone in Egypt and also in Cyprus.

People were still hung if convicted of murder. War time rationing continued even though 6 years had passed since the ending of hostilities. Most of us were about 9 years old when WWII ended and we all had vivid wartime memories and experiences to swap.

With some 90 others, we were to form the first entry at Locking, prior to the main wing moving down from a place called Cranwell later that year. I was later to learn, that the Portsmouth area was always well represented in the Apprentice Wing.

The RAF strength was approximately 270 000 and National Service had recently been extended to 2 years.

The Lincoln Bomber was still in service. The Canberra was brand new and the UK's front line fighter was the meteor and the Venom was just entering service.

Later marks of the Spitfire were still flying with the Hastings as the principle passenger and freight aircraft of Transport Command.

Parked on the Station forecourt was a solitary RAF Bedford coach. On board this small, sparsely fitted out coach was a cheerful, kindly drill instructor named Cpl Ward. We were soon to know him as Dennis the Menace.

The coach rattled and roared toward Locking. There was some excitement as we passed Weston Airport. Parked on the pan were 3 bombers. A Lincoln and 2 Brigands. We felt we were getting into the thick of things.

Attestation took place immediately we arrived. There was little chance for any last minute changes of mind. We were in!

The Entry was approximately 100 in number. Comprising 78 British, 20 Pakistanis (the last to train with the RAF), one New Zealander and one Ceylonese - these last 3 nationalities had all arrived by sea.

Sqn Ldr "Sammy" Sweetlove who had interviewed most of us at the selection board at Halton, was our Sqn Cdr, supported by Flt Lt Culliford as adjutant and FS "Smooth" Hoper as discip. This latter person was a real gentleman and rode around on a massive motor cycle combination.

We belonged to D Sqn but wore the Cranwell C Sqn blue and red chequered hat band. King George VI had died on the 6th February that year and officers were still wearing black arm bands and, when in 'civvies,' always wore a hat. We were the first entry to wear the Queen's Crown cap badge and were

segregated from the adult part of the camp, where hundreds of airmen were in training.

Our accommodation was in wooden huts near Sick Quarters. Known as "spiders," there were 12 huts to a block. Six either side of a double corridor in the middle of which were situated the ablutions. Tacked onto one end was the bath block, a dismal cold area, for, unlike the huts, there was no central heating.

We lived 20 to a billet. Ten beds either side with a tall locker and a bedside locker each. Central heating pipes ran around the walls.

During the next few days we were kitted out. Two hairy serge No 1 uniforms with real brass buttons to polish, 2 pairs of boots (no shoes), 3 collar detached shirts. One on, one in the wash and one in the locker kit layout, 6 collars, a great coat, a full set of webbing, an SD cap and a beret. Underwear was provided along with PT kit and 2 pairs of tasteful blue striped pyjamas. Collar studs



"We lived 20 to a billet"

were available from the NAAFI kiosk, price 1d each. Some people probably carry the scars these could cause to this day!

There was a Chinese laundry in Orchard street where we could get our collars starched. It was a real Mr Woo establishment where the same family ran the restaurant next door. As with every entry, strict instructions were given not to tamper with the shape of the SD cap. No slashing the peak to look like guardsmen nor propping the front up to look like the Gestapo. Left to our own devices it was likely that neither of these things would have occurred to us. The order merely instructed us in what might be achieved. Broken pieces of hacksaw blade made the ideal modification kit. This practice petered out with the introduction of the new style cap a couple of years later. A blind eye was usually turned if the modification wasn't too bizarre. Incidentally, does anyone know how SAA "Killer" Kime managed to get away with his 'Bull'?

Our introduction to the groundsheet cape was unforgettable. This item must have been introduced long ago by some cost conscious pervert. Dry shoulders, wet back where the rain was funnelled down the back of the neck and soaking wet trousers from the knees down. A pungent smell of wet serge lingered throughout the school on wet days. People developed a way of walking which kept the cape away from the body to avoid the worst effects of water

dripping on to the knees. This didn't help much and was awkward with arms full of tech books. This item remained in service for many years until the raincoat was finally introduced for all.

As we moved up the seniority ladder, we were allowed to purchase shoes and battle dress with our clothing allowance and we were even allowed out on wednesday nights. Most attended the dance at the Winter Gardens Pavilion.

