



Leslie Frank Smart

British Army

Gloucestershire regiment

Ceredigion

West Wales Veterans Archive collection continued

*** Viewer caution – This film contains descriptions of combat operations involving fatalities and may cause emotional upset. Discretion is advised.

Aide memoir to Film TWO of the interview with Leslie Smart

The viewer will note that on occasion the interviewer can be heard on the film, directing questions to Leslie. The interviewer's voice was included for the viewer to understand the context of Leslie's conversation.

Gloucestershire regiment in Kenya

In this second film, Leslie continues to talk about his experiences, as an infantry soldier serving with A company, the 1st Battalion of the Gloucestershire regiment in Kenya during 1955 and 1956.

Although he doesn't mention it in the film, Leslie had an African hound working with him (Search dog). The dog would be used to identify trails used by the Mau Mau and follow scents to try and discover Mau Mau hiding in the bush.

- A photograph of Leslie with the dog can be seen online in the Leslie Smart collection at the West Wales Veterans Archive on the Peoples collection Wales website.

Leslie describes what daily was life was like at Gil Gil camp. He explains that he preferred being out on patrol away from the camp routine. In furtherance of this, he took every opportunity to go out on patrols. He recalls going out into an area called the Bamboo Forest (Now Aberdare national park). This is a large, forested area, famous for its abundance of a Bamboo species native to Kenya. It was suspected at the time that between 3 to 4,000 Mau Mau were contained in the forest



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and mountains. He described it as a “terrible job”. Numerous patrols were launched seeking to flush out the elusive Mau Mau. This went on for weeks. Eventually, Leslie remembers RAF aeroplanes coming in to support operations. Aeroplanes struck the forest, as his patrol watched the on. Several explosions caused wildlife to rush out of the overgrowth, closely followed by Mau Mau, who were engaged by the waiting soldiers.

The Bamboo Forest operation was followed by a large-scale action to mop up the last of the Mau Mau in 1956. This took place near a lake called Naivasha. In a similar operation to the Bamboo Forest, the regiment encircled an area where the Mau Mau were suspected to be hiding out. However, on this occasion the cunning of the Mau Mau proved too much for the British soldiers and they slipped quietly away undetected.

Leslie explains his understanding of who the Mau Mau were. He estimated the insurgency was about 30,000 strong and that they were a very clever and cunning foe. He felt watched by them, as opposed to the British soldiers watching the Mau Mau. To try and gain the upper hand, the Glosters would operate at night in the dark. This was “very scary”. It also led to several soldiers losing their lives during operations. However, soldiers could get injured at other times. A friend of his was shot by the jealous husband of a local lady but survived a stomach wound. Leslie recalls that during the recovery operation, the soldiers came under fire from a Mau Mau Sniper. He heard the reports as the rifle fired at them and the rounds hitting the cab. He describes glass flying around, followed by blood. The Sniper had scored a direct hit and shot dead the soldier driving the lorry.

Leslie then goes on to talk about another incident, when soldiers being transported in a lorry came under attack from a gang of Mau Mau armed with a Bren Gun (light machine gun). This attack resulted in the deaths of several of the soldiers.

Moving on from the combatant operations the viewer hears about the soldiers being called to protect the farmsteads. This brings back some happy memories for Leslie, who talks of sleeping under canvas and enjoying the food and drink on the farms. He also mentions his love of weightlifting.

Leslie then talks about leaving Kenya and the tragedy that led to him being in hospital. This was the time of the crisis in the Suez Canal zone and the regiment was put on warning. Les can remember flying with a special advance party of infantrymen in an old Dakota (Boeing C47) aircraft. At some point on the flight, Leslie passed out unconscious. It became a medical emergency and the plan diverted to Entebbe airport in Uganda. Leslie was taken off the C47 and rushed to Victoria hospital in Kampala. He was very ill and tests revealed he had contracted Malaria. His recovery was long and slow, but with the help of a fantastic Nurse, who he remembers to this day, he got well enough to fly home. The return journey back to Gil Gil camp in Kenya was unusual. He was taken to a main road in Kampala and a Nurse flagged down a passing Lorry. By chance, the driver confirmed that he was heading the right way and agreed to drop this uniformed British soldier back to camp. By now Leslie’s three-year extension to his original contract had expired, so he was in fact over due to leave the Army.

Back to the UK and discharge

So it was that Leslie flew back to the UK and returned to where his journey began, regimental HQ at Knook camp. Warminster. His discharge was without ceremony. He remembers handing in his uniform and receiving no pay. He was obliged to remain as a reservist for four years, bringing his



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service to a total of seven years. During his time on the "colours" he had to commit a few weeks of the year to the Army.

The end of the interview heralds a period of reflection. Les confirms his service with the Gloucestershire regiment was spent in Africa. He recalls his respect and interaction with the local population in Kenya and treats the viewer to some Swahili language. He tells of his interactions with the wildlife and frightening encounters with Elephants. The viewer hears of one incident with a Lion.

The interview ends with Leslie laughing about a humorous occurrence when a fellow soldier from C company panicked when he became disengaged from his patrol. This soldier was the one whom Leslie had told to join the Army back in Gloucestershire three years earlier!

All rights to the material in the Leslie Smart collection, remain with the publisher and most grateful thanks are expressed to the following sources:

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