

Ted Morgan 1923-1989. RAF Neyland/Whitland/Pendine

West Wales Veterans' Archive, National Library of Wales

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Description

This account illustrates the contribution made by one family in West Wales during WW2 focusing on one member of the family, Ted Morgan. The account which follows captures places and events including Pendine, Whitland and even Oklahoma in the USA. It includes people who met only because the war.

Ted was born in 1923 in Neyland, Pembrokeshire before moving to Whitland. He became an architectural student in Cardiff University in 1941 and a member of the Cardiff University Air Squadron, enlisting for service in the RAF at the Recruiting office in nearby Penarth. His older brother, Kemys, was serving in the RAF and by this point had already completed one operational tour in Bomber Command during the Battle for France, Battle of Britain and then daylight attacks on the invasion ports in Northern France.

Placed initially on deferred entry, Ted was eventually selected for training as a Pilot and was posted to the No. 6 British Flying Training School, in Ponca City, Oklahoma, USA. Commissioned as a Pilot Officer in late 1943 he returned to the UK and then flew single and multi-engine aircraft. Ted was a 22yrs old Flt Lt by VE Day in May 1945 at No. 5 GTS RAF Shobdon in Herefordshire. Ted was then preparing to go out to the Far East as a member of a new Hawker Tempest fighter Squadron who would be operating in "Tiger Force" when the Atom bomb was dropped by the Americans, and Japan surrendered.

Ted returned to his studies at Cardiff University but continued to fly at weekends and during college holidays in the RAFVR. In the early 1950s he became one of the first Educational Psychologists appointed to the still very new NHS and eventually retired as Head of Applied Social Studies at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1981.

Ted lost his two wives at young ages and effectively brought up his four children on his own. He spent his final years in a small village close to the border of Herefordshire and Worcestershire and died in 1989 aged 66yrs.

Early Years

WEH 'Ted' Morgan was born at 69 Waterloo Rd, Neyland on 23rd February 1923. Ted's father Stanley Morgan worked for the Great Western Railway in Pembroke Dock station and his mother, Edith (nee Gwilliam), was a seamstress. Edith's father, grandfather and great-grandfather had all been employed in the Naval Dockyards in Pembroke.

When Stanley was promoted to become Stationmaster in Whitland, the family moved from Neyland to Whitland and Ted was accepted into Whitland Grammar School. Much later Ted recalled constructing an Anderson (air-raid) Shelter with his father in the garden of 'Arfon', their family home following the announcement of the outbreak of WW2.

Pendine & WW2

The family spent regular time throughout the 20s and 30s in 'Bayside', a house built by Ted's grandfather in 1887 Edward Morgan and located just behind the sea wall on Pendine sands. But that all changed when the War Office requisitioned Bayside in 1940 and a senior officer from the 'Establishment', a Major Reeve and his young family were installed 'for the duration'. Bayside was handed back over the Morgan family at the end of the war when Ted's mother and father ran it as a guest house. Amongst those staying there included the actor John Laurie (later of Dad's Army fame). Some 50 years later, one of Ted's sons met with Major Reeve's son who vividly remembered his childhood in Bayside and Pendine with his father during WW2. After this meeting Major (later Col.) Reeve's son then paid a visit back to Bayside.

The 'Establishment' was (and still is) the local name given to then Inter-Service Small Arms Experimental Establishment which had been transferred from Hythe in Kent to Pendine in 1940 to escape the bombing in south-east England. It is also understood that the Beach Hotel located just a few houses away from Bayside on the corner of the road running through Pendine, was initially turned into the headquarters of the firing range, before the HQ was moved to the nearby hamlet of Llanmiloe where it remains today.

During the war, extensive sea wall and beach defences were constructed on Pendine's very long beach and around 'the point' to 'Morfa Bychan', itself surrounded by Ragwen and Gilwern points. Even today, the remains of a concrete wall used during trials on the 10th May 1944 can be seen. The purpose being to establish new methods of breaching sea walls so that they could be climbed by tanks in preparation for the Allied invasion of Normandy, which took place less than one month later. Ted's uncles, Hugh and Will (a WW1 veteran), were members of the local Coastguard service and monitored the coastline for enemy activity, landmines etc.

