

Chris Armes



Following the blur of passing out, the joys of Newquay (and RAF St Mawgan) soon had my attention. What a way to begin the MANS service, with the golden girls of Cornwall, and needless to say all those others who generally wore skirts also stationed at St Mawgan, and carried out secret work behind closed doors...

This is where it was soon learnt that to fit a junction box into a Shackleton one does not use the small tin snips to remove aluminium fabric of the airframe to facilitate same, even though this skill of cutting was instilled with verve in the Locking Workshops! And the training was 2nd to none. The superhet worked first time; the miniature pylons stood erect, along with all we put our hands too. So it must be right... So we were told, to cut where it was needed to make the join or joint...

The stint at St Mawgan was broken with 2 months in the Isle of Man... on boats!! The RAF have boats? I knew that the Navy was always the calling for me, and in a way was in my blood, but, boats...? Had the message been changed in translation, was the question, boats...? Yes: --- 2* 32' RSL's (Range Safety Launches), one always on the slipway having service carried out, the other based across the island, at Peel. This venture was entirely at the mercy of wind and tide. Therefore most of the time was spent improving ones bridge tied to the harbour wall. After all it was Jan/Feb 1960. The main skill harvested here was timing; going from Ramsey dock side to the town centre to get back for NAAFI break at ten with the pies still warm. The gentle giant of a Marine fitter from Liverpool(Ex R. Navy) had only one pet hate: cold pies! He had fists like Suffolk hams, but his good side was found by helping him align RR Marine engine prop shafts by slipping the bolts into the flange couplings for him whilst he did a horn pipe on the shaft... I suppose that was a skill too... The Chippy, yes, we had



men trained in the art of working with wood; a Ships Carpenter no less, minus his mandatory two fingers on his left hand. A certificate to his skills... and he kept us amused for hours with tales from the Orient of faraway places like Haifa and other Levantine places of intrigue, and of terror.

No, you are right, up to now there had been no sight of any other Ex-84th. But, on the return to Newquay (whoops, St Mawgan, really), who had turned up but Brian Sprosen, complete with his Norton 500, something. This, under his close supervision, was "driven" for about 3 seconds. The word driven is used here reservedly. Another blurring experience. Luckily, nothing was broken. Either body, or machine.

Harvey kindly found Kathy and I accommodation after we were married on November 5th 1960, in Forres. Yes, like so many, a posting came up at the moment critique, this for us was Kinloss, that honestly was believed to be somewhere near Aden. Still Coastal Command, you will observe. So my skills with tinman's snips may yet come in handy again...

This time though, even though 120 Squad was equipped with Mk 3 Shacks, with conventional air radar and w/t and nav aids, the MOTU shacks had a wheel at the back, along with all major ASV and Sonics installed in TRIPLICATE!! Yes, three of every thing!! Harvey and I were tasked to work as a team, and clear all the outstanding RLI's (you remember: Red Line Entries!), on all the aircraft. No doubt the Chiefy had been asked: "Why are these aircraft flying with half the gear not working?" And, there were some going back 6 months or more. But we got them sorted, eventually. The tinman's snips were not needed, as far as is recalled. By then Experience had been gained. All really that was required was a screwdriver, a small pair of pliers, and some locking wire... er, locking wire does not mean Locking Wire. You were not asleep during that lecture. You Ground Guys, whose equipment was on wheels or bolted to terra firma may not know that all airborne equipment needs to be easy and quick to slide in and out and secured in place with wire locking, without the use of tinsnips. Then came Bruggen, Germany. 1962/64. Yes that much was understood, we knew where that was. Canberra's... B(I)6's... yes, 6's... the very last of the few. This was front line stuff: real guns, if gunpack fitted, or real bombs (1 ktons)

as and when fitted. Sometimes dummies. But, the bridge improved further.

Ex- 84th at this point was Tony Readman, Sgt Nav by this time... and then to CFS for the remaining years in the RAF. First to Little Rissington in the bay servicing Tacan, and then onto First line with all the Gnats to firstly Fairford, until Concorde needed the runway, and that saw us settle down at Kemble, for me, until Aug 1970, when RS Components (nee Radiospares) made me a better offer.

Ex- 84th were: Sq/Ldr Frank Milligan. Pilot who, needless to say, passed out top in the QFI Theory exam for his entry, and we were well met. Pleased to meet up after all that time. Only then to loose touch again...

The same with Tom Pope Sq/Ldr, Educator at RAF Finningley where we regularly entertained each other. This was late 70s, we met as customer/rep. He was then as I recall posted to Locking.

As of today, along with quite a few on this list so far, met up with Johnny Bench, on a Skype Mission/Search. Who tells me he is only too willing to attend an Ex-84th Reunion. July 2009 26/7th, to pass out on our 50th Passing Out Day Anniversary, the 28th July 1959.