



Cyprus Reunion Report 2006

Day 1 - Wednesday

It was 1445 hrs when we arrived at Birmingham Airport. Thinking we would be the first, we headed for the coffee bar and quickly found Steve Lister already waiting, having flown in earlier from Edinburgh. I had agreed to be available from 1530 hrs onwards to issue flight tickets, baggage labels and be on standby for any telephone calls indicating hitches: of these, thankfully, there were none.

Soon after this I spotted Don & Janette Maciver, who had also flown in from Edinburgh. They had travelled in from Stornoway where, on arrival, they had found their aircraft U/S on the ground – they soon got round this. I did begin to wonder if perhaps everyone might be flying in from Edinburgh at this point!

Quite quickly after this that the rest of the group started to appear in batches, including Terry Winnett, looking a bit fraught, with his party of 3 ladies. Terry soon cheered up when the ladies abandoned him to look around the Airport shops!

It was nice to see the smiling faces of Dave and Maureen Pottage, along with Pete & Mavis Lyver - never an easy journey from their parts of the country.

Eric May, and his friend Andrew, arrived later by the mono rail after travelling down by train – they certainly looked more refreshed than the rest of us; although suspect their refreshments travelling down were far more holiday inducing than anyone else's!

Dave and Shirley Lowe seemed to make it in good time from Bristol, this despite Dave having to work the morning in South Wales with attendant traffic problems.

It did not seem too long, helped, no doubt, by much catch-up talk and refreshments, before we were strapped into our seats - with the aircraft taking off on time.

The flight went well, landing a bit earlier than scheduled. Only reported incident was Eric May finding a can of beer, which conveniently rolled out from under his seat and was quickly consumed! Someone did say the can was part of the Captain's secret stash and Eric could well find himself stuffed into the cargo hold on the return trip.

After arrival, at Paphos airport, in the early hours of Thursday morning, the coach slowly wound its way to our hotel: after dropping off other holidaymakers' at places looking less than inviting and, in anycase, too close the hurly burly of Paphos.

Arriving en-masse at the Beach Bay Hotel, which was well away from Paphos - but conveniently sighted at the edge of the sea - we looked like the proverbial worn and weary travellers, which we had now all become.

The Night Porter, who looked as if he had seen the whole thing a thousand times before, but certainly not the first overseas reunion of RAF Cosford's 40th Entry, quickly issued room keys and smiled as if he knew some dark secret about all of us.

Then it was to bed, with many of us opting to unpack properly the next morning. A lone voice suggested it would be a bit of a tight squeeze in Terry Winnett's room.

Day 2 – Thursday

It was a real struggle for many to get to breakfast, apart from Paul and Elaine Justice, who

had arrived earlier than the rest of us the day before. Paul, it was said, had already done the billet orderly list and his name only appeared as the signatory!

Not long after breakfast, so it seemed, we made our way to the basement for the obligatory welcome briefing from our rep, who did attempt to sound enthusiastic - but that appeared to wane when she found she was dealing with a bunch of seasoned travellers who were more than happy to contribute to her briefing! The best information handed out, it was thought, concerned consuming only bottled water, a good rate of exchange at local banks - along with the fact there was still some orange juice left.

The RAF Akrotiri trip was looming the next day: a collective decision was quickly made to hire a mini-bus and driver - this was arranged through the hotel receptionist. It was then that some of the group went off to arrange rented cars.

The Justices and Lowes decided to head for the pool area for their first tanning session. With a sigh of relief, it was soon noticed there was little sign of any traditional German conquer towelling on the sun-beds around the pool area. It was thought to be Ian Duckham that suggested that they must have heard about the former RAF chaps coming in to carpet Tan the area?

A risk assessment of the bus route to Paphos harbour was undertaken by the Maciver/Stinson crew. It turned out to be good value at 80 cents each way. The buses were nothing like Don and I remembered in the 60s, when there was often livestock and chattels on the roof. Once, I even experienced 2 young goats next to me on a bus to Limassol. The toothless owner said, eyeing me up in a menacingly way, that they were headed for the kebab machine!

