



National Service: Two Years of My Life

Jim Ritchie

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I was just one of many thousands of healthy and fit young men living in the U.K. during the 40's and 50's who were given no choice (other than prison) and who were conscripted by the British government to serve in the "Armed Forces" for two years of their lives – it was called National Service. This was happening at a time in the lives of these young men, that I like to refer to as "the beginning of manhood years." Most of us had just completed a trade apprenticeship, or some lengthy training in a specific vocation, and there were also some of us who had earned a university degree. We were, for the first time in our lives earning a decent wage, and could now think of things further afield than continuing to stay at home with our parents – but with few exceptions we all had to do our time in the Forces in order that Britain could continue to wield it's power in many parts of the world where it was slowly losing it's influence. Was this call up disruptive for us? You bet, it was. Did we benefit from this experience? I guess it would depend on to whom you asked that question. Speaking for myself, it took me many years of looking back in my life before I finally came to the conclusion that my two years National Service were perhaps the two most exciting years of my life, and I am glad that I was able to recall all the memorable events that were part of it.

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