

My my name is MR JOHN ROBERT KEITH AITKEN; I was born on the 7th of November 1948 in Brighton in Sussex.

My mum was then 27 and my dad was 59, yes that's right, he had been born in 1890 and was in the first and second world wars, in the 1st he was wounded in the leg 2 bullets and also gassed, in the 2nd he was working as a dock hand at the west India docks north Woolwich and thou is was too old he knew the people their and of course as an ex-army man he just knocked at least 5 years of his birth date and enlisted. He could not be put into a fighting unit but was in the pioneer corps doing the hard and dirty jobs and went out with the B.E.F. to France and like many was captured near DUNKIRK while the younger men got back to fight another day. He was sent to STALAG VIIIIB IN POLAND and spent nearly 5 years there and he was also sent on the DEATH MARCHES, he would show me a big lump on the back of his head where he had got hit by the butt of a rifle when he was too slow marching, he was lucky, many were shot for being slow, sometime in 1945 the red cross got him back to the ENGLAND has he was in a bad way and I found out he spent some time at HATFIELD HOUSE which was used as a hospital. When he left the hospital in 1946 my mum who knew the family was ask to look after my dad and they move out of London to Brighton, well she must have done a good job has I arrived in November 1948. When I was 4 years old we moved back up to London to CHARLTON PARK into a new prefab address 113 CANBERRA ROAD S,E,7. This also brought my mum back to CHARLTON where she was born IN HARDEN'S MANORWAY CHARLTON IN 1921.This for me was paradise no seaside now but my back garden gate led to 12 football pitch's and my love of football. My school was CHARLTON MANOR and thou I admit to not being much good at sum's and English etc. I was good at sports and I was very proud to be selected for the school football team which was run by a MR GILL and our home ground was outside my back door and BLACKHEATH away games when I would take the bus there and back and sometimes I would borrow a bike

and cycle there then after the game I could buy a sausage roll as a treat and we also went to other school pitches. I have got to say I had a great time at CHARLTON MANOR SCHOOL and also my mum got a job in the kitchen and I would like other's get 2nds sometimes, I had free milk and school diners and like many schools in LONDON we had to have sun lamps as we did not get too much sun due to the smog we had in those days, even my PAT remembers sitting in vest and nickers at WOODHILL SCHOOL CHARLTON. And yes we had castor oil and no I did not ask for 2nds's then. You have got to remember that in these days you walked to school and I live about a mile away and in all weathers nowadays I see mothers drive their children to school from less than half a mile. I of course failed my 11+ exam and like many of us and to the sound of BYE BY BLACKBIRD ringing in my ears i left a lovely school and later in life can look back and say it was one of the best times in my life and you can tell anyone that thou we had to do a lot of school work we had so much fun doing it and I really missed CHARLTON MANOR SCHOOL. After this I had to go to go to BLOOMFIELD SEC SCHOOL PLUMSTEAD and the same thing happen here good on sports and was in the school football team etc., but my day to day school work did not lodge in my only active brain cell and when it was time to leave at 15 I put in for a job as a telegram boy at the POSTOFFICE I got an interview and went to their LONDON BRIDGE HQ for it, I passed the first part talking about myself to a 4 team panel but then I had my maths and English test and failed it, I was very upset has I could not see what those matted when all I was going to do was ride and deliver mail. This was a big shock and I now knew that the use of the of having some basic knowledge would have helped me, but life goes on and in these days 1963 jobs was very easy to come by and put in for and got a shop job with R.A.C.S. In their new supermarket at WESTTHORNE AVE ELTHAM. My job was to refill shelves, cook ham's, price up and serve. The co-op help me by sending me to their night school at SHORNEELS at BOSTAL WOOD one day a week and I was told if I got stuck in I could be a foreman by the age of 18/20 and a branch manager by 30 years of age .I like this job and got on well with staff and more important customers. But a year later I saw a advert for driver's

mate at the well know transport firm ALBION SUGAR COMPANY WOOLWICH, they took sugar product's to brewery, sweet firm's like MAR'S ETC and also jam maker's. Well I put in for the job and got an interview and a lot of people went for the 3 job's and I'm pleased to say I got one of those, I left the co-op and got a good reference and started has a driver's mate, they had lorries and also tankers. I Was given a job on number42 tanker a FODEN, my driver was an ex- army marine a FRED STOWER and was a lovely man to work with, these tankers were the cleanest lorries on the roads and I should know because half of my life was spent cleaning and polishing, We went all round the U.K with night outs with extra pay and just to go up to MANCHESTER we would have a night out both ways even thou the new M1 had been built. I was now going out with a girl called PAT PHAIR who lived opposite my block of flats and I must of got lucky thou I call it FATE. The block of flats was already built and they latter thought there was enough space on one end to put 9 more flats in and has a 15 year old I helped the workmen going for their papers and food and even got to lay some of the bricks. When they had finish 9 family's move in and in one of those was PAT's, her bedroom and balcony was opposite my flat and after a while we used to wave to each other she had been at WOODHILL SCHOOL and then onto KIDBROOKE SCHOOL. , Pat latter joined CUFFS OF WOOLWICH and our courting as such was going to the pictures or if we had little money to spend more often than not we use to go onto the WOOLWICH FERRY those days no getting off at each end and we use to go down below in the engine room has it was a paddle steamer then and very warm down below, One night we forgot ourselves and landed at the north side and had to walk all the way through the tunnel to get back to the south side and my Pat was not too happy has she would be late back home. I enjoyed my work very much but there was a problem that when I reach 18 I would have to leave as the drivers had to be 21 to drive and the firm would have to let me go, I ask the manager and he said has I had a good report when the time came he would get me put into the workshop till I was 21 and then take my driving test. The easy way around this was to join the ARMY after all WOOLWICH was a garrison town and my dad,

