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Date of interview: 1st December 2025

Location: Glanamman, Carmarthenshire

Interviewer: Jessica Davies

Camera: Neil Davies / Hugh Morgan

Vyron Aneurin Thomas

'The Welch Regiment'

1957 to 1959

Glanamman, Carmarthenshire



"I did enjoy it in the army I must say."

Methodology

Vyron's story of National Service in the British Army was gleaned from a visit to his home in Carmarthenshire, and the conversation which took place during this visit. Vyron was 88 years of age at the time of the visit.

The Author has cross-checked Vyron's recollections with additional sources of information in order to create an enhanced picture of his National Service experience.

The interview with Vyron was recorded on film.

The Author has summarized some of the conversation from the interview, where Vyron is quoted in this narrative.

Background

Born in Garnswllt, a small village on the border of Swansea and Carmarthenshire in November 1936, Vyron was raised by his parents along with his sister and brother. He had a happy childhood growing up in the village and especially enjoyed helping out in the garden. His father worked in the coal mines and Vyron remembers having to help him out of his dirty clothes when he got home from work. His father struggled with his health and suffered with a bad chest. This may have been connected to coal mining.

Vyron attended the Welsh language primary school in the village. As he grew older, he moved on to secondary school. It is likely that this was Pontarddulais Secondary Modern School, also known as Pontarddulais Senior Mixed School. It closed in 1973. Vyron remembers the school was on the top of a hill and the school bus would drop them off at the bottom each morning. Vyron, his brother and sister had to climb the hill up to the school each morning.

Speaking about his time at school, Vyron makes the point,

"Well, you had to go whether you enjoyed it or not. So that was that really".

He notes that sometimes you would get a "...Clipsen" (a smack) from teachers, a sign of the times perhaps. Being a small town, Vyron recalls

"You would know everyone at the school."

The pupils all came from the surrounding areas. He enjoyed playing rugby in his spare time and played for his school team. He didn't have a specific position.

"Well, you'd played a little bit of everything!"

After leaving school, he began a plumbing apprenticeship and attended Ammanford college. The pay wasn't the best, but once he'd passed his exams and received his plumbing qualifications, Vyron raised his fees and started to work independently.

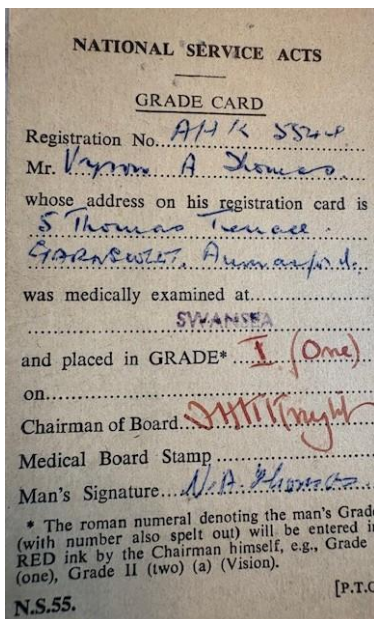


The Plumbing apprenticeship licence issued to Vyron on 11th Oct 1954, confirming he has entered an apprenticeship

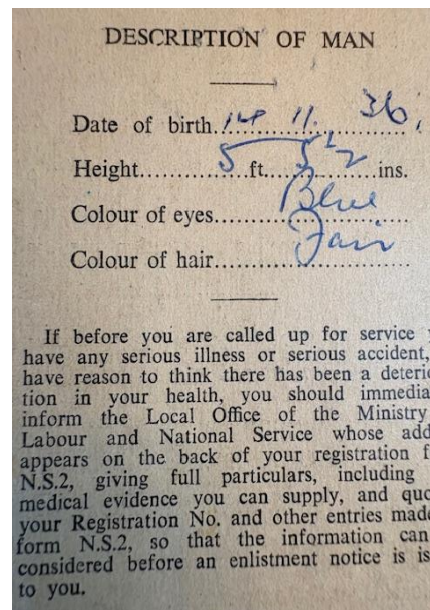
Before he was conscripted for National Service, Vyron met his future wife, Rosemary. They were introduced at the chapel in Ammanford. It was an important tradition for both Vyron and Rosemary's families to attend the Sunday service at the chapel. Following the service, families would often chat with each other, and this was how Vyron and Rosemary were first introduced, aged just 15 and 16.

In the early days of their relationship Vyron remembers arranging to meet Rosemary in Ammanford after work. However, he often had to work overtime and was not able to notify Rosemary that he'd be late. These were the days before mobile phones, where you would have to arrange to meet someone ahead of time and just hope that they turned up!

