

My NS Story

ROYAL MILITARY POLICE-THE RED CAPS-NATIONAL SERVICE IN THE 1950's-INKERMAN AND AFTER

Here's a story of MY NATIONAL SERVICE, part of which was spent at Inkerman Barracks in the winter of 1952/53, doing my squad training!

MY TIME AT INKERMAN BARRACKS (plus a bit about the place!)

The Depot & Training Establishment for the Royal Military Police was located in the village of Knaphill, some 10 Kilometers from Woking town centre, in the pleasant countryside of Surrey, a County I had lived in as a child during World War 2, at Malden Manor, near Tolworth.

When I first saw the old barracks in November 1952, having been drafted to do my compulsory National Service, I thought, "What an awful looking place"! Don Bastow, who arrived there in September 1951, over 12 months earlier than me, had described his impression of the place in his book "Redcaps and Redlights", quote, "To me it looked more like a Public School than an Army Camp".

The only concession on that sunny Friday morning after an overnight rail trip from Oswestry where we had done two weeks footslogging with the RA at Park Hall Camp, was that there was a passing-out parade of Probationers, as recruits and draftees into the RMP were called in those days, and my first impressions were, "One day I'll look like they do"! We, all 15 of us having been picked up by a 3 ton Bedford truck from Woking Rail Station and dumped at the Memorial archway by the main gate under the tower, we were made to wait until the parade was over. Then, when all the squaddies had dispersed to be with their guests, relatives and visitors, we were ushered into that huge barrack room upstairs to the right of the main entrance. It had an enormous fireplace and a large number of ironbeds. We drew bedding; completed the paperwork, and then settled down for the weekend, quickly finding out where the NAAFI (if you could call it that), was located. We lived on flaky pastry 6d sausage rolls and coffee for that weekend. (Throughout my training it was to cost me a quid a week from my POSB account in this NAAFI to supplement the cookhouse tucker).

My squad number was 332b, and the Instructor's name was a likeable Cpl. Humphreys, ex Life Guards and Supernumerary of Sgt. Bill Britten. Harry Burdon was the Depot RSM and the CO was Lt.Col.A.J.J.Somerville-MacAllister of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders.

After a couple of weeks they moved us down to the rear of the main buildings and into the twelve bedded wooden 'Spider huts'-much more comfortable. There was no leave for our first seven weeks-the first (and last), being seven days off for Christmas 1952.

Nothing happened until the following Monday morning, when at 0600 we were rudely awakened with the call, "All feet on the deck", and told to go and get washed and shaved (there was only cold water in the ablutions because of Emanuell Shinwell's power 'black-outs'). Breakfast was from 0630 until 0730. Parade was to be at 0800 sharp. (I was not shocked at this as I'd already had two weeks of it at the Royal Artillery Barracks at Park Hall in Oswestry, Shropshire, and had also done three years with the Air Cadets)!

The food was actually better here than Oswestry, and there was always the wandering duty officer asking, "any complaints?" There weren't many while I was there! We very quickly learned never to drink tea from that urn which was laced

with Bromide! Much better to wait until 10AM when the NAAFI tea room opened! Other ex-RMP have written about their experiences, some had witnessed very hard times, but I found the majority of senior NCO's to be very affable at Inkerman and Warburg.

A SHORT HISTORY OF INKERMAN BARRACKS

The Home Office purchased 65 acres of land in Knap Hill from a London owner to build a special prison for disabled (mental/physical) convicts. It was designated "The Woking Convict Prison", and was to be the first of its kind. Construction of the site began in 1859. It received its first officers and inmates a year later when they were transferred from Lewes, Carisbrooke and Dartmoor prisons. These male convicts helped construct it to reduce costs. In 1869, one hundred females were transferred from Parkhurst and employed on laundry, cooking, tailoring and other tasks. By 1870 its population had grown and had included both male and female miscreants which averaged about 613. Additional twenty acres of adjacent land was purchased for the parade ground and building was ongoing until 1892. The disabled wing was given over to the army in 1895, and converted to quarter infantry troops. The female wing continued to be used until 1895, when like all the male prisoners who had been transferred to other prisons earlier, they were sent to Holloway in London. It was given a new name and known as "Inkerman Barracks", so-named after a battle in a place of the same name in the Crimea, Russia in 1854. Now it housed the 2nd Battalion Royal West Surrey Regiment, also known as 'The Queens' Regiment'. (One of my mothers' brothers did his training in this Regiment. He and his two brothers-one in the Grenadier Guards, and the other aged, 19, in the Hampshires were shipped off to the Somme, France & Gallipoli, Turkey, and blown to bits in 1915)!