granddad, great granddad had all been in the army, I talk to my dad about this and thou he could see sense what I wanted to do he did not want me to join and after what he went through I can well understand, having said that my dad NEVER TALKED ABOUT HIS TIME IN 2 WORLD WARS saying at 16 I would not understand fully and he was right. I'M sorry to say my dad died on 26th sept 1965 and I went with my mum to Woolwich cemetery and I'm proud to say his coffin had the union jack drape over it and I hope to have the same when my time comes. I latter had a chat with my mum and she knew I wanted to be a driver in the army and of course had a long chat with pat but I got both their blessing thou it must have hard now looking back. WOOLWICH is home to RA but I got into a new corps THE ROYAL CORPS OF TRANSPORT that had been formed 6 months earlier and I joined 1 day after my 17th birthday November 8th at BLACHEATH.

My pay at ALBION SUGAR was about £5.00 a week, on joining the army my pay because I was not 17 and a half my pay was only £2.10 shillings and the 10 shillings was sent from my wages each week to my mum till I was 17 and half when I got on full pay of about £6.00 a week. I was sent to BULLER BARACKS ALDERSHOT for my 6 weeks basic training and I thought I was still fit but my legs hardly touch the ground in those weeks, we had all sorts of drill and a lot of polishing which I had done loads at ALBION SUGAR, we also was taken around all that the RCT did which was WATER TRANSPORT, AIR DISPATCH, I latter took a course and passed has an AIR DISPACHER ,we also went to do work with HELICOPTERS after my time at ALDERSHOT those who made it through 40 out of 60 was sent to YEOVIL for driver training for 6 weeks I drove or tried to drive 1TON, 3 TON, 10 TON vehicles. IN early 1966 I passed out of YEOVIL and sent home on leave awaiting my posting. I Was to be posted to GERMANY as part of the BAOR ARMY out there which was to stop RUSSIA coming across into GERMANY this was in the COLD WAR ERA and I now know that if RUSSIA had come across the border we had only 8 hours to live, I am glad they never told us at the time. I was sent to

11 SQN one of 3 sqns which made up 4 DIV REGT RCT. I was station at DORTMUND in some old SS BARACKS. When I was there we was never in our barracks much as we did a lot of exercises all around GERMANY, HOLLAND .I was part of HQ TROOP and latter was given the job of driving our OC a MAJOR about in a Land rover, this was great has when on exercises at night we would have to camouflage our vehicles a lot and having a land rover it only took about 10 min but a 10 ton lorry at least 30 min and this was out of your own time where you could be getting your food or even better still some sleep when you was not put on guard that is. After a time I got homesick has I missed my mum and more so my girlfriend pat so when I got the chance to do a HORSE COURSE back at ALDERSHOT I jump at the chance and was sent there to learn and ride horse's which the RCT still used in HONG KONG and also working with pack mules there. I arrived at an old cavalry barracks in ALDERSHOT and went and got my bedding which I did, but no mattress so I asked about this and was told that to go down to the stable and put straw and hay into a mattress holder which they had given me, well of course i thought this was joke as I was the new boy and I have just left GERMANY lying on a lovely firm mattress, but the truth was we all had the straw mattress as they said we should lie on these and get use to what our horses slept on. Well after getting over that shock the next day I was taken to the stable to see my mount a mare that was called BELINDA those sometimes I did call her something different.

We had to work long hours with our horses and thou I got to ride I was not a natural rider and in truth only wanted to be here to get home to see my mum and pat which I did when I could get away.

One day I was leading my mare across the road and she got spooked and she turn me and as she got away her rear hoof caught me on the leg near my knee I went down like a sack of spuds and BELINDA run off, there was 2 MOUNTED POLICE on horseback and they got her back but I was in a lot of pain lying on the ground and that's when i found out some people

love their horses more than humans, they was more worried about my mount than me and I was taken to sick bay and pleased to be told no broken bones but hell it hurt. I went home to WOOLWICH for the weekend to see my mum and pat and on the Monday went before the C.O. of horse transport to be told that I was going to be sent back to 11sqn, my C.O. seem to be upset that I had not stayed over the weekend to comfort my horse has I said some people like horse's more than us mortal's.

I got back to my unit to find I had lost my drivers job with my major and told I was to drive a captain instead, such is life. I was still playing football with my troop and my squadron and a couple of times for my regiment, my captain was the football officer of the regiment and said that there was not any football referees who were drivers so he said I should do a course this time in Germany at our BAOR HQ. I took the course which was a 5 day one but only did mine in 4 days has I had to come back to ENGLAND and ON 7TH OF DECEMBER 1968 TO MARRY MY PAT AT WOOLWICH TOWN HALL. This year on 7/12/2013 we will I hope be into our 45th year of our life sentence together.

WE had a couple of telegrams one from my squadron to say I WILL REALY HAVE TO DO HAS I AM TOLD NOW and one from FA TO SAY I HAD PAST HAS A FOOTBALL REFEREE and when I got back was given my FA BADGE and my ARMY REFEREE BADGE. My life change overnight has I was doing ref or linesman all over the BRITISH ARMY ON THE RHINE area and was taken off exercises, sport was an important part of army life and not only was I driven or drove to matches but I got paid 10 shillings to do lineman or £1 to referee thou this would have to pay for my refs kit which was not cheap and PAT and I had our first row has a married couple about the cost of it. Also going back to the year of 1966 I was very fit and I was picked out to be one of 24 soldiers from BOAR units to take part in THE NIEMAGEN MARCHES this event held each year in HOLLAND except the war years this one would be its 50th year.