Then the call up for the Army came...



Vyron has kept these two documents, which were issued to him on passing the medical.



National Service

Vyron was called up for National Service in 1957, aged 20. He explains that because of the plumbing apprenticeship, he was able to defer conscription until he had completed his apprenticeship.

“Then as soon as you finished, there was a letter through your door.”

Another fact he recalls is that before he was called up, his workmate and friend Einion Anthony, also from Ammanford, was conscripted into the Army. Einion was two years older than him. Einion would often call by Vyron’s house on a motorbike and take him for a ride. Vyron recalls one particular Sunday, when Einion collected Vyron and they went for a ride to Cardigan. Upon their return, Einion said goodbye, and left to join the Army.

“I had to do the plumbing work by myself after that.”

Vyron remembers his boss would sometimes come and see him and give him “enough work to last a month!”

He explains that in 1957 National Service was beginning to wind down. However, many National Service recruits were being sent overseas to places such as Cyprus, Egypt and Malaysia. He remembers Einion joined a different regiment and was posted to Germany.

After Einion completed National Service, he re-joined the plumbing company. The friends seemed to swap places. Vyron was called up, just as Einion rejoined the firm. Two years later and....

“When I came out of the army, Einion was still working there”.

Vyron’s conscription came as no surprise.

“I knew people that had already gone, the whole village had been called up”.

Because Vyron’s call up was delayed, by the time he joined the Army, many of his friends had already undertaken National Service. This fact didn’t faze him.

“I wasn’t annoyed that I got the call. I must say I did enjoy myself in the army. We had lots of fun.”

He was sent to Brecon for the National Service training course. The rugged landscape and difficult terrain of Bannau Brycheiniog is the perfect terrain for training infantry soldiers. Even today, it remains an important infantry training area, where soldiers are exercised and events such as the annual Cambrian Patrol are held. This is a gruelling event hosted by the British Army which sees servicemen compete in teams over a 48-hour, 40-mile course. The event was first launched in 1959, coincidentally the year Vyron would leave the army.

The training course required recruits to complete intensive, high-pressure tasks aimed at transforming recruits from civilians to soldiers. Tasks would include square-bashing, weapon-training, guard-duty and constant inspections of uniform and equipment.

Vyron found comfort that some of his fellow recruits spoke Cymraeg. Recruits had been conscripted from all over Wales, including where Cymraeg was predominantly spoken.

After completing the course, there followed a further period of infantry training at Maindy barracks in Cardiff. Maindy was the headquarters of The Welch Regiment. After completing the infantry training course, Vyron joined the battalion. The 1st and 2nd battalions of the Welch regiment had amalgamated in 1948. Vyron refers to serving with the 1st battalion.



Maindy barracks, Cardiff, where Vyron went after the initial recruit course.

Courtesy of Vale of Glamorgan libraries on PCW

The battalion had deployed to Cyprus in October 1957. This meant Vyron would travel separately to join up with it and experience foreign travel for the first time. He remembers being sent to a camp near Worcester in England, in preparation for overseas travel. It was likely to have been a transit camp, where servicemen were kitted out and organized into some form of ships manifest, before being conveyed to departure ports.

Indeed, he recalls that it was from this camp that they travelled to embark on a troop ship, bound for the Mediterranean. Vyron and his batch of recruits were the first to arrive onboard and had to help prepare the ship for the rest of the passengers. He also remembers that the ships manifest included soldiers from different army regiments, and some RAF airmen as well.



Vyron was a keen Rugby player at school and went on to enjoy representing D company, The Welch Regiment

The Voyage to Cyprus

Throughout the 1950's British Army troops were generally conveyed across the world by troop ship. There were several ships in the Merchant Marine fleet that were contracted by the Ministry of Transport to convey British service personnel to various destinations in the middle and far east. Some could carry in excess of 1500 troops and generally sailed from home ports at Tilbury, Southampton or Liverpool. On Vyron's voyage to Cyprus, he celebrated his 21st birthday. This birthday suggests that Vyron was somewhere at sea on 14th November 1957. Celebrating such a significant birthday on a troopship at sea was certainly a notable experience.

In a twist of fate, the captain of the ship lived just outside Pontardulais and went to school with Vyron's father. The same school that Vyron also attended!

With up to and sometimes over 1500 servicemen aboard the confines of a troop ship, tensions and rivalries often gave rise to confrontation. Vyron recalls,

"There was a lot of fighting on the ship. The Army boys. Some of them would get sent to the cell on the boat."