There is little information available about the place until 1903, when the 1st Bn. Royal Berkshire Regt. moved in. They were replaced by the 1st. Bn. Royal Scots Regt. from 1904 to 1905, followed by the 2nd. Bn. Royal West Sussex Regt. (1912 to 1914). The barracks was used as a military hospital during WW1 and then remained vacant until the 1st. Bn. Royal Warwickshire Regt. moved in from 1925 to 1927. The 2nd Bn. RWR occupied the barracks from 1930 until 1935. They handed over to the 1st. Bn. Royal Welch Fusiliers, who left Inkerman in 1937! During World War 2, a cinema (later called the 'Globe'); some wooden 'Spider" huts and other temporary structures like the Gym, were added at the rear of the buildings. Very little information is available from 1937 until September 1947, when the Military Police was lumbered with Inkerman. MOD decided that the RMP was to have it as their future training depot! A year later the Corps was to be graced with the 'Royal' title, and an impressive inaugural parade was held to mark the occasion. Have a look in the photo albums. There's a more detailed story about Inkerman in the RMPA Australasian Branch Newsletter below. Click on it and check it out, it makes for interesting reading! The bit about a white female ghost flittering around the tower is a figment of the imagination and was seen only by squaddies returning from the local pubs pissed and very ready for bed! The whole site was sold to Woking Borough Council and the Guinness Trust who began developing it as a housing estate in the early 1970's. Building continued on until the 1990's. All that remains of the original buildings is the prison officer's quarters on Wellington Terrace and Raglan Road. These were fully restored and sold for occupation.

START OF TRAINING

So, it was just over five years later when I landed in Inkerman. From November 1952 until April 1953. During this time we spent many hours in the cold class-rooms learning map reading; how to handle prisoners; Corps History; Discipline; the Army Organisation and Acts; Powers of Arrest (AFB252); Judge's Rules; Courts Martials; Factual Report writing; Traffic Accidents; investigation techniques of probe and search; physical training in the Gym; unarmed combat; assault course training; square-bashing and weapons training/firearms safety both at Inkerman and Bisley to gain our proficiency points. I've still got some of my old notes, and they make strange reading in this day and age, especially the bits on unarmed combat and police restraining holds and how to use hand-cuffs and truncheons! All this had to be recorded in a manilla exercise book-SO Book 135. The thing that I was never able to understand was spending all day copying Badges of Rank into our exercise book when we already had them in a small pocket diary you could buy for 6d from the NAAFI!

All of us had to go to the "Globe" cinema hall to see that scratchy old film about VD,(today the fancy name is 'STD's'). Wobetide any man who shut his eyes or said, "Yuk" with Harry B sitting at the back!

One of the first parades was for the education tests. Of course, many of the guys had either HNC,HSC,ONC,GCE's etc.,and so were exempt. These men had an annotation, "Exempted from General Education for the following reasons:" written on their Army Form C359. The rest had to sit exams for the required Army Certificate of Education-Third Class-a minimum requirement for Lance Corporal rank.

Some of us were interviewed for WOSB (War Office Selection Board) short-term RMP National Service Officer training at Eaton Hall, Chester for six months after pass-out as a Lance Corporal. The Probationer was 'left-right-left-right' marched into a room, told to salute a number of retired officers seated around a table. There the Probationer was told the virtues of a short term commission and asked a series of questions, the answers to which were recorded. They scored with a few of the guys. They proudly collected their 'Sam Browne's' from the QM stores after our pass-out parade. Their pay as a subbie then would have jumped to 5 Pounds a week, (we got about 47 shillings and 6d as a Lance Corporal I believe-a bit different from the 300 Quid a week they get now)! What someone failed to tell them was that their shared Mess Bill would cost them 4 Pounds 19 shillings and sixpence a week!

