



NATIONAL SERVICE REMEMBERED

Conscription through the eyes of the men who served.



NAME: Eric Blackie
BASE: Cardington
DATE OF ENTRY: June 1958



ERIC BLACKIE. 2020

"I did a 5-year apprenticeship so deferred my National Service until I was 21. I still had to go in because National Service was still going on. 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. I was ok, being 21, but some of those who came in at 17 struggled. I'd been in the building trade as an apprentice for painters and decorators so fairly used to things. I was used to working with Foremen, not as bad as Corporals, but they were a strict bunch. But when the Corporals said jump, we would jump.

After about 3 days, we were taken to Bridgnorth by train and got onto a wagon; it was dark and we jumped off and thought where the devil are we. Because I'd lived in big cities, in Manchester and Edinburgh, it was strange being out in the sticks. Then the Corporals allocated our billets."

"I did 8 weeks square-bashing and we ended up doing a 3-day camp out. It couldn't have been worse conditions in Bridgnorth - it was in a bit of a dip and it rained. We were put through our paces, looking after our kits and making sure the beds were perfect; you would bounce a penny off the blanket to make sure it would bounce.

They were very pernicky and 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.

"We were put through our paces, looking after our kits and making sure the beds were tidy; more than tidy, they had to be perfect."

After square-bashing, I went to Netheravon, Salisbury to do my police dog training. I had to do both Police training and dog training which meant I had to charge people with regulations before I became a dog handler."

"I was then posted to Lincolnshire and that's where I started to patrol the airfield and gardens. 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.

"In 1958, I got posted to Germany for 18 months. I had to leave my dog and flew out to an army camp in Sennalager. It was a big army camp with aircraft and tanks and there was a Platoon. It was quite a surprise because the Germans, all about 6'6", were singing "Deutschland".

They weren't a hard bunch though. It was quite cushy for me as it was a long time before they had a dog for me. 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. Christmas dinners weren't as good with the Royal Air Force. They didn't have the spirit, but the army chaps were brilliant, even the Sergeant Majors were very good.

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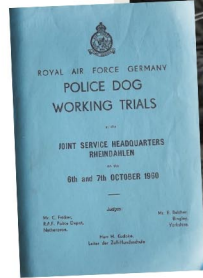


I finally got a dog and then ended up in 1961 in a horrible place, but fortunately didn't stay long and went to Bruggen, right on the Dutch border. That had good facilities including a swimming pool. We had a lot of laughs there. My wife came over but as we hadn't been married long, we did get quarters so we ended up renting a small room just outside the camp with a Chemist, his wife and their 2 children. They were lovely people and welcomed us into their home. I used to get them cigarettes from the NAAFI and he took me down into his cellar where he was brewing whisky.

I had a dog allocated to me but he didn't like the choke chain that brought him to heal and ended up biting my hand. He did it to a previous dog handler too, so in the end he got put down and then I was allocated Dusty, a lovely dog. He had a good nature but was a good guard and attack dog.



When the Berlin wall was built, everybody panicked thinking the Russians would be coming and the cold war began. I was then 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. Everyone was panicking because they didn't know what was happening.



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.

I then moved to Waddington but wasn't there long before moving to Norfolk to guard the American nuclear missiles.

I would have stayed in but my wife lost her mother whilst pregnant and lost our baby too.

A lot of the time, I wake up and do my exercise and then sit all lethargic wondering what to do next. I try to pick up my book but can't get into it so I pick up my ukulele and sing a song as I belong to a choir.

Afterwards, I went back to my old decorating firm. I did manage to join the fire brigade in Cheshire too. I loved that job as it had the same camaraderie as the air force but, unfortunately, after about 8 years, I had an accident - a building fell down and I hurt my back; they kept me on light duties for 3 years.

It was a bad time but I'm still here to tell the tale and very comfortable with a good, big, family.

I wasn't in combat or anything so I don't see myself as a veteran but I do have a National Service medal that my daughter bought for me. I could 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 think this is important to remind people that citizens had to do their National Service if they were that age, there was no choice. Sometimes they didn't agree and I can understand that but it's good for everyone to know the history. I think it's different now, youngsters go through cadets, army, air cadets and naval cadets, there's a lot of support for them but it's not National Service.

