

# Missed Opportunity

By Tony Eley



My failure to meet members of the Royal Family started early in my military career. As a young and very keen Junior Medical Officer I was based at an Air-Sea Rescue unit on the East Coast.

Being a few years older than the Heir to the Throne, my service coincided with the time when he was undergoing flying training at Royal Air Force Cranwell.

It should not cause any real surprise that we were aware of his flying programme.

Part of the training involved “night flying”. I use the term carefully since at this stage “night flying” in Jet Provosts really meant flying in the late summer evenings as full night flying capability for students was not a sensible proposition.



With the passage of years I cannot recall if we were formally tasked with moving forward or if a local decision was taken to position an aircraft closer to the area of operation, but I do recall that for a number of evenings a Whirlwind and crew ( and a junior medical officer ) moved from North Humberside to Royal Air Force Binbrook ( much closer to Cranwell ) whilst the night flying training took place. We spent a number of ( happily ) boring and cold evenings on the ground at a windswept and freezing Binbrook

The Royal Student completed his training satisfactorily and in due course was awarded his wings.

Before leaving Cranwell he made flying visits to the units who had assisted in one way or another during his training, and Royal Air Force Leconfield was included on his list. Royal Flights, of course, require additional Crash / Rescue facilities and, ( you guessed ) a junior medical officer as part of the team.

The Royal Visitor duly flew in, met and thanked the team who had supported him during his training whilst I watched his arrival and departure from the front seat of an emergency crash ambulance parked in the centre on another cold and windswept airfield!!