The marches for us was 25/27 miles a day over 4 days and on the last day getting to march over the NIEMAGEN BRIDGE with the wonderful Dutch people clapping and cheering us on while crossing the bridge I had to reflect on has a member of our family who died trying to get here with the Para's in WW2. When we got through the finish line we was given loads of kisses and flowers thou I must admit I wished the men at least had a SHAVE, we then got a medal with the 50th bar on it thou really I only then wanted a pint and a very soft pair of SLIPPERS. This medal is only to be worn at the marches or athletic events and in 2012 I was taken up to WOOLWICH COMMON and was allowed to wear my medal when I saw the 2012 PARA events there. Thou I was now married and serving in GERMANY as a driver we could not have quarters here because you had to be a SARGENT or above, then again we got a little extra money for being separated from the wife. It's funny in a way that when I came to GERMANY I wondered how I would get on with the people here after all what my dad and other family members have gone through ww2, but I found them just like us good and bad and once I learnt basic German I could get around fine and even played football for a local pub team at weekends, thou it did not help me being here when ENGLAND beat GERMANY in the 1966 final. In 1969 I was posted to 2 SQN RCT. The posting would mean another tour without my pat as this was going to the middle east at BAHRAIN on the Persian gulf, out of our squadron only the OC a major could have his wife here. The worst bit was it was going to be 9 months tour with no leave in that time and of course pat was not very happy and the only good bit was I would get extra pay for not having my wife with me and it turn out 9 months latter pat had a nice sum saved, pat I must say has always looked after our savings even up to this day. My job in 2sqn was to drive the OC a MAJOR and take his wife around too. This was ok and got to use the vehicle sometimes to take a few of the lads down to the beach. Because it was very hot place we started work at 6 or 7 am and stopped at 12/1pm, I still played football and referee and one time the chairman of FIFA SIR STANLEY ROUSE came over and gave us a talk to the referees, because of heat most times we only played 5 aside matches and would play at night

under floodlights for a full match. This is the first posting where we was on RAF rations not army's and we could not believe the food we could have and latter I got a bit of a stomach, this was because when we went into our mess hall you have a FISH, STEAK, CURRY counters and you could have as much as you wanted then go and have a beer in the NAFFI and after that a sleep before dinner. We was told no one was to do any running after 1pm due to the heat and i nearly got put on a charge for playing football at 3pm,which makes me think glad we was not at war here unlike ADEN as what would our officers say ITS TO HOT TO FIGHT.

After 3 months we got a new OC A MAJOR GRUNDY he came over with his wife and 2 children and I was given the job to be his driver/batman. He was a very nice man and all the sqn loved him, he also did radio work for the forces radio and had done in BAOR GERMANY, he had at his disposal a MINI long wheel base with the sqn badge on the car doors and we went around in this instead of his Landover, also when I babysat the children he would let me play some new records the BBC had sent out to him, the one I remember was IN THE YEAR 2525 I got to listen to this before my pat heard it in her record department at CUFFS where she was now working, he also let me take the mini car if he did not need it and took a couple of the lads around the area and to the beach. Till this day I still do not know for sure what were we doing there for 9 months and not only us but about 15,000 other troops? We of course ask the question but were told because you ARE. In 1971 we gave BAHRAIN back to the Arabs. When we finish our tour we was sent on 4 weeks leave and I of course went home to WOOLWICH to see my wife and also got my next posting which was COLCHESTER 1 SQN RCT. This meant at last married quarters for me and pat and also they was the best ELITE RCT SQN in the corps but there always was a but, has number 1 SQN RCT they very mobile unit and active and was on call 24/7 to go anywhere as support of front line troops. I arrived in nov 1969 with my pat and took up our first married quarters together and in our time we never had to pay rent not like now days so that was a big plus. When I got to 1 sqn all my other jobs was in

HQ driving the OC or other officers but now I was put into C TROOP and went to meet them on the barrack square and taken to a big hanger on the edge of the square to find I would be driving a TRACTOR and 2 trailers, well that is when I could handle them that is. My job was to learn to drive, this involved getting the trailers near to a HERCULES C190 the same I had train on and passed has a dispatcher and load or pick up items and get them loaded as from HELICOPTERS and then get them off the airfield. I have done some funny jobs in my army career but this beat them all and I can tell you now it was not as easy as you think. We was on standby for any emergency and in 1970 the sqn was sent with all our tractors and trailers plus over lorries etc. to go to the FAR EAST for a 3 months exercise, we went up to the LONDON docks and put all our tractors etc. onto a large ship called a LCT and we stayed overnight to finish the next day and I got permission to get the WOOLWICH FERRY and stay at mums house overnight, the next day we went back to COLCHESTER and packed everything up and got a week's leave and me and pat thought it would be better if she went back home for the time which she did and just left our quarters as it was. A few weeks later I flew out from RAF BRIZE NORTON to SINGAPORE. We then awaited our tractors and lorries and when they came in we unloaded them and then we was on the move up the coast and into the jungle and with RE/RAF got a landing strip where the C190 could land and drop stuff or pick up. We had a great time at first with the C190 as not only RAF was involved but THE AUSSIE AND CANADA C160 too and I have got to say the AUSSIE pilots could land on sixpence and was very quick to land and they never stop just slowed down and throw all the crates out then up up and away. The worst part of course was not being with my pat yet again and also the last 4 weeks out here we did JUNGLE TRAINING and I mean everybody even the cooks, this was very hard work and I don't know how the soldiers did this day after day in WW2 I have a lot of respect for them all, yes even the JAPS. After this training we was sent back to SINGAPORE to load our tractors etc. back on the ships and we was given a few days to look around

