

CAREER BRIEF

My tale begins way back in 1951 when I left school and went up to university to read Chemistry. During Freshers' Week I joined the University Air Squadron, not that I was particularly interested in aviation, but my brother had volunteered for the RAF towards the end of the war and always spoke well of his time in the Service. To my surprise, as the year unfolded, I found that I was deriving more enjoyment from my one day a week with the RAF, than from the rest of the time spent in the laboratory and lecture theatre. At the end of my first year, I decided to leave University and join the RAF.

After basic military training, I found myself on a Cunard liner heading for Canada, where I was to spend a year in Winnipeg training to be a navigator. Once awarded my Wings, I returned to UK and joined 44 Squadron at RAF Honington. The Squadron was equipped with the Canberra B2 bomber, a formidable machine: it cruised at 420 knots, flew at 40,000ft and carried 6 X 1,000lbs bombs. Around 30% of the Squadron's aircrew were decorated, ex-war-time fliers, but the rest were youngsters like myself- still "wet behind the ears"! It was a mix that was to serve us well a year later when the Government decided to invade Egypt and regain control of the Suez Canal. We, along with several other squadrons, were dispatched to RAF Nicosia to begin the offensive. Our aim, we were told, was to destroy the Egyptian air force, to prevent them from thwarting the planned, Royal Marines amphibious assault on Port Said.

My first mission was against Cairo West airfield; the briefing was similar to those that we had on exercises in the UK, except at the end we were issued with a revolver and ammunition, a map of Egypt printed on a silk square and easily stowed in our pocket, a survival pack and a small bag of golden coins, Half-Sovereigns, to bribe our way out of trouble!

While doing our pre-flight checks on our aircraft, we were disturbed by a stream of groundcrew from an adjoining Squadron who told us that one of their aircraft, another Canberra, had just collapsed onto its full bombload! Fortunately, high explosive will not detonate unless initiated by the fuse, which didn't become active until the bomb had fallen several hundred feet.

Nevertheless, it was an unwelcomed start to proceedings! We got airborne without further ado and met some anti-aircraft fire as we approached the target, but our speed and height kept us out of trouble. We dropped our bombs and headed back to Cyprus; we didn't see any Egyptian fighters and no

aircraft were lost. The first head through the aircraft door after landing was that of the Accounts Officer, asking for the gold back! Clearly, he didn't want us visiting the "fleshpots" of Nicosia with that in our pockets! I completed a further four raids against other airfields and military installations before World opinion forced the government to the Negotiating Table and we returned to UK, to continue to hone our navigation and bombing skills.

Naturally, there was an enquiry into the aircraft that had collapsed. It found that the pilot had retracted the undercarriage rather than undertake the mission. He was court-martialled, dismissed the Service, and sentenced to 18 months in prison. During this period my pilot and I attracted an unwanted degree of notoriety. On three occasions we returned from training sorties to find that we could not lower the undercarriage and had to conduct crash-landings! I never heard of another instance in the whole Canberra fleet, so for us to experience three failures was bizarre. Each was investigated and found to be outside our control. My three years on the Squadron were up and I moved to RAF Bassingbourn as a navigation instructor on the Canberra training unit. While there, Kathleen and I decided to get married and, in those days, officers had to get written permission from their CO's! I never understood what sanctions he could apply if he disapproved, but at least it gave him the opportunity to point out the conflicts between marriage and Service life. Clearly it worked, as we are still going strong after 66 years!

While at Bassingbourn, a pilot instructor and I were detailed to take a Canberra to Stavanger, Norway for an Airshow. Our "Party piece" for such occasions was to fly along the runway at 50 ft at max speed, pulling-up at the end into a loop and at the top, when we were inverted, select the undercarriage down, so creating an unusual sight of the undercarriage popping-upwards, whereupon we rolled level, continued downwind and landed. Alas, at the top of the loop there was a stream of bad language from my pilot: the undercarriage had failed to lower! Fortunately, we were able to pump it down manually, a remedy that I had tried, to no avail, on the earlier instances.