There followed an intense period of square bashing and bull. Life centred on knife edge creases made possible in the heavy serge only by the use of soap.

And, of course, we bulled our boots. One of our members became so locked into the practice that he was found doing little else but his boots did take on the appearance of patent leather.

We were also introduced to the delights of bull nights. Skating over the brown lino on floor pads manufactured from strips of old blanket we produced the desired shine. However, the

pads became saturated in dust which was then spread about floor. The exercise perhaps did more for our fitness than the cleanliness of our dwelling. With having to wear the same shirt for a week it perhaps didn't matter much anyway!

Kit inspections were an event dreaded by all. Presumably they were held to assess how much we'd sold off to the locals. Some members were so keen they laid out their kit the night before and slept on the floor.

"Do not forsake me," from High Noon and "Ghost Riders in the Sky" were popular tunes of the period. They were constantly blaring out over the crude public address system of the day. Not a great deal of fidelity then. Other tunes that came later were, "Because You are Mine," Mario Lanza, "Here in my Heart," Al Martino, "She Wore Red Feathers." But the best was yet to come. "How Much is that Doggie in the Window," sung by Patti Page and how about "Cara Mia Mine," sung by David Whitfield. They don't compose them like that nowadays!

Few people owned wireless sets then. They were bulky and far too expensive for us. Those that were lucky enough to possess one had to register it and were charged a small amount for the electricity used. Permission to keep a camera on the Unit was also needed. Orders were given that photography of

Service installations would meet with dire consequences.

After a month we were deemed fit to be seen by the inhabitants of Weston-super-Mare. Following an individual scrutiny by the orderly sergeant we were allowed out until 10pm. We were paid 17/6 a week and of this received 10/- (just 50p in today's cash) - the other 7/6 held back for when we went on leave. There were intermediate rises when good conduct stripes were awarded. The first came after one year which meant that the pay in hand rose to 15/- a week. Everyone waited for the big one - 49/- at age seventeen and a half and on reaching 18 we received 56/-.

The sudden appearance of our red/blue chequered hatbands caused a ripple in town and along the sea front. One group were asked in all seriousness if they were in the Scottish Airforce. To see a serviceman in uniform in those times was an unremarkable sight and competitive restaurant owners offered discounts to servicemen in uniform. On that first occasion, after some of us had eaten a meal, I left a 6d tip. Outside, when he discovered what I'd done, Len Litherland from Diddlesbury in Shropshire dashed back in and retrieved my "tanner" from the table. "We can't afford to do that," He said. The waitress had been the first female we'd spoken to for a month.

By this time we were into the daily grind of tech in a line of huts in 8 Area. Sergeants Haley, Ellis and some bemedalled corporals, Giles, Haynes, Murphy and Ken Bowles took us for basic laboratory work. Meanwhile we watched frantic building work going on in the 4 hangers which were being converted into technical accommodation.

Messrs Crowfoot and Turner were the workshop instructors. The initial job of filing a circular brass bar into a square section lost its appeal after the first 1000 strokes. Where did all those brass filings go? Before the 3 years were up a few of the Entry had managed to complete their 4 valve superhet receiver which they reluctantly purchased with real money.

After the rainy introduction to the West Country, we enjoyed a long hot summer. Much of this period was spent with Sgt Back RAFRegt, with whom we learned how to operate the .303 rifle and Bren Gun. These we fired on the 25 yd range with little safety and no ear

protection. The command, "Gun stops firing, cock, mag off, mag on, carry on firing." remains imprinted on the mind yet I never did have cause to find it useful.

Two ex-boys caused a flurry of excitement. They deserted one night and then gave themselves up at Bath police station a few hours later. There followed some strange happenings. RAF police in civilian clothes appeared and removed a shot gun. The 2 miscreants achieved their aim by being discharged a couple of weeks later. With unemployment standing at about 300 000 during the early fifties, I doubt that they had much trouble finding a job. Presumably, they later had to complete their National Service, possibly in the Army.

We also majored in physical training with our personal PTI Sgt McDowell. However, a stronger memory is of the Apprentice Mess run initially by Cpl Collier. With only 100 mouths to fill, the food, by the standards of the day, was superb. With rationing still extant, it was remarkable to many of us that we could eat so well. A typical tea would be corned beef fritters, a huge pile of chips and baked beans supplemented by bread and butter and jam and finished off with a large wad of cake. Today's cholesterol police would have loved it.



