



NATIONAL SERVICE REMEMBERED

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NATIONAL SERVICE REMEMBERED

National Service Remembered aims to bring to life the stories of those who were conscripted.

The youngest person to enter National Service is now aged 77; this exhibition honours the heroic contribution both he and a generation of men gave to their country, capturing their wealth of knowledge and historic experiences for generations to come.





COLIN SMITH



I was born in a little village called Farnham which is near Blandford and after I left school I worked on my grandfather's farm; he was a tenant farmer on the River's Estate. So I could have got out of National Service but I decided that I would give it a go. I had friends who'd been in a few years before me so I had some idea as to what was involved. I was actually 19 when I went in and I trained at Exeter. I was in the 1st Devon and Dorsets.

It was very different to what I was used to and very disciplined but I think I coped well with it. After passing out, I went to Cyprus to meet up with the regiment there. We went by troop ship, on the HMT Dunera. I became a PRI clerk working for the President of Regimental Institute. I was based in what they called headquarterd company and we were in Polymedia camp which was just outside of Limassol. I had quite a good job and enjoyed it in Cyprus. We only worked in the morning, from 7am to 1pm.

One of the things which I remember is that the day when the Greek troops all came into Cyprus, they were all coming in on trucks with guns, and of course, the English being English, we were playing cricket alongside the road as they were going past.

GEOFF CLAYTON

It was a few days after my 18th birthday in September 1947. A brown envelope dropped onto the doormat (inside was a four-shilling postal order, a rail warrant and instructions to report to Chichester barracks). I had been conscripted and given my first day's pay. There followed an army number, a demob number and my AB64. When you are only just 18, two years is a long way off. I wasn't thrilled about going but it was just something that we all had to do.

On arrival, there was a trip to the Quartermaster's stores for kit issue, trip to the Doctor for a limb count and TAB, aptitude tests and an introduction to the wooden hut that was to be our home for the next six weeks. A large barrack room with about thirty beds. I sat on my biscuit (hard mattress) to study what the Quartermaster had given me. It was a long list and included a battledress, ancient and ill-fitting denim overalls, boots, lots of webbing, two shirts and underclothes, 4 pairs of socks and a greatcoat. Nearly forgot the Hussif – needle and thread, darning wool and some spare buttons.





GEOFF CLAYTON



I was sent to a WOSB – War Office Selection Board – which took place at Hazelmere in Sussex. I passed and was deemed suitable for promotion to a second lieutenant. Goodbye to prickly shirts, hello to 13 shillings a day, sheets on my bed and Prince Charles. The 13/- was not much of an increase as we had to buy our own uniform and pay mess bills.

My ambition was to study medicine but I had fluffed my higher certificate in Biology. All was not lost. As Education Officer I was able to organise a course at Queen's University and as MT officer I could arrange transport. I was able to retake biology and ease my way along the medical pathway.

We ex National Service boys were more mature when we entered University. We had had a two-year gap year without any hedonism. Having left the service, I continued on my medical journey and enjoyed a career in General Practice.

DON CUTLER

I was born in Shaftesbury, 20 November 1937. I went to school at the Secondary Modern in Shaftesbury and when I left school, I did a 5-year apprenticeship as a bricklayer. We had about 70 blokes in the firm and many of them had been called for their National Service, so I didn't worry about joining, I just went, and I enjoyed myself. I was deferred for two years because of the apprenticeship.

I was in the Royal Hampshire Regiment in Winchester, which is an infantry battalion. They then amalgamated with the Queen's Regiment to become the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment. When you did your training, there was no point getting bolshy, you had to do what you were told. If you didn't, you had to go down and do press ups in the middle of the square with everybody watching you. You didn't do it again after that.

I was a Marksman on the rifle, bren gun and sten gun. Then we moved on to Sterling machine guns and carried a 3.5 rocket launcher.





DON CUTLER



We never had much money, National Service was only 25 shillings a week and some of that had to pay for cleaning your gear and equipment, and I used to send home 10 shillings to mum.

