And now to war years, and so more missed chances.

It was late March or April 1938 that the three of us so inseparable at that time, Albert, Tom and myself, were in the Capital Cinema in Tonbridge and before the feature film came on, as was usual, they had Pathe News on. One item showed Neville Chamberlain waving a piece of paper signed by Hitler to say he would not go to war with England. My hunch to this was immediate. WAR! I said to Albert and Tom that war was now inevitable and I was going to join the T.A.

We left the cinema right then, the car was outside the Y.M.C.A., of which we were all members and I drove straight up to the Drill Hall at Sevenoaks. (The Tonbridge Drill Hall was adjacent to the cinema but I had a preference for Sevenoaks.) I cannot remember which day of the week this was, but we had a 'medical' next evening and were then enrolled as from that date.

The following Sunday the members of the Sevenoaks T.A. were due to go to the shooting range to shoot for their proficiency tests and the C.O., Col. Ffinch, invited the three of us to go and watch. The range was at Castle Hill, Tonbridge. Having watched the proceedings for a couple of hours, we were asked if we would like to try our hands at shooting. We were the only men there in civilian clothing and none of us had ever handled a rifle before, nor of course the Bren gun which was to follow. First, we had five shots at a stationary target. The adrenalin must have been working overtime for me, for with those five shots before a rather hushed and surprised gallery of uniformed watchers I did the best shooting of my life.

I had four "bulls" and an "inner". Five shots at a moving target produced a maximum of five hits. I cannot remember what my score with the Bren gun was but it was evidently much higher than average. And I think it proved the old adage that "first impressions count" because of my rapid promotion after being called up or mobilised at the outbread of war.

The three of us were allocated to the Mortar Platoon, an elite bunch in those T.A. days, ex-public school and ex-university young men, mainly about the same age as ourselves. All very, very fit. We learned to handle and fire the mortar, Albert becoming the range-finder. He became very accurate with this instrument and I had reason to be thankful of this later on.

Two days before war was declared I met Col. Ffinch in Sevenoaks and he instructed me to report to the Drill Hall in Battle Order that same evening. I used a bike often when I was in Sevenoaks, being more convenient for the shorter or nearer distances from my unofficial H.Q. which was the "Railway and Bicycle Hotel". I forgot all about my bike which was propped up against a tree in a near road (have forgotten the name), got the car and drove like mad to Tonbridge. Having got into my uniform and collected all my things, kit bag, pack, rifle (no ammo.) and it was now evening, so I chased around, having bid my parents farewell, and collected Albert and Tom. I parked the car in the precincts of the Drill Hall and with the others took the oath etc. We then set off in army trucks to a secret destination which turned out to be Tonbridge. For the first three days we were confined to barracks. It was on that third day the R.S.M. told me I was improperly dressed. Had I not read Part II orders? I had to admit I had not. I found on reading the orders I had been promoted or appointed to full corporal. I managed to draw stripes from the Q.M. Stores and sewed them on.

The following day I was able to go up to Sevenoaks and drive the car home and run it in a car space I had cut in the garden. I had been paying 2/- a week for a garage some little distance away and had already decided if war was declared I was not going to pay rent for the duration. Hence, the car-port already made.

I cannot remember my mother making any comment on my stripes - it probably passed unnoticed.

After about two weeks in Tonbridge we moved to Axminster. Here again on the second day I was caught "napping". The R.S.M. suddenly confronted me again, saying if he found me improperly dressed again he would "put me on a charge". I rushed to the notice board to find as from that day I had been promoted to platoon sergeant. I had to rip off my three week old corporal's stripes and sew on sergeant's stripes.

Shortly after this I was informed we had to give a display of a company of troops advancing under cover of mortar fire, using live ammunition. This was for the benefit of the whole brigade, two or three generals and King George VI. We were high up, overlooking the sea, the actual range stretching out to sea. The company was about 500 yards in front and advancing, using tracer bullets. I had to lay covering fire not less than 100 yards in front. On the three inch mortar, normally for distances under 800 yards, three of the firing charges are taken out and one used a different setting for firing the mortar, bringing the angle of the barrel lower.

However, I took a calculated risk and decided to leave all six charges in and use the number two setting. This meant at 600 yeards the barrels looked as though they were upright. I asked Albert for the range, gave the order to both crews, 600 yards one round "fire". The two bombs spewed out and disappeared in the clouds. The R.S.M. came rushing to me and I shall never forget his words "My God. I hope you know what you're doing. That's live ammo. If that falls amongst us there's going to be some casualties and a Court Martial."

The bombs dropped more or less exactly as I anticipated. I immediately gave the order, "Up 50, five rounds rapid fire". I guess those men below would have advanced about 50 yards by the time those bombs fell. With constant cross-checking with Albert for range or distance from us the company was advancing on the imaginery enemy.