On the Paphos harbour front we came across the two infamous residential Pelicans, (which most of the group would encounter at some point during the week) one of whom was being chased out of a nearby restaurant on what looked to be a well trod path! Nearby, was the ruins of Paphos Castle, said to date from 1391 with the dungeons used at one time by the British as a warehouse for salt!

The food, along with the service at that first evening meal proved to be excellent - this continued throughout the whole week, apart from one incident over a wine order. The first evening's hotel entertainment was bingo, with several couples from the group deciding to chance their arm, or should I say Cyprus pounds.

Eventually, we all ended up on the outside terrace, which overlooked the bay, as a group, exchanging banter on our first full day in Cyprus. Paul Justice was nominated as the official photographer as he was the one holding the camera at the time and had no billet orderly duty to undertake!

Was it the Justices who tried to encourage everyone to swim naked around the rock of Aphrodite three times at midnight to restore lost youth? Legend has it that this is the spot, only a few miles away from Paphos, was where the goddess of love and beauty rose from the waves. It was obvious that a daily inspection would now be needed to see if anyone had taken this challenge up, perhaps then turning into a re-cycled teenager overnight!

It turned out not to be a late night for most of us; we were all mindful of an early start for RAF Akrotiri the next morning. Arrangements had already been made to arrive at the Guard Room at 0900 hrs to be met by our host. The mini-bus driver said it would be a good hours (bumpy) ride to get there on time

Day 3 – Friday

It was an early breakfast for most of us, and then a short wait for the mini-bus to arrive at 0745 hrs. The Pottages and Lyvers had already decided they would follow the mini-bus to

RAF Akrotiri, which in anycase was to carry its maximum of 12 passengers. Several of the ladies in the party had elected not to do the trip. The mini-bus left a bit later than planned; Rose had mislaid the room safe key, access to this was needed to get our Passports – a requirement for booking in at Akrotiri

The ride to Akrotiri was both bumpy, and 60 minutes long along the Motorway. Initially, Stephan, the driver, seemed resentful and guarded – this all changed by the end of the day, after he was included in everything we did at RAF Akrotiri.

The final part of the journey took us past the Medieval Kolossi Castle. At one time the Castle was the Headquarters to the Crusaders, when they occupied Cyprus, under Richard the Lionheart.

It was here at the Castle that the Crusaders fostered the making of wines, particularly the sweet dessert wine known as 'Commandaria,' said to be the oldest named wine in the world. The name was said to originate directly from the Castle, which, at the time, accommodated the Commanderie (Commander) of the Knights Hospitallers.

Shortly after arriving at RAF Akrotiri our host, Sergeant Tim Shield, met us and sorted out the booking in of the group – including the taxi-driver, who would prove vital to us getting around the base.

Tim had decided we would undertake a sight-seeing drive around the base, before arriving at the Army Maritime Mole on the end of the Peninsula, where our boat awaited us!

Tim Shield reminded me, RAF Akrotiri was first constructed in the mid-1950s to relieve pressure on the main RAF base on the island, RAF Nicosia. It was in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis when British Forces had to be withdrawn from the Canal Zone in Egypt that room was needed for personnel, equipment and aircraft.

This period also coincided with the outbreak of the internal security problems of EOKA in Cyprus, adding to the pressure on the RAF airfields on the island. Many of the buildings that were destined for the Suez Canal Zone, including the Prefab Bungalows, which became married Quarters, would remain at Akrotiri.

The outcome of the EOKA conflict was the UK granting Cypriot independence in 1960, although, under the agreement, it retained a small amount of territory to create the UK Sovereign Base Areas - which are still self-administrating and independent to this day.

It is all too easy to forget that the British ruled this island from 1878 until 1960, bringing many benefits that still continue to this day.

Touring the Base, we sighted several aircraft, including a tri-star at the Airport Terminal. Seemingly, we had missed the Red Arrows by one week; they had been at Akrotiri for several months for their annual winter training regime. The week after we returned would see the European Fighter detached to the Base. Bad timing, on our part!