Joining the RAF

Ted was a talented artist and sportsman and after leaving Whitland Grammar school in 1941 enrolled as an architectural undergraduate in the Welsh School of Architecture, University of Wales, where he joined the Cardiff University Air Squadron.

He enlisted in the RAF in Penarth in late 1941, and was placed on deferred entry, before being called to the Air Crew Reception Centre at St John's Wood in London. After initial training at No. 2 ITW Paignton, Devon, Ted was posted for 'grading' to No. 22 Elementary and Reserve Flying Training School, located in the Marshall's Flying Training School in Cambridge where he went solo for the first time in a Tiger Moth. The cadets were billeted in the halls normally occupied by the students of Downing College Cambridge University.

Posted to the USA for Pilot Training

Ted and a friend from the Cardiff University Air Squadron by the name of Owen 'Ossie' Phillips were posted together to the USA as Cadet Pilots. Ted and Ossie met up with hundreds of other young men in Greenock on the Clyde and embarked on the speedy Queen Mary to make the week-long voyage across the U-Boat infested waters of the Atlantic. It was late April 1943. Not even knowing where they were heading, the RAF cadets safely arrived in Montreal, Canada and then were loaded on large buses and taken down to the RAF Aircrew Dispersal Centre Moncton. Only at this point did Ted and Owen, learn that they were going to be trained as pilots somewhere in America. A train ride lasting several days followed, taking them across the Canadian border into the USA travelling down to the mid-west and ending up in the dustbowl of America in a small town called Ponca City, Oklahoma.

Ponca City had one main street going through it, with a rail station, swimming lido, library, milk parlors and the 'Marlands Mansion.' The influence of the Ponca Tribe featured heavily in goods in stores and on road signs. Arriving at the rail station, Ted, Owen, and the other cadets were quickly transferred onto large yellow buses and taken to the aerodrome located on the periphery of the airfield and No. 6 British Flying Training School (BFTS).

No. 6 BFTS featured a runway, main hanger, control tower and brand new, pine-clad instruction huts, dining room and barracks. The sun and heat in the month of May was something the British were not prepared for, so it was a dream to find not just constant warmth but also fresh fruit, freshly squeezed orange juice and completely non-rationed food, which came after the almost four years of deprivation back home. The two young men hailing from south-west Wales kept pinching themselves.

Social Life as an RAF Cadet in Oklahoma

The cadets quickly found a welcoming and generous local population living in the town outside the base, and many cadets were 'adopted' by local families. In some cases, those friendships – forged in a time of great adversity – lasted lifetimes. Cadets were met outside the gates by local families and by girls in their cars waiting to whisk them off to a dance or a picnic or to simply take them home to meet the parents. Ted was one of those also keen to sample life further afield and travel America. He hitched lifts on lorries to take him to places like Kansas City and Wichita and got see his jazz heroes including Ella Fitzgerald and even Frank Sinatra. Some 40 years later he would talk about those wartime shows in the States on Radio programmes including a regular jazz slot on Radio Hereford and Worcester.

Flying Accidents

By the time Ted had arrived in May 1943, the gravestones of those young men killed in accidents were already being embedded in the cemetery located a short distance from the airfield. Learning to fly in during the War was hazardous to both cadet pilots and their instructors. Just a few weeks into the basic flying training course Ted's good friend and former

Cardiff University student Owen 'Ossie' Phillips was killed. His PT 17A Boeing 'Stearman' (painted yellow and blue) plane crashed at the end of the runway killing young Ossie and his still relatively young instructor. 75yrs later 19year old Leading Aircraftman Owen W Phillips, RAF No. 1653024, continues to lie buried in the sun of the 'Odd Fellows Cemetery' in Ponca City, a long, long way from his home in Cymru!