Other guys chose to go for parachute, signals or other specialist training, which gave them another 7 shillings a week, which was a lot in those days! The fatigues at Inkerman were varied. Some others have written of hard times. I must have been very lucky as I can only remember doing potato peeling once. I never got lumbered for the washing pots 'n pans detail. Picking up leaves and paper was a favorite-and painting-now there's a story! I once got selected to clean the urinals. "Polish the copper pipes", was the order! I got the Brasso and started to polish-then I had a brainwave. I went to the stores and got some awful "Racing Green" color paint and painted the bloody pipes after placing an "Out of Order" sign at the doorway. So far as I know-nobody ever tumbled it. I never ever went back to Inkerman, as I was demobbed direct from 156, and so I didn't have the chance to see if the pipes were still painted! There sure must have been a few skives for those detailed to polish those pipes after that!

When we passed out, (there were only a couple of guys who got back-squadded; one had failed the assault course), there were so many Probationers that the parade took up nearly three-quarters of the oblong parade ground. It has always amazed

me that so many pairs of hob-nailed boots (yes, we had studs in them in those days), always came down with one thud on the command 'Shun!' Commands always resonated off of the four walls and sounded like 'Shun-hun, hun, hun!

I well remember that assault course: imagine a bitter cold frosty morning in winter. A round telegraph pole situated high over an ice covered pit full of dirty green slimy water. We had to regularly walk over it from one side to the other. You could be back-squadded for repeated failure! We had to climb up the rope tied to a cross-bar hand over hand. The bit that I didn't like was having to carry a 'wounded' man over your shoulder. I was over 6ft tall, but I buckled under the weight of some guys! Then there was that Gym, the PTI swearing at me for running up to the 'horse' then stopping suddenly-just couldn't lift both legs together!

During the weapons training bit they showed us how to take various weapons to pieces and reassemble them. When it came to the 9 mm Stengun it looked so easy, and taking it to bits was. When the Instructor (Maj.Baker ?) said, "OK-Now put it together again". We were all fingers and thumbs! Eventually we got the hang of it, and the smarties among us could strip a Sten and put it together again in under seven seconds! Firing the 32 clip dammned things was another matter! At Inkerman there was a row of tin cans suspended on a wire between two posts. Imagine us all lined up with our old Webley .38 pistols and on the command, "Two rounds each man, fire", the whole row of cans dropped to the ground! "Alright, who's the smart b*****d. He's either a crack shot or lucky with a stray"! Nobody owned up to hitting the wire, and the matter ended there.

Nearby Bisley was where we tested out the Brens and rifles-those beautiful but heavy cumbersome .303's! This was the place where Instructors aged rapidly with what the 'correct' speakers of today call 'stress' (in those days it was simply called 'frustration'). At Bisley we would all dress up in camouflage and move forward on the look-out for snipers hidden in the trees. The first man to spot one had to shout 'down'! To have spotted a sniper was guaranteed to please the Instructor !

WARBURG BARRACKS-ALDERSHOT

Then one Friday they marched us off in drizzle and fog to Warburg Barracks, Aldershot. We wore full kit, and carried helmet, rifle etc., For twenty kilometres we tramped in our hobnailed boots over the border into Hampshire. By the time we got there, soaked, cold, hungry and doggo, we didn't have the strength to complain about the conditions in the old cavalry barracks-built in the 1850's-and, to add insult to injury we all had to sleep on straw filled sacks in rooms where force nine gales were commonplace! It was a cold, damp, miserable barracks too! There must have been cheers from many an old soldier, dead or alive when, in 1964, they took the ball and chain to the barracks and demolished them to make way for a Civic Hall and car park, a fate which was to befall Inkerman some three years later!

