

## Thoughts from Tiny Clemo (Part 1)

1 February 1961 to 1 February 1981

In 1960 The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland announced the formation of three new Regiments, Rhodesian Light Infantry, SAS and Selous Scouts (Armoured Cars). Recruit training was to be done at Brady Barracks in Bulawayo and then RLI would move to their new Barracks in Salisbury and the SAS and Selous Scouts to their new barracks in Ndola, Northern Rhodesia.

In January 1961 I went to the Recruiting Office at the back of Army Headquarters and after having a medical at the KGVH hospital I was found to be fit and I signed the dotted line on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1961 (Army No 1956). A few days later I caught the train to Bulawayo and was picked up at the station by a WW2 QL truck and taken to No 1 Training Unit at Brady Barracks. On arrival at Brady we were issued eating utensils and sent to the kitchen for breakfast. Then we went to the CQMS Stores issued with bedding and sent to C Company lines to find a bed space.

When No 1 Training Unit was formed they started with A Company and as they filled up a new company was formed. I was sent to C Company and there was a big batch of recruits from the UK and South Africa who had just arrived with a smaller contingent from Rhodesia .

There were virtually no Corporals and the Sergeants were mostly from the UK, South Africa and the Staff Corp. The one Sergeant that I will always remember was Sgt Jock Tran from one of the Scottish Regiments who were seconded to us. We were fascinated with his tartan trousers and he was a short man but with a booming voice and had to learn what he was saying using his thick Scottish brogue. In addition to him we had a number of sergeants from the British Army Guards Battalions.

Our C Company Commander was Major Dudely Coventry, CSM Bert Brookes, and my Platoon Commander was 2 Lt John Pierson and Sgt Birkitt was our Platoon sergeant. At the time I was only 5ft tall and weighed 89lbs and was given the nickname of Tiny which has stuck with me to this day. C Company boasted the tallest man in the battalion Bob Hope and the smallest yours truly.

The following week we were sent out to Llewellyn Barracks where we were issued our kit. I am just thankful that I did school cadets so I was able to blanco webbing, iron my boots to make them smooth and then spit and polish the boots to get a mirror like finish, buff our belt brasses, blanco our belts and starch our KD shorts, longs and bush jackets.

Training started with Drill on part of the old runway and when you have 9 platoons doing drill at the same time it was a bit chaotic. We were issued brand new 7.62 mm SLR's and were trained on the Bren gun and 2in mortar.

The SLR with bayonet fixed was nearly as tall as me and Tom Douglas still today reminds me how I battled to cock the weapon. The one perk I had being the smallest soldier was that when I went to the mess hall for a meal the Mess Sergeant gave me double rations and a pint of milk with every meal.

As a recruit we had to do Guard Duty at the main gate. One of my Saturday night guard duties Mickey Most and his band "The Playboys" from South Africa were playing at the City Hall ( He went on to become one of the biggest music producers in the UK in the 1960's). At about midnight there was a fight at the City Hall between the Army, local civilians and Mickey and his band jumped off the stage and joined in. The MP's went out in the QL vehicles and brought back the drunken soldiers and put them in the cells. When cells were full they put about 6 guys in the garden tool shed and locked the door. I was woken up and told to guard the door with my rifle and bayonet. After a few minutes the guys in the storeroom took the tools stored inside and chopped the door down. Thankfully I knew all the guys as they were from C Company and they said they were going to their beds to sleep.

During our recruit training we had our first battalion route march and we were led by Jock Martin who he played the bag pipes and if memory serves me correctly this was the first time we marched to "The Saints".

After C Company completed recruit training the powers that be decided that the new D Company would become the boys company for all soldiers under the age of 18 years old. At this time the SAS and Selous Scouts were formed and a lot of the newly trained soldiers opted to join the new regiments and recruiting was started again fill the gaps left by the soldiers who joined the new units.

When D Company was formed there was one platoon which had completed their basic recruit training as a result of transferring all the under 18 soldiers moving to D Company and then two platoons which had to do recruit training.