The scourge of seasickness also prevailed but luckily, Vyron didn't suffer this illness.

Vyron is a little coy about life aboard ship, which provided memories which he'd rather forget! However, he does recall the somewhat cramped sleeping arrangements. Troops slept in bunk beds, also known as 'racks. Some racks contained three bunks, stacked on top of each other.

"The man on the top, the devil, he would pee on them, and it would leak down onto the men on the other beds. I remember jumping up fast. So, I made sure I got a good spot to sleep."

Cyprus

Eventually, having survived the voyage, Vyron disembarked onto an island over 2,000 miles from his beloved Wales. Cyprus covered some 3,500 square miles of sand, beaches, cliffs and mountains. The climate was typically Mediterranean.

In 1957 Cyprus was a British crown colony.

The situation on the island was unstable. A full-scale revolt against British influence had begun in April 1955. It was led in the main by Greek factions, who were committed to an armed struggle. The major resistance was led by the 'EOKA organization'. This was the Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston or 'National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters'. It was a Greek Cypriot nationalist guerrilla organization that fought a campaign for the end of British rule in Cyprus, and union with Greece.

At times there was open conflict between British and EOKA forces, resulting in fatalities and casualties on both sides. In the year before the Welch regiment arrived, British Commanders had launched several daring assaults on EOKA positions in the mountainous regions. These operations achieved success, but at a tragic cost. Nearly

30 British servicemen lost their lives in this period. Despite these successful operations, EOKA demonstrated resilience and continued to launch bombing or shooting attacks on British servicemen. Even the families of married service personnel had to remain wary of the danger posed by EOKA. In addition, elements on the Turkish Cypriot side were actively stirring up tensions between the two communities. As a result of all this, when Vyron arrived, Britain had over 20,000 personnel stationed throughout the island.

The battalion was made up of regular army soldiers and National Servicemen, who served alongside each other with little distinction. Since their arrival a few weeks earlier, the soldiers had acclimatized to the conditions and settled into a routine of patrolling, guarding and reacting to hostile incidents. Vyron had some catching up to do.

After disembarking from the ship, he was trucked to the Welch Regiment camp, which he believes was positioned on the coast, close to Nicosia. In fact, the battalion had troops stationed in three different locations, with the main body of men garrisoned at Kaplica (Dhavlos). This was indeed a coastal region but with access to the mountainous Troodos region. This is probably where Vyron joined the battalion.



Vyron has this photograph of one of his friends Posing outside Company HQ with the standard issue 7.62mm Self Loading Rifle. It offers an excellent insight into the appearance of a soldier from the regiment at the time Vyron served.

Vyron describes setting up home. This was a tent shared with fellow National Serviceman and friend Bernard Peters. Large, tented camps were the norm for infantry soldiers serving a tour of duty in Cyprus. Descriptions of these rudimentary camps have been recorded by many servicemen who served on Cyprus during the emergency. Hot, dusty and very basic, with washing facilities often being provided by the sea, just about summarizes conditions. Indeed, Vyron remembers the tents being very hot and also seeing snakes in and around the camp. The Welsh soldiers made the best of things and Vyron has fond memories of sharing a tent with Bernard.

Vyron had been issued with a uniform "to suit the weather", which was lighter and airier than the one he wore back in the UK. These uniforms were described as 'KD' or Khaki dress. The food in Cyprus was markedly different to what he was accustomed to.

"The first time you have food you think 'what's this food then, because you're used to eating the food back home."

At times, especially when on patrol, the food was a bit of meat and bread, with a sachet of salt that was kept in the soldiers' pockets, to add some flavour. Vyron made good use of the NAAFI canteen, which was in the camp. A good meal could be had in the NAAFI.



A period photograph of a Welch regiment camp at Lefke in Cyprus, at a location known as 'Aberdeen camp'.

Image courtesy of Cyprus cene.com 'Bill Chalky'

When on duty, Vyron was nearly always paired up with Bernard and 2 other soldiers. Vernon thinks they may have been named Siencyn and/or Jenkins. These 4 soldiers regularly patrolled the countryside and routes together, under the command of a battalion NCO or Officer. At other times, the routine could become a little mundane.

There was a camaraderie amongst the soldiers and often spirits were kept up with humour. Bernard and Vyron often played pranks on each other. Especially when one of them was sleeping or during a patrol. Vyron remembers that Bernard put things in his bed or in his trousers to give him a fright, when he either woke up or climbed into bed exhausted. The favour was returned in kind and the fun continued.

"I'd do the same to him, it was a bit of fun."

