



David Dudley “Dai”

British Army – Royal Regiment of Wales

Interview (One) recorded on 18th March 2024 at Dai’s home in Wales.

Description

Dai was born in 1963 in Cardiff and for as long as he can remember, always wanted to join the Army. At the first opportunity he left school and joined the Junior Leaders scheme in the British Army. Dai went on to enjoy a career in the Royal Regiment of Wales, serving over twelve years.

Junior Leaders

Dai joined the Junior Leaders school in 1979 and undertook junior soldier training at Taunton, Somerset. There were three divisions training soldiers at the school: Kings Division, Queens division and the Price of Wales division. Therefore, the infantry division was fully represented during the ten-month training course. Prior to joining the Army Dai had developed a good knowledge of the Brecon Beacons national park and was amazed to experience the Quantock hills, an area of outstanding natural beauty that resembled the Brecon Beacons.

Dai explains in the video how the training was hard and repetitive. Course material was focused on developing both soldiering and leadership skills. Leadership hadn’t been an issue he had considered when enlisting. He shares a memory of an achievement he is very proud of. Being of small stature at the time, the instructors and his colleagues, expectations of his physical capabilities were limited. However, during weapons training Dai found he was particularly adept at managing and firing the General-purpose machine gun GPMG. He quietly developed his skill at arms and was able to shine during the ten-mile route march bearing arms, at the end of the course. He carried the GPMG the full ten miles and then out-scored every other Junior leader during the end of march shoot. Dai remembers his passing out ceremony and his posting to the Royal regiment of Wales.

Royal Regiment of Wales RRW – United Kingdom

At the beginning of 1980 Dai arrived in Aldershot and reported for duty at the RRW barracks. The regiment’s location proved to be a challenge, as Aldershot was home to the UK Airborne infantry forces. Dai and his colleagues found themselves surrounded by three Parachute regiments and two ancillary Airborne regiments. The inter regiment rivalry became immediately apparent to Dai and the fighting nature of the soldiers stationed at Aldershot was not lost on him. Dai explains how the regiment would undertake normal infantry training, practising and developing their skills. The role of the regiment was to support the NATO mission in Germany, countering the threat from the USSR. The routine was interrupted when in 1997 the RRW was tasked to deploy to Hong Kong.



Age Cymru Dyfed is a charitable incorporated organisation no.1155813 Mae Age Cymru Dyfed yn sefydliad elusennol corfforedig rhif 1155813

Cyfeiriad ein swyddfa gofrestredig/Registered office address: 27 Heol y Wig/Pier Street, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 2LN

Ffôn/phone: 03333 447 874

Ebost/email: reception@agecymrudyfed.org.uk

www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/dyfed/

Hong Kong

Dai recalls that in September of 1980, the RRW arrived in Hong Kong with a brief to deploy along the border and counter smuggling from China across the border into British Hong Kong territory. The tour was to last for three and a half months. Dai found himself stationed at border posts, overlooking the Chinese border. The British soldiers were hugely outnumbered by both their Chinese counterparts and the weight of Chinese citizens, attempting to illegally cross the border into British territory. Dai explains how difficult it was dealing with the sheer numbers of illegal immigrants, crossing the border. He explains the nature and geography of the region, whilst recounting the routine of border watch.

Dai tells us of the desperate attempts at crossing the border, especially during the nights. He recalls catching illegal immigrants and the mixed emotions British soldiers felt returning them to the Chinese authorities. He also mentions patrol work, which took place in full view of large numbers of Chinese soldiers.

- Photographs from the tour can be seen in the David Dudley collection on the West Wales Veterans Archive.

Back to the UK

The tour ended before Christmas 1980 and in January 1981 the RRW soldiers reported back to Aldershot. The soldiers quickly fell back into the regular routine of infantry training, maintaining the equipment and weapons. Dai himself opted to train in Army Signalling and attended a course back in Wales. Upon returning to Aldershot Dai found the regiment had been warned to be ready for deployment to Northern Ireland. Tensions in the province were high, with IRA prisoner Bobby Sands nearing the fatal end of his hunger strike.

Northern Ireland

It was April 1981 and the RRW deployed on what was planned to be an emergency four-month tour to Belfast, Northern Ireland. Attacks upon security forces were, dangerous, often lethal, occurring daily and violent. This was to be the first of five tours of Northern Ireland that Dai would complete during his career. He describes it as a baptism of fire. He recalls the 5th May 1981 in particular, which was the day Bobby Sands died at HMP Maze. Dai remembers how it felt like the whole of Belfast erupted and the soldiers were deployed to try and bring peace to the streets. However, riots began and Dai himself was in the firing line. At one stage amidst a riot, he was engulfed in flames when a petrol bomb exploded at his feet. He describes the incident and how he feared for his safety.