I did 22 months over in Germany, then the whole battalion came back and I was getting close to demob. I enjoyed it though. Looking back, I wish I'd have signed on, stayed in the army but when I came home on leave, father had a building firm and wanted me to work with him. In those days you did what your parents told you. National Service made you look after yourself. They should have never stopped it, it made a man out of you and if you had a problem, you'd think about it and get on and do it.

JERRY ANDERSON

We had a newsagent shop near Windsor and as I approached leaving school, my mother decided that I shouldn't just be able to run the shop, I should know other things as well. I got a position at the Great Western Royal Hotel, Paignton. The first place they sent me was down to the kitchens to learn how to cook. Eighteen months later I applied for my National Service, I was 18 by then.

I was placed at Cardington and then transferred for Square Bashing to Cannock Chase in the West Midlands. As soon as I got there, they looked at my records: cook/chef and I was sent straight down to the Officers' Mess for the next 6 weeks so I never did the square bashing.

They sent me back to college to complete my training and I became a fully qualified top paid chef and I was only 19 by then. I was then sent back to the Officers' Mess and put in charge. After I was there for 2 years, I'd been asked to sign on for another 2 years to complete my training and then got paid for a regular airman. I got back paid so I'd done very well already so far.





JERRY ANDERSON



I got to France, to Fontainebleau, and of course had a lot of qualifications behind me. The Chief of Staff Sir Theodore McEvoy, was looking for a chef to run his household. I was interviewed by him and I never went back to camp after that. He lived in a beautiful village and I spent the next two years there. I had some unbelievable experiences. I was a very lucky guy.

National Service game me a leg up, having already got off to a very good start in the first place. I was good enough to cope with what they asked me to do and a bit more besides, and before you know where you are, you've made a success. I must admit, the only things I've ever done in my life are things I enjoy doing. And that's what life's all about.

JOHN HARVEY

I'm a Dorset lad. When I left school at 14, I went on the farm to work because everybody worked on the farms round here. Everybody hated it because we never went anywhere. Then we had to go and register for National Service. I finished at the farm because the farmer said that he could get me out of the army. I said no! I hated the thought of going but nobody was going to call me a coward for not putting on a Queens uniform or helping their country if they need it, I'm man enough for that.

They sent me a travel warrant and we had to go up to Gobowen by Oswestry and then get on a train. Luckily, there was another lad from two villages away who was going the same time, so we went up together.





JOHN HARVEY



We got to camp, they gave us a cup of tea and a fancy cake and I thought this isn't bad going. We then went into a big room with lots of men who had each of the kit items. One bloke had the trousers, one had the boots and then you had your belt and your jumpers and coat. They laid them all across your arms and gave you a hat that looked like a dustbin lid. I think they cut a foot off the bottom of the trousers.

If you go in the army, you've got to know what you're there for, you're not there for games, you're there for something which is deadly. To fight and protect, and protecting people means kill or be killed in some cases. Luckily, we never had to go to war, but we learnt how to fight with a bayonet and how to shoot.

All in all though, I really enjoyed it. You could go in there and be an idiot, not doing anything but it was a chance to learn a lot of things that I could never learn on the farm.

MICHAEL TURNER

I was born in 1933 and was 6 years of age when WWII broke out. In 1941, aged 8, I joined a Scout Cub Pack. My life in the Scouts in Tottenham was, for a young boy, very exciting. The excitement was the 'BLITZ'. I remember a 'Pack Outing' to London Zoo in Regents Park, when a V1 Buzz Bomb landed in the park. And at the age of 12 years old, I recall selling programmes for the "Victory Parade".



On leaving school at 16 years old, I started an Engineering Apprenticeship. This meant that I was deferred from National Service, but I hated engineering and shortly after my 19th birthday decided that I 'wanted out'. The moment you did this you were grabbed for National Service. I wanted to do my National Service in the Army and so began the 6 weeks of Basic Training that would turn us from 'Civvies' into 'Troopers' in the Royal Armoured Corps. Over the 6 weeks, our drill improved. As a squad we worked to make our barrack room the smartest, we became a team and we learnt to help each other.



