

**I went through six months of morse intercept operator training February through July 1955 in Biloxi, Mississippi. All assignments were then overseas. I was slated for RAF Chicksands near London.**

**On August 30, 1955 I boarded the USNS General William O. Darby in New York bound for Southhampton, England. It was a small WW2 era troop ship. I was in the hold with bunks five high that were canvas stretched across a frame. I grabbed a top one, so I wouldn't have a body hanging over me.**

**The last two or three days the sea was rough. It was a big relief when we entered the channel and cruised for several miles to Southhampton. The English countryside was picturesque and I stood at the rail and took it all in. We docked in Southhampton around September 7th and set foot on English soil.**

**Those of us in the USAFSS were loaded on a British bus for a short trip to nearby RAF Shaftsbury. I remember sitting behind the driver as we roared down the narrow winding roads on the left. I was pretty nervous about it.**

**We were told that our uniforms in England would always be our wool dress blue's. Our khaki summer uniforms would not be worn because of the cool weather.**

**We had to surrender our American money and were given paper military script in exchange. Even the nickels and dimes were paper. We were also issued ration books that allowed one carton of cigarettes per week and one imperial quart of booze per week. Then we were shown our quarters that were WW2 Royal Air Force. We were ready for a nice hot shower in fresh water. We found there were bathtubs instead of showers.**

**The next day it was announced that several of us would be going to a new site at RAF Station Kirknewton, Scotland. It was first evaluated by the USAF in January 1952 by then Major Russell French. When he retired as a Colonel he gave a now declassified (at the time Top Secret) oral history interview of what he found in 1952. The interview follows below. The redacted parts refer to Scotland, Edinburgh, RAF Station Kirknewton, and the Royal Air Force.**

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“...it was about 6 o'clock in the morning. It was probably the most dreary picture I ever had in my life—cold, overcast, and everything. I finally managed to find out where (redacted) was and managed to get hold of a cab, and after several wrong turns, we arrived at a desolate bunch of buildings which had formerly been used as a PW camp for Italian prisoners. They were basically concrete block buildings and not very many of them. Also, a big old hangar which had originally been used by the (redacted) to use as storage for their aircraft because it had been built originally for a fighter field. But there was a big hill located at one end of the airfield, and I

guess after (redacted) lost several aircraft into the hill, they discontinued all operation. Then it became an Italian PW camp, and then subsequently a possible location for (redacted). .... a wider part of the base was an opportunity for housing to be put into that area.....the other part which is the airfield site is where the antenna field would go.....nothing there except an old hangar and no water or anything there. It was sort of a dreary picture. I remember returning from the so called site survey and my recommendation basically was that although it appeared from a geographical standpoint and looking at the map an ideal location, ....it was not a very practical place to move.....but that was sort of glossed over in a hurry by the powers-to-be to advise me that not only were we going to send (redacted) but I also was probably going to be the commander of it. So we kind of rolled with the punches. When I returned we had a cadre I believe of about 30 enlisted people and I think six officers. And we departed on or about July 1952.....arriving at (redacted). When we first got there we stayed in various places—I know that the six officers with me arranged to stay in a boarding house (redacted) .....stayed there for I guess approximately three months, and in the meantime were able to get some support (redacted) to get some tents put up and get some camp stoves and make the place habitable for the small cadre. Then we built some more tents to handle the people—the typical WWII type thing of putting down a wood base and putting the tent over it and had the old diesel camp stove which used fuel oil to heat with. So, the situation was quite primitive for the first year, and then managed to get some construction.....as we continued to build up the base from the six officers and 30 men until we got up to I guess 3-400 men who were living in tents and we were operational. In fact, we were operational from the very beginning. I think we had one or two positions that we got going in a matter of three or four weeks after we were there."

end of interview

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**Early September 9, 1955 we boarded a British bus and headed to Scotland. The roads were narrow and winding all the way. I enjoyed sitting up front watching the road and the scenery. It took all day and well into the night. We arrived at Kirknewton around midnight. I think the driver was lost as we were all over southern Scotland. We were tired, grumpy, hungry, and about to revolt when the driver finally found the place. He pulled up to the gate and was directed to the mess hall. It was a WW2 era olive-drab concrete building with a single light bulb over the door.**

**It was raining and mud was everywhere. It was a depressing place. A cook was on duty and served eggs to order with chipped beef and gravy on toast (SOS). It tasted great after all day without much food.**

The cook was on duty since “midnight chow” was served for the midnight shift before going on duty and to the swing shift after getting off duty. Off duty airmen arriving from Edinburgh on the last bus would also slip in wearing “civvies” until it was declared off limits unless you were in uniform.

We were taken to supply and issued sheets, blankets, and pillow cases and then taken to one of four old buildings utilized for transient personnel. These were the buildings used during WW2 to house POW German and Italian Officers until they could be transported to the United States. The latrine was a separate small building between the four buildings. You had to cover some distance outside in the weather to get there.

The only thing needed to complete the look of a POW camp was a wire fence around the place. This site was located down a hill from the main base, so we were isolated from everyone.

We finally got to bed about three or four in the morning and figured with no instructions for the next day we would sleep late. We were roused out early and told the 1st Sgt would be arriving at 8am for an inspection! We hustled around to get things shaped up and he strode in with white gloves and started inspecting. Nothing was satisfactory and we got chewed. He told us that, "if you ever need to talk to me just come to my office and I will be glad to court martial you." He was old school and cranky.

