

My name is Allan Turl - John and I have been friends for almost sixty years.

John was born on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 1946 to Gus and Ivy Tovey and grew up in New Addington in Surrey. He has a sister Janet who unfortunately cannot be with us today. New Addington is surrounded by woodland and fields on the edge of the North Downs. It was an ideal place to grow up and John took full advantage of the opportunities it offered for outdoor adventures including camping with the scouts.

He went to a local grammar school, however, academia was never going to be John's preferred career as he was already army barmy. For example, in art classes at school, if told to paint a rural scene of fields and trees, he would invariably include a tank or two and some field artillery. He was a keen collector of Army cap badges and an avid reader of the Soldier magazine. He was reluctant at first to join the school Army Cadet Force as he didn't think they did proper soldiering. He did join later though, when he saw the adventures they got up to.

After leaving school he joined the Army as a Royal Signals junior leader. He had wanted to join an infantry regiment, but his Dad had persuaded him to join a regiment which would give him a trade. On completion of boy service, 23878266 Private Tovey J. transferred to Catterick Camp to begin his man service as a Royal Signaller.

John had inherited his parent's strong views of social justice and equality which sometimes were at odds with army life. During one exercise in Germany he was queuing for a meal in the rain when a nearby barn door opened. Inside the barn, in the dry, he saw the officers dining with their mess silver. It was then he vowed to become a paratrooper because he had seen that officers and soldiers of the parachute regiment ate together when on exercise. So off he went to Aldershot to begin parachute training with the infamous "P Company".

After graduating from P Coy he joined 216 Signal Squadron and went in support of the first battalion the Parachute Regiment to Aden, where something happened of which he was very proud. His unit commander wrote in his records that he had remained "*steady under fire*". To John, this confirmed that in his first test of what he called proper soldiering he had not been found wanting, and he later regarded this entry in his records as the proudest achievement of his army career.

He had always had a hankering to be a seafarer, so when an opportunity arose to become communications officer on the Army's tank landing craft he seized it eagerly. One day while at sea he went to the galley foraging for something to eat and noticed the chef taking a beef joint out of the oven. The joint was swimming in juices. He asked the cook what he did with the juice and was told it was thrown over the side in to the sea. John suggested keeping it to make dripping, and so began the daily routine of several slices of dripping toast with their elevenses. During his time at sea John gained 3 stone.

After another spell with 216 he moved on to 259 squadron Royal Signals in Cyprus. A colleague of John's there, Mick Carpenter, was on a married accompanied posting with his wife Jennie, and sometimes Jennie's sister Marion would visit them for a holiday. It was during one of these holidays that she met John. They started writing to each other on her return home and what began as a holiday romance led to their marriage in Walton in December 1982.

Soon after they were married John was posted to Germany with Marion. One day a soldier of John's troop was drawing up a list of names for place settings to be used at a mess dinner. He asked John what his wife's name was. "Mrs Tovey" John replied. Yes I know it's Mrs Tovey said the lad, but what's her first name? John paused thoughtfully then replied. "*First name? Oooo, I don't know her that well*". In fact in the Army hospital in Germany where Marion was having Ben in 1984, she wasn't even referred to as Mrs Tovey, but as wife of 266 Sgt Tovey.

John left the Army after 25 years in 1986 and he, Marion and Ben settled in their first house in Walton. He became a bus driver operating from the local Walton garage and would often make unscheduled stops and diversions to accommodate passenger's needs. Once, on arriving back at Walton garage he found an elderly lady on board who had forgotten to get off at her stop. As it was the last bus, John parked in the garage and took her home in his car.

After a few years they moved to their current home in Kirby-Le-Soken. These were happy times for the Toveys. They watched Ben growing up, going to school, completing his apprenticeship, starting work and marrying Louise. John would spend many hours walking the Walton backwaters with his dogs, first Jessie and then Fred. He took up playing the squeeze box and even tried bell ringing at St Michael's church where the Rev Holdaway is now Rector.

John was keen to be involved with the coastguard and was able to become a volunteer member of the Coast Rescue Team. His strength, fitness and military approach to training quickly led to him becoming the trainer of cliff and mud rescue operations. When Remembrance Day loomed, he had the unenviable task of getting the Rescue Team to march 'in step' to the local War Memorial. His sense of humour and patience managed to overcome their 'unmilitary failings' He also represented the coastguard at the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall, marching down the stairs to join the muster. After his experiences with the remembrance parade in Walton we can see why it was John who was selected for the Albert Hall

Later on he was employed full time as Boatswain of the Coastguard launch "Hunter", probably the second most satisfying job during his working life - nothing could ever surpass the Airborne. He retired in 2011.

Ben married Louise in 2006 and they now have four children, Phoebe, Myla, Isaac, and most recently, Wren. John slipped easily into the kind granddad role enjoying the time he spent with them.

We mostly remember him as a fun bloke to be with, but there was a serious side to him as well. He was thoughtful, reasoning, well read and had strong views about the role of society, but in the end it was the Army that had framed his life and 216 that had shaped it. He was always immensely proud to be Airborne.

Sadly, John and Marion's recent years have been blighted by the dreadful illness which finally overwhelmed him. I would like to pay tribute to Marion for the total care, love and devotion she has given to John. Early on she realised there was no point in feeling sorry for herself, that wouldn't help John at all, so she selflessly knuckled down to be his full time carer providing all the support he needed.

We thank Ben for the support he has given his Mum and Dad throughout this difficult time for them all. And we thank all the organisations and friends, some of you here today, who have given John and Marion the practical and emotional support to allow John to continue as long as possible with an active and enjoyable social life.

John enriched the lives of everyone who knew him. With his passing our lives will be that bit poorer. We shall miss his wit, his humour and the practical jokes. Despite his illness he never complained or showed any bitterness. He accepted his lot with courage and dignity.

A very brave man, soldier, airborne warrior.