*(Mike’s memories Part 14 Book 4)*

I started this day to collect an architect from Hilltop in Plymouth and visited a generator unit that is powered in a Devon and Cornwall Police Hilltop Radio station. My companion was named Tom Jane. We knew each other well as we had carried out many of such inspections so conversation was always great but a happening occurred which affected both of us after we looked at the generator and started our quite long descent to return. I was driving quite slowly so as not to cause damage as the path was very deeply rutted with small loose boulders. Looking in the distance I could see a spiralling cloud of dust moving very fast. Tom’s voice said in alarm, “Better pull in here where there is a wide area”. We stopped and waited. The drive was in another world as a van passed. The energy from it was unforgettable. We remarked to each other that we would not like to be on top of the hill when he gets there.

Next morning Radio Devon News mentioned that a person had committed suicide on Kit Hill and was asking if anyone had any information to contact Lostwithial Police. I did give full particulars of what we had seen. The response was, “Goodness! You are spot on. How did you report that information in such a short time?” I told them that the energy coming from that van was disturbing. I could not help but see there was big trouble of some sort.

Whilst talking to the Police, let’s talk of the policing of Thorn Moor, Cheriton Bishop. The area policeman was a typical comic book build, tubby, red faced and kindly man, named PC Tonkins who lived in the Police house at Tedburn St Mary but to me a small boy was always in the right place of minor offences committed by small boys.

One day my friend did not have a bike so not wishing him to walk I gave him a lift. We arrived with David sitting on my rear carrier. The shock of seeing PC Tonkins cycling towards me caused me to lose control and run up a very steep bank and fall backwards with the bike on top of both of us. PC Tonkins stood in the road and exclaimed that that demonstrated the reason for not riding 2 people on a bike. He waited to see if we were OK before continuing his journey. Luckily it was outside of David’s house and I continued to cycle home. Sometimes we would see PC Tonkins ride past our gate on his way to his favourite cider cellar and later in the day riding in a car with his bike on the back having a very necessary lift home.

Some years later PC Tonkins retired and was replaced by a PC Cannon immediately renamed by the locals as “bang bang”. Big enquiries were made about his character. I wanted to know whether or not he let minor deeds go unnoticed. I also wanted to find out whether he enjoyed paperwork as if he did this would not be good as he would probably make out a ticket for blowing our nose.

One evening I was aged about 16 and was walking quietly beside a hedge leading to a gate to the road. As I got to the gate I checked again that the gun I was carrying was empty and left open. Prior to opening the gate and stepping on to the road I was confronted by PC Cannon or should I say Bang Bang. He had remained hidden until I stepped on to the road. He greeted me with the following “Let’s see, your name is Michael?” “Yes sir”, I replied. “Let’s see” he said “Is that a 12 bore shot gun?” Again I replied, “Yes sir. It needs a shot gun licence like this one” I said pulling the very item from my top pocket and handing it over. PC Cannon said. “Ah yes. I thought you of all people would have one.” I thought, I expect he was hoping that I did not. I watched him read through the form and I thought that he was a paper man so nothing out of place will go unnoticed so watch out farmers in this area.

A rumour circulated that this PC had been relieved after the war as a prisoner of the Japanese Death Railway. I thought that if that was the case, I would forgive him his general unforgiving conduct.

*(Mike’s memories Part 14 Book 4 cont(a))*

Some years later my friend George Gillard and I were asked by PC Alan Parsley of Whiddon Down if we would become Special Constables to support him with traffic or, as happened at the time, check points following convicts’ escape from Dartmoor Prison. This we both did and spent many winter nights having training at Moretonhampstead Town Hall. One evening when a member arrived late he told us that President Kennedy had been assassinated. We all stood in disbelief.