In line with our barrage was the shed where all the marking flags and warning flags were kept. We had a new **C.O., Col. Chitty**. He sidled up to me and said, "Blow that shed to smithereens". The R.S.M. heard him and he sidled up to me and whispered if I touched that shed he would have me Court Martialled. So I carefully directed the fall of the bombs around the shed. So much depended on Albert giving me the correct range and the Number \_ne of each mortar setting his sights correctly. A hundred yards or so before the company reached the sea which was now some 1500 yards I gave the order 1500 yards, traverse left to right 20 degrees, 10 rounds rapid fire smoke.

The poor Number Four had to scramble to get ten rounds smoke uncapped and passed to Number Three singly, and he to Number two who dropped them down the mortar, Number One setting range, angle and traverse direction. The whole show was spectacular especially to me, the unrehearsed finale.

In those early days it was not the custom for Generals to congratulate other ranks, so he sent an adjutant to me, with some such message as "good show". Shortly after this I was sent out on a tactical course at Groombridge, near Tunbridge Wells. I travelled there by truck and was given a Norton motorbike for my use while at Groombridge. The others on this course were mainly Commissioned Officers and Warrant Officers.

At the end of the course and subsequent examination I was asked if I would care to take a commission. I thought about losing all my pals in the mortar platoon and told the disarmingly smiling Major of my thoughts. When I returned to my unit I found I had been transferred to a rifle company and was to take No. 22 platoon. I had put my big foot in, thinking with my heart instead of my brain.

Whilst at Axminster we had 203 reservists transferred to the battalion to give us more bite and bring the battalion up to strength. They were ex-D.C.L.I. regulars, had been stationed in India for some years. A real tough lot. They arrived early one afternoon and were ushered into the local cinema where the C.O. and the R.S.M. were going to talk to them and allocate them to the various companies. This was not their idea at all. They had served together in their various groups and they intended staying that way.

The only other West Kents there besides the C.O. and the R.S.M. were a **Sgt. Collins** and myself. I was instructed to go up in the gallery, as was Sgt. Collins. I have no idea what he said or did but I saw him being pushed over the gallery to the stalls below and then dumped unceremoniously outside.

Next to follow was the C.O., then the R.S.M., both hustled outside, leaving me to my fate. I did idly wonder why I had not been subjected to the same treatment as the others when a quietly spoken soldier sitting next to me told me to stay with him and I would be o.k. I was. He was ex-army middleweight boxing champion and very capable of handling more than one at a time. He just did not look like a bruiser but he was obviously well respected.

The allocation was at last amicably settled between themselves and I accompanied their spokesman out to see the C.O. The C.O. was all smiles and accepted their revised lists. The R.S.M. was furious. His authority had been flouted and his dignity had taken a mighty fall. Twenty-seven of the toughest were to be billeted with me in the Old Mill at Axminster, the others in various groups with various companies scattered around the area**. L.Cpl. Golding**, the boxer, was in my 27 but he was not their spokesman. Their spokesman, a thick-set man, merely said to me, "you play ball with us and we will not let you down".

In the morning before breakfast they had physical training. Their routine was so different from that I was used to and so co-ordinated, that I realised that having regular army personnel with us would be to our advantage. I eventually lost most of these men to other platoons, as my own platoon was already almost up to strength. With the four who stayed with me was one **Cpl. Green**, who some time later surprised me by saying he would put a bullet in my back when we went into action. I asked his particular buddy what was biting him and he told me Cpl. Green's wife had "fallen" for me and had told her husband. I had never seen the female but never bothered to explain to Cpl. Green that he had made a mistake. However, things must have sorted themselves out because when we finally went into action some months later he was one of my most disciplined and loyal supporters.

I, myself, became a strict disciplinarian, as was usual in the British Army. With the exception of Peggy, who wrote to me regularly, I had nothing to do with girls or women; I became too wrapped up in training others for that day when we went into battle.

When we did finally go into action, the real thing was nothing like the type of war we had been training for. The part that did count for most was discipline. It prevented panic when confronted with a very strange kind of war. Not that the British were the type to panic anyway, as was to be proved during the rest of the war. Fear. Yes! Panic. No!

It would be un-natural if there were not incidents that stood out in one's memory, even in war. I was at one time attached to a battalion of the Black Watch. Other than as an observer, my duties were nil. They were stationed near the famous, or infamous, Hill 60 of the 1914-18 war. This was during the "cold war" before the Huns invaded Belgium.

I guess to give the men something to do they had been instructed to dig trenches, as in 1914-18 time and as they dug they came across skeleton after skeleton of soldiers in the standing position as though they were shooting over the parapet. The only means of any identification was on brass epaulets found, showing they were men of the Lincolnshire regiment. They must have been covered by a massive explosion as they stood in this trench and were obviously killed instantly.

