

223 Reunion speech – Jones 082

To start, I would like to thank Bob, who obviously not having a proper job could spend time searching us all out. And here we all are today. .thanks Bob {please clap}

Back to the 70' and as we left Halton we had our whole lives ahead of us, free to follow our chosen paths. Let's hope you all did, because it's too bloody late now.

I don't remember much of apprentice life, but I vividly remember one experience that really stands out for me, it scared me for life... and it involved Flt Lt Chew. Who, no sooner having allowed me to bring my car onto camp set about having it condemned to the scrap heap in a most vicious manner?

I don't know? was it the riveted-on box sections that covered the rusty sills? the go faster 15ft arial? or the oil patch that marked my parking spots? Not content to just remove my pass he called in the police. Mr plod was satisfied it was legal, it had an MOT, insurance, a tax disc, and tread on the remoulds so they were happy, Chew was not. Next it was the department of transport. They came, they saw, they checked the MoT and they left happy. Chew was livid and so just banned my little car from the camp. For the following months, each weekend I had to walk into Wendover, remember where I had parked it, hopping it was still there. Drive off, to who knows where and then find a new street for it on Sunday nights.

Some of you may remember searching for the bell that had lived in the broom cupboard, keen to get all our names engraved on it. Well, I can reveal it fell into the boot of said car and to this day adorns my garden. Although the UK doesn't have a statute of limitations it seems there is a maximum period of 12 years before charges cannot be made, and that's to do with mortgage dept so I think I'm ok. Murder, of course, has no time limit but Chew was definitely alive the last time I saw him.

I'm going to read Taff Wilsons speech now, that he prepared some weeks ago. Taff cannot be here tonight as unfortunately he couldn't bear to see you all, sorry he isn't well.

Taff's speech

Fifty years since joining-up (*Bloody Hell*)

Was it fifty years ago, I said "I do",
as I was married to the RAF in blue.
A shy, nervous, fat, asthmatic Apprentice,
joined the throng of civies and the Sergeant's malice.

One lad, no names, no tales, called the WO, "Sir",
the old WO, his language and shape, just a blur.
He never forgot his lesson, when was told that "sirs" are officers,
a look on the old face that said that the WO's were masters.

Double to the station barber, all cut and the fifty pence paid,
no-one spared, mods, rockers, skinheads and greasers afraid.
Some lads with hair less than a quarter of an inch in length,
Had the clippers buzz above it, never testing it's tensile strength.

The corporal introduced himself and doubled timed us to the store,
where one fits all, and all fit one, the uniform, we all deplore.
Off for injections, both arms held out like planes,
disinfected each side and a row of doctors, inflicting our pains.

Attestation, what the heck is that? As we marched into a room,
Where a bloke, an officer, stood upright, staring menace and doom.

He said in a posh voice “do you honour and protect her majesty the Queen”?

One Scottish voice quietly said, “do I heck”, in my estate she’s never seen.

Like a herd of wandering Wildebeest, hats on, hats off,
to see the doctor, his freezing hands and the famous cough.
We were now in the RAF, all of us, we all had been told,
73 of us, with jocks, paddys, taffs and the *others*, to mould.

Dressed in a strange set of red, green and blue gear,
the ‘Tartan Army’, strange jocks and someone to fear.
This hard drinking, foreign language speaking and dubious clan,
bumping floors and apprentices, while supping floor polish from the can.

One of the very strange jocks whose name sounded like Kraken,
decided to play tennis over my bedspace, using light matches, being brazen.

When asleep and the heat got worst, I awoke to flames two feet high,
and the belief, my beautiful face was melting and that I was going to die.

Fifty years has passed, disappeared and went,
a lifetime of happy memories all gone and spent.
How come I was such a nervous boy, just a blink ago,
today a cripple, bald, more aches and pains to show.

It seems that my memory, unable to remember breakfast today,

but I strongly remember the stupid foolish pranks, being happy all day.
All of those from 223 are characters that cannot be forgotten,
especially when the nightmares wake me in my paranoia, wild eyed and
sodden.

I smile when I think of the guys in my entry and those, like me who left,
the Jankers, scrubbing pots and pans, marching, in time too
compressed.

I would not have missed my time being one of the Halton brats,
A great time, great experiences, despite all of you being world class
TWATS.

God Bless the lads from 223 entry apprentices, RAF
Halton.

They will always be in my heart! (that is probably why it's
about to stop)



Taff Wilson

Finally. A going away thought.

When we joined the RAF all those years ago, we were about 17 years into our young lives. Fast forward 50 years and now, if we are lucky, we are about 17 years from Goodnight. Make the most of it.

And finally. In the words of Desiderata: Take kindly to the counsel of years, gracefully surrender the things of youth. Be cheerful.

Enjoy the nosh. I thank you

PJ Jones