We were to be in Warburg for four weeks. Some of the guys had to learn how to ride a motorbike. Those of us who had motorbike and or car licences had a short session to familiarise ourselves with 15 Cwt and 3 ton trucks instead, to get used to 4 wheel drives and double "D" clutching. Our squads spent 4 weeks on the MT course. Those with licences assisting with the training! This period at Warburg was great. Making the best of a bad job, we all accepted our lot and did as we were told. After all, there was a beaut. NAAFI Club in Aldershot, and our daily drives out to Southampton, Littlehampton and Bognor all went past lovely little cafes where we'd all stop for coffee and cakes! The Instructors were

decent sorts and mucked in well. They upset a few probationers though when they placed their SD caps under the rear wheels to discourage 'roll-back' when starting off on a hill. It cost a weeks' pay to replace the cap if it was crushed-but it worked! Many would say that the reward was an AFA2038 driver's permit for those who didn't already have a licence!

After Warburg we marched back to the humdrum of Inkerman. Our training was in its last few weeks, and 'bullshit' parades and inspections now became more intense. Night after night was spent 'spit & polishing'. This didn't only refer to "One pair of boots; black; best with toecaps that had to double up as substitute shaving mirrors! It also meant shiny brassware and buttons. (To this day I'm convinced that our RSM had shares in the Brasso Company-Reckitt & Coleman)!! Our webbing had to be left in buckets of bleach water to make it easier to whiten with Blanco! Special creases in uniform jackets and trousers. I remember some of the guys climbing on roofs to collect strips of lead which we used to cut up into small pieces and fold around bootlaces to put at the bottom of our trousers where they tucked into the anklets. This used to keep the trouser legs always looking smart. I've still got them and my bootbrushes to this day! They issued us with long police whistles in week fourteen and we all drove each other mad blowing the damned things-I never used mine in service and kept it for my kids to play with!

One thing I shall always remember: Prior to our pass-out parade, CSM Vic Saxby? stood before us and, holding up a fist full of manilla folders bellowed, "Here in my hand, I hold a folder on every one of you. Wherever you go in your service, these folders will go too. Everything you do will be recorded in them. Don't you forget it. In accordance with current government legislation these files will be archived after your service for thirty years, that means we'll have a record of you until 1984 at least". Funny thing was, in the late 1990's I had occasion to write to Army Personnel for some details of a very important event that I was involved in in Germany. Back came the reply, "In answer to your request, your file does not contain any reference to it. In fact, the file contains very little information at all". That was it! So much for the CSM's speech to us that day!

END OF TRAINING

Pass-out parade day in front of the Depot Commandant

Lt.Col.A.J.Somerville-MacAlister of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders (he ne'er wore a kilt mon!), came and went, and it was a proud day for us all.

EXEMPLO DUCEMUS! The parade ground seemed to be full of men, top brass and visitors. Then we were all told where we were to be posted . I had requested Singapore and got ALL the jabs for the Far-East and couldn't move my arm for a week! But I got sent to BAOR instead. Those who asked for BAOR got Singapore-strange the way the Army works? Maybe it was because I had mentioned to the interviewing officer at my medical in Ipswich that I was learning German at Evening Classes! (Who remembers the yellow text-books "Heute Abend 1 & 2"?) One Friday we were told to pack our kitbags, be ready by mid-day. "Be ready outside the front gate", was the order. We were given a packed lunch; loaded into 3 ton Bedfords and carted to Brookwood rail station. There, joined by many Guardsmen from the Pirbright Depot, we waited for a train. Soon enough a double-header steam train stopped and we all got on. It was already crammed with hundreds of troops picked up in other areas south-west of Woking. That was the last I saw of Inkerman Barracks!!

ARMY LIFE AFTER INKERMAN-POSTINGS

The train set off and slowly skirted all around the north of London, eventually finishing up at Parkeston Quay, near Harwich, at about 2000 hours. There we all had to get off and were messed around until the same time the next night-a Saturday. At last we went aboard an old tramp steamer confiscated from the Germans after WW2-the "Vienna".

