

NORMAN DRAKE

Norman Drake



Norman is in the centre row, sixth from the right

'My call-up papers stated that I should report to Whittington Barracks near Lichfield on 3 December 1959. I was to join the Worcestershire Regiment as Private 23755030 Drake N. As I was Welsh, and Welsh rugby was quite good at that time, I was immediately recruited into the camp rugby team. This was a bonus as it saved me from many tedious marches and cross-country runs. In addition I was also asked to play for Lichfield Town Rugby Club which went down well with my superiors.

Halfway through the 10 weeks' basic training the whole intake was transferred to the Staffordshire Regiment, which meant that, when we had completed the basic training, the regiment was to be posted to Kenya. I was fortunate to be transferred to the Royal Army Educational Corps and was sent to Beaconsfield, the headquarters of the Corps, for a further six-week course. When we completed the course we were all promoted to Sergeants and given our postings. I volunteered to go to Malaya even though it was still under a State of Emergency.

My transfer to Malaya was very interesting as I was to travel by ship. The *SS Nevasa* was a cruise ship and it was with the wives and children of commandos, who were travelling ahead of us on the commando carrier *HMS Bulwark*, that we were to make the journey. An added attraction was that I was invited to join the Entertainment Committee which helped to lighten the nearly four weeks we were at sea. The route took us through the Suez Canal stopping at Aden and Colombo on the way to Singapore.

My posting in Malaya was to Ipoh, close to the Cameron Highlands, a hot-bed of communist terrorists. When the British Government declared that the emergency was over, a large passing-out parade was arranged to take place in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaya. However, it was still felt by the military that the terrorists would attempt a major attack to prove that they were not beaten. The result was that the Ipoh garrison was put on full alert to repel any such attack. Fortunately it never came.

I was then posted to the Army Boys' Trade School at Nee Soon Barracks in Singapore to teach military map reading. It made a pleasant change to teach boys who wanted to learn, compared to the hardened soldiers I had taught in Ipoh. The time in Singapore proved very interesting with little sign of any unrest amongst the population, although there were occasional outbursts. To ensure the safety of the women and children living in married quarters outside the camp, we carried out manoeuvres at night practising their safe removal into the camp.

On Saturday mornings we had the RSM's drill parade. This included all ranks from Sergeants to 1st Lieutenants. For those of us who were quite good at drill it gave us opportunities to impress the RSM, which certainly came in handy from time to time.

Once a year for two weeks the school was moved to an island off Singapore where there was no running water or electricity. As I had been given medical approval for shaving only with an electric razor, I did not shave for the whole two weeks; this photograph was taken during this period. However, as soon as we returned to Nee Soon, the RSM made it very clear, in a one-to-one brief conversation, that I should enter the sergeants' mess only when shaven.



The main event of my stay in Singapore was meeting a young woman called Joy Poole, who subsequently became Mrs Joy Drake.

I returned to the UK and Beaconsfield on 1 September 1961 and was demobbed one week later. I still keep in touch with the Royal Army Educational Corps and am listed in the bi-annual journal *Torch* as the only sergeant retired member.'