



A SCHOOLBOY IN WILTON WOODS by PETER CADDY

As a kid we lived at Lovell Hill Cottage on the Wilton Estate and I ran wild.

Let me tell you there was lots of army camps around and parts of Wilton estate were used as training grounds for war games. George and I, or just me by myself, used to sneak and peek. I knew every twig and blade of grass around and so I would hide and watch. Sometimes we were run off, other times we could sit and have a free show. What a treasure for a kid. We even saw how to prime 36 Mills grenades but what we really liked was when the friendly chaps let us watch and we got to help eat their doughnuts and sweet tea. There was a searchlight battery at Wilton bank top where we used to go and play and on good days the cook would give us fried bread.

One day Mother [Margaret] and I, and her youngest brother George (who was only 16 months younger than I), me being about 9 at the time, were walking home from Wilton village on a public foot path and saw a group of soldiers 100 yards or so away. What were they doing? After tea, doing what kids do, we went to see what the army were doing in 'our' woods. We were told by them to 'bug off' so for the time being we did. This would, I think, have been about the Summer of 1942 ?



Not far from the Wilton bunker, and not far from our house, was a search light battery and my mother used to swap fresh home-made bread for butter and dry fruit. She would not go near the camp and the lads in two army camps near us were told to keep away from the cottage. On a dark night, off I would go with a basket of bread, sometimes with a few fresh eggs, and back with the dried fruit, butter and maybe some sugar. All for the war effort you understand. The photo was from about that time, I am the dark one.

So the army lads in Wilton Woods were digging a big hole on the top of the bank above a beck. The creek is Gramsgraft. We went back a several times over a few days. Some times we had to hide and just watch, other times they would talk to us.

At this time we had no idea what they were digging but one day one of them took a bag of tea and a billycan and asked my Mother if she would make some tea for the lads. This chap told her they were digging a secret ammo bunker. She was very upset that he had told her and told him to keep me away from the dig. So this is what we thought it was, a 'secret ammo bunker'. One day there was some young women, who had been brambling, talking to the diggers, 'flirting' maybe, so seeing as how the girls had been brambling the digging must have been in August 1942?

Finally the hole was dug and lined with heavy logs and metal sheets, a flat roof and with two tunnels to get in. I have no idea how long it stood empty but not long after I can remember being in there. It was empty and dark. About this time I went for a walk and there was one chap there in Battle Dress so I went to see what he was doing. I know George was with me. This chap was putting trapdoors on the entry to each tunnel. The diggers were not the most friendly lot, just one or two. The day we saw this one man there working on the doors, he was friendly, but why would he be silly enough to show us how to open it Lord knows!

I have no memory how they worked but the doors were like a shallow tray with dirt and twigs in them. For some strange reason the chap showed us how to push one door to the side and get down into the tunnel. The second trapdoor was way too heavy for us to move and I think it could only be opened from inside. This was a very poorly kept secret. There was another dugout, an Observational Post I should think, over on the other side of Gramsgraft gully and a bit further downstream. All you could see from this was the other hillside and as far as the main bunker. It was not a very big dugout but there was a small door in the back and it had a lock on it. The soldier that showed us this put the fear of God into us NEVER open that door, and we never did.

At this point the bunker was still empty. I have no idea how long it was before the goods got there but one day, going to school, George and I saw tyre tracks in the under brush. A lorry had come down the track in the field next to the wood then into the wood, funny as it could have come down a track in the wood, sneaky ! On the way home from school we took a look to see if the ammo had been delivered for the bunker. The bunker had a small space off to one side and now we saw a bunk, a small table, a shelf and a storm lantern. The lamp I used every time I went in. There is no way to remember how many time we went in after the first 5 or 6 times, maybe only every two month or so and over how long, no idea, but I think 2 years ?

There was no ammo but some lovely looking boxes, some open, some sealed, great stuff for two inquisitive kids.

One box we could not open but had a bit of a gap. It looked like it had guns in it and as much as we would like to have got into that box it would not open but we thought; 'ok what could we do with a gun'. Think on, we were only 8 and 9 year old, George may even have only been 7, but we were the son (George)and Grandson of a Game Keeper so we knew what guns were and we had seen

soldiers shooting. But on to other things - we decided not to take much as what could we do with it and where could we put it, but strong magnets were just too good to miss. Soon after we found the goods were there, the box that I think had the weapons in had disappeared. Who ever took the box must have seen someone had been in as we had tried to cut a box open with a swede saw.

Now I'm sorry but my memory is no help here as I have no idea how long the bunker was there or how often I went in. It was our secret but we were in there quite a few times. We had to keep our eyes open for the gamekeeper, not our Granddad. Once we took the dog with us so she could keep guard while we were down inside.

