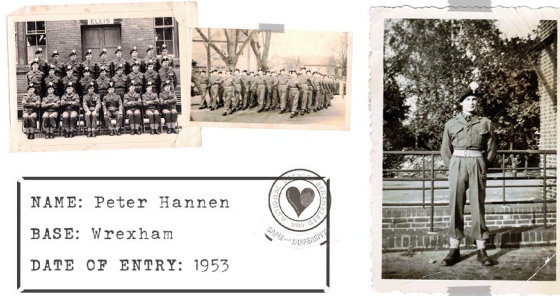




NATIONAL SERVICE REMEMBERED

Conscription through the eyes of the men who served.



I served from 1953-1956. I got my call up letter when I was 18 and had to go to Wrexham. I did 10 weeks' normal troop training for ordinary warfare in Wrexham. You think you don't know anybody, and you are in the middle of a barrack room and you've got to do all these things like making your bed, and folding your blankets, it's all part of the training. I did national service for 4 months and then I signed on. I was in as a regular from then and I went to Germany for 12 months. When the whole battalion came back from Germany, we were 2nd Battalion RWF to Wiltshire for a fortnight. Whilst we were there, we had colours presented to us by the Queen.

After that, we had a fortnight's leave and then we went to Southampton and got onto a boat called the Empire.

We didn't know where we were 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 Singapore and Malaya. They gave us our injections in the middle of the red sea. You have so many injections whilst on leave but the rest were given to us on the boat.

We got to Singapore, to a place called Le Sui. Everyone in the Battalion had to do 6 weeks jungle training; we were all trained troops but not for jungle warfare. Jungle training is difficult, because the jungle itself is more than half the battle, just to get through the territory and the water. We had machetes to cut through the jungle. 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. That was the hardest training we had to do.

After our training we were ready to go up country then. Once we got to where we were going, I became part of the gun team, and I was fortunate because I was on the transport and I stayed on that for 2 years. One of my main jobs was as a courier service around the four different companies.

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I went out every morning in a fully armored vehicle. I would visit A, B, C and D companies, they were all in different locations and I used to do around 200 miles a day. When we weren't doing that, we were taking people into the jungle, but it wasn't very often that I was in the jungle in the daytime.

NAME: Peter Hannen
BASE: Wrexham
DATE OF ENTRY: 1953



Another job I did was with an Officer, again driving in a fully armored vehicle. The officer was in an anti-tank platoon and each platoon had a section in a rubber plantation village. We went round these villages every morning to see if there were any problems, because the communist terrorist bandits used to come from the jungle to the villages, and they would threaten the villagers for food and they would shoot them. If we were notified that they were targeting a camp in a certain area then the platoon would be sent in to sort it out before they went anywhere else.



Eventually, about 6 months before I came home, we pushed the bandits back. Not just us, a few regiments, pushed the bandits up, nearly out of Malaya, and then we were able to go out on our own.

We couldn't go out before, not even to the town for a drink because we had to have escorts wherever we went.

Because I was fully armored, I used to have an escort with me. One guy with his rifle and me with my rifle and that was it.

I saw quite a lot of action. Unfortunately, on one occasion, there was a D company who had not been paid, and they couldn't get down to HQ as the scout car had broken down. You could not go out without a scout car unless you were fully armoured, otherwise you used to have an escort, a dingo, a little scout car with a machine gun and if anyone ambushed you they would think twice seeing that machine gun. But their officer decided they would go down to HQ and four of them 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.

Another time also remains on my mind - 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". When they had shot this communist terrorist, they then had to bring him in and identify him. So, I had to go and identify this man who had had his head shot off. It wasn't pleasant but there we are.



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I'll tell you another story, one night I took the lads down for a night out for a change for them. I was coming along a straight road when we were on our way back and they had put cows on the road. They had made them lie down, and if I had stopped they would have opened up on us. The guys had had a couple of drinks, and I was in charge of the vehicle so it was up to me and I decided to go straight on. So I ran over a couple of them but I didn't stop. When I got to the camp the commanding officer said you did the right thing, as I'd realised that they were put there on purpose, and that if I had stopped it would have been an ambush. But to be honest I never felt scared.



I came back home in 1956. To be honest with you, if I could have signed on for 6 months. I would have stayed in, you get so used to the job at the end of the day. I had no problems with anybody, I got on well with the officers and the NCOs. I used to go and do my job every day, I even got sent to parade; I wasn't an NCO but I would sometimes take the parade in the morning if there was no NCO available.

The ship I came back on was called the Captain Hobson. It took 6 weeks from Singapore to Liverpool, and 6 weeks is a long time on a boat. At one point we were in the middle of the Indian ocean and hit a typhoon, I can still see the waves now. When she was told that I was coming home, my mother would get the daily post and check the times of the boats, and so when I arrived in Liverpool I was called into the office and the guy said that there is someone who wants to see you on the dock. I had no idea and it was my mum and dad. They came to meet me thinking I was going home but I had to go to Wrexham first before I came home.



When you've been in for 12 months, you're entitled to leave so they asked do you want to go to Singapore or Penang. We'd been in Singapore so I said we'd go to Penang. Penang island was recognised as a nice place and it was too. The weather was nice, but what happened was that it left me with a skin complaint. I had no problems at all when I was there, apart from I had this bite on my arm that wouldn't clear up. I would go to the MO and they put this blue stuff on, and it didn't really bother me.

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When I got to Gibraltar on the boat it had disappeared overnight. But later on in the 60s, I had to see the doctor, and the maxillo-fascial specialists, as I had ulcers, quite a lot on my head and on my back. I've been in hospital having them cut out, that's what it left me with.

I had to go on reserve then for so many years, and I was paid on the reserve. I've still got my paybook. I nearly got called back to go to Egypt, the guy who came out a fortnight after me was called back. It wouldn't have bothered me, a different place to go to, Egypt. I wouldn't have lost my job, they had to adhere to the rules so if you were called you wouldn't lose your job

I used to be an apprentice mechanic in Conwy. When I came back, the boss wanted me to go back but I didn't feel like it, I liked driving and had been driving all this time so I decided to do a driving job. I went to Collaterals in Llandudno Junction - my father was working there then and he knew the personnel manager so I got a job there.

I was maintaining the vehicles at the weekend and driving them in the week. I stayed there and eventually ended up being transport manager. I got my CPC in national and international transport management..

I quite enjoyed it overall, doing what I like to do, maintaining the vehicles and driving all over the place. The first fully armoured I had, was an old one from the war, it was a Ford. You get used to the life, unless you try to be clever. You get on very well in the forces, I did anyway.

I've got my paybook and a lot of photographs. I've got photos of the ship we went out on and of the fully armoured and semi armoured vehicles, and some of the guys after we had finished work. I even have a photo of the jeep they ambushed and set on fire. Actually, when I was in the 24-hour guard, the smartest man on parade was the stick orderly and I had it 3 times in succession. I've got a photo of me in the jungle with the white belts and sash on.

I used to see one guy pretty regular, he passed away 12 months ago. There was a couple more but things change, people pass away, go to different areas.