A little further away, in an old ditch, I espied a pair of boots, or the toes of boots, sticking up. On further examination I found there were skeletons of feet in the boots and just a few inches under the compost/soil the remainder of the skeleton. This had laid there undetected probably for 22 years or more. I could find no marks of identification as was found with the others, possibly because it had been so near the surface that the brass had corroded away.

In that same area a huge, unexploded mine or bomb was uncovered. There were no bomb experts in the area and the **Black Watch C.O**. decided it would be safer if put in a pond some little distance away. The confident look he gave me suggested it was I who should do this little task. A case of fools step in where brave me fear to tread? With some difficulty I lifted the thing, carried it to the pond, waded in and placed it carefully on the bottom. Knowing now how dangerous some of those contraptions were, I reckon I should have received a medal. However, I had just to accept that it was part of normal military duties. But in any case at that time we had not been subject to any shelling or bombing and so my knowledge of the devasting effects of these armaments was nil. Even though I had been on the pushing end of the three inch mortar I had no idea of what it was like on the receiving end.

Back with my own unit they probably considered me to be a bit eccentric. At one time we were stationed at a farm. My billet, with the rest of the platoon, was in a hayloft over a barn. I looked at the thickly tiled roof and considered if a bomb was dropped it would ricochet off. And so, unlike the remainder who, quite rightly, slept in their uniforms with rifle, ammunition and all those other things that go with a soldier close by, I undressed and donned my pyjamas, folding my clothes up neatly. On yes, I had smuggled by pyjamas aboard a truck when we left England.

There was the time when I received the honour of being chosen as the new Guard Commander for Brigade H.Q. This was purely ceremonial and this spectacular changing of the guard was all done to the tap of a drum. Complete precision was essential. One great drawback here.

A number of O.R.'s had been practising during the week and the best or smartest had been chosen for this function. Somehow it had been overlooked until the Saturday morning that I was to be Guard Commander that Sunday evening. I had not even seen this ceremony and believe me, I was in a real sweat when I heard the news.

I was fitted out with new boots and clothing, rifle cleaned with the bayonet shining and by the time Saturday evening came I was ready for a drink. With the Sgt. Major we went to the Brigade Sgt. and Warrant Officer's Mess. I soon had two pints of French beer in front of me and I was warned it was custom that if anyone had more than two full glasses in front of him he was expected to pay for drinks all round. There were some sixty to seventy men in this Mess and so I began to drink very rapidly. I must have been popular because drinks arrived in succession from all sides. I must have had about seventeen pints and was nearing the unconcious stage.

I remember two Sgt. Majors taking me outside; a third had somehow commandeered an 8 cwt truck and driver. They laid me on the floor and told me to keep down and we set off for my billet. I have a very hazy recollection of an argument with the C.M.P. who had stopped the truck and some fighting.

The next I remember was being shaken and told it was 6.00 a.m. My mouth felt dry and tasted horrible and so I went into the farmyard to the pump, pumped some water over my head, and unthinkingly had a good drink. I got back to the barn and went out like a light. It was about 11.00 a.m. before I could gather my senses again, and now the big problem was before me again. That Ceremonial Guard Drill. By now I was past caring. Take it as it comes. At about 5.30 p.m. the other members who were to form the guard were marched to me. The parade and guard changing began at 6.00 p.m. (1800 hours) precisely. At 5.45 p.m., with much scurrying and bugle blowing, each man everywhere must report back to his unit forthwith.

The Germans had invaded Belgium and we were to march into Belgium as soon as we had remustered. I was saved the embarrassment of the ceremonial guard changing but now had to march in new boots. No chance of getting my old ones back from the stores as, like everybody else, they were packing up at top speed. We had a meal before we set off and then marched all through the night and next day, only stopping for brief spells when some kind of food and drink was produced along the way.

Had I still been in the Mortar platoon I would have been aboard a truck.

We stopped about three miles from Oudenade and a **Capt. Marnham** and myself were sent into **Oudenade** to control the roughly 1.1/4 million people fleeing through the town from Brussels and other places on route. We kept them moving on the left hand side of the road. There were prams, handcarts and occasional horse and cart, women and old men, children of all ages, a pitiful sight. An occasional car or truck would come along on the right hand side and we forced them to get in line at a walking pace as with the general throng of people. The sight of a rifle pointed at these drivers soon stopped their panic rush. The Captain, of course, had his revolver.

We took over the evacuated town of Oudenade that evening and commandeered now unoccupied houses along the canal. The next day our O.C. officer and other senior ranks decided they would make H.Q. on a triangular piece of land the other side of the canal, crossing over by a bridge. They had with them the spares and ammunition truck.

It was then the first of the Stukas came over. The first one dived and released his bomb, getting a direct hit on the truck, killing all those in the vicinity. On our left was the Belgian army. We were on the extreme left of the BEF. It was usual to communicate left to right. However, I found there was nothing to our left, the Belgians having withdrawn after the first spate of bombing.

