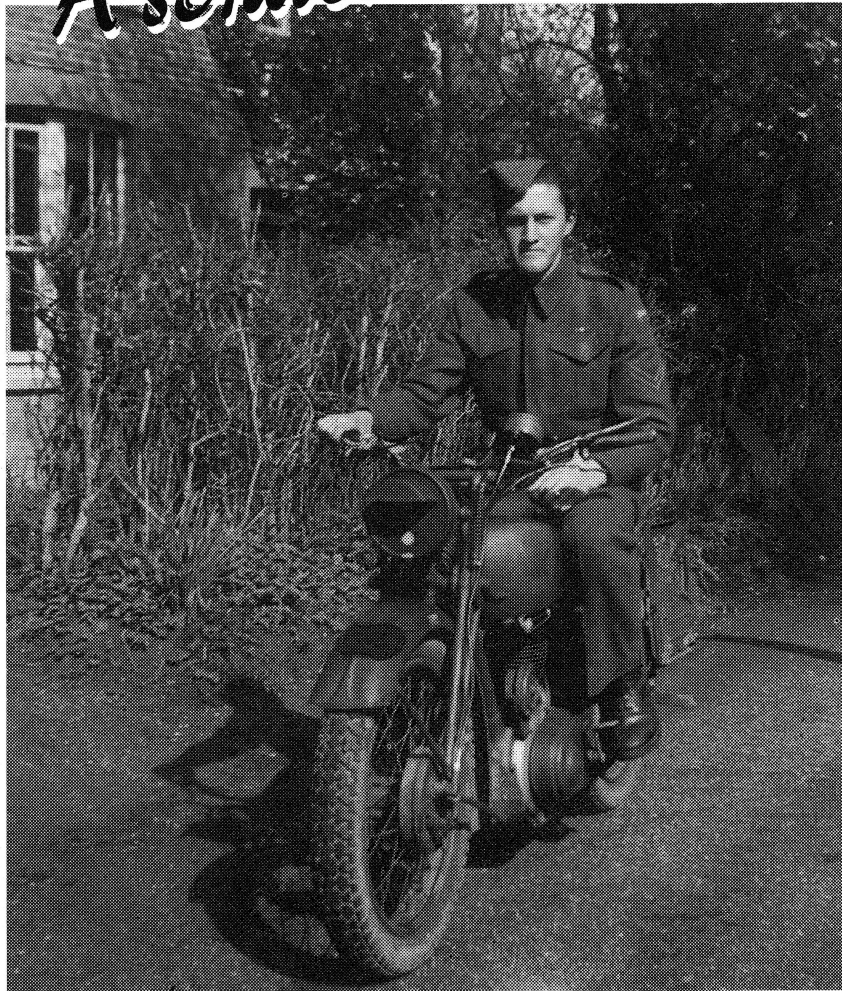

My Army Days

A soldier's memoirs



John A. Marin

Queen's Own Rifles of Canada

1999

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Copy-editor's introduction

(2014 03 10)

As the copy-editor of the online edition of this book, originally written and published by John Anthony Marin, I must distinguish my contribution from that of the author. This introduction is, of course, my own and a few other parts mentioned below are my additions as well. But this is Marin's book; my main contribution, besides copy-editing, has been to save it from obscurity and bring it to the larger audience that it deserves.

The title of John Marin's book, *My Army Days: A Soldier's Memoirs*, describes its contents well. It fits into a now large class of autobiographical accounts of the second world war by Canadians who participated in it. I have read more than a dozen of these with authors ranking from private to general. This corporal's short book scores as one of the best but is also the rarest.

Not everyone who reads the 130 pages of Marin's book will end up with a favourable opinion of the author. That seems strange; most memoir writers take pains to ensure that this never happens. They do this by carefully filtering the information reported and sometimes by nudging the facts a bit. Marin avoids this and readers benefit from his unvarnished account of the vocation and avocation of being a soldier in wartime. Even those who have concerns about the author's conduct must admire his honesty and openness.

According to the two library catalogs, WorldCat and Amicus, the paper edition of this book is held by only three libraries in the world. These include Library and Archives Canada, the Canadian War Museum, and the United States Army Military History Institute. The book has been out of print for some time but occasionally used copies will appear on the lists of online booksellers. If you want a copy of the original edition you are probably out of luck.

The paper edition of this book was published in 1999 by its author, John Anthony Marin. As a self-published book, it did not benefit from two services normally provided by commercial publishers, copy-editing and promotion. My contribution includes aggressive copy-editing and limited promotion.

My role as copy-editor encompassed the usual tasks of attending to grammar, punctuation, and spelling as well as some checking of facts. The spelling of proper nouns was a challenge. Marin did well with the many difficult European place names that he and I could check but less well with the spelling of names of members of his regiment, many of which I could not check. I have corrected a few including the consistent misspelling of his platoon commander's surname, "Dunkelman", spelled here correctly.

An early decision that I had to make was how to handle the numerous and often obscure acronyms and abbreviations used by the author. Most authors take care of this by providing a glossary at the beginning or end of the text, but Marin neglected to do so. With space not being at a premium in an electronic version, I decided to simply spell out these in the text, with a few exceptions. The exceptions include a number explained by Marin in context and several that are better known as acronyms. The latter include the insecticide, "DDT", and the German military organization, the "SS". Finally the term "Jap" in the original has not been expanded to "Japanese" because of the differing connotations of the two terms. Both are used in the book. This version reprinted in the same format as the original might be several pages longer because of this spelling-out decision.

I have gone beyond the simple editing of the copy to make several additions to the book. The original paper publication had six unnamed parts with no chapters, titles, subtitles, or table of contents. Here the parts have been converted into chapters with titles and one level of subtitles. From these has been generated the table of contents for this edition. The annotated bibliography did not appear in the paper edition and contains related books, particularly ones that I used in the copy-editing process.

As the copy-editor of this electronic edition, I have tried not to compromise the author's simple and forceful style. Marin has an important story to tell and he tells it well. I sincerely hope that I have been faithful to the author and have produced an edition that would meet with his approval.

The author of this book, John Anthony Marin (1923-2005), was born in Kilmar, Quebec but, as a child, moved to Cardinal, Ontario with his family. He received his schooling in Cardinal and, while a teenager, joined the local army militia. From there he volunteered for the active army and served in Canada and Europe. It is this latter period in his life that is the subject of his book.

After being discharged from the army in 1946, he briefly attended Queen's University and then went to work for the Dominion Tire Company in Kitchener, Ontario. He was married in 1950 and continued to work in Kitchener for the following three years. John Marin and his wife then moved back to Cardinal where he found work with the Canada Starch Company. He remained in Cardinal for the rest of his working life and during his retirement. His life in Cardinal was characterized by a number of public service activities including acting as a cubmaster and scoutmaster and culminating in the writing and publication of this book in 1999, after his retirement.

John Marin wrote and published the paper edition of this book as a service to others. He could not have made a profit from it and probably never expected to. His life of service to his country and to people in many countries combines with the low marginal cost of electronic distribution to dictate the appropriate price for this edition of his book, zero. To download this book, you need not identify yourself and you will be neither required nor permitted to pay. You are permitted to redistribute this edition of the book but must leave it intact, in its present form, and distribute it without charge.

The paper edition of this book did not have an international standard book number (ISBN) but one was assigned to it after publication. It appears as "ISBN 0-9686875-0-4", stamped on the back cover of the copy held by the Canadian War Museum. This copy gives the Library of Congress call number as "D 811 M365 CWM 1999". The Amicus library catalog gives the Dewey decimal number as "940.54/8171 21".

I encourage readers to contact me with mistakes that I have missed, mistakes that I have made, or other comments. I can be found at "web_adm at Bezeau dot Ca", after making the changes required to get an email address from this.

Author's preface

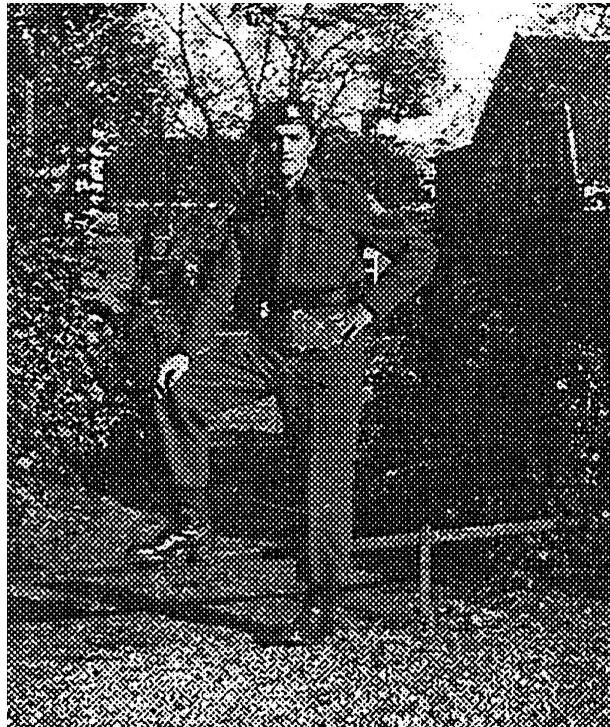
After enjoying twelve years of retirement and just loafing around, I decided to take the plunge and learn how to use the computer. Tiring of playing solitaire and chess, I learned to type using the two-finger style. What to type?

The idea came to me that some of my nieces and nephews might like to discover what I did during the war years. This then is the story of those exciting and scary days.

I also wanted to mention some of the friends that I made along the road. They made it easy for me to get along in a few dangerous situations. This book is also a part of their war years.

Author's acknowledgements

Many thanks to Jack Martin for supplying some battle dates and to Patti McCurdy for the lessons on using the computer.



John Marin in Doorn, Holland
1945

Chapter One

Serving in Canada

This is a story of the interesting and exciting events that occurred during my army days. It all sort of begins in September of 1939, when war was declared. It was only a blip in our local paper, most of it was a preprinted rag that was sent out to all of the small town papers that could not afford to hire a large staff.

At the time I was only 15 and the war did not make much of an impression on me. I noticed my parents sitting in a corner, with tears in their eyes. I learned later that they never expected to hear from their relatives again, namely pop's father and mother who were living in Italy. My mother's brother had come back to Canada in 1937 and thus missed the draft. Although he was born in Fort William, he had gone back to Italy with his mother in the late nineteen-twenties.

With Italy joining up with Germany, it was not a pleasant time to be a first generation Canadian. There were a lot of small minded people in the area, who thought they were God's gift to the country.

In the mid-thirties there was a small group of reservists, with connections to a local militia group from a nearby town. Some of the local boys joined up and met every two weeks for some foot soldiering. There were no guns available for parade ground practice until brother Joe and some friends got the idea of making some out of wood. They were cut out of 2 × 6s and painted brown. The idea seemed silly at the time, but they were serious about the rifle drills. It wasn't long before they started to look pretty good on parade, wooden rifles and all.

The main reserve base commander thought that they should be included in the two week summer camp at Connaught Ranges Camp in 1937. A result of this decision was that all the local boys were issued uniforms and rifles, for the two week period only.

My brother brought home all the equipment and laid it out on the kitchen table for us all to see. I think that the guys were all on cloud nine after being outfitted for the camp outing. While my brother was out for a minute, I grabbed the rifle and started dry firing at an imaginary target. This didn't last too long as I had to make a dash for the door when he got back. I think that was when I got the bug for thinking about army service when I got old enough.

Time went on and in some centres, reserve units were being formed. Rumours were going around that a reserve unit was to be mobilized in Brockville, with platoons in outlying towns. There was at the time a small unit in Brockville, and they were pushing for an increase in numbers so as to have a ready force when needed.

In the spring of 1940, while we were playing in the park, we could see a large gathering at the high school. We went over to have a look and saw a number of the locals inside, in their birthday suits. It was quit a sight and I saw some of the gals sneaking a peek through the windows.

A very young recruit

We soon found out that a recruiting officer was present, along with a medical officer, and they were accepting volunteers for the Brockville Rifles reserve unit.

I was only 16, but on a dare I went in and filled out the forms and proceeded to have a medical exam. I was found to be A-1. Then the officer in charge took a second look and asked how old I was and, when I told him, he wanted to know why I was trying to get in the army at such a young age. I really didn't have an answer except to say that I thought it would be exciting! He had a good laugh and said "Okay, you're in the army now".

Training sessions started in the park twice a week and by September we didn't look too bad, or so we thought. The local population turned out to watch us stumble around and they had many a laugh at some of the office staff and foremen who seemed out of their element. It was a little confusing at first but after a month we managed to look like soldiers and we could even follow the commands of a sergeant yelling his head off at us. I think he was trying to intimidate us a little and he sure had us jumping like puppets!

The rumours of a camp outing started and in September, we found ourselves in Petawawa for two weeks of training. This was my first trip away from home and I had some apprehension of what to expect.

Things started out fairly well, with early morning parades and rifle drills with lots of marching. It was strange seeing some of the locals out of their elements. Some of them were foremen at the local plant, and I suspect that a lot of the workers were happy to see them sweating it out while we were learning how to dig a slit trench. On one field drill a low flying plane took the head off an officer who forgot to duck. After that we paid closer attention to all shouted orders. There were two others from Cardinal my age. What really shocked me was to see some of the older ones being homesick and actually crying at night.

The highlight of the day was when the local bootleggers came around with a trunk full of beer, in quarts. It sold for 25 cents a bottle. I had two and felt great, until some rat told him how old I was. That was the end of the beer.

Saturday rolled around and the paymaster did not show up. Our company major loaned us five dollars each. Taxis to Pembroke were only 25 cents, but there were eight of us in each cab!

One night we had a sort of a talent night and some of the guys entertained us with music and singing. A local chap, who was a little odd, got up on stage and started reciting a dirty poem called "The midnight ride of Paul Revere" and it took a few seconds for the people in charge to realize what he was saying. The padre went on the stage and yanked him off and we all had a good laugh. The guy was pretty mad and said that if he wasn't appreciated he was leaving. The next day he was missing so the Police went to his home and dragged him back to camp. He was put on kitchen duty so that he wouldn't be a pest. He didn't last too long there either. There was a gadget that looked like a washing machine with rough ridges inside. It was spun around and took the peels off the potatoes. He let it run so long that the potatoes ended up the size of marbles. Later I heard that he spent the war working in the merchant marine and traveled all over the world. He even survived being torpedoed by a German U-boat.

One of the guys (Fred) from home kept complaining about the tea tasting like piss. One morning, another chap smelled the cup and declared that it did smell like pee. That night a couple of the boys in that particular tent stayed awake to see what was going on. Sure enough around midnight, the guy sleeping next to Fred reached over and got the cup. After he peed in it he reached outside and dumped it out and replaced the cup. The mystery was solved and one guy was moved out of that tent the next day.

The two week camp went by pretty fast, and soon we were home. Life was never the same!

I was in grade 12 at the time and found it hard to settle down. I left school in April of 1941 and went to work at the local factory. Training was a little slack during the winter months, but picked up after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

During 1940, the Brocks as a reserve force unit were authorized to train on a war establishment basis with a strength of 780 all ranks. This was a change from the 200 which was set in earlier years, but by 15th August the full complement had been reached. Through some arrangement many of the reserves were called up and shipped to other active units. This went on until

March 1942, when the Brockville Rifles were called upon to form an active unit. It was to be part of the 8th Canadian Division.

To command the new battalion a Major Lewis was brought back from the Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry Highlanders. He was appointed lieutenant-colonel commanding the 1st Battalion of the Brockville Rifles. He was a great guy.

This all happened on March 28, 1942. At the Canada Starch plant there were many for and against joining up. I don't know who started it but on April 7th several carloads of us went to Brockville and signed up in the active force. I think there were around 22 of us. The plant foremen were going crazy trying to fill in the empty spots!

When we reported at the armoury the next day, we were assigned to billets, actually boarding houses that were rented by the army. We were assigned two to a bed, and my poor uncle had to put up with me. At the armoury we were divided up in sections, three sections to a platoon, for marching drills and moving about.

The training sessions were taught by some tough old veterans from the active force, who had been brought back from England. They were hard on us, but at the same time were very fair. They did not play favourites with anyone. After four weeks of training we had to pass a series of tests, eleven in all, all being looked after by different sergeants and officers. The results were to be posted the following Monday.

On Monday morning we all stood around the armoury parade floor waiting to be called out. The first name called was mine and I stood frozen on the spot until the tough old sergeant yelled it again and out to the centre I went. I thought that being chosen marker was great, but I found out that I had made the highest marks in the tests. I was made acting platoon leader. Alas, I didn't have a good enough voice for yelling commands and was delegated to the ranks. I had a lot to learn at the ripe old age of eighteen!

We had a great time training in Brockville; the people were nice to us. We did a lot of hiking along the country roads. It was a good way to get us all in shape.

On one such hike we stopped at a store and bought some ice cream cones. The temperature was around 90 degrees Fahrenheit. I don't think this was allowed according to the training manuals and when we got back, one of the jerks from Brockville ran over to tell the captain all about it. The Captain asked him if he had bought some also and he said that he hadn't. He must have been expecting a medal. The officer told him that he should have, and dismissed him. He was excluded from any social events from then on. What an idiot.

At the end of our basic training a few of the recruits were discharged with various ailments. The rest of us were lined up one afternoon and the medical officer came in with his staff and a box of needles. We all lined up for a shot in the arm. I don't remember what it was for but some of the boys got pretty sick. One guy walking across the armoury floor passed out and his head bounced off the floor. We thought he was done for, but he got up and shook himself and said that he had a headache!

Connaught Ranges

On 17th May 1942 we moved to the Connaught Ranges, west of Ottawa.

This was our first real taste of outdoor camping! We had bell tents, with wooden floors to keep us off the ground. There were six of us in my tent, all from Cardinal, so it was a friendly group. Being the youngest I learned to keep quiet most of the time and watch what the others did and thus I was able to get along pretty well. The silliest part of this camping business was that we

had to roll up all the equipment and line it up outside of the tents. More than once we were caught in a rain storm and came back from the field to wet blankets and equipment.

We started an intensive training program and I can say that we were tired at the end of the day. On May 16th, a number of us were given the exalted rank of lance-corporal. Boy did we think that we were something. It's funny what a little thing like a stripe can do to change a person's, personal outlook. It makes one feel as though you had really done something great!

