

Thomas Edward White's version of the Battle Patrol

Dear Sir,

Please find enclosed my father's details of the start of his War exploits.

They are obviously foreshortened due to the his untimely demise. There were short stories which punctuated this period in his life, but not being able to check on them I was unable to do so.

I attempted, via the 'Records Offices', but kept getting blocked by the TOP SECRET designation. Then unfortunately my father died and so I was unable to continue.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bob White', with a stylized, cursive script.

Bob White.

### **THEY WERE ALL MY ENEMIES.**

This book is based on the memories of my father, who although he had stories about the Second World War, only talked about one period as being on 'Sentry Duty'. The stories that he brought out at the end of every family 'DO', were obviously promoted by an overdose of alcohol. They were almost exactly the same every time. They were part of MY life, but continually POO-POOED by both of my brothers (Richard - the elder and Christopher - the younger) and my Uncle Len (An ex - D-Day veteran, who should have had some story to tell). I think it was because my father was able to tell a 'Good Story', that they were jealous.. He would tell his other stories over and over and they were always the same, and so they must have had some truth in them mustn't they. But there was always this gap of about the twenty months when he said he was on 'SENTRY DUTY. Then suddenly HE RANG ME UP!

I was the only one who had stayed interested in his 'War Exploits' throughout the years, and he said " you always wanted to hear about those months that had been missing, well I can tell you now".

He had just finished reading a certain book about the German Werewolves, when the writer had discovered , whilst on holiday in East Anglia, that there were three groups of 'Dad's Army' soldiers, the 201<sup>st</sup>, the 202<sup>nd</sup> and the 203<sup>rd</sup> that were part of three secret groups in the war. At the time they didn't exist 'on paper', other than 'Auxiliary Groups'. But they did exist in Real Life.

They, like my father, had been instructed not to tell anybody. NOBODY, not their relatives, nobody at all, just like my father. Some of the men decided that the 'Official Secrets Act' was now not a necessity and, one by one, went on to tell about the training they had had during the war from uniformed soldiers, ONE OF THESE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MY FATHER.

The book was called **'THE LAST DITCH'**

## THEY WERE ALL MY ENEMIES

The title stems from an eighteen month period after Dunkirk, until 1941 when my father was instructed not to tell anybody about anything - HIS LIFE EXPECTANCY WAS 48 HOURS AT MOST. It extended right up until he discovered a book called 'The Last Ditch' in which the writer, who had been investigating German Soldiers called 'WEREWOLVES' and discovered a link, based in England!

## THE WRITER'S YOUNGER YEARS

I had always been interested by my father's war stories. They probably prompted my interest in 'all things physical'. I must have been about six when I remember playing 'war games'. Things like multiple 'IT' or 'HE' which we called 'Bombers and Fighters'. One person started off as 'It' and chased everybody else, until he caught one of us. They then joined hands and became a 'Fighter' and they chased us until they caught one of us. They then joined up to become a 'Bomber' and chased us, when they had caught another person they split up to become two 'Fighters', and both sets worked together to catch others. But there was no further extension to the 3 - man Bombers, and so it went on until everyone was either a 'part Fighter' or 'part Bomber' and everybody was caught. I was proud of the fact that I, fairly continuously, was the 'last man standing', I was small, lithe and quite fast, which all worked to my advantage. All of my training/running/dodging etc was learned in the streets. I'd run to school, not because I wanted to get there, but because each road had a 'gang'. Although there were only a few boys in each street they could give you a 'wacking' and so you learned to run there and run back. Everything you did was linked to 'your street/road', even if it was 'Christmas Day' you were out in the morning to show off your NEW PRESENT. Boy were you lucky if you got more than one. I remember one specific Christmas when, although we had our normal old grey and red topped sock which contained a stick of rock shaped like a Christmas candle, a Clementine (an easy to peel small orange ), several

small toys and a single special main present. A PUSH - AND - GO JET AEROPLANE. The 'jet' had a spike sticking out of the nose, when you pushed the jet into a solid object it fired the pilot and his canopy into the air and produced sparks from it's rear end! I must have spent at least an hour pushing it into the wall, it was great fun. Just think of the reaction now from today's kids! Boy would they be BORED!

I couldn't wait to show my friends and went outside ON CHRISTMAS MORNING! There was I attempting to show all the kids my toy. But all they wanted to play with was their GUNS!

There were machine guns, rifles, luger pistols ( That FIRED PLASTIC BULLETS), revolvers and special agent guns. Everybody ignored me, I only had a 'noisy jet'. I just couldn't compete, my sparks against their bullets!

Dejectedly I walked indoors. My mother noticed me and asked if I was O.K. I said "No I wasn't, everybody else has got a gun of some sort, for Christmas. All I got was a 'spark producing Jet', which was no use against their guns, was it", I walked off looking very unhappy.

I heard my mother and father shouting at each other, about what I was not certain but it appeared to centre around what they had bought us for Christmas.

My father then stormed off, mumbling to himself. He was heading for his 'bolt hole', his shed, where he slammed the door and proceeded to crash around for a few minutes, it then went quiet. Just one word issued forth from the shed and that was "RIGHT"! I then heard the sound of wood being moved. I must say at this point my father was a great horder, he would save anything, if in future it could be utilised. All this stemmed from his days as a prisoner - of - war. His shed was an Aladdin's Cave of bits and pieces, I then heard the sound of sawing!

After half - an - hour, with me standing puzzled outside, I then heard "let's see what he makes of this, then". He then appeared holding a 'machine gun'. It had two nozzles for barrels, two legs, a body and a handle. "Here you are, see what you can do with this". I was stunned, I couldn't speak, and it was brilliant and better than any of the other boy's guns. I thanked him profusely at which point his face burst into a beaming smile, "Now go out and play and mind you kill all the other little so - and - so's before dinner\*. " Thanks Dad, I will!" and off I rushed, making the imagined sound of the machine gun!

What a stir I caused, my father had taken a wooden bed leg ( All beds were made of wood or iron ) to produce the two legs and main part of the gun, two pieces of doweling ( wooden pegs ) for the gun barrels, the old handle off of a saw and some screws to produce what was to all intents and purposes a very good replica of a MACHINE GUN! I stopped the

show! Everybody was asking me "who made it?", "Can he make me one?". "It's bloody brilliant" were a sample of the enquiries. My answer was "My Dad, possibly and yes, isn't it", I answered in that order. When I went back indoors later on I had a list of names as to who wanted one, with modifications of each, of course. My mother saw me first and then saw the list in my hand. "Err!, I think maybe your father might have bitten off more than he can chew. Just then my father walked in and said "what have I bitten off?" "Look at the list Tom, They're all from your admirers. They want one of your guns, but each one will be have to be different! "Oh shit! Said my father. " How many names have you got there? I counted them up - there were ten, all with individual specifications. "I'm sorry about this Bob but I don't have the necessary bits and pieces, let alone the time. Perhaps the other boys' fathers could produce their guns! This one was just for you! Go out and tell them that as much as I would like to make the guns I would hate to deprive their fathers of the enjoyment of doing something for their sons!" Out I went, to tell my friends, but I swear I saw a twinkle in my Dad's eye as I past him!

He had an innate ability to produce something from almost nothing, His training from the P.O.W. days always stood him in good stead, even though he always complained about those days. They certainly produced a superb all around training for life.

## MY FATHER'S YOUNGER YEARS

He never thought that 60 - 70 years on, the events of my involvement in World War 11 would be so clear.

It was the late 1930's and the young 'uns all knew it was coming, we saw it 'ages' before the Government.

What was he talking about? – WAR, that's what he was talking about! WAR was the talk all around the pubs, clubs and any other place you could think about. Who were we talking about – HITLER, The Little Corporal.

Hitler was a maniac and had to be stopped in his tracks before he got too big for his boots and we wouldn't be able to control him. My parents seemed timid in the extreme and were being pushed from pillar to post. They had an almost devout belief in 'the Government'. The press, an accountant, a bank manager or any other group of 'Solid Citizens' you can name, as long as they were their financial superiors. The written word was their Bible; at least that was what I thought at the time. My father had fought in the 'war to end wars' and so it couldn't happen again, could it? They tried not to stare at him. ME their only son criticising the Government, what was the world coming to? Did I WANT to go to war?

They followed the Government information line of 'it will be a lovely day tomorrow', or later on 'it will be all over by Christmas', whichever way it went. Or so they thought!

My grandfather had not had a job for some years, but that wasn't the Government's fault, it must be his inability to achieve! He used to walk ten or twelve miles a day to try to get work if necessary, my mother was 'going short' so that my aunt and father could eat. My father wasn't aware of this at the time, but neither of them wanted me to worry about anything nor had they the inclination for politics, so my father was representing them---- WASN'T HE?

He had both the time and the inclination and was fairly politically minded – AND A POMPOUS BASTARD TO BOOT! He didn't know what he was talking about most of the time but he still did, -- TALK that is! People who remembered him at that time say he was 'Shy and retiring' but he didn't think that was totally true! He was a 'child of the time'.

He was a young man in his 'teen' years, although he didn't call them that in the '30's, full of youthful enthusiasm and self – esteem. In this day and age we would have called it cockiness. Everybody I knew was my age and I was a real sod, everything I earned was spent on my own enjoyment. Beetroot red hair, a striking moustache and muscular (or so I was told by all the girls), my parents took my 'wage packet, but gave me 'pocket money'! Which if the girls had known I would have lost the esteem I held in their eyes. ( This is where I have gone into My father's speech mode!)

I also had my eye on one of the girls, but she was already 'spoken for'. So I had to 'play the field', and boy did I play it! There were blondes, brunettes and, and of course, the occasional redhead. None of the girls minded that I was just out for some fun, because that was exactly what they were after. The back row of the 'fleapit', pictures or cinema to the uninitiated, a walk in the moonlight on the 'Common, a dance 'down the palais' or a ride on the last bus home! Boy did we live outside the law! There was green-eyed Angela, beautifully proportioned Ursula and big-boobied Jennifer to name but a few, oh, and the surnames have been withheld to protect the guilty. But 'the girl' that I had my eye on was engaged to my best friend Albert Jones and he and I were inseparable, so I wouldn't do anything to hurt him in anyway, I'm not that cocky! The discussions we had about 'The Little Corporal, amongst us revolved around getting rid of him, it seemed a good thing to do at the time. The most 'voted for' idea was assassination by sniper's rifle or whatever other means was available.

The 'Southampton Arms' had been renown for being a 'revolutionaries' pub since the early 1900's and anybody who had any political leanings drank there. The pub had an old rustic feel to it, there were small, enclosed cubicles where we could all sit and drink our half pints, throughout the evening, but that's all we drank. We could shout at each other, without annoying anybody else too much, or so we thought. The publican was an odd, rubicund sort of chap, a bit portly, with chubby, red cheeks. He always wore a very 'loud' waistcoat and a huge, spotted, bowtie. Added to all of this was a magnificent handlebar moustache, which made him very military looking.

But it was his hairstyle that gave him his nickname; he had what appeared to be a 'tonsure', which meant he had a complete circle of hair with a bald patch in the middle. The way his hair grew made him look like a monk or friar and so he was called 'the Friar' or just 'Tuck'. Nobody knew what his real name was, but it fitted him in perfectly with his surroundings. Nobody queried why his name progressed to 'The Abbot' later on in the war; the probable reason was that he became our

father confessor. Anyway, back to the pub.

You could almost smell the candles and gaslight, which fulfilled the ambience of the rooms. Little were we to know that not only were the candles coming back but the windows would soon be covered in sticky net curtains and all of them would have the 'kisses of death' on them. To those who weren't around at the time these were the crosses of sticky paper that stopped the glass from spraying everything in sight when they shattered, due to the explosions of the bombs.

Anyway I diversify; 'Amateur Revolutionaries' came from far and wide to pontificate in Wandsworth, of all places. The area is now renowned for being suburban in the extreme, but it had a really raunchy reputation in the '30's. But on with the story, after Sudetenland, came the 'invasion' of AUSTRIA, so we met again and 'blew off some more steam'.

We had just heard that Hitler had 'moved' into Austria, and being the pompous, self-righteous 'crew' that we were, we had all agreed to scream and shout in the 'Arms'. There would be about a dozen of us irate, young revolutionaries pontificating on the illegality of this 'invasion by the little man' and what were we going to do about it. We all had our own ideas but we were just 'blowing off even more steam. Prime Minister Chamberlain flew over to Hitler and came back with the 'PEACE IN OUR TIME AGREEMENT'. This guaranteed deep sighs of relief all around the country in the older folk; -- everything was all right now wasn't it. We wouldn't have to learn to ride and charge the Germans on our horses, the way the Poles were doing. We wouldn't have to fight the 'Hun'. There, there! A magnificent piece of pacification! --- Ha! Bloody Ha!

We, the general public found out, later on after the end of the war, a certain person called Gobbles had staged an 'Attack' on Germany by 'Polish' Convicts. Which had been filmed by the 'LOCAL PRESS' and circulated to the WORLD PRESS as a reason for Germany's declaration of their war on Poland.

There is a quote from 'The Charitable Man' which goes something like this, 'not at any price! There is a peace most destructive of the manhood of living men than war is destructive of his living body. Chains are worse than bayonets'. This was written in the middle of the last century and it stands as good today as it ever did! This 'peace in our time agreement' only guaranteed pacification, and a prolonged explosion in the 'Arms'.

I was working on a delivery van at the time. We, the driver and I, had a job delivering groceries and as an assistant I did the 'humping', but it was a job at least. Both of us had been given a half-a-crown, two shillings and sixpence or twelve and a half pence for doing the special journey we were on that day, which was one hell of a lot at the time. I

sometimes look back and wonder if the people we delivered to knew something about what was going to happen, and were ordering everything early to get in before the rush. After we had finished our delivery the driver and I decided to have a mug of tea from the local 'greasy spoon'. John, the driver, went up to pay for the teas and there in the corner of the room was a slot machine, or one - armed - bandit. Sitting like a squat, hungry toad and, of course, totally illegal at the time. But it 'took', or 'gobbled up,' half - crowns, which was the coin I had in my pocket. I thought about what my father would have said to me, 'a penny gambled is a penny lost'. I thought that because my father would not know about the 'Special Delivery, I could gamble it with impunity.

Being at a rebellious age I put the coin in and pulled the handle. The spring engaged and twanged, the ratchet clanked, the wheels span, and the figures dropped in. TIC.... TAC.... TOE.....

### **JACKPOT !!!**

Suddenly I was richer by six weeks wages, BEFORE TAX. I had never seen so much money in my life! I scooped it all up and rushed up to my driver. I was so enthralled with my luck not only did we have TWO mugs of tea, but we also had a wonderful bacon sandwich each, ----- MY TREAT! Everybody in the café started hoping for a free meal. We were munching away with relish when suddenly the volume was raised from the 'Wireless'. There was Chamberlain saying 'We had warned Germany that if they didn't retreat from Poland we would declare war at eleven o'clock' but Germany had not replied. We were all looking around at each other when the Air Raid Siren went off, everybody jumped to their feet..... and froze! What to do? Where to go? Then just as quickly 'All Clear' was sounded and we were left standing looking guiltily at each other, because none of us knew what to do or where to go in the event of this situation, it seemed like seconds but it must have been longer. We were expecting swarms of German bombers to fill the skies; as we had seen on the newsreels of Spain. What we were not aware of was the fact that there were no German bombers that could have reached us so far inland, but they would have needed to have taken off from an airfield in France. Neither were we aware that there was a newsreel in Germany that had been concocted showing supposedly Polish troops, who were attacking a German Border Installation. In fact they were concentration camp inmates, drugged, then shot without any thought of what these people would have done! All of this was going on and we were not aware of it. Our Secret Service should have known because that same person, that had helped to obliterate thousands in the Stalin Purges by concocting a malicious story, was running a bluff now. His name was Reinhard Heidrich and he had been able to subvert the military and civil servants

in Russia, getting them assassinated or sent to Siberia. But we didn't have that information at the time; we were totally oblivious and naïve of how devious the German High Command was. So off we wandered to do our business and the rest of the day was spent in a daze, we delivered our load and nobody spoke to us. We went back to our depot, but still nobody spoke to us, they were all in a LIVING NIGHTMARE. We went home, but by this time it had sunk in and all I wanted to do was explode. This came about in the early evening as we congregated down the pub again, and by this time we were really 'steaming'. It was the beginning of September 1939 and the wireless was on in the pub bar "Why wasn't the government doing something about it?"

## DECLARATION of WAR

But it had been, it had actually 'DECLARED WAR' at last, another ha! Bloody ha from us!

But a politician, who had been warning us for years, and years, a larger than life politician both physically and mentally, was growing larger. His name was WINSTON CHURCHILL, as if you didn't know.

'Fear no more – take heart, enjoy. Now you can challenge Nemesis. All you have you must employ – there never was a day like this!' So says the Book of Days for September 2nd and so we did in 1939. The quote seemed very relevant at the time and looking back it still does.

The next day we all signed up for the forces!

Stanley Baldwin had resigned, not I hasten to add because we were to join up, but probably because it would be discovered that he had supplied both Germany's and Japan's metal and raw materials, this was a major 'faux pas' on his part.

Then Neville Chamberlain took over, did his 'peace in our time' bit, but was a Mr Insignificant as far as I could tell. All our eyes were on 'WINSTON'; we didn't have long to wait, initially he became First Sea Lord, and we entered the wintertime of the 'Phoney War'.

After the normal eight weeks square-bashing and champing at the bit, I was shipped overseas to France. The only time I had been anywhere over the sea was 'THE ISLE of WIGHT' -but that was overseas wasn't it?

Six months later 'He' took over as Prime Minister, 'He' being 'our Winston' of course, and we celebrated by going 'down the 'local pub' yet again. Where else when you've got a furlough? But now 'the local' had turned into a 'bistro' and we drank gallons of LAGER, which turned out to be a local brew of 'Gnats' piss,' --- based on a German beer. When we found out about the history of the brew we started throwing it and the glasses around. But we were quickly stopped by the Military Police, ushered out of the place and shepherded back to our camp. There we celebrated our 'victory' over the French. They had the 'Maginot Line' didn't they? They were the strongest troops weren't they, but they made a terrible mistake in not finishing 'the Line'.

They had left the northern section because the 'Low Countries' were

neutral, weren't they, and so the Germans wouldn't attack through them, would they? But we all know what they did, don't we? They did just that, they bypassed 'the Line' and drove into Belgium and the Netherlands, then 'drove' into France from the NORTH!

But that was all in the future at that time. Funny how a major war with the GERMANS can be overshadowed by a little fight with the FRENCH. Old enmities die hard!

## FRANCE

But what a wonderful time I had. The wine (pissed as a newt all the time), the women (whoever said French women were wonderful was wrong, they are truly, truly magnificent), and song (why is it any song sounds lustful in French), then to spoil it all - along came the Germans! I was rushed up to the front-line, carrying my Boyes anti – tank rifle, dropped in a trench and told to ‘Take Cover!’ as if I needed any advice as to saving my neck. Just as I got comfortable somebody dived into ‘MY TRENCH’, knocking the wind out of me! Having knocked the wind out of my body the other body said ‘ Well I’ll be damned, if it ain’t me ‘ole’ mate Chalkie!” It is at this point I’ve suddenly realised that I haven’t introduced myself to the reader. My name is Thomas Edward White or ‘Chalkie’ to his friends. It was Albert Jones, my closest friend! After being inseparable for over fifteen years we had become separated when we arrived at the front-line, but now we were reunited once again. -- Just Watch Out You Germans!

As to my nickname, I should have been called <Ginger‘, But ‘Chalkie’ stems from my surname. My parents have a lot to answer for. The friend who had just ‘dropped in’ on me was my old mate, Albert.

Suddenly a huge barrage of shells exploded around our trench. We were bracketed, and anyone who has been under fire knows what that can mean. The next one was ours, --but the next shell didn’t hit. It appears that the German officer-in-charge changed his mind and we were spared, or so I thought. Not so, I was just about to say something to that effect when I turned to look at Albert. Imagine my horror when I was confronted by a mass of blood where Albert's face should have been, he had died without firing a shot! “ You bastards, you fucking bastards” I shouted out loud “He died without firing a shot!” “ You bastards, you fucking bastards” I shouted out loud, again. My hatred for the Germans began in earnest at that point in time.

“Leave ‘im, ‘e’s dead” said a voice, I looked up and saw a sergeant from my regiment leaning over me, grabbing Albert’s name tags he said “Come on you stupid sod, move your arse! We’re falling back”. “But I haven’t fired a shot at the Germans, nor had Albert’. “I don’t care about that nor do the enemy, now move it!”

He dragged me to my feet and along the road, shells exploding around us all of the time. What with him shouting, and me mumbling, I don't remember much about my first 'official' action. Or even where it occurred, come to think of it. I believe it was some where in Northern France. The next few days were continual retreating. Stop, dig a trench, and get yourself into it, get comfortable! 'All right you lovely boys you're wanted in the next town'. We got up complaining all the time and moved back even further. Why won't they let us stand and fight we all asked? The officers had an in-built answer in that 'the Government must know what it was doing!' Naïve weren't we!

By now we were completely disoriented, which for the less learned is lost! We didn't even know which country we were in or even if we were still in Europe. I was marching, by now, like a robot on automatic pilot. Village followed field, followed village, followed field, followed field. We were meeting more and more refugees. Every so often the Germans would strafe the roads, killing as many as they could in one pass and moving on, to where God knows! All this was slowing us up, which was exactly what the Germans wanted, the clever bastards. During one of these actions we, that is the sergeant, four 'Tommys' and myself, somehow got separated from the main group. We had dived into a cutting alongside the road only to find that it was half-full of water, the other half being mud. Everybody started cursing and swearing when the sergeant shouted "Shuttit!" Some wit said "How could the German pilots hear us, when they're travelling at 150m.p.h. and 150 feet off the ground?" By now I was becoming known as the 'troupe Joker', although why I've no idea, and so the sergeant immediately singled me out as the perpetrator of the comment. I attempted to argue with the sergeant, to the delight of the rest of the crowd, but we were brought down to earth by the sight that assailed us as we stood up.

Dead bodies were strewn everywhere, women, children, old people and the wounded from previous 'hit and runs'. They were massacred from as far as you could see in one direction, to as far as you could see in the other, we were dumbfounded and could only stand and stare.

That's when the sergeant, having taken stock of the situation and seeing we were in a state of shock said "Come on chaps we can't do anything here" gently understanding what we were feeling at that moment, "Head towards the woods", so of we set. Although the woods didn't seem to be far away, it took us several hours of hard slogging through the fields to get to them. We found a track and started to follow it, this one action really did show how amateurish we still were. The far more experienced Germans could well have ambushed us, but we made it more by luck than judgement. The path led us to a small clearing in the middle of the

woods, in the centre of which was a tiny cottage.

“Spread out” came the whispered order, which we did automatically, advancing in a wide semicircle towards the cottage. Other than the rumble of large guns and bombs miles away it all seemed as silent as the grave. Too silent I thought, looking along the line of the group. Ginger (although why he was called Ginger when I was redder than he was I’ll never know) looked gaunt and tight-lipped, Charlie tense, Fred had his usual lop-sided smile, but tighter, Blackie was moving his head from side-to-side covering the whole area in front of him and of course the sergeant who was doing exactly the same as Blackie, but including up and down as well! We reached the cottage without any real mishaps, except for Charlie tripping over; the noise seemed deafening in the small clearing. He got up to see the sergeant scowling at him, apologised and moved on at a shambling run. His run took him straight in to the door of the cottage, bursting it open. The sergeant shouted “Follow him in!” which being the ‘trained privates’ we were, we did with some alacrity, it might well have been through fear though! The sergeant issued orders like a machine gun “you two to the back of the house, you two upstairs and we will keep a lookout for the Boche from the front.” “OK sarge” said one of the fellas going to the back of the house; everybody went to their allotted posts. I think we surprised ourselves, let alone the sergeant, moving like well-oiled machinery (but that could have been fear as well), the situation on the road must have had its effect. I was the man designated to stay with the sergeant; I was staring out of the window when I heard a sneeze. “Bless you” I said automatically and looked towards the sergeant who was looking past me to a small recess alongside the fireplace. I followed his gaze to see a tiny movement right in the corner of the room. I couldn’t discern what was there at first as we hadn’t turned on the lights and the room was quite dark. “Halt, who goes there” I said, feeling really stupid about it afterwards, because if it had been Germans we would have been treated to “Hande Hoche”, or shot as we came through the door. As it was “Les Anglais!” and other french terminology.

I, for one, didn’t understand what I presumed was French. But it appears that our sergeant did. “Comment t’allez-vous?” which I now know means “How go you?” It’s funny how oddly they speak in France.

“Je m’appelle Gwyllum Jones”, meaning ‘I am called WILLIAM JONES’. With his thick Welsh accent we should have guessed, but how could we have known of his language talent, a French-speaking Welshman no less, wait ‘til I tell the boys.

## THE FRANGLAIS COUPLE

It was an old man and woman who crept out of a closet alongside the fire. The man said in English, "Thank God it's you," then he turned to the woman and said "it's the English", which the sergeant took immediate exception to, him being a die-hard Welshman. By this time everybody had started to congregate in the downstairs room and questions were flying from every direction. Who, where, what, when, how did they get where they were etc., etc., etc. After the initial barrage of enquiries, all inconclusively answered by anybody, we all sat down. We had forgotten about the war completely.

It appeared that the 'Frenchman' had been born in Wales but brought up in Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey. He had fought in the 'Great War', met up with and married a French girl and lived here ever since. His wife's name was Isabelle and she must have had some bellows when she was young. We all smirked at each other, all thinking along the same lines.

After he had introduced himself and his wife he finished with a vehement "Damn the Boche".

The question about the sergeant knowing french was answered in that he had had relatives in France before the war, been on holiday over here and learned 'a smattering of french'. Well that sorted out the main questions, but everybody still wanted 'theirs' answered! "How about some wine, cheese and bread, then" said our 'patronne', "I don't suppose you've got any beer" asked Charlie, to which everyone jeered! "This was France and everybody knows the French only drink wine" said Fred.

"It's funny you should ask; I have some of my own 'home-made stuff' in the back room". "There you see, those who don't ask don't get" said Charlie with a smug smile. "Tell me where it is and I'll get it!" he said. After taking the instructions he went off into the back room to find the beer.

Within the next few minutes the world stood still, none of us had seen a German close up; this was rectified almost immediately as one burst in to the room. He appeared to be as astonished, as we all were, "Gott in Himmel" and "Oh shit!" echoed around the cottage. The first person to react was Blackie, as he opened up with his machine gun, cutting the German in half. His guts spewed out all over the floor, leaving a look of surprise on his face as he slid down the wall in two almost, individual

pieces! We all continued to stand like statues until the sergeant shouted "cover", at which point we dived for anywhere we could. "Check the windows" came the next shout, everyone moved to a window, but no one looked out! There on the floor was the remains of a body pumping blood from both its top and bottom half simultaneously. As 'it' collapsed the nervous system took over, with trigger finger jerking; the gun fired one last round. Silence for what seemed an eternity; bullets tearing into the cottage from all sides only awakened us.

Having been fully woken up we returned fire, spraying bullets in every direction. The sergeant ordered all of us to slow down, concentrate and check whom, where and how many 'targets' were in front of each of us. We soon ascertained that there appeared to be only two 'Huns' at the back of the house. The sergeant organised everybody to get out at the same time, rushing the Germans at the back as we went. Just at this moment we heard a groan, everyone turned to look in 'it's' direction to find the writhing body of Charlie. He had been gut shot by at least two; maybe three bullets of the German's first, and last, round. From his ashen face came the immortal lines "And I didn't even have time to drink my pint" were said with a sickly grin, as the jug and glass slipped from his hands and smashed on the floor. His eyes glazed over, and the sergeant shouted "go". No one moved, "Fucking go, you stupid little bastards" and off we went like 'bats out of hell'. We were screaming like banshees as we hit the garden which must have put the Germans off just slightly, because we didn't get any bullets fired at us until we had crossed the small courtyard at the back of the house. The Germans didn't know what hit them, they were cut to pieces in seconds, and on we ran. We did not stop until we had really winded ourselves, and then some more. Our lungs were close to bursting point when we stopped and it took some time for all of the last few minutes to sink in. We had seen the enemy, we had killed the enemy, the enemy had killed one of us, and we had been in a full frontal defence knowing whom we were facing and WE FELT LIKE SHIT! We had lost a comrade, a colleague, an associate and a friend. We had seen men die in front of us, this was now a serious situation, we were not playing 'Cowboys and Indians' now, this; was for REAL! I had lost my anti-tank rifle at the cottage and I was now carrying a stengun. It had belonged to Charlie, but I had automatically picked it up after the killing of the German. I'm glad I did because it appears that the anti-tank rifle was good at shooting snipers out of church steeples and tigers in the jungle but it had no affect whatever on TANKS! So the first time I used it I would have been an automatic target for any German, whether he was an Infantry man or a tank commander.

We had dumped our gear on the ground and had our heads in our hands, puffing and panting noisily, when the shooting suddenly started again. We grabbed our gear and ran like hell again! Where to go to, we had no idea, but on we went. We just followed the leader, the sergeant. Who seemed to know where he was going. It wasn't until some time later that we remembered the French couple. We had left them behind, to the tender mercies of the opposition. What actually happened to them we don't have a clue!

We were running through a grove of hazelnut bushes, or trees as they had become, when the sergeant shouted for us to stop. We were just about to run across an open field right under the noses of a German spotter plane. If we had run out across the field WE would have been spotted. The pilot would have radioed to the Infantry command, which would have left us at the tender mercies of the opposition. We would have been captured or killed without firing a further shot. The sergeant ordered us to get down. Having told us to get down he went off to

Reconnoitre the edge of the forest. So we settled down to wait. None of us realised how tired we were until the sergeant came round to WAKE US UP! It was dark already, and we hadn't seen dusk fall. The sergeant informed us that we were at the edge, not only of the forest, but also of a small village. The village appeared to be untouched by the war in any shape or form; it was a complete haven of peace. We were all for trundling down to have a better look for ourselves, to which the sergeant said "you will do no such thing!" We would wait until dark and only then would we venture forth to see if all that looked good was good. That was when I realised how much we needed the sergeant. If he hadn't stayed awake, whilst we all slept, we could well have been captured or even killed. He ordered us to get moving quietly, to which I added "Do as the sergeant says lads", to which he gave me a filthy look, I couldn't blame him. I had been a real thorn in his side from 'the off' and here I was siding with him, funny 'ennit. I had learned a lot in the last few days that would stand me in good stead in later life. Anyway, back to the story. We started to move slowly and quietly towards the village. There were some lights on, although not many, these we avoided. Having gone as far as we could we realised that we would have to cross a fairly large stone bridge, which we had been unable to see during the daylight. This had been due to our vision being obstructed by some of the larger buildings. The bridge was a four-arched one, built of stones and covered in moss. The water running under it was quiet and deep, except where it came out into the moonlight. The closer we got to the bridge the noisier the river became. We could now see it was deeper than any of us had expected. The sergeant whispered quietly that we should continue along beside the

river, until we could see if there were any sentries on the bridge. We crept along the bank and peered into the night to see if there was anybody there. I don't know if we were disappointed or not but we quickly discovered that there were two guards, one at each end of the bridge. How were we going to get them both at the same time, would be a definite problem! We could use our bayonets as knives on the nearest one, but they continually called to each other and any change in voice or difference and in the time gap would be immediately noticed! This was where Blackie came into his own, he offered to swim underwater and come up at the far bank, creep up on the second guard and kill him. The sergeant asked him quietly as to whether he was certain if he would be able to do this, to which he replied "Of course sarge", I've done it dozens of times". Nobody asked WHERE he had done it, nobody could or would! He lowered himself effortlessly and noiselessly into the water. The next time we saw him was as we moved towards the nearest sentry to us a few minutes later. Just as, to the sentry's astonishment, he had turned round to see Blackie appearing where Heinie should have been. This sentry was obviously far more nervous than the other one, or so we told ourselves later. He had been doing most of the calling so he had to have been the most nervous, stands to reason doesn't it? This was why we made the next move that we did,----- we all rushed him! The last thing he saw was Blackie, as the sentry disappeared under a pile of soldiers. Somehow we managed to kill the sentry, but we were all left breathless "that was very quietly done wasn't it?" Blackie said. We all looked up to see both the sergeant and he looking down on us, causing us to freeze and listen but all we could hear was the sound of frogs and a distant Nightjar. Our sergeant put his finger to his lips and signalled us to follow him, we quietly moved on out of the town, leaving two dead bodies behind us. What we didn't realise at the time was that for every German we killed, five Frenchmen were executed. On we went oblivious of the trail we were leaving behind us.

From that point on we skirted all the villages and farmhouses that we came upon, fording every stream and river if we could and swimming, if we couldn't do that. We travelled for the next few days in this way until we came upon some sand dunes.

## DUNKIRK

After a hell of a lot of scrambling up and down we came to the top of the biggest dune so far, only to be astonished at the sight before us. The town was full with soldiers, who were all trying to board ships in the harbour. From our vantage point we could see that certain sections were moving quicker than were others. So having made our decision we joined one of them, shuffling into the moving sea of men. We must have looked like waves in our helmets, bobbing along the French streets onto the quay. As we got nearer the ship it looked as though we would get on board, but the naval officers ordered a cut-off some three rows in front of us. This caused a certain amount of cussing and swearing but what could we do, we had already 'queue-jumped' and we stood and watched the ship slowly steam off the dock. Just as it had got about four hundred yards out to sea, the scream of a Stuka could be heard. It got louder and louder, and then it could be seen diving on the ship. The ship was like a sitting duck, the bombs fell, fore and aft on the ship, but one seemed to be eaten-up by the ship's funnel. My brain went into a delayed action time loop, I thought 'that's funny, fancy that ship doing that', but it wasn't funny at all. The ship exploded into a million pieces, and the sea became amassed with the dead and bits of soldiers, all coated in oil. My mind filled with the vision of the French refugees, and the word 'bastards' came back into view. There didn't seem to be much anybody could do for the soldiers in the water, there were too many and anyway you had to look after number one, didn't you?

The sergeant said "Right lads, let's get going". "But sarg', what about the men in the water" said Ginger (I never did find out his name) "If they are still alive there are enough little boats to collect them, it's our duty to get home!" He turned and trudged off down the road, heading out of town. We followed him without a word, with our heads down and our gear being dragged along behind us we would have been an easy target for 'Gerry', the name we had given to the Germans. The houses seemed to get less and less as we got nearer the outskirts, seems sensible doesn't it, but it was so scary for all of us. We climbed a large rise or dune and as we reached the top the sight in front of us was awe inspiring, if it hadn't been so frightening. The whole beach appeared to be covered by ants

charging this way and that, and we discovered where the fighter planes had been heading! The planes were now strafing the beaches, and waves and waves of bombers augmented them. The sea was a mass of shipping. Small boats, frigates, cruisers and ex-holiday boats, paddle steamers, in fact anything that could float! The soldiers were mostly in straight lines from the beach out to sea, in some places up to their necks in the tide, it was amazing how orderly they were. A boat would come in; fill up, the owner would say "that's yer lot" and off he would go. No arguments, the soldiers would just stoically wait for the next boat, just like buses. They all looked as if they had umbrellas in their hands, which we discovered were rifles as we got closer. There were hundreds, maybe hundreds of thousands, who every time a German plane attacked the beach dived into a bomb crater that previous planes had made. It was like a deadly game of 'TAG', but I have to admit I had never seen such a dangerous version in my life.

## EMBARKATION

There appeared to be a small boat which appeared to have run aground about a hundred yards from us, to which we headed. The boat was lying on its side, looking very sorry for itself. It had been a very bright blue but the paint had seen better days and the varnish was cracking. When we got up to it, it was only to be told by the man we presumed was the owner, that the engine was 'buggered' so we were wasting our time. "Let me have a look" said Blackie "I used to be good with engines". The owner agreed to let him, but added that if he couldn't fix it no one could. He had owned this boat for 25 years and knew every part, both nut and bolt. Then continued to carry on mumbling to himself until, within the space of a few minutes Blackie's head reappeared from underneath the boat's cowling to say "I think I can fix this" then it disappeared again. After about half-an-hour his head resurfaced "try that then". The owner tut-tutted and turned the key to the engine. The engine fired into life! The owner said "Well, well, it wasn't the engine that was buggered, it was me! What the hell did you do, because whatever it was, it worked! Get on board chaps, we are off on a journey to one of the big ships, the least I can do is to get you lot away!". My admiration for Blackie was growing apace. We steamed towards the nearest ship and disembarked as quickly as possible; not even allowing ourselves time to thank the small boat's owner, nor did I have any idea what type of ship we got on board. The next few minutes were chaos to say the least, we were shunted and shuffled around, until we were split up, and the ship got underway. I didn't see the rest of the group after that, until sometime later, a few months that is. All I remember about the trip across the Channel was the smell of oil and sick, combined and with ship rolling. I must have joined the 'Walking Wounded, and been literally sick as well.

## DISEMBARKATION

I disembarked; one of many hundreds of thousands, bedraggled and beaten. I got the 'cup of tea and a piece of bread and dripping 'routine'. A

blanket was put around my shoulders and I was shunted out to a waiting truck. I had lost most of my gear over the last few days and so I was travelling light. 'Name?'. 'White, Thomas Edward-\*\*\*\*\*', funny how that number still rolls off my tongue after all these years".

I was moved from pillar to post over the next couple of days, ending up back at my original posting point. I started from here six months ago and it felt like a lifetime. I had learned how to survive under fire. How to fight dirty with the best or worst of them and hate an enemy more than I'd ever hated before.

Those days were a blur of teas and biscuits, but I couldn't get it out of my head that although we had been soundly thrashed in France, Belgium and the 'low countries', I was still being treated like a hero. Arriving back at where I started from, I was lined up outside the Quartermaster's Store.

All of the 'Dunkirk Heroes' were lined up together! I couldn't believe

I was a HERO. I turned to the man beside me and said as much, "But it was a GREAT VICTORY, they managed to get nearly 400,000 of us off the beaches. We wouldn't have succeeded if it hadn't been for the 'little boats' helping out". Then I remembered what had happened to me at

Dunkerque, and went into a dream. I was wondering what had happened to the boat 'captain, if he survived and if so where he was now only to be woken up by the local sergeant screaming for me to "Move it! You little

worm, you're not waiting for a free ride now!" I was fully kitted out, ran to my billet at the double, only to have my old sergeant come crashing through the door. "Get your arse in gear, you're an 'orrible little man in any language". From that point on I became the object of the sergeant's

derision and vicious temper. I painted the coal white, washed the floor of the urinals with a toothbrush, square-bashed by myself in the pouring rain and went on route marches carrying the sergeant's pack as well as my own. I did notice the smell of freshly dug earth, grass and newly laid concrete everywhere I went, which I quickly associated with death and decay. The local government was also making pillboxes and concrete

obstacles. But the one thing that was now 'for real' as they say today was the sound of air-raid sirens everywhere you went. Military bands were playing 'South of the Border' and irritating little paperboys were attempting to whistle it on their paper rounds. Then some more bad news

filtered down the line to us, a 'new' sergeant major was arriving. All the information about him was horrendous, he was supposedly a bastard of the very first order, he had served overseas and so he knew what 'real life' was all about. All of the local sergeants were looking forward to greeting him, but apprehensive at the same time.

I was seriously considering going AWOL or 'over the top' because I couldn't take anymore of the treatment I was getting. All of the guys

persuaded me to hang around because nothing this new sergeant could do, would be any worse than I was getting at the moment. Imagine my surprise when the sergeant major turned out to be my sergeant from Dunkerque. Well at least he couldn't be that bad, ...nor could he?

When we lined up on parade I was the epitome of the British Tommy, all my mates were casting enquiring looks in my direction, but I was ramrod straight, standing set in concrete. The sergeant major started his "unofficial" rounds of the troops, he checked every soldier in the battalion. Every man was examined with a microscope, front, back and both sides. When he got to me he hesitated "Name?" "White, Sergeant major" I answered at attention. He turned to the sergeant and said "Get this man's haircut, I'm standing on it!" "Of course Ser'nt major" he said coming to attention. The Sergeant major went on checking every man in the unit, striding off to the word "Shower", with his baton under his arm. I was frog-marched to the 'Barber', where he took great delight in shaving all my hair off. I was then put on 'Jankers', which meant any filthy job they, the sergeants could think of, and boy could they think of a few. I didn't see the sergeant major at all in the next few days, but he was around, I knew that by the way the sergeants were picking on me more than usual and snickering to each other. Expressions like 'got the little bastard' and 'that's fucked him good and proper' became more and more prevalent.

Just when I had got used to being the centre of all of the sergeants' attention everything stopped, I was left waiting for the bomb to go off. I was almost considering relaxing when I was summoned to the sergeant major's office. "You're in for it now my lad" smirked the sergeant and practically ran me over to his superior's quarters. We arrived at the office, knocked and the sergeant said "It's sergeant Southerly with "White, sarge"

"Come in" came the reply. He opened the door and marched in to this haven of peace. "All right sergeant I'm quite capable of looking after myself, you can leave now" he said quietly, but menacingly. The sergeant looked disappointed, crest-fallen even.. He did an extremely smart salute and about-faced and marched out. The sergeant major got up, walked around me and closed the door "Stand-easy White, I suppose you're wondering what you are doing here? I didn't answer, 'cos I knew it could only be for more punishment. "Well, cat got your tongue, say something! I suppose you think you're here for punishment eh? Well you're not, what else could you be here for?" He must have seen the look of puzzlement that flashed across my face because he laughed, "Gottcha" he said in a NORMAL VOICE. "Other than a bollocking, or asking you for the details of your birth, which would definitely be

interesting. There is only one other thing, think man!” and back came my look of puzzlement. I had no idea what he was talking about and so I kept quiet, which would obviously annoy him but I had no other choice. To my eternal surprise he leaned over and whispered a word in my ear I never thought I would hear.

“PROMOTION” to which I involuntarily mumbled “Oh shit!” “Oh shit is right White” as he handed over my first stripe. “Now go and sew it on my luvverly boy” I was still in a daze when I came out of there. I was so confused I nearly BUMPED into the local sergeant who shouted “where the ‘ell do you think your going?” I looked at him as if he were half-daft. “Come in here sergeant!” came the imperious order from inside the office. “But sergeant major he.....” “Come in NOW!! Carry on White”. I marched off dead upright and with a smirk on my face. By the time I had got back to my billet it had sunk in, I had been promoted and I was laughing fit to bust, everybody wanted to know what had happened to me.

When I told them about my good fortune they were astounded, they couldn’t believe what I was telling them. The first quotable comments were “you must have done something towards getting a stripe, like giving away your virginity. My answer to that was “Fuck off you stupid bastard! Do you honestly believe that I would do that?” My next thought was what the sergeants would be working along the same thought processes, if not they would also score as many points as possible by spreading the rumour. It was time to ask for a transfer, somewhere away to the South Coast. The seaside for a holiday sounds great doesn’t it? Well having kept out of the way of all of the sergeants and most of the privates over the next few days, my posting came through. The sergeant major’s ‘new runner’ passed it onto me. He said it was with the sergeant major’s compliments, whatever that meant? So I was on my way to the ‘coast’ the next day, arriving in the afternoon, to the sound of an air raid, what else.

## **THE SOUTH COAST**

By the time I had arrived at my south Coast posting my ‘reputation’ had preceded me, I was already a homosexual ‘shirt lifter’. I had crept, by way of my sexual inclinations, to my corporal’s position and might even make sergeant! Or allow a sergeant to ‘make me!’ With all this going on I needed to sort out whose side I was fighting for, whether it was the privates, ‘my privates’ or the sergeants on my new post. I would need to get the privates to work for me without showing I was a sergeant’s ‘runner’. I would have to prove I was ‘easily’ capable of doing the assault

course and improve my outrageous demeanour in dealing with the sergeants at the same time. The assault course was the easiest to start with. I entered into the course against the 'privates' had done the shortest time barring two of them. I then progressed to the next step of every day for a few weeks, finding the sergeants extremely easy to wind up. Funny how one stripe makes a difference? I soon became the most well - liked corporal in the unit, and was allocating guard duties on a regular basis. Probably due to the fact that I could get them to work for me!

Then suddenly I got a message that two German fighters were arriving in my area each morning and strafing one of the local towns. The ridiculous point about this was they were 'shooting up the town' at the same time every morning and apparently getting away with it, 'scot-free!

The time being 09.10 a.m. EXACTLY, German precision you see. I decided to report this to my sergeant whose reaction was 'they'll do something about it', I asked who would and when? The answer was 'They will' but he didn't seem to know who 'they' were "now push -- off Corporal, I'm busy" was his only retort. I asked if I could go to see the officer-in-charge and was told "Yeah, if you can find him", so off I went in search of the hapless officer. When I found him I reported the incident to see if he knew anything about it. I wanted to know if anybody had done anything about it at all. Guess what, nobody had, the officer knew nothing of the 'visiting Hun' and I said it might be an idea if the C.O. were told. "Yes sir" I said. "Well go on, go and tell him" "But sir I'm a corporal". "That's no problem, He'll listen to anybody". So off I went. Having told the C.O., he said somebody should report this to the local airfield to see if they knew anything. "What a good idea" said the officer "Why don't you do it?" "Me sir, I'm just a corporal" "Ring them!" Ordered the officer, dropping the telephone directory in front of me. I rang the number and was answered by the Squadron Leader. "Aerodrome, Squadron Leader Williams speaking". I immediately came to attention and almost saluted. "Come on, come on, who the hell is it? If you don't answer me within the next 5 seconds I'm putting the 'phone down. 1, 2, 3,....". Just at that moment my officer grabbed the phone and said "Hallo Jimmy, it's, Bob, sorry I was just trying to do something else when you answered, he went on to recount the story. But the officer appeared to know as much as my C.O. He went on to say that it was very interesting and he would deal with it, "Anyway Bobbie I'll see over the weekend". "O.K. Jim, see you then." He put the phone down and said "Right White, congratulations, this will go on your record. "Thank you sir" I said, saluted, did an about face and marched out, not knowing if I had got anything done or not. It could all have been an 'arse covering job'.

This was the problem at this time, total confusion within the communication area, and everybody who had not been in the B.E.F. (British Expeditionary Force or FARCE as it was now being re - named) suffered from the same lethargy. We were all bound by paperwork and routines and we couldn't get out of the rut. As I walked across the parade ground several of the sergeants asked me what I had been doing in the C.O.'s office. I explained and by the time I had got across to the other side of the 'ground I was a hero. The following day I was on hand to see both of the German fighters strafe the town again, my information appeared to have been to no avail, where the hell were our boys? My squad and I were crestfallen, which in normal language is 'totally pissed off'.

Then just as the Germans were finishing their run they lifted up to expose their bellies to the sun. There they were blown apart in the sky by two beautiful Spitfires. Pieces of Meschesmitt rained down on us, little bits of aeroplane like snow, but we didn't care! Having done their duty the Spitfires flew over us and wagged their wings. Boy, was that a beautiful sight! My squad burst into rapturous applause and everybody clapped each other on the back, somebody started singing 'Hitler has only got one Ball' and everybody began dancing a jig. That was when one of the 'local' sergeants appeared on the scene. "What the 'effing hell's going on here" he shouted out loud. The squad immediately stood to attention. For my sins I said "we've just shot down two Nazi planes!"

To my astonishment he grinned and said "that's all right then, as long as it's something important!" and carried on his way. "Bloody 'ell corp', what's wrong wiv 'im" asked one of the privates. "God knows" I said making the sign of the cross and putting my hands together in prayer, "but I think we should just accept it and get out of here now! Let's go!" and off we ran. We couldn't contain our glee, within the space of ten minutes of our arrival back at the other side of the camp everybody knew. They all wanted to know the 'ins and outs' of what I had done. Not only what I had done but also how I had done it! Every time the story was told it got a bit more outrageous until we were winning the war by ourselves!! That was the highlight of my days on the south coast. Other than defusing an unexploded bomb, from a J.U. 88. This was done by

shooting at the bomb, with a machine gun, until it exploded.  
I became extremely bored and kept looking for something else to do.

## **THE ADVERTISEMENT**

Although my father had told me not to volunteer for anything, I had. I had volunteered for an 'OLD SCOUTS REUNION'. All ex- scouts, sea scouts, game keepers or other folklore minded persons wanted. Well it had to be better than wandering around doing nothing. It may be teaching privates to pitch tents properly! I had seen the 'ad' at the bottom of the regimental notice board, but when I asked about what was wanted nobody knew, not even the 'know-it-all' sergeant.

The next few days turned into a completely boring time, just dealing with unexploded bombs in the local area, my gun was now in almost continual use.

Frustration was setting in then the Sergeant major walked in on me said "Well what do you think about a Boy Scouts Jamboree, Sergeants only. I looked askance at him "But Sir, I'm ONLY a Corporal" He laughed "WERE a corporal is the operative word; I've just given you a 'Field commission', with the C.O.'s O.K.! I would hate you to feel uncomfortable when you arrived at that address, a 'Little corporal' amongst a load of sergeants". He then marched out leaving me in a daze for the second time in my Army career.

Why was it every time I came in contact with this man I was mesmerised, he either dragged me through a hail of bullets or bombs or promoted me! Off hand I couldn't even remember what he looked like, he was small and wiry but other than that I can't remember a thing about him. Just at that moment my C.O. came in, "Well SERGEANT it's nice to know somebody else appreciates your abilities. Even if you don't! Now off you go and pack your gear." He then handed me an envelope addressed to Sergeant White; "this is your ticket and pass to your destination, wherever it may be, oh by the way it includes your stripes". By the time I got back to my billet my gear had already been packed in my kit bag and I was ready to go, my privates must have done all of this. What was it about this sergeant that demanded outright loyalty and obedience? I set off almost at once, to aid me in my future I had been given a 'furlough' of three days. My target was Albert's girl to tell her in person what had happened to him! All she had received had been a telegram

telling her he was dead. She needed to be told more than that and I was going to tell her, and hopefully comfort her and expand on Albert's history- if she needed it? I caught the first train to London. I knew Dot had been moved from Wandsworth, but I was unsure where she had gone to, but I was able to find out via the Army and Navy connections. Because she, and her mother had family connections she'd moved back to Balham. Exactly the opposite way from everybody else, but that was Dorothy.

### DOROTHY, ALBERT'S GIRL

I was making my way through London on a foggy day in November when I first heard the clicking sound and saw the flickering light. It was eerie in the extreme, then a shape appeared out of the 'peasouper'. It was a policeman with a self-powered torch. It was worked by a little lever, the sound being amplified by the fog. All of this startled me. I had been thinking about what to tell Dorothy at our meeting. The holder of the torch was a local 'Bobbie', copper or policeman. I asked him if he knew where Gosberton Road was. "Your in it, Soldier" "Oh, thanks very much officer" I said. "S'alright sir, my pleasure, was there a specific number you wanted". "No don't worry I think I can find it from here".

Dot was a middle-class girl, black hair, lovely body and a beautiful personality. She was renowned for being as fair and reasonable as anybody could be and a smile that lit up the world.

When I arrived at her address her mother answered the door, "I came to call on Dorothy, to tell her about Albert's last few hours." "I don't think she wants to know, she's upstairs crying her heart out, poor dear. Any further information could tip her over the edge". At this I looked crestfallen and turned to go away. She obviously felt sorry for me. "Stop! Come in and have a cup of tea. A sergeant now are we?" She stepped to one side and allowed me in. We walked through to the parlour/backroom and she asked me to sit down. "Now tell me about what's been going on at the front?" she queried. I didn't get a chance to answer her enquiry, even if I had been able, because just at that moment Dot walked into the room. Her nose was red and so were her eyes, from crying that is! She was holding a sodden handkerchief in her left hand and tea towel in her right; I really did feel sorry for her. She had lost her loved one and here was I coming to tell her about ' what Albert's last few hours were' I wanted to pick her up and squeeze her to keep her safe from the world. My heart reached out for her; she was sad, pathetic and lovely at the

same time.

“Tell me how it happened?” Her question brought me back to earth, so I decided to glorify what actually happened, somewhat. “We were part of a huge advance, with Albert leading of course, when he got shot in the arm. But being the sort of soldier he was, he carried on, then he got shot in the leg, but he waved everybody on to the objective. When we arrived we tried to organise ourselves, but there was Albert, being carried on a stretcher doing the organising. I tried to tell him he should go to the rear and get treated” but the ‘medic’ said he had tried to persuade him, ‘but to no avail!’

“That was typical of Albert” she said “He only thought about everybody else, never himself”. I grunted a non-committal agreement. “But how was he killed?” “Well during the next advance he was urging all of the soldiers over the top. When a grenade was lobbed into the trench, he didn’t hesitate, he just threw himself on top of it, taking the full blast with his body”. “

“What a brave man, I suppose he’ll get a medal for that?” Oh shit! I hadn’t thought that far ahead in the story. How was I to get out of this one?

Got it! “By the time we had got this far, we had run out of officers, they had all been killed. Without an officer there to verify the facts a medal can’t be awarded!” “But couldn’t all of the privates verify the story, there must have been lots of them who could have done” she asked plaintively. “That’s a good point” I said, thinking fast, where the hell do I go from here!

“But they have all been dispersed all over the country by now!” “Couldn’t you use the Government to contact them?” “That’s a possibility, but the government have a lot on their plate at the moment and finding all of the witnesses to the action might be a little difficult” I was thinking as fast as I had ever thought before, when Dot’s mother cut in! “They really do have too much on their plate dear, what with that nasty Mr. Hitler just about to invade us and them trying to organise the country”. “I’m sorry to dampen your enthusiasm Dot but I think your Mother is correct”. She looked at me with tear-stained eyes “Oh God, what a terrible world it is” and fell into my arms. I looked at her Mother over her head AND SHE WINKED AT ME, she must have known then that I was in love with her daughter. I continued to comfort Dorothy for the next hour, as her mother quietly disappeared into the kitchen. I cuddled her and made her as comfortable as possible, without ‘going over the top’. She snuggled into my arms, causing me to flush instantly, as a stirring in my loins occurred. Suddenly a crash from the kitchen was heard and Dot’s mother appeared, “Sorry” she said ” but I some how

managed to drop a plate". "That's bad luck Mrs. Groom" for both you and me I thought, for different reasons. She looked at me knowingly; she didn't have to say anything. "Well I'd better be off", I turned to Dot, "Must you?" said her mother guiding me towards the door. "I'll see you tomorrow Tom" said Dorothy

"Yeah, see you darlin" said I, being shoved out of the front door. I turned to wave and then the sirens went off and I ran to the nearest shelter!

The shelter was already packed with old men and old women, women and their children and very sharp suited 'gentlemen'. The besuited gentlemen were obviously working a series of scams in the shelter. As to where everybody was standing, or sitting, seemed to be connected to how much they could pay! I wondered what I could do about them, both the men and their 'fiddle'. Just at that moment one of the 'sharks' caught my eye "Watcher lookin' at, soldier-boy", "I don't know. Looks like a shark being fed on raw meat" I said with a grin. He looked shocked; nobody had spoken to him in this way before. He took a deep breath, cracked his knuckles and said "Oh great, we've got a live one 'ere", pulling out a flick-knife. A hand flashed past me, chopping the 'shark's wrist. A shout and a pained cry of "Bastard" echoed around the shelter as the blade dropped from his hand. "Why do I always find you in trouble, White?" It was my life-saving Serg., sorry Lieutenant. A shout of "That shithead broke my wrist, get 'im boys", I turned to face the enemy. But in doing that I found the Lieutenant in front of me, in a crouched position. He then showed the assembled crowd a display of unarmed combat that they had never seen before. He relaxed into his 'attack position', which I was taught a little later on in my training. He proceeded to put all four of the 'sharks' to sleep, even though each man had pulled a knife! When he had finished he wasn't even breathing heavily. The crowd burst into spontaneous applause, at which point an Air Raid Warden and a policeman arrived. Looking down at the 'debris' on the floor the policeman said "Ello, 'ello, 'ello what's goin' on 'ere then?" At which point a small, bald, bespectacled gentleman stepped forward and said "It was him officer, he did it with his hands". "If 'E did it, 'ow did 'E do it? 'Cos I can't see any lumps of wood or bricks around! If 'E only used 'is 'ands they should be damaged in some way! Would you be so kind as to show me your 'ands Sir?" The lieutenant held out his hands for the police officer to see. There was not a mark on either of his hands. "Well sir, I don't know what you did but you seem to 'ave 'ypnotised these people. They all seem to 'ave some sort of belief in your hability to destroy the hopposition without 'arming yourself. Now I would suggest you move halong before these 'ooligans wake hup!"

This police officer showed an alarming ability to put aitches in where

they shouldn't be and none where they should. "Come on sergeant let's go back to the camp, your group are waiting for you!" he ignored my questions as to his ability to appear where ever I was and help me out and who the hell was 'his group' anyway. He just seemed to have that ability! Just like Merlin the Wizard, appear, disappear and re-appear again, wherever he was needed, amazing!

We came out of the shelter to the sound of bombs dropping around us and I was then guided towards a big black car. It had slits over its head lights, to keep the light from shining, and drawing the bombers towards us. But it didn't seem to help much, as we appeared to be the centre of attention anyway. I was ordered quietly to get in and of we went, to where I had no idea. I attempted to check where we were going by the signposts, but there weren't any. "Nice to know the local councils are doing their jobs at last" I said. The lieutenant took no notice, whatsoever. The trip back to our 'post' was uneventful and it wasn't until I arrived did I remember that I was still owed another two days, and where the hell did the lieutenant come from to find me! Oh! And the German Luftwaffe seemed to be paying especial attention to our car; we were bombed and strafed nearly all the way on the first part of the journey. But the last half an hour or so was driven in complete silence. We didn't have any conversation, neither did we have any further aircraft interference, peace and quiet was the watchword! WONDERFUL!

## **THE CAMP**

We appeared to have gone out into the country, and had been driving for about two hours, half of which was along small country lanes. When we suddenly turned off down an even smaller lane or driveway. Down at the bottom of which was a sentry post and gate. The sentry asked for our papers, which the lieutenant produced. I didn't even find it funny that the officer had MY papers. 'Too much cloak and dagger' for me. I was escorted by the officer to a huge marquee where he held the flap open to allow me in!

Imagine my surprise when the 'audience' cheered and slapped me on the back. The first person I met up with was my old mate Blackie, the second person being Ginger and both of them welcomed me like a long lost brother. I didn't recognise the other four sergeants but I was quickly introduced to them by a series of nicknames.

They were ABC, or Abie for short (Albert Bertram Crastinius, was too long), our friendly Jewish member, but we weren't supposed to know

each others names. Well it was a 'need to know situation', wasn't it! Rusty, who was a sandy colour all over. Even his freckles were sandy coloured ones.

Lefty, because he was left handed, but very quick.

Shorty, because he was small and short and didn't stop talking all the time we were there.

And Tank, who was almost as big as a tank and an ex - guard to boot, but what he lost in 'chat' he made up for in size. But Shorty made up for his loss of chatting! He talked for at least two people.

They were all called after their personal connections or descriptions, as for me I was 'Chalkie'.

This introduction gave me an automatic status within the group, I was brought in by an officer, who introduced me as 'Chalkie, The Joker' and became the leader by introduction; I obviously knew an officer and so I had a 'flying start'. Anything that was needed went through me to the sergeant. After all the introductions, we were told to be seated and await further orders. Which at the time seemed like hours' but can only have been about half an hour. The volume of the crump of exploding bombs could be heard all the time. That meant there was a large town nearby and it was getting a pounding, then it all went quiet! The Germans had finished their raid for the night and we were at peace.

The marquee flap was raised and a lieutenant walked in. From what we could see outside it was pitch black with an occasional flash of a delayed-action explosion and the glow that followed it from the fire.

"OK my boys, you all volunteered for this escapade even though you did not know what you were volunteering for! After I tell you the next piece of information you can back out if you like!" We all looked at each other, what have we got ourselves in for.

"If you accept this operation your life expectancy will be forty-eight hours at the most, unless you are very, very lucky. You have fifteen minutes to decide, it's up to you" he went to walk away but turned and said "If you take on this operation you will not be given another chance to resign, so decide now."

We all looked at one another to see if any of us would walk out, but nobody spoke a word, it was the longest fifteen minutes of my life. But when the C.O returned, for that's what he was to us now, we were all sitting ready for our instructions. "Right lads you had your chance and nobody took it, I'm really glad to say!" and he then went on to instruct us in what we were going to do to the enemy! We were not the 'little lambs' going off for slaughter anymore, we had been through Dunkerque and survived.

We were not as timid as we were in 1939 at the start of the war, now we

would take at least one German with us! Only one German was a small price to pay! We were going to become guerrillas, we would be an underground-fighting group. When the Germans invaded we would literally go underground and only surface when the Germans had gone past us. Then we would destroy all of the relevant installations behind their advance and sacrifice our lives for theirs, HOPEFULLY LOTS OF THEIRS.

As of this moment we had no friends or relatives, they were all our enemies, which explained our nicknames. Total secrecy were the watchwords. We could not tell anybody anything, everything MUST be a secret. To quote T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) 'The death of a Turkish bridge or gun (German equipment) is more important than the death of a Turk (German)!' So our job was probably more important than any ordinary soldier or so we were being told!

The lieutenant left us to peruse exactly what he had said. We later discovered that each one of us was waiting to see if anybody else was going to make the first move out of the marquee, NOBODY DID! Having looked at each other, DUE TO OUR COLLECTIVE COWARDICE WE ALL STAYED, funny ha, ha!

Our training started in earnest almost straight away, we were given a Bren gun and told to take it apart. Oh boy was that fun; there were more pieces on the floor of the marquee than on the table. We were a complete mess; we had no idea what we were doing. The first person to assemble his Bren gun was Tank, when he was asked why and how he had done it he said 'Well he worked in munitions before the war and had had to do it for a living'. We were all astonished that the answer was so simple, there we were covered in gun oil and Tank was almost spotless. Amazing what training could do for you, a discussion commenced between us all as to what we had done before the war. Just as we were getting into details, the lieutenant cut through it all. 'All right, how about Tank teaching you all how to do it'. 'Do what Sir?' 'But I've already done it' to numerous sniggers, came the sounds from three or four of us at the same time. 'Assemble your Bren gun you dirty minded rabble' he said with a smirk. I was really getting to like this officer. The next two hours were taken up in teaching us to take apart and reassemble the Bren guns in front of us, in the end we could do it in a few minutes, and it was all done by learning to work together and doing it with a laugh. In a short while we could do it blindfold. We even tidied up the marquee after we had finished, just like a load of boy scouts, which in a way was what we were. The lieutenant then switched of the light, or should I say 'turned off the light', because it was an old metholated spirits lamp." Your training starts tomorrow in earnest!" he said "Now I suggest you get

some sleep, and that suggestion is more of an order!” He then marched out of the marquee to complete silence.

Having left it for a moment for him to get on his way we all started swapping stories. The stories were about what had happened to us in the last few months and our backgrounds before the war started when the marquee flap flew open and in walked a sergeant major!

He was over six-foot tall and broad, boy was he broad! ”Don’t you salute a senior n.c.o or are you too insensitive!” We all snapped to attention. ”Right my lovely lads, well at least that’s what the officer calls you, we’re off on a night trek”!

Off we went and we were loaded on to a truck and driven to a place out in the wilds of ‘god knows where’. We were dropped off and told to make our own way back, somebody said ‘back where sergeant major’? He just laughed, jumped into the truck and drove off. We looked at each other as if we were completely perplexed and after some discussion we all decided to work together to get back to the camp, but first we had to find out where we were! There were no lights on in any of the houses; in fact there were NO HOUSES! Total darkness and absolute silence surrounded us. Everybody had their own ideas how to get back but nobody had an idea how to find out where we were, but boy did we make a lot of noise trying to work it out. The first serious suggestion came from Blackie that we should follow the stars, which seemed a sensible idea. Question –Did anybody know how to READ THE STARS! ‘I do” said Blackie “where do you want to go? Everybody looked at me for the answer to the question, so I said “let’s head towards the flash of the incendiary bombs and the flames” which we did. The major problem with this was that when we got to the town we couldn’t find a nameplate or tag anywhere to identify where we were, the local council had taken them down so that none of the Germans could plot where they were. Then Tank suggested we go for a pint to which we all argued that it would be better if we sorted out our predicament first. He looked at us as if we were half-daft and said “If we went into the pub we could probably overhear a conversation and then we would be able to ascertain where we were. A round of applause followed this statement and of we went to find a pub, it was also a very sensible idea as we were all gasping. The first pub we came to appeared to be nearly empty and so rather than crash into it and stand out like sore thumbs we moved on further down the road. The next pub was a real ‘life and soul of the party’ job, so in we went. There was the usual argument as to who would pay for the first round. But everybody decided that it should go in seniority order. So, although I was only just a sergeant I had ‘rank’ by agreement, ‘sod’s law’ it was my round again, I went up to the bar to order. Having got to the bar I turned

round to ask everybody what they wanted to drink, when I accidentally bumped into one of the 'regulars, spilling his beer all over him and several others in his group. "Oi! What do you'm fink you'm adoin' then" was his quaint remark. The accent sounded a bit like a Kent one but before I could apologise he swung at me. Having ducked and side stepped his next manoeuvre all hell let loose in the bar with chairs, tables and bottles flying everywhere. There appeared to be a general agreement that as we were 'outsiders' it was our entire fault, so everybody attacked us. That seems sensible if we were the only ones that nobody knew in the bar. Blackie accounted for three of the locals, Tank did likewise, Rusty, Lefty, Ginger, Abie and I took two each and Shorty was the 'Official Cheerleader'. He did a wonderful job of doing a running commentary and demonstrating how we should be doing what we were actually doing. "Hit him with the 'ook, uppercut Tank, nut 'im Blackie" and other advice like "'stamp on 'is 'ead Abie"! So when the local constabulary arrived it was us who were the main targets, we were frog marched off to the cells, not having had our pint at all and several pounds lighter in the pocket. I was then designated as chief spokesman for the group and having got the ear of the sergeant I started to tell him what we had done. At least having explained to the sergeant what we were trying to accomplish in the pub he volunteered the information we needed, as to the name of the town, and how we could get back to our camp. He said that he would scrub our names off of the cell list, as he had a son in the Army. He said he would like to think there was a military policeman doing the same for his son. Although he didn't think his son would need anybody to help him in, or out of any scrapes, 'he was a 'good boy'! What a lovely man he was, he even supplied a truck for us to return to 'Home Base'! What he forgot to tell us was that he had already reported us to our sergeant major; we were already in his bad books because he had rung up and told him what we had 'done'! As I said 'what a lovely man!'

We drove along the small side roads and it took us almost 3 and half-hours to return to our base, it was as quiet as a grave. When we arrived we spoke quietly to the sentry and persuaded him that we would look after him when we were inside, as long as he let us in. His answer was to grin broadly and wave us through; there were lots of 'thumbs – ups' as we drove up the driveway. Boy we had it made; this was all a 'piece of cake until we got to the marquee to find both our sergeant major and C.O. awaiting us. "And what the fucking hell have you bastards been up to? You were dropped in a nice quiet part of England and you proceeded to tear it apart with your bare hands, just like the Germans would have done!" This believe it or not was from our Commanding Officer no less.

As to the sergeant major, he not only insulted our parentage but also impugned our sexual abilities, and informed us of our deviations. "All right you stupid bastards get to bed, TOMORROW IS ANOTHER DAY! I'll teach you what you did wrong and how to correct it!" said the C.O. He really knew what he was talking about and he proved it to us in the next few months.

### **CHARING TRAINING CENTRE**

Although we weren't allowed out for the next few days we were kept hard at building an assault course, in place of our training. Through our local sentry we discovered that we were in Charing, in Kent, and the 'Big House' housed a load of 'boffins'. But we were kept busy on our assault course, which we stupidly believed we were building for another group of soldiers. We built, what in essence was the hardest we could build. It took at least two days of continual slogging away to put it together, from 06.00a.m. until 13.00p.m. then we had a break, for a half – an – hour. During this break we discussed what parts of an assault course we hated most and built it in! Then we started again until 18.00p.m. and another half – an - hours break and another discussion. Then we went from 18.30 p.m. until 23.00p.m, and then we crashed out until we were woken by 'reveille' the next morning, and off we went again! After two days of this we were completely knackered, but the sergeant major never let up on us. On we went, to work harder than I had ever worked before! Everybody agreed with me, things were coming to a head! Then suddenly everything STOPPED! We had a whole day when we were just lying around. Just when we had gotten used to all this, up came the C.O. and said "Right lads we're going on a night exercise tonight, and we will be working at night for the next few months at least. Now get some rest! To which everybody said that having had the whole day 'off' nobody felt like going to sleep. "O.K. I shall be interviewing you all about what you found what you were short of, when you return and what you would need in the event of an invasion!" We were all stunned at this last remark, we had never been asked this sort of question before, in fact we had never been asked our opinion about anything, we would have to think about it! But we didn't get much chance to do that, the sergeant major came up and said "Right then we're all off for a little 'trot' boys, you've had your rest so up 'n' at 'em!" So we were off and running at a smart pace before it had completely sunk in. The first problem we encountered was our

'plimsolls', they were permanently wet and no matter how hard we tried to keep them dry we always failed abysmally. To the uninitiated 'plimsolls' were what everybody wore to do 'yesterdays aerobics', they were the most efficient form of sports footwear you could get. They were light and comfortable and you didn't have to tie them up because they had elasticised tops! Much better than the hobnailed Army boot, which was the only other form of footwear we had. These gave us blisters and made our legs ache due to their weight. This was what we discovered on our second 'night out'. But I get ahead of myself, by the time we returned to base on the first night we were exhausted but we were still expected to report on our 'plimsolls'. We were also expected to report on what we had seen on our 'Jaunt'. Although I for one had no idea what I had seen until the sergeant major started to cross-question me.

I started to re – run the 'trot' in my mind and amazed myself by remembering the first few yards quite vividly, but after that it became almost a complete blur. We all decided to discuss what we could remember about the trial run. We had all got together to discuss the run. We had got to about the end of the first mile when in walked the Lieutenant and we all sprang to attention. He waved his hands for us to sit down and said "I wanted to find out how you were getting on with your assignment. If you just carry on as if I wasn't here we'd all get along much quicker and I don't suppose you'd mind if I interrupted occasionally". "Not at all, Sir" I said. "Right you can stop there, I am not a 'sir', my name is Peter Fleming, but that will only be within our enclave or base. Now you can carry on your discussion. I apologise for interrupting your flow of thought". We all turned and looked at each other in astonishment, we had just heard an officer apologise to us, a bunch of lowly sergeants, - raised eyebrows, staring eyes and shrugged shoulders all around. But off we went on our discussion. We had only been going for another few minutes when we were interrupted once again, "Hold on, are we only going to go over this training run once?" asked the Lieutenant "Shouldn't we go over it again and again and again, until we get it right. "I agree with the officer" said Shorty; mumbles of creep and other derogatory names flowed around the marquee. So we started again with everybody interjecting with extra information. At this point the officer offered to start writing it up on a blackboard, (which to our younger readers was a solid piece of wood painted black, written on with chalk, which to our younger readers again, is a solid piece of calcium carbonate -----my God weren't we ancient!). Anyway back to the story, having offered to write down the details of our 'jaunt' he also started to query certain aspects of the run. Wasn't there a pillbox on that corner, and a large tree at that point? Which quickly

astonished us, how did he know so much? He must have planned this well before we had arrived. "Excuse me sir, but may I ask a question?" I said. "Of course you may". "You seem to know as much as we do, if not more, how come?" "Thank God somebody has asked me, I thought I had got involved with a load of 'yes sir, no sir idiots' which would have completely fucked up this experiment". Further mumbles of 'Experiment, experiment what experiment?' rumbled around the marquee, there were a lot of mumbles around that time. "OK I suppose it's about time I let you in on the escapade. You will be a special group of men, taken from the ranks and trained to the 'Nth degree'. You will be constantly chivvied and harassed to produce the best results we can achieve in the shortest time possible. You will be trained to go underground, literally, wait for the Germans to invade us. You must know every main power based connection, all of the utilities. Then surface behind enemy lines and destroy ANY OR ALL OF THE POSSIBLY USEFUL UTILITIES LIKE GAS, ELECTRICITY, WATER AND ANY TYPE OF COMMUNICATIONS. You will take as long as is necessary to achieve this objective, and then you will take as long as is necessary to return to your hideout. If it takes you two hours to cross a field and not get discovered, so be it. If then it takes you three hours to get back, without being caught, then that is also a necessity. Remember one thing, in the event of you blowing -up and destroying major areas, or objectives, the enemy will take hostages.

You must not give yourselves up; you must not tell anybody you are a 'battle patrol'. Everybody is your enemy, **THEY ARE ALL YOUR ENEMIES!!! YOU HAVE NO FRIENDS!!!!!!!** His voice had got louder and louder until the last sentence was almost a shout!

**EVEN JOE PUBLIC, THE MAN IN THE STREET, THAT I AM SUPPOSED TO BE PROTECTING, WAS MY ENEMY!!**

We looked at him as if he was daft. No friends, all enemies, no that can't be possible. Then we all looked at each other as if we couldn't believe what was being said. We must have some friends, what about our relatives, we couldn't take it in. The officer marched out and left us pondering, nobody spoke for several minutes then it was almost like a dam bursting. Everybody spoke to everyone else –we must have some form of outlet, what were we supposed to do, talk amongst ourselves, not talk to anybody, question upon question, upon question, but there were no answers! We all decided to wait until the officer returned to find out if we were correct in our assumptions. But the officer didn't return, the closest we got to him was the sergeant major. "All right my lovely lads; it's time for your sleep." But sergeant major we've only just got up, was the cry from all of us". "Sorry about that but I have my orders and that's

what's going to happen isn't it Chalkie!" As he walked out the sergeant major turned and dumped a pile of papers on the trestle table, saying "Here's a list of the local utilities. Learn them!" With that he marched out. So off to bed we went, having picked up our copies of the information which we were unable to digest, even though it was only half-past two in the afternoon. We all tossed and turned, mumbled and read quietly our lists, until about six o'clock when we were 'woken' by the sergeant major. "Right, get your gear on, we're going running again. Only this time you will remember what you have seen and you will relate it ALL to the C.O. or I'll have your hides!

We raced each other to the showers and dived inside. The first one in, that being Blackie, turned the showers on. "It's a bit chilly" he said. As we were subjected to the coldest shower I had ever experienced, chilly, it was bloody freezing. Shouts of "Fuck me, oh shittt!!!, fucking hell" and other expletives echoed around the showers. In came the sergeant major and said quietly "Cold enough for you boys? Now get your arses moving, we're going on a little run!" We all towelled ourselves down quickly and put on our 'gym' gear. As we came out of the showers the sergeant major came back up to us and said "Get your tops off, you were all sweating yesterday and we can't have you too warm can we?"

After a lot of moaning and groaning we got our vests off and went on a 'little run', -- all twenty miles of it!

By the time we had got back to 'camp' we were completely knackered. "Don't sit down! We have what; if you were at school you would call an examination or Matriculation to the more intelligent of us. Now come over here and collect your papers and we shall see what you can remember about your 'jaunt'." The sergeant major was right about getting too warm on the run but not right about keeping warm during the test. We were only wearing pants, shorts and plimsolls and we tended to cool down pretty quickly in the marquee. As we were just sitting, doing an examination we were freezing cold within an hour, but on went the questions. How many telegraph poles, how many oak trees, what colour was the cart in the first farmer's yard and so it went on!

When we had finished we were completely bollixed and we needed our beds. But we were not allowed to go there because we were wanted outside for unarmed combat. We walked through the marquee flaps like zombies only to be decked by a grey-haired man in civilian clothing. We got the pasting of our lives in a few seconds and the sky was beautiful at that time of day. All stars, some of which were REAL. We were later to find out this man was a fully fledged black belt karate and jujitsu champion and a third Dan at that. What we learned from him was to always do what was unexpected and either do it extremely slowly or

exceptionally fast, but never do anything the normal way!! The man had served in Shanghai Police Force and so he also knew all of the dirty tricks that were possible. Whatever you came up with, he had an answer for, and I mean everything. Even Blackie, who was the groups 'dirty tricks master couldn't beat him. Every time Blackie went for a specific move he was beaten before he started. By the time our first session had finished we were completely, and I mean absolutely, fucked!!!

THE WORST PART WAS THAT HE WASN'T EVEN PUFFING!!!!!!!!!!  
Just like my C.O. in the Air Raid Shelter!!!

We then had a huge meal put in front of us, but we couldn't eat it, we were too sore and our whole bodies ached. "What a damn waste" said our sergeant major and proceeded to stuff himself with OUR food. This made us mad but we still couldn't do anything about it. We were too sore. The C.O. arrived to give us a briefing on what we were supposed to be doing, which in essence was to become a suicide squad in the event of the Germans invading Great Britain. We all had family in our thoughts at that minute and we were bound to defend them, whatever the cost. Even if we were completely bugged by our jaunt and the Shanghai Policeman, we weren't going to let the Little Corporal take our country. He could land troops here but they would not stay here, unless they were DEAD.

### MORE TEACHING

The C.O. brought out a blackboard and started to draw on it! What he drew was a rough map of Great Britain; it showed three lines from east to west. They were from the mouth of the Thames to Bristol, and then there was one through the Midlands, then one from Glasgow to Edinburgh. He then went on to explain that these were our defensive 'WALLS', the first would have its main town, not as London but Ashford in Kent. This would be a WALLED City; surrounded with all the defences we could muster. This was where The Officer Commanding would be initially. The second would be a line through Birmingham and the third, which had something written on it, would be the two largest cities in Scotland. "Excuse me sir but what have you written in the section including Scotland" asked Tank. "A very good question Tank, can anybody read what's written in that space?" "It looks like Windsors, but what Windsor would be doing in Scotland God only Knows!" said Lefty "Everyone knows Windsor is in the south, just east of London and there's only one of them anyway. "Thank you for that useful piece of information lefty but it's not a place it's a 'them,' ring a bell now does it!" Oh shit" said Lefty "You don't mean the Royal Family, do you?" "We now have a

case of 'quick on the uptake', yes Lefty I do mean the Royal Family. But you won't see them and they won't see you! You're to be a secret army in their defence along the South Coast. You are only answerable to the sergeant major and myself and a direct chain of allegiance to Winston Churchill. You only work to us, not the Armed Forces Leader in the Southern Area, unless his name is Gubbins and then loosely. Now I think it's time for you lot to relax, so get exercising!" "What do you mean exercise, what have we been doing then?" I said. "What you need to do is exercise to loosen up, a bit of a contradiction in terms isn't it?" and so the sergeant major took us outside and put us through some 'light' exercises, if they were light ones I'd hate to have the 'heavy' ones. Dawn was coming up when we went to bed at last!

When we woke the next day we were as 'stiff as boards' but the sergeant major dragged our out of our bunks to get showered and ready for our 'run'. The shower was quite possibly even colder than the day before but we didn't really notice. This was due to our bodily pains; not one of us was able to bend over in the showers, even if we had wanted. We started a lot slower than the day before ostensibly to register more of the countryside, but it could well have been that we were too 'knackered'. We had all agreed to look in one specific direction. I think this was actually because we couldn't turn our heads any more than we did, and we were covering ourselves. We made our directions agreed between us. If we could half -make each other believe we must be able to convince our C.O. But we succeeded in checking far more of an area this way; in fact the entire run was done without a hitch! Run, did I say run I meant a gentle amble through the area. When we returned we were able to fill in the whole 'paper'! We had counted the oak trees, the telegraph poles, the telephone boxes and the churches, to name but a few outstanding examples of the questionnaire. Boy were we happy, in fact we were extremely cocky.

Not a question wrong. We came out into the dawn only to be dumped on our backsides by the C.O., the sergeant major and the Shanghai Policeman. Served us right for being cocky didn't it, then we were told "Right, you can go to your assault course now lads". So off to the assault course we went, having gone around it THREE TIMES and had a cold shower we got sent to bed, like a load of little schoolboys. With heads down and trailing our gas masks behind us.

An order rang out "Pick 'em up!" which some of us interpreted as our masks, where as some others understood it to be our heads and yet others our feet. But we never agreed as to which person shouted the order! It could have been any one of the three, or another officer that we were not aware of, but it was certainly imperious! We marched back into our tents

'just like chastised schoolboys'. Nobody discussed this incident immediately, but there was a hell of a lot of mumbling going on. All of which turned into an argument later on, who, which, what, but we all agreed on the where and when. We were all still mumbling when we went to bed and the sergeant major walked in and shouted 'Shuttit" and walked out with a grin! If we'd known then what we do now we'd have been grinning, we woke again at dusk still unsure as to what we were doing here exactly. Some of the physical aches and pains had now worn off and we were mentally 'aching' to know just what we needed to know. After our shower we were ready to go for a run again, but we were told to gather in the marquee and listen to the officer. We did this more through choice than being ordered to attend. The man on the dais was obviously senior ranking; you could tell this by the way he was being treated. He had a map on the side section of the tent, on which was our section of West/East Sussex and Kent. "Just in case you didn't know where you were, you are here!", He said, dramatically hitting the map with his swagger stick. The tear he created was about eighteen inches or about forty-five to fifty centimetres long. He obviously became extremely annoyed at this and he certainly did not expect the laughter that he received. His reaction was to scream at all of us sergeants, 'he was a fully-fledged major and expected total respect'. Just at that moment the C.O. walked in with the sergeant major. "Can you escort the Major off the premises please sergeant major, and please make certain he does not come back!" "This way major please" he said taking his arm firmly. "Let go of me sergeant major before I have you on a charge! And as for you Lieutenant I....." "Of course you will sir" the sergeant major said placatingly! "If you would come with me I'm certain we can sort this out quickly and quietly, if you follow me. But I'd prefer it you were in front of me" he said bowing and indicating the tent flap. "I'm not going anywhere, I am staying here until THIS IS sorted out". "I'm terribly sorry sir you can't do that, you will have to leave! You have no jurisdiction here!" He then frog-marched him out, with the help of two sentries and to the sound of jeering from the group! "SHUT - UP" shouted the C.O., "he had every right to speak to you in that way and you had no right to laugh at him. It was up to one of you to explain why he had no jurisdiction and even if he had, YOU had no right to jeer at him! As of this moment you will not be derogatory in anyway towards any other officer". Just at that moment the sergeant major walked in with a grin on his face and the C.O.'s wrath turned on him! "This goes for you too sergeant major, you were totally out of order in the way you reacted initially. You didn't take him quietly to one side and explain what type of unit we were!" "I'm sorr..". "Sorry doesn't cut it, you were out of order

and you...!" "No sir I was going to say I'm sorry but I DON'T KNOW WHAT TYPE OF UNIT WE ARE AND I'M CERTAIN THE OTHER SERGEANTS DON'T EITHER!!!!!! Sorry sir I didn't mean to insinuate that we had not been informed!"

" Ah! You have every right to interrupt me; I was under the impression that you all knew what I knew. I was obviously under a misapprehension. Right let's start at the beginning, you are a 'trial group of volunteers' that have been taken from the ordinary ranks. You will go through intense training in everything from orienteering, close combat fighting, digging your own Hideouts and disguising them. You will be taught to make bombs and plant them in the most effective places. You will be taught to cross open fields; attack and get back again, in this you will take as much time as is necessary. The crossing and returning over the field could well take two and a half-hours, it could well take MORE! The whole object of this exercise is not to be caught. If one of you gets caught you all get caught and you fight until you die, and I mean ALL OF YOU!!! Any questions?" Just one sir" said Tank, "Yes Tank?" "What does orienteering mean, is it anything to do with the Chinese or Japanese" a series of jeers all around answered this query. "No Tank, it's moving.. OK you load of smartie pants, what is it?" We all looked at each other until I spoke up "isn't it something to do with travelling at night with just a map, compass and light" "That is a very good description, although it wouldn't have to be always at night, but in your case it will be. Now back to what you were supposed to be doing here! All of you complained about your boots and plimsolls, well I have a surprise for you. Outside you will find a truck with its engine on and ready to go!" "Where are we off to sir" queried Lefty, "towards town" came the cryptic answer. We piled on and the truck moved off, there was a lot of discussion along the way as to where we were going. The ideas ranged from a naval dockyard, to an assault course to a trip to Madame Tussauds. The last being made out of 'I haven't got the faintest idea but I'd better say something!' After a while we were moving a lot more quickly than we had at the start of our journey, then suddenly we slowed up and turned into some form of yard. We were just about to comment on this when the back of the truck was pulled open and we were ushered out. "Where the hell are we serg?" said Tank "It looks like a marshalling yard of some type." "This my dear boy is one of the foremost tyre producing companies in the world". "Oh bloody great, just what we need a factory, that is one of the prime targets for the Luftwaffe " said Lefty, his comment being followed by numerous others. All of which were derogatory and every one filled with expletives. "I do hope you have all finished whingeing and complaining" growled the C.O. "Now

you can follow me, without making any further noise!” We attempted to do this, but a large fit of giggles overtook all of us. “OK you guys keep walking straight ahead and we will enter the office areas”. We had been walking for about four or five minutes when we happened to look up to see a sign, the smell of rubber was extremely strong. These two things made us think that we had come here to get our tyres fixed. With the smell and the sign, that being ‘FIRESTONES’ what other reason could there be? If we had come here for any other reason nobody could think of it!

The office we walked into was like any other, a spike on the desk crammed with papers, a heavy telephone, and a large blotting pad with a pen and pencil on it, all for normal usage. None of us had any idea what we were here for; neither did we really care! This was a really interesting outing and we were thoroughly enjoying it. A trip to a ‘tyre factory’, just what we’d always wanted to do as a boy. To visit somewhere and be **ALLOWED TO GET REALLY DIRTY**, bloody wonderful! But it didn’t look as if we were going to be allowed to muck around much, if at all! As we were pondering our future a man walked into the office, he was wearing a pinstriped suit, handkerchief in his top pocket and a beautiful carnation in his lapel. He had the look of a ‘gentleman’, and behaved like ‘a toff’ too. He didn’t introduce himself, but carried on as if we all knew him. “Right gentlemen, I will presume that you are aware of the reason you are here, oh! I can see by the puzzled looks you are not! I appear to be the one to update you, you are not here to have your tyres seen to, but you are here for a ‘re-tread’. In other words you are here to be re-soled! That appears to be the ‘in’ joke around here at the moment! When I say **RE-SOLED**,” he said spelling it out “I’m not talking about selling or anything of a religious nature, I’m talking about getting your boots done here and now!” At that moment he reached into his drawer on the right hand side and drew out a folder, he then opened it and turning to Blackie said “I believe your known as ‘Blackie’, correct?” without waiting for an answer he turned the page and looking straight at Tank said “You must be Tank, although that’s fairly obvious by your size’, Tank nodded. Then turning to me said “and you must be Chalkie, the joker in the pack!” “Oi, hold on whomsoever you may be, a joker I might have **BEEN**, but that doesn’t mean to say I am now and I..

“I’m terribly sorry if I have offended anybody, just my little joke. I have all of your details in this folder, including your shoe sizes. Although your shoe sizes have stayed the same your body weights and builds have certainly not, I think while you’re here to collect your boots you can have your complete sizes checked. We all started to mumble about this but we were overruled by the sergeant major. We’d all been done when we

joined the squad and we didn't see any reason for it to be done again. But we were all astounded when we discovered that we had put on at least a stone a man and it wasn't fat. When they went away with the measurements we were all puzzled. Why weren't the uniforms, being standard, just replaced when we got back to camp? By the time the new 'boots' were ready for us it had probably taken five hours at least, most of this time was spent without our full clothing. If you can imagine a large group of men in vest, pants and bare footed. The C.O. took one look at our feet and said "Sergeant major had you noticed the state of their feet". "No sir I hadn't, but it would seem that I should have, I'll get a nurse to deal with them straight away". We were then treated to a series of foot baths and dosed with an iodine compound, after drying our feet. Then our boots arrived - RUBBER SOLED BOOTS!!!!!!! There we were 'clomping' around the room! Well we weren't actually 'clomping'; we were stamping without making any noise! When a voice said "here you are then lads! Your new uniforms, hopefully they will be to your liking". "What the fucking hell is this serg...?" I said, "what happened to our old uniforms or the replacement ones". "These are your replacement ones; they all have A.U. standing for Auxiliary Unit on them. Which is of course what you all are? Did you think you would have BP on your sleeve, which as everybody knows stands for British Petroleum!!!! Did you honestly believe that you would have a unit badge; you've only been together for a few weeks? You're not a 'Battle Patrol' yet. Grant you, you've come a long way in a short time. But you've still got a long way to go and it starts now." "But serg.. they look like cleaners' clothing, if they didn't have the initials on them and they came with a broom that's exactly what they would be!" said Tank, holding his clothing up against his torso. "You've been instructed to put them on, now do it!" "But the C.O. said if it wasn't ordered by either himself or you we shouldn't take any notice of other orders." "Quite correct Abie, but this gentleman is an exception, he is a member of Special Operations Executive and as such you will learn from him! Whatever he tells you is GOSPEL!" "Thank you sergeant major, your interruption was unnecessary, but timely. I'm certain the gentlemen would have realised fairly quickly that I do not suffer fools gladly. Some of the things I am going to teach them will stand them in good stead in the times to come. They will learn to defend themselves against three or four combatants at any one time." "But sir we can do that already" said Tank. "Come over here and prove it" said the S.O. Executive. A grin appeared on Tank's face as he wandered slowly over to prove his statement. That was the last grin he had, other than when he was lying on the floor, looking at the ceiling. "Jesus, bloody, Christ, what the fuck

happened there? One minute I was striding towards him, the next I was flat on my back! "Now what was that about a broom, I would have thought that as you were already down there you could 'WIPE' the floor instead". "Maybe I could at that sir! If I get up? -1) will I be dumped on my backside again and 2) can somebody explain what the fuck happened to me in the last few seconds?" "I'll explain Tank, and I promise not to dump you on your backside again. I have just shown Tank what you men could do if you were trained by me. That was a version of unarmed combat, a combination of judo, tai chi and karate! All methods of fighting used in the orient! We have also included, certain tricks of our own, that's the Special Operations Executive Personnel. All this gives you a magnificent background in physical stamina and dirty tricks. But to add to this we have the experience of The Long Range Desert Group and the Commandos which should make you the deadliest fighting group in the world. Having produced you, and trained you, we will need to know what else is needed for the next step. We will need to know everything that you know, and everything that you can produce to go on!!!! Now I've made my speech, and hopefully, you have listened to and understood exactly what I have said. We need you to come up with ideas about where and how you will be living; you must develop your own weapons or take on board what we have not seen. But first and foremost you must live off the land. In doing this you will antagonise the local population, but remember, none of them is a friend.

**They are all your enemies!!!! NOW HAVING MADE WHAT WAS PROBABLY THE LONGEST SPEECH I'VE EVER MADE WE'LL GET BACK TO WHAT YOU SHOULD BE DOING, AND HOW YOU SHOULD BE REACTING!!!!!!"**

I looked around at the group; every one of us was standing with their heads down, looking at the floor. We were like a bunch of school kids, once again, in front of the Headmaster. Having been castigated, we were feeling thoroughly sorry for ourselves; we were wondering what else could go wrong. We changed sorrowfully into our 'new' uniforms and we put on our 'new' boots again. The only things that were missing were our forage caps and our socks, which were supplied, in 'good order'. We had no cap badges and so we were allowed to wear our old company badges! "Pick up your rucksacks, we're going for a 'little trot', whether you like it or not!" said the sergeant major,

"It will break your boots and socks in, and we will be training with you, **WON'T WE SERGEANT MAJOR?** The sergeant major spun on the C.O. and said "that goes without saying sir, we are a unit now so of course we will work together!" "OK sergeant major, but we haven't had this routine going before and so I didn't think you would work with us!" "I

am at your service sir, whatever you want I will deliver, and that's a promise!" ". Right chaps you all heard that, so we'll keep him to it. Whatever you ask for he will get it, so no mucking around. This is really serious". Off went a disgruntled sergeant major, a happy C. O., and six grinning sergeants. We had all forgotten about the 'cleaner's uniforms' and our 'excused boots'. When we arrived back at the truck even the privates noticed the difference in the demeanour, shame they also noticed the uniforms. We quickly became known as 'the cleaners', wherever we went. Especially as we had the tags of the AUXILLIARY UNIT, we really had to put up with some stick. The next few days were hell on earth for us all, until we were told that as we had behaved ourselves we would be allowed to react to the 'joshing'. The local pub was the first one to get ransacked, the local 'hoi-polloi' decided to 'bounce' us. But they reckoned without the training we had been receiving, boy did they suffer. It was totally one sided, there were thirteen of them, and eight, I SAID EIGHT, of us. We completely OUT - NUMBERED THEM!!! If we'd allowed the sergeant major to join in, it really would have been really unfair. As it turned out most of us were not really needed, the 'key man' being Shorty of all people. He 'took out' four men by himself and then proceeded to have a VERY large Scotch. He then 'took out' another one without putting down his drink, or spilling a drop!! We were becoming a team, if somebody attacked one of us, we became like a large version of the 'Musketeers', -----'All for one and one for all'!

This included the sergeant major whether he was around or not. He took a lot of stick playing 'nanny' to a load of cleaners, and it was noticed by us. He did not complain, he just got on with the job. But boy did those sergeants and sergeant majors suffer, they were the targets of a huge number of practical jokes. Their men were always destroyed in any competition and they all came back covered in shit and mud, even if it had been dry for weeks. Their trucks were forever breaking down; especially when they were miles away from base camp. But nobody seem to know who, what where, when or why it never happened to our gear. PERHAPS WE WERE EXTREMELY LUCKY! YOU NEVER KNOW!!!!!!

We trained harder and harder; we learned lots of new dirty tricks. But we were collecting different weapons, day by day. We 'acquired several Chicago Pianos', to the uninitiated these were Tommy guns, they were the equivalent of today's AK44. You pointed it and pulled the trigger!

We also described a knife that we thought we would be able to use in close quarter combat .It wasn't a sheath knife which was too slow and cumbersome, but was a natural 'fighting weapon'. It had a blade 7-8

inches long, with a cutting or slashing edge on both sides. In the centre of the blade, on both sides there were grooves that allowed the blood to flow easily. It also had an 'S' shaped hilt that would tear a circle in or around your cut. But best of all it would have to be a perfect throwing knife, it would have to be weighted absolutely correctly. We described this to the sergeant major in front of Fairbairn, the Shanghai Policeman. "Funny you should come out with this because what you have just described is almost exactly what the 'Commandos' want. Can you draw it for me?" "I don't see why not said Blackie, and so he set about doing just that! After we had finished arguing and drawing and arguing and drawing some more, we finished up with a rough facsimile of what we wanted. All the time we were working the sergeant major and Fairbairn were watching us, and what we were doing. When we'd actually finished the copper leaned over us to see what we'd drawn. "Jesus Christ, that's amazing! Look at this sergeant major" he said digging out a sheet of paper from his pocket. "Bloody Hell sir, you're right it is incredible!" "Can I borrow this chaps, I promise to bring it back!" "Of course sir that's why we drew it" I said, looking as puzzled as everybody else "What was on that sheet of paper he pulled out of his pocket?" I queried, after they had gone out. "It looked like our dagger, but done in a different colour!" "How do you know then?" I queried "Nobody saw me move around behind the two of them, and so I was able to get a good look at what they were holding" said Shorty. "You cheeky bugger" I chortled. "So while we were watching them you were watching what they had in their hands!" "Lesson number one, if you can't see their eyes watch what they do with their hands. It's very informative" said Shorty "The only difference was that it appeared to be sort of 'tiger-striped', if you know what I mean, and it had a straight hilt on it?" "Can you draw it for us Shorty?" I asked "I think so" said Shorty in an unsure voice. We all crowded around him; "Give him some room!" commanded Tank and we all backed off slightly. This was too important to ruin by crowding him. Shorty, by this time had spread his arms, twisted his neck in both directions and cracked his knuckles. Now he was ready to be the centre of attention and he was loving it! His big buddy Tank was 'holding back the waters' and 'Leonardo was starting to draw'! After several failed attempts, shouts of "Back off!" and "Give him some room" Leonardo's Cartoon was finished! Shorty had been correct; it was like our 'dagger', except the hilt went straight across the handle, which was striped! We were getting used to our uniforms now; we even called ourselves 'The Cleaners'. We would clean up the Germans if they ever invaded this country!

## OUR NEW EQUIPMENT

For the next few weeks we trained really hard, our body's got used to the sleep pattern and the working at night. We awoke at 17.00p.m. And showered and shaved, then we went for our daily run. This was done in full uniform and rifles, which we were learning to shoot with better than we had ever shot with before. By now we were crack snipers and as fit as Commandos, we learned orienteering and could read a map upside down if necessary. We were given map co-ordinates and told to 'get there', which we did, with some alacrity ....., after a certain amount of mistakes, I hasten to add!

We had been doing this for a couple of weeks or so when we were 'ambushed'. This was done by the sergeant major, the Shanghai Policeman and the C.O. It was achieved by using OUR map references against US, if we knew where we were going why didn't the Enemy? That seemed reasonable enough to all of us! We had achieved what we thought was our objective when we were surrounded! A hand grenade was thrown into the middle of our group and the sergeant major shouted "boom, you're dead!" The fact that I had dived on top of the grenade to stop it killing everybody was classed as an idiot's way to protect the rest of them! I vehemently disagreed, how was this an 'idiot's way', when it would have obviously saved their lives and would have killed most of the noise at the same time! The rest of the group agreed with me but the sergeant major and the C.O. didn't. "O.K." said the C.O. "What does Mr. Fairbairn think?" turning to look at him. Fairbairn said, apologetically, "I think I have to agree with Chalkie, for both of the reasons he gave, but there is one other statement I would like to make." "And what is that, pray tell?" asked the C.O. grumpily. "He threw himself on top of the hand-grenade without thinking, I have to admit I for one thought that was what you were trying to instil in these men". "O.K., I give in, what are you talking about" "I'm talking about a total loyalty to each other, down to sacrificing their own lives to save everybody else in the group!" "He has a point sir, if Chalkie would have sacrificed his life for us all, he might be classed as an idiot, but he was a hero to boot! I for one would like to thank him for giving up his life for me at least". This statement was followed by a round of applause for the person who said it, this being none other than Ginger. It was probably the longest speech he had made in the whole time he had been with us! But the one thing you could depend on was that when Ginger said something it was usually, not only correct, but to the point! He had a way about him did Ginger, quiet but definite! Just the sort of person you needed in an

argument or discussion! He could be relied upon to put a fair and balanced point of view, whatever the situation. What's more he was on my side in this discussion, so he had to be balanced and fair? Stands to Reason, Dunit!!

We all headed back to camp, At that moment Blackie who had broken away from the group on the way back, strolled in to camp, with a stick full of rabbits. "Where the hell did you get those Blackie"? "Found them 'diddle' I. They were just wandering about, so I picked them up!" "But how did you 'pick them up'?" continued the sergeant major "Rabbits don't fall off trees, neither do they jump out of hats! So tell me how you got them!" "Well, if you must know I trapped them, I have traps all over this area". "Show me, I'm really interested, this could be the start of something big!!!!" "What do you mean sergeant major?" queried Ginger "what do dead rabbits have to do with 'something big', they're just bloody rabbits to me"!

"What you don't realise is that we were looking for an alternative food source and, it appears, Blackie has had it all the time! Blackie, have you any other information on the local wild life, whether it be flora or fauna" " 'Oo's this Flora bird, and why should we fawn all over her?" asked Tank. "It's not a 'she', 'they' are 'them' – FLORA, spelled F. L. O. R. A., is a word that describes the plant life and FAUNA, spelled F.A.U.N.A, describes the animal life. Anyway as I was querying do you know anything about the flora and fauna in this area Blackie?" "I know all about it serg..., I grew up knowing all about it. The open fields and woodland was where I 'lived'. I know every blade of grass around here!" "That is the most wonderful piece of information I have heard in a long, long while. We had somebody right on our doorstep who knew all about the local wildlife and the correct plants to eat when we were hungry and we didn't even know it! I am off to tell the C.O., he will be thrilled. Oh, by the way, your knives have arrived. I'll bring them in for you, my LUVVERLY LADS!" The sergeant major was as good as his word, but we were surprised when we saw them. They were thinner than our drawing and the handles were, or appeared to be made of leather and brass. Which in itself was a very weird mixture, but we were to find out how useful that combination was. The brass was for the weight of the knife but we couldn't work out why they were such an odd combination, we were all trying to work it out, but to no avail. Until we handled the knife after being in water for a fairly long space of time.

Once we had used the knife, after a period underwater we understood immediately, the leather took on board the water, but the brass kept its normal weight, then the leather dried out. This gave the Knife a magnificent balance, whether wet or dry. We actually started using them

as 'darts' and we got really proficient with them.

But the really interesting part of the training it was done by DARKIE, because he really knew his stuff. We learned about 'Folklore', which gave us an almost complete background in what to eat and when to eat it! We also learned how to creep up on any animal, including the local deer, which would allow us to kill it if necessary. 'Ginger' added to this by teaching us to use a long bow, which added to our 'silent attack force' capabilities. We were taught to use a 'bow and arrow' better than 'Robin 'ood' as Shorty put it.

This then turned into a real game between each of us as to who was best, excluding Darkie of course. What we didn't realise was it was also teaching us to act like fully qualified and trained 'Commandos'. We learned to live off of the land, and live UNDER it as well.

When we went out at night we discovered a different world, we found out what Darkie had known since he was a child. The animals were all around us if only we looked more carefully and moved more quietly and travelled far more slowly. We had to learn to control our bodies so that if we were talking about today we would have to learn TAI-CHI to have that ability. We learned to live out in the open for days on end, 'roughing it' under the stars. Although to us it was fantastically enervating!

During one of our 'evenings out' I asked everybody if they, like Blackie, Ginger and Tank, had anything they would like to add to the information pot. This got everybody thinking, "what do you mean" said Shorty.

"Well I was thinking that we could build a camp in these woods that nobody could find". "How would we do that" asked Shorty. "If we utilised Darkie's folklore and Tank's artillery know-how, perhaps with my engineering knowledge we could design one!". "I used to work in a Drawing Office, so I could do the plans" Ginger said. "And I was a pretty good builder in my civilian life" added Rusty. "All right Lefty, Shorty, Abie what can you do to augment our little group, 'cos if you can't find anything, we'll do it for you" I said. "We'll think of something" answered Lefty, and off he went to think out it!

When he returned he had a huge grin on his face "I can teach you all to fight LEFT HANDED as I am the only one who can fight that way". That just leaves you two 'lurveverly boys' to think about what we are going to design or add to what we've got now. "I suppose I could teach you all gymnastics, although what use that would be I'd no idea.

We then progressed to our own form of 'teambuilding'.

We were able to switch hands in the middle of a fight and switch back again without hesitation. Shorty discovered he had a natural aptitude for all forms of gymnastics and proceeded to pass me in his ability. But something I didn't know about him was that he was a professional

safecracker, which would stand us in good stead later on, when we were on one of our further escapades.

Oh, I forgot, Abie could speak very good GERMAN and so would be available to hear and understand what the opposition were doing, saying or predicting, in case it affected what we were going to do to them.

ALL IN ALL WE WERE A WONDERFUL TEAM!

### THE BATTLE PATROL

The next stage in our development came when we started to design our own personal camp. We still continued our training runs, but now we were carrying more equipment, doing it faster and we weren't puffing and panting like we were in the first place.

Darkie had picked out a spot for us, secluded, very quiet and with no natural paths within a hundred yards of us. The last one was an absolute necessity. Nobody must know of our existence, we must be the ultimate in secrecy. Having found our spot we had to design, build and move into this area without anybody knowing. We were within ½ mile of the local population but we must live in these quarters 24 hours a day without being discovered. Having designed the camp we discussed it with Peter Fleming and the Sergeant major and they agreed that all that was needed was a group of R.E.M.E. privates who could lay the foundations and build the walls and we had a reasonable start. Then we started to understand what we had to put up with, we had to make certain that the 'privates' did not know where the 'camp' was. The privates had to think that they were building a 'Bomb shelter' for the locals, or the farming community. Having built the ordinary and normal bits and pieces we had to build the roof", this being the camouflaged section of the camp. We designed a cattle trough, with a false bottom. When certain letters were pushed in the side of the trough the bottom dropped, taking the water with it. This had to be done quickly and silently, which was an effort in itself. But to make the trough we had to use a 'real' one as our base, check to make certain the water didn't splash away, then keep the runners well greased. We discovered 'goose fat' was the best for this, but it did smell to high heaven. Then, so that it didn't stand out too clearly, we had to make a small 'clearing' around it, FOR THE CATTLE OF COURSE. Now came the time to move in.

Having been given strict instructions what we could and could not take, all of our army kit and any other pieces of equipment were O.K. But anything that was personal had to be 'vetted' by all of the other members of the 'Patrol', what was good for one was good for everybody.

It was about this time when the Sergeant Major came up with an idea for

a SPRING LOADED COSH! It had a handle, which connected to a strong spring and a heavy lead head. This was laughed out of court originally, but when he brought one in Tank took it and proceeded to hit the dart board at the first try. The board was at least 12 feet or just over 3 metres away. "Shouts of "Bloody Hell", "S'truth", and other expletives came from the rest of us. "This is for me, definitely. This I can handle. S'bloody great. Love it serg!". Off he went smiling to himself, picking out targets on his way outside. He did a wonderful job of knocking out one of the sentries at the entry to the camp, but was rescued by the sergeant major as he stood not knowing what to do. "Come on Tank, perhaps I shouldn't have let you out so soon" he said, hustling him away from the 'scene of his crime'. "Sorry mate" he mumbled to the sentry, who was 'spark out' on the ground. "When he wakes up can tell him I'm sorry, serg". "Come on Tank, you're not supposed to be here, remember". "Oh yeah, then how can I apologise to him, I can't can I". "Come on Tank, NOW! I'll explain later". So off they went, with Tank mumbling quietly to himself and the sergeant major continually saying he'd explain later. We heard later, that the sentry had been 'pulled up' for being asleep on duty, but he managed to prove that someone or something had hit him and knocked him out. He showed all of the officers the huge bump on the back of his head, but they never did find out who did it or what happened.

In the mean time Tank and the serg made it back to 'our camp' without any further mishaps, with Tank clutching HIS COSH to his chest, to be met by Peter (The C.O.). "You have all improved beyond my wildest dreams, in the last few months, but the next 'operation' is probably the most ambitious so far. I want you to re-create this camp out on the downs above Dover". "Wait a minute I've been there, there's nothing but grass up there, what can we use for CAMOUFLAGE" I said, at this point everybody shouted "If that's what Chalkie says, it must be true" or some such line. At least it showed how much we had improved in the belief in each other, but it didn't help our cause. We would still have to build 'our camp' out in the open! "Excuse me Peter, but why 'must' we build this near impossible camp, out in the OPEN?" asked Abie. "You obviously haven't heard about the NEW OFFICER commanding the whole of the South Coast". Who, pray tell is that, when he's at home then?" asked Abie. "If I said MONTGOMERY, would that mean anything to you". "Who?" said Abie and "Oh Shit!" said the sergeant major almost simultaneously. Peter turned to the sergeant major, ignoring us "Tell them serg, tell these ignorant know nothings, what they can expect!" "Montgomery is the 'soldiers' soldier, he only believes that a man in 'proper full battalion gear, company badges an' all, is a soldier. He would

also expect the respect due to an officer, even if the person didn't deserve it! Excuse me sir". "That's all right Serg, but don't express those sentiments outside these walls, I mean tent walls. "That gentlemen is the person we will have to prove we are a useful, nay, necessary group. That we, as a group, can do anything thirty other soldiers can and better too boot!"

We all looked at each other and said almost in unison "How long have we got then Peter?" "You have about four days, before 'Monty' gets wind of you!" answered Peter, sorry Lieutenant Fleming. Well we'd have to get used to that before we met up with the SENIOR OFFICER COMMANDING, wouldn't we?

"Then I think it's about time for us to get working, we are going to have to build this camp like we've never done before" I said. Everybody agreed with me.

The truck was waiting outside for us and so we took the short ride to the coast. When we arrived we piled out of the truck only to bump into the man in front of us. There were whistles and moans of "Oh shit!" and other rude words. There in front of us was a completely open stretch of grassland. Nothing for us to 'connect' with, no trees, no bushes, no ferns or heather. Absolutely 'Sweet F.A.'. "Right, how many people has this 'camp' got to hold?". "Well for a start it will have to hold all but one of us! These were lines that were said by virtually all of us at one time or another in the next few minutes. "Do we have use of our R.E.M.E. pals, because if not we're completely buggered" said Shorty. "Fair comment" interjected the Sergeant Major. "They're on their way, with all of their gear, but I haven't thought of an excuse for what we're doing yet" said Peter. "That's all right" said Shorty "Leave it to me, I'll deal with them! When the R.E.M.E. guys turned up Shorty went straight up to the senior man and had a chat, which ended in a 'thumbs up' sign and off they went with a will. When Shorty came over to us we all wanted to know what he had said "I just said if we promised them all a couple of pints each would they bend the rules a bit, and finish it by this evening. It's wonderful what a small amount of bribery and corruption will achieve" The R.E.M.E. were as good as they said. For price of two pints each, they sweated and slaved and earned every drop of those two pints! We were on our way rejoicing. We moved the cattle trough, positioned it so that it filled every hole then stood back and admired our work. It was Abie who noticed what was glaringly wrong at first, but he was quickly followed by all of the rest of us.

We had dug a hole, spread out the rubble, filled in the outskirts of the trench and left a huge scar on the landscape. I was all white against the green of the grass. It was Abie, having been the first to see the mark and

to put forward a super answer to how to deal with it. Instead of leaving an area for the local cattle why not actually bring them in, and include all the sheep as well. Having brought them all in and get them to trample over the whole area. There would be an expectation for hoof prints all around the trough and that's what we, and the sheep and cattle provided. I then pointed out that the hoof prints should be deeper and shouldn't we pour water around the trough to aid the depth of the marks. Every body agreed! By the time we had finished it looked fan - bloody - tastic. When Peter and the sergeant major turned up they found us lying in the sunshine, beside the trough and pretending to doze. "Well serg what do you think of their handy work?". "Not too bad for a quick job, but it could do with a bit of improvement". Just at that point Lefty interjected with "You cheeky bastard" and proceeded to hit the sergeant major over the head with a wet cloth. "Behave yourselves, you never know who's watching or from where. There is at least one other group in the caves below us!"

A few hours later, after we'd all gone into our camp, a cavalcade of cars arrived. There were five of them, Monty was in the fourth one. They formed a star shape around 'his' car and as he got out he was loosely surrounded by military police. They escorted him over towards Peter, who was standing beside the sergeant major. He was talking intently to him and the sergeant major was agreeing with him. They both snapped to attention as 'Monty' marched up to them.

"Well Fleming, what have you got me out on this windswept hilltop for ?

"I just thought, if I was able to point out some of the 'local' sights sir you might appreciate the area more". 'Monty' raised an eyebrow and said "I have far more important things to deal with on my desk in Ashford, than to spend time standing on top of a freezing cold hilltop looking out at the sea." "I agree with you sir, but are you aware that there are 17 or 18 men within 20 yards of us".

"I can see that, because most of them came with me as my guards, although I didn't think I needed them! But everybody tells me I do!"

"I'm sorry sir but I disagree on two things 1) I think you need them because if anybody wished to assassinate you, nothing would be easier than if you were by yourself and 2) You must have personal cover or you could be kidnapped, which would be far worse for this country. Anyway I wasn't talking about all of us, including the guards". "If your talking about the soldiers in the caves below us, I know about them". "That would account for eight or nine of them", at that point he turned, spread his arms dramatically and said "Within 20 feet of me here". 'Monty' turned and looked, but by the time he had returned to his original position, Peter had vanished. "All right, all right where did the lieutenant

disappear to?" but nobody knew, there was nowhere he could have disappeared to, no bushes, no trenches, **NOWHERE TO HIDE!!**

One of the Military policemen said something to himself. **"SAY THAT AGAIN PRIVATE"**. "I didn't say anything of consequence sir". "You did I heard you distinctly private, now what was it". "I said 'perhaps he's inside the trough' sir" said the M.P. timorously". "Don't be stupid man, How can he be!" "But I am sir" said Peter from below him!"

"How did you do that" asked an extremely puzzled 'Monty'. "If you'd like to push the button the side and roll into the trough section. It will drop away from you and then you can roll down to us!" "I'd rather you came up to me, so I don't have to lose my dignity, dear boy" said 'Monty'. Peter then appeared from beneath the trough, saying "There are nine other men down inside that 'tomb' and it didn't exist four days ago. That's the ability of these men. They are better trained than 'Commandos', can live off of the land without contacting any other person for months on end and can handle a knife better than anybody else in this country. Come up boys."

We came up, singly, blinking into the daylight. "I would strongly suggest you move the M.P.'s away sir, this is a 'need to know situation'. "Don't tell me what to do lieutenant, anyway why are these men out of uniform. They look like 'cleaners'. " "That's their nickname sir, they clean - up where other people leave a mess or don't finish off a job properly!" said Peter. "They can infiltrate any camp or 'Walled Town". "You know how I feel about 'Scruffy Soldiers', they either have a uniform, including regimental badges or they are not soldiers!" 'Monty' said and stormed off, to leave the M.P.s to run after him and try to catch up and left Peter to stand shaking his head sorrowfully. "Well I buggered that up didn't I?" "Never mind sir we'll have to see what we can do to improve the situation, won't we chaps!" "Yes serg!" came the reply from all of us. We made our way back to camp, mumbling to each other. We seemed to do a lot of general mumbling around about this time!

By the time we'd got back into camp we'd worked out what we were going to do, **WE WOULD LEARN TO ATTACK AN ADVERSARY, AND LEAVE WITHOUT THE OPPOSITION KNOWING WE HAD BEEN THERE!!!!!!UNTIL THEY WOKE UP, THAT IS!**

We approached Peter and the sergeant major with the idea. They were dubious to start with, but in the end gave in to our demands. We needed to train across an open field, we had to take as much time as was necessary, 'Pinch' something and get back to camp without being seen by anybody at all. We practised harder than we'd ever done before. We knew the surrounding woods like nobody else, In the end we learned to cross an open field, rolling silently from furrow to furrow, getting closer and

closer. We did this while Peter and the sergeant major watched and listened. The pair of them were attacked without even hearing us. We got them to play a game of 'STATUES' and WE BEAT THEM! After about a dozen attempts that was. Now we were ready to go. We took all of the details of the 'local' camp, memorised them and set off through the fields. Having got to within a couple of fields distance we moved in as quietly as we could. It took us close to an hour and a half until we could hear the breathing of the sentries, and we even watched one of them light up. We got into their camp by stealth and guile. Blackie's training and rubber soled boots aided us in our 'invasion'. We crept around the camp and suddenly thought, we'd done everything, but we hadn't decided what we needed to take back with us!

Just at that moment 'Tank' came up and waved the Regimental Flag at us, and the problem was solved. We were so jubilant on the way back we nearly walked into the guard, who was smoking behind his sentry box. When we got back to the 'Camp' we were met by Peter and the serg, who, when they saw what we had got didn't know whether to be angry or elated. But they still took the flag back to the Regimental Headquarters' where the Commanding Officer was fuming. This was a Paratroopers' unit, so how could anybody have stolen it while his men were supposedly on duty! The whole operation had taken us seven hours in total.

Now we were ready to 'ATTACK' 'Monty's walled town. The following day was a 'red letter day' for all of us. We all 'decked' the Shanghai Policeman. With all the training we had had we were now super fit, and extremely fast but the crowning glory was the ability to change from left to right and back again in our attack!

ASHFORD HERE WE COME!!!

### **THE ATTACK ON ASHFORD**

This was an attack which we couldn't afford to fail on. It would take all of the guile and preparation we could muster. Working on the Sergeant Major's spring loaded cosh idea I developed a series of cross - bows. These could be loaded by hand and fired like a pistol. But the idea of using actual short metal strips for the bow and rods, with heavy weights on the end of them, for arrows came from Tank. The whole thing worked brilliantly and with continual practice over the next two weeks we could do without the 'Long Bows'. We didn't need to carry the extra weight and height and we were fully operational. On our belts we had our 'Commando Styled Knives, cross bows, a catapult for firing ball bearings and Tank had his spring loaded cosh. We wore our rubber soled boots and carried our Tommy guns (with blank cartridges). With all the practice

we'd had we were ready to 'go for it'. We checked to make certain that the regimental badges we wore were of a brigade who were billeted 'up north', used our kitbags, which had our old badges on them, but covered them so that they couldn't be seen, and we were off!

We had got passes from the sergeant major, who had got the same officer to sign each of them. This was where we nearly came unstuck, because an M.P. recognised the signature and queried how each of us had the same officer. When he knew 'for certain' the officer was not in that regiment and was based 'in the midlands'. The loquacious Shorty came to our rescue yet again, by explaining that the officer had just arrived, and we had got the better of him. We had descended on him and got him to write out our passes 'before his feet had touched the ground', finishing off with a wink! "All right you cheeky buggers, but don't let me catch you coming back!" "No mate, that we can promise" as he turned and winked at us. The train stopped just outside Ashford, where there was a 'border post'. This was where we 'disembarked' on the opposite side of the train to the guard and the sentry. We then melted into the woods, we had spent sometime on the area in the rain in the last two days. The rain had helped us by covering our trail and any possible noise. We now knew where every single sentry was stationed or positioned and all we needed to do was to avoid them, or so we thought. But the sentries, due to the bad weather, had moved around and so we had to be extra careful. We moved extremely slowly so that any other soldier, from any other unit, would stand out against the wet conditions. We had some fairly close shaves but we managed to get to the railway yards, having logged as many of the sentries as possible we then moved on. Having made a mental note of where to put our 'explosives' when we came back. It's amazing how much our memories had improved, we were each able to remember upto ten different 'venues' for our explosives.

Our next target was the Army Barracks! This was going to be a lot more difficult. We had to get inside without alerting the sentries. We quickly discovered that we were up against two different battalions, one of Guards and another of Paratroopers. We moved very, very slowly about their camp so that we didn't interrupt any of the normal duties that went on there. We learned what they did, how they did it and what was involved. We soon discovered where 'Monty's' office was and how to get in there. Through the outer office when the Administrative Officer was 'off - duty' and when the corporal disappeared. This was all done within a few minutes of each other. First went 'Monty', then the Administrative Officer, all properly arranged and agreed. Then the corporal took off and didn't tell anybody that he was disappearing. This last one was all totally unofficial and he always somehow managed to get

back before the Officers. We found out how this was done by a mistake, Tank crashed into the next door office and discovered another corporal having a 'fling' with the local W.A.A.F. female, then when she disappeared to have a 'jimmy riddle', he manned the phones for her. Directly he saw the senior officers approaching from across the parade ground he 'buzzed' his mate, who was obviously involved in something in one of the other offices, and got him straight back before they arrived. After about a week the 'group' moved into the office from the side window, opened and emptied the safe. They then took all of the paperwork out and substituted a 'pencil bomb'. They were just about to get out when Shorty whispered "Let's do his geraniums" "You mean pelargonium's don't you" whispered back Abie. "O.K., O.K. smart arse! We'll do that on the way out".

We had to clear out the Secret Paperwork', putting it in sealable envelopes so that Peter would be able to give it back 'INTACT' to 'Monty' at his meeting tomorrow morning. 'Monty' would be extremely surprised, nay flabbergasted! We moved towards the window when two sentries stopped outside. They started to talk to each other, the normal sort of waffle and small talk we all do during an off duty moment. But it started to cause the guys inside to sweat, then luckily the sentries started to move off!

We then had great fun in planting our 'pencil bombs'. We 'blew up' the Guard House and all of the sentries' boxes,. We set-to planting 'stick' or 'pencil' bombs in the officers quarters, then I remembered the Radio Room, so we did that as well. We put them in every junction in the tracks, in the junction 'box' itself then moved onto the Police and Firestation. The last was where we actually encountered 'real life'. There was a fireman on guard duty, asleep in his box! We succeeded in tying him up with 'gardening wire', before he was fully awake.

We found out later he was put on a charge for being asleep on duty. We all felt really bad about this as he had been on duty for at least twenty hours before, and was expected to carry on working for another ten.

When we got back to our camp we were able to have a word with the Sergeant Major to straighten this out. Poor bloke, he must have felt really hard done by, but the situation was straightened out when the Officers Quarters blew up, Followed by all of the sentry boxes in the Barracks! The following day our C.O. arrived at Montgomery's Office with an envelope under his arm. He was ushered straight into Monty's inner office by the Adjutant and was subjected to a blast from the man himself! He stood and took it, knowing full well he would have the upper hand by the end of the explosion. Monty finally came to a stumbling stop by saying "Well then Lieutenant what have you got to say for yourself,

Eh?" " One of my squads broke into your 'Walled Town' yesterday. The bombed the railway tracks, two trains, the Fire Station, the Police Station, the Officers Billets and all of your sentry boxes without being seen or heard. What has your Adjutant got say about that?" " Er, Er, Er Not a lot Lieutenant other than our security precautions need an extreme tightening up. For that we thank you!" Just at that moment Peter looked down at his watch. "Are we keeping you Lieutenant? Do you have an appointment anywhere else at the moment or are you just being impertinent" demanded Montgomery. "I was just checking the correct time" said Peter. "About now I'd say" looking down at his watch again. This was followed by a loud bang from inside the safe. Monty shouted "Oh my God, It was full of Secret Papers". "Don't worry Sir, they're all in this envelope, unread, unseen, other than the outside of the files". The Adjutant cut in at this point "He's checking his watch again!" "What the...?" Then Monty's pelagoniums blew up! This was when Monty really did explode. "Put those men on any sort of charge. Shoot them if necessary" and then he stormed out of the office. The Adjutant caught hold of Peter's arm and said he thought it might be a good idea if he got out of the camp and got back to his command. When he arrived at the marquee he found a group of elated sergeants. "You can all stop congratulating each other and get on with your learning curves". "You Sergeant Major, haven't you got something to do, like paperwork or something!" "Yes sir I'm trying to do something for us all!" "Oh! And what's that may I ask?" "Making all of the group understand what or how Monty reacted over his Geraniums, sorry pelagoniums. He seems to have exploded more over them, than his Secret Files." "He has ordered the firing squad out for you lot so it might be an idea to get you all out of town on a furlough. I'll write one out for each of you, so start packing. Don't say a word of this to anybody. Now go before I change my mind"

### **TUBE STATION BOMBED**

A few hours later I was walking down Chestnut Grove in Balham, coming up to Hearnville Road When the air raid sirens started up and we ran for a shelter. We'd only been in there for a few minutes when the bombs started falling. The bombers appeared to have got some of their loads left over from Central London and they were dropping them on the outskirts now, ON THEIR WAY HOME ! Suddenly the drone of engines and the crump of bombs stopped, and the Dorniers and Hienkels flew on. Then somebody burst into the shelter shouting "They've bombed the bloody Tube. They've bombed the Tube. They've Bombed the Station.

Quick, everybody's needed! Hundreds of people have been buried"  
People crept out of their shelters, like mice after a cat has had its feed.  
Heads peeped from the wreckage of partially destroyed houses.  
"They've bombed the station and hundreds of people are buried, they've  
bombed the station and people need help quickly!" " But there shouldn't  
have been anybody on the station, it was open to the air" I said. "Not the  
Southern region. The Underground, you stupid bastard! Shouted the man  
' we all need help quickly" and I started to run, up the road and round  
the corner. The sight I saw had me completely dumbstruck. I had arrived  
to see two huge craters. One of which encompassed the Tube Station and  
another was right in the middle of the main High Street. People were  
being helped out of the bus that was partially in the hole, I ran to help as  
well, but a shout of "over here quick we found a child " stopped me.  
Other than the sounds made by the rescuers there was absolute silence;  
people were scrabbling with their hands in a desperate bid to clear the  
tunnel to the Tube Station. A shout of "I've found one!" echoed around  
the High Road as I came upon a small hand, with a man standing over it.  
We then started scrabbling away at the rubble and unearthed an arm, and  
then another one. My nails were cracked and bleeding after I had  
unearthed both arms and a head. The arms had protected the head and  
after some coughing we managed to dig her out. Well almost, except for  
her right foot, which had something attached to it, a female's hand  
attached to it? We continued to dig even more furiously, the child having  
been taken to hospital, the ambulance men, now called paramedics, had  
managed to get the child breathing again. The woman's head soon  
appeared and it was fairly apparent that she was the girl's mother, and she  
alas was dead. We continued digging until we got to her ankles where we  
discovered another hand. Having got her out, we continued digging to  
discover to whom the hand belonged. There appeared to be at least three  
layers of people in the tunnel. The tunnel must have filled as slowly as  
was possible, so that nobody would try get out, but the sides kept  
collapsing in on them. But slowly and inexorably enough to allow the  
men to sacrifice themselves and the women to do the same, in favour of  
their kids! This situation was being proved all around the crater. The soil  
in this area was extremely sandy and dry; whenever it was hit by  
anything it would move and continue to move like the sand on a beach  
dune. It would become like mud down a wall, into a bucket. It would  
never stop until the bucket was full up, and then overflowing on to the  
ground. Anything that got in its way would be inexorably swallowed up!  
This is what I'm fighting to stop. That was when soldiers arrived with  
spades and shovels to start in the MIDDLE of the hole, with sixty percent  
of them moving the soil in barrows. Having shifted the earth from the

middle of the hole it would allow the soil to slide back into it. Thereby creating a 'sea of moving soil and clearing the bodies on the outer ring of the Tube. Sounds sensible now doesn't it but it was an innovation to me. I was just standing beside the 'hole' when a warden shouted "'Are you just going to stand there all day or would you like a job to do?'" Then he noticed my hands and realised I had been digging out the bodies. "'Sorry about that soldier, I hadn't realised you had been helping out, but you must have seen worse than that in your occupation. But then you would be able to fight back I suppose. Would you like a cuppa'" he said kindly putting his arm around my shoulder and leading me towards a N.A.A.F.I. vehicle.

"Let's get those hands seen to, soldier" said the warden. "I didn't realise I was injured, I was so intent on digging everybody out. Is it always like this all the time or am I just unlucky? I asked." "Where the hell have you been in the last few months" moaned a passer-by. "Don't take any notice of him, he's always complaining about something. 'Perpetual Moaner' that one. 'If only Hitler hadn't started the war, if only England hadn't entered it, if only, if only if only..... If only he'd stop whingeing we'd all be better off!" said the man behind him. "In answer to your question, Yes, it's been like this for the last few weeks and it could go on for a lot more before we're through" said the warden. "Oh good, here comes a nurse, she should be able to help you with your injuries!" "I'll deal with him" said Dot, as she walked up and gently took my hands. I flushed a beetroot colour. I had forgotten all about her in the digging and scrabbling among the debris of the bomb blasts. I looked at her now in an apologetic way and started to actually apologise when she put her fingers on my lips and said "'Shhh... Be quiet. You need looking after now! Not me ! I was then lead gently back to Dot's parent's house to be looked after better than I could ever remember.

## RETURN TO CHARING

I returned to Charing more refreshed, than I can ever remember, until I met the Sergeant Major. He burst into "'Christ White, what the bloody hell have you been doing on your break. Digging a tunnel to France so that we can attack the Germans in Europe?" "What do you mean sarg? Oh! These" I said, holding up my bandaged hands. "I got these in the line of duty. I've been digging out dead bodies and damaged my fingernails a bit" "Let's have a look then" and started pulling the bandages off my hands, which hurt quite a bit, because they were stuck to the injured fingers. "Careful sarg, that hurts". "You've grown soft in the last few days" he said tearing the last bandage off my fingers. "Bloody

Hell!, What did you do, dug one hell of a hole, I'll bet" As he said this Peter walked up. "Let's see them. I got the report from the 'Authorities' about your exploits in the Balham Tube Bombing and although they were extremely heroic they were also really bloody stupid. You drew attention to yourself, without even thinking. That was extremely stupid, as I've already said. Don't do anything like that again. You are supposed to be a secret guerrilla group not a hero of the first order, remember that! Now go and get cleaned and re-bandaged up, and be ready for training within the next hour!" He growled quietly. I marched off, suitably castigated and mumbling to myself. I spent most of the next hour thinking hard about what the civilians were going through at 'home'. Mum, Dad, Ruby, Mr and Mrs Groom, Margaret and of course Dot. They must be suffering worse than I was because, at least, I could 'Hit Back'. When I walked out of the marquee all of the other guys were there and burst into a spontaneous round of applause, then they all gathered around and clapped me on the back. "Stop! Stop! I had it pointed out to me that we were supposed to be a secret group, not a bunch of heroes. We shouldn't go out to the public and take on the world in front of them! Although it is an automatic reaction to do something on their behalf when they need any sort of help. But just join in, don't make a spectacle of yourself and don't go 'Gung-ho!' Take your time and take it easy!" "Well said Chalkie! I was the one who rapped him on the knuckles when he arrived here. I said much the same as he has said but far more vehemently. I have since been torn apart myself for saying what I did. The person who did the tearing was your Sergeant Major and he was correct in what he did. He explained that the difference between doing something and doing something AUTOMATICALLY is a very fine line. Chalkie did something automatically and should be commended. He didn't do something after thinking about it, which would mean he should have been 'shot down in flames'! I for one will now say I apologise and well done!" "What we need now is to test further 'Camp' securities. We've already proved we can 'Walk into a Walled Town' and so anywhere else should be fairly easy, plus we need to build further 'hidey holes' that we can utilise, as well as the one we are already using. Plus I've also noticed that a certain person is wearing an earring, could we please take that out as it is drawing attraction to the unit from other officers. We have a distinct lack of respect for them, even if they have not earned it. You will at all times dress as soldiers and react like soldiers! Is that O.K. Blackie?" "Yes Sir. My apologies to all the men here, which of course goes last, but not least, to the senior men. I was not aware that any of the other officers had 'Twigged it' "he said, reaching up to his ear and taking it out. "Now this is the last time I will warn you about your

actions, appearances or attitudes. I am quite capable of suspending you and sending you 'home', where you will be treated like a 'private'. Do you understand me". With this we all came to attention and saluted him. From that point on we were a solid unit, behind Peter Fleming!

## INFILTRATING THE GUARDS

The next job we got was to infiltrate the local Guards camp! When you consider that the tallest one of us was less than six feet (1.8 metres), and Shorty was less still, by six inches (15 centimetres). This would be a major problem for us, but we hadn't taken into account how much and how good Shorty could talk and act. He had persuaded all of the Guards that he was a cleaner for their toilets, which guaranteed him total freedom virtually anywhere on the 'camp'. Nearly everybody stayed away from him because he was 'dirty' and he smelled. When he queued for his meals there was always a gap in front of him and one behind. There was also an oddity about the heights, there was a difference of at least a foot (thirty centimetres) in the line. The wise cracking and volume that came from Shorty made up for the continued mumbling from the Guards. Lines like "Smells like a sewer" "smells like a dead rat" were some of the more polite ones. I won't repeat the ones with expletives in them. Added to this Shorty would join a table that always had at least five Guards on it and started speaking out loud to all and sundry about what he was working on at the moment, describing everything IN DETAIL! He succeeded in clearing the table in about three or four minutes, then continued by eating some of the food left by the Guards after his description. Even I would have been put off by some of them, but he went too far when he described the sausages looking like 'dog's turds' and got chased out of the eating area by the cook, who was shouting "I can only cook what I am given so you'll eat it. Whether you like it or not!!! At which point Shorty disappeared. Last seen running in the direction of the Main Gates!

Shorty spent three days in the barracks and everywhere he went he cleared the offices within two to three minutes. His record was just under two minutes when he shouted from outside the office "Coming through, coming through". The secretaries and officers had just about enough time to clear their desks and run out before Shorty entered to a mouthed version of 'Entrance of the Gladiators', as he threw open the door! We on the other hand were beavering away at copying the sentry roster, the officers -in - charge and their regular watering holes. All of these

details we had copied from memos, lists and letters found in the wastepaper bins As a real bit of fun, the vital statistics of all of the females in the camp, were guessed. This was Blackies speciality, he could work out at a glance, to the inch (centimetre) bust, waist and hip size. It started out as a regular bet but it got boring when, other than on a very few occasions, he would win! When we put our joint report together, we were now trained in this as well, Peter took it to the Officer Commanding, who promptly exploded, demanding who had supplied the figures, how and why and for whom? Peter said the details were official and could be checked against any timetable the officer wished. If something was not corroborated it would need to be shown to him what the 'true' figures were and who had supplied them and where they had come from! The officer flushed and 'harrumphed' A few times, then finally said "If you can promise me they are accurate I have to believe a 'brother' officer".

It was then explained to him that the whole object of the exercise was to check on the security of the 'camp' and the officer should not be unhappy at the results because we, the group, had succeeded in infiltrating a 'Walled Town' and blowing up the C.O.'s safe, after having removed all the papers in the first place! The name was withheld to protect the innocent!

We as a group, had moved on from our original 'camp' to start afresh by walking through the local forest, climbing a large tree which overhung several others. Moving through them to a place that we had already marked as the new position for the next 'camp' and drop down from about six feet (2 metres). The only one of us who had any problems with this was Shorty. We forgot him on one occasion, but only one, we never did again. If ever there was a moaner it was Shorty. If he could get around to this failure of ours he would. He appeared to have an innate ability to go from a discussion on the Tower of London to 'how could you leave your best mate behind when you were going out to fight the enemy' But this finally stopped when Tank asked "who is this best friend then" which stopped Shorty dead in his tracks!

We had a fine time designing the next camp. It was disguised as a Water Board junction pipe box. It took us approximately a week and when we'd done it we all stood back and admired our work. It was pretty close to brilliant. It worked to a great extent in a similar way to the Cattle Trough, by weights, levers and pulleys. We all got inside and relaxed. We had been there for a couple of weeks and even went to sleep there on a few occasions. We had relaxed and fallen asleep when we were rudely awakened by two people, a man and a woman in a state of semi - undress crashing in on us. They had quite obviously been making use of our

Water Board 'Lid' as a love nest, rolled over and fallen through the trap door. I wonder if they discovered any new words that day. They were, of course, sworn to secrecy and bound by the Official Secrets Act, but we quickly discovered that they were not husband and wife but they were both married! So there wasn't much chance that they would TELL ANYBODY!! WAS THERE?

One of the hideouts we developed was in the shape of a boat, using a natural depression in the woods and digging into the side of it. We then angled down under the depression itself and back towards the other end. Tunneling and putting pit props all the way. We then dug a room under the depression itself and carried on to the other end, to come out in a copse of bushes, up a tree, onto another, then another and down at least thirty yards ( thirty metres ) away. To make certain we could not be followed or tracked! This was a really useful 'camp', it had two entrances/exits when we were confronted with a situation we had not had before. Blackie had gone out 'shopping in the market place', which we all knew as the surrounding area. He would check his traps, use his cross bow or his catapult, collect all of the relevant herbs, stuff them into the separate bags and head 'home'. Whilst all this was going on we would be cleaning up all of his 'regimental clothing' and doing all the other jobs in the camp. If this sounds as though Blackie was getting the short end of the stick each day, that's rubbish. He loved going out and acting like the 'White Hunter' and getting the food, for the main meals, for the 'little women' back home. On this day, in particular, he had only had time to get outside when he came crashing back into the camp! " Quiet fellas, we're being invaded. There's a whole regiment out there. Chalkie what do we do about them". Why they always came to me is somewhat of a mystery, but they did. "Split into two groups, half and half, and head towards each exit. When you've ascertained who they are, where they are and what they are doing out there come back and we'll discuss it. But make certain you leave one of you on guard ! Off we went, Blackie who knew where he had first seen and heard them, pointed them out. They were moving through the forest like a small stampede. They moved off in one direction, then having gone about 15 yards ( 12 metres ), they then zigzagged back towards our clearing. Once again like a small stampede. We watched for a few minutes then headed back inside, where we met the other half of our group. It appeared that there was another group of soldiers who were doing the same thing at the other end of our camp! They were obviously attempting to catch us in the middle of a 'Pincer movement', but with the noise they were making they didn't stand a chance!

A quick discussion and we had formulated a plan. We would break out

from the copse end of the camp, climb the tree and move off as the soldiers closed in on us. We moved out and we were so quiet we even astounded ourselves. We crept out, climbed the tree and waited. The soldiers went passed and under us. The other group had moved into the depression from the other end and were prodding the ground as they went. One of them suddenly shouted "Over here. Come quick, I've found something!" He had, it was one of Blackie's snares and it had caught his bayonet. Lucky he wasn't searching the ground with his hands or he could possibly have lost a finger or two! Those snares were lethal at close range. When he succeeded in extricating his bayonet there were deep slice marks from the middle to the tip (gauges). This brought a smirk from all of us, we nearly laughed out loud. But that would have given our position away, so we put up with smiling silently at each other! It's quite incredible how much we did SILENTLY. We had developed hand and facial signals to pass information on to each other because that was what we were supposed to do. We allowed the soldiers to decimate our 'camp'. Having finally found them it they set about systematically destroying it by crushing the entrances/exits and ripping the areas around them apart, so we would have to start afresh! From that point on we set up a series of 'guard rosters' to protect ourselves.

### **Peter's commission**

Peter went missing for some time about this period, then turned up 'out of the blue' in a major's uniform. We were all for taking the whatever, But he stopped us by saying "This will be my last visit to you all, as you can see I have been promoted and will be going overseas very shortly. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time with you and you have taught me one hell of a lot. Not least how to manage a really awkward bunch of buggers, like you lot, and that is to let them have their heads, if they go drastically wrong just redirect them. I was promoted on instructions from 'on high', which leads me to believe it came from the top, well I like to think so, so don't disallusion me please! There will be a new Lieutenant coming in to replace me, so be gentle with him please! It may take some while to train him, but with the Sergeant Major's help he should become a very good officer. What I would ask is remember you won't be able to call him by his Christian name or surname from the start. You will have to treat him as you do any other officer until he get's to know you

individually. I've just had a further thought, he will start automatically by calling you by your surnames, I think I will have to have a word with him about that initially, but if there is a further problem it might be possible for the sergeant major to have a word for the necessity for the ultimate secrecy of the 'nicknames'. Well goodbye fellas it's been fantastic working with you all, hopefully we have all learned something from each other. I will pass on what I have learned to all the other soldiers that I will be working with in the future. At that point he came to attention very smartly, saluted and turned quickly away, but not before I saw a tear in his eye, that quickly rolled down his cheek!

We heard through the grapevine some time later that he had crossed the Atlantic, to Canada, to work for the Special Operations Executive. He was commanding and training the people we 'put' into Europe, to act as our 'go - betweens' with the Marquis and the Resistance in all of the countries under German domination. All that work and the ideas we helped to generate and winning the war eventually!

There were further pieces of information:-

- 1) My father returned to his original company ( I believe it was Queen's Regiment), serving in the 8th Army in North Africa
- 2)His 'group' were utilised to build 'Special Training Courses', the venues/destinations were all unknown having been delivered to them in an enclosed lorry, collected and taken back to their 'billets'.
- 3) He was allowed to keep his 'dagger' which he wore up until the 'Salerno' landings, where during these he lost it. He was captured by the Germans. When he arrived at his provisional camp he was informed that **ANYBODY WHO HAD BEEN CAUGHT WITH THE DAGGER WAS SUMMARILY EXECUTED!**
- 4)The person who co-wrote this was supposedly an ex-commando and had a dagger and my father asked if he would bring it over on the next visit. Bob Allison-Boothe said he would.  
When he turned up in the next week he got it out. It was held in the scabbard by elastic bands. My father, at this time was a stooping 70year old. I was sitting across the room with the family terrier a foot from me. He took the dagger/scabbard in his right hand flipped the bands off and threw the dagger, sticking it in the floor (6 inches either way) between the dog and me. He was now no longer stooping, but turned to Bob and said 'It's a bit new isn't it'. 'Late 40's' Bob replied indignantly. ' That's what I thought' said my father!
- 5)The section appeared to have an almost direct route to Churchill, via Peter Fleming and Gubbins.
- 6) This narrative came to an abrupt end due to my father's untimely death.