

Meet Ron Buist – Scottish Branch’s money man

The Gazette sat down for a chat with Scottish Branch Treasurer Ron Buist about his life in the Army and nursing, honouring the memory of his father, and his hobbies which include making home-made pizza!

“When people describe Ron, they use words such as ‘an utter gentleman, loyal, honest, kind, great sense of humour, hardworking, incisive, supportive, always so smartly dressed!’” says Sheila Jones, Secretary of the Scottish Branch talking about her colleague and friend Ron Buist. “He was a hugely popular member of the Territorial Army and remains so as a member of the QA Association,” she adds for good measure.

Ron’s father trained as a motor mechanic before joining the Dunfermline fire brigade in 1936. He met Ron’s mother when she was working as a telephonist with the National Fire Service, and they married in 1952. Ron was born in 1955 and lived with his parents above the fire station in Dundee, where there was space for their house, the fire master’s house, and three flats. Recalling those early years, he vividly remembers the sounds of the bells.

“They used bells to announce when appliances were being called out – one long bell and two short bells meant the turn table ladder. They also had bells to tell them when it was change of shifts, morning tea break or lunch. I got to know the routine early on and what each bell meant.”

Ron was not quite seven when tragedy struck. On the night of 12th April 1962 his father was called to a huge fire at a jute warehouse. He bravely entered the blaze to rescue colleagues but became trapped by falling bales and never made it out. Ron recalls there being “a space” in their lives afterwards. He and his mother moved out of the fire station and Ron’s mum never got over the tragedy or remarried.

Over the years Ron has worked tirelessly behind the scenes to continually honour his father and last



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year a commemoration plaque was mounted on the wall of the new fire station at Dundee: a proud moment which provided closure.

In the early 1970s, Ron enrolled at university in Dundee to study medicine. Although his dreams of becoming a doctor or a surgeon never panned out, he did join the University Officer Training Corps, allowing him such thrills as driving armoured vehicles, and his long association with the Army was born. Ron started nursing in September 1976, which has given him “a lot of satisfaction over the years” and he has “no regrets” about failing those early medical exams.

In February 1976, Ron was commissioned into TAVR Group B as 2nd Lt. He was at Browndown Camp during the infamous heatwave that summer, firing 76mm shells on Saladin tanks and setting fire to the plain. Another highlight was taking part in Queen Elizabeth II’s Silver Jubilee in June 1977 in London when Ron carried the 6/7 Bn Colour for a parade of 1,500 reserves. “We rehearsed three times and managed to miss our marker every single time!” he chuckles. “There was lots of shuffling backwards and forwards and for the actual parade we hit the mark spot on.”

Ron was a student nurse at the College of Technology doing a second intake of the degree course in Dundee, but he realised that could not stay in the infantry when he qualified and would need to “go medical”. He transferred to 225 (Highland Field Ambulance) as 2Lt (non- med) and was there for 12 years.



Maj Receiving Op granby medal from Brig L Johnman



Capt receiving TD from Col A Sanderson

Ron was posted to Queen Elizabeth Medical Hospital (QEMH) just before sitting finals in 1980. There while working on the orthopaedic ward, he met Deputy Matron Col Hennessy (later to be the director of nursing), Col. Coull, Maj Allison Anderson and Lt Yvonne Wright, forming a Scottish contingent. Ron would go on to marry Yvonne.

He remembers one funny moment involving the wife of a retired admiral who had a hip operation. "I told her: 'After you've had your shower, don't put any knickers on – I'll come and take your stitches out.' I was dragged on to the ward round. When I went into her room, she pulled up her skirt and said I'm ready Ron. Right behind me was Col Coull on her ward rounds! She laughed."

Ron qualified with a degree in nursing, in only the second group of nurses trained to this level in Scotland at that time. He completed a full career within NHS Scotland except for a year in London. Ron worked at the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases in London for a time, and Yvonne posted to CMH Aldershot, where her boss was John Quinn (our current QARANC Association chairman).

One day in 1983, Ron and Yvonne were walking down the mile in Edinburgh when they agreed it was time to get married. Yvonne went into St Giles Cathedral and asked the minister if he would marry her. Ron jokes: "The minister replied that he was 'already taken' but was sure she could find someone suitable!"

After marrying in 1984, the couple lived in Dundee. Yvonne took a break from the Army and Ron remained in the TA, directing exercises at Keogh Barracks on occasion. He took part in Exercise Lionheart, the biggest mobilisation of British forces since World War II, which involved transporting nearly 50 vehicles across the channel and across to Germany.

In 1986, Ron received the territorial declaration for 12 years commissioned service, achieving this distinction at the rank of captain – a proud moment. 1990 saw the events that led to the Gulf War. The TA were willing to mobilise but were naturally worried about civilian employment on return. When the MOD decided that they could volunteer to be mobilised (as secure their jobs) 205 took the lead in being the core for a General/Evac hospital in Saudi Arabia. Ron recalls: "We travelled by train from Dundee to Euston each carrying two kit bags and a rucksack. When we got to the barrier at the underground it was a matter of all stick together and follow my leader. We must have been a strange site for the underground staff as when they saw us the just opened the gates and showed us through."

One night Ron heard lots of explosions and tuned in to the BBC World Service to learn that Saddam Hussein had sent SCUD missiles towards Riyadh. "We got used to the alerts, but we worried there would be chemical attacks and that involved getting into chemical suits quite frequently."

In 1992, Ron attended a map reading instructors course with the Royal Engineers at Newbury, thoroughly enjoying himself and scoring one of only two 'A' passes.

Later that year, he transferred to Edinburgh Squadron 205 and when males, who were nurses, were to be rebadged to QARANC he readily did so.



2Lt 51 Highland volunteers – Oct 1976



Return from Granby – March 91

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"When I started nursing there were five blokes and 21 girls on my course, so I wasn't worried about it, and I ended up marrying a QA," says Ron.

In 1999, Yvonne developed a peculiar sensation when out running it turned out to be a brain tumour. She underwent surgery and made a great recovery (they took part in the Nijmegen March that year) but after 26 years in the TA for Ron and for Yvonne, 16 years, they felt they should probably call it a day on the TA.

Sadly, Yvonne died in 2004. Working in neurosurgery, the couple knew what was coming and prepared for it. They enjoyed holidays, hillwalking and birdwatching, making the most of their final days together. "We were married for 20 years which is more than some people get." Ron went back to work and met Carolyn, a radiographer in the Reserves, who he had first met years earlier, and they were married in 2006.

Ron joined the QARANC Association a decade ago as a way of getting back in touch with old friends and colleagues. When the chair, secretary and treasurer of Scottish Branch decided to step down, Karen Irvine took over as chair, with Sheila Jones as secretary and they invited Ron to step into the role of treasurer.

According to Sheila, Ron is known in the branch as 'Ron, the Money Man' and is not afraid to say no to his chairman and secretary on the "rare occasion we have a fanciful idea about expenditure". However, the Branch is increasing its membership and arranges successful annual events and reunions.

Ron has many hobbies including delicious fruit and vegetables in his back garden, alongside his home smokery and traditional outdoor pizza oven (he built the oven during lockdown and now Friday night is pizza night).

Sheila, having the final word, says: "I first met Ron in '19 canteen' at Dundee Royal Infirmary when he was the Senior Staff Nurse in the Neurology Department, and I was in the final three months of student nurse training. We have remained firm friends ever since. He was the person who introduced me to the TA and thereafter the Regular Army. Ron was one of the most professional nurses I have ever known, totally committed to his patients, and a highly valued and popular member of the multidisciplinary health care team."