About this time a big load of old rifles arrived from the United States that had been in storage for a long time. We spent several days cleaning them up. Then it was down to the ranges to zero them in. We would fire five rounds and then the armourer sergeant would adjust the sights. Then we'd fire five more and so on until the rifle would hit what you were aiming at.

Since it was a hot summer we wore shorts and putties and short sleeve shirts with the result that we all received a sunburn on the exposed parts. I had been used to firing guns since I was about ten, so I got pretty good at it, but firing the rifles all week made our shoulders so sore that we had to use a towel to lessen the recoil. But we survived! I really enjoyed this part of the training. We had to zero the rifles in because a large draft was expected during May and June and we knew that most of them didn't know the first thing about weapons. We were starting to feel like veterans.

The drafts arrived in two large lots in May and June, about six hundred in all, just after we had a lot of rain. I felt sorry for the new recruits, walking around in the rain in their civvies. What a mess it was; mud, mud, and more mud. It was quite a job getting them sorted out in company lots and showing them to their tents. Then it was meal and clothing parades. Some of them grumbled a bit. Who wouldn't, but everything went fairly well.

On one occasion, another corporal and I took a truckload into Ottawa for their medical examinations. We had a system, or so I thought. I checked them in one at a time to the medical officers and, when they were finished, sent them outside to wait in the truck. When the last recruit and I went out to the truck, we found it empty. I spied a beer room up the street and went in. The place was full. All eyes were on the floor, hoping that I wouldn't know them. The other corporal was right there with them having a real good time. So I had to join them for one quick beer. I was underage but no one noticed it. Then it was time to start counting heads and we were missing one other rank. I still remember his name, H. Mandel. He was from Toronto. He disappeared and was never found. He had vowed to stay out of the army and I guess he did.

On June 11, 1942 I was promoted to corporal. Best rank in the army! No guard duty, and no kitchen fatigue duties. We did however have more to do in the training of the recruits. They came from all walks of life and there were some darn nice lads in the bunch. One chap, Cappellacci, played an accordion and was a real entertainer. It made the nights in the canteen really worthwhile.

In June we all had to go through a series of "M" tests (intelligence tests). That was so they could put the cooks repairing trucks and the mechanics in the kitchen. That seems to be how things turned out in the army! All the non-commissioned officers had to do the special M tests.

These were a series of timed questions from general knowledge to mathematics and grammar. At the conclusion the officer asked if there were anyone with university training. There was only one. Next he was looking for high school grade 13. Next came grade 12 and I volunteered. Our job was to mark the M tests. I found out that my score was 186 out of 212, whatever that meant.

We were next interviewed and the officer asked me if I wanted to go to officer training school. I was surprised and said that I didn't know. He put down that I was officer or non-commissioned officer material! That was big stuff for an 18 year old out of a small village!

We had some amusing moments while on the parade ground. Every morning we would form up the battalion, marching to the tune of Bonnie Dundee. It was a great way to start the day. The nearby units would all be still listening to our band.

There was a French regiment next to our unit. The favorite command seemed to be “with the ass to the Ottawa river, about face”. The other one that I remember was “the long knife on the big gun put, when I say ‘put’, you fix bayonets”. Nearly every Monday morning, their regimental sergeant-major would scream at them and tell them: “You dirty S.O.B.s, why don't you wash and shave. You're not out in the bush; this is the army.”. It didn't seem to make any difference. Every week it was the same thing. They were a great bunch of lads just the same and they proved themselves on D-day.

Visits home, were few because of the lack of transportation, so one Sunday a bus load arrived full of our friends and relatives. It was like a big picnic outing and a good time was had by all, with many pictures taken. The separation was hard on the family men and there were some tearful partings.

While we were in Connaught, we managed a few trips to Ottawa, and went to a few pubs for a beer or two. We also had a couple of shows at the camp. It all helped to while away the idle hours.

On the 12th of June, I was duty corporal, when an order came in to prepare for a move. The order didn't say to where but I noticed that an advanced party was to be picked ready to move out on the following Sunday. On a hunch I put my name down along with a Corporal Bunce, who was a friend. The old sergeant-major wanted to know who in hell gave me permission to do that. I told him that somebody had to go and why not me. He just laughed and said okay. There was also eight other ranks from each company to go, to make a total of 50 including the officers.

We entrained at the station in Ottawa and we were surprised to find that we would have berths and first class meals on the trip.

One of the highlights of the train ride was the fact that the train stopped and picked up people all along the way. The only train ride this guy ever had was to go from Prescott to Ottawa to see the king and queen in 1939.

A lot of students got on at Ottawa and at North Bay. I met a very cute young girl and we got along very well. It made the trip go fast. She got off at Armstrong and I remember that I carried her books up to her home. Her parents were surprised but very friendly. It was a learning experience to see how these folks lived in such an out of the way town. I imagine they all worked for the railroad.

We had a short stop in Winnipeg and I sent a card home, to let them know that I was heading west. My mother saved the card and I still have it in my scrapbook.

Prince George

The rest of the trip went fast and I also remember seeing a big moose along the tracks, just outside of Jasper, Alberta. After four days and five nights on the train we arrived at Prince George, British Columbia.

The camp was set up about three miles outside of town. It was an empty flat field of about four hundred acres, full of jack pine trees. In the distance there were some high hills, which made for a very nice scene.

We soon settled down and started putting up some tents for the battalion that was due on the 22nd of June. The real work started when the rest of the boys arrived. We started removing trees for a parade ground. Since the jack pine has very shallow roots, it was no big deal to pull them

out. One guy would climb up to the top of the tree and bend it over and the rest would just pull the tree out, roots and all. Some of the larger ones were pulled out by the trucks. At the end of the week we had cleared two hundred acres.

One silly thing happened two days after the troops arrived. The brass decided that we should go on a hike to get rid of the kinks from the train ride. Nobody was used to the high altitude and the guys were dropping like flies. The pickup trucks were full of exhausted and sick guys. The advance party was okay; we had had a week to get acclimatized. I think the brass learned a lesson.

Prince George was a pretty little town, set at the junction of the Fraser and Nechako rivers, which formed the northeast corner of the town. The army camp was set in the southwest area about three miles away. The main industries were mining and lumbering. It looked like a boom town of the 1890s. For a town of 5000, it had seven hotels all going full blast and doing a roaring business.

The camp had a main road running east to west, with the canteen and support units on the right. On the left were the rifle companies and further over were the washing facilities and latrines. We all slept in the standard bell tents, usually six or eight to a tent. I was lucky. There were only four of us in our tent and my brother made beds out of two-inch poles with smaller ones to hold the paillasses, mattresses full of straw.

After a while we had a routine which included sick parade at 0630, followed by breakfast and full parade at 0800. I guess all armies are the same in that you have to have a system. The parade and following inspection got everyone up and going every day. Details were read out, fatigues appointed, and soon the place looked like a thriving city, with platoons marching to their areas for instructions.

The rifle ranges were set up and we spent many days on rifle and Bren gun practice. I also had some training on the two-inch mortar, the anti-tank PIAT (projector, infantry anti-tank) gun, and the Boyes anti-tank rifle. When you fired the Boyes rifle, the recoil would spin you around a foot or two. The 50 calibre shell was too powerful and it was later discontinued.

My brother and some others set up a flying target. A steel cable was mounted up on a hillside and ran down across the ranges. A target was suspended on a set of pulleys and the target really flew down at high speed. Alas, it didn't last very long. Some of the recruits were a little wild with the aim and they managed to cut the steel cable. I think that some of the brass thought that we would be able to shoot down attacking planes!

We had some good times at night in Prince George. There were seven hotels, all going full out every night. The places would be full of miners, trappers and lumbermen. As soon as you sat down they would put a beer in front of you, and they wouldn't let us pay for anything. In one hotel the tables were about eight feet long, oval in shape and would hold 30 to 40 glasses of beer. When the supply ran low, one of the guys would throw twenty dollars on the table and it was refilled. They were heavy drinkers but seemed to hold their beer pretty well. On one of our trips to town, Corporal Bill and I were invited to a lumberjack's room for a drink. When we got there we saw three other guys and a lady of the night. One of them was having his way with the "lady" and she was so drunk I don't think she knew what was going on. The other two were waiting their turn. Talk about an education! The chap we were with grabbed a bottle of rye and he offered to drive us back to camp. He had an old Model A Ford. It was only three miles to the camp, but it took almost 30 minutes. We were having trouble seeing the road! We drank the bottle on the way.

During our stay in Prince George, I met a pretty young lady whose father was an immigrant from Italy. He owned a hotel and I still remember the wonderful meals that I had there on Sundays. In September of 1942 she went to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. I saw her there just before I went overseas. I often wonder how she made out.

The Elks hall was a popular place on Saturday nights. They had a strange custom between dances. Everyone kept walking around in a circle, instead of sitting down or just talking. There always seemed to be lots of ladies to dance with, mostly square dancing. I am sure that we all enjoyed our stay there. They always had lots of coffee and sandwiches for us at the end of the evening. It was a good way to get acquainted.

While there I started having trouble with an ear infection. The medical officers didn't have any idea of how to stop the earaches, so it was grin and bare it!

We had one chap who got so homesick that one night, while drunk, he jumped into the 30 foot pit where the latrine refuse was dumped. Was he a stinking mess!

We were serenaded nightly by the coyotes who were in the hills at the back of the camp. Many a night while coming back to camp through the woods, we could hear the bears rooting in the garbage that was dumped down a hill a mile from camp. I used to run through the woods and sometimes I took a wrong turn and spent some anxious moments wondering where the heck I was. It didn't get dark until midnight, and it got light again around 0300 hours. On many a night I came back in the daylight!

One item that I should perhaps mention is that in September an order came through to the companies for all non-commissioned officers to start motorcycle training. We were to report at 1830 hours, dressed in coveralls, to the motor pool area. They had sort of an oval track laid out in the sandy area, probably to provide a soft landing spot. I think I was the second guy there and inside a half hour I was zipping around the track without any problems. The bikes were heavy Harleys and weighed around 500 pounds. If one fell on you, you could suffer a busted leg or more. I was lucky and didn't have any problems. The third night, someone discovered that the non-commissioned officers were supposed to be sergeants and up only. That was the end of my training, but I had mastered the fine points and this proved to be a lifesaver later in France. It kept me out of the rifle companies.



Back row: John Marin, Bunce, brother Joe Marin, Linnen
Front row: Buckley, Reid, McCurrie

During August, we started going on a lot of route marches that got a little longer each time. They sure got us in good shape. In mid-August we went on an overnight hike and crossed over to

the north side of the Nechako River and camped near the river. The section corporals were supposed to prepare dinner for their sections. However the supply truck didn't make it so all we had were jam sandwiches.

After supper, Corporal Bill and I decided to look around. About a mile from camp we came to a farm house and the old guy asked us in to have a beer. This was against regulations, but no one would know. The old chap was quite talkative and he rambled on for quite a while. Finally he pulled out a deck of cards and proceeded to tell us our fortune. He ended up by saying that the war would be over in about 1100 days. He was almost right to the day. It was August 15, 1942.

The beer tasted good and we asked where we could get some more. He had a boat and we crossed the Nechako River in the dark, with big logs floating by. It is a wonder that we didn't get swamped. Bill and I hiked uptown and bought a case of 24s and back we went. The ale was sure welcomed back at camp, and no questions were asked!

In September the nights starting getting chilly and by October the tent flaps would be frozen shut in the morning with the heavy dew. To try and keep warm, we hung three lanterns from the top of the tent. It helped keep out the chill but the smell of the oil lamps usually gave us a headache.

In mid-October we finally packed up and marched the three miles to the railroad station, accompanied by the band. At 2000 hours we started heading south. Around three in the morning we had a train stop at Kamloops. The temp was 60 degrees Fahrenheit. What a change! Of course we didn't have a clue where we were going.

Nanaimo

The next morning we arrived at Vancouver and detrained at the docks and got on board a ferry boat to Nanaimo. What a nice boat trip that was. The scenery was great and we were looking forward to Vancouver Island.

This camp had wooden barracks, long narrow buildings with bunks along the wall on either side and a potbelly stove in the centre. It was a welcome change from the tents although I rather liked the tents. A big plus was that we had hot water for showers and washing up in the morning. Another big change was that the wake-up and parade times were delayed two hours. Daylight came later in the morning and it got dark at four in the afternoon. We even enjoyed sand-free meals!

In November leaves were starting to be granted and my uncle, brother, and I put in for a leave. We had a 30 day leave which sounds like a long time, but it took five nights and four days to arrive in Toronto. The tickets cost \$20.05 each, return! When we set out the Salvation Army made up boxes of sandwiches and candy, which they sold for one dollar a box. This was a bargain since the package lasted for two days.

When we stopped in Calgary, we hiked the ten blocks to the liquor store. They didn't ask for identification, just the new registration card which they stamped. We had to run all the way back to avoid missing the train.

We stopped off at Fort William to visit some relatives that I had never heard of. My mother's uncle and his family owned a store there. A good time was had by all. We had time to visit a small cafe out at Kakabeka Falls, where they served beer. I kept looking out for a cop, but I was assured that it was okay.

I got off in Toronto to visit a gal that I had met in Cardinal a few years back. Her father was the purchasing agent, for the local plant. She was going to the wireless school for training and then to the air force.

The time at home went by very fast. There were people to see and things to do and soon we were heading back to Nanaimo. This trip west was very different from my first one. The seats were made of wood with a centre part covered with leather. They were not very comfortable! Some of the other chaps who went home in December landed in the middle of an ice storm. The power was off for six weeks and it was pretty tough on those who were on leave.

When we arrived back in Vancouver, my brother and uncle went to Chilliwack where they had been on courses. I took the ferry to Nanaimo and since my leave didn't expire until 1600 hours, I went down to the docks and rented a boat. I sailed blissfully up the coast, north of Nanaimo, until around 1400 hours. When I turned around and tried to find the dock I was lost. I had forgotten about the high tides that they have there. It took two hours to find the dock. It was sure nice to get back on land.

In January, Corporal Bill and I were sent down to Esquimalt on a 50 calibre machine gun course. This gun had 474 parts to it. They had some good instructors and after two weeks I could take it apart and reassemble it again in record time. The high point of the course was shooting at a target towed by a small plane. I aimed high and almost shot down the plane. Lucky for the pilot we were only allowed 20 rounds!

While there we visited Victoria in the evenings. It was a beautiful city compared to what we were used to. It has two main streets, called "Douglas" and "Government", one for business offices and one was used by the ladies of the night looking for business.

All too soon the course was over and it was back to camp. On the way back we stopped at a place called "Malahat Drive", where the movie *The Commandos Strike at Dawn* was filmed. This place is 60 miles north of Victoria.

Back at camp we continued with weapons training and lots of route marches. In January of 1943 we got a new lieutenant as platoon officer. He must have been a hold over from World War One. He sure had some stupid ideas on training. He kept telling anyone who would listen how tough he was. He was about 5 feet 7 inches and might have weighed 150 pounds. The colonel decided we needed an overnight hike with all our equipment on our back. This included a large pack with the blankets on top, plus a small haversack, and finally our weapons. The march started off okay, with "pipsqueak" leading the way.

There is a small mountain just west of Nanaimo and up we went to about 1000 feet of elevation. I noticed as we neared the top that the lieutenant seemed to be slowing down. We made camp in a nice pasture-like area and made our supper, each section looking after themselves. I was our cook. The temperature was around 40 degrees Fahrenheit. We had several fires going to provide a little heat. When I turned in, I took my boots off and kept them inside the blankets, hoping that they would dry out during the night.

During the night we received two inches of snow and everything was soggy. Some of the boys put their shoes close to the fire to dry them out, with the result that they cooked the leather soles and some of them fell off. What a mess. After breakfast we headed down the hill, back to camp. The hike was 20 miles more or less. When we arrived back at camp, our expert took off his pack and threw it on the ground and wondered aloud who was the idiot who had planned the march. He was exhausted and that was the end of his bragging.

I started having ear trouble again due to the dampness. Rather than miss out on some training, I took a carpentry course in Nanaimo. It was fun. We had an old English chap who was a retired architect and builder. We started the course drawing up plans for a house (9 feet × 9 feet). Next we proceeded to build it. It was quite an interesting time. I still have the drawings.

There seemed to be a lot of ladies in Nanaimo, and I met one at a hockey game. Her name was Dorothy B. Her mother ran a store. She was a fine young lady and we had some good times

together. She took me to a lot of dances that her church group put on. I remember having a lot of good meals at her home. It sure made being away from home more pleasant.

Another favourite spot was the roller skating rink. I spent a lot of time there and met some of the local gals who loved to skate. One Saturday night I got in with a group that was out for some fun. After the rink closed we headed out for a few beers, after which one young lady invited us up for a lunch. Who could refuse. It was soon apparent that it wasn't your regular lunch break! My young lady grabbed my hand and led me into one of the other rooms. The next thing I saw was her panties on the floor. She must have noticed the dumb look on my face, because she pulled me down on the couch beside her. I hated to admit to her that this was a new experience for me, but I rallied to the cause and we did what comes naturally! One of the other girls came by and asked what was going on. My gal told her that she was helping the war effort by keeping the soldiers happy. I thought that was a good idea!

The next day I started having pains in my stomach muscles and the following morning I had to go on sick parade, because I had a hard time bending over. The medical officer checked me all over and said that he didn't see anything wrong with me. Then he looked at me with a big grin and wanted to know if I had been cheating with some guys wife. He hit it right on the head and I never felt so silly. I never went on sick parade to that medical officer again all the time that we were out there.

Long Beach

About this time the Japs were starting to flex their muscles and had invaded two of the islands west of Alaska. Orders came through for a move to Long Beach, on the west side of the island. We went as far as Port Alberni in trucks. Here we transferred to a small coastal mail and supply boat for the trip up to Ucluelet (pronounced: You - clue - let). The ship was called "The Haida". The boat was not outfitted for carrying passengers. There was only a cabin for the captain and a section for the crew of three. We were all huddled on deck and to make matters worse it started to rain.

We arrived in Ucluelet just as it was getting dark. I was put in charge of a section to unload our equipment. The rain came down in buckets and I was swearing at the situation when the captain announced that he had to leave. Half of our equipment was still on board. He said that he would drop the rest off on his way back.