ALL ARMS DRILL WING



MICHAEL TURNER

Any National Serviceman who was above average was encouraged to become a N.C.O. Instructor. Most of the Lance Corporals and Corporal Instructors were National Servicemen. Only the Sergeants and Warrant Officers were Regulars. Even the second Lieutenants, the most junior of commissioned officers, were National Servicemen.

I successfully completed my 6 weeks G.M.T. Instructors Drill Course and was given a squad of raw recruits of my own. The Sergeant of the Intake pretty much 'left me to it'. It was hard work, but enjoyable. I worked my squad hard and slowly but surely, they became a team. It wasn't much different from my days as a Scout Patrol Leader. Firstly, find out what you've got. How many were Public School, had Cadet experience, been in the Boys Brigade or Scouts? I lived with them every day from Reveille to Lights Out. Showing them what to do and how to do it. The Pass Out day arrived – we didn't win anything, but my Sergeant told me "It wasn't a bad effort for the first time – you'll learn"!

At the completion of my G.M.T. Course, I was able to select which Regiment I should like to join so I chose to wear the Prince of Wales Feathers and be a 10th Hussar. So I soldiered on getting better at my job. I was promoted to Full Corporal after 11 months and my squads became the ones to beat. I was summoned by the R.S.M. and told that I was to be promoted to Acting Sergeant. I became the only National Service Sergeant in the Regiment, with the R.S.M. doing his utmost to persuade me to sign on as a Regular. I was un-persuaded and I travelled home to Tottenham in May 1955 as Mr.

BRIAN ALLEN



I was born in Bethnal Green in 1939, so a true cockney, born within the bells. But the war started at the end of that year and I was evacuated; put on a train with some other older girls, with my name around my neck and a little lunch box. After the war, my parents moved to Bournemouth where they bought a guest house in Southbourne. I grew up in Dorset.

At 17 in 1956 I got my conscription papers and thought, yes, I want to be a Top Gun pilot! So I signed on and took the aptitude test, which was all fine. When I did my medical test, they said 'there is no way you can be a pilot, you're colour blind', and which also excluded electrics, electronics or computing, which was such a shame. So I decided to be a mechanical engineer in the RAF. The pay was terrible but if I signed on, it would be 60% more so I signed on for 9 years and 3 years reserves.



BRIDGNORTH

NUMBER 7 SCHOOL
OF RECRUIT
TRAINING
R.A.F.



BRIAN ALLEN

I went to RAF Cardington before 6 weeks of square bashing at RAF Bridgnorth. If you failed any part of this, you had to redo it. Our Corporal was a terrible man. The eyelets for his laces on his boots were polished brass and his boots were shining, beautifully polished. He used to shout at us 'if you don't march properly and don't swing your arms properly, you'll get back dated so far, you'll think that bow and arrows are a secret weapon'.

Once I was promoted to Corporal I was stationed out in Singapore at RAF Seletar – we flew out by comet on a 23 hour flight. I arrived in Singapore on my 21st birthday and so to celebrate, we went off into Singapore city to a few clubs. As it was a Friday, we hadn't yet registered at the camp. When we eventually registered on the Monday, we learnt that all the places we had been to were out of bounds.



BRIAN DORGAN



I had a provisional acceptance at the University of London and needed to complete my service ready for September 1955. Consequently, I wrote to the powers that be asking to be called up. To give them their due - I was examined, interviewed and received joining instructions in the space of a week. I felt that National Service was simply an unwelcome interruption to my life and the fact that it was compulsory added to my feeling of resentment. In retrospect, my 2 years in the army was a broadening experience where I matured quite considerably and it did me no harm whatsoever.