I was called to help a regular Constable with a road check at Beter Cross on Dartmoor commencing at 7 pm until midnight. We sat in my car as the night grew cold with heavy fog due so we could hear a car from miles away and would get out of the car standing on each side of the road and wave our torches at the car to stop. Some would not wish to stop as our torch lights would reveal their passenger to be someone other than his wife. Not our care so we thanked them for stopping and waved them on their way. In the late 1950s I was led to understand convicts would escape to pay back a debt to the tobacco baron and the longer they could stay out and cause disruption the more the debt was reduced.

When I left Caterpillar and joined Savilles it was purely to stop living out of a suitcase and working excessively long hours so that I could spend quality time at home with my Vera. The Company had the International Harvester Crawler dealership. In the first 2 years I was there I could see trade falling with the lack of International machine sales until the Company became a Lister parts dealer for the South of England. This opened up new avenues. I got the contract to carry all Hilltop Radio Station general enquiries for Devon & Cornwall Police.

We were then made MAN and Volkeswagon commercial dealers for the nation resulting in a major workshop expansion and myself building a team to specialise in Lister generators, MAN trucks and existing track dozers and loaders. Fortunately we had a good base of apprentices so ended up with a very strong and knowledgeable team of men to the extent that the workshop and parts team won the International dealership championship for 5 consecutive years, once attending Castle Combe race track and driving Formula Ford race cars.

One day I was asked to assist in the filming of Lion of the Desert as there were no Fiat or MAN track vehicles and for work in the desert, real track vehicles were required. I was shown a print of an original tank as they required an immediate answer on the spot in the office from me. Yes was given and I drove back from Cornwall designing the complete unit in my head. I stepped out of the car at Exeter Depot and requested a used International 125 from the sales fleet, drove home in the evening and commenced to carry out drawings covering the intended conversion. The next day the crew continued with normal dealership duties whilst 2 service men cleaned at speed and washed the floor which had dried whilst the donor dozer was stripped of dozer blade, all frame work, operator cab, fuel tank and bonnet. By evening the floor was dried out and the track power unit squared into position. The 3 men assistants were sent home for tea anticipating that they would have a complete mindset. In the meantime I carried out chalk drawings on the floor using nothing more than a tape measure, square and plain metal straight edges. You must understand as it came out of my head there was no heavy or sophisticated calculation but I knew of the benefit of the likeness to the track configuration must follow the original drawings. When completed the film crew came down to Exeter with our hearts thumping to test in a very rough field and that afternoon well proved itself so the heart thumping changed to back slapping. You can imagine the sales team thinking Christmas had come again when the film company ordered the conversion of 5 extra units. I understand they went on their way to carry out the filming. You will find Lion of the Desert in detail on Google and if you scroll down to ‘military equipment used’ you will see a full photo of my Fiat 2 MAN tank conversions with various comments from military experts still trying to identify the type of tank used. It was nothing like they guessed it to be but came out of my head and was made by the boys

*(Mike’s (Mike’s memories Part 14 (cont (b) Book 4*

of Exeter from an International 125 so years passed and the holding financial Company started closing and made all the MAN engineers redundant but retaining some of the generator maintenance engineers. I was then made redundant. Fortunately having observed the action taken over the past months I had a position waiting for me. When I walked into the Job Centre it became apparent that I was the wise man with still a young attitude. I thought what a pity it was that the Job Centre employed people unable to identify and communicate by using a different attitude with people that had worked all their lives and were made redundant for the first time and those with no knowledge of what to do regarding redundancy and the inefficient waster.

End of Saville employment and on to Sleeman Hawken.

Caterpillar Geneva Courses: Having spent a time with Bowmaker I was sent to Geneva on a series of excellent and in depth Caterpillar engineering courses on power shift transmissions, hydraulics 977, torque converters and turbochargers. Then some time after having carried out sea trials to the D333 CAT engines for Morgan Giles, on the Monaco 489 built at Teignmouth I was sent to Geneva on a Marine Power analyst course of 2 weeks. I will cover this enchanting period. The CAT school was located out of the town up in the hills a complex looking into the mountain of Mont Blank. The tutors were Swiss and the class consisted of dealership engineers from all over Europe – a Spaniard, 2 Belgians, a Danish gentleman, a Phillipino and myself.

