

COLCHESTER TO WHERE?

By Ken Warne

5th June 1952, a lovely sunny day, and I am off to join the Army, brown suit and shirt, yellow socks and tie, lattice top brothel creeper shoes, brown of course and my trilby. Down to North Station where I'm going to meet Peter and Denis, schoolmates, we're off to Mytchet to join the RAMC. I'd said my goodbyes to the girlfriend last night.

Got to Mytchet, got out of the train, we were met by a nice Sergeant, who said to me, "who do you think you are, "Arthur English? Take that hat off", but not as polite as that, you know what I mean. Then off to Keogh Barracks for our first two weeks in the Army. Pete, Denis and I were put in the same Barrack room, but we had some odd one's, one bloke kept crying all night, and another one kept messing his pyjamas and hiding them in his locker, it only took a couple of days to sniff that one out, but he also had a problem with marching, he kept swinging both arms together, they tried all sorts to put him right, in the end he vanished, never saw him again.

The first two weeks over we're off to Crookham to get down to serious training, the old spider blocks, Pete and I kept together but Denis was down the corridor. It took a few days to get the hang of the spider, basic training was not too bad apart from the bullshit, marching, PT, learning to be a Medic, field craft, I enjoyed. We used to get the "Sallyann" van at break times, they made a good rock cake, plus a chance to see the local talent. Then the Passing Out Parade marching with the Band, great. Then came the Postings, Colchester Military Hospital, no such luck. No 1 Company, Aldershot, along with Pete and Denis, when we got there it was home for seven days leave.

Life at No 1 was hectic, I was put on Ward 2, Pete got Ward 1, and Denis was upstairs. I enjoyed nursing, working nights was hectic, I was the only one on the ward of forty patients all medical. It was a job in the morning waking them all up to get washed and shaved, giving out washing bowls, bedpans etc. Then giving medication, then helping the day staff give out breakfast. We had a good Cpl Bob Urry from Ipswich. One of the worst times was a Saturday afternoon in September of that year, we were standing on the balcony at the front of the hospital to watch the DH110 of John Derry going through the sound barrier, what we saw was an explosion as he blew up, the wreckage landing on the crowd at he Farnborough Air Show. The next thirty-six hours were hectic, we first had to evacuate all the patients from the downstairs wards and move them upstairs or over to the barracks, then two wards were changed into operating theatres, it was all hands to the pumps. I saw sights that are as fresh in my mind today as they were then. The little boy with a hunk of metal in his stomach, another who had a leg missing and the other hanging off. The entrance hall was a huge A& E centre, we never stopped working until the early hours of Monday morning. The Matron then arranged the relief staff to come in and we were sent home on forty-eight hours leave to try and forget. John Derry, test pilot, his navigator, Mr Anthony Richards and twenty-seven other spectators were killed and seventy-three injured. Another patient I nursed was a man who got sucked into a jet engine, he had 100% burns and only lived two days.

Then it came to posting to Kure, Japan, so off on embarkation leave, when I got home I found my girlfriend going out with a bloke from the RAF, that ended that, but she kept saying sorry, and she would write to me and send me parcels etc, etc, but no way. Then it was back to Crookham transit camp to wait for our move to Southampton, then it came, November 25th "Empire Trooper". First thing to get is bloody guard duty, standing on deck on a cold foggy night, jumping at every sound. We slipped anchor as they say at midnight. Pete had already been posted to Malaya and Denis was on the next ship.

Across the Bay of Biscay, getting a bit rough, by the time we were halfway across the gullies were swimming with vomit and everything else. I was lucky I missed the swabbing details. Then into the Med, past the Rock, lovely weather, fire drill was every other day, for fun we used to have boxing matches, shooting contests, anything to pass the time.

Then into Port Said, I will always remember seeing Woolworth's there. It was fun trying to outbid the bum boats, several bought cold tea passed off as whisky, then down the Red Sea and onto Aden. But before we reached there we had a chap who went berserk, got handcuffed and put in the sickbay, they decided that he needed medical help and he would be ashore at Aden. Guess who was one of those

detailed to take him? Yes me. It was ever so funny, they took his handcuffs off, we put him in the Ambulance and he was off, out the front and away. It's no fun running through the street of Aden on a hot day. We eventually caught him, he had run halfway to the hospital. Then off to the lovely NAFFI.