After an uneventful crossing, we arrived at the Hook of Holland in beautiful weather on the Sunday morning, about 0730. There we boarded another double-header steam train-in more comfort this time, and trundled through the flat Dutch countryside, crossing into Germany about mid-day. The first stop was Osnabruck, where a lot of troops got off. One engine and a number of carriages were disconnected and we continued on for about another hour. The next stop was Bad Oeynhausen, (or BadO as we used to call it), where an officer told all RMP (about a hundred of us), to get off and where to go. The train continued on with troops for the Berlin Garrison. Trucks took us to a large building, which I took to be some sort of Town Hall. This was then the 101 NAG HQ where all postings to BAOR were sorted out. (In 1954 NAG HQ was transferred to Krefeld in the Ruhr). There we were allowed to wash and eat what we wanted (we'd already had cooked meals in the train), and then told that we had to sleep on the floor that night! The one thing that I do remember was the wrought ironwork in the room. It was fashioned with swastikas! I wonder if anyone else remembers that?

TO 1st CORPS PRO.COY.-BAD ROTHENFELDE & BIELEFELD (BAOR)
IN MEMORY OF L/CPL.WALLY C.MATTHEWS-RMP, WHO DIED ON 17TH AUGUST
1953, FROM
INJURIES RECEIVED IN A RTA WHEN, A JEEP & TRAILER IN WHICH HE WAS A
PASSENGER
JACK-KNIFED AFTER A FRONT OFFSIDE TYRE BLEW DURING MANOUVRES AT
GESEKE, NEAR
LIPPSTADT, BAOR. THE INCIDENT WAS REPORTED IN THE LONDON 'EVENING
NEWS'. VIEW
PHOTOS OF WALLY'S FUNERAL AT THE HANNOVER MILITARY CEMETERY IN OUR
ALBUMS.

Next morning, Monday, we were all given notices explaining where we were being posted to. I was the only one from this consignment of bodies to be sent to 1 Corps Provost Coy. in Bad Rothenfelde. Goodness knows where all the others went to? I was given a packed lunch and a green rail voucher and driven to the Bad 'O' rail station where I had got off the previous day. The driver said, "You'll be right mate-just look out for the station "Dissen", and make sure that you get off the train there"!

Standing alone, bewildered to say the least, I saw a small engine with just two carriages come into the station and stop. I pointed at the train and asked someone, "Dissen-Dissen"? The indication was "yes". So I climbed aboard with what seemed like ten tons of gear! I'd never seen anything like it before. Wooden slatted seats! I'd always been used to the plush seats on English trains. Anyway, we finally chugged across most beautiful countryside and arrived in Disson.

I got off at what looked like the middle of nowhere-and there was nobody there to meet me! Outside the station there was a horse-chestnut tree in full spring bloom. It was a warm day and I sat down and waited-and waited-and waited. There was not a soul in sight. About three hours later I heard the unmistakeable whine of a Ford Willey's Jeep, come racing around the corner. "Sorry mate-had to go

somewhere else"! I climbed aboard and off we went to finally arrive at the 'Oldenburger Kinderheim', where 1 Corps Pro.Coy.HQ, responsible for 1st & 2nd Inf.Div. and 6th,7th & 11th Armoured Div. Pro.Coys., was located in April 1953. A quick shower (in those days we had to sign the 'Bath Book"), and then an introduction to my quarters and room mates followed.

The next day, an interview with the CO-Major Crombie (a Para man) and the Admin. Officer, Capt. Culhane; collect stuff from stores, including some 1 Corps flashes (red diamond with white spearhead pointing upwards), which I had to sew on immediately.

Bad Rothenfelde was a quiet country place. The only excitement there was when the circus came to town! The quarters were excellent. The food was great. I couldn't fathom out what everybody's job was there! During the day everyone 'disappeared', reappearing only at lunch and evening meal times! The only significant thing I remembered doing there was a military exercise and attending the Queen's Coronation parade in Osnabruck with other Provost Company's like 6th Arm'd in June. How vastly different to Inkerman I thought? The RSM there was 'Giglo' Davies, who shouted at everyone! He was OK really. Each morning we used to go for a run. We would pass RSM Davies' married quarters and mutter unmentionables!

