

GERRY TAYLOR

'Early in the war,' said Gerry, 'I joined the Home Guard. Communication was by lamp, electric, signalling, daylight, which meant by Boer War Morse lamp. If you couldn't find water for the batteries, you made it! Armament was a pike, later replaced by a World War One rifle.

'Knowing that I'd soon be called up, and believing that if something's unavoidable it's best to volunteer, I left the HG and joined the RAF.'

That was in 1940. He emerged from his trade test a Group One

Tradesman, and was advised to take up wireless rather than radio. Like Colin Latham, he wondered where the difference lay.

'On the square bashing course, I remember being stripped to the waist, exercising in the snow outside the Winter Gardens in Morecambe, when

Max Miller drove up for rehearsal in a Rolls and a fur coat. He was the only one laughing.'

Surviving the bread and margarine of the Morecambe landladies, and being called pregnant parrots by instructors under orders not to use bad language, Gerry and his mates finished as top squad.

After an equipment course at Cranwell, spent learning about antique radio sets, LAC Taylor was posted to a night fighter squadron to look after v.h.f. ground/air communication equipment.

'VHF was very new and was better understood by civilian amateurs than by the RAF, who were used to 1929 stuff.

'My next station was terrific. WAAFs appeared on my horizon for the first time; a house party atmosphere prevailed; pyjamas could be worn at breakfast, provided they weren't coloured; sports gear took the place of uniform in the evenings.

'But it was the equipment and the technical people that really opened my eyes.

'I'd fetched up at the heart of something I'd only heard rumours about — radio direction finding, or radar as we now know it. And this was one of the first mobile night interception stations — Type 8.'

Pretty soon, Gerry decided that wireless had been a bad choice. He applied to remuster, and the right answers to four technical questions saw him into

'radio'.

There followed an almost frenetic series of postings — in all, he notched up 36 stations in 5½ years: an idyllic period in a CHL station in South Wales; introspective months of isolation in the gale-torn Faroes, with airborne radar that sat on the ground and fooled the Germans into thinking that the invasion of Europe might be through Norway; days spent in a

Martello tower in Essex; a spell maintaining an oscillator unit in a biscuit tin installed in an autogyro; a short stint in the Outer Hebrides, where he was banished after telling no less a person than the editor of *The Aeroplane* that he spent his time mending officers' bicycles.

In 1944, the RAF acceded to his request to go on a millimetric radar course. His newly acquired knowledge took him into France, Germany, Belgium and Australia, delayed his demob for six months and profoundly affected the rest of his life.

'In Civvy Street, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I was lucky enough to get a place at Cambridge and then, with a shaky third under my belt, I presented myself at Marconi. There, on the strength of my knowledge of 10cm radar, I got the only vacancy in the Company, and that was in Services Equipment Division.'

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Starting in Sales, Gerry soon switched to the technical side. 'At one time, I helped develop a display, using components bought on my expense account from a radio shop in New Street. All Company items were being channelled into the super-priority VAST & ROTOR project.'

Gerry was in the senior delivery team at the births of 50cm radar and the concept of system engineering and product planning.

He recalls an early post-war period spent at Baddow, where eccentricity ran amok.

'No one wore neck ties, ancient cars were *de rigueur*, and the chief brain, T.L. Eckersley, was so preoccupied with higher things that you'd find him standing in the loo, deep in thought, having forgotten why he was there.'

Gerry's present job as systems marketing manager gives him the opportunity to pursue his conviction that only by assiduous product planning can the Company be sure of developing equipments that the customer will buy.

Soon he will retire. 'There's no question of wondering how I shall fill my time. I suffer from a big garden and two lively grandchildren — all needing attention.

'I may do some writing, and one day, my wife and I may up sticks and head for Wales or Devon. I've enjoyed product planning: I've no doubt I shall enjoy retirement planning just as much.'