There appeared to be no water, at least drinking water, in the town but plenty of alcoholic beverages. I filled my water bottle with cognac, having had a good drink before. I think the fear those screaming Stukas put into us originally got the adrenalin working so hard that we were able to drink large quantities of alcohol without getting drunk. After a day and night of incessant shellfire from both sides, most going over us, I received orders to withdraw. And my poor feet again. Marching!

We marched all through the night, and during the following morning we regrouped. Out of 138 men in our Company, we now numbered less than 40. With those few men I was given the task of moving forward (we were now back in France) and taking over two small villages, **Sheenboque and Morbecq** (am not certain about the spelling there).

We passed through Morbecq and the road into Sheenboque village was blocked by a barbed wire barricade. When we tried to move this (I had taken only two men with me) we were shot at by a sniper using a fairly heavy calibre gun. There was an old lady and her daughter living in an estaminet by the barricade. We learned from them that the Germans had put the barricade there the day before.

At that point, two Captains and a Sgt. Major came up the road and demanded to know why we had not moved the barricade and gone into the village. When I told them it was covered by a sniper with a heavy calibre gun of some kind he, the Intelligence Officer, scoffed and said according to his information the Germans were miles away. The three of them approached the barricade and there was a crack as a heavy bullet struck a tree just above their heads cutting it through, causing it to tremble then the top part falling. Those three took to their heels and I never saw them again.

We withdrew to some small farm building where I had left the rest of our Company, and I decided to send a section of seven men, including one sergeant, to try and find where the Germans were and their possible strength. After an hour, when they should have returned, I sent out a second section, this time six men including one corporal. After about half an hour both sections returned together. I never had time to find out the cause of the delay as a D.R. had come to me to say I had 27 Field Guns at my disposal, where would I like a barrage laid down.

As you know, my hearing was and still is very keen. I could hear engines running. They must be from vehicles of some description parked in the village or dispersed in a small copse behind. I wrote my request down for the D.R. to take back to Artillery Commander which should begin at midnight precisely.

I had two men go back to the estaminet and persuade the old lady and her daughter to leave, as we were going to shell the whole village. At precisely midnight shelling began and just before 1.00 a.m. it stopped as suddenly as it started. In that quiet I heard engines running again. None of the others could hear this sound and probably thought I was imagining things.

At 4.30 a.m. I took five men with me (all volunteers for this next move) to go into the village and see what the position was. We removed the barricade and walked along the road to a sharp left turn, and there, in the square, were twenty to thirty armoured vehicles with the German soldiers ready for action.

We jumped over a wall out of sight; we seemed not to have been seen and retraced our steps, at the double, back to our temporary H.Q. We had only rifles. Our three Bren Guns were out of action and all we could do was to keep the enemy at bay by concerted bursts of fire whenever a vehicle showed itself by the now removed barricade. Ammunition was running out fast.

I gave the order for each man to withdraw back to our other H.Q. about half a mile away on the outskirts of **Maubeuge**. To get back, each one had to rush across the road singly into the cover of a farmhouse and something very rare in France, run down behind a hedge, re-crossing the road when out of sight.

I was inevitably the last to leave and as the firing had stopped the first of those armoured vehicles came trundling down the road. No time to cross the road now and so I dropped into the ditch overgrown with stinging nettles and lay facing the approaching vehicle.

I didn't move, not even to lower my head, as movement might have given my position away. The vehicle, a full track tank, stopped within 10 feet from me and the Commander was standing up in the hatch, looking through binoculars at the houses beyond me. He gave an order and the vehicle turned left into a side road. I had only two grenades in my trousers pouch, my rifle having been taken by one of the others, being now useless without ammunition, I was debating the idea of pulling the pin and throwing a grenade at the departing tank when another one appeared at the top of the road, once more preventing any possibility of my crossing the road. I decided to crawl along the ditch.

I had seen a couple of bodies in the ditch on my way up and wondered idly whether they had been overlooked or had been booby-trapped. I decided to take a chance and crawled over them, feeling death in more senses than one, and then horror of horrors, the ditch came to an end. There was only one thing to do. Cross that road and climb that hedge. Impossible to try and get through and so I climbed. Some eight or nine hundred yards away, parallel to the road, in single file, a company of German Infantry was walking, tiredly it seemed from a distance, but seeing me climbing over a hedge seemed to give them life. I think every one of those hundred or so men had a pot-shot at my wriggling body and I eventually fell to the other side of the hedge into lower ground, uninjured. I lost my tin hat, my respirator was ruined and my pack badly torn by near misses. I rejoined the rest of my unit in the house overlooking the road.

