

ARMY LIFE

In July 1947 I was at school, in the Lower Sixth form at Trinity School but my conscription deferment into the Army to take my final exams had been refused. I was ordered to proceed to an Army reception camp near Liverpool on 4th August.

The evening before I travelled on the overnight train from Euston to Liverpool – to me an unknown city.

Having spent the day in the nearby Maghul transit camp, that evening, with others, I was transported to Liverpool docks and put aboard the ferry for Belfast.

IRELAND.

A cold night on deck was followed by a slow train to Omagh on the other side of Ireland. In the barracks there I was issued with my kit and my army number, 21024790.

Within the following six weeks the 2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers regiment had installed in us the basics of being a soldier. I discovered that 'square bashing' wearing a thick khaki uniform in the August heat was not comfortable.

Next, the train back to Belfast, the ferry to Stranraer, and then the overnight train journey to Darlington. A stop in Crewe at 3 am allowed me to buy a welcome sausage roll.

Finally I reached the Royal Artillery training camp in Barnard Castle, where accommodation was in arched corrugated iron huts and the food was poor. That winter of 1947/48 was so cold that we were sent home for Christmas.

Our training was with 25 pound (11kg) field guns. We drove south to Catterick Camp with them for live ammunition firing on the Yorkshire moors.

WOOLWICH, LONDON.

Then came a posting to Woolwich Barracks. in London. In Woolwich we were kitted out and prepared for the Passing Out Parade, prior to being posted overseas. Life in the barracks was unmemorable, just the challenge each day of finding ways of avoiding fatigues. I found it very effective to carry an official looking piece of paper and to keep moving, to give the impression of carrying out a designated task. It was very effective! One job that I did attract was that of putting out 400 individual lots of jam for tea into small paper cups. The mess sergeant was not pleased, as I had been too generous and used too much jam – more than the mess allowance. However, there was not much he could do about it. It would not have been practical to take it back and do the job all over again. The squaddies won!

GERMANY

After six weeks at Woolwich, housed in the stables that had reputedly been condemned in 1913, I was posted to Germany, to the 19th Field Regiment, which was a part of the Second Infantry Division. Its shoulder flash was white crossed keys on a square black background. The 19th was based in Caernarvon Barracks, the former

Hermann Goering barracks attached to the former Luftwaffe airfield in Düsseldorf. The barracks are still there, but the Flughafen itself has now been transformed into an international airport. In 1948 the airfield was still pitted with bomb craters, which were useful as a hideaway in which to sink out of sight of the NCO's and fatigues, such as shovelling coal. It was quite a pleasant location on a warm summer's afternoon.

A daily event in the barracks was the mid-day visit by a blind German man, guided by his dog. He carried a small metal container in which he collected soup from the mess hall. Later, I saw many German soldiers in Düsseldorf, still wearing their original thin North African uniforms. They had returned from the severe winter in the Russian prisoner of war camps.



Mess Hall in Caernarvon Barracks, Düsseldorf.

At that time there were still towering heaps of brick rubble lining the city streets, where the multi-storey terraces of flats had been bombed. It was said that 2,000 dead still lay under the rubble. Other signs of war still lay about, such as the 'Beware Mines' signs beside footpaths in Bonn, and at the vast marshalling yard at Hamm, where the bombed railway lines still pointed skywards.

The saddest sight were the lines of German people, two yards apart, standing in the street gutters, asking for food or alms. Their hope was to exchange goods for cigarettes, which then were effectively the currency.

A ride on a tram from city centre back to Unterrath, the stop for the barracks, cost two cigarettes. The trams were packed, so we used to cling on the outside of the tram, or stand on the buffers between the linked tram cars. On one occasion my army forage cap blew off, and this immediately caused numerous German passengers to shout 'Achtung!' to stop the tram, which it did. They were probably reacting according to their own German army training.



No. 7 tram, running from Düsseldorf main station to a terminus near to the barracks.

In the barracks I trained as a TARA, Technical Assistant Royal Artillery. This required a knowledge of the guns themselves and all the aspects of sighting targets and working out range and other settings for them. It included using the meteorological information, which were issued every four hours. I retained the instruction manuals and recently donated them to the Imperial War Museum in London. In due course I moved to a forward observation location, which usually entailed sitting in a slit trench, observing the enemy, selecting targets,

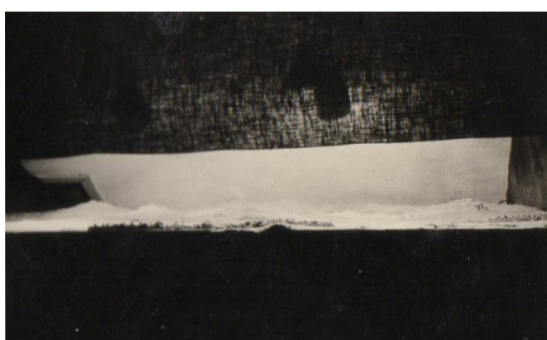
and then sending the ranging information and command to the gun battery. All of this work was manual; long before computing changed it all.

As a TARA, initially I was a no.1, in charge of a 25 pound gun and its crew, but graduated to the Forward Observation post, which often meant squatting in a slit trench and spotting targets and directing fire onto them. Interestingly, life expectancy in that job during the war had been four minutes. A sobering thought.

Having trained, one of my jobs was to construct a raised model terrain, some three yards square, constructed from hessian, some three metres square. Its purpose was to train observation spotters to hit targets. The model terrain included hills, trees, buildings, and roads, mounted on the coarse hessian. The gunner under training sat to one side, with the model terrain just below his eye level, and worked out from it the range and bearing of his chosen target – all to scale. Another man below the terrain then puffed up smoke through the hessian on the co-ordinates given, to give a realistic effect of a bursting shell. It was an effective way to train.



Observers' seating



The observers' view of the model terrain.

Out on the ranges we practiced by firing shells at former German tanks set out on one of the long established German firing ranges. It was pleasing to see the first ranging shot hit the tank. Sparks flew off it. A side effect of all this was that the ground in the range was on fire, as shells had earlier ignited the underlying peat. Such fires could continue to burn for a very long time.

Army life was really quite eventful in Germany. A lot of my time was spent under canvas on the artillery ranges, often on Luneburg Heath. This was a very large range established many years before by the German Army. We were warned not to drink the water, because the Germans had fired mustard gas shells there in the past.



Quad, limber and gun.

On one trip through the local forest by lorry I remember in particular a village called Augustdorf, because all of the houses had barge boards crossed over at the top and extended as a cut out outlines of horses heads.

At that time illiteracy was common among army recruits, undoubtedly due to insufficient education during the war period, so there were relatively few able to undertake technical jobs.

In fine weather, spells away from barracks could be quite interesting. I have, for example, spent the night sleeping on the ground underneath a lorry. While most of our trucks were armoured Fordson Quads, there were also some large open backed AEC five ton lorries.

Part way through my service in Germany, together with others in the Regiment, we were taken to a railway siding in Wuppertal. We did not know why we were there, but it turned out that new German paper currency was to be introduced. It had been printed in the USA and had all been delivered there in welded-up steel railway wagons. Our job was to guard it and to provide some of the lorries that were to deliver the currency throughout West Germany. Each lorry had a machine gunner sat up in its turret, and when each was loaded, off it went. The effects of the former degraded currency and black market activities had been dire. It was a sad sight to see German civilians standing a few yards apart in the gutters of the streets, trying to sell small items for cigarettes, which were the real currency. The Germans could only exchange old marks for new Deutschmarks to the total value of £30. This was to cancel out the funds accumulated by the black marketeers.

In 1948 the Russians blockaded Berlin, and did not allow access to it by road. The Allies' response was to mount the famous 'Berlin Airlift'. Hundreds of transport aircraft were used to fly in supplies for many weeks, until the Russians finally admitted defeat and reopened the roads. Together with other Army units, I was camped with my Battery in tents underneath this aerial armada, with an aircraft flying low overhead every four minutes. The eventual return to barracks was very welcome.

One day, in the YMCA, another army man asked me if I could draw, and if so, if I would be interested in making drawing records of murder scenes. My answer was that I was not very good at drawing people. It would doubtless have led to an interesting life! The YMCA was a former night club building on the banks of the Rhine. It is still there, but of course, not now housing the YMCA.

Another member of the Regiment could not write and so wrote home for him, and read out the replies when they came. I helped others in in a similar way.

The Opera House reopened in Düsseldorf, and I went to see Wagner's Tannhauser, sitting wedged between high ranking officers and other Army and Control Commission types. Very democratic!

Later, I went on a Rhine trip, as far upstream as Koblenz. I still have the panorama brochure given to me at the time.

Back at home the Sixth Form was still at work in Trinity School preparing for their final examination.

A little while before being 'demobbed', I went on a three week course on 'Building', in Göttingen, in the Harz mountains, and close to the Russian border. The instructor was an elderly Engineer Officer with considerable civil engineering experience. It was an interesting and enjoyable time. Göttingen was still a charming old town, with stables built in the classical style by the Hannoverian kings, later to govern England. The fable of 'The Goose Girl' I saw re-enacted in the streets. Historically, vocal geese had alerted the citizens to invaders.



The Goose Girl.

The Church Army club in Düsseldorf was situated opposite the western end of the famous Königsallee. It was there that I met Werner Leibel, an industrial photographer. He developed films for the 'squaddies'. He invited me home to meet his parents, Hannah and Willi, and became friends. Willi's only English word was 'cucumber'. He was an engraver, and a dear, kindly, man. When coming back from leave in England I would bring them coffee beans, unobtainable in Germany, but used there as the currency.



Another event associated with the Church Army was that I designed altar rails and a lectern for the German prison chapel. They were made by the prisoners themselves.

Werner (who died in 1993) had been young sixteen year German soldier on the Russian front, where he had manned an 88 mm gun. He commented "We just pointed it roughly in the right direction, and kept firing". He and I remained in social contact for over forty-five years, although less so during the latter years of my first marriage.

Werner married Ilse, and they had two children, Claudia and Axel, neither of whom have children. Claudia worked in Düsseldorf social services, helping people, while Axel became an electronics engineer. He worked in Bonn.

At one stage we were given special riot training, but were not aware of any crisis. The training was for some forty soldiers forming into a square, each side of which faced outwards. That appeared to be a defensive position when surrounded by aggressive people. We were not called upon to deal with a riot at any time. Interestingly, the same defensive square was used by the Roman Legions.

The Western Powers, France, Britain and the USA, had united their occupation zones into a new country, Western Germany. The Soviet Union's East German zone surrounded Berlin, which itself was divided into four zones of the Allies.

The next day Stalin cut the railroad links to Berlin. Road access was also greatly impeded. The Allies' response was to mount the famous 'Airlift'. Hundreds of transport aircraft were used to fly in supplies of all kinds, until the Russians finally admitted defeat and reopened the roads in May 1949. Together with other Army units, I had been encamped with my Battery underneath this aerial armada, with an aircraft flying

low overhead every four minutes. During that winter it was very wet, and we needed to dig a drainage moat around our tent to deflect the water. The eventual return to barracks was very welcome.



21024790 Gunner Mould



'Mr.Mould' in Düsseldorf with Werner Liebeling

Finally, after two years, I was sent home to Aldershot and was given a 'demob' suit, before leaving the Army in August 1949 and a life far removed from that of the schoolboy in Trinity School in North London.

Tony Mould.

Chester, January 2021