There were 80 cadets on the course plus 20 American cadets. Flying instructors were American although there was an RAF contingent on the station with the RAF Commanding Officer being Wing Commander Charles Ball. Ted's primary training lasting 70hrs was on the PT 17A 'Stearman'. Successful cadet pilots then moved onto advanced training on the North American AT6A 'Harvard' completing around a further 130hrs. Ted graduated with his Pilot's 'Wings' on 5th December 1943 and was one of 19 cadets commissioned as Pilot Officers, the other 80% being made Sergeants.

Ted's American Instructors

Ted's instructors were American civilian pilots. His instructor on the PT 17A was Lloyd O'Sims a former crop duster pilot whom Ted described as 'grandfatherly'. Lloyd 'nursed' his young pupils through their primary stage of training. Ted remembered the shock to his system however on graduating to the advanced stage of training when he found that his instructor Kenny Clapham was like himself little more than a boy but who had been flying since the age of 15 years.

The first time Ted experienced a low-flying in the 'Harvard' Kenny Clapham, sitting in the rear seat of the aeroplane screamed "*get the lead out of your **** and get down out of the clouds*". After Ted had landed, Kenny got out of the aeroplane visibly shaking "*I didn't mean that low!*". Entirely different in their approaches both Kenny and Lloyd were recognised as being highly effective in obtaining positive results.

Ted's Link Trainer (instrument flying) instructor at Ponca City was Lillian Taylor. 40yrs later in a recorded interview Lillian fondly remembered Kenny Clapham

"Kenny Clapham was the youngest instructor at Ponca City, a natural pilot, who had grown up around Waukegan, Illinois. He started flying when he was 15yrs old and had well over 3,000 flying hours by the time he came to Ponca. Kenny could fly better than anyone I ever knew and after the war he then instructed in the US Air Force on jets and stayed in aviation all his life".

But Lillian Taylor (1921-2007) was herself an incredible woman who had an amazing life. As a small child, she used to watch the planes flying above. One of her ambitions was to meet Amelia Earhart which she did, and she learned to fly before she learned to drive a car. During World War II, Lillian became a link trainer instructor at the Darr No. 6 British Flight Training School, Ponca City.

Lillian continued to enjoy her connection to the Royal Air Force throughout her life and for over 20yrs served as president of the No. 6 British Flying Training School (Veterans) Association

enjoying the travel and the many reunions with her former cadets held all over the world. Lillian was surrounded by her students as each celebrated their memories. A highlight of Lillian's life was the opening of the American Air Museum in Duxford, England, in 1997, where she was involved in a presentation with HM the Queen, Prince Philip and Charlton Heston.

In 1984/5 Lillian and her husband Harold, visited Ted and stayed with him for a few days at his home in Whitbourne, well over 40years since she had taught him to fly on instruments. Back then Lillian was just 22yrs old.

Post-war, Lillian was employed for a time with the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) and was instrumental in establishing the Aviation History Museum of Ponca City. Also, as a former flight training instructor for Braniff Airlines, Lillian was able to obtain memorabilia for the museum. One of the contributors was Ted Morgan whose original painting of an AT6A 'Harvard' in flight is on display. Lillian received many awards including Pioneer Women: Museum Woman of the Year (2003) which in the USA is an honour bestowed upon distinguished women who have made significant achievements in their profession and in their communities.

Back in the UK

On the return journey across the Atlantic, which was again on the Queen Mary, Ted stood on guard outside the cabin of the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, also a passenger on the liner. In 1990 at Ted's memorial event, another Ponca City graduate from the same course, Jack Hastings, recalled the trip and carrying out guard duty for the Prime Minister.

Back in the UK, Ted was posted on a succession of advanced flying courses and Beam Approach training on single and twin engine aircraft at stations including Moreton-in-the Marsh, Chipping Norton and Halfpenny Green flying Ansons, Oxfords, Wellingtons, Lancasters and Stirlings. Frustrated at a lack of active operational opportunities, Ted applied for a transfer to the Fleet Air Arm and was posted to RAF Errol in Scotland for carrier deck-landing training. This though was at a time in 1944 when the RAF and FAA were deluged with newly qualified pilots and the class in which Ted had enrolled and commenced their deck landing training was sent back to the RAF. It was also a disappointment to Ted that he never got to fly the gull-winged Corsair, the top FAA fighter of WW2.

