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**Date of interview:** July 2025

**Location:** Llanon, Ceredigion

**Interviewer:** Neil Davies

## **Alec James Price**

**Royal Marines**

**1946 to 1957**

**Llanon, Wales**



*“You wanted to do your bit. Although it was the end of the war, at least you’d done a bit of service, national service, you know.”*

## **Methodology**

Alec's story of his service in the Royal Marines was gleaned from a visit to his home in Ceredigion, and the conversation which took place during this visit. Alec was 95 years of age at the time of the visit.

Towards the end of the interview Alec can be heard talking about the National Servicemen that he served alongside, and offers an valuable view of conscripted men serving in an elite corps.

The Author has cross-check checked Alec's recollections with additional sources of information in order to create an enhanced picture of his Royal Marine journey.

The interview with Alec were sound recorded and can be listened to online in the Alec James Price collection at the National Service collection in the West Wales Veterans Archive.

The Author has summarized some of the conversation from the interview, where Alec is quoted in this narrative.

## **Life before National Service**

Alec was born on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1929 in the village of Monge ham near Deal in Kent. His parents went on to have seven children, some of whom served in the military during World War Two. Alec's father has served in the Army during the Great War and suffered a serious head injury. Unfortunately, this injury would eventually tragically result in his life being cut short.

*"I didn't know my father very well. He died as a result of the first world war. He had head injuries, and it took him. My mother was a widow and had seven kids to bring up. She was busy.*

Alec went to school at the nearby village school in Northbourne. He enjoyed being with his friends but never excelled in the school environment.

*" We had all the freedom you wanted. Honestly, you could go anywhere, do anything and no trouble. Happy days. I went to school in Northbourne, a country school. Educational wise, not very clever, so I wouldn't say I had a good education. "*

Given the family circumstances, in 1943 Alec left school aged fourteen years.

*"I was fourteen, o of seven and we broke up in June or July for summer holidays and of course I never went back to school. I went out to work. I was working as a Butchers boy on a bike, delivering bread, delivering meat. Also, in the van. I wasn't driving, I was delivering the stuff to the houses and what have you."*

He had experienced the war on the home front as a teenager in Southeast, England. Travelling about on his bike, he saw the action in the sky and the aftermath of Luftwaffe raids on Deal. So, it was no surprise that he wished to join the military as soon as he

could. Although Alec's small wage was helping to support the family, his mother could see how determined he was and didn't step in his way.

*"She didn't try to stop me. She said your brothers all went in the services. They done their bit and if you want to go in, you go in. That's it, that's what I done."*

*"Deal is a military town. So, they were in the background more or less from day one."*

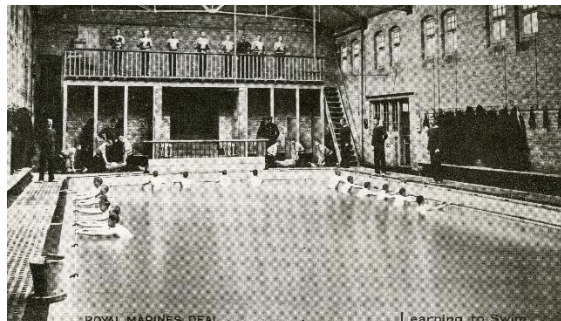
Therefore, although the policy of conscription for military service was being muted about, eventually being adopted in 1947, Alec applied to join the Royal Navy as soon as he turned seventeen. He had set his sights upon the Commandoes and in 1946 was successful in applying to join the Royal Marines.

*"I signed on for twelve and done eleven. Deal is a Marines town. I suddenly got it in my head one day to go around to the barracks and went straight in and signed on."*

### **Military Service**

In his interview, the listener will hear Alec somewhat brush over Commando training, which took place in Deal and on the military training area on Dartmoor in Devon. It is widely accepted that Royal Marine training is one of the toughest courses a new recruit can undertake, and this was certainly true in 1946. Having signed on for 12 years, Alec, a fit and able young man, would be classed as CS Continuous Service. National Servicemen would be classed as NS recruits.