"...introduced long ago!...."

At the time, the orderly officer didn't bother to ask, "Any complaints?" He came for a slap up feed in the staff rest room until the Station Commander found out what was going on. The Mess was runner up that year in the Joliffe Catering Trophy Competition. The winning station could hardly better us. No doubt they just served more customers.

The Station had its own pig farm then. It was run by Sgt Charlie Rose, father of Brian Rose, former captain of Somerset and England Batsman although at that time Brian hadn't been thought of. Charlie had a marvellous job in our eyes. He appeared to drive around the Station all day on a Fordson tractor which was permanently attached to a pig swill cart. A former professional footballer with Chelmsford, Charlie captained the Station soccer team and was held in awe by the more soccer mad apprentices. He still lives in the Weston area where he is well known to most of the hoteliers to whom he used to deliver milk for many years.

With the small numbers using the Apprentice NAAFI, queuing was not a problem for the first few months but even so transactions at the kiosk took time because of the counting out of ration coupons for soap and sweets. When we went on leave one of the more important documents we carried was our ration card on which were meat, egg and butter coupons which our Mums required in order to feed us. Clutched in our other hand was our ration allowance. No military salaries then.

Summer leave came after an eternity and for the first time since joining we could cast off our uniform. Civvy clothes and shoes were wonderfully light after serge trousers and boots. But they were nowhere near as casual. A Burton's suit cost about £5-00 and choice was limited to a range of greys, blues, black and brown usually with pin stripes. On the other hand, a hairy tweed sports coat cost between 40 and 60/- and most of us were to be found in one of these garments.

After the leave, the 72nd Entry arrived in the September and were much larger entry. The Apprentice presence was beginning to be felt.

In November 1952, the main part of the Wing arrived from Cranwell. It was very cold at the time. With 1000 mouths to feed, messing standards dropped and we discovered the misery of queuing. The term "Mess Server" was now introduced into the vocabulary. This duty lasted for a week and consisted of serving out the meals from behind the servery to the rest of the Wing.

For that week plenty of food was assured.

The combination of studded boots and often wet polished stone floors in the Mess would not have met with today's Health and Safety regulations. If some unfortunate slipped and lost his meal or broke his china mug (1/- from the NAAFI - 10% of a week's pay!) he also had to withstand the humiliation of being the cause of the enormous cheer that erupted from the 900 or so throats. We carried our own personal cutlery which we washed in a scalding hot plate wash immediately outside the Mess. Anyone in a dream - and there were many - who dropped his knife in had the choice of flaying the skin off his arm or losing the knife!

Soon after the move from Cranwell the privilege that NCO Apprentices had of wearing civilian clothing off camp was withdrawn. So it was to be 3 solid years in uniform. The authorities were also concerned about possible entry wars developing after the move and in

an effort to prevent this, dispersed all entries among the 3 sqns (D sqn disappeared the day Cranwell moved down). This affront was mentioned in the book "Poacher's Brats. So unsuccessful was the move that we quickly reverted to single entries united within a sqn. The 71st went to B Sqn with the 69th under the command of a navigator by the name of Bladdon.

Shortly after this our chequered hat bands were exchanged for single colours. "A" Sqns red/ green became blue, "B" Sqns green/navy blue became green and "C" Sqns red/blue became silver grey. Perhaps the most charitable thought was that we had become a poor man's Halton.

At the end of the first year, the entry was allocated trades. There were 3; Ground Wireless Fitter, Ground Radar Fitter and Air Radio Fitter. A frantic round of swapping took place after the allocation to try to get one's preferred slot. Only later did we learn that Air Radio Fitters received 2/6 a day extra. Had this been common knowledge, many subsequent careers would have taken a different path. The main effect of the allocation was that life had more purpose as each trade got further into their specialisation.



" good conduct stripes were awarded..."

The Ground Wireless trade were taught morse to a speed of 12 wpm in those days. The instructor, a Mr Clapperton, was a giant of a man with the gentlest touch on the key. He was partially disabled and could move only with the aid

of walking sticks. He died suddenly which was a great shock to the class. A request by a band trumpeter to be allowed to attend the funeral and play the last post for this ex-RAF pilot was not authorised. Perhaps, there were things we were unaware of then. But as a result of his passing the teaching of morse quickly died out.