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And having just mentioned Hitler, let us get back to the war, an incident that still haunts me, but in war, them or us. When I finally joined the rest of our (my) depleted company at that rendezvous house in Maubeuge, I had a count up. One Sergeant, one Corporal, and twelve other ranks and myself. We had about ten rounds of ammunition each and a few grenades between us. The lower floor of this house had four large bay windows overlooking the road. In the distance I could see some of Hitler's elite approaching arrogantly in bright yellow painted vehicles. The leader, a motorcycle and sidecar with passenger in the sidecar, and in close convoy, three open cars, each containing a driver and three other armed men, probably N.C.O.s or officers.

I remember how cool and how in full control I felt. I gave orders no shot to be fired until I gave the command. I then set about allocating the tasks for each man. Corporal Green to take the motorcyclist (driver), his buddy the passenger, and so on, so that every one of those fourteen men had a given task. Discounting myself, it was fourteen ready men against fourteen unsuspecting Nazis. One or two anxious glances were given me as this convoy was slowly approaching and I gave the last instruction "concentrate on your man, do not miss". When the leading motorcycle was about fifty yards away (and they were in close convoy) I gave the order "fire!".

The convoy was halted completely, most of those in the cars slumped at various angles, killed immediately. I did see one jump into the field and hide behind the bank. Somebody had missed, or aimed at the wrong target. This was to prove very inconvenient. He managed to crawl along behind this bank in a shallow ditch and gave bursts of fire with an automatic rifle of some kind, making it impossible for us to get out of the house and also lookout.

A major from the R.A. crawled in and suggested we climbed up in the loft, knock a tile out and fire down at the Hun. We borrowed rifles, climbed up, knocked out tiles at standing height, but we never fired a shot. He had a bullet pass through both buttocks and I found myself with a large hole in my lower abdomen. Just a quick nick was all I felt. I looked at this hole and could not understand where all the bits missing were. The material where the hole was about three inches across from my trousers, shirt and pants and all the flesh missing. No sign of it being splattered anywhere. And no pain. I clambered down and really waited for the world to black out. I said "good-bye" to all the men there and then after a while decided I was not going to die after all. We stuffed a couple of field dressings in the hole, still no pain and no bleeding. I emptied my bladder, for safety reasons, and carried on with the war.

Now to get that man in the ditch. I called the men out into the rear of the house and suggested one might throw a grenade over the roof into the ditch. Chalky White. a big strapping fellow, volunteered for this and duly pulled the pin and threw the grenade. It hooked in some broken telegraph wires and fell in the middle of us and exploded with a loud bang. Amazing people, these British. Everybody laughed like hell, and even more amazing there were no casualties. He threw a second one, making no mistake this time, and we heard the bang and after that no more firing.

What to do now ? Very little ammunition and I was beginning to feel stiff down my left side. I suggested I went back to H.Q., got a proper dressing, asked for some more ammo. and reinforcements. Now round the corner behind the building there should have been four men with the company truck. The truck was there, with wine glasses on the bonnet, but no sign of any men. It was as though they had been spirited away. The only thing to do was to drive the truck myself and go back to Battalion H.Q. The road was dusty. After about half a mile I saw coming towards me, not on the road but in the field, ten yards or so from the road, a convoy of German troop carrying vehicles. I died again. I kept on driving and as we drew abreast, I waiting for that fatal shot, instead of which they cheered and waved and I waved back.

Arriving at Battalion H.Q. almost in a state of collapse, I accidently bumped the truck into a Captain and a Sergeant Major, causing them slight injuries. Some months later, when in hospital, I saw with disgust that they had been awarded medals, sustaining injuries while in close combat with the enemy.

My own doctor in civilian life was the Battalion M.O. He saw my wound and said it must be superficial, a hole that size, or I would have died. I saw the C.O. and asked what had happened to our relief and reinforcements and he said they had been sent the day before. The M.O. insisted I be put on a Red Cross truck with two other stretcher cases, one being a German Air Pilot badly injured when his plane was brought down. He spoke perfect English and said how glad he was to be on a Red Cross ambulance. Within about twenty minutes, driving in convoy, all Red Cross ambulances, we were machined gunned by Messerschmitts. My German companion was in tears. He never believed his own countrymen would ignore the Red Cross sign in this way.

Our driver was wounded and our third companion was killed. There was a general re-shuffle of ambulances and crews, some ambulances being out of action and some drivers. This happened so many times that eventually the German officer and I were the sole occupants beside the driver on an open 8 cwt Bedford truck. Even on this we were not safe and our driver drove off the road and took cover under a tree whilst we watched the ghastly scene of a company of horse artillery stopped between two rows of houses in a village systematically bombed and machine gunned by screaming Stukkas and Messerschmitts. The poor horses stood no chance, and we could see them rearing and staggering in a hopeless mass. This was the only company of horse artillery I ever saw. A relic of the 1914-18 war? The German officer was now in a very bad state, having been wounded further by a bullet from a Nazi aircraft. I had no idea where we were and I think neither did our driver.

