

## RAF MILDENHALL

In the 1950's and 1960's we had what was known as The Cold War, Missiles, Rockets, nuclear submarines and the Berlin Wall etc.

Born out of this NATO was formed comprising of the countries of Western Europe, Canada, and the United States. Each country to form an alliance with the others and give mutual support . . . Their armed forces to move freely within the organisation and live duty and tax free in the various countries. The British government passed the Visiting Forces Act to deal with the situation.

In practice most of our visiting forces were American airmen and their families stationed at various airfields in the United Kingdom. Control of these stations was given to a single Preventive Officer who would live in on a semi permanent basis. The tenure was for not less than 28 days and no longer than a year. Relief provided for along week end every four weeks.

In the midst of these stations was RAF Mildenhall which was the main trooping centre and was staffed by 5/6 Preventive Officers on around the clock basis (24 hours). It was to this base that I was sent on detached duty in September 1959 after a summer in Folkstone.

It was unique to say the very least. We all lived in the BOQ (Bachelor Officers Quarters). The common currency was US Dollars which defined our subsistence allowance and general expenses. We were allowed to give our English batman a pound a month in cash with no receipt. We paid for our meals individually as we went along. The American Mess Secretary certified our claims. Dollar Steak Night was always popular. We got used to having shillings and pence in one pocket and dimes and quarters in the other. They had just got rid of script.

The Americans were a friendly lot. We were made welcome and included in all the social activities. This was so long as they got their own way. They were in charge and The White House ruled. They had never heard of the Customs and Excise Act, nor wanted to. So we trod a fine line and tried to keep the peace. (Cold War joke) Occasionally we tried to put our foot down. The Americans sometimes used civil airliners to move their people (mainly families and others] Some bright spark (KBH?) decided that Mildenhall was not approved for their use and that we needed a request for attendance and to raise a charge. The CPO was summoned from Kings Lynn and we went to see the Bird Colonel who, picked up the phone and said "Give me the Embassy". End of conversation and request for attendance.

All the Thor rockets came through us. They flew direct from the factory in California in specially widened cargo planes. The nose cone was almost in the Pilots lap and at the very back end was a technician who was responsible for maintenance and security. He was completely isolated during the flight until he reached the site. He was known as the Bird Watcher.

One night a mate of mine went to the camp cinema. He hadn't changed and despite clutching his pop corns he was challenged at the door. The cinema was for US personnel only. Brits were not allowed in As they didn't charge Entertainment Duty.

Some Americans were not very worldly. I had to explain to some of the passenger handlers that countries in Europe were separate entities and we had to see all passengers. Not like the various states in the US. On a quiet Sunday evening an R & R flight dropped in which I dealt

with on my own. Towards the end of the movement their appeared to be an abundance of Scotch Whisky so my suspicions were aroused to be told that I had said that all European countries were separate and that this one was from Edinburgh in Scotland. I passed.

Another incident on a flight from Rhein Main in Germany which had put into Mildenhall with engine trouble on its way to the States with mainly families and children. Alive parrot dropped out of a child's pocket in the reception area. The MATS instructions say no pets or animals so the parrot had to left with us which we kept and fed. You try to get help from the Min of Ag and Fish at some ungodly hour. Eventually it was disposed of and a certain MT Matthews could rest easy.

The Americans were conscious of bad publicity if one of theirs upsets the host country. On an outward flight to the US two passengers didn't show. After due enquiry I was taken aboard the plane to find two airmen shackled to the seat. They were being taken back to the US to be dealt with at home.

There were two squadrons of SAC B29s stationed at Mildenhall. They usually left about 0800 hours to fly right round the North Cape as far as they could over Siberia. The Russians were usually waiting for them. Occasionally they called in on Norway on the way home. The flights lasted some 22 hours. the Russians did the same to us. Their Bears flew down to the straits of Dover. We also looked after Lakenheath and the V bomber base at Marham.

We did our own Work Roster. A work of art so as to get as much time in the lee of bum island as possible. We didn't impress the Waterguard Superintendent but there was always somebody on duty and the job was always covered.

One dark night on the way to the office from the mess I was jumped upon by two coloured gentlemen in white helmets who jammed a machine carbine in to my throat. They weren't kidding. But no harm done and we went on our respective ways with a smile.

As I have said we were included in the social life. One night one of our members got involved in a game of dice. He couldn't cover a thousand dollar bet. You couldn't buy a drink you always had to roll the dice at the bar. We were on less than a thousand pounds a year. A US Major was on over \$10,000 a year. We had regular sports evenings when we watched almost continual baseball and American football. Being in a group of five POs we had our own company. The single officer stations were not so lucky. We occasionally had one on the phone for long enough just to talk to somebody that they could relate to in an English voice.

For the price of having Christmas at home I celebrated New Year at Mildenhall. The usual invitation, casual dress, breakfast will be served 0630 hours. At that time I was regaled by two Bostonians who reminded me about a certain Tea Party and I ended up making tea for the whole of the mess.

By and large the stay was a pleasant and interesting interlude. It was unique to say the least and we are unlikely to see it again.

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