Just then I heard a voice behind me say: "What's the matter boys?". I turned around and there was a chap from Cardinal. He was too old for overseas service so he was working in the air force hospital. It was 2000 hours and we were hungry. He took us over to the air force mess and we had a good meal. We slept there as well that night. Next day we went up the coast to Long Beach where our camp was being erected. It was back to the bell tents again. Long Beach is a very pretty area. It is now a park.

With all the training that we had, the brass started sending reinforcement drafts overseas. From Prince George in September of 1942, two officers and 71 other ranks went. From Nanaimo in December of 1942, four officers and 105 other ranks were sent. Next February, one officer and 21 other ranks left.

The unit was now down to a little over half the numbers that we had when we were at Connaught. Two companies were stationed near Tofino at an air force base, about twenty-five miles north of Ucluelet, and we were scattered along the coast in between the two places. The guys that were stationed at Tofino had the advantage of being able to go to the air force canteen on their off hours. They also attended shows there in the evenings. They had a pretty good setup.

We set up our tents two hundred yards from the Pacific Ocean, at the back of an open space, next to a great stand of fir trees that seemed to fill the island. It was a change being on our own, away from the main part of the battalion. Our three sections set up our tents partially out of sight of the main trail that ran along the beach. Being isolated meant that we had to post guards around the clock. The guards also kept the fire going in the cookhouse.

The first building that we put up was a shack to serve as the cookhouse. This was built from scrap lumber and with a tarpaulin for the walls. We had some tin for the roof. It didn't have much ventilation and the poor cooks started complaining about the heat. Our officer decided that since I had been on a carpenter course, that I should do something about the heat. I built a cupola, trying to imitate the style that I had seen on barn roofs. It didn't look too bad and when we cut the hole in the roof, a great gush of hot air came out. It looked pretty rustic and did the job, the only drawback that showed up was when it rained. The louvers weren't set right and the water poured in. The cook said that he would rather have the rain than the heat.

One other problem that came up was an invasion of rats. I don't know where they came from, but they must have been attracted by the garbage that was dumped in a big pile away from the camp. The rats were from six to eight inches in length. The traps that we put out were of no use. I suggested to the lieutenant that if I had a 22 calibre rifle, I could shoot them. The lieutenant went to Ucluelet and came back with a rifle and 22 short ammunition. I kept the night guard company, and as we sat in the cookhouse, I shot 23 of the rats on the first night. We put out some cheese and scraps for the rats and there would be two or three of them eating at the same time. I would shoot one of them and it didn't seem to bother the rest; they just kept on eating. By the end of the week most of them had been eliminated and we only got two or three a night after that first time. This also provided a sort of entertainment for the night guards. It helped keep them awake.

At Long Beach, we started cutting down trees to make access roads in case of a Jap attack. The trees were eight to ten inches in diameter and 60 to 80 feet high. I had never seen trees like them. They were cut in eight foot lengths and laid side by side to form a corduroy road into the bush behind our camp. We had a guy in our section who had worked in the bush lumbering and he had asked for a two-bitted axe. He had that axe so sharp that you could shave with it. It was quite a trick to use that axe, but he gave me a few tips and I got pretty good with it. When we finished I had the honour of trying out the road in a Jeep, driven by our officer. I think riding a wild horse would have been easier.

As we were on a wartime footing, we were expected to carry our rifles at all times. I shot a big fat partridge on one outing and the cook roasted it for me. I told everybody that it was wild crow. I don't think that they knew the difference.

There were a lot of eagles in the area and one pair had a nest near our camp. One of the guys couldn't resist and he shot one out of the tree. It was a great looking bird. We measured the wingspan and it was seven feet, two inches.

We spent a lot of time on the beach, in our off hours, collecting various type of shells. Starfish were a favorite item. They would be nailed to a board and left out in the sun and, when they dried out, we would ship them home as a souvenir. One day I found a blue coloured glass ball. These were used by the Japanese fishermen as floats for their fishing nets. Some of the guys caught some nice trout in a stream just back of the camp.

I think that it rained nearly every day, or else it drizzled. It was a wonder that we didn't get web feet! Keeping neat and tidy was hard to do, but we tried to look our best.

In March, a "secret weapon" was brought up to our camp to the delight of our officer. It was a Bren gun carrier with a two pounder mounted in the centre just ahead of the engine. Down to the beach we all went to try it out. A target had been set up on one of the small islands two hundred

Back to the east

We stopped in Calgary for an hour and made the ten block dash to the liquor store. Back on the train we started to party and soon had a singsong going. That night someone suggested the we peek at the records and since they were not sealed it was easy to take a look. It was amazing at all the info that was in them. All too soon we arrived in Kingston and were given a two week furlough.



Before starting our furlough, we had to have a medical exam, similar to the above picture. One of the guys showed up so drunk that he could hardly stand up. When the doctors put the light on him he could see a lot of "mechanized dandruff" (crabs) on him. He told the poor guy to collect his shaving gear and shave around his privates. Boy was he a mess when he finished. He must have cut himself a half dozen times and was bleeding. The orderly smeared some blue ointment on him and it must have stung, because he sobered up in a hurry.

We boarded a bus at Kingston expecting to be home in two hours. The first shock came when the driver would only sell us tickets for fifty miles, or as far as Brockville. This was due to a stupid policy made by the government so people would stay home and save gasoline for the war effort. At Brockville, we tried to get tickets for Cardinal but the bus was full. There we were after a 3000 mile trip, stranded twenty-two miles from home. We went up and down the streets looking to see if someone had left their car keys in the car; if so we were prepared to steal one. Finally I called the taxi driver in Cardinal, and although he wasn't supposed to go out after dark for passengers, he came up and drove us home. I vowed that I would never vote for that party, when I reached voting age!

At home everyone was worried at our leaving. Before we left I saw that our old row boat was tied up west of Cardinal. I don't know how it got there but we had to get it back. The water was high and I stripped off my trousers and waded out. By the time we reported back at the armoury I was starting to feel a little sick. That night we boarded the train and started off for the east coast.

The train traveled through the night and next morning stopped at a small town in Quebec. We were not allowed to get off, as there were a lot of civilians at the station. Of course most of the soldiers were whistling at the girls and as the train pulled out several of the girls lifted up their skirts and exposed themselves. I thought that some of the guys were going to jump off the train.

It was a long and tiresome ride, trying to sleep on the old wooden seats. By the time we arrived in Halifax, I had a temperature of 103 degrees Fahrenheit. It was a great way to start the trip overseas, in the sick bay!

Chapter Two

Great Britain

The ship we sailed on was called “The Andes”. There were about 3000 troops on board. When we boarded, the first place that I went to was the sick bay. The sergeant in charge told me to come back in the morning. An officer overheard and asked what was wrong. I told him that I was sick. He took my temperature, and it was 103 degrees Fahrenheit. He gave the sergeant a blast and I ended up in the sick bay. It must have been the best part of the ship. It was very clean and quiet with beds that were anchored to the floor and that had nice white sheets. I spent five days there before being released.

It seemed that the ship, sailing all alone, must have been travelling a southern route, for when I got up on deck, the temperature was 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Everybody was trying to get a sun tan. A lot of the boys on deck were either playing cards or shooting dice. My brother had a crown and anchor game going on. It looked to me like he was making a few bucks!

The food wasn't too bad, although it was rumoured that the sausages were filled with sawdust. They sure tasted like it but I believe they had bread filling mixed in with some meat. Since we had just left Canada we had lots of powdered eggs and bacon. We also filled up at the canteen on Oreo cookies and canned peaches, my favorite snacks. It must have kept the cooks busy feeding all the troops. Nobody really complained.

The sleeping arrangements were something. You had the choice of using a hammock or sleeping on the tables. We were all jammed in like sardines. Of course, every morning all the bedding had to be rolled up and stowed away, so the tables could be cleared for eating and playing cards.

I think that we were all a bit anxious of what lay ahead. We had sailed on the the 13th of May 1943, and had arrived on the 22nd of May. On the way over, the ship dropped a depth charge and we wondered if it was for practice or the real thing.

After nine days of sailing we entered the port of Liverpool, on the west coast of England. The ship docked early in the morning. The docks were crowded with the workers unloading cargo from several ships. We thought it looked silly to see some of the dockworkers standing around drinking tea at that hour of the morning. We had a lot to learn about English customs and how good a cup of “tay” would taste on a chilly morning.

After breakfast, we gathered all our equipment and formed up at the docks wondering what was next. When I had left home, my mother gave me a ring that she had been keeping. It was a gold ring with a garnet stone. It was really nice! While standing around I was playing with the ring, a nervous reaction. The ring slipped off and I couldn't find it. The order to move was given but I was rooting around the tracks looking for it. Finally I found it and I had to run a couple of hundred yards to catch up. Boy did I get shit! A great way to start out in a strange country. I still have the ring.

Farnborough

After an all day train ride we arrived at the town of Farnborough, southwest of London. This was and still is an army town.

We marched over to the parade ground, waiting to see where our billets were, when a voice hollered, “What the hell are you doing here?”. It was Corporal Frank H. from Cardinal who had gone over in a previous draft. We all had a great meeting and we knew that we would have a guide to show us the ropes. While we were all at ease, sitting on the grass, I found a four leaf

clover. It was the only one that I have ever found. I put it in my army paybook and I still have it to this day!

I think that the barracks were built in the days of Wellington. They were stone and brick, with no inside finishing. They were always cold and the small fireplaces were of little or no use. We were not allowed to put any heat on unless it got really cold. It seems that there was a shortage of coal!

Lucky for us that it was summer time. The bunks were double decked, with steel slats two inches wide with a straw filled mattress called a "paillasse". They were not very soft!

It was the end of May, and the weather was beautiful. We didn't mind all the marching and training which started at once. I guess they thought that idle people would get in trouble. We had to do our basic training all over again.

Finally it was over and our ranks were confirmed. This meant that it didn't matter where we would be sent, our ranks stayed the same. It meant twenty cents a day more!

The brass decided that half of our pay should be sent home or we would waste it on beer. At that time the British pound was worth 4.84 dollars in Canadian funds, so our small pittance didn't go very far.

After being confined to barracks for two weeks, we were allowed to venture out and explore the town. I didn't care for the pubs, too noisy and full of smoke, so I went to the Saturday night dance. One guy called it "the weekly hog wrestle", all you could smell was arseholes and armpits! That was quite a description!

I was dancing with one of the British army girls, when I noticed that her shoulder patch said "ATS". When I asked her what it stood for, she got a little upset and wanted to know if I was trying to be smart. When I explained that I had just arrived two weeks earlier, she said that it stood for "Auxiliary Territorial Service". Another soldier overheard and leaned over to tell me that it stood for "Army Tail Supply". Boy was she mad! I heard later that they were also referred to as "officer ground sheets".

I discovered that they were a fine bunch of girls and hard workers. The English gals were very pretty with a natural complexion. Most of them didn't use any paint on their faces. They were outgoing and liked all the attention that the Canadian soldiers gave them. I guess we were not as reserved as the average Englishman. Since we made such poor wages, everyone went Dutch treat and nobody seemed to mind it.

In June we got 48-hour passes and Corporal H. and I went to London, only thirty miles away. London seemed to be a world all by itself and indeed it was. The place was packed with people and soldiers from many different countries and of course the civilian workers.

The underground was a very busy place. The first thing that I noticed about the underground stations was that, along with the various names of the different lines, they had a different colour for each line. Above the gates leading to the rails, they also had a coloured bulb corresponding to each line. All one had to do was follow the coloured bulb and you wouldn't get lost. The reason for this was because of the many different nationalities that were in the country at this time. The subway was also used by thousands who slept there each night, along the platforms. They made great bomb shelters.

I was all for securing a bed for the night, but Corporal H. said not to worry. We thought that we should see all of London first, so we boarded a tram and asked for a transfer. This was important so we could switch from one tram to another. We rode around for four hours, and saw a lot of the city. The east side had a lot of bomb damage and many burned out buildings. That evening we went pub crawling, as it was called, until it was time to find a place to sleep. We went to the Sally Ann and my friend said just jump in any bed. Two hours later I was rudely awakened by a soldier

and told to get out of his bed. Corporal H. said to get another one. Four times I was awakened in this manner. I vowed that next time I would find a place to sleep first and go drinking afterwards. One highlight of this first visit was that I finally saw *Gone With The Wind*, which had been playing at the same theatre for over two years.

On one of our trips to London, we went to Victoria Station to catch the train back to camp. I noticed a pub nearby, called the "Windsor Dive", so we went over to investigate it. It was full of servicemen and was noisy and full of smoke. Next door was the Lord High Admiral Pub, and it looked a little cleaner, so in we go. We bought a pint of ale at the bar and took one of the nicer seats in a corner, so we could watch what was going on.

A short time later in comes a major from a Canadian unit, dressed in kilts and a fine jacket. He went over to the bar and ordered a pint of light ale. Just as he was raising his glass, a young (?) lady of the night, reached under his kilt, grabbed him by the testicle, and hung on. He froze with his arm in mid-air. He was paralyzed and couldn't move. It must have seemed like a long time, but after a few seconds the gal finally let go, and the poor guy ran out as fast as he could go. Everyone there thought that it was funny, but I bet that the major never forgot it. One of the old cronies said that he had no business being there out of his element.

Our training was finished and we were expecting to be sent out to regiments that needed reinforcements. My brother, Joe, and some others were sent to Africa. I stayed behind because the brass didn't want family members in the same units. I supposed it made the odds on survival a little better for the families.

In mid-June, twenty-four of us were picked for a guard of honour, for a Field Marshall Ironside. He was the Chief of Imperial Staff for the British army. He was invited to a garden party and was entitled to a guard of honour at this important function.

We started three weeks of intensive training with marching and rifle drill two hours a night after supper. Those old Enfield rifles are heavy enough at any time, but put the long bayonet on and it can sure tire you out in a hurry. It was strange though that, after the three weeks were up, we could throw them around like toothpicks! Finally the big day arrived. We had everything shined up spick and span, or so I thought. I never had much of a beard and I dry shaved once in awhile, so that morning I thought that I had better clean up.

When we formed up on parade the major in charge looked us over and stopped in front of me. "Corporal", he said, "You didn't shave". I was so surprised that I blurted out that I had. The soldier next to me said that he had seen me shaving. The major was so surprised that he just grinned and said to stand a little closer to the blade next time.

The inspection party went off without a hitch. The field marshal took all of about twenty seconds to march down the line. It was a bit of a letdown after all that extra work. We had a good time afterwards talking to some of the pretty English gals and enjoying some of the fancy food that was laid out for the party.

At the end of June, I was posted to the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. It was a mechanized support battalion, with 4.2 inch mortars and 50 calibre machine guns. There was a chap there from the Cardinal area, so it made going to a strange outfit a little easier. I was given a quick course on the 4.2 inch mortar, how to set up and zero in on a target. I was pretty good at math and compass work so I didn't have any problems. I learned later that a Morris from Prescott was in the intelligence section but I never did get a chance to meet him.

In July the Brigade went on a two-week exercise. This meant tearing down our existing camp and packing everything ready to move out in the field. The brigade went out into the countryside and set up a temporary camp. In an actual battle zone this would be called a "start line" with all troop movements to be coordinated from this area. Looking back, it all made sense since

you have to have a starting point in order to control the troop movements. We hopped all around the countryside doing mortar firing with dummy bombs.

Hospitalization

After a few days my ears started to bother me and one morning when I woke I couldn't hear a damn thing. I reported to the medical officer, but he didn't know what the trouble was so he sent me to the hospital.

The hospital was the Number 8 Canadian General Hospital in Horsham. The only treatment seemed to be keep warm and take sulfa powder. Boy was that a pain trying to swallow some damn powder. After two weeks my hearing returned but the ears were still infected.

This was around the time of the war in Africa and Italy, and there were some Italian prisoners of war in the hospital. The doctors were having a hard time trying to understand the lingo. Someone in the office saw my paybook and noticed that my parents were from Italy. I was detailed to accompany the doctor on his rounds. This was a very interesting time. It didn't take long to find out which ones were faking sickness. They were a young bunch that had been drafted, and were sure glad that the war was over for them. I had a great time playing cards with them and learning some of the lingo all over again.

Since I was an ambulatory patient I was free to go out for walks around the area. The movie houses were also free to anyone wearing the hospital blues. Every patient had a blue jacket and light blue trousers, not a bad outfit. Anyone could spot you a mile away. I saw a lot of airmen who had been burned in their planes. Some were covered in bandages and only had as small hole to see out. Some had casts over half of their body, but I never heard any of them complain. The average British service man was a pretty tough guy! The hospital was staffed with nursing sisters, who carried the rank of officer, so it was hands off to the average joe. There were some very pretty gals there!

Shortly after the war started in Sicily, there were rumours of a move. In mid-August, we were told that we would be moving to another hospital. A hospital troop train was readied and the hospital staff, aided by some troops, started moving us. I was tagged as a stretcher case, which was a pain in the ass. However it was all in aid of providing experience for when the casualties arrived from Sicily. I noticed that the Red Cross train was well marked. When we got underway the people along the tracks must have thought that we were battle casualties for they gave us a rousing cheer. After an all day train ride we arrived in Birmingham. The hospital here was located south of the city. It wasn't too long before we went to town and started looking around.

The centre of the city has a big circular street that branched out into a half-dozen streets. It is called the "Bull Ring". We had a great time visiting some of the pubs and shows. We were not allowed to do any drinking, but we enjoyed playing darts and cribbage, a popular game at that time.

When we first arrived I was asked to help out in the ward doling out the food at meal times. One thing that I noticed was the way that they made the tea. They took a stainless pail, filled it with boiling water, and dumped in a handful of tea leaves. By the time it was served it was as black as ink! One day I got an idea and asked the nurse for some gauze and I put the tea leaves in it and tied it up and then dunked it in the pail. When it had a nice colour I took out the bag, and we all had some good tasting tea. This was probably the first tea bag!

South of the hospital, about five miles away, in a low-lying area was an aircraft factory. Every two or three days they rolled out a Lancaster bomber. They ran the engines for a couple of hours and then checked them over. This was repeated a couple of times and then a crew would

board the plane and take off. This was a good way to see if was airworthy. The British machine operators and assemblers must have been pretty good at their jobs.

As I have mentioned before, the nursing sisters were very pretty, but one in particular caught my eye. She caught me staring at her a few times. One day she asked me to help her stack some blankets and other boxes in a small cupboard. The place was only six by ten foot in size, and when we got inside she closed the door and got on a ladder to pile up the articles as I handed them to her. Boy was I ever tempted but she was a second lieutenant and mixing was not allowed. When we finished she sure gave me a strange look. What a missed opportunity!