Alec believes that he began his training at Deal in October or November 1946. This would of have been at Deal and Walmer barracks, the Royal Marines depot. The barracks could trace its history back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The buildings held lots of heritage that not only related to the Royal Marines, but various Army regiments and a Royal Navy hospital. Indeed, the Marines occupied the hospital complex as far back as 1869. In 1946, the barracks was used to provide the initial training for CS and NS Royal Marine recruits. This was known as phase one and for Alec would last 12 weeks. He then moved elsewhere to complete the 28-week Commando training course. This is perhaps why Alex mentions spending many hours training on Dartmoor, the Commando element.



Alec was drilled on the parade square and undertook swimming lessons at depot

Whilst undergoing Commando training, the recruits were based at Lypstone, Devon. Alec can also remember undertaking training at Plymouth barracks, which he remembers was referred to as 'Gus' barracks. This was in fact RN Stonehouse, a naval facility that was a divisional headquarters of a Commando division, which operated alongside a further division based at Chatham in Kent. In the course of his service Alec would serve at both divisional headquarters. Both depot remain an important part of the Royal Marines Commando brigade to this day.

Talking about the training, Alec recalls how the recruits helped each other:

*“ You know what it’s like when you get a crowd of blokes together. You all pitch in to make things work. That’s the way that it happened. You all got stuck into what you had to do, and you done it. “*

Perhaps this stoical attitude reflected the determination of post war Britain to put the war years behind them and move on with life. Alec was certainly moving on.

He won the much-coveted Green beret and was soon posted out to join 42 Commando.

*“ I went to 3 Commando brigade, 42 Commando.”*

### Palestine - 42 Commando

42 Commando pronounced four two, had formed in 1943 and its subsequent performance during the war had earned respect. This reputation came at great cost and Alec was joining an elite body of men that were expected to perform to the highest standards on operations all over the world.

In the post war period, the Royal Marines of 42 Commando found itself serving in the middle and far east. It had occupied Hong Kong during 1946 and was redeployed across middle and far eastern command. Individual Marines posted to the command could expect to remain abroad for two and a half years.

Alec travelled with his squad of about forty-five men to the middle east on a troop ship. The ship called at various ports, including a stay at Malta. 3 Commando brigade held a significant presence in Malta. Commandos were headquartered on the island and posted out to the various deployments.

When he eventually disembarked to join 42, Alec believes this was at Palestine. In 1947 Palestine was under British control. The situation within the region was volatile and increasingly hostile to British rule. Jewish paramilitary organizations were attacking strategic locations and governing forces. There were tens of thousands of British troops in Palestine, mostly accommodated in huge, tented camps. The commitment was a huge drain on the country’s finances. There was a strong and growing opinion amongst the public back home to withdraw from the region and ‘bring the boys home’.

Therefore, Alec was dropped into a dangerous and difficult region. He remembers a little of the situation.

*“We were ‘shuvved’ up to Jerusalem. An old scout car was your sentry post. You sat there and they were taking shots at you. It could be quite frightening at times.”*



This 1946 map of Palestine highlights Jerusalem in yellow, which is where Alec was based

(At position 3pm).

Courtesy commons.wikimedia.org

Alec recalls little detail about the people firing at the British soldiers.

*“They used to be called The Bandits. That was it.”*

Fortunately, Alec can only remember the Commando suffering some minor casualties. The heat was another uncomfortable factor to be reckoned with, but Alec was happy to be in the sunshine.

*“It was a lovely temperature. Nice and hot all day, every day, seven days a week. Great, I used to love it, stripped off. Bare buff was the dress of the day.”*

Alec became a driver in his Commando. This was a role he liked and allowed him to travel and see some of the country he was living in.

