



Gordon Hickmore recalls the proud past of RAF Scampton and talks to Wing Commander Archie McCallum about the future

It was in March 1982 that I bid farewell to RAF Scampton as the last Vulcan B2 took off on its final delivery trip to Newark Air Museum. The remaining aircraft that had not been transferred across to Waddington, were in the process of being dismantled. An aircraft which had cost millions of pounds was now worth just £5000 scrap value, the most valuable part being the titanium heat shield that protected the crew compartment from the engines.

The future of the station was very much in doubt. Rumour ran riot – the Victor tankers from Marham would be transferred to Scampton with VC10 tankers from Brize Nortonthe base had been offered to the army (sacrilege!) and so on. Eventually, the Central Flying School (CFS) moved in with the Red Arrows in March 1983. Subsequent defence reviews put further pressure on the future of the historic base and, in 1993, CFS moved out leaving the airfield under care and maintenance with its sole occupants, the Red Arrows, gracefully occupying the skies above the surrounding countryside.

So it was with some trepidation that I booked-in at the guardroom to interview the Station Commander, **Wing Commander Archie McCallum** for the Burton Journal. I was escorted across to SHQ (affectionately known in my time as Handbrake House) to meet the new OC and to find out what was now on the cards for this historic base.

Archie McCallum, a Fighter Controller by profession, admits to being somewhat surprised at his appointment, which followed yet another defence review which concluded that RAF Leeming was a more suitable location for the RAF communication hub. The Group Captain appointed as OC Scampton had departed to Leeming in April and Archie had been appointed as station commander “with the same responsibilities but not the money.” he explained ruefully.

He and I served together at RAF Waddington in 1993, so we had some catching up to do about old friends before we eventually came back to the subject of the future of RAF Scampton.

It was only 18 months since it was announced that RAF Scampton would be the communications centre for the RAF. The future was then rosy, for the since it was expected that all the Air Combat Support units and the Control and Reporting and Centres (CRCs) which provide military radar surveillance of all aircraft approaching UK airspace would be based at RAF Scampton.

RAF SCAMPTON – THE FUTURE

It was forecast that Scampton would be home to 2500 RAF and civilian personnel, providing a welcome boost to the local property market and having a huge impact on the economy overall.

Several units had already moved in when, in January 2006, the MoD announced that the future of Scampton was again under review since RAF Leeming had been selected as RAF communications hub on grounds of costs.

Archie, who also commands the CRC that recently relocated to Scampton from RAF Neatishead on the Norfolk coast, stated that the review concluded that it would cost £55m less to move the units to Leeming. The North Yorkshire base currently flies Tornado F3 aircraft but it will not be required for the new joint combat aircraft when the last squadron disbands in 2008. Unlike Scampton, the runways, hangars, and buildings are in first class order, so it is not hard to see the logic of the decision.

“What will happen to the Arrows?” I asked apprehensively. “There is an ongoing review and we expect a decision in a couple of months” he replied with some caution.

Archie explained in more detail his role as Station Commander and the complexities of running a station housing several independent units. In addition to the Arrows, we have the Control and Reporting Unit which is part of the UK air defence system and the Mobile Meteorological Unit (MMU), a reserve unit that provides a pool of trained weather forecasters in support of operations throughout the world. To complicate matters further, No 1 Air Control Centre, which recently moved from Boulmer on the Northumberland coast, is based at Kirton in Lindsey and is a satellite of RAF Scampton. In all, there are 550 service personnel with accommodation for servicemen and their families split between Scampton, Kirton Lindsey and Hemswell.

We moved out of the office to visit the CRC, which is housed in the old Airmen’s Mess. Upstairs in the main hall was the station briefing room, used to brief crews engaged on the famous Dambusters raid. The rooms now contain dozens of monitors displaying the air picture covering the whole of the UK. Information from remote radar heads situated from the most northerly point of the UK to the far south west of England together with early warning information from continental countries is fed by data link to produce the air picture of every aircraft entering or leaving UK airspace.

The height, speed, identity and track of each aircraft is displayed digitally on the screen.

The role of the CRC is to police this airspace and where necessary, scramble fighters to identify any suspicious aircraft. Daily the fighter controllers carry out practice interceptions on military aircraft as part of their training commitment.



**THE CRC CONTROLLERS PROVIDES 24/7
COVERAGE OF UK AIRSPACE**

During the cold war, the whole operation was housed and controlled deep underground in hardened bunkers. Now - although security is tight - the controllers can relax off-watch in an airport style lounge. Air surveillance duties are shared with a second CRC at RAF Boulmer and between them they provide a 24/7 capability.

Back to the office, Archie explained the role of the Mobile Met Unit which is commanded by a Burton Waters resident. The MMU, formed in 1961, is staffed by a small number of full-time officers and the Met office provide a pool of trained forecasters, engineers and support staff who, in addition to being civilian met men, are members of the RAF reserve (RAFR) .

The role of the MMU is to provide met services in support of the RAF, Army and NATO anywhere in the world. Part time members can expect to be deployed to war theatres such as Iraq or Afghanistan 2-3 times a year for 6-10 week tours, so the 60 or so members of this unique unit have a very busy time.

No 1 Air Control Centre (1ACC) was the first unit to move when the MoD approved the initial plan to base the RAF's communications hub at Scampton. Uprooting from their base at RAF Boulmer, it must have been something of a culture shock to be located at Kirton Lindsey, away from Northumberland's rocky coves and sandy beaches. However, they soon settled in and the base, reclaimed from the army, which provides a comfortable home for the 250 personnel who play an active part in the local community.

1ACC is constantly geared to moving quickly as it is one of several communication units whose job is to deploy at a moments notice as part of the UK's Rapid Reaction Force. Their role is to set up forward operating bases for the use of fixed and rotary wing aircraft with mobile communications, radar equipment and air control staff. Over the past year, besides detachments in the UK, the unit has been deployed to the Oman, Cyprus, USA and Australia.

We returned to the perplexing question of the future of RAF Scampton. "What of the future" I asked. From the reply it was evident that since as the runway needed to be resurfaced, some very difficult financial decisions would have to be taken if the airfield is to remain operational. Although Scampton is of historic importance to the RAF, this cuts little ice with the Treasury.

In the short term the CRC is likely to remain at least until the new NATO air defence system is introduced in 2012. However, with defence policy under constant review, it seems doubtful that the station will return to its former glory although there may be some interesting developments.

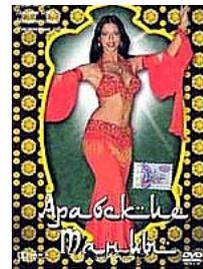
Recently Sir David Frost visited RAF Scampton with a well known film producer. They were on a site "recce" to assess suitability for a modern day remake of "The Dambusters". They also attended the 617 Squadron reunion at the Petwood Hotel in Woodhall Spa to meet the few remaining crew members who took part.

With luck, there may be life in the old place yet!



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