Towards evening, we must have crossed the border into Belgium, as there were white flags, white sheets over rooftops and a few German soldiers around. We were heralded, or guided, to a school that had been temporarily made into a hospital. There were both British and German wounded here, with I guess about forty beds. A Nazi officer came in and spoke in English and told us British we were now prisoners of war, and anyone found with arms or ammunition would be severely dealt with. I had in my pocket a jewelled-handled ladies' pistol and several rounds of ammunition. I quickly hid these under the mattress. And then I went to sleep. The first sleep for many days and nights.

I had nothing to eat or drink the whole of the next day. I was still scared to drink. My very private organ had disappeared, leaving only a lump of black skin. Other than just looking at my wound, medication for me was nil. I had the feeling that the limited medical staff there thought I was going to die soon. That was very far from my thoughts. They were on one subject only. Escape! I guess I looked a bit of a wreck anyway. About twelve days' growth of beard, torn trousers, generally unkempt.

On the third day, early afternoon, my plan was in my head. With some Belgian money in my hand I struggled out of bed, still clothed, of course, to the entrance where an armed German was on guard. Pointing to the money I indicated I wanted to buy bread in the shop opposite. With several Ja Ja's from him I went out, turned left and walked (rather bent, I fear) along the road, awaiting what I thought would be the inevitable bullet in my back. (Cowards dying several times before their death.) That was the beginning of my escape. Nothing spectacular.

I walked out of the town, or village, and suddenly heard a whistle. There was a British soldier, in an large old open-fronted shed beckoning me to him. Inside was a Humber car of the type the Generals were driven around in. When I got inside there was a **Brigadier and a Colonel of the Green Howards**, and, of course, the man who whistled to me, their driver. They suggested I stay with them, as the driver knew the way through the enemy lines to reach the coast. At about 10.30pm. we started off, with one or two near encounters somehow avoided by our driver, eventually arriving at Le Panne in the morning. There were quite a number of British troops here and we were bombed frequently. I was taken to an hotel which had been converted to a Medical Dressing Station. I had a further injection of anti-tetanus (forgot to mention I had received one when I first reported back to our H.Q. some days before, also one from the Germans)

The medical orderly, with a sense of humour, having dressed my wound the best possible, continued with the plaster around what was then left of my very private part, saying that it would probably stop my losing it completely.

After a further day and night of constant bombing and shelling, the skies towards evening suddenly cleared, as one lone Spitfire zoomed overhead, the first British 'plane I had seen since going to France. Then a few warships appeared and began shelling inland. Later a paddle steamer arrived, a few hundred yards offshore, and I was picked up by a couple of soldiers and put into a rowing boat and transferred with others to this gallant little ship. I was placed down by the engine room. There were over 500 troops crowded on that small ship. We landed at Margate and a taxi took me to the Winter Gardens Theatre. Here I was given a wash and my beard removed, my boots removed and my socks cut away, feet bathed, new socks and another pair of trousers.

I was asked did I have any relation living near. Doug was at Birchington. He was telephoned and within about 20 minutes he was with me. He then told me Albert, Ted and Tom had been home some days. I asked if they were badly hurt and he told me they were just home on leave. I was appalled. I said we were in a "hell of a hole out there" and needed every possible man. He then told me the whole of the B.E.F. had been evacuated through Dunkirk. It was not until then that I realised we had been fighting a fairly important rear guard action, not advancing as we were given the impression we had been doing. I was now a bit sadder but a lot wiser.

I was then put on a troop train, with a battalion of Seaforth Highlanders who had apparently been sent down as reinforcements but had never had the chance to go into action. I was the only wounded on that train, I knew not where we were going, but after many stops with folk offering cups of tea and various eats, and much cheering, we arrived at Liverpool station. I was completely alone. The remainder quickly formed up in threes and marched off. A taxi driver asked me where I wanted to go. I told him just anywhere, so long as it was a hospital and he took me to the **Liverpool Royal Infirmary**.

Now nearly midnight, the night staff were on duty. The nurse who came to attend me was lovely to look upon and I guess efficient. When she came to taking my adhesive plaster off, she asked why the piece around my you-know-what. I told her rather sheepishly what the medical orderly in Belgium had said, and she began to try and remove it. I said she was lovely.

Well, to one who has had nothing to do with the gentle sex for many months, that gentle caressing began to work wonders. I realised all was not lost. However, she froze the offending article with some spirit and temporarily that was that. That was Saturday night. Sunday morning, the usual hospital routine began, but for me temporarily it was Heaven. Fussed over by all the nurses, all female in those days, seen first by the House Doctor and then the Consultant, it was decided an x-ray would be made the following day. This revealed a bullet high up in my left side.

