

Grenville Jones (1928-)

National Service in the RAF (1946-49)

Interviewer Hugh Morgan

Camera: Neil Davies

Location: Pembroke Dock

Grenville Jones was born in 1928 and grew up in the village of Tylorstown in the Rhondda. He received a grammar school education and during WW2 enjoyed being an Air Training Corps Cadet (ATC). Grenville recalls an ATC visit in 1943 to the flying boat station in Pembroke Dock with the cadets being taken out to sea by launch to a Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat. A fine amateur artist, many, many years later Grenville captured this scene in one of his paintings, which can be seen today in his collection which is held on the West Wales Veterans Archive.

In September 1946 and aged 18yrs Grenville was about to enter Cardiff university, but a letter arrived in the post informing him that he was being 'called up' for National Service in the Royal Air Force. In the filmed interview for the National Service collection funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, he recalls some wonderful times from those years, but also witnessed terrible incidents.

Like many National Service entrants to the RAF Grenville was initially posted to RAF Padgate near Warrington, which was a large basic training centre. He recalls that after six weeks of 'square-bashing' a new commanding officer arrived who had been with the RAF Regiment in India. The new CO immediately instructed a Sergeant from the cookhouse to take over as a drill instructor for the recruits, and from that point drill quickly became 'a shambles'. At the end of the eight weeks basic training the 120 recruits were looking forward to going home for a week to enjoy their first home leave since arriving in Padgate. After their end of basic training 'passing out parade' the Adjutant informed them that their drill had been so bad, that their leave was being cancelled. Instead of enjoying themselves at home on leave they were drilled until the Adjutant was satisfied, at the end of which he informed them "*you are not going to believe this, but we have nowhere to send you and we have another flight (of recruits arriving), therefore you are being sent home on leave for two weeks!*"

Grenville's first posting following basic training was to RAF Syerston in Nottinghamshire and from there to RAF Cranwell '*the cradle of the RAF*' for trade training. Grenville trained as Radar Wireless Mechanic, and his task was to fit the sets into Avro Lancasters but also Supermarine Spitfires and Gloster Meteors. He recalled sitting in the warmth inside Lancasters with their engines running, whilst he fitted the sets.

Whilst at Cranwell there Grenville witnessed two memorable incidents. The first tragically when Douglas Dakota transport aircraft were flying over Cranwell with parachutists from the nearby Parachute Regiment. There were WAAF's watching from the ground. Three of the "Para's" parachuted out over the airfield but chutes failed to open, and the watching WAAF's screamed in horror. The three parachutists were all killed.

More amusingly at Cranwell, Grenville recalled that the Commanding Officer of Cranwell, at the end of the war, had brought back with him from Germany a Messerschmidt aeroplane which he used as his own personal transport! One day a homesick Polish ground crew decided to try to get home to Poland. The CO's Messerschmidt happened to be outside a hanger, and this chap saw an opportunity so clambered into the pilot's seats and somehow managed to start the engine. Not being a pilot, he promptly lost control of the CO's personal 'spoils of war' and drove it straight into a hanger door, damaging the aeroplane so badly that it was written-off.

Two of Grenville's favourite postings were to RAF Oakington in Cambridgeshire where he says the catering was superb and to RAF Colerne in Wiltshire, where he worked on Spitfires and Gloster Meteors.

One day when Grenville was in the mess at Oakington, he noticed a poster on the notice board which said 'Educational Visit: Flights over Germany,' so Grenville thought he would 'educate' himself by going on the flight. He described that the afternoon flight was in an Avro York transport aircraft piloted by an Australian who first took them at just 20ft over the Normandy invasion beaches. Then onto Holland and Arnhem flying very low between the pillars of the blown-up Arnhem bridge and along the canal. From there the Aussie pilot took them over the industrial city of Cologne where they saw the '*miles of twisted steel everywhere*'.

Grenville was demobbed in January 1949, four months longer than the usual two years National Service at that time. By not being released by the RAF until January 1949, Grenville missed the previous September academic year entry point for Cardiff University and therefore needed to find employment, entering the construction industry in which he excelled in until retirement.

Asked as to whether National Service should be reintroduced to today's younger generation, Grenville responds that it is quite difficult to answer this question primarily because the present-day RAF requires high levels of technical expertise, often at degree level and therefore requiring years of training, which if compared to the 2yrs 4months National Service he did, would provide insufficient time to complete the training.

