
Denis Cook

THIS IS MY LIFE

My first introduction to service life was at the age of fifteen, this was with the N.F.S. (National Fire Service) as a message boy.

During World War II, we were on standby in a hall, at nights, twice per week, to become a line of communication, if all lines were bombed out. That was my first uniform, dark blue trousers, blouse type jacket with the N.F.S. badge on the left pocket, a peak cap and my own bicycle.

My second introduction (after being a pest to my father, who eventually let me leave the farm) was with the Royal Navy as a boy seaman, 15 and a half years old. This uniform was much better as it attracted the younger, opposite sex. Reaching the age of 16-17 years old to the Navy, I was made an Able Seaman and I was then posted to H.M.S. Keats, a frigate, in early 1944.

Keats and Kempthorne were part of a pack of five (I have forgotten the names of the other three) and the group operated from Belfast, Northern Ireland to America, escorting merchant ships bringing supplies to Britain, through the U Boat packs (German Submarines), there were also four other packs doing the same.

This was one of the last stands by the Germans to defeat Britain. In my opinion, the merchant seaman aboard these re-supply ships, did not receive the recognition for their service. They risked their lives more than some serviceman.

After quite a few trips aboard H.M.S. Keats, I requested a transfer to Combined OPS Marine Commando's, because this gave me three pence per day extra for wearing their badge (Tommy Gun-Eagle-Anchor). We did a few funny things. I was in Cherbourg, a big port in France, for a couple of days, looking the place over before the invasion. The same thing had to be done, through the Fjordes, up to Trondjeem in Norway. Then I was discharged and it was back to civilian life. This was in approximately 1948.

I started work with BTH (British Thomson Huston) Rugby, which became a bit of a hassle, reason being, in Britain in World War II, we had conscientious objectors, who would not fight or defend their country. This meant when we returned we had these people as foreman – leading hands, union reps, bosses. To sum it up quickly, it was Canada or Australia, tossed a coin and it was "Australia".

I arrived in Australia in 1956, worked for a while and wasn't happy with the job. I joined the army in November 1957, because there was talk about forming the S.A.S. in Western Australia. I completed a parachute course in 1958 and was posted to the S.A.S. because of past service. I did the entry course, which was a bit of a shock to the system, but I passed.

We were only a coy then. We brought to WA abseiling, cliff climbing, canoeing, night and day unarmed combat, all aspects of specialist training. The powers that be in Canberra said that it would never work, but it did and that is why we now have an SAS regiment, in place of a coy.

A coy has 3 platoons, I was in one of those platoons.
The young officer who was the Platoon Commander, at one time, was Michael Jefferies, the Governor General of Australia – "A real gentleman".

I stayed with the SAS as a Sergeant until 1964. I then transferred to 4 Battalion in South Australia, where a new battalion was just being formed.
When we were at full strength we moved to Malaya, with our families, in 1965.
Malaya was a two year posting and during that time, the confrontation with "Borneo" was still on.

I moved there with the advance party, leaving the family in Malaya and I worked with the "Gurkhas" (who were due to be relieved by four battalion) checking out the areas of operations before the battalion arrived.
We were in Borneo for five months and it was harder to a few others, and myself mentally and physically, than Vietnam.
We had no air support or artillery.

Walk in walk out carrying all we needed. This was in Sarawak Hills. We had no re-supply. While in Malaya, I became the PNR Sergeant and on the request of Lord DeLisle, who presented the colours to the battalion, stated that his regiment in Britain had a PNR Sergeant with a beard.
So I was the first soldier in Australian Army to wear a beard and from then on, every PNR Sergeant has worn a beard.

PNR Sergeants are the explosives experts with a platoon that has also handled mines and destruction of enemy tunnels.
After Borneo-Malaya, we returned to Brisbane, QLD and we were then posted to Vietnam in May for twelve months of 1968/69.
We then returned to Townsville, QLD.
While we were there, I did a course for Warrant Officer, this I passed and I was promoted to C.S.M – Coy Sergeant Major.
We then returned to Vietnam for another twelve months (1971/72), then it was back to Townsville.

I then asked for a transfer to Western Australia and the only posting they had for me was to take charge of the Army Reserve Depot in Albany. The wife's family was in WA so we came here.
We left Townsville by car and we made a holiday of it coming over.
We left the lovely and warm conditions of North Queensland and arrived in Albany in the winter of 1972.
It was wet and cold and we said that after the two year posting we would be out of here. That was in 1972 and we are still here, 31 years later, with no intention of leaving.

I retired from the services in 1978 and bought a home and the wife and I ran the airports flights and freight services, for Skywest Airlines.
We did this for 15 years and now my son in law, Michael Roberts and daughter Leslie run the lot!

(In conclusion retirement was ok, until Digger Cleak, president of the RSL Albany, talked me into organising and setting up the biggest ANZAC parade ever held here. I moved ANZAC day, from York Street to Stirling Terrace and the foreshore, with a lot of help from the City Council. We established ANZAC Park, we had grass grown, I found a large rock which they brought in for me and added a culvert for laying wreaths. The whole parade had me working for approximately 3 months, pacing the ground, measuring up to fit everyone in. On the day of the parade, we had 2,400 people involved in the march, plus spectators, on the foreshore and it turned out to be an absolute success!

I am now retired FOR GOOD!

Denis Cook

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D. Cook".