I was to report to Maidstone Barracks by 10.00hrs on Wed 3rd September 1953. Enclosed was a postal order for four shillings (20p). How decent I thought, they have sent me money for my train fare. Little did I know that the four shillings was my first 24 hours' pay! On arrival we had to collect our kit; Mess tins - aluminium - two; these I had come across in the Scouts. But drawers green cellular - three pairs? Or housewives - one? These were mysteries yet to be solved.





BRIAN DORGAN

A 'short back and sides' haircut was particularly galling since civilian fashion was to have rather longer hair. Shaving every day was essential - a popular instruction from a critical NCO was that some recruit should "stand closer to the razor". Such cliches were said with tongue in cheek but always with a straight face. Another favourite was "Am I hurting you?" (No Sergeant) - "Well I should be, I'm standing on your hair - get a haircut".

I ended up with a job in the Regimental Police. Anyone less suited would have been difficult to find. I heard that a temporary clerk was needed in the orderly room (the company office). Then the Medical Orderly job came up and I was in the right position to hear about it. I regained my single stripe and became the only Lance Corporal in the place with private quarters - bliss! I learned how to stitch wounds and give injections, and even gave the MO an injection of penicillin into his backside!



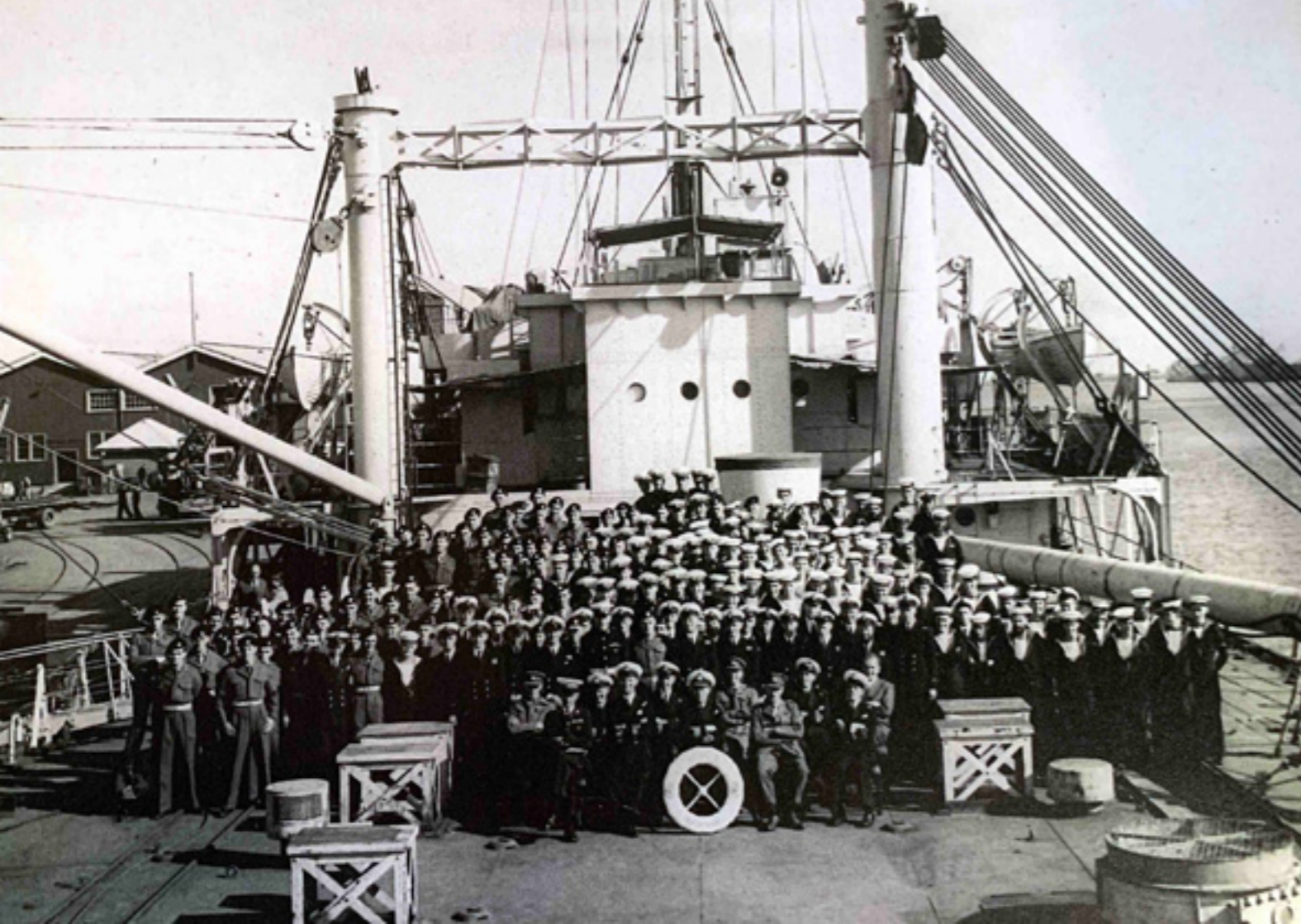
DAVID LING



I left school age 17 and joined Suffolk County Council in 1949 as a Civil Engineering trainee. I interrupted my civil engineering traineeship since all my friends had joined up for national service and I decided the two years I was required to do, would be better to be taken up then and I would resume my training as a civil engineer on completion of my service.

I was originally selected for the RAEC (Royal Army Education Corps) but on joining up in April 1951 at Bordon, Hants, they transferred me to the Royal Engineers as I was a civil engineer and could use a theodolite and dumpy level. They told me I would be posted to the Monte Bello Islands (off Weston Australia) on completion of my army training, to be involved in erecting instruments for the UK's first atom bomb, to be exploded in October 1952.





DAVID LING

