

William Morris

National Service 1960-62

Royal Air Force

Interview Date: 8.12.25

Location: Rhydowen, Ceredigion

Interviewer: Hugh Morgan

Camerman: Neil Davies

Written Description

In September 1960 William Morris was conscripted into National Service, becoming a member of one of the last cohorts of recruits before National Service ceased compulsory conscription in 1961. William's preference was to join the Royal Navy, but such is military logic he was informed that he was to report to RAF Cardington in Bedfordshire where he would serve his two years in the Royal Air Force.

William's collection contains a two part filmed interview, photographs from his personal collection, and this written description.

Early Years

Born in 1939 William grew up in Treorchy in the Rhondda. William's father had been a collier who enlisted in the British Army in 1939, serving as a driver throughout the duration of World War Two. William recalls that after demob and return to the family in the Rhondda, his father never drove a vehicle again and looking back William suspects that his father had undiagnosed PTSD and he never spoke about his war service. Also, during the war years, William's mother worked in a Munitions factory which was highly likely to be the Royal Ordnance Factory 53 in Bridgend known as the Bridgend Arsenal. This was also dangerous work, with mainly women employees and 27 lost their lives in factory accidents. As a result of his parents being away from home for much of the war, William was largely brought up by his grandmother.

William was 6yrs old by the time that the war had finished, but still has memories of barrage balloons, and recalls that Treorchy was hit by the Luftwaffe (on 29.4.41, wiping out part of a street with houses destroyed in Traen Street and Park Road with 27 killed including many child evacuees).

National Service

Leaving Grammar school at just 15yrs of age, William became an apprentice tailor. Due to his apprenticeship, conscription to National Service was deferred until his

apprenticeship had been successfully completed. Aged 20yrs William was duly called-up and instructed to report to RAF Cardington, Bedfordshire. It was now October 1960 and after a week in Cardington being kitted out along with the culture shock of being constantly shouted at by RAF NCO's, William was posted to RAF Bridgnorth in Shropshire for he believes 8 weeks of Basic training. At the end of Basic training William was directed to travel to RAF Freckleton near Blackpool, where he was to train as an RAF Medic.

Just 16 years earlier, the nearby village of Freckleton had been the site of the 'Freckleton Air Disaster' when a USAAF B.24 Liberator from nearby Warton airfield, lost control in a storm and crashed into the village causing the deaths of 61 people including 38 young children and their two teachers in the school, and serving RAF personnel and staff at a nearby café.

William did well on his course, becoming a qualified medic, leaving with the rank of SAC (Senior Aircraftman) when he was posted to the large RAF Transport Command airfield at Lyneham, in Wiltshire. Over the course of the next 18 months or so, William was to be promoted to LAC (Leading Aircraftman) to Corporal, visiting places such as Aden and Belize and in his filmed interviews he recalls his time and duties at Lyneham.

Of particular interest in William's interview and photographic collection is the part he played as a Medic in the mass Smallpox emergency vaccination programme in the Rhondda and Cardiff areas in January 1962 which had resulted from an outbreak of Smallpox. Reportedly, the Smallpox had been inadvertently introduced into Wales by a person returning from Pakistan (where Smallpox was at that point in time, very prevalent) causing a major public health crisis in South Wales. There were 19 deaths including that of a doctor who had been treating affected patients and close to a million people were inoculated in South Wales. William features in a public awareness raising campaign in a photograph depicting him and a medical doctor administering the vaccine to a cooperative WAAF. This publicity photo forms part of William's National Service collection which can be seen on the West Wales Veterans Archive.

William was demobbed in late 1962 having served two years. He says it was a surprise to others that he did not decide to stay in the RAF as a regular, such was his knowledge and enthusiasm as a Medic. Instead, William returned to the tailors who had put him through his apprenticeship, but after several other jobs eventually spent what he describes as the most enjoyable occupation of his career working in the Post Office Telegram service.

After retirement, William became an active member of the Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) and has served for several years as Treasurer to the medical branch of RAFA, which has over 200 members including doctors, dentists, and medics, and is a registered charity in its own right.

Finally, William states in his filmed interview that if he was asked to do National Service again, he would do so “*in a Heartbeat.*”