

Aged just 22, in early 1956, I received a telegram at my place of work. I thought it was a practical joke at first but with a War Office stamp and my army details on it (number & regiment). My world was suddenly transformed as it read, "Please report within 48 hours to Coopers Lane Camp, CAD Bramley, Hampshire. Railway warrant attached." I went to the nearest pub for a stiff whisky and the landlord said, "Alright mate", upon which I replied, "Look at this." I showed him the telegram and he said, "This one's on me and good luck! I had to explain to my family and tried to answer questions, but the most difficult part was to tell my fiancée, Gladys, that I had been recalled to the army, as we were planning our wedding in September but because of the uncertainty over Suez, our plans had to be cancelled. This was a huge disappointment and put a lot of stress on my fiancée to cancel various appointments and other plans were quickly talked about.

At three pm I strolled into camp, an open camp at first, for the gathering of recalled reservists. Everyone was looking at each other with a "What have I got to do?" type of expression. With no officers or NCOs and all of us in civvies, it looked more like a refugee camp than an army camp. I thought to myself, "How different to my national service in Blackdown, Aldershot." A complete shambles is all I can say, no security, no authority, and being next door to a large ammunition depot such as CAD Bramley was a potential risk given the increasing IRA activity at the time.

After a few days some sort of order was restored and our billeting arrangements were sorted. As more turned up we began to recognise familiar faces from our National Service days, a kind of reunion you might say. I teamed up with my old mate Roy Green, from Birmingham, with whom I spent two years and two lots of army reserve in Scotland together.

Eventually we got into shape but nowhere near the sharpness of our National Service days. Considering the seriousness of the situation a lot of concerns were on my mind. It was obvious that because we were reservists, no regular army personnel took any interest in us. This to me was worrying, and so it proved in the conflicts in Cyprus and Suez we were about to become embroiled in, as we were seen as a private militia.

On home leaves my fiancée and I discussed the worsening situation in the Middle East and we decided to get married in September that year at the registry office to replace our original church wedding plans. The only problem was getting permission from the Commanding Officer, as on returning from leave we were told we were going on 24-hour standbys - destination unknown. The CO, also a reservist, asked what date had been set for the wedding and I told him September 29th. He told me that he would grant a 24-hour pass, and from this quick arrangements were made by telegram back home. The CO stated, "If I have to get you on that boat on a 2-ton truck I'll do it!" At 10.00am Saturday 29 September 1956 at Wednesbury Registry Office, I married Gladys Cresswell. I was back in camp on Sunday and by Wednesday I was on my way to Cyprus, via Malta, on a converted Halifax.

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