BAD HARZBURG

One Friday in early June 1953, I was told to get my Jeep serviced and be prepared to drive and join the Bad Harzburg Detachment the next morning. I set off in lovely weather via Lemgo and spent the next couple of nights in the Hameln Detachment quarters (Sgt. Day was then NCO i/c). On the Monday morning I filled up with fuel and went via Hildesheim to Bad Harzburg. When I got there I found that my quarters were in the 'Palast Hotel' on Pappenbergstrasse, where we had a small detachment of a Sergeant (Sieboth), a couple of Canadian Provost from Hannover, and about four other Lance Corporals. I couldn't believe my luck! Luxury beds. The meals, which we had served to us by waitresses in the 'Kurhaus' restaurant, complete with a string quartet, were absolutely fantastic! We didn't see much of Sgt.Sieboth for he was always in the 'Crown & Chevrons' Senior NCO's Club on Herzog-Julius Strasse, and left us to run the show on our own! Bad Harzburg was a NATO Allied Forces Leave Centre. It was a delightful place. Our duties included the maintenance of discipline among the Allied troops on leave there from all the services, including those on convalescent recovery leave after hospitalisation. We also had to patrol the area and 'Grenz Fence'; the border between East & West Germany, indicated in those days by large yellow rings painted on the trees. There was no 'wall' then, and it was often the case that girls from the 'other side' would entice our servicemen to go over for a chat. Of course, some got caught, and the Russians would insist on a hand-over worthy of public attention, usually at Helmstedt! It was not unusual in those times to lie in bed at night and hear the rat-a-tat-tat of machine gun fire in the distance. We also policed the black-marketing of goods, especially WD property and personal possessions of servicemen & women, unlawfully held by dodgy proprietors of night-clubs and houses of ill-repute etc., for unpaid bills and debts. Then there were the 'naughty' places, which we'd raid after stake-outs! In those days we'd often do tasks which were done by the SIB in later years, and all in a normal days work! It often meant being up half the night writing reports!

Sadly, all good things must come to an end. I and one other (Rex Beard), were

called back to HQ Bad Rothenfelde for a suddenly arranged exercise. This took us all over the place which included the area where the Belsen Concentration Camp had been, next to the Hohne Barracks. I have many photos of this place which is now a memorial.

This particular 'Exercise' went on for some time, and involved other Provost Company's of 6th & 7th Armoured. There were very many vehicle accidents during this exercise, some of which resulted in the deaths of servicemen, including RMP. One of our guys, Wally Mathews, was involved in a RTA and died later from his injuries. At his funeral in the Hannover Military Cemetery in August 1953, a number of guys, including Pete Brobin, fired a salute with their pistols. I have a couple of photos of Wally's gravesite and location if anyone would like details. (The "Englischer Friedhof"-as it was known to the locals- was crammed full of British Military personnel who had died in accidents in BAOR). Drivers were on the road route-signing for periods of twelve hours or more without proper rest-breaks, which was later found to be the cause of many accidents. Re-tread tyres too were a problem on Germany's cobbled roads, which when combined with the Summer heat, would cause the vulcanised outer treads to come away, and the driver to lose control. When it was over, I went home on leave for a fortnight. There I saw a report in the London 'Evening News' about an inquiry into 'the cause of so many military vehicle accidents in BAOR'. As a result, driving hours were severely restricted for service drivers from then on! When I returned in October, the Provost Marshall, Brigadier R.H. Maxwell paid us a visit from BAOR HQ, and many evenings were spent 'Spit & Polishing'. I've included some pics. of his visit on RMP Websites.

BIELEFELD

In November 1953, the Company moved to more spacious quarters in Block 8 at Ripon Barracks, Detmolderstrasse, Bielefeld. Here the rooms were very modern; centrally heated; double glazed windows and with heaps of storeroom space in the cellars. We had all the extras like a good, well stocked Mess, Snooker table etc., and a NAAFI shop around the corner. There was a good sized shared parade ground, although we only used it once while I was there-when RSM Davies had a 'show the other troops hair-cut parade' shortly after we moved in! All of our parades were taken in front of Block 8 as I remember! Apart from the parade ground, everywhere else was paved with cobble-stones !

I could never get over those WC toilet pans, the seats of which sloped at 45 degrees. I was told that Adolf didn't want to encourage his troops to spend time on them reading newspapers; just spend long enough to do the business, then leave!

Christmas 1953 came and went with fond memories of our C.O. and the other officers waiting on us Christmas Day which began with a tot of rum and coffee in bed!. I particularly remember that brilliant L/Cpl. playing the piano without music sheets too! The party lasted well into the early hours of Boxing Day!