Eventually the conversion of the Tech Blocks was complete and we moved out of the wooden huts. From then on most instruction was carried out in these palatial surroundings.

Around this time we were grappling with the theory of the triode valve. Our basic radio instructor, Flt Lt McColl, told us that the Americans had developed a device called a transistor which would revolutionise electronics. And how!

Life seemed to be all bull, parades and inspections causing, we realised, a certain amount of friction

between the education staff and the Wing Execs (they weren't called that then). The Ed staff wanted us to spend far more time on studies outside of school hours. They blamed the high failure rate on lack of time. On the other hand, the Wing considered that our foremost responsibility was as fighting men, a policy they cribbed from Churchill. If there was any time left over from general service training then we could play at being tradesmen.

The Wing went through a period when 'jankers' were being handed out in all directions for the most trivial offenses and arbitrary punishments were very easily acquired from any passing NCO apprentice. It was almost as if a madness had gripped the Wing. Luckily this state of affairs did moderate after a period.

'Jankers' consisted of causing the maximum amount of inconvenience over the whole day. Starting at 0630 hours, defaulters reported to the Wing Picket Post at various times during the day and evening. A couple of hours fatigues in either the kitchens or Squadron Offices were the norm before the final report in full webbing with packs full of the correct items of kit. The real bind after this was to strip down the webbing and prepare all the items for locker display and the next Morning's inspection.

Smoking was allowed from age seventeen and a half provided one had his parent's approval. A smoking pass had to be applied for to make smoking legal. 'Tobacco barons' did a roaring trade on a Wednesday evening when most were broke. Cigarettes often changed hands for 9d each to be repaid after next days pay parade.

Pay Parades were an experience not easily forgotten. The Wing was paid in 3(T) Block in 2 groups; As to Ks and Ls to Zs. When your name was called out you stepped up to the table and as you saluted the paying officer you shouted out your last three. The paying officer, watched by the witnessing officer, then doled out the pittance which you picked up and departed quickly stage left. On many occasions you were quickly stopped by a SNCO who painlessly extracted a shilling from you for sports subscriptions. He would then order you to report to him after lunch with your hair cut.

One apprentice in the Entry who went by the name of Ting-a-ling was so often on "restrictions" that he would leave the pay table flicking a two-bob bit - his total week's pay - up and down. His features never betrayed whether he did this in disgust or amusement.

At least he wasn't bothered that the drinking of alcohol was forbidden. The Old Inn in Hutton and a couple of pubs in Worle had their regular customers from the Wing. Scrumpy was 6d a pint and affordable. Motor bikes and cars were of course banned but as there were few indulgent fathers around at the time this was rather academic. However, a few were kept secreted away in farm buildings at Knightcott and Banwell. For the majority who couldn't even afford a radio the cost was beyond pocket and expectation.

Cars of the period that spring to mind are the Standard 8, the sit-up-and-beg Popular, the 100E Ford Anglia and the Morris Minor. Up market models popular over the period were the Jowett Javelin (take the front wheels off to change a spark plug), The razor edge Triumph Mayflower, the Standard Vanguard Mk 1 and the Triumph TR2. The Station Commander's staff car



"Joliffe catering trophy - 1952

was an Austin 16. There were lots of different makes but the queues for new cars were very long.

Motor cycles were of more interest to us then as it was remotely possible that we might be sufficiently wealthy to be able to purchase one within the next few years. And what a choice there was! Triumph, Norton, Vincent, BSA, Matchless, AJS and lots more besides. But for the majority, local travel was by bicycle and longer distances by bus, train or hitch-hiking. The latter method was the preferred gateway to the strictly out-of-bounds Bristol.

On one occasion, I went with Dougie Arthurs to see his brother who was a medic in the 'Glorious' Gloucester Regiment. They had just arrived back from Korea. One Sunday we hitch-hiked down to Knook Camp near Warminster to see him. We were escorted through the camp to the sick quarters. Staring, gawking faces appeared in every window. Those cap bands again. On arrival we found that his brother had gone away for the weekend! It had not occurred to us that we could have telephoned to see if he was going

to be there. One just did not use telephones in those days. On hitching back, we were picked up just outside Bristol by a Cpl RAFRegt Instructor stationed at Locking. The ride back at up to 45mph in the back of his Austin 7 was unforgettable especially around the A370 bends.

