

Norman Dennis Kenney

11th August 1937 to

Royal Army Service Corps
National Service - 1956 to 1958

Trefechan, Aberystwyth

West Wales Veterans Archive

Aide to interview recorded on 4th March 2024

Early years

In 1937 Norman was born a country boy in a little village in Leicestershire. He was one of a large family and his childhood was spent outdoors, in and around the farms and woods. He has vivid memories of German Luftwaffe Bombers in the sky over his home and the concerns of his mother, as the village was situated close to a Gas works and mainline railway hub intersection. Norman became familiar with firearms at an early age and like many boys born to a country family, most of the meat for the table was hunted and caught by the boys. Skills that would serve him well when he entered service in the British Army.

National Service

In 1956 Norman reached the age of 18 years and received his conscription papers. On February 2nd he reported to Blenheim barracks at Aldershot, Hampshire. He entered the Royal Army Service Corps and undertook the six-week basic training phase, confident in his ability to adapt to service life. This was demonstrated when Norman and his platoon was detailed for guard duty at an early stage in his training. Upon reviewing the guard, the duty Officer was surprised to find the platoon was made up of new entrants.

Operational Soldier

After passing out, Norman was separated from the group of friends he'd made whilst undertaking recruit taking. Whilst they were shipped off to Kenya, Norman found himself reporting for duty at the Hampshire regiment depot on the Isle of Wight. Here, Norman found himself detailed for Water transport duties, which meant ferrying personnel and goods over to the Island from the mainland. This was a posting he enjoyed but with scant time off during the five months he was there. In the August of that year, the situation in the



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middle east was deteriorating fast and the British Army responded by preparing a rapid reaction force to deploy at short notice. As the crisis in the Suez-canal zone was on the horizon, Norman found himself and two colleagues selected for immediate posting overseas to join the joint British forces gathering at Valetta, Malta. He remembers being issued with “battle order” kit, including standard Army issue rifles and ammunition.

Valetta, Malta

As the Suez crisis played out, Norman flew out from Black-Bushe airport, Hampshire and was to spend the remainder of August, September and most of October on the island of Malta. It was here that Norman was promoted to Lance Corporal RASC with responsibilities to manage the regiments fuel supply. This duty led to Norman being placed in a sticky situation, when he countered an order from a less experienced officer. This Officer wished to leave dozens of barrels of Petrol fuel out to bake in the midday sun. Recognizing the danger of explosion, Norman ordered his soldiers to get the barrels under cover. This attracted the ire of the officer, who charged him with disobeying an order. However, upon hearing the evidence the Brigadier dismissed the charge without further fuss. Norman also remembers an exchange visit with the Royal Navy whilst on the island, which made a pleasant change to the sparse conditions the troops were living in.

Cyprus and EOKA

With the ignominious end to the Suez crisis, the Brigade command utilized the option of re-deploying the rapid reaction force from Malta to Cyprus. In 1956, the campaign of rebellion against British rule on the mediterranean island of Cyprus was escalating rapidly. The Greek nationalist organization EOKA was undertaking bombing and shootings at an alarming rate. So it was that Norman and his colleagues found themselves on board a troop ship bound for Cyprus. Following a short stop at Sicily, the ship docked and the soldiers disembarked onto the island of Cyprus. Norman remembers that first night on the island well. The rapid reaction force’s arrival was heralded by a large explosion, as a EOKA terrorist unit detonated a bomb, destroying a lorry outside the British Army camp.

As Norman and his colleagues settled in they adopted a routine of six soldiers patrolling the local area on foot. Norman’s RASC unit retained responsibility for fuel supply. This led to the unit being moved outside of the main camp, a distance from the main body of soldiers. This was due to the very real danger of the fuel exploding from accident or attack. The volume was such that the explosion could well take out a large body of men.

Norman and his unit were often charged with delivering fuel to outlying camps and depots, miles away from their camp. This entailed a full week away at times, leaving camp with a full load of fuel cans and delivering to various units along the valleys and hills of the Cyprus interior. Norman remembers the journeys up to the upper reaches of the Troodos-mountain range. He talks in the interview of the hot weather in the valley and freezing cold in the snow on the mountain. Whilst undertaking these dangerous trips, the lorries would travel in two’s with a soldier manning a Bren gun, positioned in a turret through the rood of the cab. The soldiers would be self-sufficient, cooking and brewing up on the British Army Hexi stoves and gas burners. Norman also explains how they would trade their Army



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rations for Eggs and produce from the local Farmers, in order to eat some fresh food. Rest was taken under a blanket on the floor of the flat bed of the lorry.

However, life was not all out driving in the interior. There remained the deliveries and restocking of supplies, that were arriving by sea. This entailed camp routine, which at times was tedious. However, there were times when Norman was only to pleased for this routine. One such occasion he recounts was a duty as Corporal of the Guard. He was in camp going about his duties when the camp came under direct rifle fire, from a suspected EOKA Terrorist located nearby. The Duty Officer ordered Norman to follow him, as he ran towards the gun fire. Norman quickly understood what was happening, grabbed his rifle and ran after the officer. They soon found themselves amongst buildings and Norman remembers feeling frightened, as the two soldiers searched for the EOKA terrorist. " My hand was on the Trigger" is how he describes this incident.

Returning to the deliveries, the danger of the unstable and steep mountain roads would soon to bring Norman face to face with his mortality. He was supervising a convoy of RASC lorries delivering highly flammable cans of Petroleum fuel. As Convoy commander he was positioned in the passenger seat of a Bedford four tonne truck. The bed of the truck was loaded to the hilt with cans of fuel. As the convoy drove through the town of Limassol, Norman's lorry was rammed. The collision caused the lorry to overturn, resulting in the soldiers in the cab becoming trapped, with fuel leaking all over them. Norman recalls the danger they were in. On top of the fuel, Battery acid began to leak and cover Norman. Other soldiers and by standers stood back, not wishing to be engulfed in flame should the spilt fuel ignite. Realising it was down to them to rescue themselves, Norman got himself and his troops out. Severely shaken, they then found that the Battery acid had burnt through all their uniforms. It was a harrowing incident for the soldiers involved.

One such RASC soldier in Norman's platoon was not so lucky. He was driving a lorry down the mountain, when it careered off the road and crashed into the valley. Norman heard about the accident and that the soldier survived but was in hospital. Returning from a week -long delivery operation, Norman called in to see him. The Nurses were reluctant to allow Norman in, due to the dishevelled appearance of the soldiers. However, the injured soldier was under Norman's command and he insisted. Upon seeing him Norman was taken aback by the soldier's injuries, but he was conscious and smoking a Cigarette, which was suspended on the end of a wire coat hanger, which allowed the soldier to place the filter to his lips! Norman remembers his name was a Scottish lad named Maguire.

The tour of Cyprus was to last seventeen months. Fortunately, the activities of the EOKA reduced by the time Norman's tour of duty was coming to an end. Daily routine continued and Norman enjoyed being located away from the main camp. A popular figure amongst the RASC platoon was Ruff the German Shepard Dog, Ruff was a stray that the soldiers adopted and cared for. Norman convinced the Army Catering Chef to include Ruff in the daily ration. In return Ruff would offer protection to the soldiers, barking at anyone who came near the camp.

Another memory Norman shares, is delivering the fuel in the Jerry cans and fuelling the vehicles from the cans. The fumes were heavy and avoiding them was difficult. Quite often



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the RASC soldiers would feel intoxicated after fuelling the vehicles. Oddly enough, all the soldiers were also chain smokers!

Another interesting memory of Cyprus Norman describes is that the friendly interactions he had with the local population was mainly with the Turkish people.

Time off was very limited and he can only remember a couple of trips to the protected area in Kyrenia, where the troops could bathe in the sea and the odd entertainment show from British celebrities on overseas tours visiting British forces. Sightseeing was out of the question due to the hostility of the EOKA Terrorist threat.

Back to the UK and demobilization

In January 1958, Norman flew back to the UK, landing at Southampton airport and then travelled by rail onto the British Army depot at Tidworth, Hampshire. Upon disembarking from civilian airliner, the soldiers immediately noticed the cold of the British winter. After seventeen months of Mediterranean heat, this came as a shock. However, it was on to Tidworth to fulfil his final weeks of military service for Norman. The majority of this time was taken up at the local hospital, where the soldiers helped load the coal and maintain the hospital boilers.

Norman was discharged from service, aged 20 years on 24th February 1958. He returned to the family home in Leicestershire and back to his job in the local Timber yard.

Later in life, Norman would move to Wales with his wife of many years Marion. Marion and Norman have recently celebrated their 58th wedding anniversary.



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