the city, thou some of the lads wanted to go back up country to use the lovely golden beaches and race giant turtles along the beach which I got to do a couple of times before , but I wanted to look around this great city as I might not get the chance again which has it proved was correct. We then flew back to the UK and latter had 2 weeks leave and got pat back to our flat in COLCHESTER, well for a time that is until the 1 SQN got picked to go to CYPRUS to work with and

support of THE UNITED NATIONS for a 6 month tour, of course without my pat again, now I saw a lot of marriages break up due to this time apart and I am very proud to say my pat stuck with me anyway she often say I can't have a row with you if you're not in the same room let alone country, in all I think that's what has kept us together was our sense of humour you must have this in you to stay the distance.

This CYPRUS tour was the first time we had weapons with us 24/7 and a couple of times we were told to put one up the spout on readiness, the rest of the time was spent doing ration runs or moving ammo about. Has I was a referee I was doing a lot of games when allowed and due to UN having troops from SWEDEN, FINLAND, IRISH having matches with each other and of course with us British. With the FINNS I found out what a sauna was and how you would have to drink a lot of vodka for it to work, well that's what they said and I am glad I went only twice, TOO HOT.

Because we were UN we had the blue beret and scarf and also badges on our jackets and best of all we could go all over CYPRUS has much as we liked, where most of the lads went into NICOSIA I went to old abbeys, roman theatres and some splendid ruins. If I was going for a drink I would head to KERYNIA on the TURKISH side and sit outside overlooking the harbour, I told pat about this lovely place and we both said we would like to stay there but latter in fact the TURKISH invaded NORTH CYPRUS and thou they did not too much damage to KERYNIA the lovely beach resorts and hotels were left in ruins and I think to this day there are still

places you can't go and THE UN is still there. In July 1971 I came back to COLCHESTER and to my pat.

Pat and I talk about having children and while I was in CYPRUS pat thought she was pregnant but it was not to be, we was told 1 SQN RCT would not be going anywhere in the near future because of defence cuts, thou the back of our minds we was all thinking this SQN is the main support for ground troops 24/7 so we took it in but never believed it. We carried on and after some leave was back to doing basic transport duties and very boring it was after going to all these countries in just a few years. I of course was doing my football and refereeing when I could and was also promoted to LANCE CORPRAL and moved to A TROOP and 3ton Bedford's, I also got the chance to work in our troop transport office and did a lot of work on motor servicing documents and work details, it is amazing when you need a driver to take a lorry to LIVERPOOL how many new mates I had around me .Our life seem to be running on ok but all was to change in early 1972 when the PARAS in NORTHERN IRELAND killed a lot of civilian's called BLOODY SUNDAY and in FEB 1972 it felt the whole of the British army was on the move. We was straight out there via lorries to EUSTON STATION and then march to the trains and going through the station brought a right lump to my throat has the public stop what they was doing and clapped and cheered us along the platform and some us thought if this what it was like in the WW1 and WW2, one thing seem certain this was a 6 MONTHS TOUR and even the little training we had before and also the worst bit we did know what we was going to drive till we got there because all the vehicles was being sent from all over the world and some of our trucks were painted for desert warfare, not ideal for BELFAST, so when they arrived all vehicles was painted green thou not for long thanks to the locals.

We got on out LCT ship at LIVERPOOL DOCKS and this ship had been going back and forth for a week bringing fresh troops to BELFAST, we was coming into BELFAST DOCKS and a load of us was up top taking in

the view until a deck hand said you should not be up here as they have had sniper fire when the ship came alongside the pier before, a lot of the soldiers then rushed below, yes me also.

Of course nothing happen and I heard nothing ever did and it was a joke by a fed up deckhand, but it did make you think twice and thinking in NORTHERN IRELAND was what you had to do a lot.

Our SQN HQ was to be PALACE BARRACKS BELFAST, this did not go down very well has it was THE Parra's BARRACKS until just after BLOODY SUNDAY then they got moved to a different one thou nobody told the IRA who the then tried to get back at our troops who were never there when these unfortunate killings took place. I was to stay here for a while thou others went all over N.I. to detachments with other infantry units taking them into areas for patrol.

One day I was told I was going to be 2nd in charge of 10 drivers under a full corporal at a place called CASTLE DILLION, we was going to be working with the ROYAL ENGINEERS either driving or as escorts .this place was once a mental alyssum and I can tell you now some of these engineers seem right at home here.

On the 24TH OF APRIL 1972 I was in charge has my corporal had gone on his Sgt's course and I was well on my way to be made up anyway to corporal, so I got on with the daily work when I got a called to supply a driver for escort on a slow moving load with the R.E. I have always asked for volunteers and would pick one out who I felt could not only do the job well but of course not let me down, a driver put his hand up and saw who it was and told him to get ready and issued ammo.

Later that day an officer pull me of guard duty and told me to come with him, he sat me down and said that my driver had been sitting in this slow moving vehicle has armed escort when it was attacked by youths and

sorry to say very young children no more than 5/6, 7 years old throwing bricks, slabs and of course paint in any colour. The R.E. Driver seeing the children all around him misjudge a bend and the heavy lorry overturn into a ditch and my driver had been crushed to death. I was of course in shock and my driver LAURIE JUBB was only 21 years old and his wife like my pat was expecting their first child.

