

ML.79.Boffins and Brits

'Boffins.' Scientists, researchers, people generally viewed as of highest intelligence who sometimes come up with the most absurd ideas, proposals or schemes despite their massive IQs. Often looked upon as from 'another world.'

I was introduced to this word back in 1957 or '58 when RAF 51 Squadron arrived at Forbes AFB, Topeka, KS in their modified 'Comet' for a four- or five-day orientation or exchange visit, their mission a bit more diverse than our strictly radar emission collection tasking as they had linguists aboard (as I recall) as well. We did have pre-notification and plans were made for briefings and flights for some of us in their airplane and some in ours, ours of course having much smaller capacity. Briefings were also the order of the day along with static visits to the other's aircraft, the day and evening full of activities.

It was decided in advance that, since the group was to be with us for three nights, each of our three squadrons would be responsible for hosting the Brit's at the officer's club for one of the three nights which demonstrated great foresight in planning, as having participated the night the 343rd was host, I also joined the festivities the other two nights hosted by the other two squadrons. I don't believe one squadron otherwise would have been capable of keeping up with our mates from across the sea. Each hosting squadron would at least have the opportunity to recover the following day while our guests were up ready to go the next morning.



I was invited to fly on one of their orientation flights where I learned the term the Brits applied to the back enders and those who designed their equipment: 'boffins.' We might apply the same term to our crows, especially when one views the definition: 'from another world!'

I had the pleasure of occupying the jump seat in the cockpit and as I recall the Captain on that mission was the squadron C.O. I was hooked up on the interphone and could monitor the comms inside and outside the aeroplane. We had no positive air traffic control in those days and VFR operation was standard unless weather dictated otherwise. Consequently, the crew simply filed a VFR flight plan. It all seemed rather relaxed with regard to any FAA involvement. We simply took off and flew pretty much where and what altitude they chose. We had a low frequency homer on the field at that time and returning, as we overflew the beacon, the captain called the tower and simply stated "passing over." It was a wonderful learning experience for all. I don't recall 51 squadron making a return visit in the newer 'NIMROD' aircraft.



My second experience with 51 occurred in the early eighties while serving as Vice Commander of ESC. We had, and have, a unit at Mildenhall which coordinated with 51 squadron and made arrangements for me to fly an ops sortie into the Baltic in a Nimrod. I believe they still were

operating at Wyton. At any rate I traveled up there, briefed and flew the mission and as I recall remained overnight in the Mess where I was presented a 51 Squadron necktie and made an honorary member.

A few details about the flight in closing. The Captain offered me the jump seat on take-off which I was delighted to occupy and immediately after takeoff and wheels up the cabin door burst open and one of the crew members announced "tea's up," and asked me how I preferred mine, white or black.

The flight into the Baltic was pretty benign as I recall, no intercepts by either Russian or Swedish aircraft nor do I recall the length of the mission. I do recall very specifically after let down and approaching the traffic pattern (clear, VFR) the Captain turned to me asking if I might like to try a 'roller' to which I replied "delighted," so I popped into the right seat, he gave me the controls and appropriate airspeeds to fly. I think all were pleasantly surprised to note the touchdown was indeed a 'roller,' the Captain asking if I would like another perhaps believing the first was indeed beginner's luck. "Thank you very much," I replied, "I would indeed." After surprising all a second time the Captain decided it was time to terminate and repair to the Mess.

All in all, a wonderful, motivating, educational and memorable visit and experience. 51 trained with us at Offutt in the RCs and I believe have a permanent party assigned. I am unaware of their simulator availability in UK and ours in any event went 'swimming' in the great flood and may not yet be operational I assume it will be replaced. BTW during their 1957 visit to Forbes and my flight in the Comet the captain did not offer this 1st Lieutenant a 'roller.' I'm not sure if he thought I wasn't old enough or decided to just let this sleeping 'crew dog' lie.



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Kinda reminds me the first time I crawled on the wing of a T-6 at Hondo in '54 and looked in the cockpit after flying the PA-18. I said to myself I'll never figure out what all those chewiness, dials and handles do...but I did recognize and knew the purpose of a "clock". Funny. Later when flying instruments under the "hood" in the back seat of the T-6 the instructor would shout over INTER PHONE when I screwed up an instrument exercise..." are you looking at the clock 'Mr Urschler' because you definitely are not cross-checking your flight instruments". "CROSS CHECK!". Heard that voice in my headset thousands of times during my flying career. He succeeded. Thank you Mr. Harry K. Johnson. Jekyll and Hyde he was.

Then the next iteration six months later when I climbed up the ladder and into the cockpit of a B-25 at Vance for my first flight....and then six months later into the cockpit of an RB-47 at Forbes....not yet twenty one years old. I've often wondered if I was the youngest combat ready B-47 pilot in SAC celebrating my 21st birthday at Hunter AFB, GA on a special mission and living in a swanky hotel (Oglethorpe) same time as an Arthur Murray dance instructor convention. What a birthday present I received that night. Unforgettable!!! 😊😄

Then to Yokota three month later flying an RB-47H in the SOJ, Sea of Okhotsk, East China Sea etc with a trusty 1911 Colt .45 strapped to my chest watching Mig's intercept us. Quite a concentrated education I would say. I'm the last surviving member of that crew....E-45, 343rd SRS.

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