There is an account documented by a Major Bob Smith in "[The Men of Harlech The Regimental Journal of the Welch Regiment](#)" which provides an excellent insight into life in Cyprus for the Welsh soldier.

'The task of the 1st Battalion The Welch Regiment in those days of the 'mid fifties' was to keep order among the Greek Cypriots who wanted union with Greece, and to act as a buffer between them and the Turkish Cypriots who, on frequent occasions, would get quite annoyed with the Greeks for upsetting their quiet lifestyle.

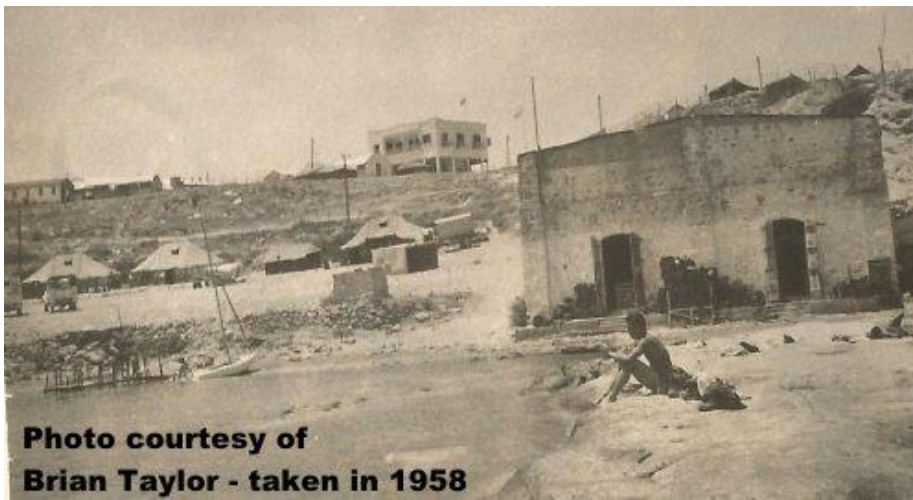
When we were not chasing gangs of Greek Cypriot 'EOKA' 'Freedom Fighters' around the pine clad mountains or waiting in ambush positions on known 'bandit runs', there were plenty of opportunities for enjoying ourselves.'



A photograph of Welch regiment soldiers in Cyprus circa 1958.

Image courtesy of Cyprus cene.com
'Bill Chalky White'

The soldiers could apply for authorisation to take “local leave”. The Officer Commanding would allow them to leave the camp and visit the local area. Vyron remembers the soldiers taking turns to have leave, on a rota system. Only a certain number of soldiers were allowed to be on leave at any given time.



**Photo courtesy of
Brian Taylor - taken in 1958**

A photograph taken at the Welch regiment encampment on the coast at Kaplica.

Image courtesy of Cyprus cene.com

The 7th October 1958 was to become a day that would remain etched into Vyron’s memory. It was a sad and traumatic day that would remind the young Welshmen of the dangers faced by British soldiers garrisoned on the island. The Welch regiment had been in Cyprus for nearly 12 months. Vyron shares his memories of the day.

Something had happened overnight and the battalion was busier than usual. The soldiers were having to turn down requests for routine jobs. One job that arose, was to collect a soldier from a location and drive him back his to camp. However, there wasn’t a soldier on duty who was free until the next morning.

“There’s no-one here to pick you up, we’re so busy”.

Bernard was off duty at the time, but as was his nature, he offered to help. Vyron explains what developed.

An NCO commented.

“Don’t worry, Bernard Peters has volunteered to do your job for you, and you’ll have to do his job back afterward.”

This seemed a reasonable solution to the problem, as the soldier was anxious to return.

“ Okay, fair enough.”

Vyron’s position on the mountain gave him a view over the valley. He looked over, as the truck driven by his friend Bernard left the camp. Bernard made his way along the road. Suddenly Vyron saw an explosion and the truck was hit.

“I was up on the mountain, watching the boys leave. Then the lorry went over a bridge, and it went ‘boom’ up like that. Bernard was killed. He was the only one to die. There were two other boys there, in the back. One was deaf for the rest of his life and the other injured his legs.”

Bernard had unwittingly driven over a hidden land mine, which detonated as the heavy truck triggered its detonator. Bernard died at the scene.*

The Officers gathered patrols together and briefed the troops, before sending them out in trucks and on foot in search of the attackers. Vyron remembers the search was extensive and the soldiers travelled for many hours across a rugged landscape. He recalls the fear he felt at the time.

“You didn’t know where any of these terrorists were.”

