

JIM FRENCH BUGLE STORY.



Jim French 1936-2020

Jim was born on 29 August 1936 at 1 Wards Place Blue Town Sheerness (behind the old Welcome Hostel) He spent early years at New Buildings Cottages (Cottages on lane to Groves Farm) and spent the next 8 years at the cottage, travelling to Eastchurch Primary School which included a 3 mile walk partway along the line of the Sheppey Light Railway. This was the 'war years'.

When he was 8, Cecil Wright the farm owner converted Groves Farm to two habitable parts and the family moved into the farm house. Jim qualified at the 11 plus for the Grammar School. Unfortunately this meant a daily 2 mile walk to the bus, a 7 mile bus ride and then an hour on the train to Borden Grammar School. It was clearly quite impractical to do this. Jim therefore spent 1 year at Sheerness Comprehensive and then on to Sheerness Technical school (which is now no more). At 15 he passed the Dockyard entrance exam and intended to be an electrical fitter. Unfortunately there were only 3 vacancies and coming 4th in the exam meant Jim qualified to become an Engine Fitter. 4 years at the Dockyard school was followed by 1 day and 2 nights Higher National schooling. The acquisition of a motorcycle Triumph Tiger 100 (with a sprung rear wheel) meant that he could transfer to Chatham Dockyard as a Student Apprentice travelling each day for a while

along the marsh road, and then for a time lodging in Gillingham.

In 1959 at 23 years old he finally got his National Service call up papers for the RAF. Off to Cardigan for kitting out then Bridgnorth for basic training. Crimped 6 terminals on a board and soldered 6 wires, and became SAC Radar Technician, then to Locking Weston Super Mare to become a Radar Junior Technician.

He met his wife Mel at the Winter Gardens Dance and was promptly posted to Culdrose in Cornwall on an experimental Tropospheric transmitter. **This meant spending** many hours hitch hiking between Culdrose and Western-Super-Mare. When his father died in 1960 Jim was transferred to Chigwell near Epping, London.

After 2 years National Service he returned to Chatham Dockyard as a Draughtsman and married Mel in 1961 where they took lodgings in Gillingham. They returned to Groves Farm for the birth of their son Michael. He then became a Technical Assistant at RPE (Rocket Propulsion Establishment) Westcott with the Ministry of Aviation and moved to a caravan on site. Finally moving to a flat at Stoke Mandeville where his second son Kevin was born. There was also a 6 months detached duty at Hawker Siddeley Hemel Hempstead.

Then in 1965 he was promoted to EngIII and moved as ARTO (E) to Bristol Siddeley Engines Coventry living in rented accommodation in Coventry where daughter Juliet was born; Finally in 1968 moving to a first house in Monks Kirby. After 6 months detached duty at RR Kilbride, Jim was promoted to RTO (E) at AEI Coventry. At this time Ministry of Aviation became Ministry of Technology.

Then on to RTO (E) Alvis, still in Coventry

and then again in 1970 promoted to EngII and became RTO (E) at Rotax Willesden London. 1971 saw the move to St Giles Court London as ARPO ADOUR. At this time the Ministry of Technology became Ministry of Defense (MoD), and grade EngII to PTO 1 (Professional Technical Officer Grade1) The years in the Adour (Jaguar Engine) office entailed trips to RR Derby, later to RR Bristol together with frequent meetings in Paris and Toulouse.

On the domestic side, after 2 years in rented accommodation the family moved to Chalfont St Peter in 1972. Jim spent 2 years building lounge and bedroom extension. He was promoted to PPTO in 1977 and moved into the Project Office for both Jaguar and Hawk Adour engines. Then in 1984 being moved to the post of Qualification and Certification of Engines. Principal engines at the time being the Joint EFA project (European Fighter Aircraft now Lightning) and the RTM322 Helicopter engine. This period involved many trips to MUNICH to produce the EFA engine Specification together with visits to Rolls Royce Leavesden for the RTM 322 certification.

Jim was a Member of The Institution of Mechanical Engineers and an Associate Member of the Royal Aeronautical Society. He took early retirement in 1993.

Post Script

Jim's family kindly gave me some notes, made by him, covering a lot of his life for which I am most grateful. I have used their words to publish this BUGLE. I'd like however to add some words of mine to this script.

I met up with Jim when I was transferred from Engine Health Monitoring to the Adour office in St Giles. We seem to hit it off straight away and became friends during our MoD days and also after our respective retirements. As a working colleague he was able to give me a lot of Engine procedure advice gleaned from his years in the RTO chain. We were fortunate in working for some very able Assistant Directors including; George Munns, Selig Finklaire and Alvin Stoat; But it was

*also the lunchtime get togethers with another Ex-Dockyard Apprentice; Peter Pearson (who sadly also passed away mid-2019) As the '3 Musketeers' we ventured out most lunch hours when we could arrange it and walk for literally miles around London. There may have been the odd 'half glass' sometimes but it was the tales told and laughs had which was a constant joy. I can report that after our respective retirements we found time to meet up together with our own families and the attached photo shows us revisiting Chatham Dockyard to rekindle old memories.
Miss you both lads and thanks for many, many fun times.*



A memorable trip around old stomping grounds for Jim and Peter.

Malcolm Hurry.

02-03-2020

(DG.Eng BUGLE No.35. March 2020)