It was in this period that a far more serious incident occurred which was to turn military aviation upside down. It was always believed that the modern bomber, by virtue of its height and speed, had the advantage over the air defences. Indeed, the Americans had reconnaissance aircraft, U2s, that flew even higher than our bombers and were crossing the Soviet Union, unopposed, gathering intelligence. The Soviets knew they were there but couldn't reach them. That was, until a fateful day in 1960 when the Soviets rolled out a new missile system and not only shot a U2 down, but also captured the pilot.

The air force decided that a change of bomber tactics was necessary: instead of flying high and fast, we would fly low and fast: 200 ft and below. That way, because of the curvature of the Earth, the enemy radars would not pick-up the aircraft until very, very late. However, we soon found out that aircraft and navigation systems designed for high altitude operations, were not best suited to low-level operations. A new, dedicated low-level aircraft was needed. This was the beginning of the TSR2 project and prominent in this programme was the Experimental Aircraft Establishment at Boscombe Down, near Salisbury.

My next appointment was to a team at that unit tasked with evaluating the navigation systems proposed for the new aircraft. Alas, the project was eventually cancelled because of rocketing costs, but I'm pleased to say that some of the navigation systems that we worked-on were used in the follow-on aircraft, the Tornado.

Promoted, I was next appointed Flight Commander on 47 Squadron flying that wonderful aircraft: the C 130 Hercules. In my opinion, it was nearest thing to "a go anywhere, do anything" aircraft that you could get. It carried 100 passengers, or 50 fully equipped paratroopers. It could lift and deliver, either by landing on rough strips or by parachute, just about any piece of kit that the army might need in a battle-the exception was the Tank, that was too heavy and large even for us. It was a navigator's dream appointment: I personally flew as far West as the Caribbean and USA, as far East as Hong Kong, as far South as Australia and as far North as Greenland! Alas, it was also the source of the saddest memory of my whole career.

We were ordered to take eight aircraft to Pisa, Italy, where we were to embark an Italian paratroop battalion: 50 men to eight aircraft: 400 men. We were to take-off at night, follow a route around the Mediterranean to arrive over Sardinia at dawn and perform a mass para-assault. I was the Stream-leader,

and we took -off and turned onto heading, followed by numbers two and three who each called "Joining" as they followed us in loose formation. Then silence! I called "4 report your position", but no reply. Then ground control told us that "4" had crashed into the sea after take-off, killing the 50 paratroopers and 6 RAF crew! It was a national disaster: Italy had never lost so many people in one air crash and the Italian Press gave us hell. They accused the crew of drinking, said that they were not qualified for the task and that the aircraft was poorly maintained. It was a wretched time. The aircraft and the bodies were recovered and there was no evidence of alcohol in the crew, the engines were set as required for climb-out and the crew had undergone all the necessary checks for the operation. The conclusion, sadly, was "pilot error". It was a very dark night and immediately after leaving the brightly lit runway, you were over an inky-dark sea with no horizon and no visual prompts. The pilot should have switched to instruments, but it was assumed that he didn't and became disorientated and lost control. A tragedy.

I hugely enjoyed my travels and only wished that the family could have experienced the same. With my next appointment that wish was answered. I was appointed to the NATO HQ in Naples, Italy. I was part of an international team, headed-up by an Italian Air Force Colonel, responsible for monitoring Soviet activity in and around the Mediterranean: an interesting role. A tradition of the HQ was that the wives organised an annual Charity Bazaar, with each nation having a pitch reflecting national characteristics. We chose to stage an English pub, serving British beer (flown out courtesy of the RAF on their way to Cyprus) and home-made pub snacks. Someone suggested inviting Gracie Fields, the retired World -famous Music-hall star, who lived on Capri in the Bay of Naples. She accepted and, although then in her eighties and rather frail, she got up and sang a few of her "big hits" which "brought the house down".