The next port of call was Colombo, where we were allowed ashore. What an education for young men, everything for sale if you had the money, but it was nice to walk on solid ground. It was there that our posting orders were changed. I was told that me and my party were going to Hong Kong, so off we sailed, the weather was great, but the best sights were the nights, with the "Southern Lights" a wonderful sight as we crossed the Indian Ocean. It was getting near Christmas and our Orders were changed again. We were to get off at Singapore and get further orders when we arrived. Boxing Day and we had arrived. Christmas Day on board, don't remember much, had a few beers and dinner, there we were, Singapore. At Singapore Station we reported to the RTO who said we were going to BMH Kamuting in Perak State, did not mean a thing. We were given a Rifle and five rounds, then onto the train, off we set across the Mollaca Straits and into Malaya, lovely wooden seats, very nice toilets "so private", then guess what? I got guard duty. Sitting on the platform seeing nothing but jungle, you felt as though you could reach out and touch the trees, we had this big monster of a train in front of us to make sure the track was not mined.

At Kuala Lumpur we got off as I thought that was it, no way, we should have stayed put, so we were sent to BMH Kluang for a meal with instructions to catch the night train to Taiping, get to BMH Kluang. The first person I met was Pete sitting outside the cookhouse peeling spuds, he was on Jnakers.

Got the night train that night, no duties, arrived at Taiping Station early Sunday morning, got a truck to BMH Kamunting, met by RSM Alf Mosley, who lined us up for a chat, everybody but me were allocated wards because I was in the printing trade, I was to become the clerk, (Army Logic). Then off to our Basha's my home for the next eighteen months.

I soon settled into my duties, learnt to type, most of my work to start was Part 1 & 11 Orders. After a few weeks I was transferred to the Pay Office as the pay clerk was posted home. I enjoyed the work, me and a civilian Mr Rhamad Sing, a nice Indian Gentleman, we got on well. Soldiers pay one a week, about sixty in total, this included ten QARANC's, then the patients, one hundred and fifty, (including Derek Oliver) more of him later, and about five hundred civilian staff, Amax's, gardeners, Officers Servants, Mess waiter etc. They were paid once a month. Then our Admin Officer decided that I should go to the FARELF at Nee Soon to do a Pay Course for two weeks, Singapore was great, most nights we took a bus into town to visit the



Union Jack Club or visits to the Happy World, Green World, one night we got very brave and decided to visit the "Raffles" Hotel, that was a dead loss, could not get in, I wonder why?

Passed the pay course and back to my unit, hoping for promotion, as the job I was doing should have been done by a Sergeant, no such luck, Capt. Alker said we would soon get an RAPC Sgt. We did Sgt. Southern, he was a right bastard, Mr Sing and I could do nothing right, we had never has any mistakes on the payroll returns to FARELF HQ until he arrived, we complained to Capt Alder about him but no use. All he kept on about was his famous sister, Vicki Southern who was a singer, so I said "so was the sewing machine", he was not very popular with anyone.



One of the great things was that we played plenty of sport. It used to seem funny going to the Gaurdroom to get a sten gun or rifle to take to play cricket, also played table tennis, we used to go to the Rehabilitation centres and play the bandits, they were great players we did not beat them very often. I enjoyed sport I was in the Cricket Team, Captain of the Table Tennis team, and in my spare time went down to the Lido for swimming, but every Wednesday afternoon we would go to the Jungle pool for a swim. Went there one day and guess what, there was Dennis, he was posted just down the road from me at 19th Field Ambulance, so we met up quiet often

It was about this time that I got an ingrown toenail, they decided to operate, that was when my problems



started, it went septic, so they put my big toe in plaster, this also went around my foot. After a few days I began to smell, under the plaster the foot had two big ulcers, also I got a fever which meant I was getting ice cold wash downs every hour, this in turn went to impetigo. After about a month they decided to send me to the Eastern Hotel Change of Air Station, Cameron Highlands for convalescence, that was alright until I hooked a black mamba out of the brush whilst playing mini golf, within an hour the impetigo had broken out and I was back in

the Cameron Highlands Hospital.