Bernard’s death had a profound effect upon the Welsh soldiers and Vyron in particular. The grief of losing such a close friend and companion was hard to bear, but the whole battalion was both frustrated and upset.

“The whole regiment went berserk. You just couldn’t do anything about it.”

Vyron found the remainder of the tour a struggle but managed to keep things together and perform his duties as best he could. The battalion’s tour of duty of Cyprus ended shortly after this tragedy.

*There are two conflicting accounts of Bernard’s death recorded but both indicate that the incident occurred on 7th October 1958 as a result of hostile activity by EOKA Terrorists. One account mentions an ambush at Ardhana, in the mountainous region around 10km from Kaplica and the other a landmine explosion. Vyron’s firsthand account of the incident offers confirmation that both accounts have credence. Indeed, a landmine detonation is often referred to by authors as an ambush. Bernard was originally buried in the British military cemetery in Cyprus, but his body was eventually repatriated and now lies in his hometown of Llanelli in South Wales.

Libya

Having declared independence in 1951, Libya was a relatively new country when, in 1959 The Welch Regiment arrived. Given the post war presence of Britain, in both military and civilian terms, there continued to be a lot of British influence in the country. The UK government was supporting the legitimate King, who was building Libya’s own independent armed forces, and increasing the development of its oil industry. The aim was to enable Libya to become fully self-sufficient, at which point British forces would

then leave. As it was, the British Army presence in Libya was being gradually reduced. When the Welch regiment arrived, there was about 4,500 troops in country.

It was widely accepted that the battalion had performed well during its tour of duty in Cyprus. However, there was to be no immediate homecoming. Instead, Britain needed 'boots on the ground' to support its aims in Libya and to maintain friendly relations with an increasingly oil rich nation. So, another 'peacekeeping' tour was ahead in a hot and dusty environment lay ahead for the Welch soldiers. Libya was in fact, to prove altogether hotter and dustier than Cyprus. Vyron and his companions were destined to endure a tough few months in the desert.



A map of Libya, with Benghazi located on the far right. The Welch Regiment set up HQ here in 1959.

Image courtesy of Wikipedia

The battalion's headquarters was established in Benghazi, and small detachments of soldiers were deployed to various locations within the region. Smaller camps were established at Derna, Marj and El Adm.

The soldier's main role was again patrolling urban and rural areas, as well as guarding essential infrastructure and tactical positions. This often meant long hours in desert conditions, where the heat and sand proved a real challenge. In short, this wasn't a country that Vyron enjoyed.



Vyron posing in front of a Bedford 4 tonne truck. Note the light colour of the truck which would indicate a desert theme. This photo was believed to have been taken in Libya in 1959.

He describes the experience in Libya one short sentence.

“It was awful”.

However, he knuckled down and did his duty. In fact, he must have done very well, as Vyron was promoted to Corporal. Time soon passed and his period of National Service came to an end. This coincided with the end of the battalion’s deployment in Libya.

In October 1959 the Welch regiment travelled back to the UK and returned home to Maindy barracks, Cardiff. Vyron said farewell to his friends and companions and left the Army having completed the full mandatory 2 years’ service.



An incredibly smart Corporal Vyron Thomas on the left, posing with a friend in the dusty camp at Libya.

Back to ‘Civvy street’

Vyron officially left the army in October 1959. When he returned home to Glanamman, his old job at the plumbing company was ready for him to pick up where he left off.

Throughout his time in the Army, Vyron had maintained regular contact with Rosemary. They regularly exchanged letters. Vyron would tell Rosemary about Cyprus and Libya,

whilst Rosemary would share news from back home. After returning to Glanamman Vyron wasted no time and 6 months after returning home he married Rosemary.

Later in life, he unfortunately experienced a protracted period of ill health. This forced him into early retirement.

Vyron had mixed feelings about his return to civvy life.

“I did enjoy it in the army I have to say. But I had an awful time with the Libyans, and of course what happened before that with Bernard.”

Vyron and Rosemary have lived a long and happy life together. In April 2025 they celebrated an incredible 65 years of married life. The happy couple are proud parents to four children, Susan, Jennifer, Meryl and their late son Alun.

Footnote

This narrative account, accompanied by a video recording of the interview and some of Vyron's photographs, is located in the Vyron Thomas collection at 'The Heritage Lottery Fund National Service collection' on the West Wales Veterans Archive, housed in 'The Peoples Collection Wales' website.

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- Walesonline
- Wikipedia
- ww1.wales/post-ww2-war-memorials
- National Army Museum
- military-history.fandom.com
- [cyprus scene.com](http://cyprus-scene.com)



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