Shortly afterwards I received notification that I was being promoted and moved to Cyprus! We had only been in Italy for 10 months, in which time we had to find and furnish accommodation and settle the children in school. The RAF had a saying for such situations: "If you can't take a joke, you shouldn't have joined!"

In Cyprus, the EOKA terrorist campaign was over by this time: British interests were confined to a narrow strip of territory to the East and South of the island known as the Sovereign Bases Area (SBA), while under the Agreement the rest of the island was an independent National State under the Presidency of

Archbishop Makarios. He had invited the Greek Army in to raise and train a Cypriot National Guard. On mainland Greece, however, the Greek Army had deposed the elected government and instituted Martial Law! The opportunity was therefore ripe for the Greek Army in Cyprus to depose President Makarios and achieve the long-held dream of "Enosis", the union of Greece and Cyprus, which had been the aim of the EOKA campaign. Makarios got wind of this and appealed to the British Government for help; the RAF was ordered to send a helicopter to pluck him to safety. The Turkish population, fearing for their safety, streamed into the SBA setting up "camps" on every piece of spare land, while the Turkish army invaded from the North through Kyrenia.

We thus had the unthinkable situation of two NATO armies facing-off on the island, while a third, the Brits, watched from the sidelines of the SBA! Our prime worry was the safety of the hundreds of our families that lived outside the SBA, in the Greek towns of Limassol and Famagusta etc. They were ordered to lock-up their homes and move into the SBA with a suitcase apiece. We had a pleasant, three bedroomed Quarter for our family of three children, but received three wives and six child without warning! The overcrowding in the Cypriot heat was extremely trying and gave rise to problems: after a few days an airlift to the UK was arranged to ease the situation. The United Nations sent a force to separate the two armies and a form of peace ensued, allowing our families to return. The rest of my tour in Cyprus was uneventful and, at the end of my three years, we returned to UK where I was appointed OC 360 Squadron at RAF Wyton, near Huntingdon.

360 Sqn was a joint Service unit, two thirds of the personnel were RAF while the remainder were from the Fleet Air Arm ie Navy. We were equipped with Canberra T17s: modified Bomber versions with the bomb-bay converted to carry a host of clever electronic devices designed to confuse early- warning radars and communications ie electronic warfare (EW). It was believed that any Soviet attack on the UK would be preceded by an intense EW campaign, our job was to simulate this to provide training for all three Services. The T17 carried a crew of three: pilot, navigator and electronic warfare officer (EWO) who all could be from either Service. During exercises we would position in Norway and mount "raids" against the UK, "jamming" the Early Warning radars as we came within range, they would react by launching fighters to investigate, but we would then get onto the radio frequencies that they were using and sing, shout, play music etc to disrupt their instructions-real bully-boy tactics! This was often at night and the potential for accidents was real, consequently

one radio frequency was always kept clear and a codeword transmitted on that would stop all the interference. Most of this activity occurred over the North Sea, an inhospitable region at the best of times, but in Winter lethal. Had we had to "ditch" in Winter, life expectancy was measured in minutes; for this reason, we wore immersion suits-heavy, one-piece rubber-impregnated canvas suits, with seals at the neck, wrists and ankles. Three hours sat on an ejection seat, clad in one of those made you feel that you had earned your money!

The three years in command passed all too quickly and I then moved to the staff of the National Defence College, which provided a six month course for officers of all three Services to acquaint them with the broader problems of defence and the aspects peculiar to the various arms. It drew lectures from academics, Government, politicians and senior officers from all three Services. At the end of that assignment, I feared that I would end up behind a desk in the Ministry of Defence, not a prospect that excited me! Fortunately, I saw a notice in Orders inviting volunteer to head-up a RAF Advisory team to the Nigerian Joint Services Staff College, I applied and was accepted!

When I asked MOD for more details, they said: "list what you would need for a three-week caravan holiday, then multiply everything by 52 and that should see you through your three years in Nigeria!" Kathleen was not impressed when I passed on the advice! Nevertheless, that is what we did, and it worked! The team comprised myself and fifteen other officers and we fitted in well with our Nigerian hosts. It wasn't that long after the Biafran War and the Nigerian Forces were consequently made up of personnel from both sides. We were impressed by spirit of reconciliation, though it was achieved at the cost of standards.

