LIFE IN THE KIPPER FLEET

By

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In July 1964 I completed aircrew training as a Signaller and went on leave for a couple of weeks. With many others from our course I had been posted onto Avro Shackletons, to serve in Coastal Command; it was affectionately known as the Kipper Fleet. In those days it was a huge organisation. Shackletons served in RAF Coastal Command, the Middle East Air Force and Far East Air Force. Squadrons were stationed at RAF Ballykelly (Northern Ireland), RAF Kinloss (Scotland), RAF St Mawgan (Cornwall), RAF Gibraltar, RAF Luqa (Malta), RAF Khormaksar (Aden) and RAF Changi (Singapore) and at one time RAF St Eval (Cornwall).

Humour was an essential element of Kipper Fleet life. Laughter made the long hours of standby duties, seemingly endless flights in all sorts of weather and long separations from families tolerable. With whimsical and gentle humour in mind the following captures some memories of my time in the Kipper Fleet.

Avro Shackleton

The Avro Shackleton was a long-range maritime patrol aircraft used by the RAF. It was developed by Avro from the company’s Lincoln bomber but fitted with a new fuselage. It was used in the anti-submarine warfare, maritime patrol, colonial policing, search and rescue (SAR) roles and later adapted for airborne early warning (AEW). In total the Shack served from 1951 until 1990. It also served in the South African Air Force from 1957 to 1984. Shackleton equipped RAF squadrons were: 37, 38, 42, 120, 203, 204, 205, 206, 210, 224, 269 and ultimately 8 Squadron (in the Airborne Early Warning role). In addition, 35 Squadron in the South African Air Force operated the aircraft.

The maritime Shackleton carried a crew of 10; two pilots, two navigators, five signallers/AE Ops and one flight engineer. It had a maximum speed of 260 knots and a range of 1,950 nm. Four Rolls-Royce Griffon liquid-cooled V12 engines powered contra-rotating propellers. Armament included twin 20 mm Hispano cannon in the nose, bombs, torpedoes and depth charges as required. It was equipped with radar, sonar equipment, VHF, UHF and HF radios together with sophisticated navigation equipment. A total of 185 Shackletons were built.

Sea Survival Course

Before we started the conversion course to Shackletons at the Maritime Operational Training Unit (MOTU) at RAF Kinloss we had to complete a sea survival course at RAF Mountbatten, near Plymouth.

In those days the RAF had its own Marine Branch equipped with high speed marine craft (launches and crews). As Shackleton crews spent a large part of their lives over the sea it was essential that they knew how to survive in their salty waters should they ever be forced to ditch in them. After classroom lectures we faced the practical lesson. We were taken out to sea and dumped in the water. A large dinghy was thrown into the water; it was our job to pull the cord to inflate it and get it upright as ‘so and so’s law’ prevailed; when it inflated it was upside down in the water. As we struggled with this task the launch sped past causing waves which added to the difficulty of ‘righting’ the dinghy.
We tried to board the dinghy, not an easy task in rough seas. Eventually one of us managed to clamber in and was able to help haul in the others. By this time there was a fair amount of water in the dinghy which we had to bale out. We experimented with various bits of survival equipment including launching a kite to carry an aerial for the emergency radio transmitter, known as the ‘Dinghy Radio, which would be available in a real life situation. After a while a SAR helicopter appeared and lifted and deposited us one by one on the marine craft’s deck. Never having been hoisted and deposited by a helicopter I was unprepared for the electric shock that I experienced on acting as a conductor for the static electricity generated by the helicopter. I acted as the earth point when I made contact with the deck of the launch and the electricity eagerly used me as the quickest route to earth. Ouch!
Maritime Operational Training Unit

The task of training new crews in the intricacies of flying and operating the Shackleton was the responsibility of the Maritime Operation Training Unit (MOTU) on the Avro Shackleton T4 aircraft. MOTU was based at RAF Kinloss in Scotland.

RAF Kinloss is near Kinloss on the Moray Firth in the north of Scotland. It opened on 1 April 1939 and initially served as a Pilot Training School. However, during most of the war it served as a bomber operational training unit. After the war it was handed over to Coastal Command.

Detached to RAF Wick

When we completed the sea survival course and returned to Kinloss there was a message waiting for me to report to Operations. The start of a big NATO exercise was very imminent. MOTU crews were taking part. One crew was short of a member and from a cast of thousands I was to fill that shortage. At that time I hadn't even stepped inside a Shackleton. Also we were deploying to RAF Wick in the north of Scotland to operate from there. All I had time to do was to dump my kit in the Sergeant's Mess, pack some fresh stuff, get kitted out for flight and report for duty as a crew member.

I arrived at the Operations Room to find that we were carrying out Search and Rescue mission looking for a light aircraft that had ditched in the sea. We took off on my first flight in a Shackleton on 20 September 1964. On completing it we landed at RAF Wick. The second flight, a Survex (Surveillance Exercise), lasted 13 hours and 55 minutes. I thought the world had come to an end.

Initially RAF Wick was shared between Fighter and Coastal Commands, with fighter squadrons based here for the protection of Scapa Flow. However, in 1940 Wick became a Coastal Command base. The station remained as such until the end of the war, flying patrols over the North Sea and Atlantic Ocean and making long range meteorological and reconnaissance flights. The last squadron left Wick in March 1946. After this the airfield reverted to civil operation which it remains to this day.

The accommodation used by the Shackleton crew during the exercise was extremely primitive. Switching on the light saw sparks dancing along the wiring followed by a blackout. The heating was antiquated; a coke fire in a cast iron stove provided what little warmth it could.
Shackleton

A Shackleton crew consisted of two pilots, two navigators, one AEO, four signallers/AE Ops and one flight engineer.

Entrance to the aircraft was on the starboard side. The Elsan was on the left hand side of the aircraft and to the left of the entrance. Going forward the two beam lookout positions were first encountered. In the same area flares, sea markers and cameras were stored. A door led to the crew rest area containing two bunks, normally used to stow kit. Opposite the bunks were flare guns used for illumination during night bombing sorties. The galley was forward of the rest bunks was the galley. The main spars were the next obstacle. The radar station was reached past the first main spar followed by the second one. The sonar station was situated between the spars on the aircraft's left hand side. Moving forward the tactical navigator's position preceded the Nav plotter's station. The sonar and both navigators position faced to the left hand side of the aircraft. The wireless operator and engineer faced forward behind the pilots. The nose was accessed between the pilots.

