

Derek Brookes (as told to Paul Spencer)

Derek was born in Sale, near Manchester, in Cheshire, in 1929.

Much of the town, including Derek's father, worked at the Ford Motor Company factory at Old Trafford. When Derek was about three Ford moved to Dagenham, Essex, not far from London and the family moved too. Derek always considered himself a Londoner as distinct from his native Cheshire.

Always interested in the arts Derek was soon showing his prowess in painting, crafts and literature. He won an all England Writing contest at the Under 9 level – First prize a whopping 20 pounds for Derek and forty for the school. Derek remembers his father as a typical Yorkshire-man – very tight with money and all Derek netted from the prize was a box of toy soldiers and a Boy Scout tent. The rest of the money was spent on giving the whole family a holiday to Jersey and Guernsey in the Channel Isles!



*Derek in "Civvies"*

Ford's was a huge factory employing many thousands of workers – Derek remembers 20,000 as a rough guide. Derek's older brother Richard joined their father at the factory in due course, and later Derek followed the family tradition. His first jobs were on the production line – very boring work for someone of Derek's intellect and he soon found himself in the more prominent role of tool maker. During his holidays Derek remembers cycling throughout England and Wales.

He also loved Ballroom dancing and before long he had met a girl, Maureen, at a local dance who took his fancy and they were duly married. Their first daughter, Janis, was born not long before Derek's call up. (Being a tool maker Derek was exempted from National Service until he turned 21 – three years later than the norm.) Derek's father had been a Sergeant in WWI and his brother

Richard served as sergeant in the Welsh Guards in WWII. In addition his sister Irene served in the ATS. Her battery shone the "V" sign over London on V.E. Night.

Derek's first posting was to the R.E.M.E. (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers). Training was in the Cotswolds – "absolutely bloody freezing at night" Derek remembers. Soon after there was a call for volunteers for the Military Police. At 6 foot 3 Derek was the right height to command respect so he was accepted. He recalls there were three classes – 6 foot three and over,

between 6 foot and 6'3", and between 5 foot 9 and 6 foot.



*In casual uniform*

The training centre was at Woking, just out of London, and Derek's wife and daughter didn't live too far away. Each weekend Derek would "abscond" from the barracks but was always back by Monday morning. This was strictly against orders but his mess mates covered for him and he was able to spend some valued time with his loved ones. The training lasted 6 months.

The training for motor bikes was very difficult with the instructor demanding that all sorts of positions be mastered, including sitting on the bike facing backward, standing on the saddle. Derek and his group were most chuffed when the instructor managed to fall off whilst showing his alleged prowess, showing us how to ride down an almost vertical twenty foot cliff.

Around this time Derek was hospitalised for a while which had a significant consequence – his 6 foot 3 and over class were delegated to be stationed in London. But when Derek returned to duty he was posted with the "also-rans" and dispatched to Egypt!



*Motor Cycle Squad 17*

Posted to Fayid, which was the headquarters of the British army in Egypt, Derek soon realised that nearly all of the locals needed to be treated as enemies. Wires were strung across streets to catch (and sometimes decapitate) British soldiers on motor bikes. Also acid was often thrown into vehicles, at drivers' eyes as they passed. Special protective glasses were worn by the MP's to safeguard against this.

The British area of control was the so called Canal Zone. Any locals caught breaking the law were brought by the MP's before the local Egyptian police boss, Captain Ali, who had been educated in England (at Eton or Harrow) and spoke extremely good English. Derek remembers the Captain as a vicious individual, who used a 12 foot long rhinoceros hide whip and who perhaps knew the best way to command respect from his people.



*In Fayid*

Derek was much taller than most of his fellow MP's and naturally towered over the locals. Also being three years older than the other 18 year old Nasho's meant he usually commanded more respect. In his spare time he learned a bit of the local language as something to do while on all night duty which also proved a real bonus. The 18 year old Nasho's were generally pretty wet behind the ears – didn't understand too much of anything let alone what they were doing in Egypt. Also many hadn't learnt how to handle liquor and the more mature Derek was often the choice for the difficult jobs. He also wrote to Maureen and daughter Janis every night that he was serving overseas.

Derek has a multitude of stories concerning his time in Egypt. I have included the following:

1. The MP's were housed in tents. Local small children would sneak under the tent sides and steal what they could. Derek was soon a wake up to this and placed a wooden base around his tent – end of problem! If caught the children faced severe punishment when brought before Captain Ali. They were usually tied to a chair which was turned upside down exposing the feet, then whipped across the soles until bleeding. Then sent home across the scorching streets and desert.
2. Called out to the British Military Hospital where someone was taking pot shots at the British sentry, Derek was very amused when the sentry confided to him “Thank God they've sent a regular, not a NASHO!” Derek soon showed what NASHO's could do by driving his Land Rover at speed, horn blaring, in the general direction of the firing which stopped immediately. Derek intended to shoot him or run him over but like all cowards, he ran.
3. A local jewellery shop was robbed in Fayid. Derek had the foresight to call in a local tracker who found the hidden heist buried in the desert within minutes. Derek was amazed at the tracker's ability as there was little sign to the normal eye of any track.
4. An Air Force Officer's car was in a minor accident with a local bus. By the time Derek arrived the serviceman's wife and children were in tears, surrounded by the screaming horde of bus passengers and the driver. Derek's imposing presence paid dividends as he ordered all the



passengers back on board the bus and then only had the driver to contend with. The bus was in pretty knocked about condition and Derek said that finding the latest dent was almost mission impossible. So he sent the driver packing and the situation diffused. Derek also told him he would introduce him to Captain Ali if he tried it again.

