Boy Soldiers Monami & Jinks

By Bob Crickard (Body Platton 1954-57)

The parade of three hundred boy soldiers under the command of the Boy Sergeant Major halted in the bright morning sun in front of the unit armoury. From the head of the parade the sergeant major marched smartly to a position midway left of the column, turned sharply to face the troops and gave the order to advance into line. The platoon sergeants marched smartly to their new positions in front of each platoon. The sergeant major then gave the command to order arms and handed the parade over to the platoon sergeants. The sergeants dismissed their platoons, each member of which had earlier been issued with a rifle and bayonet to take part in the church parade.

Dismissed, the boys formed up into a long single file and shuffled forward to hand the weapons over the counter to the unit armourer. Rifles handed in, the boys made their way, some singly others in groups, to the billets where they would change into denims prior to going to the cookhouse for the midday meal. The majority, with the ravenous appetites of growing males, ran so that they could change quickly and get near the front of the customary queue. They had to do this if they wanted a full three course meal since the cookhouse staff never seemed to know how many diners there would be and always erred on the side of less as opposed to plenty. Often the soup would run out or the custard would dry up before all the boys were fed. On some days, such as Sundays, when two choices such as meat and fish, were available the choice only extended to the first thirty in line. The less desirable choice was all that was available for the rest.

Not all the boys however, had handed their weapons in and after a tally the armourer announced to the Sergeant Major that one weapon was missing. According to the booking out records this was registered to Boy Monami.

Monami was an enlistment from the Channel Islands. He was dark and his face was devoted to the full time cultivation of acne. He had a timid demeanour and pronounced stoop both of which caused him to be the butt of cruel adolescent practical jokes and derision. He suffered dreadfully from homesickness and was the victim of the endemic harassment, closely akin to bullying, that prevailed among the teenage boys. He was also on the unit shooting team and had been on the ranges recently where he had access to ammunition. A quick investigation by the sergeant major revealed that Monami had last been seen walking, not towards the cookhouse, but towards the woods that surrounded the barrack area. Whether he was armed or not could not be determined.

Only a few boys had been served lunch by this time as a group of Boy NCOs swept in the dining room area and ordered everyone to fall in outside. With much muttering and bitching everyone joined their platoon formations. Here they were told by the sergeant major that Monami had absconded with a rifle. This was unconscionable. The weapon and Monami must be brought back. The whole formation was turned into line and marched off in the direction of the woods.

At the edge of the woods the battalion was formed up into single line abreast and given the order to advance much in the way that ghillies and beaters in the Highlands would to raise game. The annoyance at having missed the midday meal gradually dissipated as the boys began to enjoy the brightness of the day and laughed and joked among themselves. After

several minutes the trees began to thin out and the terrain changed to the combination of sand, brush and heather that the boys knew as "tank tracks". The extended line emerged from the tree line and advanced across the moor land. By this time the purpose of the exercise had diminished in the minds of the majority of the boys and completely disappeared from the minds of those who were giddier than the average adolescent. They advanced in desultory fashion, beating at the bushes with twigs and sticks in a halfhearted manner, and none really cared if Monami showed or not - or so they thought!

Suddenly with a blood curdling shriek like the most demented of Dervishes Monami leapt from hiding some thirty to forty yards in front of the search party. Continuing to screech he worked the bolt of the purloined .303 Lee Enfield, threw it up to his shoulder and aimed in the general direction of the other boys.

Never in the history of the RAOC Boys School had the coordination in the execution of a military drill movement been so precise and simultaneous. With a concerted "Oooh!" three hundred boys literally leapt into the air, spun round one hundred and eighty degrees and took to their heels with Promethean strides that any titan would have envied. The lone demented Monami spurred them on from behind with crazy banshee wails.

Eventually some form of control came back and one of the permanent staff instructors opened an upstairs window and called down to Monami who was prowling the area between the blocks. He asked if Monami was hungry and if he was would he be prepared to turn the weapon over in return for a meal and amnesty. Monami, who was not the top of his class as a negotiator, agreed a little too promptly. He was quickly joined by a surrounding group of adult instructors who took the weapon, reneged on the amnesty part, and Monami, his brief moment of glory extinguished, was marched in double time to the guardroom where he was put in custody until the following Monday. On orders that morning he was sentenced to fourteen days confinement.

Another Channel Islander, who was as strange if not stranger than Monami, was a boy called Jinks. Jinks was almost simian in appearance but not powerfully so; he was more the personification of the rubber chimps that one could win at the fairground. His lower jaw protruded and unfortunately his intelligence matched his appearance - or so it seemed. Jinks was desperately unhappy in the Army.

One day when I was checking the living accommodation for cleanliness, as part of the duties of the Orderly Sergeant, I heard a muffled shuffle followed by a double thump, pause, then, a few moments later, the same sequence all over again. It was coming from the ablutions. I went out into the ablutions where the noise was louder and now appeared to be accompanied by heavy breathing. I located the cubicle from which the noise was coming, went into the adjoining cubicle, climbed on the toilet pedestal, and looked over the dividing wall, straight into Jink's large blue eyes. He was standing forlornly on his pedestal with a red and blue lanyard looped round his neck the other end of which was knotted round the mantel of the door.
“What are you doing Jinks?" I asked.
" I'm trying to hang myself," he replied," but I keep bouncing when I jump down.’
"Your lanyard's too long when you jump off," I told him.
“I know," he said," but I don't want to get charged for cutting up my lanyard”.

Jinks gave up on his suicide attempts but remained unhappy. At that stage in his service he

could buy himself out for twenty pounds. One day I heard that Jinks was leaving us as his mother had purchased his discharge. Within two days Jinks had handed in his equipment, collected his travel warrant for his return trip to Guernsey and was gone. At the end of that month when the Army authorities presented the cheque for cashing it bounced higher than Jinks ever did on that cubicle floor.