Maritime Operational Training Unit Conversion Course

Signallers/AEOps attended numerous classes on theory covering radar, radio, coding, sonar, ship and aircraft recognition and naval operations. We used a simulator to learn about and practice radar homings in the simulated environment.

Eventually the time came to put theory into practise. As a crew we carried out a number of sorties which included radar homings. A contact would appear on the radar screen; the radar operator passed a position of the contact to the navigator in the form of bearing and range and then guided the pilot to the contact by giving headings and directions left or right. At various ranges instructions were given, for example “Blue Silk to memory” and at night “Flares, flares”. The navigator acting as bomb aimer took over when visual contact was made and dropped practise bombs.
NAVEX to Gibraltar

Our last sorties were long range navigation exercises (NAVEX) to Gibraltar and back. The outbound route was from Kinloss, along the Caledonian Canal and out into the Atlantic. We then headed west north-west to find Rockall. From there we turned south until close to Gibraltar where we were to turn east. Some distance abeam of Portugal we received a wireless message saying that due to an out of limits crosswind at Gibraltar we had to land at Lisbon International.

Three Shackletons landed at Lisbon and taxied to park alongside a South African Airways Boeing 707 and three Air Portugal Lockheed Constellations. The Shack crews made their way into the terminal where breakfast was provided courtesy of a representative from the British Embassy; he must have been delighted to have been dragged from his bed at some unearthly hour to take charge of a bunch of Shackleton aircrew.

For the next three hours or so we settled in the airport lounge restaurant. Some ate breakfast, some dozed while one was seen chatting up an air hostess.

Some three hours later the wind in Gibraltar had dropped and we continued our journey.

Flight time Kinloss to Lisbon 10 hours and 20 minutes through the night. Lisbon to Gibraltar - 1 hour and 50 minutes in daylight.

Rockall

Rockall is an extremely small, uninhabited, remote rocky island in the North Atlantic. It is about 83 feet (25.3 metres) wide and 102 feet (31 metres) long at its base and rises sheer to a height of approximately 70 feet (21.4 metres). Britain, Ireland, Denmark and Iceland all claim Rockall. The UK formally claimed uninhabited Rockall on 18 September 1955.
Numerous ideas come to mind as to how British Sovereignty can be maintained with respect to the rock. One idea is shown. Doubtless the Army’s posting organisation would desperately have to seek volunteers for such a duty.

Posted to 204 Squadron

At the end of the conversion course I was posted to 204 Squadron at RAF Ballykelly. 204 Squadron was formed in 1918 near Dunkirk, France from No 4 Squadron Royal Naval Air Service. In 1919 it was disbanded. The squadron was reformed on 1 February 1929 as a general reconnaissance flying boat squadron at RAF Mountbatten equipped initially with Supermarine Southampton flying boats. During WW2 the squadron, equipped with Sunderlands, carried out anti-submarine patrols initially from the Shetlands and Iceland and later from Gibraltar, ultimately operating from the West Coast of Africa. It disbanded in 1945.

In 1947 204 Squadron reformed in Egypt as a transport squadron flying the Douglas Dakota. In 1949 the aircraft were replaced by the Vickers Valetta. In February 1953, the squadron was again disbanded. In January 1954 it was reformed at Ballykelly as a maritime reconnaissance squadron equipped with Shackletons.

During my time 204 Squadron was equipped with Mk2 Shackletons. The Shackleton was known by other terms. “10,000 rivets flying in loose formation”, “a contra-rotating Nissen hut, “the flying spark plug” and “the old grey lady” are a handful of such terms.

RAF Ballykelly

RAF Ballykelly opened in June 1941 during WW2 as a Coastal Command airfield. Liberators flew from Ballykelly in the fight against German U-boats, in areas ranging from the Bay of Biscay to northern Norway.

In 1943, the main runway was extended and acquired an unusual characteristic in that it crossed an active railway line. The runway had been extended to around 6000ft. to allow the later marks of Liberator to operate at maximum weight. This had necessitated crossing the main Londonderry-Belfast railway line and it was decided that trains had precedence over aircraft!
The airfield was closed at the end of WW2, but re-opened in 1947 as the home of the RAF Joint Anti-Submarine School, a training flight flying Shackletons. It closed briefly in 1951 to allow preparatory work to be done for the arrival of the Shackleton aircraft in 1952.

When I served at Ballykelly 203, 204 and 210 Squadrons operated Shackletons. 203 Squadron had Mk3 aircraft; the other two squadrons operated the Mk 2.

**Canadian Detachment**

A few weeks after joining 204 Squadron our crew was one of five that went to Canada for a month to take part in a big NATO exercise.

We flew from Ballykelly to Keflavik in Iceland, stayed the night there and then onto RCAF Summerside on Prince Edward Island. It was my first time across “The Pond”. Also I was the W/T operator on that flight. As well as keeping in touch with the RAF and then the RCAF network position reports were transmitted to the Oceanic Control. The Oceanic network was alive with transmissions to and from all manner of aircraft crossing the Atlantic. Most were jets of the Boeing 707 and DC8 variety that travelled much faster than our 200 knots and at much higher altitudes. Flight time from Ballykelly to Keflavik was 4 hours and 10 minutes and from Keflavik to Summerside it was 11 hours and 10 minutes; the ground controllers must have wondered what they were dealing with as five lumbering Shackletons at a low altitude, each separated by about 30 minutes flight time, crawled and reported their progress across “The Pond”.
RCAF Summerside was an air force base located in Prince Edward Island, Canada. The base opened in 1941 as a Flying Training School that operated under the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. During the Cold War, the base was home to anti-submarine and coastal patrol aircraft such as the Lancaster B.X, CP-122 Neptune, CP-107 Argus, and CP-121 Tracker.

The Argus was the RCAF’s Long Range Maritime Patrol Aircraft. It carried search radar, sono-buoys, electronic counter measures, explosive echo ranging (EER) and magnetic anomaly detector (MAD) equipment. Weapons carried in the bomb bays, included torpedoes, bombs, mines and depth charges.

The aircraft’s flight crew of fifteen consisted of three pilots, three navigators, two flight engineers and 6 radio officers until the early sixties when the crew included both commissioned officers (tactical navigator/radio navigator and non commissioned officers (observers), the number of which was dependent on the mission. Four crew bunks and a galley were provided to extend the efficiency of the crew on long patrols. The Argus had an endurance of approximately 26½ hours with a full armament load.