*“ I was a driver, getting about the place.”*

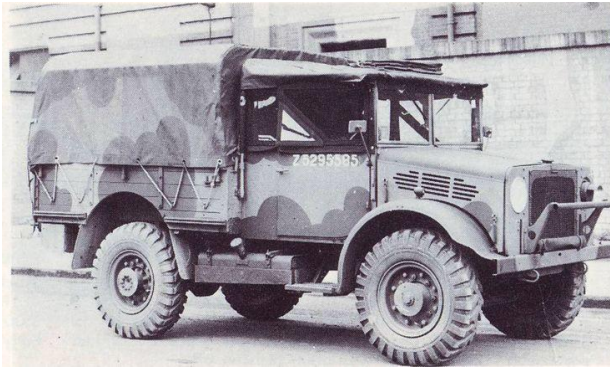
In fact, Alec would remain a driver for most of his career and relished the job wherever he served, but particularly abroad. This was despite the danger that solo drivers sometimes encountered.

*“In Malta, in Libya, Egypt, Palestine, Honk Kong and Malaya.”*

Given the passage of time, the memory of the various vehicles he drove has faded but Alec recalls a couple of models.

*“There was the Bedford fifteen hundred weight and the Yankee Jeeps”*

These vehicles were relatively abundant, having been mass produced for the war effort.



A Bedford medium weight Army truck. Alec drove the same model in 42 RM

Image courtesy of truck-encyclopedia.com



A photograph of a Jeep in Palestine in 1948.

commons.wikimedia.org

Alec explains that 3 Commando Brigade was a unit that was prepared for rapid deployment across the middle and far east.

*“We were a crowd that had to be ready to be shifted within a few hours, from one part of the country to another. They’d tell you to get your kit and you’re on your way. You packed your kit, got into a wagon and you went somewhere and that was it. Happy days, you didn’t worry.”*

Alec enjoyed the camaraderie within the Commando. He had good friends around him, who had all been through Commando school.

*“You always had good mates. You had one or two awkward ones, but you were all mates after all. Happy days.”*

There was some time for rest and recuperation. Again, this was spent with friends from the Commando, not just in Palestine but wherever the Commando was deployed and where operational conditions allowed.

*“You done your eight hours duties and you were stuck in the camp or wherever you were. You’d do anything you could to amuse yourselves. I think I better leave it there.”*

During his time serving with the Royal Marines, Alec never served on a ship. His experiences were limited to passenger status aboard Royal Navy and civilian vessels. Troopships rather than airlifts were the normal method of conveying troops in the post war years. As was Alex’s experience, this invariably involved weeks long journeys from the UK to the middle and far east. Alec did not enjoy these voyages.

*“I’m not a good sailor. Seasickness . It wasn’t serious but it was annoying.”*

42 Commando left Egypt in 1948 and were deployed into the Suez Canal Zone.

*“From Palestine we went into Egypt.”*

### **Egypt - 42 Commando**

Alec’s retained his driving role within 42 Commando in Egypt. His driving duties varied.

*“Anything. CO’s jeep was one of the jobs I had. Driving the CO Colonel Houghton.”*

Alec remembers the proximity of the camp to the Suez Canal itself.

*“ (We were) right on the Suez canal. “*

Given the hot climate, and the dusty conditions the Marines were not to be denied a chance to cool off in the water.

*“ It wasn’t very nice. You get a bit of a sandstorm and there was sand everywhere.“ You weren’t supposed to. But there were certain places where the authorities closed their eyes, and you could go in and have a bit of a swim. “*

The vehicles Alec was driving coped well with the conditions but had to be meticulously maintained.

*“They were alright. They were well maintained, crikey yes. You were given a vehicle and that vehicle you had to look after. Once a month it had a 406 inspection. If there was anything wrong with it, which you hadn’t reported you were in trouble. If you didn’t know about it, you might get away with it, but they’d say you got the vehicle all the time so you should know what’s wrong with it.”*

Alec’s time in Egypt came to an end when 3 Commando brigade was moved to Hong Kong in 1949.

### **Hong Kong – 42 Commando**

Hong Kong was very much British territory when 3 Commando Brigade arrived in 1949/50. Situated on the southern coast of China, it was a densely populated small area in the strategically import port city. The Commando brigade was based at Tai Lam barracks, which later became known as Perowne barracks.

Alec remembers some details about his time in Hong Kong.

*“I was in Kowloon, on the mainland. Our transport was sandy coloured, and we were having to repaint it, whilst we were in Hong Kong. I was up in Kai Tak airport, the RAF depot. They were looking after giving us all the stuff we required. Then we were repainting our vehicles green. They were looking right erm ? None of us were professionals.”*

Kowloon was one of the three territories of Hong Kong, situated north of Hong Kong Island.

After two and a half years abroad, Alec returned to the UK and a posting to the Royal Marine depot in Deal.

*“Actually, I was lucky as I was stationed back In Deal. It was the training barracks. Well, Deal was my hometown. But, after a while you got stuck in your hometown and I thought, no I didn't want that. I wanted to be somewhere else, so I volunteered to go abroad again.”*

Once Alec had re acclimatized back in the UK and caught up with his family and friends, it indeed wasn't long before he got itchy feet and after twelve months yearned for another overseas posting. This indeed came along and his application to return overseas was granted. He rejoined 3 Commando Brigade but this time with 45 Commando, who were deployed in Malaya.

### **Malaya – 45 Commando**

*“The next time I went abroad the brigade was in Malaya.”*

Since 1948 British governance of Malaya (now Malaysia), faced challenge by the armed forces of the Malayan Communist party (MLNA). The MNLAs fighters were jungle based and supported by the impoverished Chinese population. Chinese lived in the cities, others - known as 'squatters' - lived on the fringes of the jungle and could aid the fighters. The MNLAs and its supporters called the campaign the Anti-British National Liberation War. The British on the other hand declined to phrase the conflict as a war, in an attempt to avoid paying compensation to farmers for crops destroyed in the conflict.

3 Commando Brigade deployed to Malaya in 1950.

Alec remembers what the situation in the country was like when he joined 45 Commando.

*“There was trouble with the local bandits. You were getting attacked on the roads. I think Communism was a bit to do with it. “*

The terrain in Malaya was very different to what 42 Commando had faced in the middle east. There was thick jungle covering a lot of the country.

Map of Malaya (1952-54)



Map©Monash Asia Institute

A period map of the Malayan peninsula offers an insight into the country Alec arrived in.

Courtesy commons.wikimedia.org

Alec continued to perform his job as a driver within the Commando. This was a vital role, which at times placed Alec in great danger, as he explains below.

*“As a driver, you’d be given a point to get to. When you got to that point, you sat there waiting for the boys to come out of the jungle. You took them wherever. Either they were going back to the camp or further afield, somewhere else, another part of the country.”*

The Marines were patrolling into difficult terrain.

*“They were going in deep, just a few at a time.”*

Given that British patrols were being targeted by the ‘Bandits’, perhaps it would be expected that vehicles would travel in convoy or with protection. However, Alec mentions that this was often not the case.

*“There was many a time you went on your own. You were on your Todd. It could be a bit frightening at times. You’d think what the hell is happening here. You’d put your foot down and get the hell out of it.”*

In fact, on many occasions Alec’s only protection was his personal issue weapon.

*“You had a rifle and a magazine full of .303.”*

The orders given to a driver could vary.

*“You could be just one vehicle going into one place to deliver something or collecting something. On a main road, but at the same time it was a place where you could run into trouble. They used to set traps for you. It was happening quite often. Vehicles being ambushed.”*

Whilst driving to rendezvous with patrols, he was attacked on several occasions.

*“When you were getting ambushed, it was foot down and get the hell out of it. You weren’t hanging around there. You got out as fast as you could.”*

Alec is remarkably matter of fact about coming under attack.

*“It was just one of those things. You accepted it. That was service life. That was what you were there for.”*

There was also the problem of a solo driver navigating his way about the country.

