

John Burton's DGEng BUGLE

Part 2

Subject: From Train Spotting to Plane Spotting and Beyond by our old friend and colleague John Burton, (Ex our Quality Branch in St Giles Court)



My continuing service experience story from Bugle Number 26, issued in March last year.

If you remember my earlier Bugle story about my early life and initial service experiences in the RAF,

“After I had arrived back in Bahrain I was told a signal from Abingdon had been received to say I must return on the first available aircraft and I was booked on a Beverley early the next morning. Looking at the air movement’s chart I said I would prefer the Britannia flight later that day but was denied. The Britannia flight would have taken about 6 hours, the Beverley took 3days with a full load via Iraq Cyprus Libya and Malta.

Three days after arriving home I was admitted to Radcliffe Infirmary Oxford with Appendicitis, how lucky was I that it didn’t happen two weeks earlier!”

To Continue

The appendix operation and a medical complication affecting the healing process caused us some delay in getting married. Marital status was important for us to be eligible for RAF accommodation and family accompaniment on postings etc. Mavis and I were eventually married on 19th October 1957 when after taking out a special licence, we walked towards Oxford Registry Office and stopped a couple who were on their way to the shops. We asked them if they would be kind enough to act as

witnesses to our marriage and they agreed. After the ceremony we thanked them with a shake of hands, they went off to their shopping and we took the train to London where we spent the day and went dancing in the evening at the Muswell Hill Palais and returned to Oxford on the midnight train from Paddington.

The following week we found a property in the village called Cumnor which the RAF took on as a hiring and we lived there for 5 months before I received a posting to Cyprus.

On 1st April 1958 I sailed on the troop ship Empire Fowey and arrived in Limassol 10 days later. A State of Emergency existed on the island since 1955 where a Greek Cypriot Militant group called EOKA had sought to remove the British from Cyprus so it could be unified with Greece. EOKA attacks included sabotaging and assassinating British forces personnel.

On arrival at Akrotiri damage was evident as the roof of a large aircraft hanger sagged in the middle where it had been subjected to a bomb explosion. I was posted into 103mu where I joined four other engine fitters where there was enough work for one of us, clearly the RAF engine fitter trade had become over established.

In the next few weeks we didn't remain idle and took our hands to carpentry by dismantling a number of engine transport crates to build a workshop. We were quite pleased with it when we had it finished.

One morning I arrived at the hanger a bit late and the Chief Tech in charge said they need someone in Admin Office due to staff shortage and you are it. (This was due to National Service ending and replacements not being forthcoming). So that day I became a Leave Clerk dealing with the leave applications for all 103mu personnel. I did this for about 3 months until a vacancy occurred in the Technical Control Office which I applied for and got. At least that had some engineering content.

The priority on my arrival in Cyprus was to arrange for Mavis to join me by getting suitable accommodation in Limassol. This I did and she flew out in June just a week before they put a ban on families coming out due to the deteriorating security situation. Travel to work from Limassol was by coach picking up from door to door or if by car, at least two in a car and in a convoy of three cars, all of us being armed. Dave Moorhouse a friend in the Technical Control Office who lived near us in Limassol had bought a new Ford Cortina MKII so I travelled with him.

One day as we travelled home he overtook one of the forces coaches and as we got halfway passed it an army lorry appeared from round a bend. A head on collision was inevitable until Dave suddenly swung the wheel to the right and we took off across the drainage ditch to the side of the road into a ploughed field dotted with Carob trees. All I could remember was a big lorry grill in front of us followed by tree trunks as he swung the wheel left to right to avoid them and eventually drove back onto the road. The two friends following us were laughing their socks off at the sight. For Dave and me it was no laughing matter and we were both badly shaken up.

The state of emergency continued through most of 1959 and with it travel restrictions but then an agreement was reached for Cyprus to become independent and the British would retain Sovereign Bases at Akrotiri and Dhekalia We were then able to move around the island more freely and Mavis and I booked a coach trip to St Helena Castle in the Kyrenia mountains. We didn't know what we were in for as we set off. As the coach started to climb the mountain roads we came to the first of three hairpin bends. The road was so narrow that the Cypriot driver had to reverse so that the rear of the coach was overhanging the sheer drop. Also the side panel between the front and rear wheels scraped the road making a loud metallic noise. There were an awful lot of screams and crying going on and not just the women and children.

There was another memorable incident that occurred later when Mavis and I were swimming in the sea at the Bamboo Bar

outside Limassol. Mavis is a good swimmer but I am not, I make very little progress with much effort, except that is when I am wearing flippers. I was wearing these as we were about 20 yards out when someone shouted shark. Mavis said I Passed her like a speedboat and stood on the beach shouting 'come on May!' obviously she has never let me forget it. (The shark was in fact an upturned small boat).

Early in 1960 we were lucky to move in to married quarters for the last 9 months of our tour. With Cyprus becoming independent this was the most enjoyable time for us as we were able to explore the island sharing the hire of an open top Morris Minor with two other friends.

We returned to the UK in September 1960 and my next posting was to RAF Lyneham which had Britannia's and Comet's so I looked forward to getting back to aircraft engine work. However on arriving at Lyneham it soon became clear that there was still too many engine fitters in the service and the best job I would be offered was in the Ground Equipment Bay. This, together with the fact that we were now living apart with me in the barracks and Mavis in London with family I became quite despondent. I decided to apply for discharge and was granted this on payment of £200. During my last week at Lyneham I went into the TV room to watch the new programme that was coming on called Coronation Street. I left on the Friday of that week and as I walked away from Service to Civilian life had some feeling of relief at not being under orders for 24 hours a day and excitement at what might lay ahead job wise.

I had no job at that time but by January 1961 I started at Napier Aero Engines Research Department Acton, West London. But that's another story.

(Part 3 John?.....feel free!)

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