In Canada we flew 5 flights in the exercise; the longest was 14 hours and 55 minutes.
We returned to UK with a night stop at Argentia, Newfoundland. Flight time, Summerside to Argentia – 2 hours; Argentia to Ballykelly – 8 hours 30 minutes.

“Manders”

Pilots had to remain current in all areas of flying. On a monthly basis aircraft would pound the circuit with the pilots carrying out “Mandatory” training; the term used was ‘Manders’. It consisted of activities such as circuits and bumps as well as Radar approaches and Instrument Landing System (ILS) let downs.

For these flights we carried a skeleton crew: two pilots, one navigator, two signallers and the flight engineer.

Chasing the Soviet Navy

At various times during the year we would deploy to Norway to chase the Soviets when they exercised their fleet in the Norwegian Sea. Royal Norwegian Air Force bases at Andoya, Bodo and Oerland were our usual stopovers.

On rare occasions we came across Soviet naval aircraft, or they came across us.
If a suspected periscope or snorkel was detected on radar we would home the aircraft to the contact’s position; the contact would probably had disappeared by the time we arrived. Sonar buoys were dropped to track any would be submarine. Three buoys were dropped, two passive and one active. On contact with the sea acoustic devices dropped down to preset depths in the ocean. The passive buoys received noise signals and transmitted them to display bearing information of the source of sound and transmitted the data to display equipment in the aircraft. The active buoy transmitted and received range and bearing data, also transmitting them to the aircraft. I don’t doubt that very occasionally in the Norwegian Sea a whale would be playing a game with us.
It was not uncommon to come across whales while flying in the Arctic regions.

When considering the work that the Griffon engines had to do throughout extended flights it is not surprising that occasionally we would experience the odd engineering problem.
The Shackleton’s WW2 lineage sometimes attracted airborne interest.

In Flight Feeding

There is no doubt that we fed well while flying in the Kipper Fleet. We ordered rations before each flight; the Duty NCO collected them from the Catering Squadron. Each crew had a crew box, a large wooden, hinged container. In it we kept cooking utensils, knives, forks, spoons and plates together with items such as salt, pepper, sauce and curry powder.

On board the aircraft was a galley with a water heater and hotplate. Mainly the Siggies did the cooking. Egg and bacon sandwiches were a favourite as was what was known as “Honkers Stew”, a mixture of tinned meat and vegetables with curry powder added. Coffee and tea were made frequently and distributed throughout the crew. On joining a crew if a Siggy couldn’t cook he soon learnt how to.

Search and Rescue

One major duty carried out by the Shackleton was search and rescue. Its slow speed, long endurance and lots of look-out positions were well suited to the role. In addition, it could
carry large amounts of SAR equipment in the form of Lindholme gear, air-dropped rescue equipment designed at RAF Lindholme, Yorkshire during the Second World War to aid survivors who ditched in the sea. It is still in use.

Throughout the UK the Kipper Fleet provided SAR cover all year round. Aircraft and crews were on a 24 hour standby. The target response time from callout to getting airborne was 15 minutes.

The Lindholme Gear consists of cylinder-shaped containers joined together by lengths of floating rope. The centre container contains an inflatable dinghy with the other containers housing survival equipment such as emergency rations. The gear was carried in the weapons bay of the Shackleton and dropped up-wind of survivors. The Dinghy would inflate on impact and then drift towards the survivors.
Indonesian Confrontation

In the 1960s Indonesia was politically opposed to the creation of Malaysia. This opposition led to the Indonesia–Malaysia confrontation during 1962–1966. The confrontation was an undeclared war with most of the action taking place in the border area between Indonesia and East Malaysia on the island of Borneo. In 1964 the Indonesians had started to infiltrate regular forces by parachute and a full scale war was in prospect. The UK decided to strengthen its forces in the area and, as part of this build-up, a Coastal Command detachment was to be sent to bolster 205 Squadron, the resident Shackleton squadron at Changi, Singapore.

The task fell to the Ballykelly squadrons, and as the duration of the commitment was obviously uncertain it was planned that each squadron nominally took command of the four aircraft and four crew detachments for a three month period.

In 1965 the crew that I was on, together with three other crews and ground crew flew from Ballykelly to Singapore to start a three month detachment. We flew in a British Eagle Britannia. The aircraft picked us up at Ballykelly. We flew to London Heathrow, then via Bahrain and RAF Gan to our destination at Singapore's National Airport. Flight time was about 24 hours.

Labuan

Shackletons maintained a detachment at Labuan from 1963 to at least 1966 during the Indonesian confrontation. From Labuan Shackletons flew reconnaissance flights known as ‘Tawau Recces’ basically looking for seaborne infiltration by Indonesians. Part of 204 Squadron’s detachment to Singapore involved a detachment to Labuan in Borneo.

The island of Labuan is located just off the coast of the Sultanate of Brunei in Borneo. During World War II, Japan occupied the island and renamed it Maida Island. When Britain resumed power in 1945, it assumed its former name. In 1963 Britain ceded the island to Sabah when Malaysia was formed.

A number of aircraft types operated from Labuan in addition to Shackletons. They included Single and Twin Pioneer, Valetta and the Blackburn Beverley aircraft.
Not many aircraft have the ability to select reverse and move backwards. One that could was the Beverley. Aircraft parking space was very limited at RAF Labuan, particularly when aircraft such as the Shackleton needed quite a large turning circle. The Beverley overcame the problem by positioning itself in front of the space selected for parking, selecting reverse pitch and reversing into the space.

We were housed in aluminium huts and had to sleep under mosquito nets. The local mosquitoes seemed to operate in quick pursuit squadrons and were armed with armour piercing beaks.
Flight - Singapore to UK

On ending our detachment to Changi we flew a Shackleton back to Ballykelly. We had a night stop at RAAF Butterworth in Malaysia; then we flew to Gan. From there we flew to Khormaksar in Aden, onto El-Adem in Libya and then to Luqa in Malta. The final leg of the journey was from Luqa to Ballykelly.

Flight details are:

Changi to Butterworth – 2 hours.
Butterworth to Gan – 9 hours and 25 minutes.
Gan to Khormaksar – 9 hours and 50 minutes.
Khormaksar to El-Adem – 9 hours and 10 minutes.
El-Adem to Luqa – 2 hours and 50 minutes.
Luqa to Ballykelly – 8 hours and 35 minutes.
Total Flying time – 41 hours 20 minutes spread over 6 days.

