

**John Langcake BEM 1941-. Royal Air Force
Aberporth**

West Wales Veterans' Archive

Dates of Interview: February-October 2020

Description

John Langcake was born in the north of England and grew up for several years in a children's home. He was a Grammar School boy, a keen sportsman and joined first the Army Cadet Force, then the Combined Cadet force and then the Air Training Corps before entering the RAF as a 16yr old Aircraft Apprentice in September 1957.

John enjoyed a career in the RAF as an Air Defence/Radar specialist spanning an incredible 38yrs. He served in many theatres of operation ranging from the Falkland Islands to Cyprus and Germany, and at various stations in the UK before finishing in St Athan near Cardiff. Warrant Officer John Langcake was honoured with the British Empire Medal and retired in 1995 following his final posting in St Athan.

John and his wife, Marie who is herself a former serving member of the Armed Forces, live near Aberporth, the site of one of John's many postings. This account provides a chronology of John's service in the Royal Air Force and finishes with a reflective short story from him.

RAF Service History

Pre-RAF:

Combined Cadet Force (West Yorkshire Regiment)
Harrogate Grammar School
Army Cadet Force (Green Howards Regiment)
Middlesbrough High School
Air Training Corp - 473 Squadron (Hartlepool)
Drum Major in squadron band

**RAF Locking, Electronics Apprenticeship, Weston-Super-Mare
Trade Training School**

Attestation: 18th September 1957

Passing Out: 26th July 1960

RAF Leeming, North Yorkshire

Posted In: 22nd August 1960 to Ground Control Interception (GCI)

Fixed coil display system with radars T7/79, T13 height finder

Training aid for Javelin Conversion Unit

Posted Out: 11th June 1961

RAF Bishops Court, Northern Ireland

Air Defence Radar Station

Posted In: 11th September 1961

Fixed coil system with a T80 MkIII search radar and a T14 used for shipping plots, and two operational height finders FPS-6s.

First local WAAFs posted into camp just before Christmas

Promotion to Corporal, Spring 1962

Moved to line maintenance for UPX-6, the Interrogator for the IFF system

Training:

Two-week course, RAF Locking, SIF Decoder system

Marconi College Chelmsford

SR1000 Training Course

John was sent to the Marconi College Chelmsford to train for working on the Marconi S254.

The college didn't have a S254 transmitter, so John was placed on a training course with Finnish Air Force Officers and SNCOs, learning the SR1000.

Back to RAF Bishops Court

Posted Out: 3rd January 1963

RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus

Posted In: 3rd January 1963

No. 280 Signals Unit. Working on the Marconi S254 Radar, based on the SR1000.

Special Detachment to Jordanian Air Force.

Providing supervisory cover for the radar technicians.

Detachment to Mount Olympus.

To man the T84 radars until T84 engineering detachments from the UK began.

Played Rugby for 280 SU, 1962/63. Captain of team 1963/64.

Posted Out: 3rd July 1965

RAF Buchan, Aberdeenshire

Air Defence Radar Station

Posted In: 14th August 1965

Type 80 Mk1 radar, remote Type 7, two FPS- height finders and the R3 underground bunker.

Competed in Braemar Highland games

Promoted to Sergeant

John was best man for his best friend Dave, and through Dave met Marie (Dave's older sister) they were married in Plymouth on 10th June 1967

Posted Out: 28th August 1967

RAF Bishops Court, Northern Ireland

Air Defence Radar Station

Posted In: 28th August 1967

Main Equipment Inventory holder

SNCO in charge of Trade Training

Competed in Northern Ireland Command Shoot

Bloodhound Mk2 T86 radar course, RAF Newton

During the training course the Training Officer (TO) gave orders for the gardens surrounding the training school to be tidied for an upcoming inspection by the Station Commander. To brighten up the surroundings as there weren't any flowers, the class decided to make a 'tree' from a classroom pointer and some plastic flowers they found. They named it the Irish Bamboo Tree!

Posted Out (from course): 27th November 1969

RAF North Coates, 25 Squadron, Lincolnshire

Posted In: 27th November 1969

Attached to Missile section 3. (MS3) T86 Radar.

Posted Out: 4th April 1970

RAF Laarbruch, C Flight 25 Squadron, Germany

Surface to Air Missile Unit

Posted In: 14th April 1970

Working on the Bloodhound SAM

Played rugby for Laarbruch 2nd XV

In Johns' last years playing Rugby for RAFG, they finally beat BAOR after about 17 years. A great finish to John's rugby career.

