

Vincent Winstanley. British Army Llanfarian, Aberystwyth

West Wales Veterans Archive, National Library of Wales

Date of interview: 6.11.19. Llanfarian

Description

Born in Liverpool during WW2, Vincent Winstanley joined the British Army, Royal Medical Corp, in January 1961 aged 19yrs, serving as an Operating Theatre Technician (OTT) leaving the Army in 1982. He continued his career in the NHS being appointed as the manager of the first Theatre Sterile Supply Unit (TSSU) for the Westminster Group of Hospitals. Vince was appointed to other senior roles in the NHS before he retired in 2012. Vince moved to Llanfarian, Aberystwyth with his second wife Brenda, who comes from the area.

Childhood

Vince was born in Liverpool, one of six siblings whose father was a baker. In his early teens his parents moved the family to Saltney near Chester, Liverpool. Vince finished school at 14yrs, leaving home for the first time at 18yrs.

Entry to the Regular Army

In January 1961, 19yr old Vince enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corp (RAMC). Following Basic training and a clerk's course he was posted to the British Military Hospital at Kinrara, Malaya. Following a conversation in the NAAFI bar with one of the theatre staff (OTT) he applied to change trades to train as an OTT Medic. This was accepted and start of a long and interesting career commenced.

The Far East

Early in 1963, Vince was posted to Brunei, where an Indonesian rebellion had 'kicked off'. He was attached to Queen's Own Highlanders for three months as part of their medical cover. Vince recalled that the Medical Officer (MO) had a habit of practicing his bagpipes at all hours and the waling sound could be heard all over the accommodation they shared. There were a lot of Liverpool lads in this Scottish Regiment and coming from Liverpool himself, Vince fitted in well with them.

He recalls that upon arrival he was asked *"where is your weapon?"*

Vince replied *"I don't have one, I am a Medic."*

The forceful reply *"With us you will carry one!"*

He remembers that the jungle and mangrove swamps were so pitch black at night that 'you could hardly see your hand in front of you'. The QOH were jungle-trained, being stationed in Singapore, and knew how to set up their bivouacs whereas Vince didn't have a clue. So,

the first night out on patrol he gave up and lay down on his groundsheet, listening to all the strange 'noises' of the jungle and imagining all the creepy crawly things and could not sleep. The next night, still unable to fix up a bivouac, he was so tired that he just rolled up in his groundsheet and slept soundly.

Finishing in Brunei, Vincent was sent back to the British Military Hospital in Kinrara, near to the Malay capital of Kuala Lumpur to continue his training in theatre. In early 1964 the camp closed and moved to the newly built hospital at Terrendak camp in Malacca which was the base for three different regiments, British, Australian, and New Zealand troops plus all the support corps.

UK and Germany

In late 1964, Vincent was posted back to the UK for the next five years, to the Royal Herbert Hospital, Woolwich, where he married and became a father for the first time. It was during this time at Woolwich that Vincent was involved in setting up the first of many Preset and Sterile instrument sets for theatre in the Army Theatre Sterile Supply Units (TSSU).

Vincent's next posting overseas was to Singapore in 1969, which was cut short due to family health issues, returning to the UK and posted to the Royal Military Hospital at Catterick, Yorkshire.

Promoted to Senior NCO, after two years in Catterick Vincent was then posted to the British Military Hospital in Rinteln in the Lower Saxony region, Germany. He spent the next 6 years in Rinteln before being promoted to Staff Sergeant and posted to BMH Munster. Vincent had been accompanied during his tour to Germany by his wife and young children for most of his career but in 1979 as his eldest son was due to start secondary education he requested and was granted a posting back to the UK. Vincent was posted to the Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital (QEMH) in Woolwich and promoted to Warrant Officer class 2 (WO2). Further promotion to WO1 followed. This was the largest theatre complex the Army ever had and as the Senior Theatre Technician Vincent was responsible for the smooth running of the theatres from a staffing and logistical point. As well as trained staff there were trainees to look after and ensure that they were getting the relevant experience to enable them to become qualified.

Many casualties from the 1982 Falklands War with Argentina were treated in the theatres and he remembers those very full days with pride and empathy for the often severely burned personnel, many from the Sir Galahad. Vincent also recalls the BBC filming a documentary of the treatment of the injured Falklands veterans, with a female member of the BBC production staff turned up dressed as if she was a hippy from the 1960's and she was firmly told to leave the theatre and change.

Post Army Career

By 1982, Vincent had served for 21.5yrs in the British Army and his expertise and experience in Theatres and TSSU found him in demand. He was 'head-hunted' by the Westminster and Chelsea Health Authority to equip, staff and manage the new TSSU servicing the new

theatre suite at the Westminster Hospital. Vince applied for early discharge to take up this post and said goodbye to the Regular Army and move into civilian life.

In 1985, Vincent was appointed to commission and manage the first purpose-built Hospital Sterilising and Disinfection Unit in the Northwest of England based at Leigh infirmary in the Wigan and Leigh Health Authority. This service was extended over time to cover all theatres and departments in the Warrington, Wigan and Leigh Health Authority.

Following external audits by the appropriate authority, the HSDU was the first department to be registered to ISO standard for the manufacture and processing of Medical Devices. During his time in the NHS Vincent was an active member of the Institute of Decontamination Sciences (IDSc).

Vincent Winstanley retired from the NHS and went to work as a handyman in a care home for 4 years before moving to Wales.