

**Idris Jones 1933-. Royal Air Force
Tregaron, Ceredigion**

West Wales Veterans Archive, National Library of Wales

Date of interview: 7.8.19. Tregaron

Description

Idris Jones was born in Tregaron where his parents kept a sheep farm. Idris retains vivid recollections of life in Tregaron during WW2, especially when the family farm was almost hit by bombs which had been dropped by an overflying bomber during a snow-storm in 1943; and of watching an RAF training aircraft making a forced-landing from the school classroom. He also recalled the preparations for D-Day with the Talbot Hotel being used as the troops HQ by General Wavell.

Enlisting in the RAF in 1950 as a 'Regular', Idris qualified as an armament mechanic responsible for the armament on the early jet fighters operated by the RAF during the first years of the 1950s. Posted to the Central Fighter Establishment based then at West Raynham, he served with 245 Squadron equipped with the Gloster Meteor engaged on 'Cold War' duties. Posted to Horsham St Faith Idris' was actively involved in the rescue attempts of those civilians tragically affected by the breaches of sea defences along the eastern coast which resulted from the North Sea flood of 1953 causing massive loss of life.

Leaving the RAF in 1955 Idris then served for the next nine years on the Reserve. He returned to Tregaron, working as an engineer for Gloster aircraft and Dowty ROTOL based in Llanbadarn and therefore was able to continue his work in aviation in Llanbadarn making parts for the Meteor and Javelin. When the factory closed in the early 1980s (the site is now used by Ceredigion Council's Highway dept) Idris became the school caretaker in Tregaron. Since retiring some 30years ago, Idris continues to live in Tregaron.

Early Life

Idris grew up on his parents' farm on the hills above Tregaron and retains vivid memories as a boy during WW2 in Tregaron. In 1943, there was a violent snowstorm and the family heard what they thought were heavy thunderclaps and vivid light emanating through the night. In the morning it became apparent that what they had thought was thunder and lightning was the dramatic impact of bombs dropped by an overflying aircraft on the hill (Baynhowfant) near to the farm.

Officials from the Air Ministry quickly arrived at the farm and Idris' father guided them to where the bombs had been dropped, leaving two enormous craters, each the size of a detached house. The officials from the Air Ministry told Idris' parents that had the aircraft dropped its bombs just 4secs earlier, then because of its flight path, the farm would have been blown up and the family with it. Idris recalls that the officials were otherwise secretive in their findings and it is not clear whether the bombs were dropped by an enemy or allied aircraft. What became apparent was that the bombs had been most likely dropped by an aircraft trying to lose weight in order to urgently gain height to avoid crashing into the

mountain. For some time after, people would come to the craters to collect bits of bomb casing – some several inches thick.

Idris recalls that whilst a pupil in school an RAF training aircraft came in low over the school obviously in difficulty, with its wheels down. It then flew around on three or four occasions obviously trying to find somewhere to land. The children watched it come down behind the school and then there was no noise. The children all '*ran like rabbits*' towards where the aeroplane had come down. They found the pilot out of the aircraft and ok, but he had belly-landed the plane (i.e. with undercarriage up) which had slid along the field ploughing up the ground as it went along.

A sad event occurred when in preparation for the D-Day landings. The area around the town was being used as a training base by the Army and he recalled that General Wavell, who was commanding the troops, stayed in the Talbot Hotel. There is a photo of the square packed solid with tanks. Idris recalled that there were several fatalities when crews, sleeping along the sides of a road were run over by a tank.

Keen to learn a trade and move away from farming, Idris elected to sign on with the RAF for 5yrs in 1950, aged 17.5yrs. He left the RAF in 1955, remaining on the reserve list for the next 10yrs until 1965.

RAF Career

Idris 'signed-on' at the RAF recruiting office in Swansea and was posted to RAF Cardington for basic training i.e. 'square bashing'. Basic training lasted 9weeks. He was then posted to the RAF Technical Training School in Kirkham, Lancashire, where he spent the next 9months learning his trade. There he studied 3 core subjects, guns, bombs, and turrets, before specialising in guns and becoming a qualified armoured mechanic (now known as 'technician').

He was posted to 245 squadron located at West Raynham which was the Central Fighter Establishment. 245 was an operational fighter squadron. From there the squadron was moved to Horsham St Faith, also in Norfolk, where Idris was stationed for most of his service in the RAF. This was during the early cold war era where Russian aircraft would fly across the North Sea and close to the East Anglian coast. The Gloster Meteors of 245 were kept on standby as part of 'Operation Fabulous', setting off to 'warn off' the Russians. Idris' duties included the important task of examining the Meteors' guns.

Idris' service at Horsham St Faith also coincided with the Korean war and on two separate occasions he was posted on embarkation leave with a view to being sent out with the squadron to Korea. Returning from leave on both occasions he found that squadron orders to proceed to Korea had been cancelled.

On two occasions he went with the squadron to RAF Acklington in Northumberland. A former WW1 and WW2 airfield, RAF Acklington was the base for nearby gunnery ranges. Each posting would last around 10days. He recalls that on one of these, 245's CO squadron leader John Ford was killed when he flew his Meteor too close to the drogue being towed by

the target towing aircraft (the drogue being a long flag with a metal pole in the middle which was attached to the rear of the aircraft, thereby flowing out behind). The cannon used by the Meteors was coloured in order to signify the hits scored by individual pilots. Idris suspects it is likely that Ford flew too close and hit the drogue whilst trying to inspect the impact of the coloured cannon left on the drogue. Ford's aircraft was damaged irretrievably, and he went down in the North Sea without a trace.

One other memory of service in Horsham St Faith relates to Idris' involvement in the rescue attempts of civilians which resulted from the 1953 North Sea flood which had caused massive loss of life along the east coast of the UK. The breaches of the sea walls occurred on the night of Saturday, 31 January 1953 and morning of Sunday, 1 February 1953. The RAF along with the other armed services were sent to the worst affected areas around Great Yarmouth. The sea 'walls' of sand and earth had completely collapsed with streets and areas becoming submerged. He recalled being sent to a house at the end of a lane where a family had been rescued but the youngest member of the family, a baby was missing. He and the others in the rescue party went into the house to find that the floods had reach the rafters of the house and the baby had died. In total across Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Lincolnshire, 307 people died.

After he had left the RAF as an armoured mechanic, Idris returned to Tregaron and worked as an engineer for Dowty ROTOL continuing his work in aviation in Llanbadarn for Gloster aircraft (for example making parts for the Meteor and Javelin). When the factory closed in the early 1980s (the site is now used by Ceredigion Council's Highway dept), Idris became the school caretaker in Tregaron. Since retiring some 30years ago, Idris continues to live in Tregaron.