RAF El Adam (Libya)

RAF El – Adem, in Libya was opened as a RAF airfield in December 1942 and closed in 1970. It is located 15 miles south of Tobruk. From what I remember it was surrounded by lots of sand and was pretty isolated. The MT section seemed to have some interesting vehicles to cope with the sand and desert.

Surtsey

Surtsey, a volcanic island approximately 32 km off the southern coast of Iceland, is an island formed by volcanic eruptions that took place between 1963 and 1967. A volcanic eruption that started 426 feet (130 metres) below sea level reached the surface on 15 November 1963. The eruption lasted until 5 June 1967, when the island reached its maximum size of 1.0 square miles (2.7 km²).
Detachment to Aden

In November 1966 we were detached to Khormaksar in Aden for a month to assist 37 Squadron in Colonial Policing duties.

RAF Khormaksar was a RAF station in Aden. During the 1960s, it was the base for nine squadrons and became the RAF's busiest-ever station. In the 1960s, during operations around Radfan, the station reached a peak of activity, becoming overcrowded and attracting ground attacks by terrorists. In 1966 the UK government announced that all forces would be withdrawn by 1968. The station closed on 29 November 1967.

We flew there and back via Luqa and Akrotiri in Cyprus. During the detachment we flew a few border patrol sorties and surveillance exercises.

Trailing Aerial

Two types of aerial were available for use with the HF radio in the Shackleton. Fixed aerial and trailing aerial. The trailing aerial was wound around a reel. A brake/clutch unit released the aerial which would trail out behind the aircraft. Lead weights were attached to the end. In many ways it looked like a fishing line. Flying at low level could present hazards if the trailing aerial was still out.
Cat Board

To maintain operating proficiency and standards Shackleton crews were periodically tested and examined. Coastal Command’s Categorisation Board was charged with that responsibility. Every year the ‘Cat Board’ descended on a squadron and subjected all crews to a challenging time. Individuals were tested on their knowledge of systems, procedures and capabilities of the equipment. In the air crews were tested on their abilities in dealing with various airborne scenarios.

Faces portrayed many expressions during the cat boards, from deep thought, to puzzlement, uncertainty and at times sheer panic.

Whistling Under the Engine

Stories exist stating that if a crew didn’t want to fly a sortie, e.g. ‘Manders’ on a Friday evening, singing or whistling under and engine was perceived as being able to produce wonders in the way of a ‘mag drop’. 204’s Squadron Commander came across a Sergeant Pilot doing just that and threatened to charge him.

There is a tale that one of 37 Squadron’s crews was reluctantly preparing to return to Aden after a long weekend of R & R in Kenya. The whole crew sang their hearts out under one of the engines accompanied by chants of:

“Eye of toad,
Leg of newt,
Number three is up the chute.”
Start-up and engine checks went extremely smoothly without any ‘mag drops’. Halfway between Kenya and Aden that very engine burst into flame!

**Arrested in the Name of the King**

Master Engineer Charlie Lusty and Master Signaller Spud Murphy were well known throughout the Kipper Fleet for humorous escapades.

In 1966 three US Navy Lockheed Orions arrived in Ballykelly on detachment. Meeting the crews was a small party of Redcoats, under the command of Charlie Lusty. Drums rolled, fifes played and muskets were held at the ready. “The crews were greeted with “I arrest you in the name of his most Britannic Majesty King George the Third. The Americans at first were a little bemused but took it all in good humour.

**The Groundcrew**

Without groundcrew support the Kipper fleet would have been impossible to operate. Thus it is fitting to highlight and applaud the great contribution made by the aircraft’s maintenance crews.
Right, that's 203 Squadron's aircraft washed, only 204's and 210's to do.

After considerable investigation, extensive fault diagnosis, detailed systems analysis and lengthy technical discussion, taking all factors into account, my considered opinion is that it's knackered.
At Ballykelly one major non-flying duty carried out by Senior NCO aircrew was that of Duty NCO. He was responsible for delivering crews and their equipment to the Station Operations room for briefing, then to aircraft, collecting rations and any equipment needed by aircrew. He also collected crews and equipment when the aircraft landed after a sortie. One requirement when I was on duty was to collect a dozen gross (1,728) of eggs from a grocer in a nearby town. I thought that someone was pulling my leg. A crew was scheduled to fly to Gibraltar. Seemingly it was usual practice for Gibraltar bound crews to take such a quantity of eggs there; chickens in Gibraltar were fed on food made from fish with the result that eggs tasted of fish. Fresh eggs lacking such a taste were widely sought. The non-public fund organisation at RAF Gibraltar bought the eggs at cost from visiting crews for sale on the base. So I duly collected the eggs and they were airlifted and delivered safely to Gibraltar. As with all things in life something could go wrong, for example I imagined what if the eggs hatched en-route to Gibraltar?

The transport used by the Duty NCO was the J2, a vehicle made by Morris. This was a minibus type vehicle with sliding access doors both sides. It had a three speed gearbox column (manual) shift which after prolonged use rapidly wore to the point where selecting any gear was a matter of chance. This resulted in a number of quaint starts from rest! To make matters worse the mechanism the gear lever was about as rigid as a piece of wet spaghetti resulting in next to no ‘feel’. On one occasion I went to drive it only to find that the gear lever was stuck in reverse and would not move to any other. I drove the vehicle around the perimeter track in reverse to the MT section to get it fixed.
Crew Room Games

Time weighed heavily during SAR standby. Crew room games were one way of keeping busy. Uckers was one such game.

‘Uckers’ is a two- or four-player board game and traditionally played in the Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, Royal New Zealand Navy, and Royal Australian Navy. It was a popular game in the Kipper Fleet.

It is similar to the board game Ludo and is based on the same principles; getting four player pieces around the board before the opposition. However, the whole point of Uckers, and this may vary according to personal preferences, is to get all player pieces home without the opponent getting any home at all. The ultimate win is when the player gets all their pieces home and the opponent has all their pieces still in the base. On SAR standby an Uckers session could last many hours.

A CASE OF SEVERE UCKERS FATIGUE

Shackleton crews also played a card game called Kirky. It originated from a Polish game called Kierke. It was a sort of whist with different hands such as benefits and mizaire.