Of course that didn't stop me from looking at her and wondering. A couple of days later, she came to me and said she needed help stacking some sheets, in the same storage cupboard. I was only too glad to help. When we went in the closet with an armful of sheets, she kicked the door shut and my heart started thumping. When I was handing up the sheets, I managed to rub my hand along her knee, accidentally. She must have liked it because her legs spread a bit and I got bolder and rubbed a little farther up. The next thing I knew, she jumped off the stool and grabbed me in a big hug. Well she didn't have any underclothes on and I had on, just part of the hospital blues, as they were called, so it didn't take long to get into some love making. She had more experience than I and we sure had some fun in that storage closet. I tried to contact her later but she had been shipped out to a hospital unit in Italy.

I noticed one day that an egg came in with the rations every day and nobody seemed to know who it was for. Rather than waste it I ate it. It sure tasted better than powdered eggs.

In one of few letters home, I asked my mother to send me some oil of wintergreen. When it finally arrived, I put some of it on cotton batts and stuffed it in my ears. After a month, my ears finally cleared up and it was back to army camp at Farnborough. Because I had been away from training so long, I had to start all over again.

My friend, Hill

Money was always a problem. I was always broke, even though the beer was only a shilling for a pint. One day, out of the blue, I received a parcel from a tobacco company with 1000 cigarettes in it. It seems that a friend of the family had borrowed my accordion to play at one of the local dances. He was paid five dollars for the evening and used one dollar to send me one thousand cigarettes. Since I didn't smoke I stood outside the pub or the theatre and sold them to anyone that came along for one and a half shilling per pack. I ended up making more money than the chap who sent them to me.

About this time another draft had come over and I met a chap from Niagara Falls. His name was Major (not his rank) Hill. His family were the ones who "flirted" with the falls in a barrel. Boy could he put away the mild and bitters beer. We went to London on a weekend pass to look the town over.

Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square were two of the popular places to see and be seen. The ladies of the night were called "Piccadilly Commandos" and were always present looking for business. I noticed some of the soldiers going up the alleyways with their women, but they came back in a few minutes. I asked one of the gals what was going on and she replied that the boys were in a hurry and just having a "knee trembler" for a shilling. They must have been acrobats to be having standup sex!

There seemed to be a lot of the third sex on the streets and some of the soldiers would invite them up the alleys. Here they would beat up on them and take any money that they might have on

them. Of course the victims couldn't go to the police, or they would be charged, with prostitution. I guess it was illegal in those days.

We noticed that there was a fancy looking pub just off Piccadilly and it was full of officers and their ladies. Hill thought that we should go in and have a drink. We sure got a lot of dirty looks from the officers present, but the barman never said a word and just poured the drinks. When we got the bill we decided that the price was too high and we left.

On the Saturday we decided to go to the Waxworks Museum. We took the underground to Baker Street and then got on a tram going west. There was a fine looking elderly lady sitting ahead of us, so I asked her for directions. She said that she was getting off at the same stop and would show us where to go. After giving us directions, she asked if we would like to come up to her apartment for tea, around four o'clock. She would be having a few friends in. We agreed.

After our visit to the waxworks, all we had to do was go across the road to her apartment building. When we knocked on the door, a British officer answered and we thought that we had the wrong place. We started to salute but he said, "Never mind that Canada, this is the right place and welcome". It was the lady's son. Boy what a nice place it was and the furnishings were beautiful. I had never seen anything like it before. The people there made us feel right at home until Hill, half drunk, started talking about the upper class in England that looked down on the poor people. I could have knocked his head in. I think they were glad to see us go! I have often thought of the poor impression we left.

Then it was back to the camp and more training. It was a real pain to be doing all the drills over again, but it had been over three months since I had been on parade. I didn't mind it too much and it was a lot easier this time.

One day after a hard day of drill, we were back in the barracks when Hill let out a yell that he had an awful sharp pain in his right side. I had my appendix removed in 1940, so I had an idea that that was the trouble. I ran to the medical officers for help and two orderlies came over with a stretcher. As they were carrying him out, he whispered, "Hide all my clothes". I thought that sounded strange, but I put them out of sight.

Ten days later he was back on light duty and the first thing he did was to complain that his clothes were missing. He was issued new clothes. He then retrieved the old ones and hid the new ones, with the explanation that he would sell the new ones on his next leave.

In November we applied for and were granted four day passes. This time we decided to go to Manchester. We arrived at the London station early to make sure that we would get a seat on the train. We got on board a half hour ahead of departure and I promptly fell asleep. I woke up two hours later and a lady was holding me in her arms. Boy did I feel silly. She said that it was okay and not to get upset over it. Everyone had a good laugh over it and we chatted the rest of the trip.

Manchester was an industrial city and the day we arrived there it was very foggy. I didn't mind the fog, but it made the soot specks settle out all over your clothes and face. We checked in at the hostel and proceeded to look for customers. It was rumoured that the bus drivers would be the best customers. We started riding the buses and it didn't take long to find a buyer, especially for the heavy underwear. After awhile we spotted someone following us. It looked like a page out of an old movie. I had to laugh; the guy was dressed in a raincoat complete with a fedora and carrying a cane. He was trying to be invisible, but we soon noticed that he was following us all over town. We went down a street and in an air raid shelter and, sure enough, he came in also. When we went out the exit, we ran around and back in again. Boy was he confused, wondering how we had disappeared so fast. That was the last of Sherlock!

That night we went to the Palais Royal, a very nice dancing spot. I met and had a dance with a very pretty miss named Kathryn. Hill wanted more action, so we left and went to a nearby pub. An old chap invited us to his table. We proceeded to have a few ales. I think we had too many. A couple of gals invited themselves over and bought a round, so we had to dance with them. By midnight everyone was in a great mood. The old chap invited us to his home for a midnight lunch. It sounded like a fine idea, so I brought a dozen ale in case we ran short and up the street we went.

One of the girls was pretty tight and bragged about how strong she was. Hill said she was full of it. To prove it she said that she could lift Hill up off the ground. She tried twice and the third time she lifted him clear off the ground, and in the process, shit herself. What a mess. We left there in a hurry! At the old guy's home we had a great lunch, and then it was back to the hostel.

I wasn't much of a drinker and the next morning I had a hard time getting my head off the pillow. As I was getting up I heard a tinkle and Hill jumped up and asked if I had bottle of ale in my coat. It turned out that I had six bottles. He emptied two in two minutes and I expected him to keel over. But he was revived, so I tried one and it made me feel better. I had learned my lesson. Then it was back to camp again.

Hospitalization again

The following week after a hard day on the obstacle course, I was washing up and noticed a dribble of blood, oozing out of an old (1940) appendix scar. I reported to the medical officer and he sent me to the hospital. There the doctor injected a dye in the small opening and took an x-ray. It showed a small channel leading to a spot about half an inch size. When I had the operation some part of the intestine must have stuck to the stomach wall. The exertion must have torn it off and thus the blood. The next day they decided to operate. I was given a spinal injection, which numbs the body from the neck down. I was awake during the operation, but couldn't see what they were doing. When that damn freezing started coming out, I sure felt awful.

After eleven days I was discharged from the hospital and along with six others we were taken to a convalescent centre. Here we got out of the truck and formed up on the road. The sergeant in charge said that we had to march down to the doctor's office, a mile away. I tried to explain to him that I had just had an operation and I was supposed to take it easy. He wouldn't listen! When the doctor examined the incision which was bleeding, he asked what happened and I explained that I had walked the mile to his office. Was he mad. He called the sergeant and gave him hell. I rode in the truck back to the centre and the Sergeant walked.

The rehabilitation centre must have been an estate that the army had taken over. It was old but in good shape with twenty acres of land. It had a path that went all around the grounds, and was used by the ex-patients for exercise. I had to take it easy for a week but soon started walking around the grounds. By the time I left I could run a mile with no problems.

It was boring with nothing to do. That all changed after the major in charge noticed that I had my junior matriculation. I was put in the library to give out books and help the many who were taking courses. It was a good way to put the time in. It was hard to believe, but some of the soldiers could barely read and write. I went over a lot of the basics with some of them and I think I helped out a few.

There was a sergeant from a French unit and he couldn't speak any English. He started by learning how to pronounce the ABCs. By the time I left he could carry on a light conversation.

Infantry reinforcement unit

After a month I went back to the number five Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit and was told that I would be on light duty for six months. I think this was standard procedure after any operation.

About this time I received a letter from my uncle who was in the navy, on the Atlantic escort service, and he said that he would be in London for a four-day visit. We could always tell when a convoy had arrived; liver would be on the menu the next day. He had joined up in 1940 and had served on corvettes and mine sweepers on the Atlantic run.

I went to London, a city of twelve million, and wondered where to start looking. A lot of servicemen stayed up in the Russell Square area, so I checked in at the hostel there and looked at the bulletin board and, sure enough, he had checked in. That night I went down to the Canada House near Trafalgar Square where there was nightly dancing and lots of ladies and beer.

Just as I arrived the air raid sirens went off and everyone in the building headed for the underground shelter. I went upstairs to get a beer and join in the festivities. At the same time my uncle was upstairs and when the siren went off he went to the basement shelter. We must have passed on the stairs because of the crowd.

The next morning we had a great meeting and along with his two buddies started on a bottle of good rum, which they had brought with them. Tony and I went to a different museum every morning and toured the pubs in the afternoon. In the west end of London there was a great hall, called "Hammersmith Palace", which we decided to visit. It was a huge place with a large dance floor and an upper balcony.

The price of admission was ten shillings, which I thought was steep. After all the beer wasn't free. I noticed soldiers coming in the back door and found out that some enterprising young fellow was letting soldiers in for five shillings. Leave it to some Canadian to make a buck! We used that entrance the next time we went to the hall. It was a good place to spend an evening with lots of pretty girls for dancing and loud music. The snacks were cheap and good.

We found time to visit Saint Paul's Cathedral. It was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and was built between 1675 and 1710. Nelson and Wellington are two of the many famous people buried there. We climbed up the 164 steps to the walkway around the bottom of the dome. The view of London from up there was great. The dome is slightly out of round and by standing on one side and whispering, the sound will carry over to the other side because of its elliptical shape. There was a lot of bomb damage and in one part there was an unexploded bomb.

Rear party

When I returned to camp I found that I had to pack and leave for an unknown camp along with a lieutenant. It seemed strange for just the two of us to be going out to a unit. We arrived at a large estate, just as it was getting dark, where a company of military police were stationed. As I was getting settled one chap remarked that he hoped that I was the mechanic they were waiting for. I couldn't tell him why I was there because I didn't know myself.

The next day I had a chance to look around and discovered that the estate covered over five hundred acres. The house had twenty rooms and the military police were in the servants quarters. The estate had its own generating plant, a huge twelve cylinder Diesel engine with an electric generator. There were also twenty batteries for power storage. When I checked out the grounds, I found a herd of fourteen deer. There was also a trout stream running through the grounds. It was a beautiful place, partially taken over by the army.

There didn't seem to be anything for me to do. I had learned earlier not to volunteer for anything. I spent a lot of time down by the water reading and feeding grass to the deer.

After a week of this leisure the captain in charge found me and thought I should be doing something else. He said that the boys were getting a little soft and needed some exercise and drill. I was detailed for the job. The next day we started with a half-hour on the parade ground and then went for a mile hike. Talk about grumbling and complaining. I guess they were all out of shape from riding around on their patrols. They were a good bunch and took it all in stride.

I finally found out that the lieutenant and I were on what was called a "rear party". We would be required to account for and return to storage depots any equipment left behind when the unit moved out to the field to prepare for the invasion.

After being there for six weeks the company moved to a small village called "Maresfield". Here we were billeted in homes that had been taken over by the army. They were plain old houses and most of the furniture had been removed. The military police guys were a good bunch in spite of the fact that most of the servicemen hated them. They had a job to do and sometimes there was no easy way to do it. By now they all knew why the lieutenant and I were there and rumours started flying around.

I still didn't have anything to do, officially, so I hung around the motor pool and helped out where needed. I started going out with the ration truck in the mornings and after awhile the driver started giving me driving lessons. I should have been in the air force. It seemed that when I got behind the wheel I only had one speed, fast! After a few weeks I got pretty good and did a lot of the driving.

The next item on my agenda was to learn to handle the Norton motorcycle. After a quick lesson I went flying down the road with no trouble at all. I was feeling pretty cocky and when I came back I zoomed up the driveway and grabbed the clutch except that on the Norton, as opposed to the Harley, the clutch turned out to be the front wheel brake and over the handlebars I flew. The Captain, standing in the doorway, yelled "ride'em cowboy". Did I feel silly! But with nothing broken, I kept up the practice.

About this time I received a letter from home, telling me that the next door neighbour had a sister who was living in a small town called "Henfield". It is just north of Brighton. I took a weekend pass and went down to visit them. They were a nice family of four, a son, John and a daughter, Margaret. Mister Greenfield was in the market garden business, which was considered vital to the war effort. At that time of the year he grew mostly Brussels sprouts, which were a favourite vegetable for the winter months. When I think back, it must have been hard on them to have an extra mouth to feed with everything being rationed.

Mister Greenfield would bring me tea at eight o'clock, and his wife would bring me breakfast at nine o'clock. Talk about service; they insisted I sleep in and get well rested before returning to camp. I even got to go fishing with him and caught some small fish, the name of which I can't remember.

One night we went out to the local pub and got back around ten in the evening, in time for supper. They usually ate late at night. It must have been an old custom. That night I had the most horrible dreams, green things crawling all over the room. I didn't mention it in the morning. That night I took the young lady to a picture show and we had a late supper when we returned. That night I had the same stupid dreams.

The next day I told the folks about the nightmares and Mister Greenfield started to laugh and said that it could have been the mustard pickles. They were very spicy. That night at dinner, I avoided the pickles and that was the end of the dreams. When I left, I had to promise that I would come back again. I did spend a number of leaves with them. They were a very nice family.

Back at the camp, things went on at a normal pace. I noticed more regiments were now moving out to the fields under canvas. The military police kept up their nightly patrols, looking for drunks and soldiers absent without leave.

For recreation we would go to the pub at a small village called "Fairwarp", about a mile and a half away. The large pub sign had a beer keg on top of it to advertise its wares. It was a great meeting place, with dartboards and card tables for cribbage, which was a favourite.

One night while enjoying a pint of ale I met a stranger who wanted to play cribbage. I didn't know how so he showed me. Later that evening he took out a deck of cards and said that he would tell our fortune, if anyone was interested. I told him okay. He took out a special deck and shuffled them. I cut the deck in three piles as he wanted and he started telling me that a big trip was coming up very soon. Naturally everybody knew that D-Day was getting nearer. However he was pretty serious and told me that I would have a serious accident but that everything would be all right. I thought that it sounded silly at the time but he proved himself right later on. The pub owner told me that he belonged to a band of gypsies who were camped nearby.

We always took a shortcut through a big estate when we went to the pub and on one trip I noticed some small bombs stuck in the grass next to a small stream. Some were round and ten inches in length and painted gray. Nearby were some of different shapes and painted red. When I got to the pub, I told the owner, who was a member of the Home Guard, about the bombs. The local bomb squad was called out to check out the find. They were German bombs that had been dropped a month before during an air raid. When the bombs were checked over they were found to have a piece of heavy cardboard between the striker and the detonator. Someone in Germany was trying to help out.

An Italian prisoner of war camp was located a short distance away from Fairwarp. It had been set up in this area so that they could be used to help out the local farmers with their crops. I had met the sergeant in charge at the pub and we got to be good friends. I mentioned to him that I had a truck to drive but that I didn't like to leave it parked at the pub. It didn't take much to steal an army vehicle since no key was required. The sergeant suggested I leave it at the camp where it was behind the barbed wire. This I did one night and when I picked up the truck it was shined up and looked like new. After that I always left the truck there and gave the prisoners a pack of cigarette for keeping it clean. The captain thought that I was doing all the work.

A couple of the prisoners told me that they really enjoyed working out in the fields. It seems that some of the local gals liked the idea also. They would sneak out in mid-morning with some refreshments and at the same time get themselves refreshed. I guess someone had to look after the poor farm girls.

One night we started experimenting with drink mixtures. A pint of bitters and a shot of gin were mixed. Next we tried rye and bitters. Boy did we get looped and I had to drive back to the barracks. The sergeant kept saying that he didn't know how I could see the road, because he couldn't see past the front of the truck. I think we traveled at about five miles an hour all the way back. That was the last experiment for this guy!

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the air raids and the great job the Royal Air Force did. When we arrived the air war was in full swing with nightly attacks by the German air force. I remember one particular night when a great number of bombers came over and I watched seven planes shot down south of the London area. We were twenty-five miles south and saw seven more shot down within a five-mile area. One in particular was picked up by the searchlights and they stuck right with him. Then we heard the roar of a British fighter closing in. The secret with the searchlights was in spotting the bombers, but not blinding the fighter pilot. One searchlight opened up its light beam real wide and on cue shut it off and all the rest followed suit. The blinded

bomber pilot was unable to see and this allowed the fighter pilot to see his target and in most cases to bring down the quarry. One bomber was shot down within a mile of our billets, and since the lights were quickly turned back on we saw three Germans jump out and open their parachutes. One of them was going to land very near where we were watching, so we jumped on the trucks and headed for his landing area. We were all armed but when we arrived there was the German surrounded by three farmers, all with pitchforks. Was that guy scared!

The air war was soon turning and during the end of 1943 and the first part of 1944, the Royal Air Force bombing raids seemed to be nonstop. One day I watched over a thousand bombers and fighters go over. Later in the day and evening we watched for the returning flights. One afternoon we heard a crippled twin-motored bomber approaching and could tell by the engine sound that he was in trouble. As he neared we saw that only one engine was turning over and he was just barely able to keep flying. When he neared the landing strip and tried to turn the plane the left wing came off and he just spiraled down to the ground. We drove over to see if we could be of any help, but the five crew members were all dead. I have often wondered why they didn't use their parachutes.

At our camp, things settled down to a routine, but everyone knew that big things would soon be coming up. The night life was a little slow at times and there was little entertainment. One of the weekly highlights was the dance at the Fairwarp Hall. They had a small band, usually a piano player, someone on drums, and a saxophone player. The music always seemed to sound the same. The band played fast and loud, but they were an enthusiastic bunch and livened up the place. Sometimes when I hear one of the war time songs it sure brings back memories of the good times that we had in England.