The first day was spent analysing engine output or lack of it, the remainder explaining that a hull designed to a particular shape and long ton weight could not obtain a speed designed, for instance, a hull with a power of 500 hp unit with a maximum design speed of 7 knots will never go over that speed if the engine is replaced with a 750 hp unit. Also propeller correct size is vital for this. We were presented with a special set of slide rules and taught (with difficulty) what vital specification to ask for before coming to work out propeller size on the slide rules. Why go to such depths you might ask. Well if you are the CAT engine test engineer on the sea trial and the engine reaches full rpm and power, everyone gets a pat on the back and completes the sea trials with a big smile. If not and the rpm was below specification, open warfare would erupt in the wheel house between the designer, boat builder and the Cat man – yours truly.

This Course was to furnish us with details of the correct question we should ask, ie what weight did the boat finish up with at the build finish etc and using the slide rules supplied calculate to prop size. Regarding this we could stand our ground and respond with the useful information required.

The weekend came and no let up. We were paired up, I with the Spaniard and given a problem that needed a propeller calculation using the slide rules – heaven forbid that I was always lagging behind the very switched on Belgian and needed a night’s rest to think things over. We got to the hotel and my partner, the Spaniard said “Bye Mike I am here to enjoy myself – see you Monday morning”.

Saturday morning with the warm sun shining on me I walked with homework the 200 meters from the hotel to the Jet d’Eau on the lake (you are going to feel sorry for me) as I sat beside this lovely lake environment looking at the d’Eau I was reminded of the jetting on the lake surface to the top of the nozzle Jet to now 140 meters with a volume of the nozzle of 7 tons of water. Working alone on the problem I had a wonderful time as a local old man offered me a ride in his boat around the lake. It ended up a very delightful 2 days. Back to school questions were asked to the teams of 2 and it arrived at us before any questions could be presented by the tutor. My Spanish friend said loudly, “As Mike is an English officer and a gentleman I left him with the problem.” Well, I took the full force of the questions and corrections had to be made. I felt I came out wiser but somewhat sand blasted.

*(Mike’s memories Part 14c Book 4)*

Out of this became a better understanding and the desire to think about imagining faults and possible remedies thus I had spare time to dream.

*(Mike’ memories Part 15 Book 5)*

Bye bye Savilles – Good day Sleeman Hawkins: I commenced this job working from home working with the Company as a Parts Engineer and Marine sales. I could carry out my customer PR visits with great confidence knowing that any Lister Petter parts ordered would be with the customer within a day or so.

The area I travelled was Cornwall to Poole RNLI Headquarters at Malmsbury and Wales M4 and the Gower Peninsula. Vera and I would load the van with 3 Lister Marine engines and show kit and depart on Sundays or Bank Holidays in the morning, arrive at Newlyn fish market and build up a complete marine engine show stand.

We were ready for the Newlyn fish festival that commenced on Bank Holiday Monday a very popular event that drew in approximately 22,000 visitors. That day engines sold would be followed up with a visit to the installation site. How useful my past training in Geneva came into play. We would follow by having a stand in the NEC at Birmingham and one in Lyme Regis. Eventually I retired with Vera following 2 years later.

I was well pleased to be able to load 3 Lister marine engines and show kit into my Astra van. This was achieved because I owned a three piece breakdown engine lift and on weekends was able to check out Health and Safety with fingers on the buzzers, ie I manufactured an extension on the lifting arm so angled that it lay parallel with the engine thus manoeuvring the clearance between the engine rocker cover to the height of the van roof. With my minimising engine lift I was self-contained and able to load.

After retirement I got a piece of allotment and was given an old rusty disused Merrytiller rotavator minus the engine. I purchased and used the overpowered Honda 5 hp and it operated the unit at just over tick over and returned an excellent job.