I had a horror of anaesthetics and asked if the operation could be performed without. The surgeon consultant readily agreed. And so it was arranged for the next day. The operating theatre there was just that. A theatre with tier upon tier of seats overlooking the operating table. The surgeon was taking no chances. A nurse either side of me held my wrists. He gave a short lecture to the audience, male and female student doctors, they had all studied the two x-ray plates, and he gave an explanation as to why my you-know-what was just a blue-black lump of skin. Then the incision and a grope inside for the bullet. Apologies. It had moved. More cutting and groping and at last a blood-dripping bullet.

The only real pain I had was when the surgeon put stitches across the original, still open, wound. That did hurt. But I hoped it did not show. Yes, discipline has it!

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When I finally left hospital I was given a railway warrant, Liverpool to Maidstone, my depot. I was arrested at Charing Cross, having no hat, helmet or respirator. The C.M.P. Commandant was very sympathetic when he heard where I had come from and I was allowed to proceed. I stopped at Tonbridge and went to see my parents before catching another train to Maidstone. After spending the night there, I was given new clothes, hat and respirator and sent home for 28 days, pending discharge. At the end of the 28 days I was sent home again for 14 days and to report back at the end of that period. I decided to go up to Southport to see a C.I.D. man I had befriended in hospital. Quite another story. On returning to Maidstone I was posted by the War Office to a job in Folkestone, but owing to some mix-up I was transferred to the 1006 Dock Operating Coy. RE and I should only have been attached to them for rations and lodgings.

There was a lot of talk about a "fifth column", German infiltraters into various places. The R.E.'s had had no notification of my coming to them and for the first five weeks with them, wherever I went, even to the toilet, a Sgt. or W.O. would accompany me at least to the door. We were stationed in Hotel Wampach and they had a fine billiard room there. I spent most of my days playing billiards, always having somebody allotted to me for the day. Christmas drew near and we had a celebratory dinner for officers and senior ranks. I sat next to a Capt. from the tank corps. During conversation he told me he had been promised by the War Office to have a senior bod to help him with administration. Did he know this man's name? It was Evans. And so I introduced myself and my holiday playing billiards was over.

Folkestone had become a military town and no civilian was allowed in without a special pass. I made friends with the Garrison Adjutant and managed to get a pass for Peggy on a few occasions. But that old saying "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" was ever my failing. A girl worked in adjacent offices, comely, eighteen years old and wanting affection. Who was I to deny this longing. Her family, when I met them, were of the Oxbridge strain, her father an ex-Major in the 1914-18 war; one brother a Captain in the Buffs; another brother in the Royal Engineers and a younger sister, a dream to look at but so very aloof. I guess this lasted about six months. I even bought her a ring. Have no idea why. I had no intention of marrying her. A sort of safety insurance I suppose. Never got the ring back.

There were several more sombre incidents on the warlike side of my life in those early days when I was stationed in Folkestone. One Saturday afternoon while still at Hotel Wampach, we had a usual hit and run raid by German fighter bombers. Many soldiers, including myself, were looking out of the windows in the front of the building when a 'plane suddenly swooped in and released his bomb. It hit a house on the other side of Castle Hill Avenue right in front of us, completely demolishing the front of the house. Two people were seen still sitting in chairs near the wall. They had been sitting at a table having tea with two others when suddenly the front of the house, including table and the other two folk, disappeared with a bang and a cloud of dust.

There was a desperate scramble by the troops to start clearing away the rubble, to find the other two. The two people still in their chairs were rescued by the Fire Brigade. They were in a state of intense shock and were quickly transferred to hospital. Of the other two, an elderly woman was found to be dead and the other, a younger woman, alive but unconscious.

Some months later, when I was in private billets, a Sunday, I was due to march a contingent of C. of E. soldiers to the church in Sandgate Road. (I think it was called Christ Church.) I had assembled them under the trees in Castle Hill Avenue, it was summer, so plenty of cover, an air raid warning had sounded, so we remained under cover. We heard the explosion of a bomb, and shortly after we were showered by what looked like leaflets. German propaganda, we thought. Upon inspection, they were found to be pages from bibles and hymn books. The church had been bombed, leaving just the tower standing. Had the service been earlier, there would have been tremendous casualties.

Another incident, I remember the time and date. I had been working late at the office, there was a shelling warning in operation but nothing had happened yet in Folkestone, but one could hear the explosion of these cross-channel shells at Dover. The tremendous flash these guns gave on the French coast gave roughly 90 seconds warning and there was in operation a special warning for this, a signal known as the "cuckoo", very distinguishable from the ordinary wailing siren of an ordinary air raid warning. We also had this warning if low flying aircraft was seen heading towards the town from the sea. These hit and run raids were numerous at the early stages of the war.