Posted to 205 Squadron

In the autumn of 1967 came to the end of my tour on 204 Squadron and I left to get married. I was also posted to 205 Squadron at RAF Changi in Singapore. My wife, Lesley and I travelled together flying from London Airport to Paya Lebar, at that time Singapore’s International airport. We flew in a British Eagle Britannia via Instanbul and Calcutta. Flight time from London to Singapore was about 24 hours.
205 Squadron was formed on 1 April 1918. Prior to this it had existed as No. 5 Squadron of the Royal naval Air Service. In 1929, it became the first RAF squadron to be permanently based in Singapore taking as its motto *Pertama di Malaya* ("First in Malaya").

**RAF Changi**

Changi started out as a British artillery camp in 1940, it was used together with the nearby Changi Prison for housing many of the Allied prisoners-of-war (POWs) after the fall of Singapore in 1942. The Japanese forces constructed the airfield using those same Allied POWs as forced labourers, building two unpaved landing strips between 1943 to 1944, intersecting in a cross layout and in approximately north-south and east-west directions. The airfield became a RAF station and was renamed RAF Changi in 1946 after the Japanese surrender.

**RAF Gan SAR Detachments**

An aircraft and crew of 205 Squadron were permanently based at Gan to provide Search and Rescue (SAR) cover for RAF aircraft flying across the Indian Ocean.

Gan is the southern-most island of Addu Atoll and is part of the larger groups of islands which form the Maldives. As a UK military base it was originally operated by the Fleet Air Arm in 1941. In 1957 the Royal Navy transferred the base into the control of the RAF.
At Gan the SAR crew was on permanent standby. Basically we were on call and had a lot of time on our hands. We kept busy, some with activities such as studying, sport, reading. We made full active contributions to the sporting scene on Gan. On one occasion the crew I was on made it to the finals of the 5-aside soccer tournament.

The final match was played in the evening under floodlights. Entertainment was mainly self-made on the island with sporting events attracting large audiences. That evening there was a capacity crowd with a fantastic atmosphere. We lost but with honour. However, the game, the cheering and the atmosphere were second to none.
The SAR crew was housed in a single building. The officers had rooms at one end of the building, the SNCOs at the other. There was a volleyball court outside the building. Every evening the crew had a volleyball match which lasted about an hour and a half. We all had our different styles and abilities.

**Transforming a Warrant Officer's Mood**

Gan was bathed in sunshine for quite a lot of the time with the result that air temperatures could get high. One way of cooling off was to ride a bicycle. The breeze generated offered a cooling effect. One Warrant Officer was constantly in a bad mood. The heat made him so. It was discovered that he could not ride a bicycle. Station workshops welded a couple of hospital bed wheels to a RAF bicycle; they acted as stabilisers. The result, one far more even tempered Warrant Officer.

**Aquaplaning**

Gan is a relatively small island; it can be walked around in less than an hour. The runway basically cuts the island in half. For most of the time the weather is beautifully sunny. However, it does experience rain. It can be raining on one part of the island and not on another.

This state of affairs was experienced on one occasion when we were carrying out “Mandatory” pilot training circuits and bumps. It was raining heavily on one half of the runway while the remaining half was bathed in sunshine. On touching down on the very wet runway after one circuit the aircraft experienced aquaplaning.
Aquaplaning by aircraft tyres occurs when a layer of water builds between the aircraft’s wheels and the runway surface, leading to a loss of traction. This prevents the aircraft from responding to control inputs. If it occurs to all wheels simultaneously, the aircraft becomes uncontrolled. On this occasion the co-pilot was flying the aircraft. He had recently flown Mk 3 aircraft (the nose wheel version) where the rudder was locked on landing. He applied the rudder lock on the Mk 2 with the result that directional control could not be exercised.

The best description of the aircraft’s movement was one akin to an elephant on ice skates. The aircraft slid along the runway from side to side with the pilot unsuccessfully trying to exercise some degree of control. Looming up ahead were two Vulcans; the concern was that the Shackleton would veer off the runway and head for the dispersal housing the Vulcans. Fortunately the Shackleton’s wheels made contact with the dry surface of the other half of the runway giving the pilot full control of its direction.

Shackleton Ferry Flight

In March 1968 I headed back to UK, leaving Lesley alone in the Far East. I was part of a crew returning to the UK to pick up an aircraft. We flew back to UK in a RAF VC10 via RAF Gan in the Maldives and RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus, landing at RAF Brize Norton. Flight time was about 19 hours.
On returning to Changi we had to ferry a Mk 2 Phase 3 Shackleton from St Mawgan to Changi. The route was via Gibraltar, Malta, Djibouti in French Somaliland and Gan. The journey took 40 hours flying.

We were one of two crews ferrying Shackletons at the time. The other crew departed for Singapore ahead of us. In Malta the aircraft had a HF radio fault. By the time it was cleared the crew missed its diplomatic clearance time for the flight over Egypt and had to wait another 10 days for new clearance. The next problem encountered was at Gan.

While the Shackleton between Djibouti and Gan a Corporal driving an aircraft towing tractor in Gan changed gear. The vehicle had a double declutching system. Standing orders required drivers to wear a safety belt while driving the tractor; the double declutch had a nasty habit of kicking the clutch pedal which could throw the driver from his seat. He wasn't, it did. Unfortunately, the tractor continued without the driver, colliding with the tail of the SAR Shackleton and ripping it off.

The inbound Shackleton, modified to Phase 3 standard was significantly heavier than the pre-Phase 3 version that suffered the tail plane damage. The SAR crew at Gan was not certified to fly the Phase 3 aircraft. Consequently the inbound crew had to stay at Gan on SAR duty until a replacement non-Phase 3 aircraft could be flown from Changi.

Our flight time from UK to Changi:
St Mawgan to Gibraltar – 6 hours and 5 minutes.
Gibraltar to Luqa (Malta) – 5 hours and 50 minutes.
Luqa to Djibouti – 12 hours and 35 minutes.
Djibouti to Gan – 11 hours and 10 minutes.
Gan to Changi – 9 hours and 45 minutes.
Total flying time – 45 hours 35 minutes.

Jungle Survival Course

In the Far East all aircrew had to attend a Jungle Survival Course. Should we ever have to make an emergency landing in the Jungle it was essential that they knew how to survive in that hostile environment. The course lasted two weeks. During the first week we attended classroom lectures. The second week was spent in the Malaysian jungle. During the day we used a machete to hack our way through dense jungle, periodically removed leached off our body and arrived at predetermined points to set up camp. Our beds were para-hamocks hung between two trees. At 6 p.m. on the dot the lights went out as the sun set. Darkness prevailed and the jungle chorus tuned up. Screeches, growls and rustling sounds penetrated the surrounding area. On the ground phosphorous bits of rotting wood glistened. Around the camp site the flight of fire flies traced patterns in the darkness. I’m sure that if enough of these bugs could be captured in a jam jar they would provide sufficient light to read a book.

