Memories: Enlistment into RAOC Boys School Haslar 1950 by Roy Jacklin

I suppose like many other young boys I was filled with hopes of a bright and fulfilling future in the forces. I was bored with village life. There was very little to do. I lived in a mining village where there was a small football field and an institute where we could meet after work to play cards, darts, etc. I was employed in a woodworking factory in Marske, which was about 6 miles from home. There wasn't much money in those days so I cycled to work to save what I could for other things, cigs etc. To earn a bit extra I got an evening job at the cinema in Marske. It was only a small place. A part of the institute building. I think it cost a shilling (5p) to sit in the balcony and 3p downstairs. Well it was 1950 and I did say wages were poor.

I wanted to learn a trade, but there were no vacancies anywhere. I suppose it was because the war had not been over long and there was a lot of ex forces labour around.

I liked tinkering with anything mechanical and, as I was becoming bored with my job and lifestyle I decided to make enquiries about making a career in the forces. I went to the nearest recruiting office in Middlesbrough. I talked about what I would like to do. The officer said I should enlist in the REME as there were places available. It all sounded very exciting to a naïve sixteen year old. I talked it over with my parents and they agreed that the prospects were better than staying around my home area.

I eventually returned to the recruitment office to sign on only to be told that the REME vacancies had been filled, but, if I signed up for the RAOC I could get a transfer at a later time. Now being born in the country, and used to animal smells I should have recognized the smell that was gradually creeping around the officer's person whilst he was giving me this information. I often smelled it later when I was in uniform. It was the smell of 'Bullshit' (of the non equipment cleaning kind, that is.) I never did get that transfer. Well I was only sixteen, shy and naïve. On reflection perhaps I should have taken someone with me who was more worldlier and had served in the forces. Someone to guide me in my choices. I later learned from others that it was probably a case of the first twenty through the doors went to RASC, the next twenty went to ACC etc. or that as Haslar was a relatively new establishment and had plenty of places to fill they got first choice. "Who knows?" Well I did sign the papers and eventually left home for Haslar.

The unaccompanied journey alone was an adventure for a young lad who had not traveled more than a few miles from home before. It seemed endless, What with several train changes, the underground, another train to Portsmouth, ferry across the water to Gosport. Talk about bewilderment. I was fortunate to have been met off the ferry by a young and very smart boy soldier. It was Boy Shipley. He welcomed me and said he was my escort to Haslar, but first he would take me to the 'Dive' for refreshments. Now the Dive was a café of sorts. It was below street level and you had to go down some steps to reach interior. It was quite warm down there. Just the thing because I was very cold from my journey. There was no heating on the trains in those days, and it was a miserable cold October's day.

On arrival at the school I was put in room three in Richards house. It was the one nearest to the cookhouse. B/L/Cpl George Stemp was the room NCO. He showed me how to bone my boots, blanco my webbing, press my boots etc. A great help indeed. I soon settled in to the

routine of army life. I had been a member of the local army cadet force (Green Howards) for a year or so before enlisting. There were one or two new entrants who could not settle in to this lifestyle. I heard sobbing on several occasions. It was a big wrench for some lads to leave home at fifteen. Discipline was necessary but at the tender age of fifteen, all that shouting and cursing was enough for some to want to run back home fast. I think there was a choice of staying in or buying your freedom. "Was it discharge by purchase (£20) to get your freedom within the first three month's of joining?" You still had to do your National Service.

I did my education schooling, as was the practice. I gained enough points from the class three exams to gain a second class mark. I received my crossed rifles badge on gaining a score of 90 +. I became a member of the unit's Bisley 303 team. We used the Trent ranges on which to practice. On one occasion I and another boy had to hoist the red safety flag. This was situated on the other side of the Trent River, some distance away. To reach the flag pole we had to cross the river. This, was achieved by walking over the railway bridge which spanned it. We took our rifles and ammo with us and hoisted the flag. There was an abundance of rabbits near the flag pole area. Well you guessed it, we were only teenagers and there was a lot of rabbits. Bang, bang, two less. There was a grassy bank behind them, so no stray shots. You see we had been trained properly. An Irresponsible thing to do perhaps, but with safety in mind. When we got back to the firing point we were greeted by the range warden, a retired colonel. He'd been watching us through binoculars and had seen our antics. He complimented us on our shooting abilities then proceeded to tell us what could happen to us. Apparently unbeknown to us it was an offence to carry arms on Railway property and was punishable by imprisonment, had we been caught by the Railway police. He was a kindly person. He must have been a boy soldier himself. He let us off with a gentle reprimand and didn't report us. We didn't have anyone in authority with us at the time.

