

**Howard Parry. (b.1947-). British Army.
Llanrhystud/Bargoed**

West Wales Veterans Archive

Dates of Interview: 22nd November 2021 and 16th February 2022. Llanrhystud.

Interviewers: Neil Davies (22.11.21) & Hugh Morgan (16.2.22).

Material included in collection:

Audio recorded interview with Neil Davies on 22.11.21; written transcript; photographs.

Early Years

Howard Parry was born in December 1947 in the little village of Pontlottyn in the Rhymney Valley. One of seven children (five boys and two girls), Howard was just four months old when his parents moved to Bargoed and onto a recently built housing estate and were one of the first families to move into the new houses.

Howard's father was employed in the local coal mine. As both parents spoke Welsh, Howard grew up in a Welsh speaking family and this proved a little tricky at first when he attended school in Bargoed and discovered that the teachers only taught their subjects in English. He attended Bargoed North Secondary Modern school, though was keen to leave as soon as he could to earn money to contribute to the family.

Howard left school without any qualifications to become an apprentice butcher in the Maypole Emporium in Bargoed. Unfortunately, there was insufficient work to justify him being retained as an apprentice, so he found work with another butcher. This also lasted only brief time as Howard decided to apply for work in the local coal mine in Bargoed.

In the Bargoed Colliery he trained under the guidance of a pit-roof, repairer. Howard did well but within only few months, personally witnessed a collier being carried out having just lost a leg from an encounter with a coal cutting machine. Shook-up by this experience he decided to join the British Army. Howard was just 17yrs old.

South Wales Borderers

Howard signed on at the recruiting centre in Cardiff on 1st February 1965. Having been a member of the Army Cadet Force in Bargoed whilst at school, this meant that upon acceptance he automatically joined the South Wales Borderers (SWB). Then followed 18 weeks basic training in Crickhowell, where he met another recruit called Tom White, from Port Talbot. Howard and Tom became life-long friends.

Hong Kong

On 26.6.1965 the SWB were posted to Hong Kong, arriving in Kai Tak airport. Stationed in Stanley Ford Camp they were employed on peace-keeping duties as there had been riots. Under the direction of their Commanding Officer, 26yr old Lt Brian Titchburne, they also undertook very intensive training in preparation for postings to conflict zones.

In his audio recording which forms part of Howard's material on the West Wales Veterans Archive, Howard speaks about Hong Kong being a fascinating place. Every Friday afternoon member of his platoon caught a truck into Hong Kong returning on the Sunday evening. During this period, he came across many American troops in Hong Kong on rest and recuperation leave from the Vietnam war. Howard recalls that on one sad occasion, an American aircraft taking US troops back to Vietnam crashed into the sea at the end of the runway at Kai Tak airport, killing all on board.

Borneo

On 4th December 1965 the SWB's flew to Borneo and on 21st December, Howard celebrated his 18th birthday. He had joined the conflict which had resulted from Indonesia's opposition to the creation of the Federation of Malaysia.

The SWB's had been called to support the Durham Light Infantry in North Borneo where there was a vast border area being patrolled by Commonwealth armed forces against the Indonesians and Chinese. In his audio recording Howard describes the long treks through jungle and rainforest and climbing mountains to reach the border. He recalls '*living on his nerve's* every time going out on patrol, but also the sights and sounds of the jungle, the heat and humidity and the rough living conditions. Living on emergency ration packs, the platoon members, lost considerable weight, and were all affected by the fungal infection 'Tinea' so prevalent in hot and humid conditions. He recounts an episode of the Indonesians shelling them as they were protecting a helicopter landing pad and then after 40mins rapidly making their escape.

Tour of duty complete, Howard's platoon was posted back to Hong Kong. They were given ten days off, before taking up once again with their previous duties in Hong Kong. They then were sent back to Lydd in Kent and within one month posted to Francistown in Botswana to protect and guard a BBC relay station. Botswana was supposed to be a four-month posting but only lasted two as they were flown out to Aden on 11th January 1967 to join the conflict raging there. It was to be a full nine months before Howard and the platoon returned from Aden.

Aden

The Aden Emergency (1963-67) was an insurgency against British rule. Located in the Middle East, the port of Aden (which is now part of Yemen and East of Suez), had been subject to British sovereignty since 1931. By 1962 the British government had announced that Aden would hold a permanent British garrison on Aden. From that point onwards until the British withdrawal from Aden in late 1967, internal attacks with made by two forces – the National Liberation Front and the tribes in the Radfan area of the country; but also externally by Yemen who were backed by Egypt. British casualties during the 'emergency' grossed over six hundred and there were also British civilian casualties. Howard talks about the importance of oil in Aden with BP having significant oil refineries there.

By the time of their posting to Aden, the South Wales Borderers had been amalgamated into the Royal Regiment of Wales, and a full Battalion was sent out to Aden. But for Howard

he and his pals in the platoon who had been in Hong Kong, Borneo and Botswana, remained together apart from one or two who had left. This proved especially important as they entered Aden, for their shared experiences meant that they had learned to trust and rely upon each other.

Howard describes that the platoon's duties in Aden were to patrol Marla Main, which was the main street running through Aden from Steamer Point up to Crater (so named because the district was in the crater of an old volcano). Their primary task was to protect the families of the British armed forces as those serving and also civilian British personnel working in Aden, were extremely vulnerable to terrorist attack. Their duties included collecting the children from their parent's accommodation and escorting them to the bus stop so they could safely go to school.

In the audio recording, Howard recounts being on patrol which he describes as '*hard and frightening*' '*You were living on your nerves everyday*'. He describes their daily existence, the grenade and Kalashnikov attacks, the shootings and death. The climate was extremely hot and since those days a lasting reminder for Howard has been a skin infection which even today in 2022, still troubles him. Howard reflects now that he would '*never ever*' wish to return to Aden.

'The Aden Emergency' drew to a close with the withdrawal of the British troops in late 1967 and Howard remembers that the Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Wales were one of the last to leave. They were given two days' notice to prepare to leave and to check that their equipment was in good order and then flown back to the UK. Howard vividly remembers a song repeatedly being played at that time on the local forces radio in Aden, 'We've got get out of this place' by The Animals.

After two weeks leave it was then back to Lydd in Kent. Other highlights in Howard's service included providing the Guard of Honour for HM The Queen when she opened the first Severn Bridge in Aust on 8th September 1966 and providing Guard duty at Windsor Castle.

Howard left the British Army in 1971 but continued for another seven years in the Army Reserves. Looking back on his twelve plus years in Army, he says today 'I did my best'.

Post-Army Career

Howard returned coal mining in the Bargoed Colliery, and it was there that he became an active participant in the Miners Strike of 1984. These experiences and what followed to Howard once his employment as a coal miner ceased to exist form part of a second audio installment which the West Wales Veterans Archive will be recording with Howard and adding to the People's Collection Wales.