Dai recalls another tour and a posting to the guard force at the HMP Maze prison. The tour was a memorable one. The RRW soldiers manned the guard towers situated in a high security environment. The prison held IRA and loyalist prisoners, which presented a huge risk to the prison staff and soldiers guarding the prisoners.

- Photographs from the tour can be seen in the David Dudley collection on the West Wales Veterans Archive.



Age Cymru Dyfed is a charitable incorporated organisation no.1155813 Mae Age Cymru Dyfed yn sefydliad elusennol corfforedig rhif 1155813

Cyfeiriad ein swyddfa gofrestrdedig/Registered office address: 27 Heol y Wig/Pier Street, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 2LN

Ffôn/phone: 03333 447 874

Ebost/email: reception@agecymrudyfed.org.uk

www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/dyfed/

BAOR Germany

The regiment would return to Northern Ireland several times over the next six years, but upon return to Aldershot, the RRW were soon to find that they would be adopting a new mechanized role within a specific NATO armoured battle group. This meant a posting to the BAOR British Army of the Rhine in Germany, which was set to last for six years. The regiment settled into their new home at Lemgo, Germany.

Dai himself was looking forward to the posting and enjoyed both his job and his time off in Germany. However, he does offer a forthright account of how other RRW soldiers could not take to the routine of an infantry regiment operating in the BAOR during the cold war. In 1985, Dai and his fellow soldiers in the RRW travelled across the Atlantic Ocean to attend a joint NATO training exercise at the Canadian forces base at Suffield, Canada. There was a routine of joint exercises in Germany. One exercise was memorable for its scale.

In May 1984 Operation Lionheart was the largest exercise ever held and the biggest deployment of British forces since the second world war. It involved over 131,000 British service personnel alone. Dai, an infantry signaller operating from the inside of an armoured personnel carrier and specialized Army trucks, took part in the exercise. Dai specialized in laying communications lines, enabling forces deployed in the field to communicate with one another. As he explains, this meant working in the outdoors in all weathers. He enjoyed working alongside infantry soldiers from other NATO countries, comparing skills and equipment. (A video of Operation Lionheart, entitled "When Britain invaded cold war Europe by Simon Thornton Forces.net can be seen on the YouTube platform and offers perspective on what Dai experienced).

By now Dai was in a relationship with a German lady and during his time off, Dai enjoyed visiting as many attractions as possible. Along with colleagues some aspects of the work, brought him into contact with the local community. This community contact led to a proud and memorable episode in the RRW's tour of duty in the BAOR of the 1980's.

Swimming the channel

Dai explains how some of the soldiers from the regiment were dating local German nurses, who worked at a home for disabled children. As the soldiers chatted with their colleagues it became apparent that the home was in dire need of modernization. The RRW took it upon itself to provide the funds for improving the lives of the children. An idea was born, and this developed into a Triathlon style challenge. Twelve soldiers from the regiment, including Dai formed a team. The challenge would begin at Maindy barracks in Cardiff.

A team of four soldiers ran from Cardiff to Dover. Dai joined three soldiers who swam the English Channel in relay to Calais. Four soldiers then completed the challenge by cycling from Calais to RRW headquarters at Lemgo, Germany. The whole challenge raised thousands of pounds. The successful completion of the challenge on 3rd September 1987 attracted national interest, which eventually resulted in the team of twelve soldiers being presented to the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in the German parliament. In his interview Dai explains how they trained for the challenge and what undertaking it was like.

- Newspaper cuttings and photographs of the challenge can be seen in the David Dudley collection on the West Wales Veterans Archive



Age Cymru Dyfed is a charitable incorporated organisation no.1155813 Mae Age Cymru Dyfed yn sefydliad elusennol corfforedig rhif 1155813

Cyfeiriad ein swyddfa gofrestredig/Registered office address: 27 Heol y Wig/Pier Street, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 2LN

Ffôn/phone: 03333 447 874

Ebost/email: reception@agecymrudyfed.org.uk

www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/dyfed/

• All rights including publishing rights to this documented service history, are owned by Mr David Dudley or his immediate beneficiary in the event of his death. Publishing rights of material sourced to complete this document, remain with the original publisher and most grateful thanks are expressed to the following sources:

• Our thanks to the National Library of Wales for assisting in the producing and retention of the material.



Age Cymru Dyfed is a charitable incorporated organisation no.1155813 Mae Age Cymru Dyfed yn sefydliad elusennol corfforedig rhif 1155813

Cyfeiriad ein swyddfa gofrestredig/Registered office address: 27 Heol y Wig/Pier Street, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 2LN

Ffôn/phone: 03333 447 874

Ebost/email: reception@agecymrudyfed.org.uk

www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/dyfed/