The first 16 weeks' square bashing really sorted me out! My mother had done everything for me and it did me a world of good! On completion of square bashing, I was posted with another of my intake to Court-y-Gollen, South Wales. We stayed there until Christmas 1951 when we moved to Longmoor, near Portsmouth to join two ships, HMS Narvick and HMS Zeebrugge. It turned out to be the posting of a lifetime since we berthed at Gibraltar, Malta, Port Said, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and Cocos Islands (mid Indian Ocean). I had leave at all these places so had seen some of the world by the time I was 20!

In early October 1952, we berthed about 12-15 miles from the islands and were told the atom bomb was to be exploded on 3rd October. We fell in on deck and ordered to face away from the bomb and told we could view the scene after the first bang, which was very loud as were the shock waves which followed. About 3 days later, we returned to the islands, with no protective clothing, picked up instruments and other data etc. We then commenced the journey back to the UK.



DICK BAZALGETTE

In 1956, my National Service date was repeatedly deferred. The Suez Canal fiasco had ended so I decided to 'sign up' as a Regular. I signed up in the Royal Army Service Corps to become a Marine Engineer. When I arrived, I remember the long line of Victorian, three-story blocks of barrack rooms, interspersed with large asphalt-covered parade grounds. There were 16 beds, each with their own bedside locker and metal hanging wardrobe.

The 'Passing Out Parade' was two weeks after I joined up. My marching and parade procedures were fairly good, and my boots were so shiny that the Inspecting Officer complimented me on the 'mirrored' toecaps! Actually, the polish was so thick, it flaked off very soon after the parade.

After Passing Out of basic training I was transferred to Farnborough. Once there we had to have our 'jabs', which made our right arm so stiff (always sadistically put it in the right arm) that saluting properly, with the elbow level with the shoulder, was impossible.

All very amusing, being told off for an improper salute, with your elbow by your hip and your head coming down to meet your hand! We were marched everywhere and went out on regular cross country route marches. We visited the firing ranges, using rifles, sten guns and bren guns. At the end of the day we were all deaf. We had ringing ears, not only from firing the guns but also from the bullets whizzing over head when we were in the butts. There were no ear protectors or earplugs.

