Memories of a Junior Leader 1959 to March 1962
By Geoff Malthouse

I lived on a farm in the country which was at least a mile from the local village in one direction and 2 miles and a bit from town and the secondary school which I attended until I was 15. I say 2 and a bit because of that bit, prevented me and my sisters getting on the school bus at the end of the lane. So we were bikers from an early age.

My interest in Army followed on from joining the local Army Cadets. The detachment I joined was badged 'Sherwood Foresters', the Notts and Derby Brigade or The 45th Foot. Later to be amalgamated, with the Worcester and Foresters Brigade. I became a cadet Cpl and decided to make a career of the Army and applied to be a Junior Leader when I left school at 15.

I had my heart first set on the Royal Armoured Corps at Bovington Camp Dorset and I was intrigued with the Iron Fist of their badge and the hope to become a Tank Commander.

As it turned out, there were no vacancies in the Regiment at that time and I was offered a vacancy in The Junior Leaders Royal Army Ordnance Corps. I asked my Cadet Sgt Major about the RAOC and he assured me that they had tanks in the RAOC, in fact, so he said, they had everything! So assured that I could have my tanks I agreed and joined the RAOC.

On the day I joined my mother wanted to take me down to Blackdown but I put my foot down and we agreed to say good bye at Nottingham Railway Station. From there I travelled down to London, St Pancras, crossed over London by tube to Waterloo and then out along the Southern Rail to dear old Brookwood where I presume I was met and taken by truck to Blackdown Camp.

I started in North Frith Barracks in Aug 1959, at the top left hand corner of Blackdown and then moved over to Dettingen Barracks with the JLBn.

The object of the Junior Leaders and their predecessor, Boy Soldiers was to train young men for SNCO's and Warrant Officers. The age group was 15 to 17.1/2 although some 14 year olds were not unknown. It was rumoured that some were ex Borstal boys and other lads who apparently were given the choice, by the Judge, "Borstal or are you going to volunteer for the Army"?

There was some trade training but only B trades which at the time was only storeman or Clerk RAOC. This happened only in the final term instead of education.

We were based, in the days described above, in North Frith Barracks which was North of Deepcut and opposite Dettingen.

In the summer of 1959 there was a large intake and there were two Recruit Houses with Sgt Johnnie Walker and Sgt Pete Britcher. The REME Juniors had moved out six months earlier to make room for the expected increase in recruiting.

When we passed out, we Mulcahy and Watts House together with a third house, Recruit House formed the new C Company under Major Reason Challiner who recently passed on, and the late CSM Al Carmen. Al Carmen was an ex Inspector in the Colonial Police Force

and a professional boxing referee. In his office he had some 'artistic' photos of Diana Dors on his wall. He later became a Vehicle Specialist and I believe appointed a Conductor.

My house was Mulcahy with the late Capt G.B Hopkinson ('Hoppy') the House Officer and Johnnie Walker. I can't remember the Watts house officer.

We use to explore the tank tracks and coniferous woods all around the barracks over the weekends sometimes out all day, just coming back for tea. We had to get back for tea because we never had enough money to buy food in the NAAFI very often. Although I do recall feasting on a cold tin of baked beans and a pork pie from the NAAFI shop once or three times. Shear delicacy of it.....

Later on, we would explore the ranges over towards Pirbright. Once we got as far as Rifle Association Ranges and were very pleased to be asked to do some target spotting in the buts. They taught us the Bisley scoring and shot pointing system and they were well pleased with us. We were told to report to the office afterwards and we all got at least 10 bob each for the afternoon. We only got 25 bob (£1.25) on a Wednesday morning so having 10 bob on a Sunday night was real wealth. We didn't rush back to tea that night but had a fry up in the NAAFI. I don't remember how much we use to be paid because they kept back so much 'in credits'.

We would have to pay for barrack room damages and on pay parade you wait for your name to be called out. On hearing your name you would leap to attention and march to the front of the paying Officer and shout, "Sir". The Sgt would say something like 25 shillings less a shilling barrack damages and the officer would sign your pay book and hand you the cash from neatly arranged piles in front of him. You would then glance down and say "Pay and Paybook correct Sir"! whether it was or not actually. Salute and march back to the squad and fall back in and then to Ease until the last man had been paid. Quite a performance, every week.

The residue of your pay would be sent as a money order to your home address for each leave at the end of term. I always seemed to have enough money on leave. The reason why they sent your 'credits' home was because in the past there was some bullying and some lads went home on leave with no money, apparently?

We attended education classes each morning and sat the 'Junior', Intermediate' and 'Senior', Tests. This was equivalent to the Army Certificate of Education, 3rd, 2nd and first class. Each morning we would muster outside and be inspected by the House Sgt. We would then be fell in with our respective classes and marched by the Junior NCO's up to the education huts up by the sports fields. The Sgt would then go and inspect the rooms and woe betide you if you got picked up for a dirty bedspace!

