Captain J.J. “Jack” Thompson
OIC GORDON HOUSE
1957 to 1960



Retired Major on 1 August 1987

I have pleasure in submitting this short resume of my time as OIC Gordon House, a period of my life that was both enjoyable and rewarding.

It is hoped that some of the incidents and personnel that I recall, will bring back fond memories to those who served at the Junior Leaders during the same period.

C COY FIRE

I was alerted to the sound of ammunition exploding that was contained in the C Coy safe as the flames, fanned by a strong wind, spread rapidly.

Said Major Ted Macey, to me, in a very calm order “Run over to the mess and tell Col. Harley Peters what is happening”.

On breaking the news to the CO, who was still asleep in bed, he just turned over and said “*Jolly Good*”.

BISLEY HEATH FIRE

I was Duty Officer when called out to the fire, and, as it was customary to wear Blues when acting as Duty Officer this proved disastrous when trying to put out the fire in the heather & bracken that was smouldering everywhere.

The Fire Piquet was much better dressed for the task.

I shall never forget the fire chariot charges at full speed on the many practices, and the leaking hoses, which thoroughly wetted all the crew & bystanders too.

INITIATIVE TESTS

I recall sending McHale to Stourbridge in the West Midlands on a weekend initiative tests. He generally came back “thankfully”

FORT TREGANTLE

So many fond memories, here are but a few:

1. **Fire again**: Off duty on Plymouth Hoe I saw a huge pal of smoke coming from the direction of Fort Tregantle.

   Dashed back across the ferry to arrive at FT to see a line of Junior Leaders passing fire buckets down the range to extinguish the gorse and brambles where the fire was raging.

2. **Captain Hugh McCutcheon** playing the pipes at reveille and sunset around the battlements.

   Just like "Beau Jest"!!

3. **Captain Ricky Lane** lying in bed with a tube in his mouth from a flask of cider suspended above his head with a stopcock.
4. **Manning check points** on top of Rough Tor & Brown Willy, on Bodmin Moor. Junior Leaders sometimes kept to the course from the Cheese Rings Pub to Trebarwith Strand and back again.

   A number always managed to miss these check points and we expected the tin mine shafts may have claimed a few victims……but the rascals had hitched around the moor to avoid the slog up hill & down dale.

   No one was shot to my best belief.

5. Does anyone remember how we got from the troop train to Plymouth, onwards to Fort Tregantle?

FORT TREGANTLE RECOVERY

Captain Ricky Lane charged around in a "not to be forgotten" yellow 3 wheeled Meschersmit Bubble car!

It was very unstable on corners but being light could easily be lifted upright again.

One night, before he got married, he got bogged down on the beach near Fort Tregantle and had to be pulled free by volunteers.

For the rest of the camp he was the subject of many a leg-pull – "how do you get two inside a Meschersmit?"

He was later a Public Relations Officer in Hong Kong!

AVIEMORE

SKI Expedition to Rothmiemurchus (Para's Hut) for Cairngorms ski training, by overnight train to Aviemore.

No Ski lifts then – carried the skis and boots for several miles in thin snow.

McHoul fell at full speed and hit the base of his spine on a submerged rock.

I thought he would die, but he was tough & brave.

OUR WVS LADIES

Mrs Patterson and Shirley Goldthorpe, always trying their best to help the Junior Leaders keep happy, with games and motherly advice, along with Mrs Gibson, the Adjutants wife who kindly lent a hand.

I remember well the occasion when one chap who was "unsettled" was found with his head in a fire bucket. Not an efficient way to commit suicide……just a cry for help!

CROOKS

An infamous ex J/RSM from Rowcroft House, who robbed a jewellers shop in Woking.

I met him later in life when he was a road manager for Devon County Council.

He was terrific sprinter and rugby player.

LEAVE & PAY PARADES

Because some parents complained of Junior Leaders arriving home "broke", we grabbed their sons cash on Pay Parades and went down to the Blackdown Post Office and sent it to their home in the form of Postal Orders in Registered Letters – quite a fag!

Some orphans stayed on camp for leave and some went to friend's homes. I was often rear duty officer.

REVENGE ATTACKS

On the Officers from the NS Training Battalion, Dettingen Mess, who stole our cannons from the Junior Leaders Officers Mess.

We grabbed them back after a decent fight and dumped a cartload of manure from the stables in their Officers Mess lobby entrance!

COOKHOUSE FACILITIES

I recall the place was usually awash and the cooks wore clogs to keep their feet dry.

Too many spuds to peel, for those Junior Leaders on fatigues!!!

FIRES AGAIN

The barrack-room stoves had an inadequate winter coke supply – delivered to the QM's by horse and cart!

Fuel from the woods and some furniture and planks from some huts kept the boys of Gordon House warm on cold winters nights.

Every 5th November there was a large bonfire behind the blocks but I don't recall any fireworks – except for thunder flashes.

BOXING

Gordon House always had plenty of guts, and was usually the most successful, being a tough lot and always confident and full of fight.

Bob Manners, Allen "Taff" Alderman, Tony O'Shaughnessy & J/Sgt Williams who was from Devon, were champion.