When the bunker was dug tree roots had to be cut. One night there was a bad windstorm and the weakened trees around the bunker came down and the roof with it. How long that place was open, God knows but when I saw that, then it was all systems go and in no time flat George and I had our own 'bunker' full of 'stuff'. We had some grenades and fuses that were colour coded but had no way of knowing if a fuse was 3 sec or 7 sec. There was some soft stuff, brown in heavy wax paper, must have been explosive! Could have been to mould around the magnets to make limpet mines. It boggles the mind what we could have done! The metal from the bunker was salvaged and used on a building at the top of Lovell Hill field next to Wilton Lane.

One day one of the bigger boys at school saw I had a detonator and took it off me and somehow got it to 'go bang' - a big bang! 'Where did you get that thing asked?' the school Ma'am, 'Peter Caddy gave it me' he said. And that was when trouble started, the end of visits to MY bunker but a visit from the Village cop Mr Matson. No idea who moved the boxes from the bunker or when or where it all went to, did they build another bunker? Still at this time we thought it was a Army bunker not civilians.

Someone gave the Police a list of missing goods, then they came to the house and told my mother that they had to take me to show where the stuff was hidden. Boy was she mad, I know I got 'the belt'.

What we had taken was recovered by the village Policeman who knew not much more than I about what it all was. The last item was hard to reach as we had stuffed it all up a 'dry' drain pipe but it was like a straight thick sausage but bigger, half black, half khaki or brown and as he had a list he knew what it was. I didn't know what it was but I do know the Policeman took off like a scalded cat shouting "PUT IT DOWN PETER. PUT THE BLOODY THING DOWN!!.

We were later told it was to burn the grease out of tank bearings. The Aux member was to lay in a ditch and as a tank went by he was to jump up and lay this sausage on the inside of the tank track so as the tank moved on, the thing would be squashed, and two liquids would mix and burn with a very hot flame.

The Law caught up with me for taking (borrowing) things from the bunker in Wilton Woods and I had to go to court in Redcar.

While I sat waiting to go in and meet the judge, a big ugly Policeman came to the waiting room and asked WHO'S PETER CADDY? He had a stand that you got strapped to when they gave you a cat-o-nine tails. It put the fear into me, but he never told me I was too young to get the cat but told me to 'walk the straight and narrow. That was the day I stopped misbehaving. I think my Granddad may have set that up to teach me a lesson.

When we got to go into court there was a chap in army like uniform and he was there to tell what happened at the bunker - trees coming down and the roof caving in, then a list of the things missing.

I can remember Granddad, my Mother and a officer in Battle Dress being there but don't know if others were there. Granddad used to be the Game Keeper and told the court that the bunker was too near to a public footpath to be a secret for long. There was a pile of things on the table that we had taken and it was explained what they were. That's when we found out what the magnets were for. In later years Mum told me that because the bunker roof had caved in we were not charged with Breaking and Entry. In fact we were found not guilty. I seem to remember the judge having harsh words with the officer.

In court the Judge said the builders were to blame for not building the bunker stronger and keeping us away from the site, so the chap in khaki got a dressing down as I would think he was a Aux member but I don't know. There was no whipping or birching as we were too young, I think you had to be 11 and I was only ten. As we left the chap in khaki and my Mother got into a row and he lifted his fist, he was so mad, but Granddad was behind and hooked the man's wrist with his walking stick. A Policeman came to the door and said (as Police do) 'er er what's going on here then' and the chap in khaki was taken back inside.

I have no idea what went on after this but the bunker, at this site was history.

So there is nothing more that I can say about the bunker in Wilton Woods but here is the odd bit that we the Caddys cannot understand. We do know that seing as it was a secret bunker, there was some bloody silly mistakes made. First being that no attempt was made to keep out of sight, work was done in day time only a few yards from a public foot path Mum and I saw the workers a few times.

Informant	Defendant.	Offence	Date	PLEA	Date taken to place of holding	Adjudication	Time Allowed
20 th November 1945.							
5100	John Leif.	Edward Bennett 12. Robt. L. Sturman	Deliberately did steal 18.10.45 steal & take away 1/2 the property of Arthur Leif	"Not Guilty" "Not Guilty"	1.0 201. for 1-year probation Order made 3.0 201. for 1 yr. probation Order made		(15/-)
5101	John Leif.	John Laddy 10. Geo. Maughan 9.	Deliberately did steal 28.10.45 3 hills bombs & brass "Lins pencils" & magnets 7 incendiaries & 9 detonators from 14th W. B. Coy.	"Not Guilty" "Not Guilty"	Dismissed Dismissed		(15/-)
5102	J. J. C. Seymour	Loth. L. Gardner	Breach of Probation		Dismissed		Wm. J. Wren G. M. Daniel
18 th Dec							

All this went on without us knowing anything about the Auxiliary Units till the 1990s. In 2011 I was back in the UK (I live in Canada) and went to Middlesboro archives and got a copy of the court date to prove it did happen.

Peter Caddy