The officer said that I was to look after his best mate 24/7 as he had joined the army with him and was heartbroken and threatening to kill himself. I of course did this for a time but its funny no one ask how I was coping over this, after all I was the one who let him go on this detail.

His wife when told said she was expecting twins and latter that year had twin girls, she also wanted a FULL ARMY BURIAL SERVICE at BRADFORD in YORKSHIRE, due to this because I was in charge I was told I would be taking part in the burial and 5 others was chosen to make the 6 men who was to carry his coffin to his grave. We was flown out of IRELAND a party of 10 in all to go to GATTRICK BARRACKS to go through the service which would last about 2 hours.

Unlike now where you have SKY NEWS telling who has been killed within 24 hours we thankfully did not have that and all pat knew was another soldier had been killed in IRELAND and it was said he was a R.E DRIVER which he was not. Before the service we was given a tot of rum and then went to the coffin and took him to the graveside, after we put him into his grave the other infantry men gave him a 6 rounds salute and then I led my party to the head of his grave and each man in turn gave a salute and we was then taken to his wife and she thanks us all for doing this, I can only say she was a very brave lady indeed but all I could think of if

my pat had to go thru all this if it had been my time. After we were finish we was given another tot of rum, glad we was not driving and sent on leave for 4 days. I could not wait to get to WOOLWICH to be with my pat and has she was to give birth in 3 to 4 weeks' time and I knew she would be worrying about me.

When I got home late on the Thursday night pat ask what was happening why was I on leave till Sunday night and I told her a white lie that I had come back to work on some new vehicles going to IRELAND in YORKSHIRE and given a few days off, it was nice being with the family again and IRELAND seem a long way off but living in WOOLWICH a garrison town and R.A troops training all around us when pat and I went out. I was due to fly on the 8pm plane from Gatwick on the Sunday 7th of May, that Sunday morning pat woke me up and asked for a glass of water and I got out of bed half asleep and got her a glass and returned to the bedroom and the look on pats eyes I will never forget, pats waters had broken and last thing she wanted was WATER, I was military trained so of course I just went into panicked mode and pats mother came and ask what all the fuss was and once she was told we called for an ambulance, we was lucky that the MOTHERS AND BABIES HOSPITAL was only 800 yards from us and we was down there and in by about 10am.

I of course was due to fly back that day and while pat was being looked after I rung my unit in BELFAST and told them what was happening and they told me to call back in 1 hour and then could talk to my C.O, when I rang again I spoke to the MAJOR and gave him a update and he said whatever happens I am to be on that plane if not I would be going back to COLCHESTER not to our flat but to the GLASSHOUSE. I went in to see pat and told her I would have to go back that night, the nurses was great they knew I had to go back and told me not to worry (some chance) at about 1PM they told me pat was going to give birth soon and sat me outside in the corridor.

In these days men never went in to hold hands or take a video or dvd of the birth like they do now, while pat had 2 or 3 people helping her have our baby I was outside with 1 nurse and 1 sister helping me throw up. I don't know if it was about being a dad for first time or knowing I have to go back to BELFAST tonight either way when I heard a baby crying the nurses took me into see pat and my new son and he was not even been clean up they knew how important it was to see them before I got my plane back, Our son was called Andrew and he is also our only child has it turns out. I said my goodbyes to Pat and Andy and of course thanked all the staff and told them I was being sent back but would be home when pat came out of hospital which in our days was 10 days before mother and baby was sent home. When I got back to barracks that night at about 10pm I was told to go to the NCO'S MESS where a drink was waiting for me and all the lads stayed up to toast my new son's arrival. The day pat and Andy came out of hospital I was flown back for 7 days leave.

After my leave I was not be going back to BELFAST but to GIRWOOD PARK detachment to join my corporal who was back and I was to be is 2ic with a driver on a WATER CANNON. My job was either to load dye into a tub or use the cannon on the crowds who turn up to throw stones, metal, rocks and anything else they could pick to throw. The worst of Couse was petrol bombs and I am glad to say over a month I did this only twice did we have rifle fire at us and also petrol bombs

And once we had a window cracked but nobody was hurt. The dye we used stayed on the people for about 3 days the idea was the street patrol's would then pick them up, the trouble was anyone putting the dye into the tub even with the gloves we used always seem to have a bit on their hands or arms and if you ever went out of our camp when off duty you of course did not go in uniform and could be picked up if the patrol saw the marks. After my turn at this I was to go to the sharp end to drive a SARACEN PERSONAL CARRIER IN LONDONDERRY. I would be the driver and have an officer and radio op and up to 8 infantry and drop

them off and pick them up after their patrols, thou it might seem mad I got to say whether I would drive through a barrier or around it and after all I was the one driving and everybody wanted to come back safe in the end so the lads and usually a very young officer let me get on with my job has best as possible and I am glad these SARACEN was brought out of mothballs or sent from the desert areas to do this job. Once you got used to the gearbox even with 6 wheels you could turn on a sixpence and best of all you had ROLLS ROYCE engine to get you about, you could batten down and use your periscope mirrors to look out and even petrol bombs, bullets, could not get in and I have a few bullets in a matchbox still to prove it. Their only weakness was the underbelly and the IRA did not attack a SACACEN this way till about 1975 when 8 RE men went under a bridge and the IRA had planted a massive bomb under the road and 8 good men died.

I must say now I really enjoyed my role in LONDONDERRY and thou scared at times it was good working with men of all sorts of rank and most of the time in active service over there your first name was used more than your SURNAME and I think that was because we was looking after each other the best we could, the worst job with the SARACEN was we were sent onto to the streets with it painted green and every time we came back off duty it would be all colours and we would have to get it painted green before it went back onto the streets again, I think all the DIY shops in NORTHERN IRELAND must have sold out of paint by the time I left. After our 6 months tour we was sent back to COLCHESTER and our sqn had lost 2 dead and 8 wounded.