After a couple of weeks I returned to my Unit, my boss Capt. Alker decided to use me as a freelance, as I still had impetigo. So I went to work in the Pharmacy, that was a good, used to make my own hair cream, and suntan oil, also had the job of stocking up the local PAC's with you know what. We used to unload the stores for the Pharmacy at Taiping Station, certain items used to get diverted to the Medical Halls in town, this was a nice little earner, but attracted the attention of the S.I.B, who thought the stores were being stolen on route, we assisted in their investigation, as one would.

It was about this time that we started to get a lot of soldiers coming into hospital with the 'clap', so it was decided that I should go with the MP's down to the Taping Lake Gardens, as this is where all the Soldiers seem to have caught it. In the gardens was a prostitute called 'Taping Lill', but she was not the cause of the outbreak, she was a prostitute when the British, then the Japanese, and then the British again occupied Malaya. She was very popular, a dollar a time, or



if you had no money, pay next time. It was decided she would be best one to talk to, when we got there the queue of eight blokes long, which we had to interrupt, what we got called is not printable, (the RMP's never took any action over Lill). We had a chat with her and told her about the problems we were having, she told us of a woman operating on the other side of the park, we found the woman, she was a Chinese nurse, so we took her in and called the Malayan Police. In

all the time I was in this job there was never any records of anyone having caught anything off 'Lill', she was very clean.

Now a little about Derek Oliver (Branch Social Secretary), he was in hospital when I met up with him, he decided that he would like to go down town one night, he said he wanted to go to the pictures and he needed to borrow a uniform. So he escaped from the hospital and came over to my Barrack room and I fitted him up, now I weighed 8st. 7lb, Derek about 10st. and so it was a bit of a tight fit, but he was happy and off he went.

I was now due leave so off I went to the 'Sandycroft' Leave Centre, Penang, for two weeks, that was a great time, swimming, sightseeing, and everything else that was on offer. Some of the blokes used to book into the Leave Centre, then go into town and rent a Lady for two weeks. She was paid the same rate as Sandycroft cost, but you lived with her, she fed you and took you sightseeing, and the usual nookie, after two weeks if there was any money left she used to give it back. To them it was just like a job. A Cpl. In the Dental Corps did this, and guess what I met him one day in Colchester, he'd been posted here, and he had married his lady, do you know what he ignored me, I wonder why, we used to be mates at one time. Then back to Taiping, but not for long, Capt. Alker asked me if I would like to be posted back to 'Sandycroft' for a month as Medical Orderly in the First Aid Station, this was situated on the beach, my hours were 9am to 12noon and 1600 to 1800 hrs. During that month I only had one patient, a sailor who got stung by a string ray and I sent him to Butterworth MRS for treatment.

After my return to unit (RTU), I did a variety of jobs and a lot of on call work, Duty Clerk, Fire Picket, Guard, I got a lot of calls whilst on Duty Clerk. Soldiers getting shot and killed meant I had to type out signals, one night three Gurkhas got killed, the rest of the platoon ignored the Officers and spent two weeks in the jungle hunting the Bandits, it was said this lot was lead by Chin Peng, but they never caught anyone, all they got was a load of trouble when they returned to their unit.

It was about three months to coming home that I had to go to the Cameron Highlands with 'C' Coy Special Services to collect four of their mates who had been killed, they misjudged the distance to the ground after landing in the tree tops and dropped about fifty feet, their bones were impacted, by the time we got back to Kamunting they were full of maggots and we had to hose them down. I assisted with the post mortem's a job I had done many times before. We used to get free beer if we helped; after the PM's carried out they were buried in Taiping Military Cemetery. (This disaster was mentioned in Johnny Hooper's book 'One of the Originals')