A Long Time on Duty

In December 1967 we were scheduled to fly a 12 hour training exercise. We reported for briefing at about 6 a.m. and were due for take-off at 8 a.m. The aircraft went unserviceable and it was about 5 p.m. when we actually started up and taxied out, still facing a 12 hour sortie. As we lined up on the runway we received a message telling us to return to the Squadron’s dispersal. We were met by one of the Flight Commanders. We were told that we had to fly the aircraft to Gan as the SAR aircraft was unserviceable. Take off was at 8 p.m. which gave us time to go home and get a meal and some overnight kit. Just before 8 p.m. we lined up on the runway; number 2 generator went off line. We taxied back into the squadron. A generator drive shaft had sheared. The groundcrew worked through the night to fix it. We eventually took off at 6 a.m. I was operating the W/T on that trip. Three hours out from Gan we received a message advising us that we would be flown back to Singapore by a C130; take off was scheduled for about 4 hours after landing at Gan. It was pointless going to bed before taking the flight back so after handing the aircraft over to the SAR crew we made our way to the bar in the Blue Lagoon, the transit hotel at Gan. It was a time just before Christmas.

At Christmas and New Year the British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) always ran a fund raising event for ‘Wireless for the Blind’. It involved bids to play a particular record followed by bids to stop it being played. That event’s record was “Thank You Very Much” by the ‘Scaffold’. A few bars were played. Bids were made to stop it being played followed by more bids to keep it playing. So it went on and on but at the same time raising money for a well deserved charity. Eventually it was time to leave and we made our way to the C130.
Ten Shack crew members clambered aboard and collapsed in a heap sleeping all the way back to Changi. We arrived there in time for Christmas.

Christmas at Changi

A major event during the Christmas period was the station bar competition. Each section at Changi was invited to build and decorate a bar which was judged by a panel of senior officers. The Squadron took over part of the Ops room and converted it into a tropical setting with water, bamboo, vegetation, plants and flowers. Overall it looked pretty good.

Some of the aircrew decided that it lacked a certain something. Near to the Squadron was some swamp land which housed frogs. Some were offered new homes in the Ops room. All was well with the frogs remaining quite and still overnight and during the day. As the judging time approached the bar had filled with people which raised the temperature in the room. Consequently the frogs became active with the result that they seemed to enter into a jumping competition. I’m not sure what the judges thought. Squadron members thought it hilarious and the frogs seemed to enjoy themselves.

Squadron Party at Raffles

Raffles Hotel is a colonial-style hotel and one of the world's most famous hotels. Opened in 1887, it was named after Singapore's founder Sir Stamford Raffles. It is known for its luxurious accommodation and superb restaurants. The hotel houses a tropical garden courtyard, museum and Victorian-style theatre.
The Squadron held a party in the Raffles Hotel just before Christmas 1969. Not only did we have party but also a pantomime with, to the surprise and delight of the audience, the CO playing the part of the Fairy Godmother and the groundcrew Flight Sergeant playing the Squire. The pantomime was staged in the theatre at Raffles.

**Aircraft Operating at Changi**

In addition to 205 Squadron RAF number 48 Squadron operated C 130 Hercules from Changi. 41 Squadron Royal New Zealand Air Force operated Bristol Freighters (affectionately known as Bristol Frighteners).
Number 1574 Target Facilities Flight operated a handful of Meteor target towing aircraft from Changi.

52 Squadron operated Hawker Siddeley Andovers.

48 Squadron operated C 130s.
When the Royal Navy aircraft carriers docked in the Naval Dock Yard in Singapore they flew their aircraft to operate from the Naval Detachment at RAF Changi. While there they flew many “circuit and bump” flights. The landings were more akin to controlled crashes, each one sending the aircraft and its occupants into deep shudders.

Oz Detachment

In 1969 two Shacks spent a month’s detachment in Australia as part of a joint Naval and Air Force exercise. We flew to Darwin, spent the night there and then travelled onto RAAF Richmond.
RAAF Darwin is located in the city of Darwin, Northern Territory. Formed in June 1940, Darwin housed a multitude of Australian and US units, operating throughout the South-West Pacific.

After landing at Darwin we taxied to the dispersal and shut down the engines. As soon as we did there was a banging on the door. On opening it an Australian health official stepped in, closed the door and sprayed us all in a dense cloud of what we later learnt was DDT. Welcome to Oz!

In the 1960s Australia’s Royal Flying Doctor Service operated the De Havilland Australia Drover, an eight-seat transport, to provide medical services in the remote Outback. The aircraft was based broadly on the Dove but had three 145hp Gipsy Major engines and a tail-wheel landing gear. As we were loading to leave Darwin a Flying Doctor aircraft was being prepared for flight; a Before Flight inspection was being carried out.

Richmond is one of Australia’s oldest and largest air force bases. It is located to the northwest of Sydney, New South Wales, between the towns of Windsor and Richmond. It was opened in 1925.

The RAAF operated the Lockheed Orion Maritime Patrol aircraft.
Two crews from 205 Squadron flew to Richmond. Our crew was solely there as a reserve. In 4 weeks in Oz we flew once; the rest of the time was our own. Basically we had 4 weeks leave in Australia.

On arriving in Richmond we received another dose of DDT.

However, we then received a warm welcome from the RAAF.

We visited a number of places including Sidney. Some members of the Squadron marked their visit to Sidney's Harbour Bridge.
Majunga Detachment

One task that befell Shackleton crews was flying Beira Strait patrols from Majunga in an effort to stop Rhodesia being supplied with oil after Unilaterally Declaring Independence (UDI).

HF radio communications along the eastern coast of Africa were notoriously bad. We were meant to pass safety position reports via Addis Ababba if we couldn’t contact the RAF at Majunga by W/T. The latter frequently proved very difficult, the former impossible. So we used to pass the reports through Salisbury in Rhodesia. Eventually the UK Government got wind of this and a directive was issued forbidding us from doing so.

There was precious little entertainment available in Majunga. One major source was the cinema. The airmen’s quarters had an open air cinema. Locals used to flock to see a film. They sat on the branches of trees surrounding the site.
Puncture at RAAF Butterworth

Flying normally took us to the east of Singapore. However, in April 1969 we were tasked to carry a reconnaissance sortie in the Gulf of Thailand. After taking off from Changi we headed up the Malacca Straits. After about an hour we received a W/T message directing us to land at RAAF Butterworth; our fuel was suspected of being contaminated with water.