I went back to WOOLWICH and saw my pat and our son and then the family wanted to talk about what I saw and what I did but my father in law KEN he was ex ROYAL NAVY and told them to leave me alone he had fought in WW2 on a MINESWEEPER and he told me some of the things he had done and seen and I now know why my own dad would not talk about his 2 world wars he was in and like them I had

seen things that nobody would want too or even believe them and some of this written down pat did not know about because she would had worried even more.

I then went back to Colchester with pat into our flat and things settled down and we knew we would not be going back to NORTHERN IRELAND for some time as other sqn's took it in turn to do infantry support over there, I then went back to playing and refereeing football matches which we did not do in IRELAND.

My family talk about me leaving the army has I not only had a new baby but I not had a settled life with my pat. Of course I did not want to leave the army and was not a coward in any way and I knew I would be a corporal very soon but I did ask about leaving and when I told my SGT MAJOR he said I would be mad to leave and also told me he would stop me getting my promotion I was due till I saw sense, this hurt me a lot so I ask to see my O.C a MAJOR HOLLINS, he was new to our sqn and when I talk to him about what I had been through and the birth of my baby boy he fully understood and told me that has I had done very well in all my reports and he did not want me to leave the army he said I could be made up to corporal and to chat with my wife has he would send me to any posting I wanted within R.C.T. world wild and better still with my wife and son. I went back and had a long talk with pat and told her I would like to go to BERLIN has that was the best post to have in our CORPS and the money was better even thou I would be driving through all the checkpoints daily, the standard of living was very good and we would have our own rented house outside the army base. Pat asked if I could be sent back to IRELAND and I told her it was very unlikely but I could never be 100% sure, pat and the family had a good talk about this and they all agreed

that I had done my bit and should now have a new life with my pat and our son, after a lot of talking I agreed that I should give my notice to leave the army after nearly 8 years. I put in for my discharge and was told as I was trained in many aspects of transport I would have to pay the army £150.00 for my discharge, I was upset about this but was told this was the norm for leaving before my 9 years was up and when I left I would get this back and more in the form of a tax rebate and this is what happened later. I was also put on army reserve for the next 20 years and was only put on standby twice in that time.

I went back to my OC MAJOR HOLLINS and was given my discharge and my red book stating all my army service and conduct also my character. I am very pleased to say I left with the army with EXEMPLARY conduct and character just like my own father had been given when he left the army in 1945. A couple of weeks before I was due to leave the O.C let me have time off and go to interviews in COLCHESTER as pat and I loved it here in the countryside to bring our son up. One of the first jobs I put in for was THE POST OFFICE but I had been turned down when I was 15 and I thought I would have another go and took the interview and exams and also shown them my red book where all my time in the army, places, units, driving grade which was H.G.V. 1 and also my education exams I had taken in my service and after 1 hour was told I had a job when I came out the army, I felt great about this and happy that my new life with my family was going to be ok.

I thanked the P.O. and told them I would be in touch when I left the army but I still had a couple of more interviews to go to first and one of those was near where we lived near to the army barracks. The firm was called WALLS ICE CREAM WHOLESALERS LTD. This firm only sold ice

cream to the shops and not on the streets and they wanted a new salesman, the main job would be taking pre ordered bags to shops but they also had 2 salesman selling from the vehicle to CLACTON/WALTON ON SEA AREA and another one to SOUTHEND ON SEA AREA. In my interview it turned out that 50% of the staff was ex-service personal and I was told that I could fit in so well here and also the money was better than the P.O. job and would earn commission on sales if I was given the van sales job as the CLACTON job had just been made vacant and they wanted someone to take it on, after a look around and meet some of the lads I could see me fitting right in here and though I had no van sales skills I thought this would be a better job in the long run and took it there and then, I could not give them my address as the council had not given us a place yet but we were on a very short list as anybody leaving the army in those days was given a place within 4 weeks. We were given a 3 bed house on an estate the other side of the town where I was going to work but as I would be leaving at 6am this was not a matter with traffic. I was taken down to CLACTON and met the kiosks owners who most part were ex London people who had moved down here and as I came from CHARLTON/WOOLWICH area I got on great with them all, there was about 35 kiosks which 30 were walls and 5 were Lyons maid ice cream. This had been a good time to leave the army as it was April and the ice cream season was just starting going on to the end of sept when we did contact work for CADBURYS doing their Christmas range from OCT to DEC and then doing hampers for FAIRPACK right through to Christmas EVE then in Jan to April working again for CADBURYS on their Easter egg range till April and back to the seafront so you can see I would not get bored in anyway. I enjoyed my work very much and

got to see my family a lot more, I had steady trade in the summers up to 1976 and also had got all the kiosks back from Lyons maid and then in 1976 THE SUN CAME OUT AND STAYED OUT.

From end of April to end of September it was wall to wall sun and I was run of my legs and this was due to doing a double run on all my kiosks the early one where I could drive on the prom and unload but after 10am I had to get off the prom and then barrow any ice cream down the slopes to the kiosks, at least I was still fit and at the end of these long days I would get good commission on my sales. Of course WALLS ICE CREAM had not predicted that it would be such a good year and had to go back into full production to try and meet demands which they never got to do and I had to go all around my kiosks and tell them I would have to ration some lines and I would then come back down latter in the day and give them the choice of what was left over from my first run, this was the only way to keep them all happy and glad to say they did their very best to help me that year.

