

LIEUTENANT COLONEL NEVILLE POULSOM

30TH JANUARY 1926 - 5TH NOVEMBER 2020

I have been extremely fortunate that my father was an inveterate 'kerfuffler', never threw anything away and was always on a project, new collection, writing a book or just generally recording things. He wrote his memoirs and in it he included many pivotal points in his life and over the last month, knowing that God and my mother were beckoning him to a better future, he kept it beside him in his sitting room. He never pointed it out but I knew why it was there and that he was recollecting a very full and interesting life.

Neville Wright Poulson was born in Darlington on the 30th January 1926, moving to Barnsley three years later and then on to Newcastle on Tyne via Airedale and Ackworth.

When war broke out he was a pupil at Newcastle Royal Grammar School and with all his fellow pupils was evacuated to Penrith. *"All I can clearly remember of that day is leaving school in a long crocodile, with a small suitcase and a gas mask, and making our way to the Central Station past groups of weeping women muttering in Geordie fashion, 'The poor bairns.'"* The three years he spent in the Lake District gave him an abiding love of the Lakes and the military, the latter through the Cadet Force. *"My father met an elderly Indian Army Lt Col of the 8th Punjab Regiment, who had been recalled for army service to recruit public schoolboys for the Indian Army when the war was over. The thought of joining the Indian Army fired my imagination and the moment I was sixteen I applied."* After a short period at Durham University reading Civil Engineering at seventeen he was called up.

"In late afternoon in January 1944 we were put on a troop train in London, and set off for an unknown destination to embark on a troopship for India. When we set sail we went up onto the limited open deck available to us and saw dozens of ships, both large and small, all taking up position to form a convoy. All around us was our escort of destroyers and one aircraft carrier. With the minimum of fuss and delay we were soon underway. We eventually reached the Straits of Gibraltar and discovered one morning when we went on deck that the rest of the convoy had gone, and except for one destroyer we were on our own, with the ship's engines stopped. However, we finally got up full steam and caught up with the rest of the convoy. We must have been one of the first convoys through the Mediterranean after the landings in Italy."

After disembarking in Bombay, my father went to Belgaum for officer training, before being posted to the 10th Baluch Regiment in Karachi. *"The next three years, spent serving in the Indian Army, were without doubt the finest of my military career, and if India had not received independence, I would have hoped to continue my service in the Indian Army."*

After India my father obtained a commission in the East Yorkshire Regiment, spending time in Austria. After becoming increasingly disillusioned with the British Army he volunteered for the King's African Rifles and sallied forth to Mombasa, en route for Morogoro. *"Marching with the African soldiers was quite novel for me. For one thing they never stopped singing. The singing was led by a song leader, usually the sergeant, who throughout the whole march ran up and down the line of marching soldiers leading the singing, with the men stamping their feet like a Zulu impi, this was despite being laden with equipment and rifle."*

1949 saw my father in Mauritius. *"All the soldiers (Askari) and their families had to be vaccinated and inoculated, nominal rolls prepared of the names of the men and their families; one of the problems was trying to identify the wives of the soldiers as they went off on embarkation leave with one wife and returned with an entirely different one."* It was here that my father met my mother, Mary, a QARANC theatre sister at the military hospital. The battalion left Mauritius in 1951 with my parents a newly married couple on the troopship Empire Test. *"Coming through the Red Sea, at night, the ship would turn round to get what little breeze there was for the stokers in the engine room; the ship was one of the last with coal fired boilers. We eventually stopped at Port Said to take on coal. For three days all the portholes were closed and canvas covered the decks to keep out the coal dust; the heat due to lack of ventilation was overpowering."*

In 1955 my father, mother and myself aged one, flew to Singapore from the UK. Incredibly the route stopped for refuelling at Rome, Cyprus, Bahrain, Karachi, Calcutta and Bangkok before reaching their destination. Father was upcountry while my mother lived in various lodgings from Singapore to The Cameroon Highlands. Next was Germany and another daughter, Bridget, and then back to UK for a few years before reporting to Southampton to board the troopship Nevassa in 1960, sailing for Hong-Kong to command the Royal Military Police dog company (having transferred to serve with The Royal Military Police). This was the start of me being aware of what an interesting and interested person my father was.

On his return to England my father embarked on another of his passions; polar exploration. *"I found myself writing a book on polar exploration, with particular reference to the award of the Polar Medal. Mary and I spent many hours in the Public Record Office carrying out research for the book. Research and writing continued throughout my stay in Aldershot, but eventually the book "The White Ribbon - A Medallion Record of Polar Exploration" was published together with "A Catalogue of Twentieth Century Medals Awarded to the British Army."* Apart from a two year tour in Germany my father spent most of the next ten years in the UK moving every two years before leaving the army in 1975 to work for the Sussex Police as their chief administrative officer.

Retirement came in 1991 and my parents settled in Mayfield, East Sussex, where they became immersed in village life. My father was chairman of The Royal British Legion and together they became heavily involved in their parish church, helping elderly parishioners and running the church fete in between writing more books on military buttons, medals and their ribbons. Bravely, and without a word of complaint, my father stoically nursed my mother through advanced dementia and only conceded defeat when he placed her in a nursing home for the last two months of her life.

After my mother's death Daddy and I did a nostalgic trip to the North, staying at The Howtown Hotel on Ullswater. He had not been there since his wartime evacuation, but he could still remember every turn in the road from bicycling it over eight decades ago. Our trip to RGS went brilliantly with him recounting to staff how it operated in the thirties; for example how the girls' grammar school could observe the naked boys while they swam in the pool and much more.

Four years ago he moved down to join us in North Devon, by then ninety years of age. Life revolved around Mass, trips to the pub and family lunches at the weekend with the four generations sitting down to eat. One of those round the table was Daniel Smith, ex RAF, now an air ambulance pilot and ex RGS pupil 1981-88, who is married to his granddaughter, our daughter.

In Daddy's final week and by now terminally ill, his twelve year old great grandson said to his mother, "You don't understand why I don't want to go to school. My best friend is dying." That is what he always was for his family and friends, a loving, gentle, kindly best friend and we will miss him, but know that where he has gone is a far better place and that he has been wanting to go there since our mother died. God bless, Daddy, your loving daughter, Sarah (Farrelly).