Leaves were well organised affairs. On the morning of leave starting we were up, breakfasted, cases packed, kit stowed, paid and bussed to the Locking Road Excursion Station by 8-o'clock where a special train awaited us. The train ended up in London so shed passengers at various points. In those days the journey time to London by a fast express was a sedate four and a half hour affair.

The Apprentice Wing advancing onto the square lead by the pipe and trumpet band, with 18 inch fixed bayonets attached to varnished drill rifles, was a stirring sight. It was guaranteed to strike terror into the heart of any potential adversary. It might even have caused maiden's hearts to flutter if there had been any around at that time in the morning.

The 2 most popular tunes we marched to were 'Scotland the Brave' and 'She wore red feathers and a hula hula skirt.' The 71st were well represented in the band. AAs Brindley and Mardle were the Drum and Trumpet Majors respectively and a further dozen or so played pipes, trumpets or drums

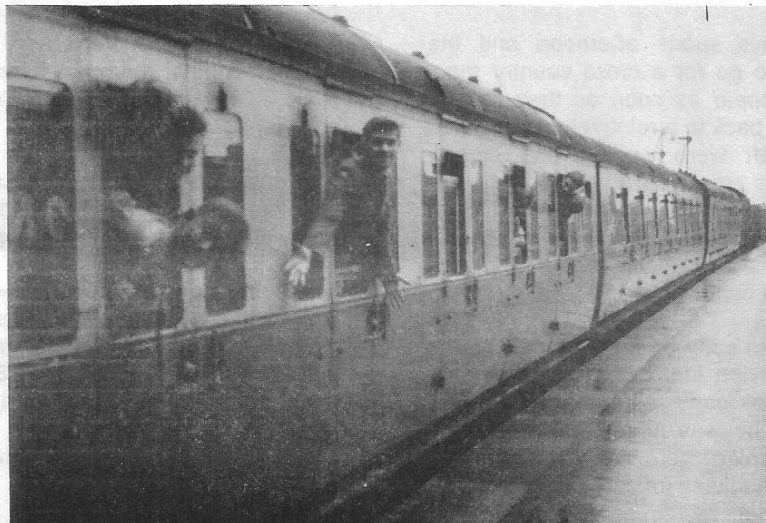
Frank Manning, who had played in pipe bands before joining up was so accomplished on the drums that he became a professional bandsman who, for many years, was the Drum Major of the Central Band at Uxbridge.

The Queen's Coronation was set for 2 June 1953 and lots of Apprentices were detached for intensive training before lining part of the route in Regent Street. On that day it was announced that Mount Everest had, at last, been conquered. Although the day was a public holiday most of us spent it travelling back to Locking after the half-term break. Some weeks later a detachment of Locking Apprentices joined with a group from Halton to make up a flt for the Royal Review at Odiham. On this occasion, there were 300 aircraft on the static display and 641 in the flypast. Apprentices chosen for these events were issued with a new style T63 uniform which was quickly

snatched back afterwards. It was another couple of years before this uniform was on general issue.

Most Saturday mornings were taken up with either a Wing or full Station parade. This was in addition to a Tuesday morning one. On Saturday morning the parade was followed immediately by a barrack block inspection and to make sure that we didn't get stale we had a church parade on most Sundays. The exception was when there was a fifth Sunday in the month and there were precious few of those.

Another parade, now long defunct, was called an FFI (Freedom from Infection Inspection). I think that the beings still had hang ups from the war or perhaps they knew of goings on behind the bike shed. The form was for everyone to stand by his bed facing the wall. As the MO approached you had to turn round and drop your pants. The MO would grunt and pass on to the next man. The Wing WO, in those days a man by the name of Charlie Weygood, would follow the MO round and offer a unobtrusive commentary on the build state of the assembled company.



"Leaves were well organised affairs..."

The Station cinema, the Astra, run by the Services Kinema Corporation was a cheap night out. If not on 'jankers' and you still had money in your pocket you could, providing you had 3 good conduct stripes, watch all time greats such as 'Angels One-five,' 'Twelve O'clock High,' 'The Dambusters' and 'High Noon.' I also remember seeing 'Singing in the Rain,' 'From Here

to Eternity' and 'Shane,' in the big wooden hut opposite the Sergeants Mess. They don't make them like that any more.