Then came that cruel January 1954, when frost hit with a vengeance. Night-time temperatures dropped to minus 27 degrees and Detmolderstrasse, outside the barracks became a nightmare to drive on with the thickly packed down snow. Even so, some bright sparks at Rhine Army H.Q decided that the moment was right for another of those darned exercises, (they loved playing toy soldiers with real people did those top brass), so off we went, deep into the Munsterland, all covered in snow a foot thick; bedded down in stinking farm barns, trying to sleep on straw with rats running all over the place; cold, miserable, hungry and dreaming of demob! The guys, who were 95% NS, were so demoralised that the

authorities called a halt to the manouvres after a few days and we all returned to Ripon in absolute silence! The CO (Major Crombie), was a very unhappy chappie and there were nasty feelings all round for weeks after that episode!

Not long after I remember escorting some prisoners to the then Military Corrective Establishment in Bielefeld, (an ex-Gestapo prison), who had gone AWL. Poor sods were frozen stiff after being out in the open in PT gear for two days or more near Halle. I hated that duty! The much decorated Lt.Col.R.Dobson was the Commandant there then. There are two photos of the MCE in General Album 4.

COLCHESTER

I never saw another exercise, for in April 1954 I was ordered to report to the C.O. at 156 Provost Coy. (Major Mark Charlton-DAPM), at Reed Hall Lines in Colchester. I was given a rail voucher; driven to Bielefeld rail station, where I caught a train to the Hook of Holland. After a terrible crossing with four metre waves, I arrived at Parkeston (Harwich), and then another train for Colchester North station, where I was collected and driven to 156, (next to Kirkee Barracks).

156 was a good Company to be in. I had a cushy number here as Company Clerk with Capt. Mumford, a good sport. I had to type up the Daily Orders, arrange transfers, postings, leave passes and rail warrants etc., The officers and senior N.C.O's were a friendly lot. The CO, Maj. Mark Charlton, was also DAPM for Home Command, Eastern District. I was particularly proud of something that the CO wrote on my Discharge (Army Book 111) Testimonial, "This NCO has the ability to influence the actions of others". I've certainly done that many times in my working life! (Exemplo Ducemus!). As my family home was then in West Mersea, not far from Colchester, I was given permission to sleep out except when on special night duty, which was a blessing!!

Between April 1954 and demob. in November 1954, I spent a short period at the Orsett, Essex, Detachment. These were fun times!. We even did a defensive driving stint at the Essex Police skid pan in Chelmsford! While I was there, a transport driver's strike was in progress at the Shellhaven Refinery. MOD (Army) had been called in to take supplies of fuel from the refinery to distribution. We had to police their movements. Our biggest problem was as the fuel tankers drove out through the refinery gate, the strikers ran after them and attempted to open the stop-cocks, so that as the the tankers drove along, fuel gushed out onto the road!

In August 1954, we had a 'Corps Day' at Reed Hall Lines. An "Essex County Standard" newspaper helicopter gave us and our invited friends and families rides for free, and we soared high over Colchester. A party was held in the mess; we had a day coach trip to Southend and a good time was had by all.

DEMOB IS NEAR!

As the day of demob. neared, the CO. asked one last time, "Do you want to sign on"? The deciding factor at that time was all those 'Z' reservists being billeted in our camp. Not one of them had wanted to sign on, and I still had three and a half years AER service to complete in 1955, '56, '57 & '58! My previous employer's, where my father was Engineer and Chief Planner, Davey Paxman's of Colchester, (manufacturers of V12 Diesel Electric engines for the Royal Navy's Submarines and Destroyers and British Railways-employing 4,500 in those days at both it's Britannia & Standard Works), had sent me a letter, asking if I'd like to return when my two years obligation was up? They offered me excellent pay of 13 Pounds 10 Shillings p.w.(which was good money in those