I noticed that a young lady and her sister always came and left by themselves. While dancing with the older one, I enquired why she didn't have an escort and she said that no one ever asked her. I was her escort from then on. Her father owned the pub at Fairwarp. It was called the "Forresters Arms" and was a very popular place. I was invited over for many Sunday dinners and even helped the old chap serve beer once in a while.

I remember one Saturday night when the place was packed and I spotted two guys from home. They were stationed near Horsham. When it came time to leave I drove them back to their camp. Since they didn't have passes we had to drive around and find a place where they could jump over the fence. They didn't get caught and I am happy to say that they both survived the war. I got lost going back and got in around three in the morning. No one noticed that I was late, so all was well.

In April, things started to happen. Some of the old equipment was being replaced with new, and we had to take the old and worn out vehicles to a storage area. A lot of surplus personal items were also packed and these we loaded on the small truck and took them to an area near Aldershot. The officer and I made a lot of trips. He read the road map and I drove. Several times we came upon a road that was blocked off. There was a guard house with troops stationed there. The roads were full of army vehicles and tanks for as far as the eye could see. They were parked side by side and I heard the guard tell the officer that there were about 500 to the mile on each side of the road.

Once while going around a sharp corner we almost collided with some of the gentry riding along the road with twenty or more fox hounds. It was quite a surprise that they were still doing that in wartime. It made a nice picture.

On one trip, I must have been carrying a special load, because a captain from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police came with me. He was a nice guy and didn't mind talking to me. On the way back I thought I'd surprise him, so I asked him if he would like a home cooked meal. He

thought that that would be great, so I told him about my neighbour's sister living in Henfield. It was only ten miles out of our way. I felt sure they wouldn't mind us dropping in.

I think we surprised Missus Greenfield, but she rose to the occasion, especially when they all found out that the captain was a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer. I never thought too much about the ration books that were required, but Missus Greenfield put on a fine meal. I later heard the captain telling the other officers about the trip. They probably wondered who in heck I was.

Near the end of April, I had the job of getting rid of several hundred maps and was told to burn them. In the back part of the house there was an old kitchen of sorts that had not been used for a long time. The fireplace was six feet wide, three feet deep, and five feet high. I started throwing the maps in and when I had a pile I lit the lot. They wouldn't burn very well, so I dumped in a little gasoline and that did the trick. I soon had a roaring fire going when all of a sudden I heard a noise like a plane going overhead. I stepped outside to look and there was a solid flame shooting out the chimney, at least six feet high. I thought that the whole place was going to go up in smoke so I took the rest of the maps and threw them down a nearby gully. They are probably still there. That chimney hadn't been cleaned for years, but it was sure nice and shiny after all the creosote had burned out.

There was one big army scheme to prepare the troops for what was coming in the near future. All the divisional units were out in the field and I never saw so much confusion or so it looked. In mid-week the lieutenant suggested that I should take the unit's mail out to them. He showed me on the map where they were supposed to be. I left early the next morning and I finally found them at 1400 hours. They were glad to get the mail and then someone suggested that I should go and fill up a five-gallon water can with beer. If you have ever driven in the southeast of England you would soon find out why they make the cars so small. It took over an hour to go the ten miles to find a pub and almost as long to get back.

After I had a sandwich I started back. By now it was pitch black and driving without lights takes a little getting used to. To make matters worse, I met a convoy of tanks practicing night maneuvers. The road was very narrow and I climbed up the left road bank as far as I could. Those drivers were pretty good. Only one tank touched the side of the truck. I was stuck there for two hours and it was now 2200 hours. By the time I got back it was 2300 hours so I decided to go to the Fairwarp Pub and get some ale.

The place was closed but I woke up Mister Dodds, the owner, and he was a good sport and sold me two bottles of light ale. When I got back the lieutenant was having a fit wondering where in hell I had been. After I explained he just laughed and said that he thought that I had been in an accident. We drank the beer and all was well.

It was now May and all the units were out in the field, or scattered around the channel ports in final preparations for D-Day. We had nearly all the surplus equipment turned in except two boxes of 303 calibre ammunition, that is, 2000 rounds. We didn't know what to do with it and I suggested that maybe the Home Guard might take it. I drove up to the Fairwarp pub and asked the owner if the Home Guard would be interested. He was surprised at the offer; it seems that they were used to a lot of paperwork. He finally agreed to take one case but was very nervous about it, and didn't know how he could explain it to the authorities. The other case stayed in the back of the truck for three weeks until I found a unit that wanted to use it for target practice. The ammunition was old and not suitable for the invasion forces.

Moving day arrived for the lieutenant and me so we loaded our gear in the truck and headed for the rear-party main section. This was located near a place called "Forest Row". It was a very nice small town and we were two miles south of it. These billets were in a nice big mansion with

twelve rooms and had beautiful grounds. In charge was a major from the Winnipeg Rifles. The rest of the party consisted of the lieutenant, a sergeant, myself, and eight other privates. Most of the furniture had been removed from the house and stored away somewhere else. The major took the best room on the first floor. It had windows on two walls overlooking the grounds, and I think it boosted his morale. I found out later that he was considered too old for the invasion forces. He was all soldier and a fine old chap.

Here the main job was to go around the various units and collect money that was owed to stores that had supplied the officers' messes. My job was to drive the major around. It was a boring time, sitting in the truck waiting for him. On more than one occasion he came out of the mess, a bit unsteady.

On one trip to Forest Row, we visited the house where Anne Boleyn, Henry the Eighth's second wife, had lived. The place was in good repair. What I found strange was that the ceiling heights were only six feet six inches. The ancient Brits must have been short. The interior was held up with 12 inch \times 12 inch oak beams. It was really a fine piece of construction.

In East Grinstead one day while parked, we watched all the pretty gals going home at the end of the day and I remarked to the major that I wondered where they came from. He said, "Corporal, I wonder where they go at night". The only time they came out was for the Saturday night dance.

The main hospital for burn patients was in East Grinstead. You could see them sitting on hospital grounds or out walking. There were some awful looking cases. Most of them were air force casualties. They were a cheerful lot and were making the best of it.

One of the highlights of our rear party was the cook. He was a former chef to the Duke of Windsor before he left the country. He had his paybook to prove it. After the war he was the chef at the Crossroads Motel near Massena, New York. He had learned to cook in India and could turn out great dishes of curried lamb, which I had never tasted before.

We were sure busy the month of May, turning in equipment for the 4th Division. The other ranks doing the heavy work were always grumbling and complaining, until the major told them that they could always go to one of the units that were about to embark for France. This kept them quiet. One night they stole my truck and the next day it was found in a ditch with the gas tank empty. I think they were a bunch of misfits.

In early May I got a letter from my uncle who was in the navy and he said that he could meet me in Manchester for a couple of days. I found out latter that he was on the Prince David and was later part of the naval force on D-Day. We had a good visit and got all the news from home. I took him to the Palais Royal dance hall and he met the young lady that I mentioned before. She was a fine young girl and her father, who had been a professor at Manchester University, had been killed earlier in the war. I was invited up to her home for a dinner and it was a really nice home. Her mother had prepared everything and then left us alone. I should have stayed the night but I wasn't ready to be tied down, so I went back to the hostel.

D-Day

When the D-Day invasion started everyone was put on high alert, which meant that we carried loaded weapons at all times. There was lots of excitement in the air, but we had to finish the job that we were on. A few days after the invasion had started a sergeant and I were on the road and we came up behind a farmer with an old horse and wagon. We kept sounding the horn, but he didn't seem to hear very well. After we followed him for a mile or so, I stuck the Sten gun out the truck window and let loose a burst of fire. That woke up the old boy and he soon pulled over.

I think it was around June 12th when the V-1s, also called “buzz bombs”, started coming over. One night, just as we were going to bed, I heard an engine which had a strange pitch to it coming very near our house. Then the anti-aircraft fire started along with someone firing a heavy calibre machine gun. It was so close that I think we all ducked under the beds just in case it might be a fighter shooting at us. A minute later we heard a loud explosion as it hit the ground. When we checked it out the next day we discovered that it had crashed about a mile away. It must have exploded just on ground contact because all it did was cut the grass off for a hundred feet or so in a circle. I didn't think that it was anything to get too excited about. Boy was I wrong!

A few nights later another bunch of buzz bombs came over and one was shot down a half mile from our billets and it buried itself before exploding. We felt the shock of it and the blast blew in all the windows in the major's “sun room“. He moved to another part of the house. The next morning, we went to look at the bomb site and were we surprised. The crater left by the bomb was at least fifty feet across and fifteen feet deep. I later saw some of the damage that it caused in London. I don't know how those people stood it.

These V-1s started coming over at all hours of the day or night and we watched the air force pilots chase after them. I think they went around two hundred miles an hour. I saw one pilot in a Mustang fighter come up along side the flying bomb and, with his wings, he tipped the V-1 over and it went straight down. It was a good trick but it wasn't always that easy to get close enough to do it.

By the end of June all the business was completed and we were shipped out to the various reinforcing depots. I went to a camp fifteen miles north of York. It was very beautiful country with the rolling hills and it reminded me of home. There were a lot of air force landing fields nearby and of course a lot of fliers in the small towns at night. The dialect of the natives was a little hard to grasp at first. It seemed to me to be a mixture of English and Scottish brogue. A favorite expression seemed to be “eeh by gum 'tis an' all”. I think it sounded like they were agreeing with each other.

The camp consisted of Nissan huts with double bunks running along each side of the outer walls and a stove in the centre of the hut. There were thirty bunks to a hut. The beds were double bunks with the usual steel straps for support and straw-filled paillasses. I noticed that there was quite a mixture of foreign soldiers in this camp. I found out that they had come to England when their countries were invaded. In the hut next to ours it was rumoured that they slept in pairs! It took me a while to figure out, what was going on.

We knew that we were heading for France when the instructors started giving us lectures on how to behave when we came in contact with the people in Europe. There was a round of shots in arms, three at the same time. Some of the guys' arms swelled up and they could hardly move them.

They also issued new weapons. I got a Sten gun with an inch of grease on it. It took a half-day to clean it. There weren't too many dress parades, mostly on what to watch out for when we went into action. I think the pep talks were to boost our morale.

I was orderly corporal for a week and the hardest part of the job was trying to get the guys up on time for breakfast. One morning I decided to try something different. I took an old broom and put the end of it against the corrugations on the outside of the hut. I held it tight against the side and ran down the length of the building making a hell of a racket. It must have sounded like a machine gun inside, because the guys came flying out both ends of the hut. They got up on time after that.

It was now near the end of July and we boarded the train for the south coast. It was late at night when we arrived at Portsmouth and, after a quick meal, we were issued twenty-four hour ration packs. Everything was dehydrated and was supposed to last a soldier for a day.

Around ten o'clock we boarded the infantry landing craft and I went below to find a bunk. I fell asleep at once, but when I woke up around three in the morning the place smelled like a sewer hole. I think that most of the guys were seasick and the temporary toilets were full and overflowing. The vomit bags were all over. It was a mess!

I went up the gangway and a sailor asked me if I was seasick. I told him no but that everybody below was. It was really stormy with the ship going up and down in the big waves. The sailors invited me into their cabin for some tea, freshly made bread, and jam. It sure tasted good and I can still remember it. I stayed up on deck and at first light I could see the shores of France.

Chapter Three

France and the low countries

As we neared the coast of France, the weather cleared and the sun came out. I thought it might be a good omen, for the future. The coastline from a distance appeared to be low lying ground with a sharp rise back of the beaches. I tried to imagine what kind of hell the troops had to go through when they landed here on D-Day! We docked by a jetty which stuck out about a mile from the shore. Part of it was a floating dock and part of it was the concrete sections that were floated over after the beach was secured. I found out later that Prime Minister Churchill had come up with the original idea.

We debarked and formed up on shore and the thought “cannon fodder” popped up in my head. I guess that's what we were going to be, if we weren't careful. The first “native” that I saw was an old dog walking along the beach. Everyone tried to call the dog but he just kept going. Then I remembered the French word for come here and the old dog trotted over, to have his ears scratched. We all marched up to a staging area away from the beach and were loaded on some trucks and taken to an area where we would spend the night.

We were located about two miles inland and 15 miles from the front. There was a field hospital nearby and across the road was a landing field for Royal Air Force fighters. They were mostly Spitfire aircraft.

We were given shovels and told to start digging holes in the ground for protection in case of shelling or air raids. Some of these were quite elaborate. Some had logs or planks on top with two feet of dirt on top of them. Of course the idea was to sleep with your feet at the exposed end and if you got a shell fragment in your foot you could go home, or so they told us.

When it came time to eat we opened up the twenty-four hour pack and tried to figure out what to do with it. The idea was to dump it in a mess tin, add water, and heat it over a fire. It looked like dried meat and vegetables mixed up. It didn't taste too bad, since we were pretty hungry by then. The mixture was very good and there was also some candy and chocolate.

That night there was an air raid alarm and I heard a plane flying over but couldn't see anything. I heard a “bump” and then all was quiet. The next morning, when I got out of my hole, I saw a large crowd near the field hospital. The plane had dropped a parachute type of bomb and it was laying across the road. Sitting on top of it was a British soldier with earphones on. As he was removing parts of the detonator, he kept up a running commentary on what he was doing. I have often marveled at that soldier's guts. When he finished, he held up the parts and a great cheer went up from the onlookers. That bomb was about eighteen inches in diameter and about eight feet long. If it had exploded there would have been a lot of casualties, since the hospital was full of patients waiting to be evacuated back to England.

The Queen's Own Rifles

Later that day the unit representatives that were coming for us arrived so we all lined up again and waited nervously. A sergeant came up to us and asked if anyone could ride a motorcycle and I stepped forward at once. I don't know what prompted me to do this, but it was my lucky day when I did. The sergeant looked me over and said “I guess you'll do”. I soon found out that I was to be part of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, one of the finest units in the field. This unit has a history that goes back to 26 April 1860. It was referred to as one of Canada's oldest and finest regiments!

The sergeant drove a number of us to the unit, which had just come back from the front line and was in a rest area near a place called "Fontaine Henry". After nearly two months of fighting, the front was only about fifteen miles away. The Queen's Own Rifles had been the first Canadian troops on the beach and had suffered many casualties up to this point. They had fifty-six other ranks killed in action; seven died of wounds. Six officers and sixty-nine other ranks had been wounded.

All the reinforcements went to the rifle companies and I went to the mortar platoon as a rider for Captain Dunkelman who was in charge of the mortars. After meeting some of the other guys, I was given a beat-up Norton bike to check out. Lucky for me, it was the same model as the one that I had practiced on in England so I had no problem getting used to it.

Captain Benjamin Dunkelman was a big guy, about six feet three inches, and he weighed close to 250 pounds. His father owned Tip Top Tailors in Toronto. Captain Dunkelman used to tell us that after the war he would give a can of bully beef with every suit sold. His mother used to send him huge parcels with the best of canned goods and meats. I found out later that he always gave most of it to the platoon. He was very generous.

The unit had been going pretty steadily since D-Day and this was their first real time out. There was a round of activities to keep everyone busy and to help them try to forget the trauma that they had just come through. They all had a change of clothes and we all went for a swim in a nearby river which had salt water in it. I found it great for floating around on.

I was also introduced to the British rations which came in a compo box, enough for a platoon for a day. Good old Montgomery decided that two meals a day was enough food for us. The Canadian army had had an offer of United States army rations, but the brass thought that we should have the same as the British army. The main staples were the cans of meat and vegetables, that were referred to as "M&V stew" and were also called "muck and vomit". That's exactly what it looked like! Some of it wasn't too bad when mixed with potatoes in a sort of a mush. I didn't care too much for the M&V that was made from sheep. The tallow seemed to stick in your mouth for a long time. The compo packs also had a ration of chocolate and some hard candies to keep one from getting too hungry during the day. The best part of the packs were the tins of plum puddings. We would punch a couple of holes in the top and set them over the fire to heat up. When we were travelling, the tins were placed on top of the carrier exhaust and they would heat up just fine. Another item was the cans of soup that had an element in the centre of the cans and when it was lit, the fuse would slowly burn its way to the bottom of the tin and presto we had hot soup. I think this was a special, that had been made for the invasion forces. There was also a tin, of fifty cigarettes per tin, in the large compo packs. It took a little know-how to make a meal out of the packs, but we got along okay.

I met some of the boys that had come in on D-Day and listened to their stories, and I think that those who made it were lucky. It sure made men out of boys. I did a lot of listening and heard how they had discovered that some of their buddies had been shot in the head after being captured. All in all it was a depressing way to start out. The captain's carrier driver, Jim Tran, went out of his way to show me the ropes and make me welcome to the platoon. Another chap, Jack Martin, told me of some harrowing tales of the beach landing and the fight at Carpiquet Airport.



unidentified, Tran, Gianetto, Marin

While the units were resting, getting new recruits and ammunition, and servicing the carriers and trucks; the battle to dislodge the Germans from the area south of Caen continued. The grand plan by the brass had been to try and cut off the escape route and trap as many Germans as possible to shorten the war. Someone forgot to tell the enemy to play dead because some of the units driven by the SS were putting on a hell of a fight. It took until August 7th to clear the area around Caen.

After resting up for a week it was time to move on. We were all packed up and ready to set out when I discovered that the clutch cable on my motorcycle was broken. There was a bit of swearing by the captain, with the result that the bike was dumped in a ditch and I rode in the carrier with him and his batman.

Into combat

On August 8th, our convoy left the rest area and headed east for the front line by way of Caen. I was amazed that the convoy could get through the city. It had been almost completely destroyed by the allied bombing. The only road through was a lane that had been bulldozed through the rubble. The roads were packed with the various units moving up to their start lines for the attack to close the Falaise gap. When we approached the main crossroads, our convoy was stopped and another unit was allowed to go ahead of us. This split the Queen's Own Rifles' convoy in two.

The Régiment de la Chaudière went ahead of us. About ten minutes later a Flying Fortress came over and started dumping their bombs right on top of the convoy ahead. The Chaudières lost twenty or so killed and dozens wounded. When we drove up we could see the dead and wounded laying all over the roadway with many trucks on fire. It was a sobering sight for me!