The odd CSE show was performed in the 3(T) Block theatre. On one occasion, Dick Emery was appearing. The OD Padre, Sqn Ldr Cook leapt on to the stage and literally stopped the show because he considered the material to blue for our innocent ears.

A projector type TV set with a large screen was installed in the NAAFI. This room was usually crowded. Well it was when 'War in the Air' in fifteen parts was on. It was in black and white of course.

In 1952, BOAC started jet passenger services with the De Havilland Comet. Two crashed into the

Mediterranean sea after taking off from Rome in 1954. By the time the cause was found in 1955 after much destructive testing, the Americans had cornered the World market for jet airliners with their Boeing 707. The British Aircraft industry never recovered from these losses but the RAF were later to fly both the Mk 2 and 4 Comets for many years.

Out of the many hilarious incidents that occurred during our time at the School, a few spring to mind. One such was when a certain sqn ldr lost control. "This is mutiny." he shouted. "You can be hung for Mutiny." One of our number, suitably enraged by this slur, leapt forward, arm outstaid and finger pointing, yelled back at him, "Well, ***** well hang us then." Happily we all escaped the noose although one or two of us felt that it was a close run thing.

A Pakistani in a senior entry to us was 'ceased training' and returned to Pakistan. I asked one of our members what would happen to him there? The reply was, "They will probably hold a court martial, then shoot him. He has brought disgrace on us all." I don't think he was kidding.

Wednesday was always sports afternoon and the idlers always elected to go for a cross country run. They would then disappear as soon as they passed out of sight and double back to a relatively warm billet. One day the PT staff were waiting and closely controlled an enormous crowd on a camp road run. The following Wednesday only a small group of genuine runners were present. But there were also some excellent athletes and sports teams who won many Service and local cups.

Changes of personalities early on made us realise the itinerant nature of Service life. Our first Sqn Cdr, 'Sammy' Sweetlove took early retirement. Four foot six of stern authority, he was never the same man after he met us. His replacement was 'Updick.' Sqn Ldr Uprichard had a modicum of fame. He was an Irish Rugby International; moreover, his cousin was Portsmouth's goalkeeper. Such fame impressed us immensely.

Perhaps the man who had the greatest influence over us was Percy Parkes, the Wing WO. He was a 4 foot high fireball who ran the Wing boxing team. A 6am road run you never enjoyed with him! You wouldn't see him in a crowd but you would certainly hear him. He is still remembered by a few at Locking where Parkes Road is commemorates his name.

With the arrival of April 1955 it was time for the 71st to pass out. To many, it was a date they never thought would never arrive. Passing-out parades were always impressive and emotive occasions as the passing out entry slow marched off the Square through the ranks of the support entries to the strains of 'Auld Lang Syne.' All had arrived as youths and some had actually reached maturity.

There was a big world waiting out there in the 50s. Germany, France, Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kenya, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, Ceylon and many more. Despite these varied and sometimes exotic theatres, many spent their first tour at Henlow. The Entry split far and wide. I only met 5 in the next 20 years.

A member of the 72nd met some of the Pakistani ex-apprentices when staging through their Country on a V Bomber detachment. Many thought they had received a raw deal from their authorities and few had had their expectations met. He also met our New Zealander when on a detachment. John Hardwicke was a fit It engineering officer. Both of the Ceylonese members (Veerisingh was an FT from another entry and naturally known as 'Vera Lynn' whilst Andree Cooray was our original member) had left their Service after suing for breach of contract. Cooray was last heard of studying law in London.

I returned to RAF Locking as a ground wireless instructor in 1959 and found that there were already many changes from when I was there 4 years before. Brick Barrack Blocks were in the course of construction and many of the wooden huts were being demolished. Whatever happened to the acres of gleaming brown lino? There were even locally enlisted WRAF serving on the Station. I doubt that we ever saw one in our 3 years of training.

'Percy' Parkes had retired and was working in the clothing stores as a civilian. He was still able to recognise every ex-apprentice who came through the door.

There was a saying on the Apprentice Wing when we were there which went, "If you can't be gen be smart." My last duty in the Service before I left in 1975 was as SNCO IC the Escort Squadron to the Queen's Colour of the Central Flying School, then at RAF Little Rissington. I've often wondered what it was like to have been one of the gen kiddies.

MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR