



**MARK TIME TRILOGY**  
**A STROLL THROUGH DISJOINTED SOLDIERING**  
**BOOK TWO: "SHIP ME SOMEWHERE EAST OF SUEZ."**

## **To The Warrior His Arms** **(McLeod Reorganisation)**

**Bob Le Vaillant**  
**Based loosely on a True Story**

## TO THE WARRIOR HIS ARMS

1965. Eighteen year-old Mark is the Airdrops Clerk in a Supply Depot on a small island in Borneo during the Malaysian 'Confrontation' with Indonesia. Less than a year into his adult service, the Army is disbanding Mark's Corps...

Up at Director of Borneo Operations (DOBOPS) Headquarters, arrangements were finalising for the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) disbandment. While Staff Sergeant Prescott, the Supply Depot Chief Clerk, seemed unconcerned about what was happening, saying he had no intention of serving with the "blanket-stacking bastards" once he left Borneo, Mark was appalled to discover that, instead of the Intelligence Corps or Royal Corps of Signals, Staff Clerks were transferring to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Mark couldn't believe it. It was another example of military stupidity. The RAOC specialised in weapons, ammunition and other hazardous undertakings like Bomb Disposal. And it was one of the Army's few Corps or Regiments whose capbadge made its task patently obvious. Shaped a little like Ah Ming's hips, the badge had a small shield in the middle, on which three widely out-of-scale cannon balls surmounted three old fashioned Crimean cannons. While probably a simple matter of designer perspective, it was rumoured that the reason for such crass mismatching was a permanent token of the Corps' disgrace for having supplied the wrong size ammunition at a vital stage in some long forgotten conflict. And the badge was complemented by the rousing motto: *Sua Tela Tonanti - To The Warrior His Arms*, a task widely divorced from the role of the Staff Clerk.

"Sewer-teller-fucking-what?" repeated the Master Baker, who unusually was taking a turn running the bar. "What about *To The Limbless His Legs*, for the Medical Corps?"

"*To The toothless, His Teeth!*" chuckled Prescott, who equally unusually was a customer.

"*To The Eunuch His Balls,*" Kelly chuckled.

Mark didn't think it was funny. He would have to wear that bloody badge from now onwards - perhaps thirty years, if he got commissioned. And worse than that, he might have to serve in RAOC Units. Soldiers were already referring to the Corps as "Rob All Our Comrades". Not that it was much different from what they said about the RASC - "Run Away Someone's Coming". It felt nonetheless like a betrayal, almost on the same scale as Profumo's. Mark had fought hard in Boys Service for his little star-shaped *identity* and, like the identities of many of those young soldiers lying in the island's War Cemetery, some faceless bastard was taking it away. And without even asking him...

A large green marquee had been erected near the waterfront on a dusty *padang*: a flat piece of scorched land which in a more balanced climate would be covered by grass and used by small boys to play football. Headquarters ran the ceremony as a solemn historical event with soldiers from each of the island's RASC Units dressed in full uniform and required to march in single file through a flap in one side of the tent, into the middle and to halt smartly a foot in front of two stout headquarters wooden tables manned by supercilious HQ staffers. Scores of soldiers followed the Supply Depot contingent. They came from the Airdrops, Transport and Waterborne Units and from Headquarters itself. The tables were stacked with items of the soldiers' new identities and, as the men stepped forward in pairs, they were instructed to stand at ease and remove their RASC cap badges, shoulder titles and distinctive blue and yellow lanyards and deposit them in large metal tubs underneath the tables.

Stooping quickly and tapping the edge of his badge sharply on the tub's rim so it sounded like he'd dropped it inside, Mark carefully palmed the small brass star, returning to the stand at ease

position and slipping the badge into the back pocket of his shorts. He wasn't throwing it away after so long. Having double-checked Mark's Serial Number and name against an alphabetical index, the Warrant Officer manning the desk handed him his replacement badge with the disgraceful little cannons and their shameful cannon balls along with two sets of brass RAOC shoulder titles and a miserable-looking dark blue and red lanyard. Glancing at Kelly beside him, Mark noticed that Kelly was given a badge looking suspiciously like the one they'd both just taken off. It was the 'new' Royal Corps of Transport (RCT) badge – the same *Star of India* and the same bloody motto! The lanyard was different, simply dark blue.

Grinning, the Warrant Officer winked at Mark. "Right, get 'em on, Comrade," he ordered. "We're all in this together. Stop bloody sulking. Thank Christ I've only got two years to pension!"

"Are you a Staff Clerk, Sir?" Mark asked him.

"Yes, Chief Clerk G Branch. Name's Daley. Look me up in Singapore District. I'm going next week. And don't let anyone know you nicked that Service Corps badge..!"

In their sudden and separate identities, the soldiers gathered uncomfortably on the far side of the tables before being marched out the tent, split into two groups and ordered to wait to have their hands shaken by either a RAOC or a RCT Lieutenant Colonel, lofty individuals who, according to the Ammunition Depot Regimental Sergeant Major in charge of the re-badging ceremony, had been "amputated from their fucking air-conditioners and flown out from Singapore on the direct orders of the Commander Far East Land Forces and were on their way to the padang for that one fucking purpose!"

Why they had to do it in the blazing sun was a mystery but Mark stood stoically with the other fidgeting troops waiting for the colonels to arrive. Glancing at the RCT contingent separated only a few paces from his group, Mark saw Captain Travis standing in front of them, head down morosely examining the toecaps. Kelly and Brian Copeland stood behind him, the only soldiers from the Supply Depot who were re-badged into the Royal Corps of Transport.

Stepping uncertainly from their staff car, the two sweating colonels peered round for a moment, rubbing their eyes as if unaccustomed to the sunlight.

"Fuck me, it's Abbot and Costello!" Travis whispered.

"And we've got the shortarse!" Kelly answered.

Shooed forward by the Ammo Depot RSM, the two senior officers strode importantly along the lines, briefly shaking each soldier's hand, asking inane questions like, "Are you enjoying yourself here, Corporal?" before stepping away smartly before anyone could answer. Hearing a loud "NO" from Sergeant Clegg, Mark grinned as he watched the colonels peel off from the men, strutting quickly to the front and then pausing to look stupidly at each other as they reached a small wooden dais which was clearly too small to hold both of them.

After what looked like a heated exchange of words, the short RCT Colonel mounted the dais first, launching into an insincere speech about "New Beginnings" and how they must all "Build the pride of their new Corps into a shining example of what was best in the British Army."

"Bollocks," whispered Kelly from the Transport Section.

"I have to agree with you, Corporal," breathed Staff Sergeant Williams from Ordnance.

"Shhh, they're changing partners," Jock hissed. "Here comes the Reverend Canon Balls!"

"Well, uhm, welcome to our honourable and *very long-established* Corps," the rotund RAOC Colonel trumpeted, glancing smugly at the back of his sweating RCT colleague's neck. The RCT Colonel had vacated the dais and was standing a few inches below him. "The Royal Army Ordnance Corps heartily welcomes you, men, including, er..." he hesitated. "Yes, the, uhm, Staff Clerks," he continued. "Now, you might not be aware of this, men, but *our* Corps – *only* the Royal Army Ordnance Corps – has the Army's Senior Warrant Officer Appointment of *Conductor*. And

that, let me tell you, is an immense honour dating back to the year *Thirteen Twenty-Seven*! Now," his speech quickening with excitement, "the appointment is awarded only to a *select group* of First Class Warrant Officers. Warrant Officers," he repeated, eyes bulging, "whose conduct, let me tell you, is *exemplary*; whose careers have been *outstanding* and whose sacrifices for the good of the Corps and of the Army are *above and beyond the call of duty*! Now, let *that*," he raised his voice heroically, "be *your target, men!*" Red-faced, he stopped and saluted them.

"Fuck me," muttered Kelly. "Why can't *we* 'ave that *Conductor* thing? I started in the Army at the front of the bus an' I always fancied standing at the back taking the bloody fares!"

"Belt up!" hissed Travis. "Who the hell is that fat prat saluting?"

"Me, of course, Sir," murmured Staff Williams. "And a very uplifting sermon, if I might say so."

Stepping down from the dais and looking anxiously towards their staff car, the RAOCLieutenant Colonel theatrically shook the RCT Lieutenant Colonel's hand and they both marched hurriedly towards the road, beckoning their driver.

"Should I fall the men out, Sirs?" the Ammo Depot RSM called anxiously behind them.

"Fucking get on with it, RSM!" growled Travis.

"Okay, Sir," shrugged the RSM, turning his back on the accelerating staff car. "Go on then girls, piss off," he grinned at all of them.

"Look at the ruddy time," muttered Kelly. "Let's go back and get the bar open!"

"Can it," Prescott laughed. "It's an RAOCLieutenant Colonel Bar now. You're in the RCT and you buggers are paying double!"

Breaking away, the various unit contingents clambered disconsolately onto the backs of their three-tonners and sadly, Mark thought, with some of the soldiers sitting separately - RCT on one row of hard seats, RAOCLieutenant Colonel on the other. What would the Boys Service Drill Instructors, the old sweats in Wales, have said if the Army had taken away *their* badges he wondered? Visualising the Tank Regiment Skull, Welsh Fusilier Northcote and the dog-loving Devon and Dorset, he suddenly thought about his foster parent, the retired Royal Military Police Colonel. What would've happened if someone tried to snatch his cap badge? Christ, Stirling would've hanged them first and then bloody shot them!

Strolling into the Orderly Room next morning, Mark was greeted by Prescott who told him that Mark had reached the six months point and now qualified to two weeks Rest and Recuperation Leave in Singapore. "You can go on tomorrow's flight if you want to. Chat Taffy up for a bag of free johnnies and don't come back too bloody knackered..!"

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*Bob Le Vaillant joined a Boys Regiment from a Children's Home in 1962. He served in Borneo, Singapore, Hong Kong and South Korea, also in West Germany and Italy and seconded to the Royal Navy onboard HMS Ark Royal. He adopted his first daughter, Mansae, in South Korea in 1975 and he founded Stepney Children's Fund in 1982 while serving at the Ministry of Defence. He finished his career at the Ministry of Defence and was discharged in 1986 with the Army's senior Warrant Officer 1 appointment of 'Conductor Royal Army Ordnance Corps'. From Whitehall, he moved to Whitechapel where he formed and headed the Universities Settlement in East London (Toynbee Hall) Services for Children & Families which provided outdoor learning, youth crime diversion and parents' support programmes for children & young people living in the East End. He retired in 2005 as Toynbee Hall's Deputy Warden. Now Co-Director of Le Vaillant Owen Consultants he lives in Walmer with his wife, Valerie, 3 teenage daughters and a Cocker Spaniel. A magistrate since 1989 and past governor of schools in London and Kent, Bob supports the White Cliffs Duke of Edinburgh's Award Panel, he represents the National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association and he is Lifeboats Visits Officer for Walmer Lifeboat Station.*

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