

Life in Linden Barracks, Penang island 1965 -1967.

My father was offered a posting to Malaysia while we were living in Winchester. Fortunately, he accepted and the family went through a rigorous vaccination program aimed at avoiding tropical disease. We left England on a BOAC propeller powered aircraft and landed at Istanbul, Bombay and lastly Butterworth airforce base. The trip to Minden Barracks was via truck and ferry. My father, Sgt Paddy McCann, was with C company of The Royal Greenjackets. He got a promotion with the move.. We had a large flat in the Sergeants quarters overlooking a large field with the BASC school in the distance. Beyond that, was a rubber plantation. I, my brothers and sister all attended the BASC during 65-67. The Headmaster at the time was Mr Beadle, who had lost a limb. I remember that we would still get our 1/3 pint of milk a day and that later they introduced strawberry and chocolate versions!!!

Growing up in the camp was wonderful. We had a maid called Theresa, who cleaned and cooked all our meals. The school put on many a sports event and everyone learned to swim. The pool was an essential part of camp life and involved a fair walk over large hill from our house. Alternatively, an easy downhill bike ride followed by a killer uphill battle on the way back! Many of us did our Amateur Swimming Association medals there. I personally did Bronze Silver and Gold. The monsoon rains were quite torrential and the drains were six foot deep in places. Huge toads would make use of them and create quite a racket in the evening. Small fish could also be caught from some of them.

Just before nightfall, bats would turn up in huge numbers, blackening the sky and deafening us with a demented screeching sound. This would last for 10-15 minutes and then it was all over.

We all took anti-malarial tablets and slept under mosquito nets. Geckos would come out a hunt insects that were attracted to the lights – we called them Chit-chats. We would watch them hunt from our beds as we awaited the onset of sleep.

The Army put on many events like beach parties at places like Tiger Island. We used to go to the hills outside the camp to a place called Mt Pleasant and swim in the pool followed by a huge feast. The camp cinema was always popular and represented a big link to life at home in “Blighty”.

Wives used to go shooting at the range. The kite flying season was also memorable because everyone had a paper and bamboo kite to fly - mostly individually and beautifully hand painted. Mr Chong(a Chinese version of Arthur Daily) would turn up once a week with his Cortina and sell vegetables, fruit and er..... those kites from his boot! Naturally, Chinese New Year was eagerly awaited for the fireworks. Fortunately, we celebrated eastern and western culture.

On pocket money day we would all race towards the small shop at the NAAFI to get Airfix models and comics like The Beano, Topper, Dandy etc. We were bought bikes and this allowed us to explore the barracks in detail. The camp was full of mysterious places and we found Japanese tunnels and ammo dumps. Later these would be barricaded off with barbed wire..... There was regular reports of bomb disposal crews taking care of newly discovered WW2 ordnance.

We were befriended by the young soldiers who educated us on new musical trends from England and let us listen to their records. Some flew remote controlled aircraft on the fields at the entrance to the camp. One young gent had a hobby of keeping poisonous snakes!..... Speaking of snakes, the place was crawling with them; mostly Cobras, Green Tree snakes and Pythons. I remember some unpleasant confrontations with Hornets as well. Coconuts, Bananas, Rambutans and Pineapples were easy to find. However, only the brave would try Durian, which had a foul odour.

Sundays meant church and my brother and myself were alter boys. We did our First Communion there. My brother also almost set fire to the Priest.....thats another story.

In addition to our school buddies, we also had Malay kids as pals, they were sons of workers in the camp. They taught us how to escape from the camp by crawling under the fence to visit the local Malay village. We would collect newspapers in the camp and the shops out there would weigh and trade them for fireworks or whatever.

It was always terrific when Dad arrived back from Borneo. He would always bring back presents and we would all go out to places like the Botanical Garden, the Pagoda, Snake Temple etc.

However, the best of the best was when dad would take us fishing.....I remember two place we used to go; one was at the back of a smelly pig farm, south of Snake Temple, where we caught catfish and the other was along a long jetty halfway between the camp and Georgetown.

It all seems like a dream now but I know that the time we spent in Penang was one of the most magical periods of our life.

Written by Cavan McCann Perth 21/12/14Now aged 58 (How did that happen?)

PS - My brothers are David and Rory. My Sister is Siobhan and my mum is Doreen McCann
Alas- Patrick McCann died Nov17th 2012 aged 87God bless you Dad.