5. Dog training by the British was pretty cruel. Someone was designated to dress up as an Arab and then beat the dogs across the snout. As a result the dogs took an instant dislike to anyone in Arab dress. Derek once (see picture) was getting on very well with one of the dogs, a great Dane. That is until the handler told him that with one word from him the Dane would be at Derek's throat. The handler claimed that one of the dogs, a boxer, had already killed six. The end of a beautiful friendship.



*With great Dane*

6. Derek and three other MP's were called to a local bar where a private was smashing the place up. The private was sitting at a table with an empty glass face down. This was a signal that if you wanted to fight then you had to turn the glass upright. Derek did so but when the private (sitting down) saw Derek, an MP, towering over him his pluck quickly disappeared and he was led away without incident. There were severe penalties for striking a MP. Rest a hand on one's shoulder and he'd get six months in clink, which involved running around the parade ground carrying a bag of cement.
7. One interesting thing Derek mentioned was that the first round of a gun was never loaded. This was in case an Arab managed to steal a gun from the holster you would have time to accost him before it fired.
8. The MP's kit (buckles, belt and shoes) had to be polished twice daily.
9. Mention has been made of the use of wire strung across the street by the natives. One sad incident saw three locals shot down and killed as they fiddled with a wire atop a pole. Turns out that the particular pole was no longer used and the Arabs had permission to take it.
10. One of the regular jobs was looking for terrorists whose identities were not known to the soldiers. Derek still remembers the fear of kicking in the door of an Arab dwelling (usually made of petrol tins and cardboard) and not knowing if someone with a gun might be ready to fire at you inside. One MP next to Derek once had not put the safety on his Sten gun which went off unexpectedly. Fortunately the weapon was pointed

upwards as otherwise lives could have been lost.

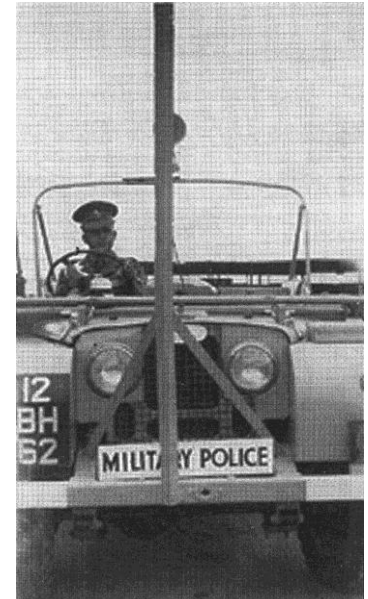
11. Derek's relative poise and maturity as a 21 year old was again highlighted in a riot at Suez Square where two air force families had been surrounded by a screaming, shouting mob. Derek's 18 year old off-sider had said, "How about I fire a shot into the air to frighten them." To which Derek said, "How about you don't. Get the women and children into our truck and we'll get them to safety while I keep watch." Derek got the family out of harm's way keeping his gun levelled at the locals the whole time. A dangerous situation could have become much worse.
12. About 100 Mauritian soldiers had been brought in to supplement the local Egyptian police force. Derek found nearly every one of them stretched along outside a tent at the edge of the desert were two prostitutes were servicing their clients on two sacks a yard apart.- Very sexy! Two regular army MP Corporals arrived and told Derek he could go. Derek realised what they were up to. They took the women back to the cells and had their way with them. One of them contracted a dose from the episode – a just reward.
13. Derek was quite surprised on duty one day when a motorbike being driven by a soldier sped past him. He chased the bike which went straight into the desert and the rider fell off. An embarrassed instructor soon turned up explaining that he was teaching the rider, who couldn't work out how to stop the bike!
14. Another time a staff car passed Derek at speed. Pulled over, the rear window opened and a British General explained that he was running late for a meeting and he took full responsibility for telling his driver to speed. End of story. He actually said. "Sorry corporal, we are running late for a staff meeting."
15. One of Derek's fondest memories was a visit by Field Marshall Montgomery for a meeting. The route from the airport was manned by MPs and the Egyptian police to prevent any trouble. Derek remembers giving Monty his best salute as he passed and Monty acknowledging accordingly.
16. Whilst away the enlistment term was increased from eighteen months to two years which didn't please Derek too much. Perhaps because of having Maureen and daughter in England Derek was given one month's leave. Derek



*The trip home*

thought it was the R.A.F's way of saying thanks for saving three of their officers and wives from serious trouble. He was flown back to England in an R.A.F. aircraft - just the pilot and one other passenger!