The whole group, including Stephan (by now, a very wide-eyed and open-mouthed, taxi driver!) boarded one of the Landing Craft and quickly (at least 6 knots!) proceeded out into Limassol bay to sail along the coastal beach, known as Ladies Mile, towards Limassol Port.

Quite properly, all this did not happen without first getting a health and Safety brief, given professionally and with real enthusiasm by the young (everyone to us in uniform these days looks young!) Chief Engineer - with the Skipper (Staff Sergeant) looking down from his bridge. We were given the freedom of the boat, which only a week ago saw one of the Prince's from Sandhurst undertaking some sort of training.

The highlight of the trip was when the resident search and rescue helicopter flew alongside us and gave a bow - all pre-arranged by Tim, and the Landing Craft Skipper. The Landing Craft returned to its berth after an hour of what was a real treat, with a crew who were kindness itself. At one point, Carol Winnett took control of the steering wheel and seemed to be steering the boat towards the Gulf!

After the boat trip, we proceeded to the Peninsula Club (Pen Club) for cool drinks. The club is utilised by families and single; it has now been part of the base scene since the 60s. Sadly, it was time to bid farewell to what was a wonderful morning.

It seemed a quicker ride back to the hotel. The Pottage/Lyver crew made the right decision to take the coastal road back, rather than follow the mini-bus along the uninspiring motorway.

In the afternoon, Eric May managed to get into the pool, forgetting he had his mobile phone on him. The mobile did eventually dry out the next day; unfortunately it did leave dial buttons 7,8 & 9 inoperative. It was at this point that his dear wife began to get cryptic text message back home!

Eric's good friend, and companion, Andrew, really got into the spirit of the whole reunion. It did seem, at times, that he had been a former Boy Entrant - what with his many witticisms and slant on life.

The evening saw entertainment in the way of Greek Dancing. Several of the ladies ably joined in and looked the part. Jeanette Maciver, who teaches Scottish dancing, said the steps were very similar and easily picked up: quite a few of us were not convinced by this observation, remaining clear of the dance floor, leaving it to the experts!

The highlight, of all this, was Ian Duckham's outstanding contribution to the dancing, no doubt, learnt on one of the many cruise ships he has been on!

Much drink seemed to be consumed this night, added together with the names of those remembered from the 40th, either not here - or sadly gone before. Also, perhaps many of us were just remembering what day it was - May 26th, Attestation Day!

For a short while, the two trusty lifts seemed to be required continuously while we all left in a big clump, some still talking about the visit to RAF Akrotiri and ready to join up again - no doubt, spurred by the fact that they only pay £1 a week for the many condemned bungalow married quarters!

Day 4 - Saturday

At Breakfast, Dave Pottage was sighted going into Ops Room mode - planning his Flight Plan (route) with Pete Lyver. Steve Lister, as the Senior Ops Officer (Chairman) had supplied the Charts. Steve would follow them as tail end Charlie, with Ian Duckham as his rear gunner.

Even this time of morning Carol Winnett, along with sister Nicky and friend Sheila, were heading for the pool area before making their way to Limassol with Taff to meet some old friends of her parents.

The Lowes/Justice crew went off touring: although there was a small suspicion that Elaine may end the tour at the shops - after all she did have previous at our Reunions!

The Maciver/Stinson crew took advantage of the coach run from the hotel to the indoor market at Paphos. Although I was with Rose, I did disown myself from all the shopping bags she accumulated in such a short time. Don acquired a new super-duper camera; it made my digi look like an old Kodak box camera!

Somehow, or other, the whole group managed to get back to the hotel for the evening meal. One nearby table of young diners thought we had all casually met on holiday and when told

the facts could not believe people went that far back in time and remained good friends! I replied most kindly: although we are history, we have a long future, with many more reunions ahead of us!