Butterworth was opened as a RAF base in October 1941, as part of the British plan for defending the Malayan Peninsula against an imminent threat of invasion by Japanese forces during World War II. It was captured by The Japanese forces in December 1941 and remained under Japanese control until September 1945 when the war in the Far East ended. It then reverted to being a RAF base. In 1957 control of the base was transferred to the Royal Australian Air Force. Butterworth is situated in the state of Penang in Malaysia, directly opposite Penang island.

Landing at Butterworth we taxied to the dispersal and shut down the engines. We got out of the aircraft and stood around waiting for RAAF groundcrew to check our fuel. An ominous hissing sound was heard coming from one of the main wheels. It was punctured. Spare wheels were not available at Butterworth.

A signal sent to Changi requested a replacement wheel. Late that afternoon one of 41 Squadron’s RNZAF Bristol ‘Frighteners’ duly arrived with a wheel, aircraft jacks and some of the squadron’s groundcrew. Their task was to change the wheel. It was not to be.

The Shackleton had been resting on the flat tyre all day – aircraft jacks were not available to support it. When our groundcrew started to change the wheel they found that the wheel’s bushes had become distorted due to the unusual gait the aircraft had displayed throughout the day. Moreover, new bushes did not feature in the equipment delivered courtesy of the RNZAF.

We stayed the night at Butterworth. Late in the night we sat and watched a fantastic display of a lightening storm that took place in the extreme upper regions of the atmosphere.
A set of buses arrived next morning, again courtesy of the RNZAF. The new wheel was fitted and we took off and returned to Changi. The fuel contamination? Our aircraft was not affected!

**Hong Kong**

We sometimes flew to Hong Kong landing at Kai Tak. Opened in 1927 RAF Kai Tak was first used for seaplanes. The Japanese were stationed at Kai Tak during World War II and extended the runway at the base.

The approach to Runway 13 at Kai Tak was said to have been one of the most difficult approaches in commercial aviation. The aircraft descended on an initial heading of North-East. This took the plane over the harbour and then over west Kowloon. This part of the approach was done with an instrument guidance system. Passengers who had not been to HK before found this quite thrilling, as they got their first views of the place, but they were unprepared for what happened next.

The final part of the approach was necessarily flown visually. The aircraft flew up to the "chequer-board", two miles from touchdown, and at six hundred and fifty feet turned Right 47 degrees, as shown below.

Leaving the turn at 140 feet the aircraft lined up for the runway, flying over high rise flats.
Reviewing the Future

Our first son, Harvey, was born in Singapore in 1968. His arrival led to a major rethink of my life. Throughout my time in the RAF up until then I was to a degree unsettled. The work as a maintenance technician and then as aircrew while enjoyable was not the challenge I ultimately sought. I looked ahead for probably the first serious time in my life and viewed the future with some apprehension. I would continue flying until my mid 40s and then what? I wanted a bigger say in what was happening and to play a bigger role. I decided to change things. I settled down to studying ‘A’ level Maths. Such a course was not available in the RAF education system in Singapore so I obtained a syllabus, acquired some text books and sat down and studied the subject for the next 15 months or so. I maintained a detailed record of my work with dates and hours studied. I went to great lengths to ensure that I studied for at least 1½ hours a day; I frequently worked in the early hours of the morning so as not to deny family time. I presented myself and my records to the Station Education Officer and he arranged for me to sit the examination (four in fact because the Pure mathematics and Applied mathematics subjects were examined by four 3 hour papers). I sat two papers in Changi. A crew due to go to RAF Gan for SAR duties was short of a Siggy; I was tasked to fill the gap. Urgent arrangements were made me to sit the remaining two papers in Gan. To cut a long story short I passed. The Maths qualification together with a good Ordinary National Certificate gained at Halton offered an opportunity to enter university. I applied for and got accepted to study Aeronautical Engineering at Salford University, in Manchester. I applied for release from the RAF, on either a permanent or temporary basis but with the aim of becoming an Engineering Officer in the RAF. The response from HQ Far East Air Force was to the effect that no provision existed for NCO aircrew to go to university; I was a Flight Sergeant by then. Fortunately a very decent officer sat down with me and helped formulate and develop an alternative route. I applied for a commission as an Engineering Officer.

Tour-ex

After 2½ years my tour came to an end. In March 1971 we had farewell parties with members of the crew and squadron friends. We packed and shipped our belongings, handed the house back to the landlord, spent a couple of nights in the RAF’s Changi Creek Hotel and departed RAF Changi in a RAF VC10 bound for RAF Brize Norton in UK via RAF Gan and RAF Akrotiri.

After 19 hours flying we landed at RAF Brize Norton. Harvey was 15 months old. Lesley was expecting our second child and we had at least 11 pieces of luggage. We took the most sensible form of transport home, a taxi. On our way on a beautiful frosty but sunny morning
we passed near to RAF Little Rissington, then home to the RAF’s aerobatic team – the Red Arrows. They were practising – what a homecoming.

**Posted to 42 Squadron**

On completing my tour on 205 Squadron I was posted to 42 Squadron at RAF St Mawgan. The Squadron operated Mk 3 aircraft. It was a much heavier machine, had a tricycle undercarriage and was fitted with extra fuel tanks on the wing tips. Two Viper jet engines were installed under the inboard engines to offer additional power on take-off.

Towards the end of my time on 42 Squadron I took a photograph of Wolfe Rock lighthouse in a heavy sea. The photograph was published on a half page spread in the Sunday Express. A considerably large number of requests were received at St Mawgan for a copy of the picture. A copy is displayed at the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. In January 1971 the photograph was enlarged to a height of 8 feet and was displayed in the Boat Show in London.

‘Ello, ‘Ello, ‘Ello !

One tale that sticks in my mind concerns a 42 Squadron Sergeant who called in at a local pub to buy a packet of cigarettes before he went flying. He reversed his car into a parking space but unbeknown to him the car’s exhaust backed into a pile of sand. He went in to the pub, bought some cigarettes and got into his car to drive to the squadron. The engine would
not start. He tried a few times to start the engine but without success. He checked the fuel – all was OK, opened the bonnet – everything looked intact. Walking back to the car he noticed the pile of sand and soon found that the engine exhaust was blocked with sand.

