

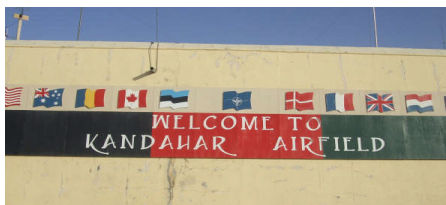


The journal interview

Our man in Afghanistan

The journal talks with burton waters resident
wing commander jim squires

At the age of 51, one might have thought that **Wing Commander Jim Squires** would be settling for a quiet life, compiling the quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society or perhaps something more glamorous and exciting, presenting the weather forecast for TV from the London weather centre. But no, Jim is the Officer Commanding the RAF Mobile Meteorological Unit, based at Scampton but ready at any moment to travel anywhere in the world to set up a weather service in support of RAF and NATO forces.



He has just returned to his house in Burton Waters following a 3 month detachment to Afghanistan, his peace disturbed only by the noise of a bird scarer rather than the rattle of an AK47 rifle or the whump of a rocket whistling through the air. Based in Kandahar, he has been very much in the front line of operations in Helmond province providing Met services to the coalition forces fighting the Taliban.



His unit of 8 RAF, Canadian and Danish servicemen provide 24 hour met services for the ground troops and aircraft involved in the battle. Conditions are not easy at Kandahar airport but the accommodation is probably considered luxurious compared with the troops in the field who patrol the surrounding villages and billet in the local mud fort.

The weather is one of extremes. Hot and dry in the summer with temperatures rising to 40 degrees C from June to September but temperatures dropping to below freezing during the winter, sometimes with heavy snowfalls. Little rain falls during the summer so it came to some surprise to Jim's team when a tropical cyclone swept in over the mountains from the Arabian sea and deposited inches of rain on the airfield, washing dozens of land mines (relics of the war against the Russians) across the jogging track, much to the dismay of the members of the RAF Regiment squadron who provide airfield security.

It is the Harriers and Apache helicopters that provide air support for the ground troops in Helmond, and forecasting is tricky with local winds whipping up sandstorms, reducing visibility to a few yards. The dust hangs like talcum powder in the air, sometimes for days, making it difficult for the pilots to make visual contact with the target. The proverbial seaweed has little use in this environment but experience and local knowledge is all important in providing an accurate forecast, get it wrong and lives could be at stake. Despite the conditions, the morale of all the units is very high and no doubt British dry humour abounds even in the most trying conditions



**Don't blame the weather man !
A missile scores a hit on the
met office window**



Born in Worksop, Jim attended Henry Hartland Grammar School and then joined the Meteorological Service in 1974. Having completed an HNC in maths, stats and computing he then trained as a forecaster.

Between 1974 and 1990 his postings took him to RAF airfields in East Anglia including Coltishall, Wattisham and Marham and to the Met Research Flight at Farnborough flying in specially modified Hercules and Canberra aircraft. A stint at the London Weather centre brought him in contact with the TV weather presenters including Michael Fish, Ian McCaskell and Bill Giles. Jim's desk was a little less glamorous, providing a worldwide weather service for the offshore oil industry.

Perhaps life was getting a little boring after 16 years with the Met office, but as Jim admits, it was the money that made him change careers, so in 1990 at the age of 35 he decided to join the Royal Air Force. The Initial Officer Training at Cranwell is physically demanding so when he graduated as an officer, he was at peak fitness to cope with his first RAF posting to the Middle East at the start of the first gulf war.

The conditions were a shock even to someone who had just completed the rigours of officer training – a five star hotel in Bahrain! From here, the RAF Meteorological team provided forecasts for the RAF Headquarters and the RAF detachment airfields dispersed around the Gulf.