Then one plane looked like it was having trouble and I saw some of the airmen jumping out. A couple landed quite close. They were sorry but there was something wrong with their plane and they had to get out. One American traded his 45 calibre handgun for a German pistol that one of

our boys had. The Queen's Own Rifles were lucky; only two men were wounded. We learned later that the two pilots of the pathfinders and the crew of two Lancasters were demoted to air-craftsman first class rank. This was similar to a private in the army.

The pathfinders flew Mosquito fighters. They had twin engines and were made of plywood to keep the weight down. They were very fast and as a rule, didn't worry too much about the German fighters. Their job was to fly ahead of the bombers and spot the targets and then drop special coloured flares to mark the targets for the bomber pilots. I remember seeing them go over Brighton and head for the French coast. They would fly just over the houses and when they were out over the channel, they dropped down to three or four feet above the water. This kind of flying called for a steady hand. Later on the Mosquitos were equipped to carry bombs for special targets.

Although I was in the mortars, I kept an eye out and watched the infantry in action. It was nerve racking to see them heading down a road or lane, generally behind a tank or two if they were available. Otherwise it might be a gun carrier with a 30 calibre or 50 calibre machine gun mounted in front. There was always a man out in front, called "the point", and a few feet behind him would be a second man, to give covering fire if needed. If the enemy was spotted they would send back the information and the mortars or artillery would be brought to bear on the target. It all looked easy on paper but when your life is on the line, it's a different story. Some of the point men didn't last very long.

To keep me occupied the captain gave me a roll of maps and told me to study them and to keep track of our location. I had always been good at map work since scouting days, so this was no problem. Later on it also helped to plot the mortar targets.

A few miles past Caen, there was a small woods and, as the point man got close, you could see flashes of fire coming out of the woods. A lot of good men were lost in clearing out those woods. That night we were all on alert in case of a counterattack. It was a long night!

The next stop was in another woods that had been cleared and was to be used as a start line. We were waiting for the bombers to come in and start the attack. I remember that I was on the east side of the road, next to a large farm of 600 to 700 acres, when the bombers came over, and starting dropping bombs ahead and to the left side of the road. Someone mentioned that the Polish armored unit was in those woods. When the bombs starting coming closer we all ran out to the open fields, hoping to show the planes that we were friendly troops. The observation planes were flying in among the bombers trying to divert them away. It was a wonder they weren't shot down. Finally someone got through to the planes and they went for the right target. I looked around and there must have been two or three thousand soldiers out in the open fields. The infantry then went on the attack and suffered many casualties because the supporting tanks had been knocked out.

While we were out in the field, I noticed a downed German plane that had crashed landed. It wasn't in too bad a shape and we had a good look at it.

The small towns in that part of France are laid out differently from what we see over here. There, each farmer has his farm some distance away and all the farm owners live in small settlements. This must have been for protection in the old days. When these places were either bombed or shelled they produced a lot of rubble and this made an ideal place for the Germans to hide. These small places had to be cleared out one at a time, with the result that a lot of casualties were incurred. When a tank led the way, usually a few rounds were all that was necessary to encourage the Germans to give up. It was a different story if they had any 88 millimetre anti-tank guns handy. It was a deadly weapon and also used for anti-aircraft fire.

Falaise

The main prize ahead was the city of Falaise, where it had been planned for the British and Canadians to join up with the Americans, to cut off the retreat of the main German army. Because of the stubborn rear guard action of the Germans, a large number of them escaped. The air force had a field day strafing the retreating columns. When we drove down the main road, I counted 344 burned out or exploded cars, trucks, and tanks in a one mile stretch. There were a lot of dead soldiers along the road, and dozens of horses. The master race was using horses. In some places the bulldozers had to clear the road so we could drive through. The smell of the bodies and dead horses was awful; it is something that is not easy to forget. When we were checking out some of their dugouts, I found a 0.765 Browning automatic pistol which I brought home as a souvenir.

Falaise fell in mid-August. During the next five days it was open season on the retreating Germans. The Allied air forces and artillery made a mess of eight divisions and did a lot of damage to sixteen other formations that were caught in the pocket. The Queen's Own Rifles moved on to a small town called "Damblainville" where the people were really friendly and some passed out their homemade wine. This was good farming country and they had a lot of fruits and vegetables that they gave us.

That night we made camp in a field and the carrier driver, Jim Tran, and I made our slit trench along the fence for extra protection. That night a lone German bomber came flying over and dropped a large bomb. We could hear the loud whistling noise that it made as it fell towards us. We braced for the shock but all we felt was a loud thump as it hit the ground and the vibration shook the slit trench that we were in. If it had exploded, I am sure that it would have been the last of us. The next morning we found that the bomb had fallen only a hundred yards away.

Now that the Germans were retreating, it was a matter of chasing after them and trying to keep the casualties down. The carriers were used for forward scouting, to spot points of ambush and road blocks while keeping the battalion headquarters informed. One morning as we crested a hill we could see that a scout car had been hit and both the soldiers were dead. They were buried along the side of the road, to be retrieved later by the burial parties. A half mile down the road we found a large cooking pot, about three feet in diameter and three feet high. It had a foot of porridge in it. Someone didn't have his breakfast that morning. The pot was put to good use later in cooking stews.

That night we stopped at a small village and parked next to some farm buildings. After supper some of the residents came out and joined us and they brought with them some wine bottles and also some cider. We had a little celebration and one gal brought out her record player and we had a dance session under the apple trees. It was a welcome break after what we had seen the past week.

Dashing across the countryside was great. We covered over sixty miles in three days and the countryside looked very nice. When we went through the small towns the civilians came out to give us bottles of wine, eggs, bread and real butter. This part of France was spared the destruction that had happened in Normandy. We felt like heroes!

One day as we were starting out, I noticed a camera crew set up along the side of the road. They were taking movie shots of our convoy. There were two Russian officers with them, watching us go by.

We pulled into a small town after a hard day of slow travelling and sat around waiting for supper. It was being prepared in the back shed of a house in the centre of the small village. When it was ready we lined up for the grub and as I came out, with the mess tins in both hands a sniper let go a round that just missed me and the chap ahead. One of the guys ran over to the carrier that had a 30 calibre machine gun mounted in front. He cocked it and looking around spied a church

steeple, so he let loose a burst of fire, at the vent opening near the top. A flag was stuck out the opening and two of the guys grabbed their rifles and went rushing over looking for the sniper. The German soldier was only too anxious to give up. He had been hiding out there for two days, waiting for a chance to surrender. He hadn't eaten in two days and was sure glad that it turned out okay for him!

Now we had a three day halt near the River Seine to regroup and get cleaned up. The mobile baths were brought up so we could have a bath and get clean clothes. It was quite a sight, dozens of soldiers going around in their birthday suits. I noticed some gals a short distance away watching us and having a good laugh at us. It sure felt good to get cleaned up and have some good meals for a change.

At this time our Lieutenant-colonel Spragge was appointed commander of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade and Major Lett was made our new commanding officer. He was a great guy and was smart and liked by all so the chain of command carried on without any problems. This was good for the morale of the troops.

Across the Seine

We crossed the Seine at a place called "Elbeuf" on August 30th and bypassed Rouen. Someone else would go there while we continued up the coast towards a town called "Neufchatel" where we spent the night. In a house basement we found a two gallon crock of calvados. It was strong liquor. We poured some in the gas tank of a motorcycle and it ran very well. Since nobody wanted it, I took charge. I found that the proper mix was a half inch in a glass and then fill the glass with water. It was sure to ward off the chills. It took over three months of sipping to finish it all. We also found some beer that was still fresh and a lot of the guys filled up on it. That night some of them were up many times, to visit the latrines. The fresh beer sure gave them the runs!

As we went from town to town, there were still some pockets of Germans who had to be routed out. We crossed the River Somme at a place called "Abbeyville" and found that the enemy had left the day before, taking all the horses with them. The local area had many acres of grapes growing and they were just starting to be picked. Boy, where they good!

It had now been three months since the boys had had a haircut, so driver Jim and I went looking for a barber shop. We found one that had been shelled and vacated, so we looked around, but could find nothing. All the haircutting tools were gone. One corner of the upstairs room didn't look quite right, so we started tapping on the walls. In one corner we found a hollow spot that had been papered over so well that it looked like part of the wall. When we peeled off the paper we found a cupboard with the haircutting tools and 23 bottles of the finest Bordeaux wine. I guess it could have been called "looting", but since the building was empty, we looked at it as liberating the wine.

On the 5th of September we reached the small village of La Capelle, just east of Boulogne. This was to be the next big battle for the Queen's Own Rifles. Boulogne was a coastal port that was vital to shortening the supply lines. On either side of the main road running west into the city were two high hills, and to the east another small hill, with a few houses on the downside along the road. This is where we set up in the basement of two houses.

The captain wanted to see the lay of the land, so we went up the road to a tee in the road and then went left towards the top of the hill overlooking the city. We were standing there looking at the distant buildings when we heard a sharp whistling sound. I turned around to say something to Captain Dunkelman and he was already in the ditch yelling at me to get the hell down out of sight. That was the first time that I had heard a German 88 millimetre shell that close, but I never forgot

the sound. I think the reason that they missed us was probably because they couldn't depress the gun barrel low enough to hit the top of the hill.

Two of the mortar crews were attached to the rifle companies who were in the forward holding positions, so we had a small number in our group. One of the mortar men was also our cook. He was a chap from northern Ontario, rough and ready, but a friendly sort, considering all the remarks that we made about his cooking.

The French civilians were good to us and gave us eggs, butter, and great homemade bread. They were fearful of being blown up when an attack would start, but some of the guys tried to calm their fears. One chap became friendly with one housewife and she looked after him like a son. One night while answering a call of nature, a shell came over and he got hit in the leg with a shell fragment. He was sent to the first aid post and we learned later that he had lost his leg. We thought that we were pretty safe, but after that we were more careful when out in the open.

A lot of patrols were being sent out to get the lay of the land, so that a start line could be located on the maps. On one of these observations, a couple of the officers were looking out the basement window of a forward position when an 88 millimetre shell came in the window, killing one officer and wounding another. When they brought the dead officer back, all that was left were just pieces. It sure made us realize that the coming battle would be no push over. In ten days one officer and six other ranks were killed and fifteen others were wounded. The patrols were necessary but always incurred casualties.

The city was heavily fortified and had around ten thousand troops stationed there. In September the Germans allowed the civilians to leave, and we watched them straggle by all day. There must have been seven or eight thousand of them. It was pretty sad to see some of them trying to carry their belongings with them. Some of the women had their hair cut off and looked funny. I think that some of the French people didn't approve of them being friendly with the Germans.

It was at this time that the captain decided that I would go with him to the observation post during the mortar shoots. I was introduced to the number 18 wireless radio set and given a quick lesson. They were heavy damn things to carry, even with the shoulder straps, but easy to use. Since we were going into action the next day, it was necessary to synchronize them on one channel and then lock them in so we could transmit the orders for the mortars.

It was now mid-September and we broke camp and moved to a wooded area, where the start line was located, around six in the morning. Several hundred bombers came over and circled around and around and we wondered if they knew where they were supposed to be dropping their loads. Finally after ten or twenty minutes, the pathfinders arrived and started dropping flares to mark the targets. It was a noisy affair and the first time that I had seen so many bombers that close and watching their bombs falling. Then they were joined by the Hawker Typhoons, which were used in dive bombing special targets. I watched seven of them circle around and then, as in a movie show, follow their leader onto the target. The German fire was very thick and the seventh plane took a direct hit and blew up in pieces. Then we saw a four-motored bomber take a hit and the wing came off and down it went with a big explosion. I think everyone had their own thoughts as to how the battle outcome would be.

Boulogne

The start line was in a woods on the east side of Boulogne, about 5000 yards from where the bombers were dropping their loads. When they went over us with the bomb bays open it was a little scary. We were thinking of the mistakes that happened at Caen. The two companies were

about a thousand yards ahead and hiding in some woods waiting to go forward, after the bombers had gone. The artillery was to start firing then, to give covering fire, and allow the troops to go forward.

Since the mortars were to be used, at about 0630 hours we got the signal to go. The captain's carrier group, of which I was a part, started down a laneway at high speed and after about three hundred yards Captain Dunkelmann yelled "Turn here!". Jim Tran put on the brakes and turned ninety degrees. As we were turning, two 88 millimetre shells hit the ground fifty feet away. The ground was soft and all we got was a lot of dirt showered on us. We tore off across the field and, at the far side, the driver spotted a ditch. He hit the brakes and the carrier took a nose dive. Anything that was loose went flying out and then we ran over the pots, the ammunition, and our packs. We went on to a small woods and into an open field. The captain decided to have the mortars set up in the centre of the field away from the woods and farm buildings. It proved to be a wise move. The Germans shelled the woods and the farm buildings, but not one shell came close to our position.

Captain Dunkelmann yelled "Let's go!", so I strapped on the radio set, grabbed my Sten gun and a large map case, and started running after him. Three hundred yards later, I was out of breath and started walking. The captain came back, grabbed the maps, and yelled to hurry up. We must have covered the six hundred yards in record time. We came to a large concrete bunker that had been built facing the city and it was just right for an observation post. An artillery officer was already on site.

I connected up the radio set and turned it on, but all I could hear was music. Before any shoot we would synchronize the radios on a certain band number. If we took too long to do this the Germans would lock on to our sets and when we tried to use them all we would hear was music. The infantry was moving forward and all we could do was wait for a phone line to be strung to our observation post. Ten minutes later the phones arrived and just in time. The guys from seven and eight platoons were under fire and Captain Dunkelmann soon had the mortars firing high explosive and smoke bombs to provide some cover.

I was watching the hill, on the west side of our front, where some soldiers were going. As they reached the top, I could see gun flashes coming out of a German bunker, near the top of the hill. One soldier fell and the rest came back down the hill. A big Churchill tank, with a large spigot mortar mounted in front went lumbering up the hill and at a range of one hundred yards, fired a round at the bunker. This blew the camouflage off the front of the bunker. They then fired another round down the opening and then backed off down the hill. When the infantry went back up, they were fired on again. Back went the tank and this time from fifty yards they let go three more rounds. The tank stayed there until the soldiers came back up and tossed in a couple of hand grenades, and three Germans came out with their hands up. I was amazed that there was anyone still alive.

Ahead of us the guys were having a hard time with some machine guns that were firing at them. When they went forward to take them out, two soldiers were hit and one was killed. It took a lot of mortar and artillery fire to knock them out. We had a ringside seat and the captain was very good at directing the mortar fire. Around noontime the troops were out of our sight, so all we could do was wait, in case of a counterattack. It was a long afternoon and we knew that the guys were having a rough time.

All morning we could see the battle going forward as our observation post was on high ground. I took a look around at our little fort and it was a good example of German fortifications. It was a massive piece of concrete with the lookouts facing the English channel and had been built

in case of attack from the channel. It was just right for our use. The troops were now out of sight, having reached their first objective, so all we could do was wait around in case of a counterattack.

Late in the afternoon a sergeant came up to tell us that our dinner had arrived. This was usually in big pots with sealed covers, for easy carrying. When the three of us were walking back, a shell exploded overhead. The noise almost deafened us, but the scary part was the pieces of shrapnel that went flying by. You couldn't see them but the whistling noise was really loud and scared the hell out of us. After we ate, we got word that the Germans were starting a counterattack, so we ran back to the observation post. The attack didn't last long with the mortars and artillery firing at them.

We had to stay there until around nine o'clock and it was dark when we started back. As we got near our camp a shot rang out and someone yelled "Who goes?". Captain Dunkelman and I fell to the ground and then he recognized the voice of his batman. The guy sounded like he was half drunk and the captain did a lot of talking before he put the rifle down. The batman was very lucky because I was about to shoot him when he decided to let us by.

The next morning we loaded up and drove into the north part of the city. On the way in we saw dozens of dead German soldiers and many horses lying alongside the road. The city was a mess after the aerial bombing and a dozer was brought in to clear the streets. We caught up with rest of the mortar platoon and I saw that they had set up the mortars in the bomb craters.

The captain and I went on ahead to an observation post that was manned by the artillery. Once again the damn wireless would not receive anything except music. Dunkelman would give the artillery captain the coordinates for our mortars and he sent them back to his troop over his set and they then sent a runner over to the Queen's Own Rifles. Thus we were able to keep the mortars firing ahead of the troops. They were firing a mixture of high explosive and smoke. One of the smoke bombs went down a ventilator shaft and started a fire. A few minutes later there was a big explosion; the German ammunition dump had blown up. The army newspaper called it "a shot in a million". It had been Sergeant Corrigan's section that had fired the lucky shot. There was a lot of bragging afterwards. Again we had a ringside seat for the battle as we watched the troops going forward.

That night we decided to find an indoor billet so a large brick building was picked out. It had been used by some refugees and we were only inside five minutes and everyone was scratching. We were all covered with fleas. All the mattresses were thrown out the windows and someone got a blowtorch and went over all the steel bed frames, burning all the fleas. They also went around the room. A can of DDT was obtained from the medical officer and we were told to sprinkle some all over ourselves. We even put some across the doorway, to keep the damn fleas out. We slept on the steel springs that night. It was better than the ground.

The next morning, the captain was in agony. He was a big man and sweated a lot and the DDT had formed a hard crust around his privates and he could hardly walk. The medical officer just laughed at him and told him to wash it off and use some salve until it got better.

We stayed there for five days, until all of Boulogne was cleared. Although some of the companies were down in strength, they were sent up along the coast to Cape Gris Nez, where the big coastal guns were stationed. These were the guns that had been shelling Dover, England for a long time. It must have been a relief to the people along the coast.

We were camped east of the Cape Gris Nez, with a hill for cover, while the attack was starting when some huge shells came over our position. They sounded like a box car going through the air. The Germans put up a token defence, but nothing too serious. Several soldiers were killed by land mines when some prisoners being brought in stepped on them.

The enemy troops at Cape Gris Nez had heard about the outcome at Boulogne and gave up readily. We had a chance to examine the coastal guns. They had a 16 inch bore and were set in huge concrete bunkers. It would have required a direct hit to knock them out. One of the smaller guys had his photo taken with just his head stuck out the barrel. That was one of the lighter moments of the war.

Calais was a little different. Here the French weren't as friendly as the others we had met. I think it may have been that the special German forces that had been there for two years or more were part of the community. However after a short battle, the white flags went up and a cease fire was called. The commander had saved his honour by "defending" the town.