Major Willar was our OC, Capt Tom Davidson 2i/c, CSM Makin, Platoon Commanders 2L/t Wells and 2/Lt Smith Belton, C/Sgt Haslam CQMS and Platoon Sergeants Miles and Kerr.

In July 1961 C and D Companies were sent to do Foot and Mouth patrols in the Gwanda area for about 4 weeks which we found very boring and the high light of that trip was when I turned 17 and Major Willar took me into town to Hardy's Inn (The owners son Billy was in MT in the RLI) for a drink.

When we returned to Brady we were sent to the Congo. As soldiers it was very boring and we did not really understand what was going on. The one good thing that happened was when we went on RR from the border was that we used to go to the Mine clubs and the miners used to put 10 Pound notes on the bar and say to the barman that this was for the soldiers beers.

\*\*I cannot remember too much about the stint at the Congo Border so have included Nigel Ritteys memories he sent me a few years ago

### **Congo Border.**

#### **(Nigel Rittey)**

As happens in Africa the Congo blew up in late 1961 when the Belgians, in their infinite wisdom, pulled out leaving the indigenous population to fight over the prize. They have been fighting ever since.

Katanga, under Moishe Tshombe, decided to break away from the rest of the hooligans, which resulted in chaos. They were fighting God knows who for God knows what reason. The remaining Belgians packed their belongings into their cars and ran for the Northern Rhodesia border to the south bringing with them tales of dreadful atrocities committed not only by the locals but by the oddball and trigger-happy assortment of United Nations forces dumped there to keep the peace.

The brand new RLI was sent to Ndola by land and air and then dispersed into positions at Kipushi, Kasumbalesa, Solwezi, Mwinilunga and a whole lot of other “backside of the universe” places.

The trip by air was made in two beat up old Rhodesian Air Force Canadairs...a sort of DC4 Skymaster with different engines...and a Dak or two. A few Vampires also came up to provide air support against whatever someone might have put in the air. (The Katangese at one stage actually had an aeroplane or two including a Fouga-Magister flown by a mercenary that evidently did wreak a bit havoc amongst its enemies on the ground.)

Some blokes made their way by road from Bulawayo bringing much needed transport and supplies. Initial transport was rented from construction firms on the Copperbelt but, until that was secured, we found ourselves as inmates of a disused Prisoner of War camp alongside Ndola Airport, which had once housed Italians captured during the Second World War. The plumbing was shot and the toilets were little oval shaped holes in the floor of the shower rooms. Some had feet painted on either side to ensure that one’s aim was mostly dead centre. The walls bore the forlorn etchings of those lonely men who had been locked up there nearly 20 years before. Their names, if put on a piece of paper, would have made a good menu selection in a Pizzeria!

The road trips to our destinations were hot, bumpy and very dusty. When we arrived we looked like the contents of a vacuum cleaner bag... sort of moving piles of dust with red-rimmed eyes. After that, the only washing facilities were provided by plunging into nearby rivers, bathing and washing clothes, without soap. There wasn’t any. At this time a tragic accident involving a Bren took the life of Private De Haas who became the RLI’s first operational casualty.

I ended up at the Kasumbalesa Customs post, where, being a Bren gunner, I had to dig my trench on top of one of the giant termite mounds found in the area because our subaltern Lieutenant Bob Davey had read in the good book that your platoon’s Bren had to have a superior field of fire. The authors of this good book had not known that the termites of Northern Rhodesia had made their homes from concrete. I was still digging at the crack of dawn while the other okes had been kipping for hours.

At one point the Katangese had kindly sent us a truckload of their “Simba” beer as a goodwill gesture. Rumour also has it that an approach was made at the time to our top brass who were asked “if perhaps they would consider hiring the regiment out to go and sort out a few of their enemies?”

We patrolled the border by Landrover and often met with the Katangese in their Austin Gypsies. We traded smokes, beers and bits of uniform with them. All this was done in sign language as they spoke no English and we spoke no French.