At 9.00 p.m. that winter evening I decided enough was enough and decided it was time to go back to my billet in Bonsor Road. The date, December 10th l942. My birthday next day. I walked down Cheriton Road, across Radnor Park into Radnor Park Road. A shell had burst somewhere in the vicinity and I heard the tinkle of shrapnel on roofs. As I started down the hill there was a flash immediately to my left and I was thrown on my back on the ground. I instinctively turned over to protect my eyes and face from falling debris. The greater part of the house was demolished, houses on the other side of the road were damaged and my hat was missing, hurled away by the blast. Fortunately, my head was not in it. Beyond a few bruises and a ringing in my left ear, I was unhurt. Two RAMC men helped me out of the debris and took me to a shelter and after I had assured them I was o.k. I went to my billet. I still have that noise in my left ear, but it does not affect my hearing too much. Strange thing is, I saw the flash quite close to me but cannot recall hearing the bang - probably too close.

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One little incident in the earlier stages of our sojourn in France during the war occurs to me. We had travelled by a very slow cattle train to somewhere in a kind of no-man's land behind the Maginot line. My platoon and I were allocated a deserted farm complex, obviously unclaimed after the 1914-18 war. Whilst investigating around the buildings we came to a small building obviously used by the British Army during the 1914-18 war as a store house. We found cases of .303 ammunition, but over the years expansion and contraction of the brass cases allowed the bullets to fall out. This enabled us to shake out the gun cotton and use it as fuel for heating up water in the "Billy Cans". Amongst other things we found crates of tins of "bulley beef" (corned beef). We opened one can and it seemed o.k. but on reflection decided not to use it in respect of its age. With at least 22 years in store at constantly changing temperatures, it seemed amazing that some of those tins had not exploded, or at least split open or rusted through.

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As a Sergeant Major in the army I was a "somebody", used to being addressed by other ranks as "Sir" and younger commissioned officers seeking my advice and held in obvious respect. And six years in the Army can change one's views a lot. Having no job to go to and a family to provide for, I finally tried for clerical jobs in Folkestone, but what jobs there were going were so poorly paid that I had to decide to forsake the pen for the spanner.

I shall never forget my first couple of weeks working at Martin Walter's in Cheriton Road. Having done no manual work since escaping as a prisoner of war in June 1940, and now the end of 1945, my hands were as "soft as butter". They became so sore, I was unable to button up and unbutton my clothes. In my later years in the army I had an orderly to clean my boots etc. The heaviest tool I had then was to lift a pint of beer most evenings and that many times each evening. Which is why so many of us say fervently "Ah, those were the days". \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I returned to Folkestone.

I remember our O.C. Capt. Nutt calling me to his office and stating he understood I was responsible. I had to confess, not guilty. The culprit told Lorna he was going to marry her, but I held his documents and I knew he was already married with one child, so I had to break the news to her that marraige to him was out of the question. Her baby was born on 10th December 1942, the night of the near miss by a cross channel german shell. I was on my way to see her. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

During my later days in the army whilst serving in Swindon we had allotted to our unit in two separate batches about 200 Polish troops for the main purpose to rehabilitate them to normal life. Some had served with the German army, some with the Russian army. All could speak Polish and there were two interpreters, both Polish, one a Captain, the other a sergeant.

The first batch arrived on V.E. Day and I had the job of allocating them, with the aid of two sergeants and the two interpreters, to private billets. These dear land ladies had been served the necessary requisition notices beforehand.

The second batch arrived after the first had departed and coincidentally this time on V.J. Day. Again I was on duty and had to carry out the procedure as before. On Saturdays these troops were free to wander into the town as they wished. There was also a lot of American soliders in the town at this time.

Now it is not customary for the British soldier to salute a Sergeant Major but the Polish troops did. This became very embarrassing for me when I went into the town as the Polish soldiers saluted me very smartly, which I had to acknowledge with a salute, the Americans seeing this thought they must be bound to follow the example set, and also saluted me, and again I had to acknowledge in the approved style. After a few weeks I became used to this and no longer felt embarrasssed, but it did make coming to terms with civilian life a little harder.

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The last time I was addressed as "sir" as a Sergeant Major was on the day I was "demobbed". I travelled from Swindon to Guildford in charge of a group of soliders of various ranks from sergeants downward and at Guildford where we were to receive our "demob" suits etc and divest ourselves of army clothing one of our number was missing. Actually he lived in the town and wanted to get home to his wife rather unexpectedly. He was suspicious of her fidelity.

I reported to the sergeant behind the desk that I was one man short and he began to rebuke me in no uncertain terms that I was responsible and should make sure all the men were present.

This made me rather angry and so I said to the sergeant to stand up, he was still talking to a Sergeant Major and should also address me as "sir". He stood up, was most apologetic and proceeded to addresss me as "sir". After I changed into civilian clothes and reported back to him for my railway warrant to Folkestone, he still decided to address me as "sir". Really it was hard for me to accept my lowly position in civilian life.