Between Boulange and Calais, nearly eighteen thousand prisoners were taken. Some of them were marched to the rear by their own officers, our guys being too busy.

We now had a chance to get showered and cleaned up, although we didn't have a change of clothes. I found it amazing how long one could go without washing or changing clothing. Maybe that's why we were so healthy; the bugs stayed away.

After a couple of days the brigade headed up the coast to clear out some small pockets of resistance. These small pockets always produced, one or two dead or wounded. The land was getting flat without much cover which also helped to produce more casualties. One good thing that was settled was the fact that the coastal guns and V-1 bomb sites had been completely cleared. The English coast and London could forget about being shelled or bombed.

Belgium and Holland

As we entered Belgium, we noticed some indifference to us by the population. When we drove through the small towns, it seemed to us that their stores were well stocked. As soon as the Germans left, their shelves would be filled up with goods. One Belgian civilian used the expression, that translated meant "nothing in the window, all in the cellar".

While driving along the road, we noticed a team of Belgian horses in the field. I thought that our driver, Tran, was going to jump out of the carrier and go and look at them. He was a great lover of fine horses and had never seen any as big and sturdy as these.

We had a lot of dirty weather. It was raining very hard but the farmers objected to our sleeping in their barns. They were soon overruled. It was now October and the rainy season had started in earnest, with rain nearly every day.

The next dirty job for the Canadians was clearing out the enemy along both sides of the Scheldt River, in a fifty mile stretch. Without this, the Port of Antwerp would be useless. The Germans were stationed along the mouth of the river, on both sides, to prevent ships from coming in.

When we approached the Dutch border, we were halted by the border guard demanding to see our papers before entering Holland. We all had a good laugh at him, but he was really serious until one of the guys pointed a rifle at him and told him to get the hell out of the road.

In Holland the contrast in the people was really something. The crowds were lined along the road and cheering us along. We spent that first night at a small village near the city of Temeuzen, and some of us got to sleep in some of the houses. The town folks decided that there should be a party to celebrate our arrival. They had a hall complete with a band and we had a great time dancing and drinking Dutch beer which was very good.

For a couple of days we enjoyed good food which we bought from the locals. There was plenty of vegetables, corn on the cob, tomatoes, and grapes. It had been a long time since we had seen any of these. They sold Belgian beer, but the troops didn't have much money to spend and

the paymaster had only a limited amount. We managed to get a couple of headaches while we were there.

The next day saw the arrival of some strange type of vehicle called the “Weasel”. It was an amphibious carrier designed to carry four men and a wireless set. The other interesting carrier was called a “Buffalo” and it was designed to carry a Bren gun carrier and its crew of three or four over land or water. I think it went around three or four miles an hour. I know it wasn't fast enough when the Germans were trying to shell us later on.

The Scheldt River

The 3rd Canadian Infantry Division was given the job of clearing out the south bank of the Scheldt River. It was rumoured that the defenders were a tough lot who had seen action at the Russian front, and who were well supplied with ammunition and food. It looked like a tough fight ahead.

We had a good look at the terrain in this part of Holland, and it was discouraging. The land had been reclaimed from the sea and was divided into large square fields with dykes around them to keep out the water. Around the fields, called “polders”, small ditches had been dug, to collect the water that seeped in. This went to a low point and there was usually a windmill at this spot connected to a pump to run the water over to another system and so on. It was an ingenious drainage system that worked well. The roads ran on top of the causeways and the dykes surrounding the polders. At various road crossings there would be a few houses owned by the farmers who worked the farms.

It was now the 6th of October and the rainy season was starting. I think it must have rained nearly every day for the next three weeks. The fields were starting to flood from the rain and also from the dykes that had been breached by the Germans.

On the 6th of October, the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade crossed the Leopold Canal using Wasps (flame throwing carriers), followed on the 9th of October by the 9th Brigade crossing the river in Buffaloes. This took the enemy by surprise, since they had not seen the Buffaloes before.

It was decided to move the battalion headquarters forward because of the 9th Brigade's success. Our driver, Jim Tran, drove the carrier onto the Buffalo and we started down the bank and into the river. Those things were slow and sat high in the water. We sure felt nervous. On our right were the big guns on Walcheren Island that could reach us easily. Just then our artillery opened up with smoke bombs, dropping them in the centre of the river. The wind spread the smoke down river and blocked the view from the German side. It took an hour to arrive at the beach to the right of where the enemy were dug in.

We debarked and went up the causeway toward the town of Biervliet. Here the Queen's Own Rifles relieved the Highland Light Infantry of Canada. Our carrier followed the colonel's driving to the south of Biervliet. We went down the road on top of a dyke and pulled into a farm yard. There was a house and a large barn with a row of trees, a hundred feet from the house.

The colonel and his group went into the barn to set up shop and we headed for the trees. Just as we pulled in under the trees, the mortar shells started dropping. I was heading for a slit trench that had been used by the German defenders when Tran grabbed my arm and said that it would be safer under the carrier which was parked under the trees. How lucky for me that I took his advice for, as we were watching the shells come down, one shell hit the slit trench dead centre.

The shelling lasted for an hour or so and I found it interesting to note how scattered the mortar shells were. While we were under fire a guy came down the road on his motorcycle and he was just opposite the laneway when a shell landed twenty feet in front of him. The pieces of shell and

dirt went up in a 45 degree angle to the road, and just missed the top of his head. Was he lucky! He wheeled in the yard and headed for the basement. The colonel gave him a glass of rum to settle his nerves. The only casualty was the colonel's Jeep; it got hit and burned up.

When the shelling stopped and we gathered around to make sure that everyone was okay, the colonel brought out a gallon jug of rum and gave us all a good sized shot. With the cold and dampness it sure hit the spot. Tran and I dug a couple of slit trenches for ourselves and backed the carrier over part of them for protection. Just before dark our supper arrived. I don't know how the cooks managed it, but they usually had a hot meal every day. That was really appreciated.

The next morning when I woke up, I discovered that I had four inches of water in my trench, and I was soaked through to my hide. What a way to start the day! After packing up, we started south to join up with the Highland Light Infantry of Canada who were in Biervliet. This meant that the Buffaloes could be retired as we now had a supply road in from Terneuzen.

The conditions for the fighting sure changed from what they had been in France. The only travel was by the roads on top of the dykes and these were under fire by the Germans. They had all the crossroads zeroed in for their mortars and artillery, so the poor foot soldier had to stay off the roads and slog along through the flooded fields. In some places the water was four feet deep. The Germans had blown some of the dykes.

You could see just two or three infantry men going up the field to take out the machine guns and mortars one by one. It took a lot of guts to keep going. To make things worse, the Germans would have their guns dug in on the far side of the dykes and we would be unable to see them. It was a tough job for the soldiers.

It was a matter of taking one crossroad after another, with many casualties. In this case a corporal and six or seven men would be all that could be deployed. If they stayed too close to the road they had to watch out for mines, so they ended up walking in the flooded fields alongside the roads. It wasn't long before it was discovered that the Germans would place one mine on top of another and when the top one was lifted, the bottom one would go off. It got so that every building, barn, and haystack had to be checked out or bombed out to make the area safe.

The sappers had the dirty job of checking the road for mines. It was usually just one soldier going down the road swinging his detector from side to side. It was pretty dangerous work.

By mid-October, the village of Ijzendijke was taken after the Germans counterattacked with a bayonet charge. They didn't last too long. Since there was a lot of shelling, someone decided that we should take some of the older people back for safety. Tran and I loaded up the carrier with four old ladies and took them back about four miles to a farm house. On the way back, Tran stopped the carrier about a hundred feet from the tee in the road leading to the town. When I asked him why we were stopping, he said that he had to pee. It seemed like a good idea, so I got out and as we were standing behind the carrier, we heard the "moaning minnies" coming. The six rounds landed on the tee section of the road. The Germans must have spotted us and had we kept going, we would have been blown up. When we got back on, Tran gunned the hell out of the motor and we skidded around the corner. The next shells landed behind us as we tore up the road.

A lot of prisoners were taken here and some of them were put to work peeling potatoes and cleaning up. They didn't seem to mind; the war was over for them.

The advance continued towards a place called "Oostburg". On the morning of the attack, Captain Dunkelman and I went to an observation-post location that he had spotted the day before. Since we would be going out before daylight, I carried a bren gun and ammunition along with a field phone. Two signal men came with us, stringing phone wire as we went along across the fields. We were about five hundreds yards in front of the infantry. As daylight started I could see our troops coming through the fields behind us and the captain gave the order to our mortars to

start firing. They threw smoke bombs mostly, to hide the advancing troops. We shelled a couple of farm houses and barns ahead of us as the soldiers advanced. All of a sudden I heard a peculiar noise and Dunkelman said to duck. The fins had come off one of our bombs and it was tumbling end over end, making a hell of a noise. It landed fifty feet from us, but due to the wet ground, all we got was a lot of dirt thrown at us. It kept us alert.

We kept the mortar bombs dropping just ahead of the infantry, with some smoke bombs to give cover. As the infantry neared any building, the mortars would be dropped on the houses or barns. Around noon, they reached their objective and we stopped firing. The captain went back down the road looking for our headquarters.

An hour later a sergeant came up and said that the front was secure and that we were done for the day. We collected up the Bren gun, telephone, and ammunition. We were standing about six feet apart, when I heard a "burp" and a hail of bullets went between us. I dropped down in the slit trench and the sergeant fell behind the mound of dirt. I loaded the Bren gun and looked around, but couldn't see anyone. I then connected up the phone on the chance that someone was still on the other end, and gave it a ring. Lucky for us someone answered and I asked for Captain Dunkelman. When he came on I told him that we were being fired on and that I couldn't see anything. He said to hold tight and that someone would take a look.

A few minutes later Lieutenant Auld (later a Member of the Provincial Parliament of Ontario) came up the road followed by two riflemen, spaced fifty feet apart, so that they would see any gun flashes if someone started firing. A few minutes later a flag was stuck out of a hay stack and a German soldier came out with his hands in the air. The officer checked him over and we marched him back to the farm yard, which was where battalion headquarters was set up.

It was starting to get dark and the cooks had just arrived with supper. As we were eating, a hail of bullets hit the top of the barn. We dropped everything and grabbed our weapons, not knowing what was happening. One of the scouts spotted two flags in a hedgerow, and then four other Germans surrendered. They were a sad looking bunch that had been hiding since the day before and were they ever hungry. Maybe that's why they gave up. The intelligence officer was glad to have some prisoners to interrogate.

The next day we moved into the outskirts of Oostburg. There was a lot of shelling so we hid in the cellar of one of the sturdy looking houses. It took a number of hits. Outside of scaring the hell out of us, no one was hurt. I remember at one point during the shelling, two of the boys cracked up and tried to dig a hole in the concrete floor, with their bare hands. It was pretty upsetting to see grown men crying and being terrified like that.

The next day we pushed on and were stopped short of a small village. At one point, the Germans started a counterattack and all hell let loose. I remember seeing a gun crew get so scared of the shelling that they hid in an old bunker while the Germans were coming down the road. The sergeant couldn't get them out so he started loading and firing the anti-tank gun all by himself. He didn't have too much time to aim the gun and so just fired it down the road. After nine or ten shells the Germans starting running back down the road and later gave up.

The next village was a small place called "Zuidzande". Another company was in the lead so we stayed in town on alert in case of counterattacks, although these were getting fewer. Late that night a rider came in and told us that a lot of prisoners would be coming in. Tran and I aided by a couple of others, collected them as they arrived, escorted by our carriers. The prisoners were herded into a local church. While they were being searched, I checked the wallet of one prisoner. He must have thought that I was going to steal his family photos, as he jumped on my back and started yelling. One of our boys gave him a clout on the head with the rifle butt and he settled down.

Their officer came over and gave him shit. By two o'clock in the morning, the church was full and we were told to take them to the transports three miles back.

It must have been a strange looking sight. There were just four of us with about three hundred prisoners. I stayed at the back with the young German officer. He gave me his paybook and it showed that he had a degree from Oxford University in England. He even spoke with an English accent. As we started out I told him, that if anything started happening, he would be the first to get shot. He assured me that the reason that they had given up was that they knew that the war was lost. By the time we had delivered them and walked back, it was 0430 hours and we were tired out.

While we were searching the prisoners, we found that they had a lot of Dutch money on them and, since it was of no more use to them, they left it behind in the church. I went back next morning and gathered up enough to fill my ammunition pouches. I wasn't sure that it would be of any use in the near future, but I kept it just in case.

We had a bird's eye view of how good our mortar crews were when they had to take out several buildings. The mortars were set up in a farm yard on good hard ground. The target was a house and barn that had some Germans hiding in them. As the infantry were going up along the fence line, the mortar crews dropped smoke bombs to hide their advance. When the infantry were near the house, the sights were raised and a bomb hit the roof of the house, blowing off the tiles. The next one went straight in the same hole and blew out all the windows and made a mess of the interior of the house. That was the end of engagement.

We witnessed one sad event on the road just before Zuidzande. We met the anti-tank carrier coming towards us towing a captured field piece. The anti-tank crew were in high spirits and a few minutes later they passed us on the way back to the front. They were only about two hundred yards ahead when we heard an explosion and saw a big ball of fire. They had hit a landmine that was buried on the side of the road. This anti-tank crew had done a great job, along with the mortars, in reducing small pockets of resistance along the dykes and buildings. The Bren gun carriers were also used a lot of the time to give covering fire when it was a matter of taking out a house or barn. This trio had been used in nearly every engagement and some good friends were lost that day.

In the three weeks that it took to clear out the Scheldt, I think that it rained every day. I don't know how the infantry could stand the mud and wetness of tramping through the fields, day after day. The Canadians were nicknamed "The Water Rats" afterwards.

During one short time out we came across some good wine. We also "found" some chickens and the captain made up the best chicken stew that I had ever tasted. Some of the boys got feeling pretty good.

The captain had a little accident that night while going to answer a call of nature. He forgot that although the first floor of the house we were in was level with the road, it was twenty feet to the ground from the back porch. Sometime in the night Captain Dunkelman's batman noticed that he was missing. His batman woke us up and we started looking around and found the captain laying on his back at the bottom of the stairs in the back yard. We thought that he was dead, but it was a case of being overtired and having too much wine. His batman wanted to leave him there, but he was overruled. It took six of us to drag him into the cellar. He was a big man, over two hundred fifty pounds. The next morning he was wondering how he had ended up in the cellar. We didn't tell him.

The battles to clear out the enemy that were preventing the use of the port of Antwerp were winding down. There were quite a few casualties in this operation. The Queen's Own Rifles had two officers killed and five wounded. Sixteen other ranks were killed and seven died of wounds.

Ninety-seven other ranks were wounded. The end of this operation came around November 3rd or 4th.

Looking back

Looking back, it had been quite a trip from France to Holland. We might have been a bunch of amateurs but we caught on quickly. It was a wonder that we stayed healthy all through the operations. We had slept under trees, in slit trenches, in the rain, and in wrecked buildings and old barns. Sanitation was no problem; you just found a corner somewhere and did your duty. Washing up was the biggest item, unless we were near water.

We drew rations in the form of compo packs and one of our guys volunteered to do the cooking. He was a French chap from northern Ontario and was nicknamed "Frenchy". His cook stove was a tin out of the ration box and was about twelve inches square and ten inches high with the top removed. This was then filled with sand or dirt and some gasoline poured in. When lit it provided a good fire for cooking. A little stir once in a while would keep the fire burning pretty well. He would boil up a mess of potatoes, mash them, and then dump in several tins of canned bully beef or whatever was in the packs. This mess was all stirred up and served while it was still hot, so the grease wouldn't gag you too much. With only two meals a day, we couldn't afford to be fussy.

We had one good spot for sleeping along the way. It was an old brick kiln where the bricks were placed in and then fired up to cure them. It was a series of heaters with a rounded roof made of bricks and two feet thick. Inside were some cars with bricks still on them. The operation had been suspended when we arrived. The kilns were still warm and provided a nice warm spot for a couple of days. Sleeping in barns on hay was also a good spot, as long as there wasn't any shelling going on.

One thing that was a real pain were the damn mosquitoes, probably because of the poor sanitary conditions. One night I was having trouble sleeping because of them. I lit a small length of rope and while it was smoldering I hung it from the roof of the slit trench. I put my respirator on because of the smoke and fell asleep. I woke up an hour later, almost drowning in my perspiration. That was the end of that experiment. I had written to the young lady at the Fairwarp Pub in England about the bug problem and a short time later I received a jar of anti-fly ointment. It was good stuff and it kept the flies away.

One interesting item that I had found in our dash across France was a homemade radio. It was near Abbeyville and we were staying on the outskirts of town. The owner of the house told me about how they received the British Broadcasting Corporation news every night. They had a large fireplace with the opening four feet wide and three feet six inches high. He reached up in the flue part and, from a shelf there, he brought out a small crystal radio set that he had made. It was a board three inches by six inches, with a piece of Galena crystal mounted on it. This was connected to an aerial wire that ran up the fireplace flue. On one side from under the crystal a wire went to the ear phone and the second wire of the receiver was connected to a small flat spring which was mounted so that one part was over the crystal. On the end of this flat piece was fastened a needle. To receive all he had to do was move the needle to various parts of the crystal and this would pick up the music and news from the British Broadcasting Corporation in England.

In one small town, we noticed a bank building with the front blown out. Someone wondered if there would be any money in the vault. One of the anti-tank guns was brought up and aimed at the vault door which we could see from the street. Two shells were fired and the door fell off but the damn vault was empty. We got out of there in a hurry.

With the Scheldt being finally cleared, it was announced that the battalion would be going to Ghent for a few days to clean up and rest. It had been a dirty three weeks so we all looked forward to civilization again.

Ghent

On October 3rd, we piled into the trucks and carriers and headed for Ghent. Along the way, people were lined up along the road and cheered as we drove by. In the city people crowded out on the roads and made it hard to get by. It was our first look at a real city and quite a nice change from living out in the fields. We reached Ledeberg, a suburb of Ghent, where we would be billeted out. Captain Dunkelmann drove to the centre square and we formed up. We were a dirty and sad looking bunch, but the women and children came running over to us and grabbed a soldier or two, and took us to their homes. What a treat to be staying in a house again! Here we had a hot bath and a good meal. The next day we had a change of uniforms. The people couldn't do enough for us. The people that my two friends and I stayed with, took us on a tour of the city and bought us numerous drinks.