We now had a new CSM he was a pratt, his name was Blaze, he came from Colchester Military Hospital, he should have stayed there because I has an easy role no parades etc, and only wore flip flops because of my impetigo, and he did not like that. Also I was doing a lot of work for Capt. Alker, doing the accounts, dishing out medals (Queen's Coronation Medal), we were allocated six, the CO got one, Capt Alker, the Matron , my mate George Hardy and Ann Philips QARANC, and me. The CSM did not like that, but he was too late. But he did get me two weeks before I came home. I got back late from town (after curfew) and drunk, I got seven days which was a bit awkward as Capt. Alker had booked a night out in town for my farewell party, but he told the CSM that he party would go ahead and he was not to interfere. So off we went, why are all the best Chinese Restaurants always in the out of bounds part of town? Had a great party until 0020hrs, the MP's decided to pay a visit. Out of bounds and after curfew, I shall never forget Capt. Alker's immortal words that night, he stood up and said my name is Alker, Capt. Alker and this is a party for Warne who is going home, he is my friend who I shall miss very much, the MP's said 'right sir, we will be back in 15 minutes, perhaps you could be gone'. We were.

Then it was off on the journey home, meet up with Dennis at Taiping Station and at Kuala Lumpur we met up with Pete, then on to Singapore to board the HMT Lancashire, what a tub. On the way back we called into Ceylon and parked next to the Royal Yacht, it was bigger than us, did not see the Queen. Coming through the Suez Canal and into the Med we listened to Blackpool and Bolton playing in the FA Cup Final, we got into the Med and a storm blew up, fish and ships on the menu that night. It got rough, we had a tanker stay with us for three days, we were like a cork in a dishwasher, but the Bay of Biscay was like a sheet of glass. Then up the Irish Sea to Liverpool.

We got onto the Troop Train for London and near London the train caught fire, it was the guards van with all our gear in, so we got to London with just a kitbag. It was decided that we would spend the night in Goodge Street Station, this was used as a transit depot, it was situated in the bowls of the earth we had to carry our kitbags down a very long spiral staircase. The bed was a straw paillasse after dumping our kit, it was off to see the sights of London and a few beers, when we got back and laid on our beds we had to put up with the beds shaking and the noise of trains running, and the beds were full of bed bugs, we were bitten to hell, we had red lumps all over us. We got back to Crockham and then Demob. When I got home everything seemed so small, the roads looked narrow.

Pete and I agreed to meet and do a tour of the town in our uniforms, with our Malayan flashes on, then I spotted the menace (my old girlfriend) who found out my address in Malaya and kept writing to me vowing unending love. She even told the girls in Woolworth's where she worked that she was going to marry me, so we dodged into the Corn Exchange, it was roller skating

night. I met an old friend who worked at Rose's the Calendar Factory, where I worked and she was talking to a pretty girl. When Pete and I left I said to him I'm going to marry that girl, he said you did not even speak to her. But I met her later and we did eventually get married. In 2005 it will be 50 years, but in the meantime I was posted to Braintree for my 3 ½ years TA service, when I got there 20th May 1954 the Chief Clerk said to me we do not need Medic's so I signed on and became a Royal Engineer.

This is an email received regarding the above story and feel it courteous to include it

I am perhaps nearing the last years of my life and find it necessary to make some corrections to Ken Warne's story of his National Service as I am the "right bastard" Sgt. Southern to whom he refers.

Some factual corrections:

There were not a lot of unit pay sergeants available so they were allocated where they were most needed. Our training took 13 months. BMH Kamunting had well over 100 errors in pay in 6 months and I was rerouted there, thankfully, from Korea. My instructions were to avoid the use of the staff who had been handling pay for the hospital staff and patients. That is why Warne and Mr Singh were moved to other posts. Whether "anyone" liked me or not was not the point - I was a regular soldier and there to do a job. My duties extended far beyond this unit as I had audit and fraud investigation duties through Malaya, under the Command paymaster. The adjutant was Capt. Alkers, not Alker or Alders.

I have no sister Vicki, my only sister died in infancy of diphtheria. I used to sing and I suppose Warne and his mates thought it clever to call me Vicki, my name is Victor.