With the forthcoming preparation being made for the Allied invasion of Normandy there was a need for Glider and Tug pilots for airborne operations. Ted was posted to No 3. GTS (Glider Training Squadron) stationed at RAF Culmhead in Somerset where he converted onto the twin-engine Armstrong Whitworth Albermarle, the RAF's first tricycle under-carriage bomber which was being transferred from bombing onto Glider towing duties. On one occasion he and his co-pilot Squadron Leader Bill Edrich DFC (the England cricket test captain) flew an Albemarle from Culmhead to Fairwood Common airfield, near Swansea.

By now a Flying Officer, Ted was then promoted to Flight Lieutenant and posted to No. 5 GTS RAF Shobdon in Herefordshire. Here he flew the single engine Miles Master II which towed

Hotspur Troop-Carrying Gliders. The Hotspur was used to prepare the airborne troops and their glider pilots for the invasion of Normandy, which of course was then followed by Arnhem and later by the Rhine crossing in 1945. As the pilot of the Master 'tug' aircraft Ted's job was to tow the Hotspur from the ground into the air. At the appropriate height he then released the tow rope and broke away. Both he and they eventually returned to base.

But one training sortie didn't go according to plan with near fatal consequences for Ted. Trying to reach sufficient height to set the glider loose the pilot of the Hotspur glider, Ron Kille (1920-2017) remembered Ted speaking to him across the intercom from the Miles Master. 45yrs on he still recalled Ted's message being short and to the point. Ted told him that his engine had seized, that he was cutting them loose and that they were to make their own way back to base. Ron knew without an engine the Master 'would drop like a stone' and he worried that Ted would not make it.

Ron took the glider and its troops back to Shobdon. Upon safely landing was met by a furious officer who had charged up on his motorbike telling him off for landing without permission. Ron put this officer straight, got onto the back of the motorbike and went off to look for Ted, fearing the worst. They eventually found Ted in a potato field in the Black Mountains standing by a crashed and very bent Master, telegraph poles at the edge of the field having been brought down, but surrounded by three land-army girls one of whom had given him an apple. Ron said that Ted was facially bloodied but relatively unscathed, and they were very relieved to find Ted alive. Post-war Dr Ron Kille had a very successful career as a well-known zoologist with Edinburgh University and UNECSO and continued flying as a glider pilot and instructor for several decades with the Edinburgh University Gliding Club.

VE Day

To celebrate the end of the war in Europe (VE Day), Ted led a flight of three Master IIs on a 'beat-up' of the nearby town of Leominster. They carried out a display of low-level aerobatics and believed they were giving the local population a treat. As they landed back on the airfield, Ted was met by an armed guard and told to report to the Commanding Officer. He immediately thought the worst especially when the CO told him that someone had witnessed the display, taken the registration details of the aircraft involved and phoned through to report them for low-flying. But then the CO added 'my wife also witnessed your display in the town and has asked me to congratulate you on a wonderful display of flying!' The CO then offered him a drink and told him 'My only concern is that my wife is happy!'

The official online history of No. 5 GTS at RAF Shobdon says that '*Altogether 1,345 pilots, 291 gliding instructors and 218 tug pilots were trained at Shobdon during WWII and they saw action in the major airborne operations, including the landings on Sicily and the Normandy beaches (D-Day) and the battles of Arnhem and the Rhine. No.5 Glider Training School also holds the record for the most day and night glider training missions, with 96,925 separate glider launches up to 1945.*'

'Tiger Force' and Post-War Life

Shortly after the end of the war in Europe, Ted received news that he was to join a fighter squadron being equipped with the powerful Hawker Tempest. The plan was that the squadron would be shipped out to the Far East as part of 'Tiger Force'. But this never happened. The Atom bombs dropped by the Americans on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, resulted in the Japanese surrender, and the RAF cut back dramatically on its need for aircrew.

Ted was then recruited to become a junior member of a career selection panel set up by the RAF to interview RAF personnel who were considering remaining in the post-war RAF. He was given the temporary rank of 'Acting Squadron Leader' in order that he didn't seem too out of place with his more senior colleagues, not least as he was interviewing some very experienced and battle-hardened aircrew including those of senior rank to him. Ted was himself encouraged to remain in the RAF post-war by a senior officer who predicted that he would go far, but he decided he wanted to get back to his education in Cardiff.

So, aged just 23yrs Ted was demobbed and returned to his studies at Cardiff University. He continued to fly at weekends and during college holidays in the RAFVR until 1953 with the substantive rank of Flight Lieutenant. During this period, Ted flew war-weary Spitfires, Mosquitos and even the early Jets, Meteors and Vampires. For example, at RAF Bircham Newton he flew Mosquitos and Miles Martinets, which included the dubious task of towing targets to be shot at by new, green pilots. He flew Spitfires with 614 County of Glamorgan squadron from Llandow, near Cardiff, in the immediate post-war years. His last flight as an RAF pilot was in a De Havilland Chipmunk at RAF Exeter in 1953. The Chipmunk was the first aircraft that Ted's eldest son flew in as an Air Training Corps Cadet in 1969 from RAF Little Rissington, a coincidence which Ted enjoyed.

During the war Ted had become a proficient squash player and continued to regularly play well into his 50s. He decided to move away from architecture and became one of the first Educational Psychologists appointed to the (then) still new NHS in early 1950s. Ted worked initially at the Royal Western Counties Hospital in Starcross, Devon and then in what were called 'Approved' or 'Classifying Schools' in Redhill, Surrey, and Kingswood, Bristol. In 1963, he became Head of Applied Social Studies at Ruskin College, Oxford, retiring in 1981.

A decent jazz pianist himself, Ted always retained an active interest in jazz serving on committees promoting many jazz concerts including Acker Bilk, Monty Sunshine, Ken Colyer, Chris Barber, Kenny Ball and many of the great veteran American 'jazzers' from the 30s and 40s who were touring the UK in the 60s and 70s, at that point in the twilight of their careers. During the 1980s he personally promoted many jazz concerts in Whitbourne Hall in Worcestershire attracting prestigious names to this tiny village and was also a popular choice for guest appearances on radio talking about the history of jazz.

Ted retained his pre-war skill as an artist with several of his paintings being held in museums in the UK and USA with three in Wales at the Royal British Legion Club in Whitchurch, Cardiff.

He spent his final years in Whitbourne on the border between Herefordshire and Worcestershire and died of heart failure in 1989 aged 66. Ted's first wife, Joan, died at 28yrs old during childbirth in 1959 and his second wife, Moira, died of cancer aged 41yrs in 1974. Ted was survived by his four children and several grandchildren.

Postscript: The Morgan Family During WW2

Ted had four siblings, three of whom actively served in WW2:

Elder brother Kemys (1919-1989) flew two operational tours with Bomber Command during WW2. With 105 Squadron during the Battle of France in May 1940 and then on the daylight raids attacking the invasion ports during the frantic summer and winter of 1940. He later flew a second daylight tour after D-Day on the B.25 Mitchell III's of 98 Squadron, flying from captured airfields in Belgium and then Germany. Kemys remained in the RAF until 1955 serving in Malaya and was decorated in both WW2 and in Malaya.

Ted's two sisters Chrissie and Rita both served as nurses during WW2. For Chrissie (1921-1985) her work led to love and marriage as she became a wartime bride of an injured Canadian serviceman, Richard Arkwright. Post-war, Chrissie emigrated with their baby son, Stan, to Richard's picturesque home village of Fenelon Falls Ontario, where they lived for the rest of their lives. Rita (1926-2014) continued with her career in nursing and was for several decades the District Nurse for Tumble, Cross Hands and surrounding area in Carmarthenshire.

Ted's younger brother Wilfred (1930-2011) served his national service in the British Army, before becoming a toolmaker on the MoD Firing Range, the 'Establishment' on Pendine dunes. Wilf spent his final years in retirement in Carmarthen.

Throughout the war their father Stanley kept the troop and freight trains running through Whitland Station.

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