The obvious solution was to remove the sand from the exhaust, but with what? In those days many cars still had a starting handle. That was the only device available to clear the exhaust. So the starting handle was stuck up the exhaust and turned to remove the sand. At that point he heard a voice say: “‘Ello, ‘Ello, ‘Ello!” and looked up to find a policeman standing over him. An explanation of such an action in a car park outside a pub was demanded!

**Things That Might Have Been**

When the RAF was formed from the RFC and RNAS many of the RN squadrons transferred into the RAF later became famous Coastal Command squadrons.

**WHAT IF** the role of Coastal Command had remained with the Royal Navy? I developed the following with that view in mind, focusing on the RN operating Shackletons.

In the early days of the RNAS flying airships the vessels had two helmsmen; one for controlling direction and one for controlling altitude. Also a way of communicating was needed with the Flight Engineer. An engine room telegraph was the obvious answer. With these ideas in mind I viewed that piloting the Shackleton would adopt similar approaches.
Royal Naval vessels sport an anchor and portholes while flying the White Ensign. Why should the Shackleton be any different?

An important Royal Navy tradition is that of piping someone aboard the ship. Piping was originally used to give orders on warships when shouted orders could not have been heard. The piping was done by the ship's boatswain and therefore the instrument is known as the boatswain's Pipe. It is also used in a ceremonial way, i.e., to "pipe" someone aboard the ship — usually Captains, including the ship's Captain, and more senior officers. Doubtless the Royal Navy would retain the tradition on Shackletons.

Semaphore Flags are used for conveying information at a distance by means of visual signals with hand-held flags. Information is encoded by the position of the flags; it is read when the flag is in a fixed position. Semaphores were adopted and widely used in the maritime world. Why fix something if it’s not broken; the Royal Navy would continue to communicate with the fleet using semaphore flags.

In days gone by sailors used lines weighted with lead in order to check how deep the water was beneath their ships. So a method of plumbing depths already exists. Surely logic suggests that the method could be adapted for gauging aircraft height during low level bombing runs?
A crow’s nest is a structure in the upper part of the main mast of a ship that is used as a lookout point. This position ensured the best view of the approaching hazards, other ships or land. In early ships it was simply a barrel or basket lashed to the tallest mast. The term crow’s nest comes from the Viking’s use of a cage, mounted on the highest mast of a ship, which carried ravens as an early type of direction finder. When out of sight of land a bird would be released, and as it headed for the nearest land the ship would follow the direction of its flight. In keeping with longstanding tradition the crow’s nest would be reinstated for special occasions.

Inspection of a ship’s quarters by the ‘Officer of the Day’ stems from Nelson’s day. The accompanying Petty Officer walks in front with a lamp to illuminate all dark corners of the vessel. While the main reason for the inspection is to check that all is ‘ship shape’ on board one part of it is to check the vessel for leaks. Continuing in this duty the Royal Navy would inspect each Shackleton for leaks albeit the Petty Officer would be advised to avoid getting too close to those arising from aviation fuel.
A breeches buoy is used as a way of transferring a person between ship and shore or from ship to ship. The breeches buoy is made up of a lifebelt with a canvas bag attached. The canvas bag has two holes in it to allow the person's legs to go through, like breeches (hence the name). It can be moved along by a series of ropes and pulleys. Even if the Royal Navy wouldn't normally use it to transfer crew members between Shackletons they would do it at least once to show that such a technique could be used.

Tradition dies hard in the RN.

**Farewell to the Kipper Fleet**

My last flight in a Shackleton was on 16 December 1970. My last duty as aircrew was on SAR on Christmas Eve, 1970. On Christmas Day morning I left St Mawgan driving north to join my family for what was left of Christmas. A couple weeks before leaving 42 Squadron I took Lesley, Harvey and our second son, Adrian (born in Cornwall) to her parents' home. That gave me time to clean the married quarter and hand it back to the RAF.
I left 42 Squadron just as it was about to start converting onto the Nimrod.

In August 1970 I had attended the Officer Selection centre at RAF Biggin Hill and was successful. In early January 1971 I reported to the Officer Cadet Training Unit at RAF Henlow.

Postscript

In 1993 while working for a civil aerospace company I travelled to Pretoria, South Africa to assess a software package for use by the company. One evening I heard a very familiar growl of engines and looked up into the sky; a Shackleton was flying overhead. I learnt that it was one of two that the South African Air Force Museum kept flying. In 1994 one of them crash landed in the Sahara desert while en route to the Oskosh air display in the USA.
In 2011 I joined the Manchester Aviation Art Society and attended my first meeting. The Society meets in the Air and Space section of Manchester’s Science and Technology museum. I was shown to the meeting room by one of the attendants. En route he pointed out a Shackleton, WR962, now displayed in the museum. I told him that I flew in Shacks and that WR 962 was in my log book having flown in it in Singapore. He invited me to have a look inside. I climbed the access ladder and entered the aircraft. The smells of leather, oil and human sweat inside the Shack were very powerful, as were the Kipper Fleet memories that flooded back. Over 40 years had passed since I last had entered a Shack. I must admit that I was not quite as nimble as I used to be in climbing over the main spars. My Kipper Fleet legacy consists of lots of great memories, high tone deafness, tinnitus and two hearing aids!

In my youth I used to draw and paint but always ended up frustrated with my efforts. In my mid 20s I totally turned away from painting and drawing, having found another medium in which to express my creative aspirations; that of woodcarving. In 2003 a friend motivated me to return to the drawing board after a gap of about forty years. I started cartooning in 2009.

I have studied the work of many aviation cartoonists. David Langdon, Wren, David Low, Joseph Lee, Bill Hooper, former US Pilot Bob Stevens and RCAF Warrant Officer Ray Tracy are among many whose works have influenced me as I try to develop my own style. I have experimented with a variety of techniques and approaches in portraying memories. My aim has been to capture and portray whimsical aspects of life in the Kipper Fleet with gentle humour. Another forty years and I might get there!

Sadly life in the Kipper Fleet was not without tragedy and sadness. In the space of 6 weeks in late 1967 and early 1968 four RAF Shackletons crashed with the loss of nearly 40 lives. One of those was a friend, Sergeant Ken Hurry, a Signaller. Ken and I had trained together as ‘Siggies’. He had a wonderful sense of humour which lightened many a gloomy day. These memories are dedicated to Ken and to all members of the Kipper Fleet.

Rob Knotts
26 September 2012