Friday night was bull night and the rooms, and all you kit had to sparkle for Saturday mornings inspection. For the jobs a boy would be selected for his skills because if anything was failing we would be in trouble. Not just from the Sgt but letting down your room mates was a crime! Two of the experts were the polish 'flipper' who precisely flicked the polish to precisely the correct space so it could be rubbed in and later buffed with the other expert. The Bumper. Too much or too less polish in a spot could ruin the effect and cause much extra work. The polish was usually flicked with the flat end of a button stick. Swinging

the bumper was an art not blessed with everyone who would get the other menial jobs like latrines, ablutions, outside areas or dusting.

Saturday morning was an early start and the room had to be finished off, and kit laid out on the bed for inspection by the House Officer or CO. While this was going on we would be on Battalion Parade under the RSM endlessly marching around and around in slow and quick time.

Education training was a major part of our training and took part every weekday morning up to lunch time. Up to 1960 you had to pass all subjects in the one sitting, and if failing, you resat all the subjects. In 1961 they changed the rule and individual subjects could be accumulated. I was thankful for that because although I passed my Junior and Intermediate at the one sitting I found the

Senior Certificate much harder to obtain and had to sit my final subject later when posted to the ranks in the RAOC to complete my ACE I.
Some boys who were considered bright were allowed to commence their studies at the Intermediate level. I had to start at the Junior entrance level although I passed both Junior and Intermediate in successive terms, surprising them all, including myself. On passing the Intermediate Test we were allowed to wear two stars on our lower arm on the Service Dress. We still wore the old pattern SD which is reminiscent of the uniforms of WW1 but with trousers rather than those with the long puttees.

The subjects we took according to my certificates, were Junior; English, Arithmetic, General Science and General Studies.
Intermediate; English, Arithmetic, General Studies and Map Reading.

The Senior Test had two compulsory subjects which I think was English and Advanced Map reading, and required another two (or three?) optional subjects to complete the qualification.

On passing these tests we were ‘exempt’ the equivalent in Army Certificate of Education (ACE).

The ‘Advanced Map reading’ we studied was considered well above the equivalent, ‘Applied Map Reading’ in ACE I or even GCE ‘O’ Level Geography. But, we did get an extremely good grounding in map work.

In 1961 we also had the choice of Arithmetic, Mathematics or the new subject, ‘Military Calculations & Arithmetic’ which was based on the type calculations one would expect in the service.

We were taught by RAEC instructors and in the fifties and sixties most of them were SNCO’s but later they were required to be commissioned.
A ‘fry up’ in the NAAFI was usually; sausage, egg, chips and beans with a slice of bread and cup of tea. Lashed with salt and vinegar. Price? I think it was about two and eight pence if my memory serves me right. Not cheap but about 32p in today’s money.

Now when you got a stripe you had to do Duty Cpl. Not very pleasant trying to keep order but the great thing was that you always got served a free fry up courtesy of the NAAFI manager just before closing time.

If you smoked, you could sell it for some fags. The number of fags depending how far you were off pay day.

A better duty was 'WVS' ('Weavers') NCO. You had to issue out all the books and games and make sure they were returned and all locked up before closing.

The Weavers was like an oasis of quiet calm compared to the barrack room and the NAAFI. There you could write your letters, play card and board games and of course the WVS lady was always there to offload your troubles. I can't get my head round the new 'WRVS' despite the Royal honour.

The worse duty was fire piquet; it was for a whole week. First we had to be trained by giant of a Sgt. Sgt North I believe.

We had one of those 'fire chariots' It was a box containing hose, standpipes, and nozzles etc, slung between a pair of 'horse cart' wheels with a pole and a tee handle at the end. Two lads would stand each side of the front to steer and the rest pushed. Fearsome vehicle it was too with no brakes.

There was a fire practice every day just before tea. We would drag this monstrosity on wheels at break neck speed around the roads of the barracks. God help anyone in the way.

When we were in North Frith barracks we had to do tin bashing in the cookhouse every night too. It was as bad as being on jankers.

I got a little diary for Christmas 1960 and one of the few entries was on Fri 13th January 1961 with the entry "Moved to new accommodation in Dettingen Barracks".

It seems we were always doing drill in the afternoons, sport or weapon training. Note that I did my SLR TOET's that term. Tests of Elementary Training!

Another thing that I had long forgotten is that we not only had church parades on a Sunday, we also had them on a Wednesday morning.
This was quite an occasion and would always attract spectators out of the Cafes on Deepcut hill. We were led by our Corps of Drums and Bugles with a Drum Major who use to swing his stick or mace? Up into the air and catch it to everyone's cheer! I note that some parades were without the Corps of Drums which made the march back to camp very irksome and no spectators. Our favourite tune was Black Bear usually played as we were marching back into the barracks. There is a point where the drummers stop and the steel studded boots would keep the beat and we would force our heels into the gravel at that point. Real stirring stuff only a soldier would appreciate.

Sportswise, I wasn't much of a sportsman but I did manage to get into the Bn Hockey Team. I think we were trained and led by a Captain Field. I remember him well because I took a part of his shin off one afternoon with my stick.