In 1992, Jim was detached for the first time to Bosnia, providing a Met service as part of the United Nations Joint Forces based in Split and Sarajevo. It was a far call from the comforts of a UK forecasting office, and once when the team were moving out from Split, the UN convoy was ambushed by Serbian forces. From 1995 the NATO led Stabilisation Force (SFOR) took over the commitment in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Jim's task as part of the Air Coordination and Operations cell was to provide a met service for aircraft engaged in air strikes against both the Croat and Serbian forces. This was an ongoing commitment and between 1992 and 2001 Jim estimates he spent 4-6 months each year on deployment away from his home base.

Promoted to Wing Commander in 1999, Jim took over as the Officer Commanding the Mobile Meteorological unit (MMU) firstly based at RAF Benson but the unit then moved to RAF Scampton in 2004.

He has a small administrative staff but the MMU is essentially a reserve squadron of 70 to 80 men and women, who are trained as Met Office observers, forecasters and engineer support staff who are commissioned as reserve officers or airmen and women in the RAF.

Many have civilian appointments but as reservists they can be called upon to deploy at any time with the RAF to overseas theatres. When deployed the MMU staff quickly establish a 'Mobile Met Office', using portable weather displays and information systems, to give aircrews the latest weather information in an area where this data is often sparse.



After nearly 10 years in command of the MMU he is expecting a posting to the Ministry of Defence in London later in the year. This will enable him to keep his house at Burton Waters and commute back to Burton at weekends.

However, it will give him time to pursue his hobbies of flying (he has a private pilots Licence) sailing, squash and family history and enjoy quality time with his partner, Julie, also an RAF officer, who is based at RAF Cranwell.

Somehow I think he will miss the sharp end - there is nothing quite like the excitement and esprit of commanding a unit in the field.



gpc

West Lindsey district council news

By councillor david cotton

New Guildhall

West Lindsey District Council has now moved in to the new building on Marshall's Yard. The address for the Council has now changed to reflect this but the phone numbers; E-mail and website have all remained the same. There is little doubt that this is a fantastic new building and acknowledged as currently the greenest most environmentally friendly building in the East Midlands. We are harvesting rain water for flushing toilets; we have smart air conditioning which cuts down on heating costs substantially and we are using solar panels for electricity generation.

I still believe that the cost of this building, which has no effect on Council Tax, nor is funded from it, cost too much. However we are told that if we realise the assets of the old site including the supermarket next to the former Guildhall and the Ship Court we will have actually acquired the Guildhall from a cost neutral position. The former building society on Lord Street is to remain in the ownership of the Council and be leased out, possibly to the County Council for use by the library.

New Concessionary Travel

Members may be aware that the new national scheme for concessionary travel comes in to force from 1st of April this year. There are a few restrictions on that travel but it does allow travel all over the United Kingdom. Up until now the seven districts of the County have paid a subsidy to the bus operators to allow those eligible to travel at any time of day. The new scheme modelled on several others only allows travel for free after 09:30 and before 23:00.

We were told most firmly by government that if we wanted to continue to have unlimited travel then we would have to have a separate scheme for inside the County boundaries. There is no provision for bolting on any extras to the national scheme. The districts were also told that the money given for the national scheme could not be used to fund anything else, even a similar scheme. Therefore the cost would have to fall totally on the Council Tax. This would also mean two cards for those using the scheme which would be confusing for everyone. The cost of such a separate scheme would be in the region of £250,000 per district. This is not cost effective or good use of money.

Recycling

Hopefully from April there will be major changes to the Recycling scheme with much more able to go in to the blue bin. While the absolute details are still to be worked out, and I hope to be making an announcement soon, this will be good news for the district. We have tried but failed to find an end user of plastics 3 and 4 which are previously recycled from plastics 1 and 2. No one is willing to take them at this stage though we understand that processes are being worked on which might allow better recycling of those plastics in the near future. We have introduced the ability to recycle Tetra Packs. There have been receptacles placed at those locations in the District where there are current bring sites. Sadly Saxilby refused one many years ago and so the facility for the Parish is only available if the packs are taken to one of the other sites. The packs are going back to Tetra for them to recycle.