

REMEMBER THE SUMMER OF 1961-By Phil Mills

The following item has been reproduced from the book 'Over and Out- A History of RAF Locking' by Squadron Leader Ray Tillbrook

Remember the summer of 1961, many will because it was a lovely time to be a Member of the Senior Entry at RAF Locking. There was something quite challenging about defying the odds and illegally crawling out of the camp through the hole in the hedge behind the Officer's Mess, to escape to the Brewer's Arms in Banwell, or somewhere else out of bounds for two or three pints and a game of darts. In those days we could get blissfully blotto on three pints of scrumpy for half a crown. The lucky few of us with motorbikes in handy secret hideaways near the camp, roared away with pillion passengers hanging on for dear life to places further afield, like Draycott to do a bit of strawberry picking, to get a few bob to spend at the Strawberry Inn afterwards.

Talking of the Strawberry Inn - It was a week after the 1961 Draycod Strawberry Fare, after chucking out time at the Strawberry Inn, when some gallant merry makers of the 90th entry were leaving the pub. They were hailed by attractive young lady leaning out of her bedroom window. 'Here, you boys, will ee do something for me'? The pleading by such damsel just couldn't be ignored. Her father had locked her in the bedroom because she wanted to elope with her boyfriend. While we were talking to her the father came out and told us to, mind your own business and go away in short jerky movements'. But the pleas of his broken-hearted daughter were rather like a call of nature – it just had to be answered. The father got more than he bargained for, he was tied to a chair, his daughter released, who was last seen driving off on a tractor with her boyfriend towards Cheddar.

Remember FS Beetell? We called him 'Beetle'. He didn't like the 90th - he was in the wrong squadron. He always seemed to turn up at the wrong time, one moment the coast was clear, the next Beetle appeared on his bike. Beetle and his bike were an item as we rarely saw him off it, but one day we did. He was spied going into a B Squadron hut and he left his bike where it could be pinched and pinched it was. It was next spotted during the following morning's NAAFI break suspended high above the apprentices' heads in the middle of the indoor parade ground. How on earth Beetle's bike was ever suspended from so high up in the roof structure of 3(T) was a real mystery, because it took special equipment to retrieve it later.

Talking about Flight Sergeants -Ted Pollard was Duty Sergeant one night. He was checking on the guard and was stood beneath the water tower having a quiet five minutes and a fag when he heard a little sound from above. Shining his torch he saw looking down at him one of his apprentices - Curly Cambelton with an entry flag in his hands. Curly was dangling upside down over the side at the top of the water tower held by his ankles by two of his compatriots, unseen from below. 'It's OK Chief' whispered Curly 'you finish your fag I'll be done in a tick'. The entry flag remained in place for two days before being removed.

When the old huts were being demolished the workmen put all the old toilet pans to one side to be taken away later and they made a second mistake by leaving sand and cement around, too. It was getting close to passing out time and every parade had a rehearsal. On the parade square everything was in order, all the spots were marked for the markers and flight commanders. What fun it would be, we thought, to mark the spots with something everyone would see - but with what? Toilet Pans was the answer! Four of us busied ourselves under cover of darkness-two taking toilet pans to the parade square, one mixing mortar and the other keeping cavy. Heavy stuff mortar, heavier than toilet pans, but we stuck at it and eventually everything was assembled. On the parade square over each marker spot a toilet pan was set into a good dollop of cement. On the dais were set three toilet pans, one each for the Commandant, his Adjutant and the stand-in Reviewing Officer. The next morning the Apprentice Wing assembled on time for the passing out rehearsal. Suddenly as the junior entries were about to march on the Wing Warrant Officer began to do his nut at the Parade Square. All hell was let loose, he was shouting at people and bawling left right and centre. The junior entries marched on 40 minutes late. Being the senior entry we marched on last. The Wing Warrant Officer stood at the marching on point with a face like thunder. There wasn't a toilet pan to be seen anywhere, just a lot of dirty wet patches and no nice marked out spots. Nothing was ever said about the incident afterwards, but someone found another use for the toilet pans. They appeared on the top of 2(T), all beautifully lined up as if on parade with a big banner underneath proclaiming 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here'.

Then there was the night when midnight parade rehearsal. Bullied up to the eyeballs - pyjamas, gleaming hob nailed boots and brasses, rifles and white webbing. We got the smallest apprentice from the junior entry to take the salute and then marched off with rifles at the slope and fixed bayonets through the Officers Married Quarters. They were all in bed and we woke everyone up - except our flight commander - Ted Edwards. Someone else rang him just to tell him, 'your bastards are at it again.' Ted watched us march past his house from behind his bedroom curtain, expecting an angry call from the Commandant which never came.

We had some fun with Ted. He came round on a bull night and while he was inside we put his new Mini on a foot high concrete plinth some workmen had just constructed. And who remembers how many balloons we blew up to cram C Squadron offices so full that Ted and the others had difficulty in opening the doors the next day let alone get into the offices?

Who remembers the ghost of the headless airman who walked from the Apprentice's NAAFI to Sick Quarters, via the junior entry billet? Frightened the poor little dears out of their wits apparently.

The World War Two Mine

In the summer of 1960 the 90th Entry went to Penhale Sands, near Newquay on summer camp. On the sea front was a mine painted red to collect donations for the RNLI. When the two weeks were up, the 90th Entry returned to RAF Locking and the 91st Entry went to Penhale. The red mine was still there, but not for long. Whether it was a combined entry effort is not clear, but some form of illegally obtained transport was used to move the mine from Newquay to a secret location near to, or on the camp. In those days there was a rostrum for a policeman to direct traffic at a busy junction in Weston (High Street and Regent Street-Burton's Corner). Very early one morning a few of the 90th and 91st entries took the mine to Weston on a cart and placed it on the rostrum. The local coppers soon discovered it and their suspicions were soon aroused by a group of young men seen on the road near Weston Airport with a sturdy cart running in the direction of the camp. The long and the short of it was when challenged they owned up and were made to return to Weston and remove the mine. It is said that the mine decorated a farmer's muck heap for some time, and then disappeared - only to turn up again months later.