

Chapter 4

Civilian versus Service Life: 1970 to 1979

Decision Time: Serviceman or Civilian? - Surface to Air Missile System -
RAF Bruggen- Europe - UK, via Hospitals - RAF Henlow -
Officer Training Unit - RAF College Cranwell - RAF Wattisham

Decision Time: Serviceman or Civilian?

As you just heard, my educational qualifications were still limited to four GCEs when I arrived at RAF Waddington as a radar mechanic in 1960. For the first two years I concentrated on learning my trade at work and then completed my training as a radar fitter. Once again, I put that new training into practice when I returned to RAF Waddington. I was beginning to realise that one day I would be looking for new work outside the RAF and decided to look at civilian qualifications. I was advised that the best option would be to study for an Ordinary National Certificate (ONC) in Engineering. I made enquiries at the Lincoln Technical College, but was told that I would need to take a General Course in engineering first and then, if my marks were high enough, I could proceed to the ONC course. I enrolled for the course and attended classes and workshops at the college in Monk's Road, Lincoln, but was then posted to RAF Lindholme. That wasn't a major problem as I was soon transferred to Doncaster Technical College where I eventually received credits in Mathematics, Engineering Science, Engineering Drawing and Workshop Processes & Materials. I was ready to start my ONC course when I was posted again, but this time to Singapore, and to a different, broader type of education, as you heard earlier.

I was due to leave the RAF in 1970 but, bearing in mind my family responsibilities, I was still undecided on what to do. I seriously thought about a new career and started to look at the options available; as an interim solution, I extended my RAF service from twelve to thirteen years. In the meantime, I completed my studies at the County Technical College, King's Lynn and was awarded the Higher National Certificate in Electrical and Electronic Engineering on the 1st of June 1971. In 1971 Norwich Airport was expanding, because of the plans for the UK to become more

involved with the European Economic Union. Therefore, the airport was looking to employ a manager to maintain the airfield facilities, including the airfield radar system; that appeared to be just what I was looking for. I filled in the application forms and was short listed for the interview, which went very well. I was quite confident that I could do the job but, having only RAF experience of manpower management, I explained that I knew nothing about trade-unions or conditions of service for civilian personnel. I also asked for clarification of the scope of work and the support facilities available. It then transpired that the person that they were looking for was to be responsible for the airfield radar, the navigation beacons, all radio communications equipment, the airfield lighting and the airfield security system. Moreover, at that time, all of their equipment was being maintained by subcontractors, but the managers of the airport were looking to save money by employing their own maintenance staff. There was no support documentation for any of the airfield systems and no test equipment of any kind, although they did agree to allocate a small budget to purchase whatever equipment the new manager deemed essential. There was some surprise when I asked how many people the manager would be responsible for; it appeared that they were looking to employ just one person, which was why I was being interviewed! It was also explained that I would be entitled to three weeks leave per year, but that I would be expected to be on call at any time, in case of emergencies, including my three weeks leave. The following week I was offered the job, but I declined to accept it. I don't know whether they ever filled the post as described, but I suspect not.

It was at about that time that there was a minor problem at RAF West Raynham; the Education Officer for the GCE "O" level Physics class had been posted at short notice and there was no replacement for him. A general appeal went out for a suitable instructor to take the class. As I had just completed my HNC I thought that this might be an opportunity for me to put something back into the system. However, I had never taught and had, by nature, a rather quiet and withdrawn personality. Nevertheless, I arranged to see the Senior Education Officer and asked if I could study the GCE syllabus. After a week I returned and offered to

take-on the teaching task, providing that he would let me compress the course into six months. Initially, he said that it was out of the question as it was normally a two year course. My reasoning was that we were teaching mature students; they were willing to give up their time to gain this qualification and were, therefore, well motivated; finally, there was a very high probability that some of the students would be posted before they completed the longer course and would then have to start again. He was not convinced, but as no one else had come forward he agreed to think about it. The following week he was still hesitating when I suggested that he could set a mock-exam at any time before the six-month deadline and that he would not need to forward names for the final exam if he was still unhappy with the students chances. Eventually, he agreed to the six month course on those terms. I had fourteen students and structured the course carefully. Each of the physics subjects was related to everyday events that the students could identify with; that was based on my own learning experience of understanding things rather than just trying to remember lots of facts. All fourteen student completed the course; they all took the final exams and all passed. More importantly, the Senior Education Officer admitted that he was delighted because he had never seen such consistently high pass marks, or a 100% pass rate for a class of that size. It was hard work for that six months, but the results were well worth the effort. I then started to think about the possibility of becoming a professional teacher when I left the RAF.

The other major decision as to whether to remain in the RAF was based on our children's future schooling. If we stayed in the RAF we thought that it would be unfair to move them to a new school every time that I was posted and, from my childhood experience, leaving the family in a fixed place while I was posted elsewhere was not an option. David and Michael were attending the Church of England Primary School on the base at RAF Sculthorpe and seemed happy. David then passed the 11+ exam, which qualified him for a place at Grammar School; that started to ring more alarm bells from my past! We then looked at the options of boarding schools, for the stability of our children's education, and found that the King's School in Grantham was both a Grammar School and a boarding school for a limited number of pupils. King's appeared to be an

excellent school with a good track record; moreover, my father and brother lived in Grantham and Phyl's Dad lived only about sixteen miles away in Lincoln, so there were close family members on the doorstep - if needed. Finally, Sir Isaac Newton had been a former pupil at King's School and it didn't appear to have done him any harm! We then discussed this with David and set off to Grantham to see the headmaster and to have a look around the school; the headmaster was quite happy to take David in as a boarder; my Dad, brother and Phyl's Dad were all happy to be available if needed. More importantly, David said that he was looking forward to his new school, so we agreed to enrol him for King's and he started there the following term. On the 6th of July 1971, after long discussions with Phyl, I took the plunge and re-engaged from thirteen to twenty-two year's service in the RAF; that now gave me a long-term career in the RAF, future stability for the children's schooling and a reasonable pension at the end of my service.

Bloodhound Mk 2 Surface to Air Missile System

On the 29th of December 1971 I was posted to RAF Newton, No 9 School of Technical Training in Nottinghamshire, on a Bloodhound Mk 2 course. The Bloodhound Mk 2 was a second generation Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) system developed by the UK. It was introduced into the RAF in 1964 to defend specific targets, such as the RAF's strategic deterrent bomber bases. The system was highly classified, for security reasons, and comprised a state-of-the-art Continuous Wave (CW) Type-86 radar detection and tracking system, instead of using the old Bloodhound Mk 1 pulse radar system. A Fighter Controller in the Launch Control Post (LCP) co-ordinated the flow of information between the radar tracking system and the missile system; he then took decisions on whether to select and launch missiles at hostile enemy aircraft. There was a battery of eight missiles on each site, each with its own 360 degrees launch pad; each missile had four solid-fuel boost motors and two Thor ramjets which then took-over in flight. The main radar system continued to track the enemy aircraft and also fed information about the target to the missile while it was in flight. When the missile detected that it was within range of the

target its expanding war head would detonate, destroying the enemy aircraft. There were extensive electronic counter-measures built into the system to ensure that it couldn't be fooled.

I was trained specifically on the whole system and the intricate LCP in particular. The whole missile system was computer driven, but it now seems hard to believe the technology used in those days; the software was written in a similar way as today, but the heart of the computer hardware was in racks of paxolin-trays and the program was loaded onto those trays by inserting ferrite cores into pre-drilled holes for each bit of information! The computer must have taken up about half of the available space in the large LCP. After the course I returned to RAF West Raynham, on the 6th of September 1972, and on the 27th of April the following year I was promoted to the rank of Chief Technician. Six months later I was posted to No. 25 (SAM) Squadron HQ, at RAF Brüggen in Germany, to put my year's training on the Bloodhound missile system into practice.

RAF Brüggen , Germany

When I arrived in Germany, there was a delay of about three months, waiting for family accommodation, before Phyl could join me. At least that gave me a chance to get to know people in the Sergeant's Mess at RAF Brüggen and to get to know my new job. The 25 Squadron H.Q. was based at RAF Brüggen and the three missile sites were on the RAF's operational airfields at Brüggen, Laarbruch and Wildenrath. I was appointed technical supervisor on the operational missile flight at Brüggen , where we worked a 24 hour watch system for 7 days per week, 52 weeks per year. The work and responsibilities were extremely interesting, but I don't wish to elaborate on that. One of the advantages of working on such a system was that there were strict rules on the hand-over of duties when going either on or off watch; we worked hard while we were on duty but, because of security aspects, we handed over all responsibilities when we were off duty. For the first time, for as long as I could remember, I had spare time on my hands when not at work. That stimulated my interest in things non-technical, which included painting, ornithology and travel.

The airfield at RAF Brüggen was in a wonderful natural setting. Within the perimeter of the station the airfield was surrounded by thick woods, a hilly sand-extraction area, a small lake and a large Golf Course. During the days when I was off duty, I would spend hours walking through the woods. I was amazed at the wide variety of fungi growing in the woods and so I decided to make a detailed study of them, because it was a new subject to me. The Golf Course was also a wonderful habitat to explore because of the open fairways, surrounded by trees and shrubs. On one particular morning at the golf club there was much consternation when the Green-keeper discovered that the golf driving range appeared to have been attacked by mortars during the night. He then found that the damage had been caused by wild boar who had ploughed their way across some of his manicured greens looking for food. That brought very different reactions from the local Service population, depending on whether they were golfers, naturalists or hunters! In the end, the hunters were given permission to set up hunting-hides at night so that they could shoot the wild boar when they returned, but I think that the boar were clever enough not to pay another visit.

I then became even more aware of the number of wild birds in and around the woods, with the highlight one day of finding four different species of nesting Woodpeckers. I'm afraid that the fungi survey, which was becoming increasingly complex, then gave way to ornithology. The definition of "ornithology" is the scientific study of birds, but that doesn't mean that one has to be a scientist; it is the study of birds, rather than just seeing them and ticking them off a list. I am often asked what a "twitcher" is and, to me, it is a person who appears to just race all over the place to "tick-off" a new bird that he hasn't seen before. I must admit that, for me, twitching seems to be such a waste of time, money and energy, with the end result of having a list of birds which one can boast about. It reminds me of my schooldays when we used to go train-spotting! If there was any single bird that changed my life, it was the Black Woodpecker. Initially, I studied that magnificent bird at its nest sites in Brüggen woods and then over the rest of mainland Europe. The Black Woodpecker has quite a lot of local legends, folk-lore and myths associated with it, particularly in

Germany, probably because of a combination of its large size, its black plumage with red crown, its impressive flight through the woods and its weird cry. I am still looking forward to hearing of the first reports of it arriving in the UK, which I am sure it will do before too long. Shortly after discovering the woodpeckers I formed the RAF Brüggen Wildlife Group, to study the flora and fauna on the base and to share that wonderful experience with other like-minded people, of which there were many. I also became increasingly involved with the nearby Rheindahlen Bird Watching Group (RBWG), which was run mainly by Army personnel. The RBWG was very active and at least once a month we would explore other good ornithological sites to study the birds, up to about 100 miles away, in Holland, Belgium and Germany. I also started to write and illustrate articles for local magazines on the birds found locally and people appeared to enjoy reading them.

I was keen not to fall into the trap of spending all of my spare evenings socialising at the bar in the Sergeants' Mess while waiting for Phyl and the boys to join me. I quickly found a small art club on the Station and decided to get involved and started oil painting again; the first time for about fourteen years. By the time that Phyl arrived in Germany the walls of our flat were covered by my new paintings. Eventually the leader of the painting group was posted back to the UK and I then took over the running of the club. As time went by we started to have regular exhibitions of our work and the sale of those paintings encouraged us to buy new canvases, paints, brushes, etc. There was a good art materials shop in the nearby Dutch town of Roermond where we bought most of our materials and the owner, Frau Selder, opened one of our local exhibitions just before I left Germany. We also organised regular trips to the world famous art galleries in Amsterdam and my favourites included the Rijksmuseum, Het Rembrandhuis and the Van Gogh Museum. We travelled by train from Roermond to Amsterdam and our outings were as much social events as educational. However, I was puzzled why some of the ladies always checked the train's corridor carefully before producing the usual bottle of wine and glasses to help the journey along. My curiosity eventually got the better of me and I asked them why they always went through that same ritual. Apparently, they had seen the

prominent sign on the carriage window; the sign was a red circle, surrounding a bottle, with a red diagonal line passing through the centre of the bottle – they thought that it meant “*No drinking on the train*”! It actually indicated that bottles must not be thrown out of the windows! The refreshments on the train then became less furtive and more enjoyable after the real meaning was explained.

One of the major differences that I found between towns in the UK and those on mainland Europe, thirty years ago, was that most European towns, and even the larger villages, would have a good selection of art galleries where people were made to feel welcome. It also seemed quite natural for “ordinary” people in European homes to have original artwork hanging on their walls, whereas in the UK it appeared to be an exception, unless the owner was reasonably wealthy. Another difference was that many of our art galleries in the UK had a “snobbish” air about them that did not encourage the general public to take an interest in the arts, unless they were either well educated or wealthy, as we shall see later.

When Phyl and the boys first joined me in Germany we were allocated a hiring in a block of flats in Wickrath, to the south of Mönchengladbach and about fifteen miles south-east of RAF Brüggen. I travelled to and from work in my old Ford Escort, until I had a serious accident one day, when crossing the *Wegberg Ring*. The Wegberg Ring was an old motor racing circuit, and it appeared that some people still thought that it was one. My car was a write-off, but the other car, a Mercedes that appeared to come from nowhere, had only a slight dent on its bumper. Luckily, I got away with whiplash to my neck, but that injury didn't materialise until the next day. When we realised that our car was a write-off, we ordered a new Morris Marina 1.8 TC and collected it from Bremerhaven, near the north coast of Germany, about a month later. We lived at Wickrath for about eighteen months and then moved into a three bed-roomed married quarter at RAF Brüggen, next to the Station swimming pool. RAF Brüggen was on the border between Germany and Holland, about seven miles east of the Dutch town of Roermond and about twelve miles to the west of the German city of Mönchengladbach.

Exploring Mainland Europe:

A marvellous thing about living on the continent was the opportunity to easily explore other countries. Many of my colleagues used their annual leave to return to the UK. To me that seemed to be such a waste of a wonderful chance to visit new places and to meet other people. We made a point of getting away from the RAF Station whenever we could, including weekends if I wasn't working, but the boys were still young and we had a limited budget to spend on holidays. The first year that we were in Germany, instead of having a normal summer holiday like everyone else, we decided to buy a second-hand family tent, new cooking utensils, camp beds, sleeping bags, etc, and to go camping. Having said that, it was much more refined than my early scouting days and we did stay at modern camping sites. David flew back from boarding school in the UK at the end of each term and we made up for the lost time with him by having a wide range of family activities and visits whenever he was home with us. During our first year we concentrated on camp sites in Holland, Belgium, Luxemburg and the areas of Germany that were not too far away. By the end of that first year we had travelled extensively and, although it had rained on every camping occasion, we had all thoroughly enjoyed it. The next year we bought a new, larger family tent and made more ambitious camping plans for the next two years. It would be too tedious for readers if I listed all the places that we visited, but some of our favourite memories are recorded here.

Although we lived in Germany, we did much of our shopping and touring in Holland. Roermond was the closest Dutch town that we visited regularly, but historic Venlo with its busy market was another favourite place, because it was only about twelve miles to the north of us. The children always enjoyed visiting the remarkable space-age *Evoluon* exhibition centre at Eindhoven, about forty miles away. In 1966 the electrical engineering company of Philips, with a major factory in Eindhoven, came up with the idea of building an exhibition to show what influence technology had on our normal way of life. The *Evoluon* building resembled a huge flying-saucer, the size of a football pitch, which appeared to be hovering above the ground, but it was actually supported

by a central concrete pillar. It housed a permanent exhibition on Man, Science and Technology. It was a wonderful introduction to science and showed how technology could be made interesting to everybody, particularly if there were attractive exhibitions based on that theme. To give one simple example, in the exhibition there was a display of the way mankind developed technology in the measurement of time; progressively, there were working displays ranging from pre-historic stone circles, sand and water clocks, sun-dials, clocks and watches to atomic clocks. The children also enjoyed less technical themes such as the 375 acres of Recreation Park at De Efteling. The park was about thirty miles north-west of Eindhoven, at Kaatsheuvel, and it won Europe's premier award for tourism and recreation in 1972 - the Golden Apple Award. The park always made a good day out with long walks through an enchanted forest full of fairytale characters and buildings such as, Little Red Riding Hood, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Hansel & Gretel's gingerbread house and numerous other characters from nursery rhymes. There was also an old fashioned fairground with an original steam carousel - that was all many years before Paris Disneyland was built. A favourite place of mine, as well as for the rest of the family, was the Netherlands Open-Air Museum, north of Arnhem. There was a wonderful collection of nearly 130 historic buildings and artefacts, collected from all over Holland, and then re-built in a really interesting and natural setting. The comprehensive guide book recommended three different routes, ranging in time from one hour to four hours, but we usually managed to spend most of the day there. The exhibition included major farmsteads, houses, mills, and workshops, as well as gardens, costumes, farm carts and vehicles.

Other Dutch cities and towns that we enjoyed visiting included Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht, Nijmegen, Maastricht and Valkenburg. We also had a few trips to Luxemburg and to Belgium, with some good camping weekends in the Ardennes, visiting towns and villages along the picturesque River Semois. Just over the borders between Belgium and Holland, but on the German side, was the old city of Aachen, recorded as being a Royal Villa in the year 765 A.D. It was also Charlemagne's favourite Palatinate, firstly because his empire was still extending

eastwards, but also because of the vast forests and the warm baths in that area. The core of the present-day cathedral, the octagon with the dome, was completed by Charlemagne in 880 A.D. and is well worth a visit. South of Aachen, on the edge of the Eifel Hills and very close to the Belgian border, was the attractive village of Monschau. The village sat at the bottom of a steep wooded valley, with the River Rur running through the middle of Monschau, making it an ideal location for artists and for my sketch book. Although we weren't far from the French border, we deliberately left that country off our main itinerary because we thought that it would be quite easy to visit there from the UK, when our tour of duty in Germany came to an end. However, we did spend poignant and memorable visits to the World War I battle fields on the Somme and to the Verdun Memorial Museum.

Our day-visits and major camping holidays in Germany for the first year tended to be around the areas close to the mighty River Rhein. The nearest city to us on the Rhein was Düsseldorf and that was a fairly regular place for us to visit on a Sunday afternoon, after we got used to negotiating the priority of trams over cars on the roads! The Rhein flows north from Düsseldorf and then heads north-west, towards the Dutch border between Arnhem and Nijmegen. It is then re-named as the River Waal, and flows south of Dordrecht and Rotterdam, into the North Sea. The fields on either side of that part of the Rhein were very good areas for studying wild birds such as geese and duck, particularly in the winter months. We often visited Cologne, south of Düsseldorf and also on the Rhein, and found that it very easy to drive into the centre of the city, as the roads converged there like the spokes of a wheel. Unfortunately, getting back home was not as easy as we never found the right road signs and we usually ended up on the wrong side of the city. Bonn was quite a small city, but it was the capital of West Germany when we lived there. Since the reunification of East and West Germany, the capital has now moved back to Berlin. Going further south on the River Rhein, at the junction with the Moselle River, we found the picturesque town of Koblenz. By the time we reached that area we felt as though we really were on holiday. Probably the most accessible and attractive destination for weekends, or relatively short holidays, was the Moselle Valley.

We had numerous visits there and stayed at many different places along the valley, including Winnigen, with its large vineyards and orchards. Moselkern, at the mouth of the Eltz Valley, was about one hour walk from the beautifully preserved Eltz Castle. The chief town of the district was Cochem, about thirty miles south of Koblenz. That was definitely a good base to stay as there was so much to see in and around the town, such as the mighty Reichsburg Cochem, originally built in 1027, destroyed in 1689, but then rebuilt in 19th century. Moving on down the Moselle Valley from Cochem became even more interesting as the river twisted and turned continuously passing through even more attractive vineyards and villages, such as Bremm, Zell, Traben-Trarbach and Wehlen. The next place, where I enjoyed more drawing, was Berncastel-Kues with its famous old market place and town hall, dating from 1608, and above the town the ruins of Landshut Castle. Moving further along the river, as it became narrower, there were more bridges allowing us to cross from one side to the other to explore even more villages. Finally, we arrived at Trier, the oldest town in Germany. The old name of the town was Treves and is reputed to have been founded 1300 years before Rome, but it became a town proper under Caesar Augustus in about 15 B.C. The impressive Roman Porta Nigra and the Cathedral date from about the 4th century and the Apostle, St. Matthew is said to be buried in St Mathias Basilica. There are many other Roman remains, including the Amphitheatre that was used as an arena for gladiators and animal fights. Just below Trier, the Moselle splits, where it joins the River Saar; the Saar Valley is even more peaceful than the Moselle and visits to Saarburg and Mettlach are strongly recommended.

South of Koblenz we discovered the rolling hills either side of the Rhein, covered with vineyards, and the pretty towns and villages such as Boppard, St. Goar and Bingen. Although the Rhein was always very busy, with huge barges travelling up and down, we always felt relaxed and on holiday. At Bingen the Rhein turns sharply east towards Wiesbaden, but the smaller River Nahe carries on to the south and then meanders through attractive countryside and villages, with fewer tourists. After Wiesbaden and Mainz the Rhein turns south again, where the cities of Ludwigshafen and Mannheim straddle the Rhein, but just to the north of

them the River Neckar leads to Germany's oldest University Town of Heidelberg. We had another good camping holiday there, with the opportunity to do several pen and ink drawings of Heidleberg Castle, the old bridge and many other parts of the town. Between Heidelberg and Nurnberg, and south of Wurtzburg, is one of the most attractive medieval towns that we came across in Germany: Rothenburg-on-the-Tauber. We spent several holidays in that area, but Rothenburg-on-the-Tauber was always a very special place for me. We would camp just outside the town and I would get up at dawn every morning and walk into town to draw and sketch, before it got too busy. Obviously, my unusual habits were noticed, because one day a German who was camping close to us came rushing over to see Phyl to let her know that he had discovered my secret. His curiosity had got the better of him and, unknown to me, he had followed me into the town and then found that I was only drawing! The town is built on the River Tauber, at the junction of the "Burgenstrasse" and the "Romantische Strasse". Unfortunately, but understandably, it is also a favourite tourist attraction. Rothenburg is a walled town and all of the buildings within the walls retain their medieval looks. It is almost impossible to select my favourite buildings, but a short-list includes the 12th century Castle Gate and the Weisser Turm, the 14th century Toppler Castle and the 15th century St. Wolfgang's Church. A few other special places are the Markusturm and Rodder Gate, the Klingen Tower & Lane, the Klingen Gate and, tucked away in a charming corner of the town, the Plonlein with the Siebers Tower on the left and the Kobolzeller Gate on the right. I was so intrigued with Rothenberg that I eventually produced a large "fantasy" oil painting of the town, from the numerous drawings in my sketch books. It is one of the few paintings that I still have from that period, but it now hangs in my studio behind other new paintings that are waiting to be finished; the colours in my Rothenberg painting are quite garish, compared with the way that I paint now.

South of Mannheim the Rhein flows past the French city of Strasbourg, to Basel on the borders between Germany, France and Switzerland. The Rhine then turns abruptly to the east towards Lake Constance, which is about forty miles away. This tri-angular corner in south-west Germany, from Baden-Baden in the north to Waldshut-on-the-

Rhine in the south, is the called the *Schwarzwald*, or Black Forest. It is about ninety miles long and twenty-five miles wide, with picturesque roads running through towns and villages such as Wolfach, Freudenstadt, Freiburg and Titisee. The mountains, with peaks as high as 5,000 feet in the south, are studded with pine and birch trees and are alive with fairy-tale villages, spas and modern ski resorts. Unfortunately, although we thoroughly enjoyed our few visits to the Black Forest, the rain always stopped me from doing any serious drawing when we were there. We enjoyed our first year's camping with the children so much that the following year we decided to buy a new, larger tent and to be even more adventurous. We were in regular contact with John and Cath and, after some discussion, we invited them over to Germany to join us for a two-week camping holiday in Austria. There was a caretaker, or "Hausemeister", in charge of our block of flats at Wickrath and I would talk to him regularly, as it was an effective way of improving my knowledge of the German language. We were discussing holidays one day and I said that we were thinking of going to southern Germany, possibly on the Austrian border. In the end, we decided to camp at Bregenz in the Voralberg region of Austria, at the eastern tip of the Bodensee - otherwise known as Lake Constance.

The origin of the River Rhein starts in the Alps and then broadens out, to a width of over eight miles, to form Lake Constance before continuing on its 820 mile route to the North Sea. The lake, which is forty mile long and covers an area of 220 square miles, is the second largest freshwater lake in central Europe and it attracts about 250,000 waterfowl and shore-bids in the winter. John and Cath arrived at our flat, the week before we were due to set off for Austria, with their two children, Helen and Francis. That gave us the chance to unwind and to visit local attractions before the long drive south-east to Austria. We hired a family tent for John's family and spent the evening loading up both cars ready for an early start the next morning. It was a fairly uneventful journey, with an overnight break en-route, but by the time that we arrived at the campsite we had driven about 450 miles in the two days, it was pouring with rain, the children were tired and it was pitch dark! We booked-in at the camp-site and we were then directed to the far end of a large field.

We wondered where to start, as it was not much fun trying to unpack the car in the dark and erect the two tents in the heavy rain, particularly with five very tired children. We then heard some friendly voices, coming from out of the dark, asking us in broken English if we would like some help. We didn't take long to thank them and to accept their kind offer, but the six young people insisted that we joined them for a drink before we started to unpack the car. We've no idea what was in the warm, orange-tasting drink, but the next thing that we can remember was that both tents had been put up in the head-lights of the cars, our bags had been unpacked and the children were all asleep in bed, just before we were! We all slept very soundly and woke up the next morning to the sound of the bells from a nearby monastery. We soon settled into our camping routine, with a cooked breakfast each morning, and then started to explore our new surroundings. Bregenz was a good base to work from, particularly for first-time visitors to that part of Europe. It was at the western end of Austria, with the rolling hills of southern Germany to the north and the Swiss and Austrian Alps to the south. We visited towns in southern Germany, such as Friedrichshafen, Lindau, Wengen and Konstanz, as well as day trips to St. Gallen and to the two lakes of Zurichsee and Walensee, in Switzerland.

Another place of interest was the land-locked Principality of Lichtenstein, which had a twenty-two mile border with Austria and a twenty-five mile border with Switzerland. That tiny country had a total land area of only about sixty-two square miles but the height above sea-level ranged from 1,400 feet to over 8,500 feet. Lichtenstein was established within the Holy Roman Empire in 1719, became a Sovereign State in 1806 and it was closely tied to Austria until the end of the First World War. It then developed customs and monetary union with Switzerland and it became neutral in W.W.2. Although Lichtenstein was very small and had a population of only about 33,000 people, it could at least boast to be the source of the mighty River Rhine! After a while we decided to explore a bit further afield. I then remembered that our "Hausmeister" at Wickrath had told me that we must drive over the nearby Silvrettahorn Pass, because the scenery was so spectacular. We studied the maps and then set off for the day. The first thirty-five miles were very pleasant, with an

interesting drive through the mountain foothills, on a good autobahn to Bludenz. We then turned off, onto a relatively minor road, through the Montafon Valley for about thirty miles, and our adventure started. We eventually reached the top of the pass, at about 6,700 feet, and stopped for a break. I was not Phyl's best friend by that stage, because the journey had been so frightening, with the sharp twists, turns and most of the dangerous drops from the edge of the road being on her side of the car! We found a small car park, with a spectacular view of the 10,636 foot high Silvretta Mountain and the calm water of the adjacent Silvrettasee. We then wrapped ourselves up in all the spare clothes that we could find and tried to boil a kettle for a quick cup of tea. Eventually, we managed to prise Phyl out of the car, but I don't think that she appreciated the view as much as we did. We then continued our journey east and back down a mountain valley for another thirty miles to Pians. The next leg of the seventy-six mile return journey took us over the Arlbergpass, at nearly 5,900 feet, back to Bludenz and then home to Bregenz. That was our first real adventure into the Alps and the children really enjoyed it. We spent the next few days relaxing around Bregenz and then Phyl started to talk to me again. We had a most enjoyable holiday, but it was soon time to return home to Germany and back to the real world.

We had been travelling for only about one hour when John's car broke down, just after we went over a railway crossing. I drove on to the next village to find a garage and they came to our rescue, diagnosing a burnt-out clutch. In the mean time, before he opened the bonnet of his car, John had remembered the correct drill and immediately put out his *red triangle*, to warn other traffic that he had broken-down. A curious cyclist passed him and the next thing that John heard was a loud crash as the cyclist ran over the warning triangle. John had put the warning sign in front of the car, instead of behind, so it was facing the wrong way and the cyclist ran into the back of it- after over-taking the car. Looking back, we wonder what on earth we would have done if the clutch had burned out a week earlier on the Silvrettahorn Pass. Eventually we all arrived at Wickrath and John and Cath, after a short period of relaxation, returned safely to England a couple of days later.

Because the boys enjoyed Austria so much, we decided to return the following year. For those visits, we decided to go further east, to the Austrian regions of Tirol, Salzburger Land and Ober Osterreich. Although we enjoyed Innsbruck and the views of Kitzbuheler Alps, we all fell in love with Salzburg and the Salzkammergut. Naturally, Salzburg is a city of culture, dominated by the music of Mozart, and with numerous wonderful buildings, but the Salzkammergut, the Lake District east of Salzburg, is where we spent most of our time. We camped next to the lake of St. Wolfgang See and then explored the towns of St. Wolfgang, St. Gilgen, Strobl, Unterach, Mondsee and Fuschl, with their associated lakes. I had the chance to produce several detailed pen-and-ink drawings during that holiday. Looking back through my sketch-books today brings back fond memories of the Rathouse in St. Gilgen, Shonblick Pension in Gschwendt, Lake Wolfgangsee from Gschwendt, farmyard buildings in Zinkenbach, St Gilgen - with mountains in the background, and The White Horse Inn at St. Wolfgangsee.

We had two very memorable days out during that holiday; first to the ice-caves in the nearby mountains and second to Berchtesgarden and the under-ground salt-mines. Eisriesenwelt, said to be the largest ice-caves in the world, were near Werfen, about thirty miles south of Salzburg. The explorer Anton Posselt discovered the caves in 1879 and published a paper on them, but they were then ignored until 1912 when Alexander Von-Mork re-explored them. There were about twenty-six miles of interconnected caves, tunnels and chambers, but less than one mile of the complex was open to the public when we visited. To reach the ice caves from the village of Werfen was not simple and Phyl decided, wisely, to explore the village while I took the three boys with me. The first leg was about three miles up a mountain road and then a twenty minute walk along a mountain track. We then reached the "launch-pad" for the cable car, the steepest climb in Austria. The gondola took the fifteen passengers up the almost vertical rock face at a rate of about 1,640 feet in three minutes – it seemed to take much longer! We then had another twenty minute walk along a narrow mountain path to the entrance of the caves, at a height of nearly 5,400 feet. From there we could look down into the valley of the Salzach River and see the tiny castle and village of

Werfen, with the ant-like vehicles crawling along the road. The boys looked up at me with a beam on their faces and said "You didn't enjoy that climb, did you Dad!" – as usual, they were right. When we entered the caves we were given heavy coats to wear, to keep out the cold, as the temperature in the caves was at freezing point. We were also each given a carbide lamp so that we could see in the dark caves but, from time to time, the guide also illuminated the huge natural ice sculptures and formations with magnesium ribbon flares. The entrance to the caves was about sixty feet wide; we then moved into the first of two chambers, nearly 100 feet wide and seventy feet high, with gigantic ice columns, towers of ice, ice waterfalls and a sixty-five foot thick glacier wall. The largest ice chamber was the Alexander Von Mork Dom and was nearly 200 feet long, 100 feet wide and almost 120 feet high. That cave contained the Mork Glacier, a twenty-six foot high wall of blue, white and brown ice, polished smooth by the internal winds. Von Mork died in the First World War and his ashes were buried in a niche in the chamber, at his request. It was a remarkable experience and the boys were pleased to be able to give their Mum all the details, especially about their Dad's reactions during the journey up, when we found her in the village several hours later.

Our second adventure was to the underground salt mines. Salt has always been a valuable commodity and the salt mines at Hallstatt, at the foot of the Dachstein Mountains, are one of the oldest in the world dating back to Stone Age Man; a 7,000 year old antler pick was found in the mines in 1838. Wet-salt mining started in the region in the 12th century when rocks of salt were dissolved in artificial pits of water and the saline solution was piped down the mountain for processing. In 1595 the pipeline was extended by 40km to Ebensee for final processing; that was the oldest known industrial pipeline in the world and was made from 13,000 hollowed-out tree trunks. For our salt-mine visit, we decided to travel over the German border to the 500 year old salt mines in Berchtesgarden. This is a small region of Germany that cuts into Austria and extends to about 25 miles, south and west of Salzburg; it includes the long, narrow, attractive lake of Konigssee. At the entrance to the salt mine we all dressed in miner's overalls, helmets and had to wear a leather apron,

back-to-front, before boarding a simple pit train that drove us about 700 yards into the mine. We then disembarked and sat on our leather aprons, astride a long, highly polished, wooden beam. There were groups of about ten people sitting on the beam and each person had to wrap their arms tightly round the person in front. When everyone was ready we then proceeded to slide, at great speed, down the polished banister-like chute for about 100 feet until we reached the bottom! The first cave that we arrived at, covering an area of about 3,600 square yards, was beautiful, with different shapes, colours and formations of rock-salt. From there we walked along a narrow tunnel into an interesting salt museum, where we spent quite some time. A second chute then took us down to a large calm salt-lake, about 300 feet long and 100 feet wide, where we boarded a flat-bottomed, wooden-platform boat that took us silently across to the other side of the lake. An inclined elevator then took us up to another pit-train that returned us to day-light and to the end of a very impressive trip. We tried to make our holidays as interesting and enjoyable as we could for all of the family. Now we must return to work and the real world!

RAF Service Career:

I was now enjoying being fully involved with the RAF and, after lengthy discussions again with Phyl, I decided to apply to extend my commitment from 22 year's service to a full RAF career to the age of 55. I filled in the usual application forms and then submitted them to my Flight Commander. He was a young and enthusiastic officer, but he did not always seem to think through his decisions, which often led to potential problems. I seemed to be regularly visiting his office to suggest to him better ways of handling people. After submitting my application for a full career in the RAF he called me in to his office and told me that I had filled in the wrong form; my initial thought was - "here we go again"! He then told me that I should be filling in an application form for a Permanent Commission. I was stuck for words, as he was the last person that I would have expected to make such a suggestion. I agreed to go away and think about it and eventually submitted my application for a Commission. The Station Commander at the time was Air Commodore Peter Harding, later

to become Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Peter Harding - Chief of the Air Staff (and, incidentally, a Vice President of the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society, of which we will hear more later). I was interviewed by him and he advised me that I would be at the Officer & Aircrew Selection Centre for only three days. He stressed that I must overcome my natural shyness if I was to convince the selection board of the abilities, that he knew I possessed, but at the same time I should also try to be my natural self. I attended the selection board at RAF Biggin Hill on the 19th of July 1976 and then returned to Germany. Within a few days I was off again, but this time on an expedition to Norway.

The expedition was to the Lyngen Peninsula, about three hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle. It was a joint ornithological and mountaineering expedition and I was asked to co-ordinate the ornithological aspects. David had left school by then and the expedition leader asked if he would like to join us which, to my delight, he accepted. We drove from RAF Bruggen to the base camp in Norway, with a few overnight stops on the way; it was a long, but interesting journey. Our base-camp was at the edge of a fiord with a wonderful view of a huge hanging glacier on the opposite side. Initially, we were delighted to have fresh cod, which we caught in the fiord each day, but then the novelty started to wear off. Reindeer meat was not very tender, or readily available, but then we found some fresh-water lakes in the mountains and changed our diet to freshly caught trout! The expedition team worked very well together and I had some very enjoyable days high up in the Lyngen Alps with the mountaineers. It was quite an unusual experience to have twenty-four hours of daylight and to be watching White-tailed Eagles flying overhead at midnight. There was a temptation not to go to bed, because of the continuous daylight, but the fresh air and physical exercise helped to keep that in check. We did notice that the few local people that we came across, in this very sparsely populated area, seemed to work throughout the night on jobs such as repairing their houses. When we mentioned this to them, they said that they had to make the most use of all the daylight in the summer, because of the long, dark winter days. One problem that we found, when washing and bathing in the fiord, was that we couldn't use soap to get a lather using sea-water.

Consequently, most of us grew beards for the month that we were away.

We had a successful expedition and all too soon, we were packing our tents ready for the long drive back home. We arrived at RAF Bruggen a few days later and Phyl told me that the Squadron were holding a fancy-dress party that weekend. I did some quick thinking and decided to go as a German tramp. The idea came after a discussion that I had with a Padre some months earlier, when he mentioned that he was concerned that he had never seen any tramps in Germany; he wondered, quite seriously, what they did with them, as all societies have some "drop-outs". I already had a beard, which no one at work had seen because I had just returned from Norway. I made some simple wire spectacles, turned my old raincoat inside-out, hung an old baked-bean tin from a piece of string tied around my waist, put on some old torn trousers and old boots and I was ready. I spent the whole evening chattering to everyone in German and broken English and I don't think that anyone recognised me. At one stage there were a few puzzled looks when it was clear that someone had asked if there had been a breach of security. The one or two people who were in on our secret convinced the powers-that-be that I was a well known member of the Squadron, which made them even more curious. It was one of the most enjoyable social evenings that I can remember. Perhaps there is a message there for any other normally shy people who wish to socialise more to try some type of disguise!

By the time that I arrived back from the expedition to Norway in late August, the news was waiting that I had been selected for training at the Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU), at RAF Henlow. It was wonderful news; I had never been more fit, because of the month in the Arctic mountains; we were coming to the end of a most enjoyable tour in Germany; it also gave a new dimension to the rest of my career in the RAF. There was just a minor medical problem that had still not been resolved. I had already seen the medical officer several times during the previous six months about a swelling in my groin, but he said that it was nothing to worry about. When I returned from Norway the swelling had continued to increase and so I thought that I had better have a final check before going to OCTU. This time I saw a junior doctor who, after consulting his colleague, reassured me that it was probably just a cyst,

but he had arranged for me to visit the nearby hospital at RAF Wegberg the next day - just to be sure. The following day, after careful examination by the Group Captain consultant, he asked how quickly I could move into the hospital. I explained that I was about to go to OCTU, but I was sure that the authorities would let me go into hospital as soon as I had finished my training there. I then received a cold stare from him and he said that he wanted me in hospital that night as he was going to operate on me the next morning!

The operation took place the next day and the removed lump was sent away for diagnosis; I was told to remain in bed, in hospital and that I was not to move. During the weekend, a duty doctor called in to see me and asked if I understood why I was there and whether I would like him to explain what was happening. I had to admit that I was rather confused because everything had happened in such a rush and I had been asleep for most of the time in hospital, following the operation. Later on, I understood that, because I was looking so fit, the other patients assumed I had come into hospital for a simple family-planning "snip". The duty doctor then sat down and explained the difference between benign and malignant tumours; in summary, he said that a benign tumour would not be a problem but a malignant one could be fatal. It was then obvious to me that mine was benign and that I would be home again as soon as the removed lump had been checked. How wrong I was - the lump turned out to be a malignant teratoma!

Back to the UK, via Hospitals

Within the next few days I had been flown back to the UK and was admitted to the hospital at RAF Halton, in Buckinghamshire. When I arrived on the Cade ward I was met by the Ward Sister who sat and had a cup of tea with me and a warm, friendly chat; I retained a soft spot for her over many years to come. I had been in the ward for several days when one of the patients mentioned that we were all in that ward for the same reason. I'm not sure whether I was in some sort of denial or just plain ignorant of things medical; I couldn't see anything in common, as each patient appeared to show a completely different symptom ranging

from problems with heads, arms, legs, skin or something completely unseen - like mine. That kind patient then said that we all had cancer, but that none of the hospital staff ever mentioned the "big C" word. I found that very hard to come to terms with, particularly in the casual way that it was mentioned, but I soon accepted the fact and got on with the next stage of treatment.

We were driven by ambulance each day to the Middlesex Hospital, in London, for radio-therapy treatment. Like many other places, the Middlesex was a Teaching Hospital and the consultant asked me if I would mind if medical students attended during my next routine examination, to which I readily agreed - we all have to learn, and doctors were so important to all of us. On the next visit I was taken into a very large room, with curtains around each bed space. I was asked to strip off completely and then to lie, face up, on the bed. After a while, the curtains were flung open and I was surrounded by a sea of male and female faces all peering at me while the young lady consultant lectured to them and probed around all of the places that embarrassed me most. All of this took place without speaking to me at all - it was if I was just a lump of meat on a butcher's counter. She then whisked them away, with no reference to me, to the next unsuspecting victim. Perhaps she was absent on the day when they mentioned bedside manners during her training - or perhaps she thought it too trivial a subject for her consultant status. By the end of the radiation therapy, a few months later, my physical appearance had changed dramatically. I was looking gaunt, had a continuous dry cough, was lethargic and had diarrhoea. From what we had been taught over the past few years, in our Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) warfare training sessions, it sounded as though I had a classic case of radiation sickness!

During the radiotherapy treatment, chemotherapy had also been mentioned by the young, efficient looking lady consultant at the Middlesex. The surgeon back at Halton was Air Commodore Winters and I found that he was very easy to talk to and he always made time to talk to the patients, when needed. I decided to ask him for advice and to explain to me the advantages and disadvantages of chemotherapy. He saw me the next day and explained that it was a complex and somewhat

controversial subject; he summed it up by saying that the doctors were always trying to improve and learn new techniques, for the good of the patient. He then admitted that when he looked back to the outdated techniques that he had been using only ten years earlier it made him shudder, but they were then doing what was the best practice at that time. He was a very honest and sincere man and, later on, he always asked why I wasn't yet at OCTU whenever I saw him for my routine check-ups after leaving Halton. I was very upset a few years later when I heard that he had died suddenly of a heart attack at Wimbledon; he had been one of the officials during the annual tennis tournaments for many years and I understand that he died after a warm-up game with one of the competitors. In the mean time, having thought carefully about what I had been told, I decided that I was not going to have chemotherapy when the radio-therapy finished. The young lady consultant was horrified when I told her and said that ignorant people like me should be allowed to have any say in the matter, as she was the expert. I stuck to my guns and, by the grace of God, I'm still here. Phyl was able to visit me only once while I was in hospital at RAF Halton, initially because she was still in Germany and then, after she returned to England, there was a new house to run and schooling to be organised for the children. However, John and Cath visited me several times and my brother Brian picked me up and took me back to RAF Cosford on one weekend.

Brian and Doreen were obviously worried by my gaunt look and my dry, rasping cough, so they took me to see their doctor. After a check-up and a chat, the doctor made it quite clear that I should not be thinking about OCTU any more; in his opinion it would be at least seven years before I would be fit enough, if ever! I really didn't need that sort of news. On one particular night back in the hospital, after the weekend with Brian, I was feeling particularly anxious and I needed to talk to someone urgently. I rang John and Cath, but they weren't available. I then went for a walk down the hospital corridor and discovered the empty hospital chapel. I hadn't been to church for some years, but not for any special reason; I think that we had just stopped going because of so many other activities, particularly with a young family and with being on the move every few years. There was certainly no other reason for not going. I

stayed in the chapel, on my own, for several hours and made up for lost time with my prayers. I thanked God for such a wonderful family and hoped that I would be able to see the boys grow up, but if that wasn't to be I could accept that. I then made a promise that if I recovered fully, then I would continue to work hard, enjoy the time with my family and not waste any time given to me in the future. I left the chapel feeling very calm and at peace. In later years I was often accused of being a workaholic; I just saw it as keeping a promise.

At the start of this traumatic time, Phyl was still in Germany and she had to come to terms with what was happening to me, as well as packing up our household belongings and making plans to return to England. The RAF held surplus married quarters in a few places across the country, for emergency cases such as ours. I found that there was one available at the old RAF Birchwood site, on the outskirts of Lincoln, and arranged to have a weekend pass from RAF Halton so that I could take over the married quarter and to get Phyl and the children settled in. Phyl drove back from RAF Bruggen, via Zeebrugge and Felixstowe, and arrived in Lincoln after midnight on the 30th of September 1976; we unpacked the car, had a cup of tea and, exhausted, we all fell into bed. At about three o'clock in the morning I needed to go to the toilet; as I didn't want to disturb the rest of the family after such a tiring journey I decided not to put on the lights. I felt my way through the bedroom door, along the corridor and then turned left into the bathroom. Wrong move! The bathroom was on the right; the top of the stairs was on the left and the next thing that I knew was that I was lying in a crumpled heap next to the glass front door - so much for not wishing to disturb the family. Phyl managed to get me back upstairs and eventually we all fell asleep again until daylight. I had to return to Halton that night, by train, so it was a very short visit, but at least Phyl and the boys were all back home and safe. When I saw the doctors the next morning there were certainly no signs of sympathy for my accident. They were furious because they thought that my grazed back, through falling down the stairs, would probably stop my radio-therapy treatment; as it happened, they decided to take the risk and to continue with it anyway. Eventually, my radiotherapy treatment finished and I was sent home from Halton on sick-leave, but I had to report back

to the hospital for regular check-ups.

In the meantime, I certainly didn't want time to sit at home and brood. Our friends from Singapore, Barry and Val Bowden, were living in Lincoln as Barry had been posted to RAF Scampton. On one of his visits Barry suggested that we redecorate the house in Hykeham Road (Phyl's Dad had died while we were in Germany and he had left the house to Phyl in his will). I was still planning on going to OCTU and, if successful, I knew that I would then be going to nearby RAF College Cranwell, south of Lincoln, on a postgraduate Aeronautical Engineering course. Therefore, Barry's idea seemed to make good sense. Phyl's Dad had been a very heavy smoker and, being non-smokers, we decided to strip the house completely and to make a fresh start with it. It was hard work, but it stopped us from dwelling on other things; we also decided to modernise the house and to replace the old toilet, hand-basin and the cast-iron bath in the upstairs bathroom. Phyl decided to have a long day-trip to Norfolk, as we had decided to sell our house in Fakenham; that seemed like an ideal time to strip the bathroom while the house was empty and when no one was using the water. The hardest thing was trying to smash the cast-iron bath with the sledge hammer - it just bounced off each time I hit it; eventually I managed to break it up and to somehow take the bits down stairs. Changing the toilet was quite straight forward but then the fiddly bits started with the plumbing and pipe joints under the new bath and the hand-basin. I managed to have it finished by the time Phyl came back that night, but I was then laid-up for nearly a week with a double case of "housemaid's knee"! We did manage to completely redecorate the house, but some of it was done after we gave up the married quarter at Birchwood and moved in to 40 Hykeham Road.

Michael was particularly unhappy with his new school in Lincoln. Prior to going to Germany we had noticed that Michael's reading was not to the same standard as his two brothers and that he didn't seem to enjoy school; he didn't pass the eleven-plus exam either. However, his reading changed significantly when Michael started school at Rheindahlen, in Germany. He had an elderly, Scottish lady teacher who believed strongly in the merits of the *three-Rs*; she seemed to take a shine to Michael and he then moved forward in leaps and bounds. When he started school at

Lincoln Michael was upset because he was repeating work that he had done years before, in Germany. He asked if he could change schools and whether he could go to the King's School, as a border like David. As he hadn't passed his Grammar School entrance exam we weren't sure, so an interview was arranged with the King's School headmaster. After seeing Michael, and his school reports from Germany, the headmaster said that Michael could start the following week, which he did.

The Radio Engineering Unit, RAF Henlow

After my sick-leave from the RAF hospital had finished I was posted to the Radio Engineering Unit (REU) at RAF Henlow, in Bedfordshire. There was still much debate on whether I would be fit enough to attend OCTU, as the officer training was a particularly challenging course physically; medical opinions on my likely recovery for the course ranged from at least nine months to seven years, and from some people - never! I thought that it was a good omen to post me to the REU at Henlow, as it kept alive my hopes of moving across the road to OCTU at some time in the near future. The REU work was completely new to me; we were responsible for deep level refurbishment (3rd / 4th line servicing) of Tactical Radars. The tactical radars were used for long range air defence against enemy aircraft, but they were relatively easy to deploy and hence not so vulnerable to attack as most of the fixed radar sites used by the RAF. Just after I arrived at the REU I was awarded the Long Service & Good Conduct Medal; sometimes referred to by the wags as being awarded for eighteen years of undetected crime! I first heard about the Royal Air Force Ornithological Society (RAFOS) when I started planning for the Norway expedition, while I was in Germany; within a few months I became a member. Just after I arrived at REU Henlow the RAFOS committee was trying to publicise its activities to recruit new members and they decided to hold a poster competition. I submitted a poster depicting a range of birds, asking the question "What Type Are You?" Beside each drawing of about ten different species of birds was a single, appropriate description, such as Inquisitive, Probing, Serious, Shy, etc. To my surprise, particularly as a new member, I won the competition.

I never dreamt at that stage how significant RAFOS would become to me in the future.

I was very aware of my poor fitness state while I was at the REU, so I visited the gym and asked the staff how to get myself fit again. At first they thought that I was joking, but then took me seriously when I explained the reasons; they advised me to get my heavy service boots and, after soaking them in a bucket of water to soften the leather, to run as far as I could each day around the airfield. I started training that week, but had to turn back after struggling to reach the start of the airfield on the first attempt. Gradually, I managed to get a little further each day and my fitness started to return. It was at the REU that I discovered that my new Flight Commander was also a member of RAFOS. Finally, on the 6th of June 1977 I was posted to OCTU, as an Officer Cadet, to start my training for a new career.

Officer Cadet Training Unit, RAF Henlow

The officer cadet training was a balanced mixture of man-management training, RAF law, administrative procedures and stretching students to their physical limits; it was hard work, but rewarding. The course membership was made-up from a wide range of ages, with some of the cadets younger than my sons; at the other end of the spectrum there were older ex-servicemen, like myself. At 39 years of age, I was the oldest one on the course and was competing with healthy young men who had just left school or university. However, we soon found that youth and strength didn't necessarily count for everything; the members of staff were also very aware of that and made sure that there was a balance of ages in each team.

The training staff had found, from experience built up over many years, that there was a higher rate of success on the courses when there were older members in the team; conversely, there was a higher failure rate when only young people were selected for a team. We all have different breaking points and it is not until we are put under extreme pressure that we start to understand how much pressure we can actually take. The physical challenges gradually built up to a climax towards the end of the course. The final outdoor camp lasted nearly a week, with

continuous tasks being set during the days and the nights. As physical pressures increased, and as tiredness set in, mental agility started to deteriorate. However, it was amazing to find that each time one found oneself thinking that they had almost reached their limit, a new problem introduced by the directing staff would stimulate more energy from somewhere deeply hidden; no sooner had that problem been solved before another new one was introduced. In general, the older students took much longer to break under pressure than the younger members. We learned more about ourselves and our personal limitations, as well as the advantages of teamwork, during these physical challenges than we could ever learn from books and lectures. I passed-out from OCTU, as a Flying Officer, on the 8th of September 1977 and was on my way to the RAF College Cranwell for my next major phase of training, on a postgraduate Aeronautical Engineering course.

RAF College Cranwell

Initially, for the first few months of the one year course, I lived in the RAF College; I was then allowed to go home to Lincoln each night, probably after I had been carefully observed for long enough for the staff to take that risk! Once again, I found that I was the oldest member on our course, with most of the students coming from university only a short time before the course started. I was on a very steep learning curve again, but it was a most enjoyable course and aircraft now became real, complex flying machines, instead of being just orange or green blips on a radar screen. An important part of Service life was building bonds and then supporting each other. One way of achieving that was by holding formal Dining-in Nights each month in the Officers' Mess; all officers were expected to attend.

From time to time there would be special VIP guests and, occasionally, the guest list would include a member of the Royal Family. The evening would start with members being greeted by the President of the Mess Committee (PMC) on arrival, followed by cocktails in the anti-room. The serving officers dressed in their formal Mess Kit, with medals; if it was a ladies guest night, the ladies would be in their formal evening

gowns and any male civilian guests wore dinner-jackets. The seating plan would then be checked and each officer would identify the lady nominated to be escorted by him into the dining room for dinner. With the formal announcement "*Dinner is Served*" each officer would guide his nominated lady to the dining table where the place-name confirmed that he had read the seating plan correctly and had found the right place - or not! Usually, there would be a small band playing suitable quiet music during the dinner. Typically, there would be a four course silver service dinner, served by the Mess staff, and all the historic Mess silver would be laid out on the tables. The Senior officers and any official guests would be seated at the top table and the ranks of the officers decreased as they were seated further away; the most junior officer, known as Mr Vice (short for Vice President – and not the other reason!) would sit at the far end of one of the tables leading from the top table. After dinner, the PMC would ask Mr Vice to toast the Queen, and the head of any other State represented at the dinner, before listening to the speeches. The speeches could be from visiting guest, senior officers or from officers who had just been posted and who were being "dined-out" on that particular night. We would then retire to the anti-room for more drinks and then possibly "Mess Games", if it was not a "Ladies Guest Night" or after any VIPs had left. Those games tended to become quite boisterous, as a way of letting off steam in a controlled environment, but could become quite expensive for those that became to enthusiastic. The format for dining-in nights was always the same, whether it was at Command HQ, the RAF Colleges, RAF Stations or Units; only the faces, speeches and the conversations changed each time. I graduated from the RAF College Cranwell in August 1978 with an A1 pass and was the runner-up for the *Beckwith Trophy* on a paper that I had written on a "*Proposed Aircraft Electro-Optical Defence and Attack System*". I was then posted to RAF Wattisham, in Suffolk as the Officer Commanding Avionics Flight.

RAF Wattisham

My tour at RAF Wattisham was relatively short and started off with me being detached to RAF Conningsby on a Phantom FG1 / FGR2

Manager's Course. The McDonnell Douglas Phantom FG1 entered service with the RAF in 1969 as an interceptor; the FGR2 followed later that year in the reconnaissance and ground attack role. My Flight was responsible for the second-line repair and testing of all the Phantom avionics equipment at second-line. For those who may not understand RAF engineering terminology, a simple description follows, as it will also be referred to in future chapters. First-line servicing refers to work carried out directly on the aircraft; second-line refers to items removed from the aircraft and repaired in workshops on the RAF station; third-line refers to repair work carried out in specialist maintenance workshops off the station, usually at a specified RAF Maintenance Unit; fourth-line usually refers to the original factory where the equipment was built. Sometimes fourth-line repairs were at RAF Units, but the repair work would still go as deep as the original factory build standard.

Avionics is a general term used for radio, radar, electronic or computer equipment that is fitted to modern aircraft. Those items are usually in sealed boxes often referred to as Line Replaceable Units (LRUs) or as "black-boxes". At Wattisham the avionic "black-boxes" removed from the Phantom aircraft were brought into the Avionics Flight workshops, which was part of the Electrical Engineering Squadron. The engineering tasks were not too challenging in my first post a Flight Commander, but the man-management aspects made up for that. Those man-management responsibilities involved looking after the career prospects and the welfare of the people in my flight; the latter included family and domestic issues, civil court cases and sorting out the estate of a Senior NCO from my Flight who had been murdered! I also became the deputy editor of the Station monthly newspaper - "*The Wattisham Eagle*"; that gave me a completely new interest and included some of my articles and drawings of local towns, villages and other places of interest, as well as regular features on the wild birds in the area. I was also involved in running the local ornithological club, assisted by another member on the station who was the RAFOS Secretary at the time. On the 2nd of February 1979 I was detached to the Institute of Naval Medicine, at Alverstoke, on a Radiation Safety Officers' Course and was promoted to the rank of Flight Lieutenant on the 8th of September.

RAFOS held regular overseas expeditions to study birds and in 1978 the committee started planning a return to Masirah, in the Middle East, as a follow-up to an expedition in 1976. I applied for a place so that I could learn from those experienced ornithologists and was delighted to be short-listed. I was then told that I was on the main list and attended the final briefing weekend, as one of the original members had gone sick. It was at the last minute that the original applicant recovered; therefore, I couldn't join them - so close and yet so far! I was thanked for going on stand-by and was told that I would be seriously considered for any future expeditions. In 1979 the RAFOS committee invited members to apply to take part in a new expedition to southern Norway, which was to take place in 1980. I couldn't believe my luck and filled in my application form. A few months later I received a reply; the good news was that I had been selected; the bad news, for me, was that I had been selected as the expedition leader and was responsible for the detailed ornithological planning, travel arrangements, camp logistics, etc. So it was back to the paperwork again!

My first tour of duty as a commissioned officer was coming to an end and I was surprised to receive a telephone call from my desk-officer asking for my views on a possible posting to the RAF's Central Servicing Development Establishment, in Norfolk. Apparently, there was a job coming up for an engineering officer to be attached to industry and he thought that I may fit the bill. It certainly sounded very interesting and I said that I had no objections. We were on the move again.

Chapter 4

Civilian versus Service Life: 1970 to 1979