Screening refugees was a heart-rending affair. We were told of drunken soldiers tearing around Elizabethville spraying machine gun fire at will, looting and raping at random. Some cars carried bullet holes as witness to the horror these unfortunates were leaving behind.

After a few weeks we were pulled back to Kitwe for a couple of weeks R and R. The mining townfolk entertained us royally while we fascinated their daughters. Some got caught a dose of the crabs which resulted in all of us having to endure a "short arm inspection"...why "short arm" I will never know! There were a lot of guys standing on that parade in the middle of the Kitwe showground's with their "shreddies" around their ankles, who were well enough hung to put horses to shame. Fortunately only a few found their courting tackle shaved and painted blue by the "turdstrangers".

The regiment returned to Bulawayo at 30 miles per hour in the trucks and Landrover that had been sent up to support us. We had all grown from the experience...so had our piles!

When we returned from the Border we moved to Cranborne Barracks and all we seemed to do was plant trees and Kikuyu grass, collect tobacco stalks from the tobacco floors to fertilise and kill flies which loved tobacco stalks.

In 1962 the battalion started the first Champion Company competition in the Battalion and there was fierce competition and eventually D Company (Boys Company) won the competition.

The remainder of 1962 we spent our time training doing guard at Pomona Ammunition Depot, exercises at the School of Infantry and doing stints at Kariba which was great as we spent a lot of time fishing.

Towards the end of 1963 the Army of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland had its final parade before the Federation was dissolved at Glamis Stadium in Salisbury. Just prior to this at the end of the year the Battalion had its final exercise at Salisbury South. This was a memorable camp and a lot of beer was consumed. At the end of the year the majority of soldiers left and our strength was reduced to about 130, D Company was dissolved and amalgamated with C Company. The SAS returned from Ndola and moved into D Company lines and half the Selous Scouts Armoured cars were sent to RLI as the unit was disbanded.

1963 the RLI Drill team went to the Rand Easter Show in Johannesburg to do a display and recruit. (The following was written by Nigel Rittey)

Choreographed under the pace-stick of RSM Ron Reid-Daly, this display was lauded by Press and spectators alike. It took weeks of practice and damned hard work both behind the scenes and on the parade ground.

There were two elements to it. The first was a precision display of drill without a word of command from start to finish. The troops in full Greens came in to the stadium straight after the show-jumping events, which was a bit dodgy because of the horse droppings and piles of sawdust. We marched in a single block (80 men) and moved to a set series of manoeuvres timed to a double tap on the base drum. The block split in four different directions followed by further splitting off and the performing of intricate wheels and counter marches. Finally the whole thing got back together as the original "column of klompies" and then exited the stadium to loud cheering.

The Toy Soldiers thing was equally intricate, but here we were all dressed in ridiculous costumes and carrying wooden muskets. Some guys were cavalry, which meant wearing a sort of "horse" made of plywood and hessian as well as a uniform. (They performed in fear of an attack from the rear by the randy stallions quartered around the arena but, fortunately, none were propositioned!)

The highlight came with the firing of cannon that meant we had to fall down onto the grass, flat on our faces one after the other like rows of dominos. A few were unlucky enough to plop straight into the mess left by the show jumpers so, by the time the last display night came round, the red, white and blue uniforms had camouflaged themselves and stank horribly.

Accommodation was provided at the Milner Park show grounds and we were allowed out between shows to wander around the exhibits and fascinate the dollies. Very early on, Reid-Daly declared the fleshpots of nearby Hillbrow and the ice rink were to be off-limits (too many accidents). There were enough fights with Joburg's "Duckies" in the show ground let alone out of it.

