This memory was donated by Ralph D Fella
Body Platoon 1965 - 7

Recollections of Jnr Ldrs

Well my father was a serving SSgt in the RA and we were living in Lippstadt Germany. I attended Kings School in Gutersloh and one day the Army recruiters came along. They explained how we could visit exotic places and be trained killers within a month of training. Six of us were interested. The rest were not so easily fooled!

Asked my dad for permission to join. He was estatic. Couldnt bloody wait to get rid of me. Before I knew it I was on a plane taxing down the runway (my mother in hot pursuit with tears streaming down her face). I swear I could hear my father cheering! It also occured to me at the time that, when I looked around the plane, I was the only one of the original six schoolboys that had volunteered and that indeed I had been conned. Never did find out what happened to the others. I still suspect to this day that my father had paid them to draw me in! Dastardly.

I was 15 and had to make my way to Blackdown. I think it took me about 3 months but I got there in the end. Arrived at Brookwood Station (is there a more desolate and depressing place than Brookwood Station)? Arrived at the Guardroom at about 23:00 hrs. I didnt know it was 2300 hrs then of course. I was only 15 and just knew that it was very dark. An angry Cpl asked me who I was. When I told him he explained that I was a day late. Such language I had never heard in my life before. Well maybe once before when I knocked my dads bottle of beer over. I was shocked. I had travelled all the way from Germany for gods sake!

I think he began to feel a bit sorry for me (or began to realise that, with my parents in Germany, I could be an endless source of duty free fags for him), rather than have me sleep on the floor he gave me a bed with bare springs. He explained that the bedding store was closed until 08:00 hrs the next morning. Sounded reasonable to me.

Next day I was brought over to the Recruits block and introduced to the remainder of the intake. They, of course, were already old salts and fully trained killers. You have to understand that they had all been there for a day already. I felt a little bit out of my depth.

Marched off to the clothing store. Issued with assorted clothing. Also pint mug and KFS. Now how many times did we have to replace them during the next 2 and half years? I have calculated that in the years I was there, if every Jnr Leader had to replace his Mug and KFC at least twice, the income would finance the Sgts Mess Summer Ball and Christmas Draw each year. Just a coincidence I am sure.

Was introduced to the Cookhouse. Stood at the end of the queue for breakfast. It took so long that, by the time you reached the front, the menu had changed to the lunchtime one. One sound that stays with me to this day is the sound of hundreds of sets of KFS being tapped against those bloody pint mugs.

Food was strictly rationed. The only way you could get 2 fried eggs for breakfast was to give a seductive wink to the very suspect civvie bloke who served up the food. This would only work for a short while though. He soon realised that the wink was not a sign of promises to come. (There is a play on words there somewhere methinks).

I had been allocated a bed-space on the first floor of Recruits Block. This personal area came complete with a metal bed complete with mattress (luxury after my experience the previous night in the Guardroom), 2 sheets, 2 pillowcases, 2 pillows (which explained the need for the pillowcases), 2 hairy blankets and a green bedspread. Also standing proud was a grey metal locker. The room itself contained approximately 20 beds. 10 down each side. In the middle of the room was a chimney which had a metal coke fire on either side of it. It always intrigued me that the rules stated that the coke fires had to be extinguished before lights out on a night time. The time when you needed the heat most. How many poor souls were there that in blatant disregard for these rules, kept the fires going so that they could dry their freshly blancoed webbing overnight, only to find the next morning said webbing burnt to a cinder and only the brasses left.

I looked around the room at my fellow recruits. A massive chap with biceps that even Popeye would have envied, was two spaces up from me. He was never 15???? Hooky Rowlands was a Geordie lad. As tough as they come but with a surprisingly good singing voice. Unfortunately, as good as Hookeys voice was, it did rather start to grate a bit at 2 o'clock in the bloody morning! I swear that over the next 2 years the only time Hooky stopped singing was when he was eating. Next to me on my left was Jock Kuzma. A lad smaller than me with a shock of fair hair. Jock was a real character who decided that the only way to get through the next two years was to just blend into the background and pretend he wasn't there. He did this so successfully that when it came to the passing out parade some 2 years later, none of the permanent staff knew who he was. (You should allow for a little bit of poetic licence with that story, but you know what I mean). Now it may well be that someone reading this (and if you are....get a life!), may be somewhat disappointed to see that his/her name has not been mentioned as a member of this little room of horrors. (His/Her??? Why did i say her? There were no hers. The closest to a 'her' was that slightly effeminate lad in Watts platoon. The best platoon for him too!) Bear with me. You may well appear later. But Hooky and Jock were to follow me to Body platoon after recruit training. That is why I remember them so well.

We all sat around that night before lights went out and tried to get to know one another. I personally was trying to figure out who might be harmful to my personal health should I cross them. Well after watching a bit of telltale body language I decided that they were all potential violent cyclepaths and my life was in danger. I would have to stay awake for 2 years!

We climbed into bed and the Duty Cpl switched off the lights. As he closed the door behind him he said "Tomorrow is when it all starts. Be prepared. You are not going to realise what has hit you". He signed off with a very theatrical hysterical laugh.

We all cried ourselves to sleep.....

By Ralph the Tash
June 2011