Being such a small unit, we had none of the usual support services and relied solely on local facilities, this led to one testing situation. One of our wives was parking her car downtown in Kaduna when she was ambushed by a local, brandishing a revolver and demanding her car keys! She told him what he could do in no uncertain terms, whereupon he shot her, the bullet entering her groin, narrowly missing the Femoral artery. She was rushed to the local hospital, we had no medical coverage in the team, and successfully operated on. The Nigerian system differed from the NHS in many respects, one of which was that they provided medical care, but feeding and patient care was down to the family. Our wives organised a rota to ferry meals to the hospital, thankfully she made a full recovery.

Although our Quarter was only a standard four bedroomed house, we had a cook, maid, gardener, night guard and driver! The cook and maid could never agree, and their squabbles were tiresome in that heat. Eventually, I had the cook, "Sunday" by name, in and asked what the problem was. It was Veronica, the maid's fault, he said, "she comes into our hut at night and jumps on my wife's stomach preventing her conceiving"! To my suggestion that he locked his door, he said that it was her "spirit" that entered and anyway, the lock on the door was broken. When I attempted to repair the lock, I ended up locked in his hut, to which he said triumphantly, "Maybe no voodoo in Britain, but in Nigeria there's plenty voodoo". Game, set and match to Sunday! It was a memorable tour, with many happy memories.

On return to the UK I was given command of JARIC, the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Unit at RAF Brampton, near Huntingdon. No doubt you have all seen those wartime photographs of people looking through magnifying glasses, extracting intelligence from aerial photos. Well, that was JARIC's role., except that the photographs that we were now examining, were from a US satellite orbiting the Soviet Union. In the 80's the fact that the US had this capability and was sharing the information with UK was Top Secret. Everyone in the Unit, from the most junior airman to me had been "cleared" by the Security Services and sworn not to divulge the source to anyone, even Kathleen was unaware of what I was up to! So it was a surprise one day to receive a phone call from MOD, saying that, as reward for our efforts, we were being given a Royal Visit: HRH The Princess Margaret would visit the Unit on such and such a date, but on no account were we to show her, or mention, satellite photography as she did not have the requisite security clearance! This was a huge limitation, as over 90% of our work was on that source. It was true that we also examined conventional photos, primarily from the "troubles" in Northern Ireland and some work for the Police, but that was "small beer". The Big Day arrived, and a highly polished helicopter of the Royal Flight landed on our Sports Field and HRH and her Lady-in-Waiting emerged. I escorted them to the Secure Compound enclosing the Unit where the wives and children had gathered outside waving flags etc and HRH said the most surprising thing: "Isn't it wonderful to see the children so happy and healthy, not a sign of Rickets anywhere!!" Why she should think that Rickets could be present on an RAF station in the 80's I can't imagine! During the presentations on our work, I had the distinct feeling that she was aware that we were not telling her the full story, but after drinks in the Sergeants' Mess and lunch with the Officers, she relaxed and left on a "high note".

After three years at JARIC it was time for my final appointment which would take me to my retirement age of 55. My luck was in, with an appointment to NATO HQ in Brussels! NATO HQ is the political HQ, the military HQ is SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe) at Mons, Belgium. The role of the military in NATO HQ was to brief the national representatives on the current Military situation and answer queries. Again, I was working in an international team which I very much enjoyed, my "boss" was a Dutch Admiral and it was a happy "ship". The Secretary General at the time was Lord Carrington, who had been Minister of Defence in Margaret Thatcher's Government. He had also won a Military Cross in the Second World War, so was well versed in military matters.

I returned to the UK in 1988 and left the Service after 36 interesting and happy years. For the next ten years I was the Technical Director of the Agricultural Engineers Association, a case of "beating swords into ploughshares"!