When we returned to Haslar from our practice shoots we would boil out our rifle barrels at the cookhouse. On one occasion I heard someone shout my name. It was Barry Driscoll. Before I joined the boys I mentioned that I had worked in a factory. This was in Marske. Barry lived there. I knew him before joining the boys and it was on one of my home visits that I must have convinced him of the life we led at Haslar. He signed on.

I was at Haslar when Major Wiggins started the Toy Soldier Displays. Those cardboard hats were, to be polite, bloody uncomfortable. The chin straps were secured using what we then called sweetheart pins. They dug into your forehead and the hat rims gave me a headache. I stuffed mine with dusters to make them more comfortable. When the gun went off (only one gun in the early days) and you fell down, what a job to find your hat in the dark. We always manage it though. I can still remember some of the main characters in the display team. Atkinson 'the voice' Gunners: B/Sgts Rex Harral, George Smith, Cpl Stemp, (Rex Harral and I were in Korea together in 53. He was S/Sgt chief clerk at our Seoul FOMC. I was a Cpl clerk at Inchon Vehicle and Gun Park. I believe Rex died some time ago.)The Duke on horseback was Boy Alf (Spiv) Richards, who now lives in Pocklington Yorks.

The officers at Haslar in 1950/51 were Major RAJ Wiggins, Capt Hall, Lts. Webber, A.N. Other, CSM 'All Balls' Egglington, Sgts. Pete Crossley, Wright (ammunition examiner) Cpls Jolley, Bird, Les Jordan, Dezzani P.T.I.

"Who remembers the coal detail?" We were allowed two blocks of coal/anthracite per room a week. It was a dirty job. We were always scrounging anything that would burn. We were only a short distance from the sea and in winter it was a cold miserable place to be. There was

an empty barrack block when I was there. One day when I had appropriated a spare wooden locker and was chopping it up for the fire I was confronted by the CO and others who were doing an inspection of the block. Caught red handed destroying govt. property, I was placed on orders. Expecting to be severely punished for this dastardly deed I was surprised to be promoted to B/L/Cpl instead. Funny old world what! I was put in charge of room three, Richards house. Jimmy Hunt, (who died overseas in 1953) and Roy Parker were in my room. Pete Palmer was one of my close friends as was Tom Quinn. Tom also died overseas.

We had some characters at Haslar. There was one boy who thought he could get out by trying working his ticket. When we were on the Saturday morning muster parade and the officers were inspecting us this boy would sometimes follow the inspection team around. He had a piece of rope which he dragged behind him saying something like "Come along Harvey" Some weeks back there had been a picture showing at the Forum in Gosport. It was about and imaginary Rabbit called Harvey. He must have thought this would be his way out of the army. I don't remembering it working though. Another boy used to shave off his eyebrows and the hairs on his legs. He would then draw exaggerated ones back on using a biro pen. He was often in our guardroom. Another took himself off one night and pinched some prize pears from the garden of Maj Wiggins next door neighbour. He had dumped the leavings in the empty block. Silly boy.

When my time was up at Haslar in late 1951 I was posted to Blackdown for man service basic training. Many boys left at this time. I think there were 35 of us: Some I can still remember Ex/B/Sgts Rex Harral, Pete Smith, B/Cpls Alex Jameson, ? Roberts, Ex/boys ? Glenton, Dave Minnard, Alf (Spiv) Richards, Pete Palmer, Trevor Hardy (who I met once in Egypt in 1955……..Memories fade out. All the boys who went to Blackdown at this time were chosen to represent the Corps when the King died. Read my story.

It would be nice to hear from anyone who remembers me from Haslar or any of the postings I was at after leaving Boy Service. ie Blackdown, Chilwell 52/53 Korea Veh & Gun Inchon, 53/54 Port Said BVD(E) 54/56

I am currently in contact with Bob Walker and Barry Driscoll. We had a reunion in late 04. Present were Frank Webster ex Lt Col, The 'voice' Atkinson, Bob, Barry and myself.

After failing in my pursuit for a transfer to REME, and a job to which I would have been more suitably employed, I left in 1957. I hated my job, clerk. Enjoyed the military discipline.

Discharge by purchase, Queens Reg's 507 or something. Memories fade……..

Roy Jacklin (22292362)……..You never forget it. "Do you?" Your number. Like Blackpool rock. It's stamped through your middle.