We then processed in and attended a briefing. We were told that we could never talk about our work and were given a cover story. Later in the day we were told that several of us were not cleared yet for top secret and I was one of them. The others would move and join their assignment after going through a security briefing and signing their life away. The rest of us would continue to bunk where we were and would be on work detail around the base. My duty was to pick up litter all day and be a general all around flunky.

It was late fall, wet, and cold. A senior career airmen told me that it has rained since he arrived three years ago to open the base. If you didn't get pneumonia the first year you would get TB the second year.

We were issued knee length fleece lined parkas with fleece lined hoods (WW2 army stuff). They became the most essential item of our on-base attire. The heat in the barracks was a small oil burner at each end of the barracks and did not do much for the middle. The only sitting area was your foot locker and a couch on one end that would sit three people.

I spent my spare time reading books and writing letters. There was a small snack bar up the hill at the main site where you could get snacks. It had a small jukebox with 25 records on it. A record of Bing Crosby singing “I’ll be home for Christmas” played over and over. Those going home played it to our chagrin. We would not be going home for another three years. I played “The Green Door” a lot since the door into the operations building in the secure area was green. The song was also known as “What’s Behind the Green Door”. It seemed to be appropriate. I could not go through it until I was cleared for top secret.

Four of us were still in the transient barracks when Christmas came. We got two of those red fold out paper Christmas bells, cut some green and red crepe paper stringers, and put them up for a little Christmas spirit. I have a picture in my old photo album of me sitting on my foot locker with book in hand and the decorations visible hanging from the rafters. I wrote that an airman walked in with a case of beer and two boxes of Ritz crackers and we were going to have a Christmas party.

I got a small break from picking up litter. It was two weeks at the new NCO Academy. I cleaned the class room, got coffee from the mess hall, and donuts from the snack bar. (One year later I found myself attending the NCO Academy in the second class)

There was also a week working at the rifle range on a nearby Royal Army base. My job at the range was to help qualify the officers on the 45 pistol and the airmen on rifles.

I had one other break from litter patrol when I was assigned to the antenna maintenance crew. There was a large antenna field that covered the old runways that were last utilized during the war. Each antenna had four tall wooden poles that the wires were strung between. The poles were hinged at the bottom so they could be lowered for maintenance. The maintenance crew would lower a pole with a winch on a truck and my job was to paint it with olive-drab paint. The job lasted three or four weeks and it was great to work with regular guys that had been there for a while.

In my work around the base I got to know support people that you normally would not get to know while working shift work in the secure compound. It paid off later.

I was issued a steel helmet, a gas mask and once in a while played solder. We would have an alert, handed M2 carbines, and go out into the surrounding woods to set up a perimeter to protect whatever we were protecting. It was spooky on a dark snowy night out in the woods tromping around.

By February 1956 everyone but me had received their top secret clearance. I was moved to a barracks on the main site that housed support personnel and continued to be a general all around flunky.

I started getting letters telling me the FBI had been around asking a lot of questions about me. Everyone assumed I was in trouble. I realize now that the reason my clearance took so long is because I grew up at a remote mine in Idaho. The closest FBI office was 500 miles away. They got around to investigate when they had nothing else to do and had the time to travel.

My clearance finally came through about March 1956. After security briefings and signing my life away I was assigned to Dog Flight or Dog Trick as we called it. It would be shift work that went around the clock seven days a week, 365 days a year. We would rotate shifts with Able, Baker, and Charlie flights. The rotation was seven days on day shift, then the next day start seven on swing shift, then on the next day seven on the midnight shift,

Then it was two full days off, and start over. Finally, I was going to get to go through the green door. It was behind a huge prison like fence with armed Air Police

I was in the third bunch of the early cadre. The tent living quarters had given way to prefab barracks known as the "H-frames". They were in the shape of an H with 10 bunks in each of the legs of the H, with the latrine in the center. Each leg of the H was called a bay. Each bay was heated by two small oil burners. If they were turned up on high they glowed red and were dangerous.

I was nervous about copying morse code since I had not heard any for many months. I started by sitting beside experienced operators. After a couple of weeks I was put at my own console. I had a head set, two big receivers, a direction finder, a reel to reel recorder, and a typewriter loaded with continuous six part paper. There were about fifteen radio operator positions and a few Russian linguist positions. My job was to search and copy transmissions if I found something.

I remember an important assignment. It was to find and copy Sputnik when it was launched into orbit. I discovered that the transmission was not sent by a human. It was automated to send the same character over and over.

In 1957 a call was put out for operators in Samsun, Turkey. I volunteered as it paid daily per diem. You lived on your own among the locals. I was told you could live on your pay and save the per diem.

I figured it was time to leave as everyone was getting married to local girls. The marriage rate was around 80%. I didn't want to be one of them.

I was accepted and went to Turkey the end of November 1957 for one year. I saved money but it was a miserable year.

I was discharged December 15, 1958 after signing papers that I would not travel to certain countries for 20 years or talk about what I did in the Air Force.

Around 2010 I discovered that the veil of secrecy had been lifted. I was attending reunions with my former comrades and we were still unable to talk freely about our service. It was not until the 2013 reunion in Edinburgh that a presentation was given to RAF cadets about Kirknewton's role during the Cold War. The presentation can be read by clicking on the entry in the Directory to the left.

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