

Brian Sprosen



RAF Life

December 1959: 201 Squadron at RAF St Mawgan, which was a welcome relief after 3 years at Locking. As Chris Armes reports, a great attraction of the posting was that there were a lot of lovely ladies both on and off camp. The Newquay pubs and beaches were great places to pursue these delights.

It was good to be an Air Radio Fitter (wireless and radar). For detachments the Squadron could send one radio fitter to cover both trades. The outcome was that in the two year tour I went on detachments to Gibraltar, Malta, Ballykelly, Lorient, France and Den Hague Holland. The final trip lasted, I think, 4 weeks. This took us to Keflevik Iceland, Greenwood, Canada, Winnipeg, Comox AFB, Vancouver Island, USN Norfolk, Virginia, where I met Harvey Morton in the Senior Rates mess. After that it was Bermuda, Azores and back to St Mawgan. I never understood the purpose of the trip but so what.

January 1962: No 2 Radio School RAF Yatesbury where, after an excellent 1 week IT Course, I became the instructor for the Radio Altimeter MkV.

The highlight of 1962 was my marriage to Margaret. We rented rooms, not a house, in Chippenham, which was great fun. A little later we met up with Tom Pope and his wife but then unfortunately lost contact.

October 1962: Selected for navigator training and posted to the OCTU at RAF South Cerney. Like 2009, the 1962/63 winter was bleak. They had to use snow ploughs to get us in and out of the Brecon Beacons where, with a week under canvas,



in deep snow, we enjoyed sub-zero survival and escape and evasion training.

February 1962: The severe winter delayed the navigator training programs and so I was detached to the Central Flying School (CFS), RAF Little Rissington to act as a stand-in for the Station Adjutant, who was on a staff course. Naturally, the CFS was staffed by egocentric competitive instructor pilots, the students were much the same. The station was commanded by Group Captain Henry Chinery and the CFS by Air Commodore Bird Wilson (WW2 ace). This was a heady mixture for a freshly minted Acting Pilot Officer to face each Monday morning. Fortunately, the Station Warrant Officer, whose son was an apprentice, was a great help with the formal disciplinary procedures used for charges in front of the CO.

May 1963 to May 1964: Navigator training at RAF Hullavington and then RAF Stradishall. Then, June 1964: RAF Lindholm for the H2S9 radar navigator training.

January 1965: No 100 Squadron, RAF Wittering, Victor 2 equipped with the nuclear armed Blue Steel missile. The missile was fuelled by the potentially volatile high-test peroxide, which if contaminated would overheat. Luckily in my time a real emergency fuel offload was not needed, the practices were exciting enough.

Whilst at Wittering we bought our first house in Stamford, price £2850 with garage £150 extra. Unfortunately we then dropped out of the housing market until 1976.

November 1968: RAF St Mawgan for Shackleton conversion course. Then March 1969: No 206 Squadron RAF Kinloss. Operations concentrated on chasing Soviet ships and submarines, fishery protection and of course search and rescue. I ended-up with a very deep respect for the fishing industry. December 1970 converted to Nimrod MR1.

1972: RAF Manby completed the GD Aerosystems Course, which I look back on as my second apprenticeship. This intensive one-year course provided an academic core that led into systems engineering and practical flight test training. Thereafter my career alternated between operational squadron

flying and system test and evaluation work.

January 1973: Central Tactics and Trials Organization (CTTO) RAF Northwood. I was responsible for tactical system, radar, acoustic and weapons elements of the Nimrod MR1 weapon systems evaluation test programme. The tour concluded with a 6 week test program on the Atlantic Test and Evaluation Centre (AUTEK) range in the Bahamas.

November 1975: A&AEE Boscombe Down where my task was to define the scope and estimate the cost of the Nimrod MR2 Weapon Systems Acceptance Programme (WSAP).

August 1976: Back to flying, promoted and posted to 42 Squadron RAF St Mawgan as Navigation Leader. Sqn Ldr Mike Barnes was there as a flight commander on 7 Squadron.

April 1979: Back to A&AEE Boscombe Down to manage the Nimrod MR2 WSAP test programme that I had planned on the 1975 A&AEE tour. This activity culminated with a major test programme on the AUTEK test range.

September 1981: Posted to the NATO team working on the GPS Navstar program at HQ Space Division Los Angeles. My job was to set up and manage the contract for the analysis of data generated by the GPS field test programs. The test vehicles included an aircraft carrier, submarine, multiple aircraft types, helicopters, tanks and troops carrying GPS receivers fitted in backpacks. Needless to say the tour was a lot of fun and a great practical experience.

May 1985: Back to flying, promoted and now Officer Commanding 206 Squadron RAF Kinloss. I was fortunate in that I was able to run the squadron and continue to fly as an operational navigator. In all respects this tour was the high spot of my RAF career.

October 1987: I had spent my career flying and running test programs but I had not been to Staff College. As a punishment I was sent to an administrative job at HQSTC. Time to PVR.

October 1988: Left RAF and got started in industry.

Civilian Career

October 1988: Joined AC&S GmbH, a small systems engineering company in Friedrichshafen, southern Germany.

Our furniture arrived in Friedrichshafen but we did not unpack. Instead Margaret and I left immediately for Madrid. There I joined a team preparing the proposal needed by CASA to bid on the upgrade to the Spanish Air Force P-3 Orion maritime weapon system. Margaret enjoyed Madrid for 3 months and then returned to Friedrichshafen to unpack our new German home.

From Friedrichshafen work included South African projects:

SAAF: 35 Squadron: Conversion of Dakota for maritime operations.

SAN: Ship-board helicopter program.

High point: I was able to initiate a Nimrod detachment to Cape Town to participate in the celebrations for 35 Squadron's 50th anniversary.

December 1993: Returned to the UK and set-up Brian Sprosen & Partner, which is still in business. I do the technical work and Margaret looks after the books.

Since our return to the UK, high spots included the installation design and management of ground and flight test for:

1998 Nimrod MR2 Link 11: So it was back to Kinloss and that was fun. I was 60 years old still flying and most of the flight test aircrew had worked for me in the RAF - just the job.

1999 Tanker Link 16: for the VC-10 and TriStar Link 16. Now 61, still flying, and getting to know a bit about tanker operations, which would be useful.

2003: For AC&S started work on the German/Canadian programme converting the Airbus A310 to an air-to-air re-fuelling tanker.

However I was running out of speed. For about 3 years I travelled say 3 times each month to Germany and occasionally to Canada. I had 295,000 air miles with BA and 160,000 with Lufthansa. I was sick of airports, airline food and hotels. So in May 2006, some 50 years after joining the RAF, I retired.

Semi-retirement

The summer of 2006 in the UK was super and I enjoyed the change of pace. But by October, with the winter ahead, I thought I would need some diversion. I rang my man at AC&S and discovered that they had been invited to participate in a study for the European Defence Agency. Needless to say I got involved and from this came my current work. I am employed 6 days a month, working over the Internet, developing an unmanned aircraft database in Germany.

I was 70 this January and perhaps the old Air Radio Fitter will give full retirement serious consideration next year.