I also boxed for the company as a Bantam weight; 9 stone to 9 stone 7 lbs, if my memory serves me correctly. I wouldn't mind being a bit closer to that now? I think for a time I was a Bn Boxer and attended the morning training sessions and was privileged enough to having

the 'boxers diet' which for the evening meal included steak. I presume my elevation to the Bn team was solely on the fact that there was no one else of my weight to select. I don't recall ever taking part in any events other than inter company. I do recall Ted Macey talking to us between bouts and advising us where to aim our blows to gain full advantage. When I got into the ring, I managed to aim my first blow precisely in the position advised by Ted. Smack above the nose and between the eyes. Dong, his eyes glazed over, and I followed through with blows like a deranged windmill. I got a technical knockout and a little fame for a few days.

In my last year I was introduced to Gliding by Sgt Walker and went with him and some other lads to Lasham on a Wednesday afternoon. The flights were paid for by the PRI and we filled in a form at the end of the afternoon for all the bills to be paid.

One leave, I decided to spend a fortnight at the flying club and took a hand full of PRI forms with me. My flying instructor was Derek Piggott who flew the stunt scenes in the film The Blue Manx and others. I did manage to get my first flying license the 'A' Certificate so I was well pleased. I believe I was the first Junior Leader in the Bn who went solo although I did notice someone else claimed this in the 'Thunderbolt' some years later. When I got back to camp after the leave I found I was in trouble for using the PRI forms to pay for my private flying lessons! It never occurred to me it was wrong. Anyway I found myself in front of the OC and got a rollicking for using the PRI forms and congratulations for going solo.

The Barrack rooms had a large central chimney about four foot square. There was a coke fire on both sides. We used to take the fire bricks out so that we could get some heat out of them. Yes I can smell those acrid fumes now. And..... If they didn't glow red, how were we supposed to do our toast?

It was a miracle how we lit those fires. All we got was the coal or coke and only if you hung around between 4 and 4:30 pm for the store man to open up and let you in. Trouble was that it was tea time, and it meant you were last in the queue for the goodies. If it was your room job and you failed it meant that you had to go over the wall and nick some if it got cold and the room wanted the fire.
They never issued kindling of any sort, or coal, so God knows how they expected us to light coke!

The education huts, yes those wooden ones, along the side of the sports field, started to get stripped of their external cladding.....

We also had to do a Company Office cleaning duty too. The cleaning bit wasn't so bad but in the winter the fires had to be lit. Now if the OC's or the Sergeant Majors fire wasn't going when they got in, again you were in trouble! And, they didn't provide any kindling either and the coal drum had to be replenished. You lived on your wits in those days.

The coal yard was an unroofed brick building with about 10 foot high walls. So if you had failed to get the 4:00 pm issue it was over the wall mate! And, it was quite a job to get over it. The front of the coal yard had large corrugated iron covered double doors and inside the coal or coke was stacked up against the walls.

I think I, or an equally lightweight sucker, would be thrown up and over it by a couple of the bigger lads. Not that I was over enthusiastic about it. You seemed to be 'expected' to do

these jobs. Getting that coal bin back over that wall must have been somewhat of an effort so I reckon that we just flung over large lumps of coal for your mate to collect? (Oliver Twist would need little adaption to fit this story) Getting back was the problem especially if the coal stack was low. I had heard of lads left trapped in there all night only to be let out in the morning to explain himself to the Sergeant Major.

I also remember coke being stacked high outside the shower/bath houses. So why didn't we help ourselves to that? Probably did. But in those days didn't they use to whitewash piles of coke and the such to deter pilfering? I remember in the early days we had a story of a 'phantom sh!tter'! A spate of sightings were reported of a giant 'turd' being found on the top of the coke pile. Now that is difficult without disturbing the coke pile?

Even more so, when, apparently finding the object on top of a snow covered coke pile, in the midst of a Blackdown winter. And, no footprints or other signs of human construction! All this was before Monty Python was ever thought of. Such was the passing conversations of the average Junior Leader in the primitive cold barrack room.

There were always the two main camps.
Blackdown in the North with North Frith, Dettingen and Alma barracks, and Deepcut in the South with North and South Minden Barracks. South Minden was across the Pirbright road.

My recollections end in 1981 when I was in the North Minden barracks when I last attended the School of Ordnance. This was later renamed the Princess Royal Barracks.

When I was going through the 'Depot and Holding Bn', in 1964 en route for Borneo we were billeted in those lovely 'spiders'on the Deepcut side of North Minden. They were wood construction and far more comfortable than the 'modern' two storey brick buildings. And, they had central heating. No dirty old coke stoves to clean out. Ablutions and showers were centralised. They were clustered just north of the RAOC memorial close to the square. A short cut led past close to the church into the village. The SKC cinema or 'kinema' was close by too. Between the spiders, Company Offices and the square was the statue of Private Barry which later became famed by adult recruits as 'Mr Smith' but we didn't seem to take much notice of him in our days further up the road. We did form an Honour Guard a little further down on North Minden Square in front of the RAOC Memorial on Remembrance Sunday. Being in November and cold we would wear Greatcoats and gloves on that parade.

Wonderful days, I only wish I could remember more details and names.

Geoff Malthouse
Newark on Trent
August 2006