

Thomas Henry Blake (1931 -2019) was born in Elham in Kent one of five siblings and the third child of Charles and Elizabeth Blake. His early years, before a move to London, were spent in Elham and Folkstone and throughout his life he was always proud to tell people that he was a Man of Kent. In later years when travelling through Dover or Folkstone he would always refer to the days when, as a boy, the White Cliffs of Dover were his playground. His childhood companions were his brothers and sisters Bill, Ronald, Gladys and Pamela. His father died when Tom was quite young, and the family moved from Folkstone to Hampstead in London, where they were living when war started in 1939.

The war had a devastating effect on the family, Bill was severely injured in an air-raid and the rest of the children were evacuated from London to many different places in the UK.

Tom was evacuated to Wapley in Wiltshire to stay with his mother's family and he remained there until the end of the war. He spoke years later of not enjoying being split up as a family and not enjoying his schooling, he was left handed and was always made to sit at the back of the class until he had learnt to write right handed.

On leaving school he completed an electrical apprenticeship and in his spare time he played cricket and it was at a cricket match that he met Vera, the love of his life. Vera was from Folkestone and they started courting just before Tom had to undertake his National Service.

Tom signed on as an electrician in the Royal Navy between 1952 and 1954. He served on HMS Whirlwind and was based in the Mediterranean. This period gave him his love of travel and I was shown wall maps at Tom's house covered in pins which detail some of his travels including his naval adventures.

He thoroughly enjoyed his service and visited many Mediterranean ports, but his favourite was Malta, which he often spoke of. He also spoke of his role in

recovering the wreckage of a Comet, the first jet airliner, which had come down in the Med.

When he returned home, Tom joined the BBC as an electrician in 1954. Broadcast Television was in its infancy and needed many new skills to be developed so Tom became a television cameraman. He worked on a variety of live studio productions, but he also worked on Live Outside Broadcasts which were new to everyone and he became a most respected OB camera man in the BBC.

He worked on many famous TV shows including The Goon Show, The Val Doonican Show, Morecambe and Wise and Sunday Night at the London Palladium he even met Vice President Richard Nixon during a visit to the Television Studios in London and was tasked with showing him how to use a television camera.

Tom and Vera married in 1956 and lived in Hampstead where three years later Graham was born. When Graham was small the family moved out of London to High Wycombe.

Tom's love of cricket continued, and he was involved with the BBC social teams. It was around this time that he was introduced to golf, again being left handed caused him a problem - left handed clubs were too expensive – so he taught himself to become a right-hand golfer.

Vera confessed to Tom that she liked Val Doonican but Tom couldn't see what she saw in him, so to prove his point he told her to watch the show that he was working on next. When Tom was asked to zoom in on a close up shot of Val Doonican, he went it much closer than was required, so he could show Vera just how much make up was required to cover Val's poor, pitted skin. – Just to prove a point.

BBC Wales began broadcasting in 1964 and Tom was one of the founding members of staff having been promoted so the family moved to Newport where Mandy was born in 1965.

Even though Tom was now based in Cardiff he was still called upon to work for the occasional programmes in London, one such responsibility was the funeral of Winston Churchill. He was positioned at Tower Pier as the coffin was moved from the gun carriage to the motor launch that would take Churchill's body down the Thames.

There was no chance of a rehearsal to work out the best shots on such a huge undertaking. So Richard Dimbleby asked each camera man what would be best for their location. Tom was set up at Tower Pier and as the light would be fading Tom suggested that he zoom in onto the face of a single soldier as the coffin passed.

As it turned out with the light fading to dark, the slow zoom on to the distraught soldier's face was extremely poignant. Richard Dimbleby later remarked that that segment of the coverage became the expression of the nation's grief and one of the iconic moments in television history.

Tom was involved in recording much of Welsh history in the coming years, he showed the Nation and the World things that brought great pride, he covered Rugby and Football Internationals, Eisteddfods and the Investiture of the Prince of Wales. He also had the task of bringing some of the pictures of the Aberfan disaster to our screens.

In 1970 Tom had an accident in work that left him seriously injured and he spent a year in hospital. When returning to work he could no longer work as a Television Cameraman so became a still's cameraman working for the BBC

Wales sports department. During his time there he must have taken pictures of every sports person in Wales

He was a hard-worker, and this meant he was often away from home, but when he was home he spent all the time he could with Graham and Mandy. He was always encouraging in everything they did, particularly sporting activities and enjoyed playing sports with them.

The love of travel he developed when in the Navy led to the family taking many holidays and as well as the usual summer holiday, each year the children were given the choice of a really good present or going on holiday for Christmas. They always chose the holiday and spent their Christmases in Europe, sometimes in the snows of Austria but usually the sun in Spain or Italy.

Summer or Winter while other families would be lying by the pool the Blakes would be active perhaps playing tennis or golf regardless of the temperature.

Graham told me that because of his work the family had some additional luxuries, they were the first in the street to have a colour TV, a non-party telephone line, so Tom could always be contacted by work and he always had his own car.

When he gave up cricket, about the same time he moved to Wales, golf became the main focus of his sporting passion. He won the BBC championship and played at courses across the UK as well as foreign destinations. When the family moved to Church Village he joined Llantrisant Golf Club.

Tom's beloved Vera died in 1982, before her death Tom promised Vera that he would keep in close contact with the children, that was evident during the Gulf War when Graham was stationed in Saudi Arabia where contact was particularly impossible. During an air raid with sirens, Scud missiles overhead and Patriot Missiles launching Graham answered the phone and it was Dad

asking how he was. After a large explosion Graham suggested he ring him back at a quieter time. After hanging up Tom realised that he was watching the events unfolding live on the News channel.

In 1988 he retired and was able to indulge his love of golf to the full. Upon his retirement he and Graham went on an around the world golfing tour, playing many countries, which are recorded on a wall map at Tom's home. Other trips followed over the coming years as Graham put it Tom had played golf in places many people have never heard of, his favourite destinations being Thailand.

Tom was also very interested in history whether through books or the television and in particular the Second World War. He was fortunate to visit the war cemeteries and battle memorials in France with Graham on numerous occasions, always packing his golf clubs.

Tom had suffered from the injuries he suffered in his accident for the rest of his life and over the years other conditions were added which affected how he lived his life. But it did not affect his attitude to life. He bounced back after every problem and never let his health spoil him from enjoying his life to the full.

In 1997 realising that his mobility was decreasing he moved home so that he lived next door to Llantrisant Golf Course. His neighbours at his new home became great friends and were very helpful and supportive to him.

About twelve years ago he had a fall which resulted in Graham moving back in to the family home. Tom continued playing golf until about five years ago until he found it too difficult.

Family was very important to Tom, from his early years playing with his brothers and sisters, to his own children, gaining a son-in-law Chris and two lovely grandchildren; Carys and Rhys. Tom was always asking how they were

doing in School or University or all about their various sporting achievements whether it be Carys's netball or Rhys's cricket or golf. Rhys has another thing in common with his grandfather - the love of ice cream.

After so many health problems, Tom died peacefully at home on the 18th of May. He will be dearly missed by his loving family.