SHOOTING

Major Ted Macey was keen to instruct us to use our instincts and not to take deliberate aim!

He could bounce tin cans around in this way from a pistol fired from the hip.

.22 Range shooting was very popular, and Ted was always so patient and motivated.

ALDERSHOT DISTRICT JUNIOR OFFICERS COMPETION

Our team was very fit comprising:

Reg King, Johnny Johnson, (RAEC & London Irish), Ricky Lane, Barry Bloxham (later Brigadier & Director ACC), "Hoppy" Hopkinson (also later a Colonel) and myself.

Barry and I were in the lead when we reached Hawley Lake but we capsized a canoe and had to spend a long time searching for my rifle, which was on the bottom close to the shore.

NCO's/WO's and OFFICERS OF NOTE	
CO's	**Maj. Amato**
	Lt Col. Harley Peters
	(Drove a flash limousine wearing a bowler!)
2 IC's	**Maj. Jimmy Magee**
	(*A fun guy, later MA in IRAQ. His many children, all like him, had red hair & freckles)*
Adjutant	**Capt. Ted Gibson**
	(*Excellent Adjutant. The CO used to smoke all his fags.*
	A very good friend later in life, he sadly passed away in 2002 in Sixpenny Handley after many years on the Sultan of Oman's Staff.)
COY Commanders	**Maj. Ron Haworth**
(	*Excellent, he came from the North Country*)
	Maj. Ted Macey
	(*A most generous man who had war experience with the SEO in Yugoslavia, sadly killed in Cyprus by the EOKA, could speak both Greek & Turkish*)
	Maj. Reason-Challinor
	Maj. Kemp REME
	Maj. Peter (Unknown) REME - "B" Company
	(Posted to the Xmas Isles for Nuclear Tests)
Other Officers	**Capt. Fred Parker REME**
	(A very good shot, he later ran Bisley in retirement)
	Capt. John Head RAEC
	(*Superb for the recruits & scouts, always had his dog with him)*
	Capt. Jack Dominey RAEC
	(*Keen on Rugby and very "sparky")*
	Capt. Hugh McCutcheon
	(*Body House and Band*)
	Capt. Gardner RAEC
	Capt. Jim Clifton
	(Baker House. He emigrated to Australia. Rtd Lt. Col.)

NCO's/WO's and OFFICERS OF NOTE (contd.)	
Other Officers (contd.)	**Capt. Mike Linfoot**
	(Baker House. He passed out from Staff College.
	Played Basketball for England.
	He was killed in 1961 in Aden Protectorate)
WO's & NCO's	**RSM Tara McCann**
	(*A Heart of gold – Ex Guards*)
	Sgt. John Bollers
	(*He had a never to be forgotten "word of command", rose to the rank of Major QM*)
	Sgt. Meaker
	(SAS. Irish and before "timber" Woods")
	Sgt "Timber" Woods (later CSM)
	(*A gentle giant*)
	Sgt Jannoway REME
	("Tiny" - A very fast winger)
	Sgt. Titmuss
	Cpl. Norman Bruce RAOC Regimental Police
	(Scotland International Hooker who played for Blackheath, London Scottish & Army. Used to attend Church in a kilt.
	Rtd Lt. Col. Was at one time CO of Army School of PT. He died several years ago)
	Cpl. Ronnie Bender RAOC Regimental Police
(	Cockney who was jailed along with the Kray gang for Murder)
Footballers of note:	**Ostell REME**(*Centre Forward from Aspatria in Cumbria*)
	Higgs REME(*Centre Half*)
	Bob Manners(*Goalkeeper*)
	Bill Chamberlain(*Winger*)
	Tony O'Shaughnessy (*A strong tackler, nickname "shag"*)
	John Woods *(later commissioned – a good dribbler)*
	Eggbear REME *(from Devon?)*
	Eastwood *(Lanky centre forward)*
J/NCO's & Others	**Underwood** *(J/Sgt from Yorkshire I think he had a slight stammer?)*
	Reid *(Cpl from Ramsgate. Kent – Brilliant all rounder)*
	Diffin *(J/RSM – made Major I understand)*

NCO's/WO's and OFFICERS OF NOTE (contd.)	
J/NCO's & Others (contd.)	**Garry Hawthorne** *(became a Major and served in Para Free Fall Team and Ac Sp Unit as I did. Following retirement he later became an Estate Manager in Norfolk)*
	Goldstone *(X country - Excellent stamina)*
	Schiff *(A Jewish boy)*
	Webster*(Became a WOI Conductor)*

I appreciate that the above contains just a few anecdotes of the many incidents that occurred, however many names and faces of Junior Leaders are indelibly etched in my memory, particularly those "rascals" of Gordon House.

During my career I was fortunate to meet a few of those ex boys, and since being contacted by Bill Chamberlain recently have received a number of calls from ex boys who all appear to have become mature responsible adults, that fact gives me both pride and pleasure in knowing I was a small part of their growth.

I look forward to hearing form any ex boy who may wish to reminisce over those days whilst they were under my command.

Good luck, good health to all and every success with the Junior Leaders web site.