17. Being on patrol was a constant danger. Land Rovers were especially fitted with a large triangular wire cutter attached to the front. (See photo). That's Derek behind the wheel. Drivers and passengers wore protective sunglasses as stated. Chains were also hung down from the front of the Land Rovers which were capable of being electrified with a tank booster coil. This was necessary as Arabs would often lay in the path of vehicles to stop them for an ambush. Derek remembers that anybody doing so was thrown about three feet in the air when the shock hit enabling the vehicle to carry on. The driver also had a special prod that could be electrified to keep locals at bay in an emergency.



*With wire cutting bar*

18. *A favourite trick of various enlistees was to book out a vehicle, fill it up then drive out to the desert and siphon some of the petrol off to be sold on the black market. MP's were always looking out for this and Derek pulled one vehicle over. Mileage books were kept so determining this had been the case was not difficult. Asking the driver's name he was told "Brookes". Where are you from in England? "Sale, Cheshire". It was obviously an unknown relation of Derek's so he was sent back to camp to report the incident to his CO. Derek took no action. It looked like it would result in a Court Martial – so he did not want to be involved.*
19. The MP's had an ingenious way to trap speeding vehicles. They set up at three points on a winding road each a couple of hundred yards apart and timed how long it took to pass between the first two points at the speed limit. At the first point the handset was lifted on a telephone when a vehicle passed, lighting Derek's phone at the second point. Derek started a stop watch. When the vehicle passed him if it had been speeding Derek would similarly lift his handset sending a signal to the third MP a few hundred yards further down the road who would stop and book the culprit who generally had no idea how he was found out.
20. One of the things that stood out to Derek was the visit to Egypt of Albert Pierrepoint, the English hangman, who was called to Egypt to hang three British soldiers. Derek remembers everyone at the mess hall

clamouring around, and Pierrepont's fine sense of humour. Derek had the job of clearing the last breakfast plates of the condemned away – something he found very sobering. Pierrepont was back again within a month to administer justice again.

21. Sleeping in tents in the desert saw many problems with scorpions. It was found that by placing a ring of petrol around the scorpions and setting fire to it, they would sting themselves to death.

22. The amount of flies was just extraordinary. Playing darts in the mess ten points were scored if anyone skewered a nominated fly!

23. The Mess Hall named “Wee Run ‘Em Inn” had many of Derek's pictures and paintings adorning the walls. Many visitors were invited to look at the local Art Gallery – all of it Derek's work.



*Wee Run 'em Inn*

24. Many Arabs had wild dogs – named “pyards” - almost all were infected by rabies. A popular off duty occurrence for the officers was to drive along Sweetwater Canal” where these dogs roamed in their hundreds, and take rifle and pistol shots at them. Derek says that the Sweetwater Canal was anything but.

25. Derek will always remember his last night before being sent home. He had never seen so much grog. For most of his tour of duty he hadn't drank much alcohol but on this night he got right royally drunk!

As Derek was preparing to leave he was offered the promotion to Sergeant if he stayed. Derek replied “No thank you sir. I am off home to wife and family.” Derek returned to Maureen and their daughter still living in Ilford just out of London. He returned to Ford and would ride his push bike the five miles to and from the workshops. Derek remembers five straight days of immensely bad fog, perhaps the thickest ever known. Riding his bike to work one day he could just make out the side of the road and thus was able to keep a straight



line. He soon heard a bus behind him and discovered that the bus driver being higher up couldn't see the road at all, so he was following Derek's tail lights along with several other buses and cars. The fog was even worse at knock off and Derek had to push the bike home as it was just too dangerous to do otherwise.

Not long after Derek and Maureen decided to emigrate and finally settled on Australia. Arriving in Perth Derek was told there were no vacancies for skilled tool makers there, but there were vacancies in Melbourne. Having heard about Melbourne's fickle weather Derek and Maureen settled on Adelaide – as it was in the centre of Australia! Derek had several jobs as a tool maker before retiring from Mitsubishi in 1989 as Manager, Quality Control.

Derek joined the RSL on retirement in 1990 and took on the job as Internal Auditor for the Brighton Sub-Branch, a position he held for twenty years. He was awarded Sub-Branch Life Membership in 2010. He is now unable to paint because of problems with his right hand but then turned to bark painting, a skill he learnt at a WEA course. So good has he become that he has won prizes at every Royal Adelaide Show for over twenty years, the vast majority being First Prize. He also has won prizes at the Strathalbyn and Queensland Royal shows. Derek also makes bark jewellery pieces and has sold this and his bark paintings all over the world.

Sadly Maureen passed away suddenly in 2010.



*Derek with some of his works*