After passing out of initial training, I was posted to Portsmouth, HMS Vernon. The LCTs (Landing Craft Tanks) when in Portsmouth, were moored on buoys, in the centre of the harbour. My accommodation was in Southsea Castle, an Army barracks at that time, in an uninsulated wooden hut, with cracks in and between the planks which you could literally see through! The wind didn't half whistle through them! We slept with our greatcoats and duffle coats over the blankets.





IVAN RUSS

I knew I had to do my service unless I was physically unfit. It was a pity because I'd completed my apprenticeship and being deprived a man's wage, but in retrospect it was the best thing because I was a country boy down in Devonshire and I was then thrown into the British mix of people my own age, and that was eye opening. When you hear about lads that grew up in Glasgow and the room was separated by a curtain stapled to the ceiling to separate one family from the other, it makes you think a bit.

We knew we were going to get an easier life after square-bashing. It's all shouting and swearing, trying to reduce you mentally, change your attitude. I think our generation knew we had to do things and the easiest way was to just accept it and get on with it, but we knew that trade training was going to be easier.

After square-bashing I was sent down to Yatesbury to train as a radar operator (I knew nothing about radar) and sadly, that meant that I was stuck in the UK. I ended up in Portland, which was a very nice posting. The billets were nice, relatively new, plenty of

bathroom facilities. The camaraderie was great, we used to leg pull and it was always fun, a much more relaxed atmosphere. I earned 27 shillings a week. We kept most of it unless there were barrack room damages like a broken switch or something. We had to pay for that and if it didn't get fixed, we'd have to pay for it again.

Many ex-servicemen didn't want to go in the first place but when they finished, they were glad they had done it. Not only did I meet my wife but I got to know people from other walks of life, it widened the horizon greatly.

National Service gave us the knowledge to operate in an independent manner and the ability to manage others. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

JEFF ASHLEY

I was 18 when I was conscripted into the army on 23rd July 1953, for 2 years. I reported to Budbrooke Barracks, in Warwick, the HQ of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment.

I entered the army with some trepidation, as an innocent country lad with no experience of the wider world. After being kitted out we were placed in the merciless hands of drill NCO's.

Discipline was strict and the training staff, non-commissioned officers, NCOs, corporals to sergeant majors kept us busy every minute of waking hours, shouted at, made to do menial tasks, painting stones white, cutting grass with scissors, but importantly concentrate on our kit, making our boots that shiny you could see your face in the toe caps, blanco our belts and gaiters daily, polish brass buttons, but the most traumatic time was the kit inspection, held once a week during basic training.

We lived in Nissan huts, sheds with semi-circular corrugated roofs which slept about 20 to 30 men. Each squaddie had a metal framed bed, a bedside locker and a wardrobe for our greatcoat and uniforms. There was a coal and wood stove in the middle of the room, which didn't warm the hut at all in winter. Each morning we had to strip our bed and make the sheets and blankets into a neat bed block. Every bit of our kit was laid out on the bed in a prescribed layout, neat, tidy, clean and immaculate.

I was transferred to the R.E.M.E basic training camp at Blandford Forum. As the next group of National Servicemen were not due to arrive for two weeks and the several weeks of basic training I had carried out didn't count, I had to be keep busy until I could join the new intake. I completed my eight-week basic training, went on to a 3 month vehicle mechanics course at Taunton, which I enjoyed immensely and in January 1954 signed for 3 years as regular soldier, odd really.





JOHN WELLMAN

I grew up in Poole and attended Poole grammar school. I took a summer job as a bus conductor before being called up at the age of 19. I went to join the Devon regiment in Exeter, as part of the Wessex brigade to do my basic training. I was a bit disappointed at going into the infantry and not to the education corps.

The first thing we were told was that we had to look like soldiers if we wanted to go home for Christmas. We all applied ourselves very quickly, polishing boots, looking smart and ensuring our beds were beautifully made, even to the point of sleeping on the floor so it would pass next morning.

