

Alan Barnett has written some memories of his father
WO Edwin Arnold Barnett :

Dad was a great guy, everyone loved him & he always put time & personal interests aside to help others whether it be with fixing old radios & tv's or motorcycles & cars. I'm touching 64yrs now, but whenever I catch the scent of Brylcreem memories of working with Dad out in his workshop still come flooding back; he persisted in wearing his old RAF (Brylcreem infused) beret whenever he tinkered with mechanical problems.

Dad was so proud of his RAF career & his stories, from WW2 & beyond, linger with me even now. He'd love to know the latest Lightning aircraft are now stationed at RAF Marham (I think I read an article relating to that quite recently?). I think I might be one of the last RAF kids to have been born in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon)? Upon my birth, at RAF Negombo Base Hospital, Dad had to fly immediately to Singapore to register my birth since the Sinhalese Govt at the time was somewhat anti-British. Thus I have the dubious honour of holding two birth certificates... one in Sinhalese & the other in English but registered in Singapore.

We lived at RAF Marham for many years until Dad retired from the RAF. Our first home was at 91 Hall Crescent, from where we looked thro' perimeter mesh to outbuildings &, if I recall, barracks. The serried ranks of Greyhound missiles always fascinated me & upon my asking why they were all pointing in the same direction, Dad would quietly say: "They're pointing at Russia, son. They're pointing at Russia". Back then, I imagined

Russia to be full of very dark & dangerous people all looking in the direction of the UK.

- Later, we moved from 91 Hall Crescent to 286 Elm Rd... following Dad's promotion to Warrant Officer. I think it was HRH Princess Marina (of Greece & Denmark?) who visited RAF Marham in June, 1964(?)... I was around 11 yrs of age then. Our house, at 286 Elm Rd, sat right on a corner just across a large patch of grass from the main road leading into Marham village. The Princess' official cortege was scheduled to follow the main road thro' RAF Marham, passing within full view of our house.

The entire camp had been prepared for the official Royal Visit... grass nice & green, everything along the route spic & span. But a day or so before a tremendous thunderstorm hit RAF Marham. Lightning struck our house at 286 Elm Rd, taking out the entire brick chimney & part of the roof... I was playing in the lounge at the time & my mother was working in the kitchen. There was a terrific bang, our little black Cocker Spaniel ran around in circles yelping in terror, bricks & soot exploded out of the fireplace narrowly missing the dog & myself, & my Mum rushed into the lounge to rescue us both.

The Commanding Officer at the time had heard or witnessed the lightning strike from Ladywood House, his official residence, or thereabouts, & he came racing over to check on things & discovered my mother huddling on the floor holding me & our dog. Dad was not far behind, since he was returning home for lunch, & if he had arrived only moments earlier the cascade of

house (chimney) bricks would have landed on top of him.

The fire-crew came out & secured a huge tarpaulin over the demolished roof, bearing in mind it was pouring with rain at the time. When the Princess' cortege passed by they were greeted with the sight of a partially demolished house covered in ropes & tarps... unfortunately, it could not be hidden from view.

- I also recall a 'Ban the Bomb' march that targeted on RAF Marham, but the date escapes me. I was late home from playing at a friend's house & got mixed up with the 'Ban the Bomb' crowd... I'd been warned to get home early but, like most young boys, I conveniently ignored my parents' instructions. My Dad came out looking for me, somehow found me & took me out of harm's way.

The marchers were extremely agitated & I recall a lot of yelling & waving of banners & placards. It was quite intimidating at the time. I understand the marchers climbed over the airfield perimeter fence only to be met by Police Dogs & Handlers & Military Police. Then, if I'm correct, fire-hoses were turned on the marchers to keep them away from the aircraft (Valiants), & I think one of the aircraft might have been fired-up & positioned so the jet exhaust bowled the marchers back from the aircraft... I'm not sure, but that account rings a bell. I do know that RAF servicemen were tossing the marchers back over the fence as they climbed over. Young boys tend to remember such exciting events.

- I worked at RAF Marham, for one year & in a civilian capacity with Wimpey Construction,

building the big concrete hangars & hard-pans in preparation for the arrival of either Tornadoes or Jaguars(?). I assume they are still there?

- I also worked, as a young family man, for some years in the camp Barracks Stores. I was out on the pantehnicon (the old 'Pantech') every day, come rain come shine, delivering furniture, etc, to the base houses. So I knew the base layout very well back then. I recall us driving thro' the main barricade & smashing the pole by the main gates/Guardroom during a base security exercise. Some of the young airmen were armed with pick-axe handles & their cockiness had begun to wear thin after several trips back & forth from the Barracks Stores out into the base housing; we resented being stopped & checked every time we passed thro' the gate, which was swung down & hit the cab before we could stop.
- I also spent a year, as a Barracks Stores employee, helping a carpet-fitter from Norwich lift old carpeting in the Officers' Quarters & re-laying brand-new carpet. The Stores staff would trim & edge suitable off-cuts for future distribution. The serried rolls of carpet being stored in the Supply Squadron building alongside the base laundry depot & our civvys' tearoom. A young airman's wife suffered a horrific accident at that time while working off-camp during the potato harvest. Her arm was trapped in some agricultural machinery & was amputated. We laid new carpet in their home in an effort to provide some assistance & comfort, but the poor girl was in a terrible state.
- Civvy names I recall from that section: 'Jock' Baird (ex-Warrant Officer/Barracks Stores manager);

Alan Yallop (laundry); John Badham (Storeman); Alan ? (young skinny kid/Storeman); George Alger (ex-RAF Sgt Cook/Storeman on the pantech); Trevor ? (Storeman/Admin); Tom ? (Supply Sqdn tea-room cleaner/doled out the tea & coffee); others whose faces I can recall but not their names.

- We were once delivering furniture to a house just across from the Guardroom & I noticed the bedroom, above the front door, was on fire. The occupant's teenage daughter was at home & it appears she was unaware an electric-heater had ignited something in the room. George Alger went in to quickly check for other occupants while I ran across to the Guardroom to raise the alarm. The bedroom window blew out in a gout of flame & broken glass. The fire-crew arrived &, ironically, it turned out one of the fire-crew was the occupant of the house. I recall the hand-held trigger-hose didn't work properly & I think there was an official inquiry into that later on.
- I also recall an RAF Officer was building a concrete-hulled yacht on base, but the thing seemed to sit there for years. I've no idea if it was ever finished.
- My childhood friends, on base, included Alan Jones, Timothy Roberts (Officer's son), Philippa Skevington/Skeffington (lived just along from us in Elm Rd/her parents were, I believe, Polish), Adrian Wostenholme (not sure of correct spelling/an Officer's son), Renee or Raily(?) Neale/Neal/Neil (lived just around from Hall Crescent/her father was an American serviceman... I recall a child being hit by a car back then in that vicinity & it might've been the US serviceman's daughter).