The remainder of 1963 and 1964 we were training recruits and getting the battalion up to strength. Towards the end of 1964 six soldiers from RLI were sent to The School of Infantry to attend a Vickers Medium Machine Gun Course. Because we did so well in January 1965 we were sent back to the School on a long drill and weapons Course. At the time there was only one RLI Drill and weapon instructor at the School of Infantry which was Frank Turner (Ex D Company) who had just returned from Pirbright (UK). Our instructors were Robin Tarr, Harry Springer and Frank Turner. This was the start of RLI soldiers being posted into other units within the army.

After we completed the course we were all posted to Llewellyn Barracks as instructors to train National Servicemen. As Corporals most of us ended up as Platoon sergeants and later on became Platoon Commanders.

### **Tiny Clem (Part 3)**

In 1972 I was posted back to RLI and served in Training troop, 2 Commando and Base Group. 1974 I was posted back to Llewellyn where I was a CSM and was then posted to 1 RAR as the RQMS and later became the Quartermaster where I served until I completed my 20 years in 1981.

At the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary it came to me that there are not many of us left who joined in the early 1960's. We are all into our seventies and those that I know who are still alive and attend the meetings are:

Tiny Clemo Woody Williams John Pierson Ian Carswell Mike Loots Charlie Farndell

Yogi bear (Mike Low) Peter Nieuwoudt Derrick Fraser Tom Douglas Nigel Rittey

Jimmy Jameson Gus Mason

I would like to say thank you to the RLI and the very important role Regiment and comrades played in my life. If it was not for this I do not believe I could have had a successful career in the army and then after the army a successful consultant in the fields of Logistics and Manufacturing which resulted in me spending a lot of time all over the world.

I have now been married for 46 years and a few months ago my wife Linda and I were talking and she said that when I went to the bush she never knew if I would come back alive and that she could be left with two small children without a father. This got me thinking that whenever we went to the bush we never gave this a thought and we should be very grateful for the uncomplaining support we got from our wives and girlfriends.

## **Duke of Edinburgh**

In the early 60's the Duke of Edinburgh went to Malawi for a visit, due to security concerns his plane was sent to Salisbury to be parked until he returned to the UK. While the Royal Flight aircraft was parked at New Sarum, some bright spark decided it's safety could not be entrusted to the "blue jobs".

A guard was called for from the RLI. One of the carefully selected soldiers from B Company was a little fellow with a big chip on his shoulder. He was always moaning and blasphemed anything to do with the establishment. George Dearnley probably had trouble living with himself let alone with his peers and had a reputation of always being in trouble. The night was long and he got bored, so he started to do the equivalent of what he probably idly did all the time to the tube trains in his native England...he lovingly carved his name into a panel of the aircraft's undercarriage doors with the point of a bayonet. This resulted in another plane being dispatch to collect the Duke whilst his original plane was repaired.

## **Pets**

Whilst the keeping of pets was generally frowned upon...except by married personnel at their quarters...there were a few informal ones worthy of recall.

## **Skate**

Was a cross Maltese and lived in C Company and 3 Commando. He was a popular dog and used to wander onto the parade square when the RSM (Reid Daly) was on parade. This resulted in Skate being arrested by the RP's and put in the box and then transferred to the SPCA. Chris Strydom who was in MT used to go down to the SPCA and bail him out and bring him back to the barracks.

Urban legend has it that Skate stole the Cheetahs food this resulted in him being allowed to stay in the barracks. The cheetah used to lie in the quadrangle at battalion headquarters and whenever Skate went to battalion Headquarters the Cheetah would stop what he was doing and start tracking Skate for a meal. The Cheetah was tied to a garden table and had enough slack to be able to walk around. Whilst the Cheetah was eating a chicken Skate visited him and then slowly he started to walk around the table just out of reach of the Cheetah until the Cheetah tired himself up and could not get his chicken. Skate casually walked up to the chicken and took it away.

## **Banda**

Banda was a black and white dog who belonged to B Company who was renowned for running into walls. As people were driving around the circle at night and their lights shone on B Company officers Banda used to chase the lights and inevitably was not able to stop in time at the end of the veranda and ran into the wall.