Memories: 1958-1960 Bill Boyd
Baker Platoon, A Company

On the 3, November 1958 I joined the Junior Leaders R.A.O.C. at the Belfast recruitment office, that evening I meet up with Danny O'Donohue and Paddy Philips at the Belfast docks they both had also joined up the same day. The journey was really hectic as we spend all night on the ship and then spent several hours traveling by train from Heysham.

When we reached Brookewood station we met up with several other chaps who also had joined up. However we were to travel the rest of the way by bus to the camp when one of the other chaps decided to phone the camp and ask for transport, we arrived at the camp we were met by a very angry Sgt Luke, who informed everyone that we should have traveled by bus as we had the tickets, he also informed each and everyone that he was our instructor and he would make each and everyone pay for the misuse of military transport. We were all escorted to the training block where we were allocated our sleeping area, and then it was off to the QM stores for our kit and bedding.

If you ever saw the film "Carry on Sergeant" then you will have some idea how we were kitted out, how we ever managed to carry all that kit back to the block I will never know. Afterwards it was off to the cook house for some tea, we were allocated one slice of bread and one square cube of butter, followed with two fried eggs and some bubble and squeak.

I remember at the training block we had a senior J/Ldr in our room who was in the REME, his job was to teach everyone how to make a bed box, press their uniforms and bull their boots etc, I always remember his face he was a real grumpy sod probably because he had to do the job of a Junior NCO but was not getting paid for it. Next morning it was a very early morning rise, and onto the drill square with Sgt Luke to teach everyone how to march etc. I found him a very good instructor and we all learned very quickly which pleased him, that was until someone wrote to their MP and the Newspapers stating that we were all being drilled in the freezing cold and in the snow, and not allowed to wear gloves, this really made him very angry and by god we all paid for that letter that was sent.

A few days later we all moved to a different block that had been used by the permanent staff, and was very close to the square. I remember one morning Sgt Luke was inspecting our kit lay out and as standard we had to have the bottom of the windows open. The person next to me was told that his kit was not up to scratch and Sgt Luke picked it up and threw it out of the window, he then got to my kit and was checking it, at this point I thought it was going out of the window so I picked it up and threw it out. Sgt Luke looked at me and said you should not have done that lad as it was a very good kit lay out; to this day I never knew if he was serious or just joking. Thanks to Sgt Luke we all turned out to be a very good squad, who helped each other out in getting our kits and drill right. Chippy Chandler was our room J/CPL, once too often Chippy tipped the guys out of bed, and then found himself hanging upside down out of the window of the top floor, after a few screaming sessions Chippy was pulled back in and he took it all in good spirits. To be honest Chippy was not a bad guy even though he got me seven days jankers which ended up being fourteen days but he got on well with the lads.

I remember in our training squad was Danny O'Donohue, (no longer with us a great mate) Paddy Philips who was nearly thrown over board of the ship on our way home to Ireland because he kept annoying Danny, Freddie Truesdale (was a mate in the J/Ldrs) Ginger Carroll , Eddie Hillan, Jock O'Hara (who later became a Para, and I understand was in the SAS great guy) Chalky White (who was awarded the GSM whilst still a J/Ldr, because he

joined up in Malaya I understand that a number of the J/Ldrs and Permanent staff were not very happy about him getting the GSM).

After our recruitment training I was placed in Baker House where I stayed until about March 1959, whilst in Baker house I did notice some lads being bullied and a few of them ended up in the toilets crying their eyes out in fact one lad tried to commit suicide. Some of the bully boys were J/NCOs I could mention their names but I won't. We also had an incident in Baker house where two Welsh lads were caught in the toilets together doing something they should not be doing, the next day they were no longer a Junior Leader, I know who they were but again I will not mention their names.

I was promoted to J/Lcpl in March 1959 and transferred to C Company, CSM Carman was the company CSM and Sgt Walker our House Sgt. The J/Sgt was John Silver, he was fair with the lads but firm, however I was given the room where all the lazy and scruffs of C Company were as no one else wanted them in their rooms, but after a few months of hard work they turned out to be the best in the company and we won the best room in the company for five weeks on the trot. I think that I did myself no favors for having the best room for five weeks on the trot, because if a lazy or scruffy lad joined C Company he was placed in my room and one of the other lads was moved to another room or block. I was even put in charge of training some Cadets who were at the camp for a short period. During my period at C Company I was sent on an outward bound course at Tywyn in North Wales and what an experience, there were other J/Lds there from different corps and regiments there and we got on well together. The big shock was getting up very early in the morning and running down to the sea in just your bathing trunks and carrying a towel in the freezing cold with snow on the ground. The officer in charge I believe was a Brig, and he was first into the sea swimming about whilst we all stood there freezing, until he ordered everyone into the sea, I can still feel the cold from the sea when I think about it. The officer in charge of our billet was a Lt. Chris Bonnington; every thing in the room had to be uniformed if a piece of fluff was under a bed then everyone had to have a piece of fluff under their bed that was his policy. We were taught mountain climbing on Snowden by Lt Bonnington, and we climbed the devils kitchen and the main face, we also had to climb Wales's three thousands and that was some task as you had to do it in a certain time. Each Billet had to take it in turn in the cookhouse to do the washing up after meals and to serve the food. I remember that we had to do the cross country run but it was cancelled, some of the lads went to the NAFFI and stuffed their selves with cream cakes and pop, only then to be told that the cross country run was then on, you can imagine those who had too much to eat felt after a few hundred yards run. I think most of them were sick and crawled their way to the finish line. Although the outward bound course was hard I really enjoyed it and got a B+ reward from Lt Bonnington. When I got back to Blackdown with my uniform wet as it had been raining the whole way from Wales everyone had left the camp and I had to spend the night there as it was too late to catch the train for my trip home to Ireland. I have also fond memories of Fort Tregantle, like sneaking out of the fort at night to go to the pub for a pint of scrumpy or a beer.

When I look back I think that being a Junior Leader was a great experience for everyone who had joined up, there was great friendship within the Battalion forgetting about the bullies, and we had great senior staff, Major Macey, Capt. Thompson, RSM McCann, Sgt Pop Fenton, Sgt Bradshaw, Sgt Black, Sgt Bollers, CSM Carman, CSM (blink blink) Middleton, CSM Woods, Sgt Luke, to name a few. I also think that being in the Junior Leaders helped many of the guys achieve very high senior ranks, including commissions. If I were asked if I would do

it all again I would say "YES" although I would be much wiser and not get talked into doing something for other people that ended me getting punished for something I did not gain from.

I would say that I forged a very good career after I left the Army in 1966, having qualified as a translator in the German language, I worked as a junior translator in Rheindahlen Germany but after a failed marriage I returned to England where I embarked on the career as a Buyer for a large Australian Hi Tech Company later becoming the IT Manager for the same company until I retired in April 2008.

I sometimes wonder what has happened to people like Freddie Truesdale, Eddie Hillan, Ginger Carroll, Jock O'Hara, Taffy Higgs, & Paddy Philips.

By Bill Boyd
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