

Roger Trenfield

British Army

Royal Army Service Corps - Royal Corps of Transport

Ceredigion



West Wales Veterans Archive

Aide memoir to Film ONE of the interview with Roger Trenfield

The viewer will note that the interviewer can be heard on the film, directing questions to Roger. The interviewer's voice was included for the viewer to understand the context of Roger's conversation. The interview is largely unedited, which is a deliberate decision. This contributes to a very authentic interview which offers the viewer an insight into Roger's unique and endearing character.

Description

Roger was born in Birmingham in 1936 and lived in Yardley. His father, Jack Trenfield was an amateur Boxer and prize fighter who used to take on all comers in the Hay-mills markets area. His official boxing record was five bouts and a total of 55 rounds; however, this discounted all the prize fights. Jack was a British Army Veteran himself and had served in the Royal Army Service Corps.

His father's character would have a significant impact upon Roger's childhood. Roger joined the Army at an early age to make his own way in life. He took to service life and especially enjoyed his trade of driving in his father's old Corps, Royal Army Service Corps. His driving skills developed and with the formation of the new Royal Corps of Transport, Roger would go on to become a VIP driver. This role brought him into direct daily contact with high-ranking officers from all three services. He especially remembers chauffeuring Lord Louis Mountbatten and treasures a letter of commendation from the great sea lord. Roger went on to serve a full-term engagement of 22 years in the Army.

Early life

Roger has vivid memories of a childhood lived under the shadow of World War two and the Luftwaffe bombing raids on Birmingham and Coventry. He describes what this was like early in his video interview. He recalls his father taking him to what was then known as Eldham airport, later to become Birmingham international. His father used to leave him to watch the aeroplanes, as he visited the nearby pub. He offers some insight into the Yardley area in the 1940s and some of the things he used to get up to. He also recalls a humorous episode during an air raid when he saw his father using a Saucepan as a protective helmet. Commenting on the air raids, Roger describes looking up and "...the sky was black with them (aircraft)" and describes watching the dog fights between the aircraft. As the danger from these air raids grew, he was evacuated to the countryside and found himself living with relations in south Herefordshire near Ross on Wye.

Joining the Army

Roger pulls no punches in describing why he joined the Army, which was to escape his father's habit of using Roger as training aid for his prize fighting. "...I thought I got to get out of this.....so, I hopped on the train with a warrant that I got from the Army recruiting office in the recruiting centre in Birmingham and got the train down to Aldershot. Oddly enough there was a truck (Army) there and he said where you going? I said Buller barracks and he said jump in. He gave me a lift to the barracks. "

Roger was 15 years of age and on 29th January 1952 joined the Royal Army Service Corps arriving alone at Buller barracks to begin his new life. Roger describes his early days at Buller barracks in number 1 training battalion RASC. Memories of "square bashing" come flooding back to Roger, who goes on to describe some of the 47 new recruits he trained with. Roger describes training as a "Good grounding" for his military service.

He shares an interesting memory of his first large parade. He also remembers his first Commanding Officer, Major Grierson MM, an officer he held in great esteem and his humorous first meeting with him.

Trade training

Roger moved on from basic recruit training to trade training. This was undertaken at Elles barracks, 3 Training battalion RASC Farnborough, Hampshire. Here he trained as a Driver. This establishment was next door to Farnborough airport and afforded Roger an excellent view of the famous air show. However, he was to witness a horrific crash that claimed the life of former RAF pilot John Derry. On 6th September 1952 Derry was demonstrating the flying capabilities of a De



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Havilland DH 110 jet fighter plane, when the airframe disintegrated in mid-air. As the plane crashed it not only killed the two crew members but also 29 spectators who had been enjoying the air show.

Roger broke his ankle playing Rugby for the depot training team and was sent home. Upon his return to Elles barracks he found the accommodation blocks empty. In his absence his fellow recruits had all been posted to their various units. Another humorous event followed, as Roger reported to the Sergeant Major's office. The Sergeant Major informed Roger that he was classified as a Deserter and assumed he was surrendering to him, after a period of AWOL (Absent without leave). Fortunately, the plaster of Paris covering Roger's leg, explained his absence and it seemed the Army had forgotten about his sporting accident! After he recovered from his broken leg, Roger was posted to RASC Houndstone & Lufton, Yeovilton, Somerset, close to the Royal Navy Fleet air arm base.

Operational career

The theme of humorous confusion continued. Upon reporting for duty to the Regimental Sergeant Major (McKnight), Roger was handed a military pace stick (an aide for parade drill). Enquiring what he was to do with this, the RSM replied that he was to use it for his drill instructing. Roger clarified that he was posted as a Driver Instructor. As opposed to a Drill Instructor. However, the RSM insisted that Roger make his way to the parade square, where there was a squad of national service recruits awaiting instruction. Roger duly obeyed orders and began to teach drill to the recruits. However, one of the recruits could not grasp the fixing bayonets routine. This tested Roger's patience, and this led to the recruit lunging at Roger with the rifle, bayonet attached! Perhaps those early defensive moves Roger learnt evading his father's punches came good, as he deflected the bayonet and punched the recruit to the ground. Hearing of this incident the RSM called for Roger, resulting in a decision to post him to an operational unit.... overseas.

Jordan

This is how Roger came to work in Aqaba, Jordan. He was assigned to 26 Independent Transport platoon of the RASC. At the time there was over 5000 British soldiers stationed at various bases in Jordan. Roger's platoon was however a small unit servicing the larger British Army detachments in the country. In particular the 10th battalion of the Queens Own Hussars, an armoured regiment. He describes what the platoon's duties were and the problems they encountered, especially with theft of Army rations and vehicle tyres. He also shares some other interesting occurrences and characters he worked alongside. Roger found himself at the wrong end of a harsh military justice system, when a large amount of vehicle tyres was stolen whilst he was on guard duty.

The British Army decided to close the base at Aqaba in May 1957 and the Queens Own Hussars were due to be flown out of Jordan and back to the UK. Roger remembers the transport which was detailed to fly the soldiers out. These were old RAF Transport command aircraft called Valetta's. On 17th April 1957, unfortunately one of these Valetta's was taking off from the airfield loaded with an advance party of 23 soldiers from the Royal Hussars. A tragic accident occurred, and the Valetta crashed, killing all three RAF crew on board and the soldiers from the Royal Hussars. Roger's platoon was ordered to recover the bodies, and this was a traumatic experience for him. He describes recovering and burying the bodies near the crash site. However, a short time later the British authorities ordered that the bodies be exhumed and conveyed to the British military cemetery at Habanera in Iraq, where they were to be buried. Therefore. Roger and his platoon travelled to the burial site to exhume and recover the 26 bodies. He remembers the officer in



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charge, Captain Redgrove, showing some understanding. He sat the platoon down and gave the soldiers a stiff drink of Whiskey before the exhumation began. Roger later visited the place where the soldiers were buried, before he himself flew out of Jordan. Incidentally Roger's memory of the amount of personnel lost and the burial place differs from the official accounts. Perhaps the passage of time and traumatic nature of the event plays a part in the differing accounts

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Horsepowermuseum.co.uk – The museum of the Kings Own Hussars.

en.wikipedia.org

boxrec.com

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