At the end of 1976 season WALLS had sold more than any other time in their history and myself had done very well and in July and august had sold out every day and my manager told me I had earned more than him over those 2 months anyway I knew the taxman was happy by what he had taken out of my wages those 2 very busy months. Our depot like others had record sales that year and when the final count was made it turn out that our depot had out sold the rest in the EASTERN AREA and better still for me I had been told I was the top van salesman in our area.

Our depot was given a night out at CLACTON for our sales figures and a free prize draw and I won a hostess trolley and then swap it with a

REP for a new style vacuum cleaner which when I showed my pat when I got home it did not go down that well. I was thinking she would use the cleaner more than a heating trolley so thought she would be more happy, put it this way if I could have got into our spare room pat would have put me in it and said you're a lovely man but don't THINK too much.

This was not all our depot got WALLS ICE CREAM HQ said has we had the most sales not just in our own area but countrywide they was going to treat all our staff to 5 days in MARJOCA but we had to split the staff in 2 groups as we still had to do our CADBURYS XMAS contract, pat and I went with the 2nd group and was driven down to GATWICK for the flight out and pat's first one, we had a great time there and we only had to spend money on our own gifts.

When I return off holiday I was called into the mangers office to see someone about being a REP and went to a meeting at BARKING our DEPOT, when I came back from this I told my boss I still wanted to stay a salesman on CLACTON SEAFRONT and I think he was pleased has he bought me a pint latter that night, a couple weeks later I am back in the boss's office to be told that I have been selected to go ROTTERDAM to our parent company UNILEVER HQ and not only that I could take PAT who only just unpacked from our other holiday.

I was told I was going to be the one chosen to represent THE EAST ANGLIA REGION and was to go from COLCHESTER to LIVERPOOL ST STATION to catch the boat train to the HOOK OF HOLLAND. Well me and pat got to LIVERPOOL STATION and went to the HOTEL there to meet up with others from BIRDSEYE/WALLS who were picked out to go on this great trip. At the hotel I book in and Pat and I was shown

into room full of very smart people and lots of drinks being given out, we sat down and was all told that this 5 day holiday to HOLLAND was for our work in getting great sales figures in this record year of 1976.

And your wife or partner are there because they had to put up with you not being home on time most days this summer and they should join you on this trip. WE was all then taken to a train and shown our seats and told we would be having dinner on the train on the way down to HARWICH to get out ship. We of course went right through our COLCHESTER STATION on the way down to HARWICH but pat and I did not mind with such a lovely dinner and trip before us.

We had a lovely time being taken all round HOLLAND going to UNILEVER sites and also the windmills etc.

I can honestly say 1976 was our year, after that in 1977 WALLS ICE CREAM who had lost of a lot of money due to having not enough ice cream in 1976 went into full production ready for the 1977 season, of course 1977 turn out to be a normal English summer wet/dry/wet. I stayed doing my job till October 1979 when I left to do van sales for a wholesale flower firm just down the road from my home at MARKS TEY. My job was to go around shops and also to other wholesales outlets, I kept in touch with my old mates at WALLS ICE CREAM and my old boss Gordon and in FEB 1980 he had a chat with me about coming back to do van sales for the new season but not on the Clacton area he wanted me to take on SOUTHEND ON SEA seafront with also MALDON PARK AND COLCHESTER ZOO. This round had been losing kiosks and GORDON wanted me to try and get them back.

I had a chat with PAT and she said go for it so I started the 1980 season on SOUTHEND sea front, the people there were ok mostly ex

LONDONERS and has a boy I had been taken down here from WOOLWICH on a PADDLE STEAMER to SOUTHEND for a very long day trip. I got started that year serving my kiosks and getting back what I could of the people who did not use WALLS ICE CREAM.

I had a very good time down there and the only trouble I had sometimes was while sending the ice cream up to the end of the pier (the longest in the world at this time) was if the café owner was not at the other end to take it off and I always waited to the train had come back to see if they had been taken off so I could get on with my round. Over the next couple of years I had got back 90% of the kiosks but sales was dropping year by year has people went elsewhere to spend what little money they had mostly abroad to the SUN. We was told at the end of 1982 that next year was going to be the last of van sales and in 1984 everything would be ordered over the phone and their orders prepack. I of course was unhappy about this after 10 years work but could see that WALLS wanted to know they had sold a product so they could see what production they need that month. In 1983 I started SOUTHEND but was now looking out to move to another job, I know WALLS was still going to keep me on but I thought this was a the right time at 35 years old to start another job away from van sales but not away from the general public who I got on so well with. A friend of mine work for a local skip firm F W WESTS only 3 miles away from my home, I phone them and left them my phone number they said they did not a vacancy as yet but would ring back if one came up as the staff their change quite a lot, the outcome was that I left WALLS in July 1983 and went to work has a waste driver on a very old LEYLAND 16 TON skip lorry , the hours was 0630 to 1830 and you took your dinner break when you could I think the hours and

the work put a lot of people of and that's why there was such a turnover of staff.

My boss FRED WEST was a self-made millionaire and us working up to 12 hours a day must have helped him. We worked 5 and half days a week, the Saturday was to come in to wash and check your lorry out for the coming week thou if you was not on wash-down and a job came in you had to go and do that job and get back into a queue to wash-down before you could go home, it was not all bad news the boss would check our vehicles out and give us a £10 note if he was happy if not back to wash-down again. My job was to deliver skips and collect loaded ones and take them and tip them into our own tip, this save the boss loads of money tipping at our own landfill site and not using the local council sites, also there was no recycling at this time only on metal i.e. copper brass etc.

