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| Logo | ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUSARMED SERVICES LIAISON **STORIES BY AA MEMBERS WITH ARMED SERVICES EXPERIENCE** |

# Tony’s Story

When I was seventeen years old, I was an indentured apprentice joiner with a local house-building firm. I decided one Friday lunch time to leave work, go to the local pub, and drink four pints of beer. When I came back, a man of the world, I punched the general foreman after a heated discussion regarding more money. I was sacked. If I had learned my lesson, then the next fifty years or so wouldn’t have happened. With no job, no prospects, and my mam and dad constantly on my back, I decided in my wisdom to join the Royal Marines. The training—as you would expect—was extremely hard, but I made it through with room to spare. My first posting was to Singapore, in 1967. I had been arrested in the arrival lounge at Bombay airport for being drunk. People had been praying there, kneeling down on prayer mats, and in my drunkenness I thought that they wanted to play leapfrog.

Our training out in Singapore was geared up to go to war in Vietnam. In the camp next door to ours, Nee Soon Garrison, there were Australian and New Zealand troops stationed. They were actively involved in the war in Vietnam. My first eighteen months out there in the far east were sometimes just a drunken blur. I was arrested, locked up, beaten up by a dozen-strong group of Chinese men who thrashed me with bamboo canes, was involved in loads of fights, and met my first wife out there. She was sixteen—I was eighteen.

I came back to England, underwent a training course, got married, and then went out to Singapore again for another 12 months. Nothing had changed drinking-wise, although I passed the junior NCO course, and my first daughter was born. On completion of that time, we came back to the UK and underwent training for Northern Ireland. When we would return from Northern Ireland, all we wanted to do was to get drunk with our mates down in Plymouth. The wives and families came second. My Higher Power was looking after me on my first tour of duty over there when the armoured car that I was travelling in was blown up. According to the Royal Engineer search team, it was only a five-pound charge of a 500 lb bomb that went off. One of my colleagues was shot dead by an IRA sniper. My own section was practically wiped out by another IED when I wasn’t there. I blamed myself for that for years. Four other colleagues including the Company Commander were shot by snipers but survived. The memories of my time in Northern Ireland in the early seventies haunted me for years until I found the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. I witnessed some terrible times. Troubling events happened on a daily basis. The Step Nine Promises say that we will not regret the past nor wish to close the door on it. I wanted to forget the past. I wanted to slam the door on the memories when I was nursing a litre bottle of vodka, crying my eyes out until only a few years ago.

I ended up as a Corporal HW1, which means Heavy Weapons Instructor in bootneck language. I was dual-trained on 120 mm WOMBAT anti-tank guns and 81 mm mortars. I was also a mortar fire controller and could also control artillery fire. After our return from Singapore and due to the UK’s commitment to NATO, we spent 4 months of every year on board the commando carriers, either HMS Bulwark, Albion, or Hermes, conducting exercises around the Med. I was drunk in Cyprus, Malta, Greece, Turkey, and Corsica. We also conducted exercised down in the Caribbean, Aruba, Curaçao, Puerto Rico, and Fort Lauderdale in Florida, although the last one was just a four-day run ashore. Prince Charles was one of our chopper pilots down there. Then we carried on to Canada, St John in New Brunswick, for exercises with Canadian forces, and onto Montréal and Québec. It was on this last trip that I received a ‘Dear John’ from my first wife that declared that because of my drinking our marriage was over. I then—through drink—decided to go AWOL with a Canadian girl that I met, giving myself up after a couple of days. As far as my career was concerned that was about it.

I know now through the help of the Twelve Steps that my experiences of my ten years in the Royal Marines and my experiences of life may help fellow alcoholics. A young lad of nine years of age turned his back on the church and God. What I didn’t realize until I came into the fellowship was that the God of my understanding never turned his back on me. I am sixty-nine years old now, and I am still alive. My stories about my military service with the Royal Marines, mainly 42 Commando from 1966–1976, would take forever to relate. Alcohol virtually got me into the Royal Marines but later effectively ended my career. I have a home group now plus a brilliant sponsor, and I am now the Armed Services Liaison Officer for Durham and Cleveland Intergroup. Alcoholics Anonymous has given me a new life. I have got my family and friends back now and, hopefully, one day at a time it will stay that way.