

# Terry Bunce - RAF 1958-1984, three postings to Bawdsey 1963

I was posted to Bawdsey three times in my service career. The first time was in April 1963, as an SAC, on my return from a tour in Germany. Although I had some previous knowledge of operations from basic training, this was my first time on a major air defence RADAR site since joining the RAF in 1958.

My initial memories are of getting off the train at Felixstowe and not knowing where I was supposed to go. Fortunately a young lady spoke to me and directed me in the right direction; that being the old bus that ran from Felixstowe town to the Bawdsey Ferry. I remember the bus so well because it is the only bus I have ever known with a door that closed with the driver pushing a long handle next to his seat. The driver was of course Albert. On the bus the young lady, who turned out to be a WRAF, told me about the ferry. I expected something like that which I had just come across on to cross from Holland to UK across the channel. The surprise was of course the small boat run by Mr Charley Brinkley. It took all of five minutes to cross the river. Then it was into the routine of reporting for arrival, accommodation, bedding and the inevitable sojourn into the airmen's mess for tea, followed by a few drinks in the NAAFI, accompanied by the young lady who had shown me around. For the next 18 months I was involved in the operations of the site as a Master RADAR Station, MRS, and the real beginning of my career in Air Defence. It was I have to say one of the best times of my life. I got married and was eventually posted away to RAF Buchan in 1964. I should mention a few events of note. With the American forces just down the road at Woodbridge and Bentwaters, Bawdsey got a bit of a reputation at that time as a baby farm. Many new WRAF's posted in would make every effort to 'catch a yank' as we use to say. Some did but sadly many fell by the wayside and were left with the consequence. Also with Hollesley Bay Boys Institute just down the road, whenever one of the boys absconded the camp was put on alert as it was obviously the end of the road, literally. The assassination of President J F Kennedy on November 22 1963 also caused uproar and the camp went to its highest level of alert, which lasted a few days

My next posting in was in 1966; this time as a Corporal. The camp had not changed one bit in its operational role, nor in its character. It was still the place to be. An excellent operations team, sailing and water skiing on the river, radio BFN and of course, AOC's inspections on the jetty. Albert's old bus was still in operation and Charley Brinkley still ran the ferry. However there was an incident which rocked the Air Defence world. I was on night shift in February 1966, and talking over the land lines to a WRAF on duty at RAF Neatishead, the next station up in the air defence chain. Suddenly she had to go, a fire drill she said, and that was the last we heard from anyone at Neatishead. Neatishead burnt down in very quick time but with no loss of RAF lives. Sadly 5 civilian firemen died. The resulting enquiry put the fire down to carelessness in smoking within the bunker, and that the rapid progress of the fire was due to the amount of polish that had been bumpered into the floors so that they had a permanent shine. The polish used being highly flammable. Polishing of corridors was stopped immediately.

My last time was in 1971 when I returned for my last tour but this time as an instructor on the School of Fighter Control. This was probably one of my favourite times. Teaching new RADAR Operators, commonly known as 'scopies', how to do the job was very rewarding. At the time my wife and I lived in a quarter down by the river and I am sure it was in No 5. The ferry still ran across the river, but I do believe the buses had changed. What a beautiful setting that was. Two incidents come to mind. The first being the night someone stupidly set off a flare on the ferry. It was the last trip across the river and

the ferry was full. Two people were quite seriously injured. An enquiry was held but the results were not made public and no blame was apportioned except that a general caution was issued in relation to behaviour and safety. The second was the unfortunate death of two airmen who tried to cross the river late at night in a borrowed boat. The boat capsized and they could not cope with the tidal flow. They were both accorded a full military funeral and buried in Bawdsey cemetery; I eventually left in 1973 on promotion to sergeant.

Bawdsey will always be to me the home of RADAR. The old CHEL towers and concrete enclosures were still there in 1973, it was still a nice walk to the ops site, as long as it wasn't raining. The Manor Officers Mess was and still is very imposing, the sailing club, and parades on the jetty. A valuable operational role, good accommodation and excellent company, what more could a young 'scopie' ask for.

Terry Bunce  
RAF 1958 – 1984  
(Flt Sgt retired)

If you spent time at Bawdsey Radar Station or have stories to tell about events in and around the station please do get in touch with us!