

## **John Evans (1942-). Royal Air Force Brecon**

West Wales Veterans' Archive

Dates of Interview: December 2020 – January 2021

### **Description**

John Evans was born in 1942 and attended Christ College School in Brecon where he acquired a passion for rugby which served him well throughout his chosen RAF career. As a boy entrant, John underwent supply trade training in RAF Hereford before receiving his first posting as a Senior Aircraftsman at RAF Stafford. In 1963, John was posted to 86 Movements Unit in Dusseldorf on the Rhine, to a unit commanded by a former WWII Air Gunner. It was here that he met Carol, but it was only after a gap of some 40 years that they met up once again and married. Posted to the UK in 1966, John was stationed at RAF Lyneham before being shipped out to Bahrain where he remained for the next 13 months. Promotion to Corporal with postings back to Stafford, then to the Shetland Islands and finally onto Thorny Island including a detachment to Northern Ireland brought John's 12-year RAF career to a satisfactory conclusion.

For the next 31 years, John served in Huddersfield with West Yorkshire Police. John and his first wife Jacqueline had two sons. After the loss of his first wife, John and Carol connected again, and for the past 6 years have lived in Southwestern France.

John tells his own story through his audio recording and his written account.

### **Early Life**

I was born in 1942, in Brecon. My father, John Evans, was born in 1906 at the Vicarage, Tremain, Cardiganshire, where his father was a vicar. My great grandfather, also John Evans, was a master mariner and was the captain of a ship named Convoy, which was built in 1861 on the shore at Llansantffraed/Llanon in Ceredigion. My mother, Ena Mary Evans, was born in 1912 in Newport, Monmouthshire, and went into nursing. At the time of meeting my father, she was the Matron of a cottage hospital in Haverfordwest, specialising in cases of tuberculosis.

I attended a local primary school, then as a day boy to Christ College School in Brecon. While there, I learned to play rugby. I also went through cubs and scouts, climbing Pen-y-Fan many times. Being the adventurous type, I caught the steam train from Brecon to Hereford on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1959. There, I started life in the RAF as a seventeen-year-old entrant in the supply trade. While there, I took part in the first ever Ten Tors walk over Dartmoor in September 1960 which took 36 hours to cover 50 miles, with an overnight rest period of 12 hours.

### **Royal Air Force**

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 1961, I passed out to become a fully qualified Senior Aircraftsman, after which I was posted to 16<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Unit, Stafford, where I played rugby for the station

team in my position of hooker and had the Station Adjutant as one of my props. While there, I was sent on a movements course in Lincolnshire.

In August 1963, I was posted to 86 Movements Unit in Dusseldorf on the Rhine, where we met the barges bringing bulk freight for distribution to RAF stations throughout Germany. The freight had been brought across the North Sea by boat and then transferred to the barges to travel down the Rhine. I had to arrange for the relevant stations to have transport on the dockside, ready for when the freight was off-loaded. There were only about 12 of us RAF lads on an Army barracks behind the airport, where we sometimes had to clear urgent freight through customs, and then with onward transmission to the appropriate RAF station. After only having been in Germany for a month, it was my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, so a few of the lads, who had been there for a while, took me to Amsterdam to celebrate my birthday.

While there, I met a young lady, Carol, a ballet dancer with the German Opera of the Rhine Opera Company, Dusseldorf. We became a couple, and I was able to watch Carol in some of her performances on stage. The station commander at our Dusseldorf Movements Unit was a Flight Lieutenant who had been an air gunner during World War Two.

In March 1966, my two and a half years in Dusseldorf was up. I was posted back to the UK at RAF Lyneham, Wiltshire. As Trim Clerk, I worked on a shift which involved getting the weight of the freight loaded into each compartment, the weight of the aircraft and the weight of the fuel on take-off. Then I completed the graph on the weight and balance trim sheet. Once finalised, I handed it over to the air quartermaster of the aircrew. The Flight Sergeant in charge of the loading team on our shift had been a Pathfinder pilot during World War Two. While there, I continued to write letters to Carol who had returned to Tasmania, having emigrated there with her mother in 1958. Due to the distance between us, the letters petered out and we went our separate ways.

After two years in Lyneham, I was posted to Bahrain in the Persian Gulf where it was very hot and humid. Again, I was Trim Clerk for the shift. Aircraft would stage there, change crew and fly on for the Far East, and then the same coming back to return to the UK.

After 13 months in Bahrain, I was again posted back to the UK to 16 Movements Unit, Stafford. On reporting on arrival to the guard room, I was told I had to report to the Station Commander. I went to the Station Warrant Officer who escorted me upstairs to the Station Commander's office. He greeted me by saying, "*Congratulations SAC Evans, you are now Corporal Evans.*" Having been on movements for a number of years, I did not know the latest procedures in the supply trade. After a while, I noticed a posting advertised for a Corporal Storeman wanted at Saxa Vord, Shetlands. Within a few months, I was on the overnight ferry from Aberdeen to Lerwick. I crossed over a few islands by bus and took a couple of water trips in small boats. I arrived at Saxa Vord, which was a radar station looking out for Russian aircraft flying into UK air space. The Russians were known locally as "Red Bears." I spent eighteen months there, two winters and one summer. On days off, I used to go walking around the island visiting Muckle Flugga lighthouse, the most northerly one in the UK. I used to enjoy talking to the Shetland ponies, of which there are many.

My last posting was to Thorny Island on the Sussex/Hampshire border, another operational station flying transport command aircraft. I was in charge of the lads loading the freight, taking note of the distribution between each compartment and then completing the trim sheet. While there, I was sent on a detachment to RAF Aldergrove, Belfast. I arrived there a day after Bloody Sunday. My duties also included accompanying RAF policemen on their perimeter patrol around the airfield. I was armed with a 303 Lee Enfield rifle and ammunition. Luckily, I did not have to use it! My final posting was back to Thorny Island for demob in September 1972.

### **Post-RAF Life**

In January 1973, I joined the West Yorkshire police, stationed in Huddersfield with my first wife, Jacqueline. By then, our first son, Gareth, had been born. After two years, a second son, Colin, was born.

While in Huddersfield, I used to go walking with the Police Walking Club in the Peak District, Yorkshire Dales and Lake District. This got me fit enough to go to the far north of Sweden three times, 200 miles within the Arctic Circle. The first walk was in Sarek National Park, the second and third walks to part of the Kungsladen (Kings' Walk), each one lasting ten days. Each time, we started from Abisko, the most northerly point of the walk.

After 31 years in the police, and my first wife having passed away, I retired to Spain where one morning, having my first cup of tea, the telephone rang and a lady's voice said, "*you don't know who this is, do you?*" I replied, "*yes, hello Carol, how are you?*" I recognised Carol's voice straight away after all the time apart. I had never forgotten her.

A while later, I was at the arrivals' lounge at Heathrow Airport to meet Carol who had flown in from Tasmania. We had three weeks together visiting respective relatives after which Carol to Tasmania with extra baggage – me, who sat next to her. We got married in Tasmania but decided to return to Europe to be near relatives in UK. So, here we are in Southwest France, having lived here happily for six years.