My boss was happy to let us take anything in the skips unless it was metal and I was very happy with this as in the 1980' people and shops threw out loads of good things which could be reused and after all I was brought up on second hand and hand me downs and thou a lot of the other drivers did not bother I did not let this little perk go and I took what I wanted for me and my family and the boss was happy as long as I did my work after all has he said it not filling up his landfill. I also had another reason for picking up items to be reused, in the early 1980 I used travel to WROTHAM IN KENT to go around a BOOTSALE at a farm there, this was once a month on a Sunday and there was no big shops open like nowadays and thou I did not have a pitch there I would go around picking up a few bargains we did not have a boot sale in ESSEX at the time and it was a lovey day out and would then go and see our family in WOOLWICH afterwards.

I was picking up loads of stuff from skip/shops which they no longer wanted and anything which the family did not want I would go to the KENT boot sale and sell it cheap, this boot sale got bigger and bigger and in the early days you had to ring the farmer up giving your car reg and vehicle type and when you got there you was crossed of the list and you paid £5 a pitch. In the end when this boot sale got so big they had to bring in security to stop people fighting to set their pitch up first and we was all put into long lines to await our call forward, like me a lot of people travel from ESSEX to either sell or buy that a few people got together and started a Sunday boot sale in ESSEX but not on the same Sunday has KENTS one. We started one at THE ESSEX SHOWGROUND IN CHELMSFORD and it took off in a big way that in time we even had police getting the traffic in and out and one time having over 1,000 pitches and about 10.000+ people looking around. Over the years Boot sales are now held daily somewhere but I am glad to say I was there at the very start. My work carried on at WEST's waste and over time was given 2 drivers under me to run just the waste in/out of the COLCHESTER area and even at times the 3 of us could not cope.

In October 1987 we had like other people a GREAT STORM where trees was uprooted and lots of buildings damage, the next day when we could get into our work we was inundated with skip orders and I can say now over these months from OCTOBER /April the next year you had more chance of winning the football pools then getting any size skip and we was also given licence to work 7 days a week if you wanted. After the clear up my boss had made a mint and now and then would go into his very deep pockets and pull, out a £10/20 note and place in your hand to say well done now go out and do some

more work, he also at CHRISTMAS every year gave a dinner/dance with our wives and a free raffle with very good prizes and best of all free drinks, he also took an interest in my boot sales and ask me to get him a certain item if I came across it and he would paid me back and this happen a few times and one day I found an item he wanted and i told him there was no charge has it came out one of his skips and he smiled and said I would never be a millionaire and he has been proved right thou I did have an extra £20 in my pay-packet that week. In 1988 my boss sold our waste firm to LEIGH ENVIRONMENTAL LTD, he said his landfill was getting full and was given silly money from LEIGH to buy him out. We was to move out of his yard to another depot in Colchester and our job was going to change also we was still doing household/shop waste but also TOXIC/ CHEMICAL WASTE. I was trained up to do this and at times when I did some jobs with my suit on I looked more like the man on the moon the just a waste driver, I found this part ok if you took it slowly and found time to do the job not only right but safe. We also got a change in our pay with LEIGH and got an extra £50.00 a week bringing in line with their other depots in the MIDLANDS.

I got on with this type of very well and always played safe doing toxic loads, thou in the early days ABESTOES was broken up by us in our yard by hand and many years on we were told not to touch it without masks/suits. Over the next 25 years I was in waste disposal with small and big firms working with hazardous materials, mostly moving to another firm when a bigger one us took over, the firms were. F.W. WEST, LEIGH LTD, TANNER, TANNER, HALES LTD, BIFFA LTD. I wanted to retire with a family firm like when I first started out and joined ALL CLEAR SKIPS about 10 miles from my home, thou I had been a

recycling and environmental officer with some of big company's I was back just doing household skips once again.

I was going to keep doing this till I retire latter this year 7/11/2013, but my luck run out has both my legs had arthritis in them and was told my right knee had to be replaced. So on the 7/2/2011 10 years to the day my mum had died in there I entered COLCHESTER HOSPITAL to have a right knee replacement (too much football and jumping out of helicopter's and also jumping down from my lorries over time). I had my operation and my new knee was in place but they also gave me a BLOOD CLOT to my lung which set me back quite a bit. When I came out of hospital and sent home I was told after 6 months I would be back with just a limp when walking and I know many people have had this replacement and gone back to having a normal life but I am now told over 2 years plus that I HAVE BEEN UNLUCKLY and my leg will not fully support my replacement due to muscle wastage and also my knee and ankles swell right up and my leg can give way at any time throwing me forward so I still use my crutch a lot now while trying to walkabout, I have been classed as disabled and I feel very angry and upset over this UNLUCKLY operation as I so wanted to teach my lovely grandson THOMAS how to play and enjoy FOOTBALL. I am now told he is doing quite ok without my help must be in the blood.

I go back in feb/2014 to see my consultant again who will tell me that my knee replacement is alright and I am just UNLUCKY that I have all the other problems to bear for the rest of my life. It's a good thing I believe in FATE, the first time was when they had nearly finished BIDDULPH HOUSE and they put 9 more families into it with an extension which brought me my lovely PAT without who would bring

me my icepacks at night. The next time was when my lovely son ANDY was born I was only there because I was burying one of my drivers and had a couple of days leave after the funeral and the last time was when only getting a blood clot to my lung and not my heart or I would not now be able to BORE you with my true story.

JOHN ROBERT KIETH AITKEN

SEPTEMBER 2013.