Posted Out: 14th April 1973

RAF Aberporth, Cardigan

Missile Firing Range

Posted In: 14th April 1973

Bloodhound Firing Unit, Missile Firing Flight (MFF)

T86 Radar

Retrained on T87, RAF Newton

Back as SNCO in charge of T87 Radar 2nd Line workshop

SNCO management course RAF Upwood

Duty Systems Engineer training, RAF Locking

Posted Out: 21st July 1978

RAF Boulmer, Northumberland

Air Defence Radar Station

Posted In: 21st July 1978

ADRS-T85 Radar

Chief Technician in charge of D Watch

Posted Out: 18th April 1983

RAF West Raynham, Norfolk

Surface to Air Missile Unit

Posted In: 18th April 1983

Flight Sergeant in charge of Engineering Support Flight

Falkland Islands detachment, December 1983-April 1984

Posted Out: 24th August 1984

RAF Locking, No. 1 Radio School, Weston-Super-Mare**Trade Training School**

Posted In: 24th August 1984

Air Defence Systems, Training Supervisor

Promoted to Warrant Officer

The Queen's Visit to RAF Locking

John and Marie's daughter went and picked wildflowers from the local woods especially for the Queen, which Marie made into a posy. Fiona presented the Queen with her posy.

Posted Out: 19th October 1987

RAF Wattisham, No.144 Signals Unit, Suffolk

Posted In: 19th October 1987

OC Engineering Support Flight

T99 Radar

Presented with Warrant by Wing Commander Cliff Spink, OC 74 Sqn.

British Empire Medal, New Year Honours List

Presentation of medal by Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Harding

John was awarded the British Empire Medal in the New Year's Honours list for his work with the civilian community and his secondary duty in the Motor Club whilst stationed at RAF Locking.

Official visit by Air Vice Marshall Roger Palin

The T99 radar was erected between two old WWII hangers on RAF Wattisham airfield for the visit by AVM Palin.

Official visit by the Princess Royal

13th April 1989

Princess Anne visited RAF Wattisham in April 1989 for a scheduled visit, as for the AVM the T99 radar was set up between two WWII hangers, and Princess Anne was introduced to John.

Posted Out: 28th January 1991

RAF Buchan, Northern Sector Engineering**Air defence radar station.**

QA Audits and HSW inspections.

Posted In: 28th January 1991

Falkland Island detachment, January to May 1992

Whilst based at RAF Buchan John was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal.

Posted Out: 4th January 1994

Last Posting: RAF St Athan, Cardiff

Posted In: 4th January 1994

Last tour of duty

O/C GRF

Operational Security Officer

Tempest Configuration Control Officer

Duct Plant Co-ordinator
Deputy Station Radiation Safety Officer
Left Airforce: 11th November 1995

The Tool Bag

I joined the RAF as an Aircraft Apprentice and in those days, I could only visit the radar if accompanied by the SNCO in charge of the section. I could look but not touch and was not allowed to go anywhere near the Sergeant's tool bag.

When I graduated as a Junior Technician and posted to a real radar station, I became part of the radar fault-finding service led by the Sergeant. The Corporal made me carry the Sergeant's tool bag.

Within two years I was promoted to Corporal and was a proficient member of the fault-finding team led by the Sergeant, and I made the new Junior Technician carry the Sergeant's tool bag!

At last I was promoted to the rank of Sergeant and led the fault-finding team. I used tools to fix the radar and got the Corporal to arrange the transportation of my tool bag.

On promotion to Chief Technician, I was given a pokey little office which I shared with two other Chief Technicians and became the inventory holder for all tool kits. I made regular trips to the radar sections to ensure that all bags and their contents were present and correct.

In due course I was given a crown to put on my arm, not my head unfortunately, and a bigger office which I did not have to share. I carried out quality assurance checks on all the tool kits on the station, which sometimes took me to the radar.

At last full recognition came my way along with a set of gallopers. I had a nice office with a window giving me a view of the radar across the site. I was allowed to visit the radar but only if accompanied by the SNCO in charge of the section. I could look but not touch and was not allowed to go anywhere near the Sergeant's tool bag. I have to ask myself: *"have I actually achieved anything?"*