There was one other person from Poole, that I knew of by reputation, a bit of a villain who had been in court for throwing somebody out of a car and it didn't take him to long to threaten another chap. The corporal in charge thought, as I lived in Poole, I might be able to stop him doing anything stupid.

One evening, he was dying for a drink and was going to go over the wall, so I decided that I'd best go with him. After a couple of beers we broke back in. Next morning, I realised that we hadn't gone unobserved but as I was trying to stop him doing anything serious, I got away with it. I did make it home for Christmas.

I passed out and they allowed us to draw our postings out of a hat. The favourite places were Hong Kong or Bermuda and the worst was Germany. I drew North Wales, however, one of the chaps, who was Welsh, had been home because his wife had a baby and when he came back he was upset at being posted to Germany. So we swapped. We were sent to Hohne on the eastern Russian border. Hohne was very close to Belsen concentration camp and that was one of the worst experiences of my life. There were great mounds with simple crosses, with words like '500 buried here' and '1000 buried here'. We were very moved by it all. I wasn't prepared for the enormity of it, knowing that underneath it were skeletons. We actually felt physically sick.

MICHAEL GOODEY

My father was the district Reporter for the East Anglian Daily Times. I only ever thought of going into newspaper journalism because I was brought up with the sound of my father typing his reports. I joined my father's paper at 17 and stayed there to complete my training in journalism, so my entry into National Service was deferred until I was 20.

We did parades and ground-work for about a month and then things got better and I was very pleased to be able to join the signals branch of the Navy. I was posted to The Royal Naval Signal School at St. Budeaux, Plymouth and had a very fine position there looking down on the River Tamar.

Only 9 or 10 of us went into visual signals, and we learned Morse code, semaphore, flag recognition and had a great time. I had my 21st birthday there. And then the exciting thing was, at the end of our training period, the whole class, were being posted to the Far East.





MICHAEL GOODEY



It was quite an eye opener really, because a lot of us had led quite sheltered lives. When I joined up, there were Scousers, Geordies, Scots and Cornish, a great variety of young chaps with their different accents. We all got on very well.

I wish I'd joined up as a regular for 3 years, I enjoyed it so much. I bought a nice camera and took lots of photographs, particularly of Hong Kong when the Bank of China was the tallest building. It was the first time I'd been abroad. It was a big culture shock but a wonderful experience really.

I didn't get homesick at all because I was a touch typist and had a typewriter at my disposal. I used to write reams and reams, long letters home and I was just so pleased to be out there that I didn't feel homesick at all. I think it certainly helped me to grow up because I was a bit green around the gills.



TOM CRABBE

I was very upset when I left for the army and there were a lot of tears on the train when I got on the platform at Blandford to say cheerio to my mother and my auntie. My National Service started in September 1958 when I went for a medical in Salisbury in 958. I was deferred because I was 20 and I'd done a five years' apprenticeship as a Carpenter and Joiner at a local building firm.

We were met with a very strict Sergeant major there, who showed us all round and we had cups of tea and a bit of cake. Then we were shown to our rooms with a lot of shouting and hooting and we were a lot of frightened little boys. We didn't know where we were going wrong or what we were coming into. It was chaos really, there was 250 of us and we didn't know anybody. It was very hard going for the six weeks, but it didn't hurt us.

After about 8 weeks we had our passing out parade. We were then posted to a cooking school. Fortunately, they opened a cooking school at Blandford Camp during that time. It was a transitional camp for boys training to be cooks before being posted out to different regiments all over the world. But when they asked for volunteers to go and get the camp ready at Blandford, several of us from Dorset put our hands up to come back home, which was wonderful. I only lived 6 miles away so I used to get home quite a lot.

National Service gave an insight to the way other people lived. It taught you to respect your elders, which sadly is not done nowadays. It was a wonderful way of life.



This project has been generously supported by:



