

NATIONAL SERVICE REMEMBERED





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Empowerment.

Same but Different is a not-for-profit organisation that uses the arts to tell unheard stories. We create thought-provoking art projects that stimulate conversation, change attitudes and empower those affected.

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.





DAVID RYAN



I went in at 22 in 1960 and I was one of the last to go in because mandatory National Service finished later that year.

They send you a call up notice for a certain date along with a railway train warrant that enables you to hop on a train and go to where they want you, which for me was to Gobowen. I'd never heard of it.

National Service was just something that you had to do. I'd been at grammar school where we'd had a Cadets force so I knew all about marching and drills, it wasn't news to me. I managed to get on well with it and I enjoyed it.

During our basic training, we weren't allowed out. The army's psychology is brilliant because they coop you up and they make you do lots and lots of cleaning kit and so on and before you know where you are, you're a squad.

DAVID RYAN

Eventually, after a few weeks we were allowed out one evening. It was Valentine's Day, and in through the door walks these attractive looking girls, one who became my wife.

After a few weeks I was posted down to Aldershot and used to hitchhike miles back to see her. Yesterday was 60 years since the day I proposed in Shrewsbury and that was within 10 weeks of meeting.

They keep you busy and as time went by you almost finish up taking pride in uniform, your squad and your regiment, it struck me as good and a useful experience.

I was in the army, Royal Artillery. Oswestry was a royal artillery training regiment. I finished in anti-aircraft and became an Officer.





ELWYN DAVIES



I was a police cadet in the Denbighshire constabulary, and police cadets had an opportunity for an early call that I applied for. I had my call up papers in soon after my 18th birthday in April 1955.

Initially we did our square-bashing, drill training, in Caterham for 3 months. Because it was at the time of the Egyptian Crisis we went straight out to Egypt from there for our battle training, in a place called Mowaska. We actually did our battle training in the desert – it was really tough.

There was a great spirit amongst us. It was an experience you'll never forget. The camaraderie it was really tremendous. There was one particular soldier with us who, he decided that he wasn't going to play soldiers like the rest of us and so he sat down on the Barracks' square and refused to soldier. He was taken to the Guard room for 2 days and he came back, sat down again, taken to the Guard room again, but after 4 days, he was playing soldiers like the rest of us.

ELWYN DAVIES

That was what the army did to you, they couldn't afford to have people who didn't obey. That showed us in the First World War when they say go over the top, they didn't think, they just had to go and that's why really, that was ingrained in you that you just did what you were told.

It certainly made me a man, without a shadow of doubt, within days I realised that there was more to the world that I'd already seen. It's an experience I wouldn't be without and I think it would do the world of good now.



NATIONAL SERVICE ACTS, 1948 to 1950
ENLISTMENT NOTICE

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND NATIONAL SERVICE RECRUITMENT OFFICE,
DOMINION HOUSE,
QUEEN STREET,
CARDIFF.

26 APR 1950 (Date)

Mr. ELWYN DAVIES,
31, BRYN TRION PARK,
GYFFIN,
CONWAY, GAEYS.

Registration No. GNY. 2891.

DEAR SIR,

In accordance with the National Service Acts, 1948 to 1950, you are called up for service in the Regular Army and are required to present yourself on **THURSDAY** (date) **12 MAY 1950** (date), between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to:-

Guard
Guard Depot
CATERHAM
SURREY
(nearest railway station).

* A Travelling Warrant for your journey is enclosed. Before starting your journey you must exchange the warrant for a ticket at the booking office named on the warrant. If possible, this should be done a day or two before you are due to travel. If your warrant is made out to travel from London you may obtain a railway ticket at, and travel from, the most convenient station to your address.

A Postal Order for 4s. representing an advance of service pay, is also enclosed.

Immediately on receipt of this notice, you should inform your employer of the date upon which you are required to report for service.

Yours faithfully,
T. BARRY
for Regional Controller

YOU SHOULD READ CAREFULLY THE NOTES ON THE REVERSE OF THIS NOTICE.

* Delete if not applicable.

N.S.12A Ws.11972-2413 (Rev. 7-53) WFA & Co. Ltd. S.2 (P.T.O.)





ERIC BLACKIE



I think this is important to remind people that citizens had to do their National Service if they were that age, there was no choice. I did a 5-year apprenticeship so deferred my National Service until I was 21. I got accepted to join the air force and went to Cardington in June 1958. We got issued with uniform and a number, 40400083, did the oath to the queen, took lots of medicals and then we were in the Royal Air Force.

We were put through our paces, looking after our kits and making sure the beds were perfect. We thought we were being bullied but when it came to 6 or 7 weeks down the line, we were being moulded and then it was great and I started to enjoy it.

I went to Netheravon, Salisbury to do my police dog training, and was then posted to Lincolnshire and that's where I started to patrol the airfield and garden. My wife came up to visit me and the female air force personnel smuggled her into the billet, there was lots of high jinks and good laughs.

ERIC BLACKIE

One Christmas day in my bunk, there was a knock at the door and it was the Sergeant Major, "morning Merry Christmas!". He came in with a big mug of rum - that was the best Christmas dinner I ever had.

I was allocated Dusty, a lovely dog. He had a good nature but was a good guard and attack dog. My dog took ill towards the end of my term there and it was quite poignant. I took the dog to the vet and he put him down with a syringe. He was such a lovely dog, it did make me cry.

When the Berlin wall was built, everybody panicked and the cold war began. I was sent to an airfield with a revolver and 6 rounds of ammunition, I didn't have my dog but I was supposed to keep the Russian hoards at bay. I wasn't in combat or anything so I don't see myself as a veteran. I can understand being called a veteran if I'd been up to my neck in muck and bullets but I suppose I am in a way because I served my queen and country. I have a National Service Medal.





JOHN CRESSWELL



Life was so different. I didn't have any qualifications, I just left school. My brother got me into the Butcher's, so I used to go all around Liverpool on a bike. I enjoyed it. It was freedom, getting out, and I enjoyed my life. I was a bit of an earwig, doing this and snatching that, but when I went in the army I put a stop to that. It made you realise what you were doing and that it was unacceptable.

I was 18 when I joined in 1955 and did two years. I went to Blandford, did 12 weeks and then I was posted to the 41 company in Catterick. You were there to obey orders and look after yourself and, at 18, it made me realise that I had to grow up and accept all the responsibility that was getting thrown at you.

At Catterick I was given my own vehicle and I had to do its MOT, it made you take a lot of interest and care in what you were doing. That was the idea of the forces, it was to make a man out of you. If it wasn't done properly, I'd get square-bashing or they'd put me in the clink, so it made you think and stand up for yourself.

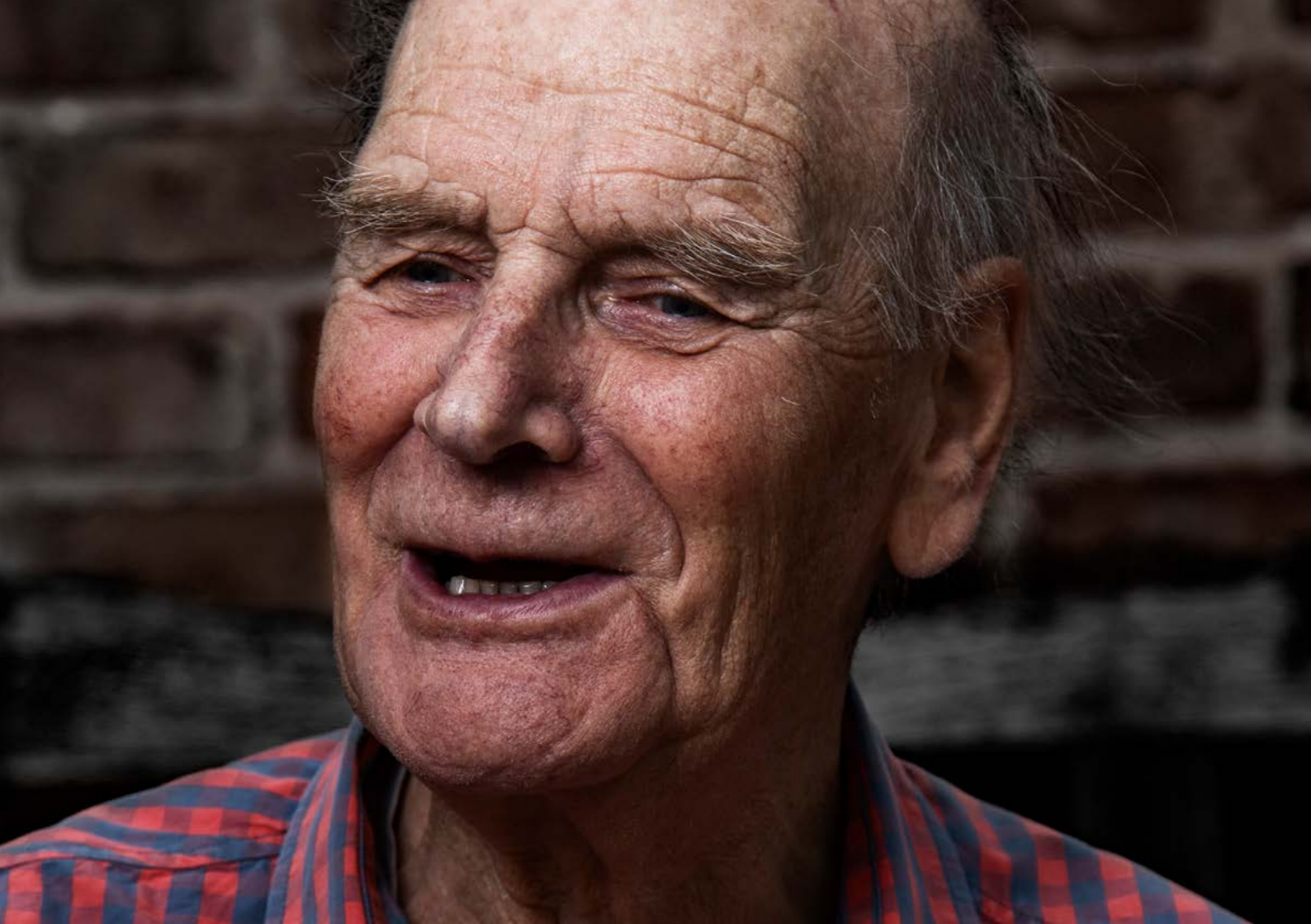
JOHN CRESSWELL

It was a time when the IRA were very active because when we used to go on guard, we had to patrol the wagons and all the fence, making sure there was always two of you that went.

I enjoyed the camaraderie, backing your mates up all the time. In the army your boots had to be taken out and polished up so you could see your face in it. Someone would be looking at you and going to pieces because he couldn't get his boots shiny so you'd pitch in and give them a hand. And on inspection, if they hadn't made their bed properly or folded their sheets properly, they'd get into trouble again so you always helped people. It was brilliant.

You had to respect other people, and the army taught you to be that way inclined, the army taught you to respect, to be a good citizen. I definitely think, without a doubt that the forces did me proud, they made me realise that I was an adult, that I had to stand on my own two feet and make my own decisions without affecting anybody.





MICHAEL WILKINSON



I didn't go in until I was 19½ and I'd already left home, in a way, I looked forward to National Service. I started on the 24 February 1953. I was given a train ticket and went from London to Padgate, from there we were sent to do the basic training and were there for 8 weeks.

They just shouted at us everyday, and the whole time we were absolutely whacked. Square-bashing meant learning discipline, learning to march and run and do exactly what you were told.

It really is tough and I can understand why a lot of people were crying. I remember once this Officer came along and he recognised me, he was a school mate. He said "Ah yes, Mr Wilkinson" and I said "yes", and I called him by his Christian name. Of course, I really got into trouble for that. Put on fatigues for that and sent to the Cookhouse.

MICHAEL WILKINSON

They asked me if I wanted to go abroad and I said I'd be quite happy to do that so they posted me to the Middle East to the canal zone.

I hadn't appreciated until I got there that we were in a state of semi-war and all the army stations and the RAF stations all had extensive arms.

You stayed inside almost all the time and we were on guard 12 hours or 24 hours, trying to protect the outside of the stations.

I got a medal for serving in the Canal Zone. It only came out relatively recently and I certainly didn't expect that. The Canal Zone was tough, quite a few people died and we were under quite a lot of stress.

Overall, I think National Service was a very positive experience. It wasn't easy but I learnt a great deal.





KEN GRAIN



I did not find the initial training too hard as I had had plenty of drill practice with the Boys' Brigade and knew all the movements. This was much better as I did not get the rath of the DI like those who did not know their left foot.

The worst part was the "spit and polish". We were shown how to prepare our boots to a high standard and plenty of elbow grease was needed to achieve this. Everything was cleaned, our kit, the Billet and particularly the floors, which had to shine. We even walked around on old pieces of Blanket prior to the inspection so as to leave no marks.

If we failed the inspection, we would lose some of our free time.

When the twelve weeks were up, we had chosen the jobs we would like to do during our service, I chose to become an RD Op (Radio Direction Operator).

KEN GRAIN

You could work in the control tower and talk to the Pilots. It sounded interesting and that is what I was given. You then waited for your posting.

I was part of Draft 1163 and called ourselves the forgotten draft as we were the last to hear where we were to go.

I remember telephoning Mum with the news when it eventually came through. "Guess where I have been posted to? It is to the Far East, Singapore."

Whilst there I found myself in hospital, and when I was in Princess marina, Duchess of Kent, was on an official visit and came around the wards and spoke to each of us.

I was lucky to travel out by air and return by sea thus enabling me to visit many different parts of the world.





GALVIN CARVILLE



I was 18 when I was called up and I served from March 1954 to March 1956. I'm 85 now but I can still give you my number, 2722817, I'll never forget that number.

When I went in, I wasn't worried about fighting. I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the air force and the service. I'm sure if I had gone in the army, I would have had a good job and maybe done the same but I was lucky, I enjoyed my radar operating.

Our Sergeants were all regulars, decent people. Do your work and you can have what you want. Our man in charge was brilliant, we got commended for everything. It was RAF Buchan but the real name was 409 Signals Unit.

We had some top people and equipment, my work was very interesting.

GALVIN CARVILLE

After I left I was in Germany on and off for 23 years, mostly with Americans. I got to know the American services well as I was working with them, and all the top people were all draftees, not regulars but draftees, secretaries to the First Sergeant, the Sergeant Major, the CO, all draftees.

In the division where I worked quite a few military people with top positions had been draftees, and our National Service people went in as they had to, just like the draftees in America.

I personally think they should have National Service, people have forgotten its very, very, important. You know, a country with a regular army has never won a major world war. Germany has never won a major world war, France has never won a world war, it's the people and volunteers that win the world war.





PETER HANNEN



I served from 1953-1956, I got my call up letter when I was 18.

I did 10 weeks' normal troop training for ordinary warfare in Wrexham. I did national service for 4 months and then I signed on so I was in as a regular from then.

I went to Germany for 12 months, when my battalion came back from Germany, we went to Southampton and got onto a boat called the Empire.

We didn't know where we going but we assumed it was Korea. When we got to the middle of the Red Sea they told us that we weren't going to Korea, we were going to Le Sui in Singapore.

Everyone in the Battalion had to do 6 weeks jungle training; we were all trained troops but not for jungle warfare.

PETER HANNEN

Jungle training is difficult, because the jungle itself is more than half the battle, just to get through the thick growth, the difficult territory and the water.

If you were a foot away from me I wouldn't be able to see you, it was that thick. You had to realise there could be an ambush and you wouldn't know.

You could not go out unless you were fully armoured, and you used to have an escort with a machine gun and if anyone ambushed you they would think twice seeing that machine gun. But on one occasion an Officer and some men set out in a jeep, which was really a bad mistake. They were ambushed. They had dropped a tree across the road then they shot the four of them and set the jeep on fire.

Because I was fully armored, I saw quite a lot of action. One time I was in the NAAFI, having my steak and chips and the orderly officer sent for me. He said, "I want you to go out and pick this body up".





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This project has been generously supported by:



