

Peter Latham (1929-2024)

British Army 1947-1982

National Service 1947-50

Dates of Audio Interviews: 4.5.20; 11.5.20; 19.5.20.

Location: via Telephone due to Covid Lockdown Restrictions

Interviewer: Hugh Morgan

Description

Lieutenant Colonel Peter Latham spent his entire career in the British Army. Born in Wolverhampton in 1929, he entered the Army initially as a National Serviceman, before transferring to the Regular Army and becoming a Commissioned Officer. Peter completed two tours of duty in Hong Kong, and undertook operational postings to Kenya, Germany, as well as the UK. After thirty-four years of service, Peter retired from the Army. He and his wife, Sheila have lived alongside the Dyfi Estuary for over forty years, a move they have never regretted making. This is his story told to Hugh Morgan during the early weeks of the global Covid Pandemic in 2020.

Preamble

“This history was written in 2020 in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic when life was in ‘lockdown’. Being ‘aged’ now my memory is not what it used to be so I tried to contact the Army Records Office in order that I could be accurate with places and dates. Alas, they were themselves on ‘lockdown’ so some dates may well be wrong. Anyhow, let’s have a go....

Childhood

I was born in Wolverhampton in 1929. My parents lived in a little place called Brewood which is a small village near Wolverhampton. The family had always been strong Catholics and I went to a succession of Catholic schools progressing to Belmont Abbey in Hereford and finished up at Ratcliffe college near Leicester.

As a teenager during the war my father arranged for me to work alongside the apprentices in the Boulton Paul Aircraft factory in Wolverhampton, making parts for the Boulton Paul Defiant which served in the RAF during the early years of the war.

Call-up for National Service

In late 1947 I was called up to for National Service which commenced at Whittington Barracks in Staffordshire. Whittington Barracks was a large complex built in 1881 for the Staffordshire Militia. It was built around a central, very large parade ground. Around the parade ground were a number of large barrack blocks, two stories high. Each block having four Barrack rooms in the centre of which

were 'ablutions' which consisted of open fronted toilets and great long slabs of slate, with inlaid white porcelain sinks. These sinks had only one cold water tap each.

On the first day our intake collected the kit from the stores, consisting of clothing, bedding and then onto the armoury where we collected a rifle and bayonet, and then back to the Barrack room where we were harangued by the NCOs who told us what we were going to do and what was going to happen to us.

We were allocated a bed and shown how to box our bedding for inspection. We had one steel cabinet and that was about it. Most of the recruits were from the Black Country and there were only two of us who had hailed from public schools. On the first night the two of us got into our pyjamas prior to bed. Suddenly we were surrounded by the other recruits. They hadn't seen pyjamas before and had always gone to bed in their pants and vests. There as much hilarity.

The beds had no mattresses. They were steel pull out frames upon which we put our three 'biscuits' every night. The 'biscuits were filled with straw and during the night as we slept on them the 'biscuits' managed to spread apart and each morning we would wake up with a pattern down our sides where the steel wires had been. We had little round pillows which were also stuffed with straw.

The following day we were all marched off in quick time to have haircuts where 'short back and sides' was the order of the day. There were agonised howls as cherished locks fell to the ground. From there we were taken to the medical centre for our injections. We were lined up shirts off, hand on hip, and the doctor with a large syringe went from one to the other, injecting us with the same needle. Some of the recruits literally fainted and the doctor was saying to his assistants. 'catch that one'. Two in our platoon alone fainted.

Training consisted mainly of drill and weapons training. We spent a lot of time on the rifle ranges learning how to shoot. These were about a quarter of a mile away, long 600yd ranges. I remember being a good shot and was awarded a 'marksman' badge. When it was raining, we went into a big shed which was on the edge of the huge parade ground to continue weapons training there.

I can also remember going into the gas chamber. We went in with our gas mask on then a gas cartridge was set off and we were made to run around a bit, before taking our gas masks off. We would then be overcome with the gas before the NCOs opened the door to let us out, by which time nose and mouth and everything was streaming. It took a bit of time to recover. I think some of the NCOs took great pleasure in keeping on their own gas respirators, so the recruits got a real good dose and the NCOs didn't. The purpose of this was to teach us how to fit the masks and demonstrate to us that they worked.

During our training for one week we were directed to agricultural work which consisting of helping the local farmer to collect his potatoes. It proved to be back breaking work.

After the six weeks training at the end of 1947, we went onto 'Continuation Infantry Training' at a little place called 'Tinkers Green' near Oswestry. This was for a further six weeks. One incident I do recall was that one of our intake was a great bruiser and he would try to boss everybody around. He was a genuinely nasty chap and went out boozing to extreme when we were allowed out. He would come back in the early hours of the morning and create a hell of a noise and wake everybody up. One night when he had been doing this, I yelled at him to 'shut up'. He came straight over to my bed and tipped the whole thing over on the floor. So, I got up and confronted him and we had a bit of a scuffle. When he found that he wasn't getting the best of the scrap due to my long reach and

boxing training at school, he went over to his bed and got his rifle (which were kept on racks behind our beds) fixed his bayonet and started charging around trying to stick me. By this time everybody had been aroused including the NCO's who lived in a room alongside and he was overpowered. He was taken away and eventually court-martialled. Luckily, he never got to me with his bayonet!

The winter of 1947/1948 was a terribly cold winter and I went up to Catterick Camp in Yorkshire for Infantry Signals training. We lived in what were called 'The Spiders' which were wooden huts each connected up in the middle to the ablutions. It was so cold that sheep used to come in at night. The only heat we had in there were small round coke stoves with a chimney going up through the roof and you put the coke in through a little flap in the top of the stove. Sheep came in because it was a bit warmer than on the outside. We only had a very small ration of coke for each barrack room. It was tiny and wasn't enough. Just enough to light the stoves and then they would go out. To try to get around this we used to foray at night and raid the coal stores in the Officers mess and Sergeant's mess and pinch some of their coal to try to keep warm. They got wise to this and stopped us by painting the edges of their coal bunkers white so they could spot if any was missing.

Our intake was one of the last ones in our part of the Catterick Camp because much of the camp was closing down. The effect of this winding down was that there were night guard duties to be done with less and less personnel to do these duties. So, in the end we had to do more and more duty until we were on guard duty once every three nights.

Part of our Signals training involved riding motorbikes. We had '18 sets' which was a wartime radio set that you wore on your back and we went off into the hills on our motorcycles to practice our radio training. We were stationed at Catterick for six weeks.

Officer Training

From there I was asked if I would like to try for Officer training, so I thought there was nothing to lose. There were tests and interviews which I passed and was sent to OCTU – the National Service Officer Training Centre near York. It was a beautiful old manor house, owned by Lord somebody. We were barracked in the grounds in wooden Spider huts again. I was only there for a short time when I was asked if I would like to try for Sandhurst. So again, I thought I would have a go. I went down with a couple of others to a testing place somewhere in Wiltshire run by an old General who was a dear old chap. I passed and was selected to go to Sandhurst. It was made clear to us that we could leave at any time during the first six months if we didn't fit and would then continue the remainder of our National Service elsewhere.

So, I went to Sandhurst at Camberley, and was consigned to 'Burma Company' in New College. The study and training there was a bit like university on steroids! We studied a wide range of subjects from accounting to history with everything in between, as well as military training. I did nearly two years training there.

My sport there was long distance running and I ran for Sandhurst against other institutions. I well recall our 'Passing Out Parade' and marching up the steps into the old college following the Adjutant on his white charger. That evening we had the 'Passing Out Ball'. All of us in full dress uniform and the ladies in Ball Gowns. My parents and my girlfriend, Sheila (who later became my wife) were there.

I left Sandhurst in 1950 and was commissioned into the South Staffordshire Regiment which at that time was stationed in Hong Kong.

Journey to Hong Kong

Right at the end of 1950, the two of us from Sandhurst who had been commissioned into the South Staffordshire Regiment boarded a ship HMS Devonshire at Liverpool and looked forward to setting sail for Hong Kong, especially reaching the 12mile limit so we could get drink and cigarettes without tax. In fact, the cost without tax was next to nothing. But when we left Liverpool, the sea was so rough that we were immediately seasick which continued for the next ten days all the way through the Bay of Biscay. We didn't settle down until we got past Gibraltar and into the Mediterranean, where it calmed down and at least we could enjoy a drink and cigarettes.

The ship called in at Malta for fuel water and supplies and sailed onto Alexandria, Egypt, where we disembarked. We were surrounded by hawkers on the dock and one sold us a small bottle of 'Spanish Fly' reputed to be an aphrodisiac. When we got back to the ship, we fed this in the milk to the ship's cat which spent all night 'meowing'! We also visited a most beautiful Catholic Cathedral in Alexandria with beautiful stonework and blue stained-glass windows which bathed everywhere in cool blue light.

From Alexandria we got back on board and travelled along the Suez Canal. The journey along the Canal was extremely hot. So hot that there was no fresh air below in the Troop Decks, where the troops slept. It was unbearable for them. The only air conditioning came from the big scoops on the deck which channelled any wind down below. It got so hot that we had to ask the Captain as soon as he got to the great lakes, which are in middle of the Canal, to turn the ship around into the wind. Later that night he turned around again and continued sailing down to the bottom part of the Suez Canal and into the Red Sea.

We stopped at Aden to take on stores and stretch our legs on the dockside but were not allowed further as there were rebels fighting in Aden Old City (at that time a chap who was with me in Sandhurst was captured and killed by the rebels in the Old City). From there we sailed into the Arabian Sea and on into the Indian Ocean. We stopped at Colombo in Ceylon (Sri Lanka now). Two of us took a trip to a pineapple canning factory and were given two of the largest pineapples we had ever seen. That evening in our cabins we ate a whole pineapple each not realising what so much in one go would do. The acid left us with sore mouths for 24hrs!

The next stop was Singapore where most of the passengers left the ship. We were there for quite a while and so a fellow officer and I went to the Raffles Hotel for one of their famous teas and to the Botanical Gardens which were beautiful. I remember the lake in the gardens being full of Carp and the water 'boiled' with Carp when bread was thrown in.

The ship's Adjutant disembarked with most troops, leaving only those troops destined for Hong Kong, so I was made ship's Adjutant. I was tasked by the ship's Captain to interview the wife of a Colonel who was a passenger on the ship and had delayed its departure by arriving back late, having been on shore. She had been told to arrive back on-board by 15.00hrs which was the allotted time for the ship to depart Singapore. She eventually arrived back two hours later and the ship's Captain was not amused. Her reason was that despite being married to a senior serving officer she had never learned the 24hr clock and therefore had associated 15.00hrs as being 5pm and had therefore arrived back two hours late!

Hong Kong and the South Staffordshire Regiment

Back on-board ship we sailed directly to Hong Kong, where we disembarked. Two of us, both Subalterns, went up to the South Staffordshire Regiment Camp, which was in the New Territories, only about 2 miles from the Hong Kong/China border. Our Camp was under construction at the time and we were living in big tents called 'EPIP's'. These tents normally took about six people but in our case, it was just two officers.

One afternoon we were in the tent and a Chinese man came in with a hoe type of implement and started digging up the floor. We watched and asked him what he was doing. Of course, he didn't speak English and we couldn't speak Chinese. He went down about 6 inches into the ground and dug up a coffin. He took the top off the coffin which had a skeleton in it. How long it had been there we didn't know but all that remained was the skeleton with a trilby hat on its skull. He proceeded to take all the bones out and placed them in a large earthenware pot called a 'chatty pot'. He then took the 'chatty pot' away with him. You could see these pots stashed all the way along the hillsides, which were in fact, Chinese cemeteries.

I was a platoon commander in Hong Kong and my job was to train my 30 men. I remember I had my 21st birthday there and I hired a very large American car to take us junior officers into Hong Kong for my birthday bash. We had a great time but when we were coming back, the Police picked up on us and clocked that I was driving over 60mph but apparently, they couldn't follow us for some reason. The next day the Police came into Camp and spotted the big American car standing outside the Officer's mess. They spoke to me and I was duly cautioned. Shortly after I was called into see my Adjutant, who gave me seven extra Orderly officer's duties for getting caught!

One of our tasks was to accompany Police patrols on the boarder because there was a lot of smuggling going on, especially petrol smuggling. Two-gallon biscuit tins containing petrol would be smuggled across into China. On one patrol we came across a bunch of smugglers who rapidly ran off, leaving their petrol cans behind. We collected all the petrol tins and took them back to Camp. Whilst I was in Hong Kong, I had a BSA motorbike and I was able to fuel the motorbike from those petrol cans for the remainder of my time in Hong Kong!

One sport we did do in Hong Kong was running up and down the mountains. This was called 'Cud' climbing. It was very competitive and all the units in Hong Kong took part. But it could quite dangerous especially coming down steep hills at breakneck speed resulting in many falls and injuries. No team ever managed to beat the Gurkhas; little, tough, wiry men and great Soldiers.

Part of our training there was to dig defensive emplacements lined with corrugated iron along the border to defend it if the Chinese came over. But what happened was that the Chinese civilians would come at night when we weren't there and steal the corrugated iron! We got around this by putting holes in the sheeting, so it was no use for them.

Whilst in Hong Kong two of us Subalterns took a leave cruise to Japan. These cruises were on cargo ships that had a couple of cabins for tourists. We went from Honk Kong to Japan and called in at Osaka. Here we met a couple of Americans who were part of the Occupation Forces. They invited us to their Officer's Club and warned us to wear uniforms (which they had to do the whole time). We turned up in our smart Service Dress uniforms to be greeted in the foyer by a Sergeant seated at a desk. He looked at us and said "Hey, you guys, recruits ain't allowed in here". Luckily, our hosts arrived and took us inside. Loud music, officer's lounging around in short sleeves being served by lovely looking Japanese waitresses. It was deadly boring (apart from the latter). We had a couple of dinks and made our excuses! Later the ship sailed onto Nagoya and then back to Hong Kong. We found the Japanese very polite and helpful.

PART TWO

Return to the UK

In 1951 I left Hong Kong and returned to the UK to do a series of infantry training courses at Warminster and Hythe. Warminster was the Platoon Commander Long Course and Hythe was the Small Arms Training Course, which was on the huge shingle beach between Hythe town and the sea and consisted of many ranges. After these courses, I was posted as the Depot Training Subaltern, South Staffordshire Regiment, Whittington Barracks, yet again! One of the first chaps I saw as I went through the gates was the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM). He looked at me and I looked at him and he said 'Latham?', I replied 'Yes RSM I'm now Lieutenant Latham'. We always got on well.

My job was training recruits for the South Staffordshire Regiment, and life was spent getting them fit, teaching them drills, handling of small arms with a lot of the time spent on the rifle ranges. The Officer's Mess was a lovely building on the edge of the Barracks and my room was at the top of the stairs.

Our Adjutant at that time was a very tough, rugby playing South African by the name of De Villiers and he had a bull terrier which he had taken from a friend of his, who couldn't control it. The dog bit him on the first day and they had a falling out. Thereafter it adored De Villiers but the problem was that the dog took a dislike to me. At lunchtimes it used to wait for me behind the swing doors leading into the marble hall. I would rush through and up the stairs two at a time with the snarling dog close on my heels, into my room, slam the door, draw my sword, and open the door. As soon as the dog saw the sword it took off along the corridor, down the back stairs to hide in the back regions. This became a regular occurrence. The dog never caught me, and I never caught the dog!

Transfer to the RAOC

Around this time the Army was shrinking, and regiments were being disbanded. A friend of mine and I could see the writing on the wall, and I was asked if I would like to transfer to the Royal Army Ordnance Corp (RAOC). I agreed and was transferred in early 1953. I then was sent on two long RAOC courses the first being 'procurement' of military stores and the second the 'long vehicle course'. Both took place in Aldershot in the RAOC depot there.

After completing these courses, I was posted to the RAOC Depot at Bicester. My first job there was to supervise the transfer of stock levels to punch cards which were put onto the new computer being built at RAOC Chilwell, Nottingham. I got married end of 1952. In those days Officers were not entitled to married quarters until they were twenty-five years old. I was twenty-four so had to find some civilian digs. I eventually found some in the old manor house at Tingewick near Bicester. This was a rather threadbare old manor own by Lady Keyes the wife of Admiral Sir Roger Keyes of the Battle of Jutland fame and the mother of Jeffrey Keyes (VC) who had died in 1941 whilst trying to snatch Rommel in the Libyan desert. She was a dear old lady who dressed in the most shabby clothes. On one occasion she invited us to accompany her to the 'Bicester Hunt Ball'. She appeared in a beautiful black flowing evening dress and dripping with fabulous jewellery. When we got back, still dressed in all her finery, she put on her old trilby hat and with a torch went out to the chickens to collect the eggs!

From Bicester I was posted to the OCTU at Aldershot as 'Training Subaltern' and as the RAOC representative. I recall one frightening episode. We were training the cadets in 'live' hand grenade

throwing. It was one to one supervision. The cadet I was supervising pulled the pin out, but instead of throwing it out of the bunker he dropped it. I had to push him out of the way, pick up the grenade, and throw it out before it exploded! My first son, Andrew, was born in 1953.

Back to Hong Kong

After OCTU that I was posted again to Hong Kong and we sailed out on the old HMS Oxfordshire. In Hong Kong my job was as Staff Officer Vehicles and commanding the small vehicles depot. At that time, we were supplying vehicles to the units in Hong Kong and to the Brigades fighting in Korea. I had been promoted to Captain by this time. My second son, Robert, was born in the British Military Hospital in Hong Kong. We lived in a block of flats in Kowloon and were beautifully looked after by two Ahma's ('Ahma' refers to a girl or woman employed by a family to clean, look after children, and perform other domestic tasks). I was very lucky to get in a lot of fishing which has always been a passion of mine. We would go out fishing in Sampans both in Hong Kong harbour and in the estuary of the Pearl river. The fishing was very good indeed. We used huge prawns as bait (costing one HK Dollar each). The Sampan lady at the back of the boat fried up the leftovers in oil and tomato juice, and they were absolutely beautiful. The Ahma's loved it when we came back from fishing because they knew that we would be bringing lots of fish back for them.

Cambridge

We flew back from Hong Kong and I was posted to a vehicle depot in Cambridge for around one year. This depot stored what were known as 'A' vehicles; that is tanks and armoured cars, scout cars, left over from the war. Our job was to take these vehicles out of storage once a year and together with the REME get them running, before returning them back to storage. Eventually they were all sold to a firm called 'Kings of Cambridge' who made a fortune out of the scrap steel. The Americans had manufactured Bren gun carriers for us during the war and some of these were all boxed up in the Depot. Kings of Cambridge bought rows of them for £50 per box. Powered by Ford V8 engines (which by themselves were worth a lot of money), were complete-running vehicles but were also scrapped.

Our Unit's living quarters whilst in Cambridge were in nearby Royston. We had our caravan towed to Royston and lived in it on a chicken farm. We didn't need an alarm clock in the morning for at about 4.30am they would all start crowing.

My next posting to the headquarters of the vehicle organisation which was at the Ordnance depot in Chilwell, Notts, and by this time I had been promoted to Major.

Kenya

From Chilwell I was posted to Kenya to work for Joseph Kenyatta, Prime Minister of Kenya, as part of the British Army Training Team, and served as a staff officer on his staff. I met him on many occasions and during my time there one of our jobs was to design new army uniforms for the Kenyan Army which were then made in the UK. Another of my jobs was procuring vehicles from the UK for the Kenyan army. We found that we could not source any water tank bowlers. These were very important as it was so hot for the Kenyan Army soldiers who at that time were engaged in the 'Shifita' war (63-67). To get around this, I designed water tanks which slid on and off the backs of ordinary three tonners. These were also used by the Kenyan Air Force and the Kenyan Navy down in Mombasa. They could also be used as fire engines with the addition of a powerful water pump.

The Shifita would mine the tracks to blow up the vehicles of the Kenyan army. To get around this the Kenyan army captured Shifita combatants and bound them to the front of their vehicles so if the

vehicle drove anywhere near a mine they would yell out. The mine would then be safely decommissioned.

Kenya was a lovely posting and the work was most satisfying. We got about quite a bit. I recall flying round Mount Kenya at 18,00ft with the Kenya Air Force and journeys right up to the north west of Kenya and wonderful holidays in Mombasa, fishing for tuna and relaxing at the leave centre there. I also remember being threatened by an elephant when we were travelling down the road to Mombasa. Scary! On occasions we went into the rift valley and hired permanent tents on the shore of Lake Naivasha. We fished by day and by night sat around a huge log fire with a drink and watching all the eyes gleaming in the reflection from the fire and listening to the grunts of the hippos. Wonderful! I also remember looking for rock hyrax (a medium-sized mammal native to Africa and the Middle East) in the Rift Valley. We saw the hyrax but suddenly we got a very strong and distinct smell of lion. We made a fast exit back to the car! Before we left Kenya, I had trained up my African replacement and he took over from me.

After Kenya I had a series of postings. Initially I was posted back to the UK to the headquarters of the vehicle organisation at the big ordnance depot at Chilwell, Nottingham. I used to visit all our different vehicle depots and I remember a visit to the Vehicle Depot at Lugershall, Wiltshire, where I was taught to drive tanks. I think the one I trained on was a 'Centurion'. I was then posted to Germany.

Part Three

Germany

My posting to Germany became the highlight of my career. This was to 2 Division in Germany to command one of the two Ordnance Field Parks (OFP's). Not many Officers get to command a Unit. My OFP was stationed at Osnabruck in a beautiful old German Barracks on a hill. The OFP held the first reserve of stores for 12 Brigade.

As well as the Brigade and Divisional exercises we used to train by taking out the whole of the OFP which consisted of about 20 or 25 vehicles for our own exercises. I found a farmer some 20miles away who allowed us to deploy the OFP in one of his woods. After I was satisfied with the layout and camouflage of the vehicles we would step down to non-operational, and the chaps would go to the nearest village for a bit of a binge. I was invited to the farmers house for a drink and I would present him with some of the brandy which he was rather partial to called De Roche brandy, which I bought very cheaply from the NAAFI. In response he gave us a complete deer which he had shot in the woods for us. This was taken back to the cook house and went into the general diet for the OFP. At the end of my service in the OFP and for my previous experience in administration I was awarded an AMBIM (Associate Member of the British Institute of Management).

My next posting was as a Staff Officer on CRAOC's staff of 2 Division at Lubeka (see photo). From there I went to the headquarters of The British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) at Rheindahlen, again as a Staff Officer, at the ROAC headquarters (see photo).

We were fortunate to live in very big married quarters. It was a huge house with four bedrooms and was on the edge of a wood. The garden was very bare indeed so the first week my wife and I went over the border into Holland to the market and bought lots of flowers, which we planted that day.

The next morning, we went out and they had all gone having all been eaten by rabbits, which led us to understand why the previous owner had not done much gardening!

Whilst serving in Rheindahlen a big new Army Forces children's school was being set-up. My wife, Sheila, was very much involved in this and when it opened, she was appointed school secretary. A busy job. So much so that she herself had an assistant to help her and do her typing. Sheila stayed at the school until we left Germany.

During our time in Germany the 'Cold War' was in process and Berlin was surrounded by Russian controlled territory. The British Sector in Berlin was connected to the West by a single, highly controlled, road. We had a leave centre in Berlin, a very nice hotel. We took advantage of this and I took the family to Berlin. We went by car, stopped at the guard post to the controlled road, signed in by very smart Russian soldiers in tailored uniforms. I was saluted, but embarrassingly for me, was not allowed to acknowledge their salute. It was something to with 'recognition'. We toured Berlin's West Sector, saw the Berlin Wall and took the children to the wonderful zoo in West Berlin. We also had a very controlled tour of the Russian Sector. We passed through 'Checkpoint Charlie' and we had a very good view of the much-chipped Brandenburg Gate amongst many other sights. I remember how clean and smart were the areas we were permitted to see. Interesting.

Back to the UK

I was next posted to the very large Ordnance Ammunition Depot at Kineton, which was located on the site of the 1642, Battle of Edgehill. I was Officer Commanding Troops. The soldiers were all ammunition experts who looked after ammunition for issuing world-wide.

My next posting was back again to the Ordnance Depot in Chilwell, as a Major commanding one of the sub-depots, staffed by civilians and a few soldiers. Around this time my wife and I bought our own house at Long Eaton, near Chilwell. It was a beautiful Edwardian House once owned by one of big tobacco families in Nottingham.

My final posting was to the Central Ordnance Depot (COD) at Donnington in Shropshire. I was promoted to Lt Colonel as the depot Chief Administration Officer and at this time we sold our house in Long Eaton and bought an old farmhouse in Wales, on the banks of the River Dyfi Estuary, near Machynlleth. For two years I commuted to Wales on all possible weekends, until I retired in 1981.

Retirement

Before leaving the Army, I undertook a six weeks retirement course at an agricultural college in the South. One thing that course taught me was never to be a farmer! After forty-two years we still live at our farm along the bank of the Dyfi Estuary and have been really settled here in beautiful Wales. Especially enjoying the fishing on our doorstep and in Cardigan Bay, off Aberystwyth!

Mae Casgliad y Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol Cymru, (1947-61/63) a grëwyd gan Age Cymru Dyfed,

wedi'i wneud yn bosib diolch i Gronfa Dreftadaeth y Loteri Genedlaethol.

Dyddiad y cyfweiliadau sain: 4ydd o Mai 2020, 11fed o Mai 2020, 19eg o Mai 2020

Lleoliad: dros y ffôn oherwydd Cyfyngiadau Cyfnod Clo Covid

Cyfwelydd: Hugh Morgan

Peter Latham (1929-)
Byddin Prydain 1947-1982
Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol 1947-50

Disgrifiad ysgrifenedig

Treuliodd yr Is-gyrnol Peter Latham ei yrfa gyfan ym Myddin Prydain. Ganwyd yn Wolverhampton ym 1929, ymunodd â'r Fyddin i ddechrau fel Milwr Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol, cyn trosglwyddo i'r Fyddin Prydain lle aeth i dod yn Swyddog â Chomisiwn. Cwblhaodd Peter ddau gyfnod o ddyletswydd yn Hong Cong, ac ymgwymerodd â swyddi gweithredol i Kenya, yr Almaen, yn ogystal â'r DU. Ar ôl tri deg pedair blynedd o wasanaeth, ymddeolodd Peter o'r Fyddin. Mae ef a'i wraig, Sheila, wedi byw ar hyd Aber Afon Dyfi ers dros ddeugain mlynedd, symudiad nad ydynt erioed wedi difaru ei wneud. Dyma ei stori a adroddwyd i Hugh Morgan yn ystod wythnosau cynnar Pandemig Covid byd-eang yn 2020.

Methodoleg: “Ysgrifennwyd yr hanes hwn yn 2020 yng nghanol pandemig Covid-19 pan oedd bywyd mewn ‘cyfnod clo’. Gan fy mod i'n ‘hen’ fy hun nawr, nid yw fy nghof cystal ag yr arfer fod, felly ceisiais gysylltu â Swyddfa Cofnodion y Fyddin er mwyn groeswrio atgofion fy hun, ynwedig amseroedd a dyddiadau. Yn anffodus, roedden nhw eu hunain mewn ‘cyfnod clo’ felly mae'n bosib bod rhai dyddiadau'n anghywir.”

Mae'r cyfrif hwn wedi'i ysgrifennu yn y person cyntaf fel Peter.

Plentyndod

Cefais fy ngeni yn Wolverhampton ym 1929. Roedd fy rhieni'n byw mewn lle bach o'r enw Brewood, sef pentref bach ger Wolverhampton. Roedd y teulu wedi bod yn Gatholigion cryf am oes ac es i gyfres o ysgolion Catholig gan symud ymlaen i Belmont Abbey yn Henffordd a gorffen yng ngholeg Ratcliffe ger Caerlŷr.

Yn fy arddegau yn ystod y rhyfel, trefnodd fy nhad i mi weithio ochr yn ochr â'r prentisiaid yn ffatri awyrennau Boulton Paul yn Wolverhampton, gan wneud rhannau ar gyfer y 'Boulton Paul Defiant' a wasanaethodd yn yr RAF yn ystod blynyddoedd cynnar y rhyfel.

Y galwad i fyny i'r Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol

Ar ddiwedd 1947, cefais fy ngalw i fyny i'r Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol ym Marics Whittington yn Swydd Stafford. Roedd Barics Whittington yn gyfaddilad mawr a adeiladwyd ym 1881 ar gyfer Milisia Swydd Stafford. Cafodd e'i hadeiladwyd o amgylch maes parêd canolog enfawr. O amgylch y maes parêd roedd nifer o flociau barics mawr, dau lawr o uchder. Roedd gan bob bloc bedair ystafell Farics ac yng nghanol y rhain roedd 'ymolchi' a oedd yn cynnwys

toiledau agored a slabiau hir mawr o lechi, gyda sinciau porslen gwyn wedi'u mewnosod. Dim ond un tap dŵr oer oedd gan y sinciau hyn yr un.

Ar ein diwrnod cyntaf, fe gasglon ni'r cit o'r storfeydd, yn cynnwys dillad a dillad gwely ac yna i'r arfdy lle casglon ni reiffl a bidog, ac yna'n ôl i ystafell y Barics lle cawsom ein briffio gan yr 'NCOs' a ddywedodd wrthym beth oeddem yn mynd i'w wneud a beth oedd yn mynd i ddigwydd i ni.

Cawsom ein dyrannu gwely a dangoswyd i ni sut i roi ein dillad gwely mewn bocsys i'w harchwilio. Roedd gennym un cabinet dur a dyna ni fwy neu lai. Roedd y rhan fwyaf o'r recriwtiaid o'r Wlad Ddu a dim ond dau ohonom oedd wedi dod o ysgolion cyhoeddus. Ar y noson gyntaf, gwisgodd y ddau ohonom ein pyjamas cyn mynd i'r gwely. Yn sydyn, roedden ni wedi ein hamgylchynu gan y recriwtiaid eraill. Doedden nhw ddim wedi gweld pyjamas o'r blaen ac roedden nhw jesd yn mynd i'r gwely yn eu pants a'u festiau. Roedden nhw'n ffeindio hwnna'n ddoniol iawn!

Doedd dim matresi ar y gwelyau. Fframiau dur tynnu allan oedden nhw lle bydden ni'n rhoi ein tri 'bisged' bob nos. Roedd y 'bisgedi' wedi'u llenwi gyda gwellt ac yn ystod y nos wrth i ni gysgu arnyn nhw, roedd y 'bisgedi' yn llwyddo i ymledu ar wahân a phob bore bydden ni'n deffro gyda phatrwm i lawr ein hochrau lle'r oedd y gwifrau dur wedi bod. Roedd gennym ni glustogau bach crwn a oedd nhw hefyd wedi'u stwffio gyda gwellt.

Y diwrnod canlynol, cawsom ni i gyd ein gorymdeithio i ffwrdd yn gyflym i torri ei'n gwallt lle roedd 'cefn ac ochrau byr' yn drefn y dydd. Roedd yna udo poenus wrth i wallt annwyl phobl syrthio i'r llawr. O'r fan honno, cawsom ein cludo i'r ganolfan feddygol am ein brechlynnau. Cawsom ein rhesi lan heb ein cysau, ein dwylo ar ein clun, ac aeth y meddyg gyda chwistrell fawr mynd o un i'r llall, gan ein chwistrellu â'r un nodwydd. Llewygodd rhai o'r recriwtiaid yn llythrennol ac roedd y meddyg yn dweud wrth ei helpwr, 'daliwch un yna!' Llewygodd dau ddyn o'n platŵn ni.

Roedd yr hyfforddiant yn bennaf yn cynnwys ymarfer arfau. Treulion ni lawer o amser ar y meysydd saethu yn dysgu sut i saethu. Roedd rhain tua chwarter milltir i ffwrdd, yn ystodau saethu hir o 600yds. Dwi'n cofio o'n i'n saethwr da ac fe ges i fathodyn 'marksman'. Pan oedd hi'n bwrw glaw, aethon ni i mewn i sied fawr oedd ar ymyl y maes parêd enfawr i barhau â'r hyfforddiant arfau yno.

Dw i hefyd yn cofio mynd i mewn i'r siambr nwy. Aethon ni i mewn gyda'n masgiau nwy ymlaen yna cafodd cetrn nwy ei danio a roedd rhaid ni i redeg o gwmpas ychydig, cyn tynnu ein masgiau nwy i ffwrdd. Yna byddem ni'n cael ein llethu gan y nwy cyn i'r 'NCOs' agor y drws i'n gadael ni allan, erbyn hynny roedd eich trwyn a'ch ceg a phopeth yn llifo. Cymerodd ychydig o amser i wella. Dw i'n meddwl bod rhai o'r 'NCOs' wedi cael pleser mawr o gadw eu masgiau nwy eu hunain ymlaen, yn weld y recriwtiaid yn cael ddos cryf o'r nwy a doedd yr NCOs yn profi ddim. Pwrpas y prawf hyn oedd i dysgu sut i ffitio'r masgiau a dangos i ni eu bod nhw'n gweithio.

Un wythnos yn ystod ein hyfforddiant, cawsom ein hanfon am waith amaethyddol a oedd yn cynnwys helpu'r ffermwr lleol i gasglu ei datws. Profodd i fod yn waith galed ar y cefn! Ar ôl y chwe wythnos o hyfforddiant ar ddiwedd 1947, aethon ni ymlaen i 'Hyfforddiant Troedfilwyr Parhaus' mewn lle bach o'r enw 'Tinkers Green' ger Croesoswallt. Roedd hyn am chwe wythnos arall. Un digwyddiad rwy'n ei gofio oedd bod un o'n recriwtiaid yn ddrwg iawn ac yn ceisio rheoli pawb o gwmpas. Roedd yn ddyn cas iawn ac yn mynd allan yn yfed lot pan oedden ni'n cael mynd allan. Byddai'n dod yn ôl yn oriau mân y bore ac yn creu sŵn uffernol ac yn deffro pawb. Un noson pan oedd e wedi bod yn gwneud hyn, gwaeddais arno i 'cau dy ceg!'. Daeth yn syth at fy ngwely a thafu'r cyfan ar y llawr. Felly, codais i a'i wynebu a

chawsom ychydig o 'scuffle'. Pan sylweddolodd nad oedd yn cael y gorau o'r sgrap oherwydd fy hyfforddiant bocsiio yn yr ysgol, aeth at ei wely a chael ei reiffl (a oedd yn cael ei gadw ar raciau y tu ôl i'n gwelyau), ac ei fidog a dechrau rhuthro o gwmpas yn ceisio fy nhrywanu. Erbyn hyn roedd pawb wedi deffro gan gynnwys yr 'NCOs' oedd yn byw mewn ystafell wrth ein hochr a chafodd ei drechu. Cafodd ei gymryd i ffwrdd ac yn y pen draw ei ddwyn i llys milwrol. Yn ffodus, nid aeth e gallu dod ato fi gyda'r fidog!

Roedd gaeaf 1947/1948 yn aeaf oer ofnadwy ac es i fyny i Wersyll Catteric yn Swydd Efrog ar gyfer hyfforddiant Signalau Troedfilwyr. Roedden ni'n byw yn adeilad o'r enw 'Y Pryfed Cop' sef cytiau pren, lle roedd pob corridor o'r barics yn cwrdd yn y canol lle roedd yr ystafelloedd ymolchi. Roedd hi mor oer lan fynna, roedd defaid yn arfer dod i mewn yn y nos i geisio cadw'n gynnes. Yr unig wres oedd gennym ni yno oedd stofiau 'coc' (tanwydd) bach gyda simnai yn mynd i fyny trwy'r to. Roeddech chi'n rhoi'r 'coc' i mewn trwy fflap bach ym mhen uchaf y stof. Dim ond dogn bach iawn o danwydd oedd gennym ni ar gyfer pob ystafell farics. Roedd yn fach iawn ac nid oedd yn ddigon. Dim ond digon i oleuo'r stofiau ac yna bydden nhw'n diffodd. I geisio osgoi hyn, roedden ni'n arfer crwydro yn y nos ac dwyn glo o storfeydd yn mess y Swyddogion a'r Rhingyll i geisio cadw'n gynnes. Fe wnaethon nhw sylweddoli hyn a'n hatal ni trwy beintio ymylon eu bynceri glo yn wyn fel y gallen nhw weld os oedd unrhyw beth ar goll. Roedd recriwtiaid ni yr rhai olaf yn ein rhan ni o Wersyll Catteric, oherwydd bod llawer o'r gwersyll yn cau lawr. Roedd effaith hwn yn golygu bod dyletswyddau gwarchod nos i'w gwneud gyda llai a llai o bobl. Felly, yn y diwedd roedd yn rhaid i ni wneud mwy a mwy o ddyletswydd nes i ni fod ar ddyletswydd gwarchod unwaith bob tair noson.

Hyfforddiant Swyddogion

O'r fan honno, ges I gofyn os roedd I eisio roi cynnig ar hyfforddiant Swyddogion, felly meddyliais pam lai? Doedd gen i ddim i'w gollu. Roedd yna profion a chyfweiliadau a basiais cyn cael ei hanfon i OCTU – y Ganolfan Hyfforddi Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol ger Efrog. Roedd yn hen maenordy prydferth, yn eiddo i ryw Arglwydd. Cawsom ein baricsio yn y tiroedd mewn cytiau pren 'Spider' eto. Dim ond am gyfnod byr yr oeddwn i yno pan ofynnwyd i mi os hoffwn i roi cynnig am Sandhurst. Felly eto, meddyliais y byddwn i'n mynd amdani. Es i lawr gyda chwpl o rai eraill i le profi yn rhywle yn Wiltshire a oedd yn cael ei redeg gan hen Gadfridog, a oedd yn hen ddyn hyfryd. Pasiais a chefais fy newis i fynd i Sandhurst. Gwnaethon nhw yn glir i ni y gallem adael ar unrhyw adeg yn ystod y chwe mis cyntaf os nad oeddem yn ffitio ac bydd ni yna'n parhau â gweddill ein Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol yn rhywle arall.

Felly, es i Sandhurst yn Camberley, a chefais fy anfon i 'Burma Company' yn New College. Roedd yr astudiaeth a'r hyfforddiant yno fel prifysgol- ar steroidau! Astudiais ystod eang o bynciau o gyfrifeg i hanes a phopeth rhyngddynt, yn ogystal â hyfforddiant milwrol. Treuliais bron i ddwy flynedd o hyfforddiant yno. Fy sbort yno oedd rhedeg pellter hir ac fe redais dros Sandhurst yn erbyn sefydliadau eraill. Rwy'n cofio'n dda iawn ein 'Passing Out Parade' a gorymdeithio i fyny'r grisiau i'r hen goleg gan ddilyn yr Is-lywydd ar ei ceffyl gwyn. Y noson honno cawsom ein ddawns 'Passing Out'. Pob un ohonom mewn siwtiau a'r menywod mewn ffroc dawns. Roedd fy rhieni a fy nghariad, Sheila (a ddaeth yn wraig i mi yn ddiweddarach) yno. Nes I adael Sandhurst ym 1950 a chefais fy nghomisiynu i Gatrawd De Swydd Stafford a oedd ar y pryd wedi'i lleoli yn Hong Cong.

Roedd rhan o'n hyfforddiant Signalau yn cynnwys reidio beiciau modur. Roedd gennym '18 set' sef set radio amser rhyfel yr oeddech chi'n ei gwisgo ar eich cefn ac fe aethom i ffwrdd i'r bryniau ar ein beiciau modur i ymarfer ein hyfforddiant radio. Roeddem wedi'n lleoli yng Nghatteric am chwe wythnos.

Taith i Hong cong

Ar ddiwedd 1950, aeth y ddau ohonom o Sandhurst, a oedd wedi cael ein comisiynu i Gatrawd De Swydd Stafford, ar fwrdd llong o'r enw 'HMS Devonshire' yn Lerpwl lle roeddwn ni yn edrych ymlaen at hwylio i Hong Cong, yn enwedig wrth gyrraedd y terfyn 12 milltir er mwyn i ni allu cael diod a sigaréts heb dreth. Mewn gwirionedd, roedd y gost heb dreth bron yn ddim byd. Ond pan wnaeth ni adael Lerpwl, roedd y môr mor arw roedd ni'n sâl ar unwaith a pharhaodd am y deg diwrnod nesaf drwy Fae Biscay. Wnaeth y salwch ddim setlo i lawr nes i ni fynd heibio Gibraltar ac i Fôr y Canoldir, lle tawelodd ac o leiaf gallem fwynhau diod a sigarét.

Galwodd y llong ym Malta am danwydd, dŵr a chyflenwadau a hwyliodd i Alexandria, yr Aifft, lle wnaeth ni lanio. Roedden ni wedi ein hamgylchynu gan werthwyr ar y doc a gwerthodd un botel fach o 'Spanish Fly' i ni a rhannodd ei bod e'n affrodisiad. Pan wnaethon ni'n ôl i'r llong, fe wnaethon ni roi hwn yn llaeth y cath y llong a dreuliodd y nos llawn yn 'miawio'! Ymwelon ni hefyd â'r Eglwys Gadeiriol Gatholig mor prydferth yn Alexandria, gyda gwaith cerrig hardd a ffenestri gwydr lliw glas a oedd yn ymdrochi ym mhobman mewn golau glas oer.

O Alexandria, aethon ni'n ôl ar fwrdd y llong a theithio ar hyd Camlas Suez. Roedd y daith ar hyd y Gamlas yn hynod o boeth. Mor boeth fel nad oedd awyr iach isod yn y Deciau Milwyr, lle'r oedd y milwyr yn cysgu. Roedd yn anniodefol iddyn nhw. Yr unig aerdymheru oedd yn dod o'r 'scoops' mawr ar y dec a oedd yn sianelu unrhyw wynt i lawr isod. Aeth e mor boeth roedd rhaid i ni ofyn i'r Capten cyn gynted ag y cyrhaeddodd y llynnoedd mawr, sydd yng nghanol y Gamlas, i droi'r llong i'r gwynt. Yn ddiweddarach y noson honno, trodd o gwmpas eto a pharhau i hwylio i lawr i waelod Camlas Suez ac i'r Môr Coch.

Arhoson ni yn Aden am cyflenwadau ac i ymestyn ein coesau ar ochr y doc ond roedd ni ddim gallu mynd ymhellach gan fod gwrthryfelwyr yn ymladd yn Hen Ddinas Aden (ar y pryd cafodd dyn oedd gyda mi yn Sandhurst ei ddal a'i ladd gan y gwrthryfelwyr yn yr Hen Ddinas). O'r fan honno, hwyliodd ni i Fôr Arabia ac ymlaen i Gefnfor India. Arhoson ni yn Colombo yn Ceylon (Sri Lanka nawr). Aeth dau ohonom ni ar daith i ffatri canio pîn-afal a chawsom ddau o'r pîn-afal mwyaf a welson ni erioed. Y noson honno yn ein cabanau aeth ni bwyta bîn-afal cyfan heb sylweddoli beth fyddai cymaint mewn un tro yn ei wneud. Aeth yr asid gadael ni gyda chegau poenus am 24 awr!

Yr arhosfan nesaf oedd Singapore lle gadawodd y rhan fwyaf o'r teithwyr y llong. Roedden ni yno am gryn amser felly aeth swyddog arall a minnau, i Westy'r Raffles am un o'u te enwog ac i'r Gerddi Botaneg a oedd yn brydferth. Dw i'n cofio'r llyn yn yr ardd yn llawn Carp a'r dŵr yn 'berwi' gyda Carp pan fyddai bara'n cael ei daflu i mewn. Daeth 'adjutant' y llong oddi ar y llong gyda'r rhan fwyaf o'r milwyr, gan adael dim ond y rhai oedd ar eu ffordd i Hong Cong, felly cefais fy ngwneud yn 'adjutant' y llong. Cefais y dasg gan Gaptan y llong i gyfweled â gwraig Cymol a oedd yn deithiwr ar y llong ac a oedd wedi gohirio y hymadawiad trwy gyrraedd yn ôl yn hwyr, ar ôl bod ar y lan. Roedd hi wedi cael gwybod i gyrraedd yn ôl ar y bwrdd erbyn 15.00 o'r gloch sef yr amser roedd yr llong fod adael Singapore. Yn y pen draw, aeth hi cyrhaedd yn ôl ddwy awr yn ddiweddarach ac nid oedd Capten y llong yn hapus

iawn. Ei rheswm oedd, er gwaethaf bod yn briod i uwch swyddog oedd yn gwasanaethu, nad oedd hi erioed wedi dysgu'r cloc 24 awr ac felly drysodd hi 15.00 o'r gloch am 5pm a dyna pam roedd hi wedi cyrraedd yn ôl ddwy awr yn hwyr!

Hong Cong a Chatrawd De Swydd Stafford

Yn ôl ar fwrdd y llong, hwyliom i Hong Cong, lle y glaniom. Aeth dau ohonom, y ddau yn Is-filwyr, i fyny i Wersyll Catrawd De Swydd Stafford, a oedd yn y Tiriogaethau Newydd, dim ond tua 2 filltir o'r ffin rhwng Hong Cong a Tsieina. Roedd ein gwersyll yn cael ei adeiladu ar y pryd ac roeddem yn byw mewn pebyll mawr o'r enw 'EPIP's'. Fel arfer, roedd y pebyll hyn yn cymryd tua chwech o bobl ond yn ein hachos ni, dim ond dau swyddog oedd yna.

Un prynhawn roeddem yn y babell a daeth dyn Tsieineaidd i mewn gyda math o offeryn 'hoe' a dechrau cloddio'r llawr. Gofynnodd ni iddo beth oedd yn ei wneud. Wrth gwrs, nid oedd e yn siarad Saesneg ac nid oeddwn yn gallu siarad Tsieinëeg. Aeth i lawr tua 6 modfedd i'r ddaear a chloddio mas arch. Tynnodd top yr arch a oedd ysgerbwd ynddi. Pa mor hir yr oedd wedi bod yno, dwi ddim yn gwybod ond y cyfan a arhosodd oedd yr ysgerbwd gyda het trilby ar ei benglog. Aeth ymlaen i dynnu'r holl esgyrn allan a'u rhoi mewn pot mawr o'r enw 'chatty pot. Yna aeth â'r 'chatty pot' i ffwrdd gydag ef. Gallech weld y potiau hyn wedi'u cuddio ar hyd ochrau'r bryniau, a oedd mewn gwirionedd yn fynwentydd Tsieineaidd.

Roeddwn i'n gomander platŵn yn Hong Cong a swydd I oedd hyfforddi fy 30 o ddynion. Rwy'n cofio nes I gael fy 21ain pen-blwydd yno a llogais gar Americanaidd mawr i fynd â ni, y swyddogion iau, i Hong Cong ar gyfer fy parti pen-blwydd. Cawson ni amser gwych ond pan oedden ni'n dod yn ôl, fe wnaeth yr Heddlu sylwi arnom a chlocio fy mod i'n gyrru dros 60mph ond ni allent ein dilyn am ryw reswm. Y diwrnod nesaf daeth yr Heddlu i'r Gwersyll a gweld y car Americanaidd mawr yn sefyll y tu allan i'r fwyty'r Swyddogion. Siaradon nhw i mi a chefais fy rhybuddio'n briodol. Yn fuan cefais fy ngalw i weld fy 'adjutant', a roddodd saith dyletswydd Swyddog ychwanegol i mi am gael fy nal!

Un o'n tasgau oedd mynd gyda phatrolau'r Heddlu ar y ffin oherwydd bod llawer o smyglo yn digwydd, yn enwedig smyglo petrol. Byddai tuniau 'bisgedi' dwy galwyn yn cynnwys petrol yn cael eu smyglo ar draws i Tsieina. Ar un patrôl daethom ar draws criw o smyglwyr a redodd i ffwrdd yn gyflym, gan adael eu caniau petrol ar ôl. Casglon ni'r holl duniau petrol a'u cymryd yn ôl i'r Gwersyll. Tra roeddwn i yn Hong Cong, roedd gen i feic modur BSA ac roeddwn i'n gallu tanwyddio'r beic modur o'r caniau petrol hynny am weddill fy amser yn Hong Cong!

Un sbort wnaethon ni yn Hong Cong oedd rhedeg i fyny ac i lawr y mynyddoedd. Roedd hyn yn cael eu galw ddringo 'Cud'. Roedd yn gystadleuol iawn a chymerodd pob uned yn Hong Cong ran. Ond gallai fod yn eithaf peryglus yn enwedig wrth ddod i lawr bryniau serth ar gyflymder gan arwain at lawer o gwympiadau ac anafiadau. Ni lwyddodd unrhyw dîm erioed i guro'r Gurkhas; dynion bach, caled, gwifrog a milwyr gwych.

Rhan o'n hyfforddiant yno oedd cloddio safleoedd amddiffynnol wedi'u leinio â haearn rhychog ar hyd y ffin i'w hamddiffyn pe bai'r Tsieineaidd yn dod drosodd. Ond beth ddigwyddodd oedd y byddai'r sifiliaid Tsieineaidd yn dod yn y nos pan nad oeddem ni yno ac

yn dwyn yr haearn rhychiog! Fe wnaethon ni osgoi hyn trwy roi tyllau yn y dalennau, felly doedd dim defnydd iddyn nhw.

Tra roedden ni yn Hong Cong, aeth dau ohonom ni roedd yn Is-filwyr, ar fordaith i Japan. Roedd y mordeithiau hyn ar longau cargo oedd gyda chwpl o gabanau ar gyfer twristiaid. Aethon ni o Hong Cong i Japan ac alwon ni yn Osaka. Yma, fe wnaethon ni gyfarfod â chwpl o Americanwyr oedd yn rhan o'r Lluoedd Meddiannu. Fe wnaethon nhw ein gwahodd i'w Clwb Swyddogion a'n rhybuddio i wisgo lifrai (roedd rhaid iddyn nhw ei wneud drwy'r amser). Fe wnaethon ni droi i fyny yn ein lifrai Gwasanaeth i gael ein cyfarch yn y cyntedd gan Sarjant yn eistedd wrth ddesg. Edrychodd arnom ni a dweud "Hei, chi bois, nid chaniateir recriwtiaid i bod mewn yma". Yn ffodus, cyhaeddodd ein gwesteiwyr a'n mynd â ni i mewn. Cerddoriaeth uchel, swyddogion yn ymlacio mewn crysiau byr yn cael eu gwasanaethu gan weinyddesau Japaneaidd prydferth. Roedd yn ddiflas iawn (ar wahân i'r olaf). Cawson ni gwpl o ddiodyd a gwneud ein hesgusodion! Yn ddiweddarach hwyliodd y llong i Nagoya ac yna'n ôl i Hong Cong. Fe wnaethon ni ffeindio bod y Japaneaidd yn gwrtais ac yn croesowgar iawn.

RHAN DAU

Yn ôl i'r DU

Yn 1951, nes I adael Hong Cong a dychwelyd nol i'r DU i wneud cyfres o gyrsiau hyfforddi troedfilwyr yn Warminster a Hythe. Warminster oedd Cwrs Hir y Cadlywydd Platŵn, a Hythe oedd y Cwrs Hyfforddi Arfau Bach. Roedd ar y traeth graean enfawr rhwng tref Hythe a'r môr ac yn cynnwys llawer o feysydd saethu. Ar ôl y cyrsiau hyn, cefais fy bostio unwaith to' fel Is-Sarjant Hyfforddi'r Depot, Catrawd De Swydd Stafford yn Mharics Whittington. Un o'r dynion cyntaf welais wrth i mi fynd trwy'r gatiâu oedd y Rhingyll Catrawdol (RSM). Edrychodd arnaf ac edrychais arno a dywedodd 'Latham?', atebais 'le RSM, Lifftenant Latham nawr'. Roedden ni wastad yn dod ymlaen yn dda.

Swydd i roedd hyfforddi recriwtiaid ar gyfer Catrawd De Swydd Stafford, a threuliais fy mywyd yn eu cael yn heini, yn eu dysgu driliau a sut i drin arfau bach gyda llawer o'r amser yn cael ei dreulio ar y meysydd saethu. Roedd Ystafell Swyddogion yn adeilad hyfryd ar ymyl y Barics ac roedd fy ystafell I ar ben y grisiau.

Ein 'Adjutant' ar y pryd oedd De Affricanwr cryf iawn, yn chwaraewr rygbi, o'r enw De Villiers, ac roedd ganddo 'French bull terrier' a gymerodd gan ffrind iddo, achos oedd e ddim gallu ei reoli. Gwnaeth y ci brathu ef ar y diwrnod cyntaf a fe wnaethon nhw ddadlau. Ar ol hynny, roedd e'n hoff iawn o De Villiers ond y broblem oedd bod y ci wedi dechrau casau fi. Ar amser cinio, aeth y ci wastad aros amdanaf y tu ôl i'r drwsau a oedd yn arwain i'r neuadd. Byddwn yn rhuthro drwodd ac i fyny'r grisiau gan gymryd dau ar y tro gyda'r ci grac yn agos ar fy sodlau, rhedeg i mewn i'r stafell, slamio'r drws, tynnu fy nghleddyf, ac wedyn agor y drws. Cyn gynted ag y gwelodd y ci y cleddyf, fe redodd i ffwrdd ar hyd y coridor, i lawr y grisiau cefn i guddio yn y cysgodion. Daeth hyn yn ddigwyddiad rheolaidd. Gwnaeth yr ci byth dal fi erioed, ac nes I byth dal y ci hefyd!

Trosoglwyddo i'r RAOC

Tua'r adeg hon roedd y Fyddin yn crebachu, ac roedd catrodau'n cael eu diddymu. Roedd fy ffrind a finnau'n gallu gweld yr ysgrifen ar y wal, ac nes I cael ei gofyn os hoffwn drosglwyddo i Gorfflu Ordnans y Fyddin Frenhinol (RAOC). Cytunais a chefais fy nhrosglwyddo ddechrau 1953. Yna cefais fy anfon ar ddau gwrs hir RAOC, y cyntaf yn 'gaffael' nwyddau milwrol a'r ail yn 'gwrs cerbydau hir'. Roedd yr ddau yn digwydd yn Aldershot yn nepo'r ROAC yno.

Ar ôl cwblhau'r cyrsiau hyn, cefais fy bostio i Nepo'r RAOC yn Bicester. Fy swydd gyntaf yno oedd goruchwylio trosglwyddo lefelau stoc a derbyn cardiau a roddwyd ar y cyfrifiadur newydd a oedd yn cael ei adeiladu yn RAOC Chilwell, Nottingham. Wnes I priodi ddiwedd 1952. Yn y dyddiau hynny nid oedd hawl gan Swyddogion i lety priod nes eu bod yn bump ar hugain oed. Roeddwn i'n bedair ar hugain, felly roedd rhaid i mi ffeindio ryw lety sifil. Yn y pen draw, des i o hyd i rywle yn yr hen maendory yn Tingewick ger Bicester. Hen maenordy braidd yn llwm oedd e, a roedd yn eiddo i'r Arglwyddes Keyes, gwraig yr Llyngesydd Syr Roger Keyes, a oedd yn adnabyddus am enwogrwydd Brwydr Jutland, a mam Jeffrey Keyes (VC) a fu farw ym 1941 wrth geisio cipio Rommel yn anialwch Libia. Roedd hi'n hen wraig annwyl a oedd yn gwisgo'r dillad mwyaf diflas. Ar un achlysur, wnaeth hi gwahodd ni i fynd gyda hi i 'Bicester Hunt Hall'. Ymddangosodd mewn ffrog ddu prydferth, ac yn llifo gyda gemwaith gwych. Pan gyrhaeddodd yn ôl, yn dal i wisgo ei holl ddillad hardd, gwisgodd ei het trilby a chydiodd yn ei fflacholau ac aeth allan i gasglu'r wyau gan yr ieir.

O Bicester cefais fy bostio i'r OCTU yn Aldershot fel 'Is-reolwr Hyfforddi' ac fel cynrychiolydd RAOC. Rwy'n cofio un bennod frawychus. Roedden ni'n hyfforddi'r cadetiaid mewn taflu grenadau llaw 'byw'. Roedd yn oruchwyliaeth un-i-un. Tynnodd y cadet roeddwn i'n ei oruchwyllo'r pin allan, ond yn lle ei daflu allan o'r byncer fe'i gollyngodd. Roedd rhaid i mi wthio o'r ffordd, codi'r grenad, a'i daflu allan cyn iddo ffrwydro! Ganwyd fy mab cyntaf, Andrew, ym 1953.

Yn ôl i Hong Cong

Ar ôl OCTU, cefais fy anfon eto i Hong Cong a hwyliom allan ar yr hen 'HMS Oxfordshire.' Yn Hong Cong swydd I oedd fel Swyddog Staff Cerbydau a rheoli'r depo cerbydau bach. Ar y pryd, roedden ni'n cyflenwi cerbydau i'r unedau yn Hong Cong ac i'r Brigadau oedd yn ymladd yng Nghorea. Roeddwn i wedi cael fy nyrchafu'n Gapt en byrn hyn. Ganwyd fy ail fab, Robert, yn Ysbyty Milwrol Prydain yn Hong Cong. Roedden ni'n byw mewn bloc o fflatiau yn Kowloon ac roedden ni'n cael ein gofalu'n hyfryd gan ddau Ahma (mae 'Ahma' yn cyfeirio at ferch neu fenyw sy'n cael ei chyflogi gan deulu i lanhau, gofalu am blant, a chyflawni tasgau domestig eraill). Roeddwn i'n ffodus iawn i ffitio mewn llawer o bysgota sydd wedi bod yn angerdd i mi erioed. Byddem ni'n mynd allan i bysgota mewn Sampans yn harbwr Hong Cong ac yn aber afon Pearl. Roedd y pysgota wir yn dda iawn. Defnyddiom ni gorgimychiaid enfawr fel abwyd (yn costio un Doler HK yr un). Roedd y ddynes Sampan yng nghefn y cwch yn ffrio'r gweddillion mewn olew a sudd tomato, ac roedden nhw'n hollol blasus. Roedd yr Ahma wrth eu bodd pan ddaethom yn ôl o bysgota oherwydd roedden nhw'n gwybod y byddem ni'n dod â llawer o bysgod yn ôl iddyn nhw.

Caergrawnt

Fe wnaethon ni hedfan yn ôl o Hong Cong a chefais fy anfon i ddepo cerbydau yng Nghaergrawnt am tua blwyddyn. Roedd y ddepo hwn yn storio'r hyn a elwid yn gerbydau 'A'; hynny yw tanciau a cheir arfog, a oedd ar ôl o'r rhyfel. Ein gwaith ni oedd tynnu'r cerbydau hyn allan o'r storfa unwaith y flwyddyn ac ynghyd â'r 'REME' eu cael i redeg, cyn eu dychwelyd yn ôl i'r storfa. Yn y pen draw, cawsant eu gwerthu i gyd i gwmni o'r enw 'Kings of Cambridge' a wnaeth ffortiwn o'r dur sgrap. Roedd yr Americanwyr wedi cynhyrchu cludwyr gynnew 'Bren' i ni yn ystod y rhyfel ac roedd rhai o'r rhain i gyd wedi'u bocio lan yn y Depo. Prynodd 'Kings of Cambridge' resi ohonynt am £50 y blwch. Wedi'u pweru gan beiriannau Ford V8 (a oedd eu hunain yn werth llawer o arian), roeddent yn gerbydau rhedeg cyflawn ond roedd nhw hefyd yn cael eu sgrapio.

Roedd llety ein Huned pryd roedden ni yng Nghaergrawnt yn Royston gerllaw. Cawsom ein carafán wedi'i dynnu i Royston a wnaethon byw ynddo ar fferm ieir. Doedd dim angen cloc larwm arnom yn y bore oherwydd tua 4.30am byddent i gyd yn dechrau canu!

Fy swydd nesaf oedd i bencadlys y sefydliad cerbydau a oedd yn nepo'r Ordnans yn Chilwell, Notts, ac erbyn hyn roeddwn i wedi cael fy nyrchafu i Uwchgapten.

Cenia

O Chilwell cefais fy anfon i Kenya i weithio i Joseph Kenyatta, Prif Weinidog Kenya, fel rhan o Dîm Hyfforddi Byddin Prydain, a gwasanaethais fel swyddog staff ar ei staff. Wnes I cyfarfod ag ef ar sawl achlysur ac yn ystod fy amser yno un o'n swyddi oedd dylunio gwisgoedd byddin newydd ar gyfer Byddin Kenya, a wnaed wedyn yn y DU. Swydd arall oedd caffael cerbydau o'r DU ar gyfer byddin Kenya. Fe wnaethon ni ddarganfod nad oeddem yn gallu dod o hyd i unrhyw cerbydau danciau dŵr. Roedd rhain yn bwysig iawn gan ei bod hi mor boeth i filwyr Byddin Kenya a oedd ar y pryd yn rhan o ryfel y 'Shifta' (1963-67). I osgoi hyn, dyluniais danciau dŵr a oedd yn cysylltu ar gefn lorïau 'tri thunnell' cyffredin. Cafodd rhain hefyd i defnyddio gan Llu Awyr Kenya a Llynges Kenya i lawr ym Mombasa. Gall nhw hefyd cael eu defnyddio fel peiriannau tân gydag ychwanegu o pwmp dŵr pwerus.

Byddai'r Shifta yn cloddio'r traciau a rhoi fwynglawdd ynddo i ffrwydro cerbydau byddin Kenya. I osgoi hyn, cipiodd byddin Kenya ymladdwyr Shifta a'u rhwymo i flaen eu cerbydau fel pe bai'r cerbyd yn gyrru yn agos at fwynglawdd byddent yn gweiddi allan. Yna byddai'r mwynglawdd yn cael ei ddadgomisiynu'n ddiogel.

Roedd Cenia yn swydd hyfryd a'r gwaith oedd y mwyaf boddhaol. Fe wnaethon ni deithio o gwmpas dipyn. Dw i'n cofio hedfan o amgylch Mynydd Cenia ar 18,00 troedfedd gyda Llu Awyr Cenia a theithio i fyny i ogledd-orllewin Cenia a gwyliau gwych ym Mombasa, pysgota am diwna ac ymlacio yn y ganolfan wyliau yno. Dw i hefyd yn cofio cael fy mygwth gan eliffant pan oedden ni'n teithio i lawr y ffordd i Mombasa. Dychrynlyd! Ar adegau, fe aethon ni i mewn i ddyffryn yr hollt ac aros mewn pebyll parhaol ar lan Llyn Naivasha. Fe wnaethon ni bysgota yn ystod y dydd ac yn y nos fe wnaethon ni eistedd o amgylch tân enfawr gyda diod a gwylïo'r holl lygaid yn disgleirio yn yr adlewyrchiad o'r tân ac yn gwranddo ar grwgnach

yr hippos. Hyfryd! Dwi hefyd yn cofio chwilio am 'rock hyracs' (mamal maint canolig sy'n frodorol i Affrica a'r Dwyrain Canol) yn Nyffryn yr Hollt. Gwelsom yr hyracs ond yn sydyn cawsom arogl cryf a phendant iawn o lew. Fe wnaethon ni adael yn gyflym yn ôl i'r car! Cyn i ni adael Cenia, roeddwn i wedi hyfforddi fy olynnydd Affricanaidd a chymerodd e drosodd oddi wrth i. Ar ôl Cenia, cefais gyfres o swyddi. I ddechrau, cefais fy anfon yn ôl i'r DU i bencadlys y sefydliad cerbydau yn y depo mawr arfau yn Chilwell, Nottingham. Roeddwn i'n arfer ymweld â'n holl ddepo cerbydau gwahanol ac rwy'n cofio ymweliad â'r Depo Cerbydau yn Luggershall, Wiltshire, lle cefais fy addysgu i yrru tanciau. Rwy'n credu yr un wnes I hyfforddi arno oedd 'Centurion'. Yna cefais fy anfon i'r Almaen.

Rhan Tri

Yr Almaen

Fy swydd yn yr Almaen oedd uchafbwynt fy ngyrfa. Roedd hyn i'r 2il Adran yn yr Almaen i reoli un o'r ddau Barc Maes Ordnans (OFP). Nid yw llawer o Swyddogion yn cael rheoli Uned. Roedd fy OFP wedi'i leoli yn Osnabruck mewn Barics hardd Almaenig ar fryn. Yn ogystal ag ymarferion y Frigâd a'r Adran, roedden ni'n arfer hyfforddi trwy ddileu'r OFP cyfan, a oedd yn cynnwys tua 20 neu 25 o gerbydau, ar gyfer ein hymarferion ein hunain. Des i o hyd i ffermwr tua 20 milltir i ffwrdd a rhoddodd ganiatad inni ddefnyddio'r OFP yn un o'i goedwigoedd. Ar ôl i mi fod yn hapus ar gynllun a chuddliw'r cerbydau, byddem yn camu i lawr i anweithredol, a byddai'r bois yn mynd i'r pentref agosaf am ychydig o 'sesiwn'. Cefais fy ngwahodd i dŷ'r ffermwr am ddiod a byddwn yn cyflwyno frandi iddo o'r enw brandi De Roche brynais yn rhad iawn gan yr NAAFI, yr oedd e'n eithaf hoff ono. Mewn ymateb, rhoddodd e garw cyflawn i ni yr oedd wedi'i saethu yn ei coedwig. Aethon ni â hwn yn ôl i'r cogyddfa ac aeth i mewn i'r diet cyffredinol ar gyfer yr OFP. Ar ddiwedd fy ngwasanaeth yn yr OFP ac am fy mhrofiad blaenorol mewn gweinyddiaeth, dyfarnwyd AMBIM (Aelod Cyswllt o Sefydliad Rheolaeth Prydain) i mi.

Fy swydd nesaf oedd fel Swyddog Staff ar staff 2il Adran CRAOC yn Lubeka (gweler y llun). O'r fan honno es i bencadlys Byddin Brydeinig y Rhein (BAOR) yn Rheindahlen, eto fel Swyddog Staff, ym mhencadlys ROAC (gweler y llun).

Roedden ni'n ffodus i fyw mewn llety mawr iawn i briodaswyr. Roedd yn dŷ enfawr gyda phedair ystafell wely ac roedd reit ar bwys coedwig. Roedd yr ardd yn noeth iawn felly'r wythnos gyntaf aeth fy ngwraig a minnau dros y ffin i'r Iseldiroedd i'r farchnad a phrynu llawer o flodau, a wnaethon ni blannu nhw I gyd y diwrnod hwnnw. Y bore wedyn, aethon ni allan ac roedden nhw i gyd wedi mynd ar ôl cael eu bwyta gan gwningod, yna roeddwn ni yn ddeall pam nad oedd y perchennog blaenorol wedi gwneud llawer o arddio!

Tra roedden i'n gwasanaethu yn Rheindahlen roedd ysgol newydd i blant y lluoedd arfog yn cael ei sefydlu. Roedd fy ngwraig, Sheila, yn rhan fawr o hyn a phan agorodd, cafodd ei

phenodi'n ysgrifennydd yr ysgol. Swydd brysur. Cymaint felly roedd rhaid iddi hi gael cynorthwydd ei hun i'w helpu a gwneud ei theipio. Arhosodd Sheila yn yr ysgol nes i ni adael yr Almaen.

Yn ystod ein hamser yn yr Almaen roedd y 'Rhyfel Oer' ar y gweill ac roedd Berlin wedi'i hamgylchynu gan diriogaeth dan reolaeth Rwsia. Roedd Sector Prydain yn Berlin wedi'i gysylltu â'r Gorllewin gan un ffordd dan reolaeth lem. Roedd gennym ganolfan adael yn Berlin, gwesty braf iawn. Manteisiwyd ar hyn ac es i â'r teulu i Berlin. Aethom mewn car, a stopiwyd wrth y safle gwarchod i'r ffordd dan reolaeth, lle cawsom ein cofrestru gan rai milwyr Rwsiaidd smart iawn mewn gwisgoedd wedi'u teilwra. Cefais fy nghyfarch, ond yn embaras i mi, ni chaniatawyd i mi gydnabod eu cyfarch. Roedd yn rhywbeth i'w wneud â 'chydabyddiaeth'. Aethom ar daith o amgylch Sector Gorllewin Berlin, gwelsom y Wal Berlin a chymerwyd y plant i'r sw gwych yng Ngorllewin Berlin. Cawsom daith dan reolaeth o amgylch Sector Rwsia hefyd. Aethom trwy 'Checkpoint Charlie' a cawsom olygfa dda iawn o Gât Brandenburg, ymhlith llawer o olygfeydd eraill. Rwy'n cofio pa mor lân a chlyfar oedd yr ardaloedd cafodd ni caniatad eu gweld. Diddorol.

Yn ôl i'r DU

Nesaf, cefais fy bostio i'r Depo Arfau Ordnans mawr iawn yn Kineton, a oedd wedi'i leoli ar safle Brwydr Edgehill ym 1642. Roeddwn i'n Swyddog yn Rheoli'r Milwyr. Roedd y milwyr i gyd yn arbenigwyr ar arfau a oedd yn gofalu am arfau ar gyfer eu dosbarthu dros ledled y byd.

Fy swydd nesaf oedd yn ôl i'r Depo Arfau Ordnans yn Chilwell, fel Uwchgaptan yn rheoli un o'r is-ddepoau, gyda staff sifiliaid ac ychydig o filwyr. Tua'r adeg hon, prynais i a fy ngwraig ein tŷ ein hunain yn Long Eaton, ger Chilwell. Roedd yn Dŷ Edwardaidd hardd a oedd unwaith yn eiddo i un o deuluoedd tybaco mawr yn Nottingham.

Fy swydd olaf oedd i'r Depo Arfau Ordnans Canolog (COD) yn Donnington yn Swydd Amwythig. Cefais fy nychafu i fod yn Is-gyrnol fel Prif Swyddog Gweinyddol y depo ac ar yr adeg hon, fe wnaethom werthu ein tŷ yn Long Eaton a phrynu hen ffermdy yng Nghymru, ar lannau Aber Afon Dyfi, ger Machynlleth. Am ddwy flynedd, roeddwn i'n teithio o gwaith i Gymru ar bob penwythnos posibl, nes i mi ymddeol ym 1981.

Ymddeoliad

Cyn gadael y Fyddin, wnes I cwblhau gwrs ymddeol chwe wythnos mewn coleg amaethyddol yn y De. Un peth wnes I ddysgu ar y cwrs hwnnw oedd peidio byth â bod yn ffermwr! Ar ôl deugain a dwy flynedd rydym yn dal i fyw ar ein fferm ar lan Aber Afon Dyfi ac wir wedi setlo'n yma yng Nghymru hardd. Yn enwedig rydym yn mwynhau'r pysgota ar ein stepen drws ac ym Mae Aberteifi, oddi ar Aberystwyth!

Mae'r adroddiad naratif hwn o Wasanaeth Cenedlaethol i'w gael yng nghanasgliad Gwasanaeth Cenedlaethol Peter Latham yn Archif Cyn-filwyr Gorllewin Cymru, gwefan Casgliad y Werin Cymru.

Mae pob hawl, gan gynnwys hawliau cyhoeddi i'r erthygl hon, yn perthyn i Peter Latham, neu ei fuddiolwr uniongyrchol pe bai'n marw.

Mae hawliau cyhoeddi i ddeunydd gafodd eu defnyddio i gwblhau'r ddogfen hon yn aros gyda'r cyhoeddwr gwreiddiol.



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