*“Maps military maps. We used to know where we were going, put it that way. But I wouldn’t say I was the world’s best map reader.”*

Fortunately, there was off duty time, where the Marines could try and relax.

*“ We used to have to go to different camps to get a few drinks. There was always a NAAFI canteen, where you could get a beer.”*

### **Service Overseas**

Alec spends some time talking about an overseas posting.

*“ When you were going aboard, you knew you were going for two and a half years. That’s what it was. Later on, you could get home service leave, but it never affected us. We weren’t there for it (a policy introduced at a later time).”*

With no possibility of returning to the UK for leave, Alec would write home and occasionally phone.

*“ You could phone if you wanted to, but you had to have money, which was very short in those days. I think (pay) was about two bob a day. I used to write a letter home once a week. Sometimes your one week would run into a couple of months and you thought it was time you wrote a letter home.”*

At times, Alec was all too aware that he was a long way from home.

*“ Obviously you were looking for when’s my time like for me to go home, you know. I did two and a half years with 42 Commando and near enough two and a half years with 45*

*Commando. So, I done five years abroad. Not in one go. If I complained, it was my own fault. I volunteered to go. That was it, I was happy enough.”*

### **National Service**

Alec remembers serving alongside Marines, conscripted into National Service.

*“There was a lot of National Service men going out. The regulars, who were coming out of the forces were being replaced by National Service personnel. The National Service personnel were the relief.”*

Alec offers his views on National Service.

*“My personal opinion is I think it’s a good thing. A lot of people didn’t agree, but a lot of people did. You got trained and that was it.”*

Alec was asked if the National Servicemen were trained to the same standard as the regular Marines.

*“Yes. Sometimes we did a little bit of extra training you know and different tactics and what have you.”*

### **Illness**

At some point during his service in Malaya, Alec contracted Dysentery. The infection developed into a complicated and chronic condition, ending his time in Malaya. He was evacuated back to 3 Commando brigade headquarters in Malta. After spending an unspecified amount of time in treatment, he was repatriated back to Deal, UK. The illness hampered his ability to perform his duties and eventually the Royal Marine physicians decided that he would not be able to fully recover his fitness, before his contract expired. Therefore, he was medically discharged from the Royal Navy.

### **Footnote**

Alec moved to Wales after leaving the Royal Marines 1950’s. During his time serving in Egypt, he fostered a relationship with one of the girls that served the British servicemen and women in the NAAFI. Her name was Julie, who had joined the NAAFI from her home city of Cardiff and was undertaking an overseas posting. She worked in the canteen and Alec would spend as much time as he could manage chatting with her. Alec cannot accurately recall, but he remembers a very happy reunion with Julie at a Cardiff transport hub, after his discharge. The couple married and settled in Wales, whereafter they enjoyed many years of happiness together.

The author has cross checked records of 3 Commando brigades’ deployment during the time Alec served. Given that the interview took place well over seventy years after Alec’s first deployment with 3 Commando Brigade, his memory is remarkably good. Clearly

there may be some confusion in chronology and missing periods of service, but essentially this story of Alec's service is valid and as accurate as the passage of time allows.

The final words rest with Alec himself.

*“ I got to be honest I had a good time. I did have a good time. There were times when things weren't as comfortable as they could have been, but you know....”*



A photograph of an unidentified Royal Marine, with his camp in the background. This image was captured in Hong Kong in 1949.

Alec was serving with 42 Commando in Kowloon at the time. The image bears a remarkable resemblance to Alec, although we cannot be sure of the Marines identity, it illustrates the conditions the Marines were living and working in.

Courtesy of Gwolu.com

- This narrative account of Service accompanied by an audio cast of the interview with Alec, is located in the Alec James Price National Service collection at the West Wales Veterans Archive, Peoples Collection Wales website.
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- [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

- [royalmarinesheritagetrails.org](http://royalmarinesheritagetrails.org)
- [www.royalmarineshistory.com](http://www.royalmarineshistory.com)
- [truck-encyclopedia.com](http://truck-encyclopedia.com)
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