That evening, when most of us were gathered together in the hotel, the entertainment consisted mainly of Eric reading a risqué extract from a book recalling the story of Pete and Mavis Lyver and the story of the washing machine. Quite a few tears were shed in merriment by all of us. It gave us all a new insight into the genteel nature of Pete and Mavis persona! It was at this time that Eric declared an interest in bringing his wife, and their children, to the next reunion. This declaration was well received by all of us.

All this lead onto the discussion of hoping others from the 40th would perhaps consider attending future reunions after the photos, etc, of the Cyprus reunion got posted onto our Web Page.

The Winnett crew reported back to the group that the family friends they had visited had now resulted in an invite to a wedding reception in Paphos on Monday. Along with this, he had discovered that the head of the family was the Officers Mess Manager at Episkopi and, more importantly, a former 40th Boy Entrant Cook from Hereford. It seems we had a good contact for any future visit to Cyprus.

Day 5 - Sunday

It was on Parade at 0930. Present & Correct: Eric/Andrew, Steve/Ian, The Stinsons, The Macivers, The Pottages & The Lyvers. Mission: Nicosia – The Green Line.

It was quite a drive to Nicosia. The old memories of the place still lingered for a few of us: Hot, Dusty, expensive and divided, even then - between the Turkish and Greek quarters – it turned out, not much had really changed in the intervening years.

On arrival, we found a free car park. The City seemed quiet, with little traffic, as we headed for the nearest restaurant for a drink.

Nicosia had become a real divided city since 1974, when Turkish troops invaded the island and claimed 37% of northern Cyprus as a pseudo-state that has since been recognized by no nation, other than Turkey. With this thought in mind, we all headed on foot towards the Green Line.

I felt quite knowledgeable, for once, when someone asked me why they called it the Green line. I was here (RAF Episkopi) in 1963 when after armed skirmishes in Nicosia, and elsewhere, between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, the UN was mandated to resolve the impasse. They took the decision to divide Nicosia City into Turkish and Greek Quarters, with a dividing line drawn through the City map by a UN officer – he used a Green Pen, hence the Green Line. Then, unrestricted access between the two quarters was formalised with the UN monitoring for problems that might occur.

The Barrier across the street loomed before us, the steps up led to the platform overlooking a derelict and sad looking other half of the street we were now on. It looked totally abandoned, which it was. The Greek armed National Guardsman, on our platform, peered across intensely – we did wonder what he could actually do. It was just a token presence with the Greek Flag hanging limply nearby. Not far away, the Turkish Flag hung in defiance close to their barrier. The space in between brought home quite strongly the phrase 'No Mans Land.' The whole group seemed despondent and sad about this awful fixture, with the derelict feature beyond.

As we left the platform, general agreement on the sadness of a divided Capital City (the only one in the World) and a lovely Island was implied, rather than stated. Some of us visited the nearby museum, which highlighted the unknown plight of those 1,619 Greek Cypriots who were still missing after the invasion. In addition, it told of the 5,000 killed and the 180,000

Greek Cypriots displaced from the northern part of the island. To all of us who saw them, the photographs spoke a thousand words.

After this, the whole group wandered on foot along part of the old walled city. The Venetians built these original star shape walls, and their eleven bastions, in the 1570s to repel attacks by the Ottoman Army, who eventually overran and occupied the City.

We eventually found our way back to the car park. after stopping once again for refreshments. It seemed ironic, and a bit inappropriate, too, after just seeing the results of a City divided, that the group split into two, using two restaurants facing each other across the road. That image was quite powerful for some of us.

On the way back to the hotel we opted to head for Limassol, a less boring route than the motorway. Others had hunger pangs and wanted to eat, which most of us did in a sea-front restaurant at Limassol, shortly after arrival.

In the meantime, the Justices had gone to Akrotiri village in search of home-spun lace – it had been recommended to them. Seemingly, they knocked on many doors in their quest!

That evening the entertainment was a Film/Music Quiz. We all sat together, once again, on the open terrace. We started out a 2 teams in the quiz but seemed to combine resources, with eventually Elaine Justice (Captain Team 1) winning the first prize of a bottle of Red House wine, which was kindly shared out at the last dinner we would all be together.

It had been another splendid day, as someone remarked. The memory of stepping up onto that Platform, and looking across the divided Green line in Nicosia, will remain as a poignant moment, as many agreed on the terrace that night.

Day 6 - Monday

Soon after breakfast the Maciver/Stinson crew set off for Lara Bay (also, known as Turtle Bay) via nearby Coral Bay. It was to turn out an incredible journey - in more ways than one.

It was in 1978 that the Cyprus Turtle Conservation Project was initiated, with habitat protection on Lara and neighbouring Toxeftra beach - along with three small neighbouring beaches.

The Project aims to build and conserve the marine turtle population in Cyprus. Two species of marine turtle still breeding on the protected beaches are the Loggerheads and the rare Green Turtles. We found, Lara Beach has a dedicated turtle hatchery and the whole Project attracts grants from the European Union and World Wildlife Fund.

Annually, between 6,000 and 10,000 hatchlings, of both species, are released from the protected areas. Cages on-site protect turtle nests, and any turtle nests found on nearby Coral bay are transferred to the hatchery on Lara Beach. Sadly, we did not see a single turtle that day.

I digress, after Coral bay we headed for Lara bay and just beyond to take refreshments overlooking the bay. It was after this that we decided to head inland with hope on getting back onto the main road to Paphos. How wrong could we be? It was a maze of the dreaded and badly signed white roads.

We became hopelessly lost, but had the great fortune of being pulled up by a herd of several thousand goats moving across our path to pastures new. They were in somewhat of a hurry; the family units moved together as part of the herd; it was a good 15 minutes before they disappeared; we never saw the leader of the pack; perhaps the goat herder was well over the horizon, with his fleet of foot herd following.

Eventually, we got back on the main road. It was much later, when we looked back on an experience we would not have missed.

During this time, the Pottage/Lyver crew had visited the ruins of the famous Temple of

Aphrodite, which are said to go back to 12BC. The Temple is in the district of Palaepapos – once, Old Paphos.

The Lowes/Justices crew ended up at the Paphos harbour front, encountering the infamous pelicans.

Eric and Andrew had made their way to Larnaca and the Famagusta area, reporting on the access border manned by Brits and the Turkish Forces.

The Winnett party were headed for the wedding reception they had been invited to in Paphos; they were later to report a good time was had by all.

The gathering on the open terrace that night seemed to be centred on the day's excursions by different parties, especially the Macivers/Stinson crew's white road adventure. There was, however, a sprinkling of reminiscing about some of the old 40th boys, along with their instructors.

Day 7 – Tuesday

It did not seem too long after breakfast that the day-trippers to Troodos gathered in the car park ready to go. There would be 12 of us on this trip, with Dave Pottage as Red Leader 1, ably assisted by his Nav 1, Pete Lyver. It did seem, to many of us, Dave and Pete, along with their lovely wife's, were clocking many more miles than the rest of us.

We left at 0930 hrs and had an uneventful journey, apart from when we stopped at a roadside restaurant, where Ian Duckham managed to acquire the cold lemonade drink intended for Pete. Of course, it was all down to waiter error – nothing to do with inter-squadron rivalry!

Eventually, after a small detour, we got to Troodos, just stopping for a quick look around the few shops and ignoring the restaurants. The ladies always seemed to conjure up time for shopping anywhere – even on top of a mountain!

The next stop was the famous Kykkos Monastery, which stands 1318m on top of a mountain. Although the Byzantines founded the monastery in 1092, many of us thought the building was much more recent than that.

It was established that the original building had long gone. Today's modern looking building is the result of the monastery suffering several fatal fires during its history.

The monastery is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and is said to be the richest one on the island. It also possesses one of the three surviving icons ascribed to Saint Luke.

A couple of sightings of the monks are worth mentioning. One was seen getting an ice cream from a vendor outside, whilst two others were sighted carrying pots of paint. Someone did remark it was the same colour that was often used in RAF married quarters – the dreaded magnolia!

Certainly, we all enjoyed the visit – especially the Church, which was magnificent, even to those who were not particularly religious. Perhaps, the only morose thought was the fact that the monastery, during the island's EOKA troubled period, hid several terrorists, whom the British were most keen to apprehend.

Nearby to the monastery is the monument to Archbishop Makarios, the first President of the Republic of Cyprus. Sadly, time constraints prevented us from making this visit and we eventually made our weary way back down the mountain to the hotel, arriving at 1645 hrs.

The evening meal saw 18 of us sat together; it did vividly recall one of the wonderful mosaic pictures seen earlier in the monastery of the last supper!

Later on we congregated, as usual, on the open terrace. Eric May read out the list of awards gained over the week, which are worth listing even now. Eric turned out to be the perfect Master of Ceremonies for this, ad-libbing wonderfully as he went along – all this, did attract much mirth from nearby tables!

40th 2006 Cyprus Awards:

Most Envied Person in the hotel award – Terry Winnett & his Concubine
The Dancing Queen award – Ian Duckham
The Double Act award – Paul & Elaine Justice
The Red 1 Leader/Nav award – Dave Pottage/Peter Lyver
The Brewmaster award – Don Maciver
The Comedian award – Eric May
Honoury 40th Boy Entrant award – Andrew Briers
The Wifelets award – Carol/Nicky/Sheila
The Chairman of The Board award – Steve Lister

The evening was a complete success, it was just a shame the whole week was coming to an end. The following day would see Paul and Elaine Justice leaving on an early flight, and the rest of us with a long day ahead of us before our flight home.

Day 8 – Wednesday

After an early breakfast, the Macivers/Stinson crew set off for RAF Episkopi to visit their old haunts - then both single, and sharing a 5 man room for the whole tour, apart from a few months in '63 when the troubles entailed 10 of us being double bunked in the room!

As we arrived in good time we visited the nearby ruins of Curium, said to be the most spectacular archaeological site in Cyprus. During our time (1963-65), the site was little developed, but it is easy to see why it has since become a major tourist attraction.

We were met at RAF Episkopi Warrant Officer Kiev Thornton (TG11), who kindly booked us in and gave us a tour of the base. We visited our old block, ensuring we had a photograph taken outside our room. Overall, the visit threw one glaringly obvious change, the presence of cars everywhere!

After this, we visited the nearby tunnel beach and so called Happy Valley area. Janette & Rose certainly enjoyed seeing places they must have heard us talking about many times over the years and from now on would be able to relate to them.

The remainder of the group visited various local places or just confined themselves to the pool area to get their final uv top-up. Along with this, as all rooms had to be officially handed back at 1200 hrs couples doubled up and hired rooms up until 2000 hrs at a small extra cost. Those with hire cars saw them collected from the hotel at 1700 hrs.

The evening dinner saw all of us, apart from the Justices, who had left on an earlier flight, dine together for the last time. One small incident, over an order for a bottle of wine, came as a disappointment after such superb service throughout.

Transport picked us up at 2225 hrs and we then wound our way back to Paphos airport. It was eventually 0500 hrs local time when we landed back in Birmingham - a much cooler place all together than the one we had left.

Summary of all the comments kindly received indicated our first overseas Reunion was an outstanding success and the wish was for others (overseas) to follow, perhaps at 2 yearly intervals.

Already some agreement has been reached on given consideration to Gibraltar for the next one. This proposal will be further explored and reaction monitored on our Web Page. In its favour, Gibraltar, a Sterling area, does have the attraction of having easy access to Spain, with an easy day trip to Tangiers by ferry.

Finally, without your continued support and Steve, who originated the 40th Reunion concept, none of all this would be possible - thanks.

Dave Stinson - 08 June 2006

P.S. Apologies for any errors, omissions and inaccuracies. The whole report was written from recalling events and comments made, which were often just overheard - sometimes through a haze of Keo!