Memories of Haslar Barracks
Fort Gomer and Blackdown
By Dennis Kilbride 1951 - 1954

I joined the R.A.O.C. Boys School at Haslar Barracks Gosport on the 17th September 1951 just over four months after my fifteenth birthday.

Having just recently read Bob Walkers excellent contribution to Memories I will try not to repeat his anecdotes but try to find some of my own and also to fill in some blank spaces.

I boarded a train at Leeds City Station on a bright September morning on the start of a journey and adventure that was to last Forty Years. The London Underground was my first test, this experienced I am sure many others who followed my journey to Gosport in the years that followed. Having arrived at Portsmouth Harbour railway station I was then on the ferry to the Gosport side onto a bus to arrive at Haslar Barracks in the early evening.

Allocation of a bedspace a visit to the bedding store quickly followed by the Q.M. stores, what would then become my labour of love over the next three years crammed into a kitbag and with no bearer to help in these days or helpful comrades in arms to give a helping hand it was a struggle to get back to the allocated billet. Very quickly surrounded by your new friends, hello mate where do you come from? Got any ciggies? need a help with your kit? pressing, boots, blanco!!! even in those few hours you quickly learnt that anything you needed had a price..

The following weeks or maybe months just flew by as one struggled to cope with this new life of scrubbing, cleaning and polishing just about everything that did not move. A memory of always being hungry I guess the cooks!! did what they thought was a good job with the food I suppose it could have been good before they got there hands on it, still it was three meals each day with supper if anything had been left over,it was never certain that we would get supper but the crust box (crusts of bread from the loaves of the previous meals) was always a favourite with the cheese and potato pie.

With a pay packet of 17 shillings and 6 pence per week (that's £39.00 for those working in real money) before stoppages not much left for the luxury purchases, laces, duster and brasso and if anything left a Nelson Slice at the NAAFI on the Friday night and all before the weekly shower, then back to the billet to get pressing and polishing for the Saturday inspection.

Sundays came as a bit of relief, not with breakfast in bed but praying for rain and to hear the whine of the TCVs which indicated we had a lift to the Garrison Church at Southsea, no rain meant a march across the Toll Bridge at Haslar followed by a long march to Southsea.

Over the many months that followed with education and trade training becoming an important part of our lives, we became more aware that our prospect once joining man service would or could be much better with qualifications than those not having had the advantage of being a Boy Soldier or as we became known with much affection!!! as Ex Boys by those not having had the privilege.

The Toy Soldiers is covered by other contributions but did offer some light relief to our otherwise very busy and exhausting life.

Due to the increase in numbers Fort Gomer became the second home for some of us but despite the shortcomings it will be remembered, maybe for visits but not to stay, do you remember the coal fatigue to the M.Q. at Fort Brocklehurst, or the dangers of putting a brasso tin on the open fire, how close can you get!! remember the flag flown at reveille different colours to indicate the dress for first parade.

Moving to Blackdown opened another chapter in our lives still very much Toy Soldiers with Alan Greenbat (RAEC) Bob Cox (CSM) Bill Clayton (Sgt) and Stan Tunnage (Sgt) but all good things come to an end and we all moved on to continue or adventure.

For Roy Venables, a better use of the brass trouser button was to find an out of the way light fitting, remove the bulb, place the brass button on the bulb and replace, no lights no barrack in night and the collection did not suffer still two buttons left.