When Vera and I enjoyed our Ruby wedding anniversary we invited friends and relatives to a Sunday lunch with a request for no presents but if they wished to put a donation for the Devon Air Ambulance in a bucket, that would be appreciated. The following morning we delivered the bucket to the Devon Air Ambulance HQ to be opened. It was an exceptional surprise to find generous amounts of money had been donated. We were then asked if we could help as there was a shortage of speakers. Vera said, “Mike will be a speaker”. So from then on I became a speaker and Vera and I always worked as a Devon Air Ambulance team of speakers, Vera operating the Power Point system whilst I spoke. This we continued to do until the Covid 19 lockdown. In the previous 16 years we had given talks at the length and breadth of Devon manning stalls at shows and in the latter period Vera worked in the garden whilst I spent time in the garage/workshop making leather swords, fobs and belts as I had taught myself leather work at the beginning of my story when I mentioned a very young John Anstee who would spend much time with me as an engineer who controls a welding and engineering business of his own. We spent many hours discussing engineering projects from the latest to the old types of problems and carried out modifications to a great friend’s son’s new kit car.

I also remember being in daily contact with Gordon Long. One day I was contacted by Poltimore Church warden in desperation for a replacement old fashioned church key. I told him that I would make a replacement. Having never made a key before I thought this should be interesting so I examined the old 8 feet long item and selected the metal required. I set forth with quite an amount of hand hacksawing followed by an equal amount of small filing and it came to pass that a key presented itself. I ended up making 2 or 3 more for Poltimore and one for Huxham Church. I returned them with the completion of the regular 2.5 inches and ¼” key rings as I remembered at Sunday School in Cheriton Bishop Mrs Hill explaining that all church keys should have a 2.5 inch key ring for should the bridegroom or best man forget the wedding ring the vicar would call the Church Warden to hand over the church key and the special ring was placed on the bride’s finger and duly blessed so three good things came out of the manufacturing of the keys. The Church Committees were not overladen with the cost of a replacement key though these keys were approved of by the old customers. Two Church Wardens had been re-educated to cope with modern day weddings should the unthinkable happen.

Vera and I have had great fortune in having such lovely people around us to keep our early retirement alive, such as Julie, first cousin to Vera and Godmother to Julie’s daughter, and her husband Richard, who both chaperoned us to five unbelievable holidays on Lake Garda and then to Venice and to Florence in Tuscany and kept a close watch on us at all times. Also John and Ann Anstee now identifying that the old joints need an extra grease nipple fitted together with an extra squirt of WD40, collect us and take us for Sunday lunch and the everlasting friendship of Judy and Gordon Long ever ready to present a meal and our very many friends and acquaintances.

To cast my mind back in time I was introduced to John Anstee by his Mum, Elsie when I was 15 years of age. He was a babe in arms and as you can imagine we lost touch over the years until the 1990s when John carried out a specialist stainless steel welding upgrade on my Super Seal 26 boat rudder. Now standing before me is this very experienced welder with all metal type experience. From that time on we sailed on the south coast and carried out mooring repairs at the Ham, Dittisham thus extending our happy boating life until Covid 19 hit the world.

We were very lucky because we Caterpillar men, known as the CAT men had not met for 49 years so I set forth with pen and phone and arranged a reunion on 15 February 2020 which developed into a great event at the Beefeater, Middlemoor with Devon Life sitting with us and interviewing us all and put us in Google. As a band of brothers we had the following boys, Joe Morrish aged 94 who was Depot Service Controller, Jack Carter, Depot Parts Manager and Colin Wroth, Engine Rebuild Supervisor. Also there was Bob Richards aged 70ish, Depot Overseas Service Engineer, John Cole aged 80, Depot and overseas Service Engineer, Johnny Blackmore aged 72 and myself as Field Service Engineer. We both worked the length of theM5, part of the M4, Telegraph Hill and I did a section of the Plymouth Highway whilst Johnny Blackmore accompanied by the late Tony Butt continued to manage the Plympton site and sometimes I would break from duty to engage on marine work as discussed earlier in my story.

My Uncle Ronald said, “The trouble with folks moving down to Devon is that they think we Devonians are daft because we have no sense!”