

RAF Cottismore - 'A fishy story'

As a recently promoted PO in 1967 I was fortunate enough to get a posting to RAF Alconbury, a USAF base, for 12 months through 1967/68. There were two POs on the base - myself and Phil Horncastle. These were highly sought after postings, not least because we lived on the base in our own rooms in the BOQ, received a daily allowance paid in US Dollars, and enjoyed all of the base facilities.

In addition to looking after our USAF guests we were also responsible for four neighbouring RAF bases at Wyton, Oakington, Wittering and Cottesmore. We were supplied with official transport in the form of a RAF Mini to get us to the various outlying stations as and when required.

We each had a telephone by our bedside and took it in turns to be on call 24 hours a day. It fell to me on one occasion to attend an early morning arrival of a Vulcan bomber at RAF Cottesmore. We had been well briefed by the base Commanding Officer about this pending arrival from Goose Bay, Canada, as the top man 'Chief of the Defence Staff', Sir Charles Elworthy would be on board, returning from a well planned salmon fishing trip!

I received the early morning phone call, dressed in No.1 uniform, and set off up the A1 arriving at Cottesmore at about 7am. The RAF top brass were out in force organising the laying of the red carpet (not for me), and generally flapping around.

The Vulcan touched down on time and the aircraft crew, headed by Sir Charles, entered the Officers main reception building where a makeshift 'bench' had been set up for Customs clearance. Sir Charles made a beeline straight for me and said 'Good morning Customs. We've nothing to declare except lots of frozen salmon, would you please come and join us for breakfast?'

I naturally and graciously declined, but Sir Charles was insistent and it seemed rude not to. I reluctantly accepted, and there was furtive whispering amongst the RAF greeting party. I was then escorted to the Officers' Mess by Sir Charles, where silver service place settings had been laid out on the best long table for about a dozen invited breakfasters. As we entered the Mess an additional place setting was frantically being squeezed in, with an extra chair provided for the 'unexpected guest'.

I spent the next half hour or so sat next to Sir Charles enjoying good conversation and a truly fine cooked English breakfast before making my excuses and returning to Alconbury.

We subsequently had many a good natured banter with the RAF boys at Cottesmore, and the other RAF stations, when the grapevine had got to work about how their top brass had been well and truly caught on the hop that morning.

Not surprisingly I never crossed paths with Sir Charles Elworthy again, but my lasting impression was that he was the epitome of an Officer and Gentleman. I never did see the salmon!

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