FEBRUARY 1958 – JULY 1960
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GORDON HOUSE



Recollections of Two Years as a Junior Leader

EPISODE ONE

In a way my army experience started with John Broadbent of Smethwick, and now as things come to a close Johnny will be ending this episode too.

I first met John in the recruiting office on James Watt Street, Birmingham.
It was a grey day in late January 1958.
He was stood next to me with his trousers down.
I was trying not to look but following the instruction "cough", I heard such a deep "KHOOO" that I was sure there was something I shouldn't miss……I was wrong, but after all at 15+ we all had to try to exaggerate a bit.
I couldn't talk, as I don't think my voice had broken by then.

I suppose it was the embarrassment that bought us together but anyway outside we agreed to go for a coffee.
This was new to me as it was the first time I had been to Brum on my own (Birmingham to the uneducated amongst you).
Johnny was a real "townie" and suggested Rackhams.
I was overawed at his Teddy boy clothes and the wonderful D.A. haircut.
He suggested hot chocolate and paid.
What a lad!!

We agreed to "stick together " when we got there, although he was due to report two weeks before me. He invited me to his house in Spring Hill and he played records. He loved music and in particular the words. One that I remember to this day, was a Country and Western, "Life Sure Gets Tedious"……prophetic or what?
It was a fortunate and memorable day for me.
I remember thinking on the way home to Stourbridge that if nothing else came out of this Army stuff I had at least met a nice kid whom I could look upon as a friend.
The wrench at leaving for Blackdown……the girl I left behind June
Flello…….heartache, had I done the wrong thing?

I stepped down off the bus and a scruffy individual with a large cold sore, shaved hair and deep sunken eyes stared at me and bent to take my case from me. He looked like a down and out in some sort of rough grey Denim outfit.
I said, “It’s ok mate I can manage” protecting my worldly possessions.
He stared at me as If I should recognise him and then said, ”It’s me Mac, Johnny”!
I was horrified, “what’s happened to you”?
“It’s terrible here Mac, I hate it.
“Blimey John I’m not surprised you look awful”.
He said you’re in Recruit House too I’ll show you around.

Johnny never liked the Junior Leaders but he settled down and was given a tape towards the end, just to confirm his capitulation I think.
He went into Body house and was known for some time as "excused boots Broadbent" on account of him jumping from a high tree in order to break his leg so as to get a medical discharge.
He remembers to this day being carried back through the woods in a wheelbarrow.
I cannot divulge as to where I got the wheelbarrow……but if the owner of a big white house on the edge of Frimley woods is missing one; I am at liberty to say it’s about 200 yards south of the Junior Leaders Guard room……well it was in 1958…!

While in Recruit house I find another Brummie in the bed next to me called Dennis Dennis.
I remember well being awake and listening to the racket coming from the house opposite……the one next to the road at the bottom end, next to the woods and the static water tank, opposite and across the road was the coalbunker……of which I will talk of later!!!

Anyway I longed to be assigned to any other house than the, “Black Flash Brigade”.
Well of course, there could be no other outcome.
As I looked on the House allocation following Recruit stage, there it was **GORDON**.

Hawley Lake, Snow, sitting in a boat with an oar bigger than me rowing a “Cutter” up and down while the snow settled deeper and deeper on legs arms and head. Worn out, and then back to a leaking tent as the snow turned to rain,
Forty-Eight hours later and I find myself in Cambridge Military Hospital with pneumonia.
The Para in the next bed kept putting the screens round and calling for the nurse who apparently was only too pleased to attend.
All I got was the sharp end of a needle……those penicillin injections don’t half hurt!
Back to Gordon House after two weeks sick leave.
Someone had packed my kit in a kit bag when I was sent to hospital.
When I opened it the entire kit was mouldy.

As I was still a sprog I was still getting tipped out of bed and all the “treatment”.
As things settled and the attentions went elsewhere I began to feel one of the boys.
Crummy Reid our room corporal (left at top of stairs) was of the same quality as Johnny Broadbent. He was a laugh, and very just.
He created an enthusiastic atmosphere combined with a team spirit and was a person to look up to, and yet so humorous.
I remember him getting up every morning and showing everyone his green undies he had slept in.

"Look at that", he would declare, "stiff as a board, wait till those laundry girls get a sight of those", as he wrote a love letter to enclose with his Dhobi.
He never did get a response and we never did find out whom it was that was making the springs on their bed squeak!!!!!!

I remember another Brummie called Brookie. or Brooks, who stood up for me in the dinner queue. What a thing having to come to fisticuffs over a square inch of margarine.
Boy did we get hungry?
In the NAAFI I can remember regularly begging one of the women servers for a cream cake. She must have taken a shine to me because she bought the cake and gave me half.
Her name was Francis and she was the wife of one of the sergeants. Kindness comes in many ways.

Now I look back I realise the efforts the Permanent Staff made, and thank them all for making such good and positive input to all our formative years.
Obviously there were some Main Men from my point of view.
There was Mad Jack Thompson, Best House Officer by a street!!!
Sergeant Bollers, "Whose had my Messerschmitt"?
It took some getting on to the top of the ablutions roof. Where did the rope come from?
Oh yes out of the gym across the road! Sergeant Black, kindly, patient and as smart as a carrot.
Sergeant Barnes with those boots that reached for the sky. He would stamp his feet and the gravel was dust.
I remember Major Macey, coming and giving a speech to us all in the NAAFI.
He started by saying he didn't like little boys, but went on to say that he looked upon us as young men and would treat us as such……and so he did.
There seemed to develop such a fellowship.
It's hard to describe but enough to say that in November 2005 I still find my self smiling and would give what I could to see **ALL** those faces again, and tell them "**Thanks**" for playing such a huge part in my early development.
I came off leave early in the summer of 1960 to shoot at Bisley for the Battalion.
There was a photo in the corps gazette I'm sure, which I would dearly like to see as I have a small wager as to the rifle we fired.
So to hobbies - shooting, canoe making, etc…add your own here…for Gordon house.
Needle work for the other houses.
Oh, and Tope House, what a regrettable name!
I think most of us were in some team or other.
I played cricket (wicket keeper), football, and ran cross-country.
Those runs to the cross roads every morning with QMS Robinson……he must have been 45 at the time and he ran the legs off us.
I would vote Willie Williams as the best and braves of us though.
I will remember always his fights in the ring. What a toughie!!
As I come to the end of this first episode I'm only too aware of the subject matter that is still outstanding, so I end by telling you a little of the, "**Keys Café Trips**", and will then list the memories that I will relate in further submissions.
I am sure everyone that reads this is becoming bored.
Keys, as everyone fondly remembers was the almost sole location for, "The Boys" to regularly catch sight of some beauty.
Although **Slim Belcher** was the exception as he worked out behind his locker door. That's for a later date.

Anyway Keys held the key to seeing colour, shape, smiles, beauty and also the key to warmth, scent, charm, romance and……a bostin egg sarnie.
Johnnie Broadbent would have committed murder to get to keys for a glimpse of Ann.
There was also Rosie, Carol, and Wendy (Ann's twin), I leant towards Carol but I think she was unaware of my inadequate approaches.
Having recently spoken to Ann, she tells me Johnnie went to Singapore following Boy's service. He kept in touch with her and on his return shot down to the Keys, and Married her.
Yes he had it bad all right!!!
They are still together after all this time!
See there is hope for us all.
Both Ann and Johnnie deserved the happy life they shared.

So the next thrilling instalment will include:

The Blue Lagoon
Slims Haircut
Bill's lucky pull in the sardine factory
The lifts on the moor……and there's more…… and more.

Hope I've helped to rekindle your thoughts.