days). Employer's were obligated to retain staff after NS. After a spell in the Drawing Office, I went on to Quality Control and Inspection until 1959. By now married, I joined Elliott Automation at Rochester Airport, Kent as a quality assurance inspector on aircraft flight control systems (VC10;BAC111;C5a and Concorde). With two small daughters we then emigrated to South Australia in November 1967. My first job in Australia was as Chief Inspector of an Adelaide engineering company, and soon after by a chance meeting with Lt.Col. Leo Lukis, Royal Marines, who was then the Royal Navy's delegate Chief Inspector of Naval Ordnance in Australia attached to the then Weapons Research Establishment (Naval Ships' Missile Systems), at Salisbury, South Australia, (we were both members of the Institute of Engineering Inspection), I joined his team and spent the next twenty-two years with the Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, (Supplier's Management Systems, Assessment, Audit & Review), retiring as a Senior Technical Officer. For many years, as a trained interviewer, I was also a member of the Staff Promotion Appeals Committee. But I digress-back to 1955!

ALDERSHOT-AGAIN!

I did do my first AER stint with 241 GHQ Provost Company, only this time not in the Warburg barracks (thank God)! We were at Long Valley from 7th to 21st May 1955. There we found row after row of bivoacs, complete with air conditioning! Fortunately, the weather was glorious. My employer paid my salary, and the two weeks' army pay was a welcome bonus!

The 2 i/c was a colleague of a close friend of my sister-Capt.Terry Wilby, who had been advised that I was coming, so this had made life a lot easier for me! I had driven to Aldershot in my father's 1938 20HP Hudson 'Terraplane', a real petrol guzzler. Fortunately, there was no shortage of fuel at Long Valley, and we'd go all over the Hampshire/Sussex countryside courtesy of HM Government! I was the only one, so far as I recall, that was not a member of one of Britain's Police Forces. Fantastic bunch of guys they were too!

THE END OF MY FULL-TIME NATIONAL SERVICE!

In April 1956, I received an OHMS letter telling me to stuff my kitbag with all my gear, tie an enclosed label on it, and take it to the nearest railway station. There I was show them the letter as payment.The letter had also stated that I was no longer required to perform the remainder of the AER service. My two younger brothers (both now sadly passed on), had done their NS from 1953-55. Carl was in the Royal Engineers, SQMS Accounts Clerk with the HQ Troop, 55th Field Squadron, BAPO 3, Korea, and later became Chief Cashier with Rentokil in East Grinstead, Sussex, and the youngest Derek, an Ace motor mechanic/auto electrician, was with HQ Section, 33rd Armoured Brigade, 11th Armoured Div.Pro.Coy. in Sennelager, BAOR 15, Germany. Neither of them wanted to sign on as regulars either as, like me, they both had good jobs to return to in "Civvy Street".

So, my active service association with the RMP was over! In later years, and with the advent of Computers and the Internet, interest in all things RMP has been rekindled. And, as old as some of us now are, we still, God Willing, can communicate between each other, and share our past experiences!

I am a 'Life' member of the RMPA and a member of both the Colchester & East Anglia Branch-RMPA, and the Australasian Branch-RMPA.

NOTE: It is worthy of mention that very many ex RMP members have stated to me that their training in the Corps changed their lives and shaped them into worthy

members of society! There are those who have gained degrees in Science, Medicine, Arts, Engineering, Law etc., Some have even been ordained into the Churches. Many have attained high rank in the RMP; other branches of the Army; the various police forces; as airline pilots and 'Captains of Industry'. So, the Corps can be proud of its training achievements over the years.

Sadly too, I have had many tell me of ex RMP falling on hard times. Some have expressed their thoughts that perhaps not enough has been done by those in a position to help them. BUT help IS available! There is a free helpline provided by the Veterans Agency of MOD. The telephone numbers are: (In UK) 0800 169 2277 and from overseas: +44 1253 866043. 'Phone lines are open Mon to Thurs. 0815 to 1715 and Friday 0815 to 1630 hours. If you wish you can write to: Veterans Advice Unit, Veterans Agency, Norcross, Blackpool, FY5 3WP, or e-mail them at: help@veteransagency.gsi.gov.uk or visit their website at: www.veteransagency.mod.uk OR: Go to my Main Page and click on Veteran's Helpline Pages 1 & 2 where you can download the leaflet.

Ian Dixon Squad 332b; 1 Corps (BR) Pro.Coy; 156 Pro.Coy. Updated March 2006.