



## **The Two Years of a National Serviceman**

**By John Cox**

Life for me as a National Serviceman began on the 20th February 1952 (my 18th birthday) at the Old Labour Exchange office (now Park House) in Leicester Road, Market Harborough when I signed on for 2 years in the army.

After medicals and interviews my final decision was to join the Royal Army Service Corps as a driver. My call up papers arrived on the 1st May 1952 together with a one way train ticket to report to Blenheim Barracks, Aldershot.

On arrival I was kitted out and given an army number and I became 22672959 Driver Cox J, with a pay book and a wage of £1.22 1/2p a week. For the next 7 days I endured spit and polish before going on to Blandford, Dorset for 8 weeks training - 4 weeks drill and weapons and 4 weeks driver training.

On completion of this 8 weeks course I finally qualified and was posted to Watchfield, Swindon on a 12 weeks Air Despatch course. Here with the aid of one mock up Dakota, I became a trained Air Supplies Crewman and posted to Malaya to take part in the Malayan Campaign 1948-1960. I was given 4 weeks embarkation leave and then sailed from Southampton in the Empire Trooper in November 1952 arriving at Singapore 3 weeks later.

I joined 3 Company RASC as a Scout Car Driver in Johor-Bahru but later my platoon was sent to establish a new base for the Company about 360 miles to the north near Ipoh.

Shortly after I was transferred to 55 Air Despatch Company RASC near the capital Kuala Lumpur. We lived in tents in a clearing in the jungle but close to the airfield. We worked in 4 man teams delivering supply packs to our Infantrymen fighting the Communist guerrillas in the jungle where vehicle access was impossible.

We flew with RAF crews in their twin engined Vickers Valetta, dropping all kinds of supplies, from ammunition and medical supplies to leaflets and food - including eggs! We even dropped live chickens for the Gurkhas!

It was hard going and not without danger, as the packs had to leave the aircraft at the right moment to hit the Drop Zones - small clearings in the jungle. Often we were flying four sorties a day at very low altitudes without parachutes over this thick jungle, and this type of flying caused crashes; there were eight during the 1950s and our Company lost 19 men. In all 15,000 sorties were carried out and 30,000 tons of supplies were dropped. During the Monsoon period we still had to fly every

day in appalling weather.

All supplies were packed in wooden crates and to soften the blow Coconut Fibre Bales were used for packing. I well remember scorpions emerging from this fibre and tales of the presence of snakes in this land could fill another story.

We had regular leave and went to Singapore where the Union Jack Club and the Nuffield Centre gave us rest and entertainment. But with only £1/2/6d a week to spend, life wasn't too pleasurable.

Malaya was a most interesting country. Apart from the jungle, there were numerous rubber plantations and Ipoh was mining country. A mountainous area known as the Cameron Highlands was beautiful country and at such heights the temperature was perfect and because of this the main hospital was there.

The Campaign in Malaya up to 1960 was not well known at home and soldiers, especially the Infantrymen, felt that they were the Forgotten Army, like their predecessors in Burma, Siam & Malaya had done during the war.

With mixed feelings I joined a troop train back to Singapore on May 6th 1954 where I boarded the Empire Fowey arriving back in Southampton 3 weeks later and was demobbed on May 30th. My Army career as a National Serviceman had ended!