

David Waite (1935-)
National Service 1954-56
British Army

Interview Date: 19.2.26

Location: Haverfordwest

Interviewer's: Hugh Morgan and Neil Davies

Camerman: Neil Davies

Introduction

David Waite was born in Newport, Gwent, in September 1935 and David's collection for the Age Cymru Dyfed's Heritage Lottery funded National Service project includes filmed interview, photographs and written description.

World War 2

World War 2 broke out on 3rd September 1939 when David was just four years old. His father worked in Newport Docks in a reserved occupation.

The Luftwaffe bombing of nearby Newport and Cardiff Docks and also attacks on the rail marshalling yard in Maesglas, located just a short distance from where the Waite family lived, was not an uncommon occurrence. David recalls that the disruption caused by the bombing to be part of the routine of daily life.

David's earliest recollection of World War 2 occurred when an incendiary bomb came down nearby, causing what he describes as a "*kerfuffle*", setting fire to a roof and cascading onto the road. He remembers ARP wardens equipped with stirrup pumps extinguishing the flames from the incendiary bomb.

In the garden of their house David's father constructed an Anderson Shelter, and he recalls having been taken by his father into the shelter when a bomb hit the rail engine sheds, sidings and trucks located just behind Maesglas, causing explosions, fire and considerable damage. The Maes Glas shopping precinct nearby was where the Co-op had its windows blown in, with the street in front of the precinct being strewn with cereal. On another occasion a landmine blew up just across the street from the family's house.

From the Spring of 1944, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of American troops piqued the curiosity and excitement of Welsh children and also the child evacuees who had been taken in by families in the area. David vividly remembers American troops arriving by ship in Newport Docks and the rail line which had previously transported coal

from the Valleys was now being used to transport the American troops to the Rhondda, and beyond. David and his friends quickly caught on that trains carrying the American troops made a stop on its journey not far from them. So they made sure to meet the train at the holt, catching chocolate and gum thrown out to them from the carriages by the US troops. He specifically recalls walking up to an American officer and cheekily asking him 'Got any gum, chum' – whereupon he was given sticks of Wrigley's Chewing Gum. David also remembers American troops being billeted in the grounds of Tredegar House with the main house being used as the officer's quarters.

National Service

Aged 15yrs in 1950, David left Crindau Modern Secondary School to work in the Co-op butcher's shop as a "Butcher's Boy". Three years later aged he received a letter instructing him to register at the Labour Exchange for National Service. David was originally due to enter National Service from his birthday in September 1953, but as his mother had sadly died in August, David's entry to the British Army was deferred. He then commenced his National Service on 7th January 1954.

Basic training for David was spent at the Army Catering Training Barrack in Aldershot, before a posting for 'trade-training' as a cook with the 6th Cookery Instructional Unit in Blandford Forum for approximately twelve weeks. Initially David heard that he would be posted to Egypt, which was cancelled and then informed he was going to Germany, which was also cancelled.

Training completed, David was posted to the Worcestershire Regiment located at Norton Barracks, Worcester, spending the next eighteen months of his National Service in 'Norton Camp;' cooking mainly for the Royal Engineers stationed at Norton. At one point David was posted to the British Army Cookery Instructional Unit in Lichfield to undertake an advanced "BII Course," which led to the award of additional grades and therefore a little more pay.

David describes cooking outdoors on the shooting range, using dehydrated potatoes called 'Pomme' and also cooking in the mess at sittings for 600+troops. He remembers on one occasion an egg-fight breaking out between the cooks causing "*a hell of a mess.*" Then Sergeant walked in and the egg fighters fully expected to be put a charge. Instead, the Sergeant thought better of it and ordered them to make the kitchen immaculate in one-hour.

David describes the food prepared the National Service cooks for the troops, as "*basic*" but "*nutritious*" typically consisting of meat with three veg and pudding for the main meal of the day. One advantage which the cooks had above the other troops was they could eat what they wanted, when they wanted.

Demob for David took place on 5th January 1956, narrowly avoiding the British armed forces intervention in the Suez Crisis from July to end of October 1956. Like all demobbed National Servicemen, David immediately transferred to the Reserve and to the 159 Welsh Border Infantry, REME/TA, based at the Territorial Army (TA) Centre, Blain y Pont, Newport. David spent a fortnight training with the TA at the Menai Straits, the stretch of water separating Ynys Mon from Gwynedd. He also recalls four weekends away with the TAs. Interestingly, in his interview David also refers to the “Army Emergency Reserve” which operated alongside the TA’s. This less well-known part of the post-National Service armed forces came about through the [Army Reserve Act, 1950](#) with a limit of 15,000 men to serve in this category who then quickly be called up in an emergency.

Post-National Service David met and married Joan and they had two children and have grandchildren. David was employed for Newport City Council and Joan became a social worker. Now both retired, David and Joan continue to live in Newport.

Today, looking back some 70yrs, David sums up his experience of National Service *“Wouldn’t have missed it for the world!”*



Norton Barracks 1955. David was stationed in nearby in Norton Camp, catering for the Royal Engineers and Worcestershire Regiment located in Norton Barracks shown above.