The next day was spent cleaning up our equipment and carriers. That night we decided to go out and explore on our own. The city was full of troops so we started checking out the various beer places. Actually, we were looking for places of horizontal refreshment. The one pub that we entered seemed to be nearly empty and there were no ladies of the night present. Of course I didn't have any idea of what they were supposed to look like.

Since I was the only one who had taken any French at school, I was elected to do the inquiring. In my best French, I asked the old gent at the bar "Avez-vous des femmes ici?". This only drew a blank look. As we drank our beer we wondered what to try next. Then one old guy yelled over "pour faire l'amour?". I told him yes, that's what we were looking for. They all had a good laugh and then the barkeeper told us to go down the street four blocks, turn right, and look for the OK cafe.

We found the cafe and went in. The place was full of soldiers and the smoke was so thick that you could hardly see across the room. We sat there and ordered a beer. Looking around, I didn't see any women. We thought the old guy had played a joke on us.

Finally a beautiful looking gal came along and sat at our table. She introduced herself as the owner of the place. She must have weighed around one hundred seventy pounds and was nicely dressed with lots of jewelry on. After a few beer I was getting braver so I asked her the same question about the girls. She had a big smile and said "yes", that she had working girls there, but that they were expensive, two hundred francs. Money was no object so we decided to take the plunge. The place of business was upstairs. I tried to make a deal with her first but she declined saying that business came first. We decided to visit the "hired hands" instead.

The stairs going up were set in the middle of the room and everyone knew where you were going. But when you're half drunk, who cares! A lady was waiting on the second floor and guided me into her den. I looked around and all that was in there was a bed and a night stand with a jug of water and a basin. She didn't waste any time, but unbuttoned my fly and took out my pride and joy, grabbed a cloth soaked in cold water, and gave it a good scrubbing. What a shock! She then lay down on the bed and spread her legs one hundred eighty degrees. Gad, what a sight! I almost headed down the stairs, but it would have been too embarrassing to explain the failure. It was all over in twenty seconds and at the rate she charged, I figured she made around a thousands francs an hour. That's pretty good pay!

Downstairs, the other guys wanted to know how she was, so I told them “just great” and up they went. I sure caught hell afterwards. They weren't too impressed either.

The next night we headed back for another look around and the madam asked if we wanted the same one again. We told her that we could do without, if that was all she had. We explained that we were looking for someone a little younger and not in such a hurry. The madam just smiled and said that yes there was a younger one just back on the job. It must have been her time out. The younger one turned out to be a nice looking blonde with a slight limp, from a car accident when she was young. She had a lot more finesse than the old gal and a better approach to her job. I think she rather liked it. In that part of the world, this was a business and no one made an issue over it. Afterwards we settled in for a lot of beer drinking.

The next day we were a little hung over so rested until pub time. Since this would be our last night in the city, back we go to the same place. When we had arrived in Ghent the paymaster could only give us a part of our pay because he had run out of money and even had to go to the banks for more. At this point we were almost broke. We then decided to bring along some chocolate bars for barter. The madam said “no deal”; she wanted cash and it would be up to the blond to decide what she wanted. The outcome was that it would cost one hundred francs for the madam and the blonde gal would settle for five chocolate bars for herself. One chap was so drunk when he went up the stairs that he was gone for over an hour. We wondered what had happened. It took the poor blonde gal that long to fix him up. I guess if they don't finish the job, you don't have to pay. That's a good system.

While the battalion was in Ghent, Field Marshall Montgomery held an investiture on November 5th for several officers and non-commissioned officers who received awards for bravery on the battlefield. On November 7th the officers held a formal mess dinner and, from the stories that emerged, our Captain Dunkelman was the life of the party.

November 8th saw us leaving Ghent for a small village called “Eyne”, a few miles south of Ghent. Again we had a great welcome and the people wanted us to stay with them, but the training had to start again. We had a lot of parades, lectures, and weapons inspections to make sure that all was ready for the next move.

Ending this phase

The captain brought out some maps of Nijmegen, which was where the American 82nd Airborne Division had dropped earlier. At this time I noticed that a new type of wireless set was brought in to replace the old number 18 sets, which the Germans could and did jam very easily. The new set were the number 22 type which were also used by the tank corps. These sets were heavy and were mounted in the carriers. They were a big improvement.

November 11th saw us packing all the equipment on the carriers and trucks for the big move to relieve the 82nd Airborne Division. Late in the afternoon we got the order to move. The convoy stretched out several miles on the highway. The convoy went up through Ghent again and many small towns until we reached Antwerp, where we had an hour rest stop. This type of traveling was tiresome, as we were moving very slowly, with no headlights allowed. The only light was a small one about an inch in size and mounted under the truck body near the rear end. It was very dangerous for a motorcyclist to stay between the trucks or carriers and a couple were severely injured when caught between the trucks.

It had been an exciting and also dangerous trip from France to the Scheldt and, looking around, there were a lot familiar faces gone from the scene. We felt lucky to have made it this far and wondered what lay ahead. There had to be a pause. The Allies needed time to bring up rein-

forcements and supplies. The Germans were not threatening in our sector at this time since they had been either killed or captured. The few who got away had to regroup. Thus ended the first phase of the war for the British and Canadians troops.



Back centre: Coullrer
Far left: Gareau
Standing: Pinkney, Corrigan, Weatherstone, Marin, Bridge
Kneeling: Chalmers, Wilson

Chapter Four

On to victory

The drive through Antwerp was very interesting. We passed via a tunnel that had been built under the Scheldt River. It was about a mile long and was finished with white tiles on the walls and ceiling. It had a different type of lighting, sort of an amber colour. The effect was almost like a movie set. However we were not long going through and were back to the darkness again.

Once past Antwerp, the convoy had an hour stop, to check if all was going okay, and to give us all a chance to get out and stretch ourselves. Around midnight we arrived at a small town called "s-Hertogenbosch" and had another stop for a quick check of the trucks and carriers. Some of the trucks were starting to overheat because of the slow pace of travel and some carriers threw their tracks and this meant more delays. At 0400 hours, it was decided to stop for an hour's nap, as we were all pretty sleepy and tired.

Missing soldier

An hour later the order was given to proceed, but one of our crew was missing. It was our despatch rider and when we found him, he looked as if he had been drinking and had passed out. We threw him in the carrier and put him in my seat. I took over his motorcycle for him. Ten minutes later, someone noticed that only part of the convoy was following us. I was sent back to see what the trouble was and I found that they were still asleep. I had a hell of a time waking them up. I roared up and down the road to wake them.

Finally we got underway again and it was pretty scary for me as I had never driven at night, let alone without lights. I couldn't see a damn thing. I tried pulling in the clutch and revving up the engine to get some light on the road, since the battery seemed to be almost discharged. All the light did was give a little flicker. I thought that the rest of the convoy would keep going, but all at once a truck loomed up ahead, stopped on the road thirty feet away.

I jammed on the brakes but being so close the bike slid at an angle to the truck and I hit the back of the 60 hundredweight truck. The handlebar touched the left side of the truck and snapped back catching me in the breast bone. This probably saved my life as I missed the full impact of hitting the tailgate. I took a dive onto the road and landed head first and the crash helmet broke into two pieces. It was a good thing that I didn't have the chin strap fastened or it might have broken my neck. I was lying on the road trying to catch my breath. The Jeeps and trucks following almost ran over me. When I recovered enough to stand up, I discovered that my belt buckle had been bent in a U shape and I had lost the heel off my right boot. My gloves were worn down to my skin, from sliding down the road. The front wheel of the bike was alongside the rear one making it a write-off. The driver of the truck was amazed that I had survived. So was I! He helped me get in and the convoy got underway.

At daybreak we came to a first aid station and the officer in charge told me to stay there and get checked out. I was black and blue all down my right side and I hurt all over. I had two dandy black eyes, from the helmet hitting me. The officer said that he was recommending that I go to a hospital for X-rays. I told him that I didn't want to go anywhere except to find my unit. I knew that if I went to the hospital, it would mean going to a holding unit afterwards and then to another battalion. I certainly didn't want to change at this stage of the war. We had quite an argument and he finally gave in and put me in an ambulance and told the driver to dump me off at Nijmegen.

The driver was of the opinion that I wasn't in any shape to go wandering by myself. We drove to Nijmegen and the place was packed with troops. It seemed that the whole Canadian

army was there. We spent the next three hours looking for the Queen's Own Rifles mortar platoon and around four in the afternoon we finally found them. They were set up in a forward position at a small town called "Berg en Dal" which straddled the border between Holland and Germany. The ambulance driver had to stay the night since it was dark and he wasn't sure of finding his way back.

Captain Dunkelman took one look at me and said "What in hell happened to you?". When I gave him the details, he said to take it easy for awhile. I was pretty sore for a few days but being young I soon recovered. Two weeks later I thought that I should try riding a bike again. When the new one arrived, I got on and all of a sudden I got the shakes. I felt foolish, so I gunned the engine and tore off down the road and everything was okay again.

Nijmegen

We were staying in some houses that had been damaged when the American 82nd Air Borne Division had landed and seized Nijmegen. They were a hundred yards from the German border, so we crawled over and jumped over the fence, so that we could brag about having been in Germany. When we got back, we were greeted by a few mortar shells coming in. I guess we had been spotted and got out just in time. For us, it was a time of watching and waiting. We were about a mile back of the front with no clearly defined forward line. It was a no-man's land with patrols coming and going.

One day the captain called me in and showed me a map on which he had marked out a couple of roads. He wanted me to take the bike and check them out. After driving a mile or so I seemed to be in a big empty space. The whole area was empty and eerie. When I drove down the dirt road, I came to a spot where a big German tank had taken a direct hit. Parts of the tank were all over the field and the only piece left was the bottom of the tank that had been forced down in the dirt, level with the road. I had a strange feeling that I was being watched as I kept going. The road ended at the edge of a large woods called the "Reichswald Forest".

When I reported back, the captain had a Jeep waiting. He said to jump in and we would go and take another look. When we drove across that open space again I still had the feeling that we were being watched. We pulled up at the edge of the woods and crawled forward. I had no idea what we were looking for. As we came to the far edge of the woods, there was an open field and in the field were about twenty gliders. These had been part of the 82nd Airborne Division. Some of the gliders had crashed on landing and many were still intact with some of the American soldiers still in them. When we stood up for a better look, we were spotted and bullets started coming in over our heads. The captain yelled "Let's get the hell out of here". I think he set a new record for the 100 yard dash with me right behind him!

I remember looking back that we had seen a bunch of Germans at the far edge of the field but I guess we just got a little careless. This was another story for Captain Dunkelman at the officers' mess.

Some stories came out about the relief of the American 82nd Airborne Division. Our companies were at about half strength with only six or seven men to a section. At one spot a section of four soldiers of the Queen's Own Rifles were sent out to relieve a platoon of Yanks consisting of thirty soldiers. The Americans seemed insulted and one said that he had heard that the Canadians were good but he didn't think that we were that good. One of our privates told him that we were not as noisy. The Americans had been making so much noise that they could be heard a hundred yards away. They were in a large house playing cards and shooting craps. They were a good

bunch though and started trading badges and pistols and they left in good spirits. Some of them had also lost a lot of friends during their parachute jump.

There was no doubt in my mind that the Yanks were better equipped and their food was excellent. They had canned turkey, chicken, beef, spaghetti, and lots of it along with sweets. They seem to have an endless supply of cigarettes on hand.

Holding pattern

It was about this time that Captain Dunkelman was promoted to major and posted to D Company as the new company commander. He had done a great job with the mortar platoon and there was no doubt that he would carry on as usual. We were all sorry to see him leave us. There was a shortage of officers with the battle experience that he had. He was one of the few who had survived since D-Day.

His replacement was a Lieutenant Dean, who had been in the rifle companies and had been wounded. He seemed to be an odd duck, never really getting close to the men in the mortar platoon. He was hardly ever around which suited us just fine, as we didn't need parade-ground discipline in a forward zone.

The next three months were spent in a holding pattern. Our supply lines had been stretched to the limit and we had to wait for supplies and reinforcements. A lot of patrols were sent out, trying to find out exactly where the Germans were. They seemed to know where we were; every time we moved around some mortar bombs would come crashing down on us.

The Queen's Own Rifles were in reserve at this time but we had to be ready in case a counterattack came in. Living conditions weren't too bad in this location. We had some houses to stay in, and the cooks had a decent place to prepare the meals. We even had time to watch a couple of movies in an empty schoolhouse.

A lot of reinforcements started arriving and they had to attend some training courses, probably so they would be able to duck at the right time. It was quite a shock to some of the recruits, since they had been anti-aircraft gunners and service corps personnel, to find themselves in a front line roll.

Near the end of November, we had to move out of our plush quarters to a spot, about four or five miles east of Nijmegen, near a big bend in the Waal River. The Germans had blown some of the dykes and there was a lot of flooding in the lower areas. Because of the high water, we had to carry in most of our food and ammunition supplies. It was especially hard on the night patrols; they were soaked by the time they got back.

A new element was added to the war arsenal shortly after our arrival in Holland. The Germans started firing V-2 rockets towards England. We could see the smoke trails that they left behind as they went almost straight up and then headed north. They traveled at such a high speed that there was no defense against them.

Combat again

Later we moved further east and north to a new position. It wasn't long before the patrols ran into a German strong point, and all hell let loose. One of the D-Day company sergeant-majors showed his battle experience and managed to bring the platoon out of a dangerous situation. He called back for help and had the Typhoons drop some bombs on several buildings, where the enemy were holding out. For his part in this action Company Sergeant-major Charles Martin was awarded the military medal. There was no doubt that he saved a lot of the boys that day.

In December, with the water still rising, the Queen's Own Rifles moved out and the North Shore Regiment took over. We moved up closer to the river where there was a number of German troops. One of our patrols got surprised and all hell let loose again, with machine gun fire and mortar bombs coming in. Since it was considered a static front, the mortar platoon was used as a rearguard back-up.

During the second week of December we went to the rear and got cleaned up again. Some of us even had a chance to go into Nijmegen to see a show. It were part of the army's troop entertainment section. I had never seen this type of show before and found some of the skits silly, but it did amuse us for the time being.

In mid-December we moved again and were in an area southeast of Nijmegen. The Germans had taken one of the outposts and once again the Queen's Own Rifles had to go in and knock it out. There was a lot of shooting going on and at one point we thought that we would be overrun. Tran and I got on top of a haystack to get a better look at what was going on when suddenly a hail of bullets hit the stack and some just missed us. We slid off the stack and got behind a stone wall in case the Germans got through. Luckily for us the artillery fire that had been called in knocked out some of the German positions. The lieutenant in charge was wounded but hung on until he was relieved. He was later posted to the mortar platoon. He received the military cross for his part in this action.

During this period when we were back in reserve and sitting around cleaning up our equipment, we noticed a small spotter plane circling overhead around fifteen hundred feet up. Nobody paid much attention to it, until one of the guys took a look at it with his field glasses. He yelled out that it was a German spotter plane. One of the men from the carrier section ran over to his carrier and loaded up the 50 calibre machine gun and started firing bursts at the plane. Suddenly the engine started smoking and the plane went into a long glide path back towards the German lines. This type of plane was used by the artillery for spotting their targets.

Digging in

In mid-December, the Germans broke through the American lines at the Ardennes Forest. Immediately bulldozers were brought into the Nijmegen area and started digging out trenches for the tanks and self-propelled guns to take cover in. This would be our first line of defense in case of an attack in our sector. Another thing that was done was to gas up all the vehicles and have everything ready for a pull back, if it became necessary.

The Queen's Own Rifles went back to the area by the flats, next to the river. We were in a holding area again.

Just after dark we started hearing a clip-clop sound on a road not too far over the river. We thought that it might be someone taking the evening meals out to the Germans. After a couple of nights of listening the lieutenant thought it would be good practice for the mortars to see if they could deprive the enemy of their meal. One mortar was set up, lined up and a couple of bombs fired, with no results. The guy driving the horse kept whistling the Blue Danube waltz. The next night a couple of more bombs were dropped and still they missed. By this time the officer was getting frustrated and suddenly the light came on. He said, that since the German was so close, it meant that the mortars were firing almost straight up. The flight path must be getting diverted by the winds higher up.

He got on the phone to the air force command centre and explained the problem. They confirmed that at five thousand feet up there was a strong wind blowing from the east. At that distance our bombs would be right in the high wind area. We could hardly wait for the next night's

delivery. This time the mortars were aimed away to the right and only one bomb was dropped. When the whistling continued another bomb was dropped and there was no more clip-clopping on the road. I bet the Germans must have been pretty mad because they shelled our location several times, but didn't hit anyone.

Another chap and I were looking after bringing in our rations, since the area was almost all under water. I noticed a half gallon of rum in the ration box. Someone had decided that we should have three quarters of an ounce per day, to keep out the chill. The gang all decided that we should save it for a party when we got back to Nijmegen and so we did.

Just after Christmas we went back and stayed in some houses that had been evacuated. One chap had been in town and returned with three bottles of gin. On New Year's eve, the gin and a gallon and a half of rum was all mixed together in a big pot and the drinking began. Then it started to rain and it was freezing, but that didn't bother us. At midnight we set up a mortar and let one go to celebrate the new year. Almost immediately the other side sent back a couple of rounds, but they were off target and no one was hurt. None of us were feeling any pain by this time.

Missing carrier

Around eight o'clock in the evening, one of the drivers came in and said that a carrier was missing. We looked around and one of our chaps was missing also. Just then a call came in from British headquarters to the effect that one of our vehicles had slid down the road and had smashed a guardhouse, almost killing the soldier on guard. Jim Tran, our driver, and I along with another chap got dressed and went out in the pouring rain. We followed Jack Martin who was in a carrier just ahead of us. The road was covered with ice and it was tricky driving. Just outside of Nijmegen, we found the carrier and it had thrown a track. To make matters worse the track was on the inside of the sprockets. The boys had to take it apart in three sections and reassemble it back on. By this time we were soaked and almost sobered up.

I talked Tran into letting me drive his carrier back. He agreed; maybe he couldn't see the road either. Boy that was an experience! I had never driven one before and had to remember that the steering wheel actually applies a braking action to the inner track allowing the outer track to push the carrier around. I don't know how I did it but I managed to drive back to our billets without anything happening, except for turning around in a circle a couple of times. Tran said that he thought that I had done a good job.

Around this time the sergeants' mess was planning their Christmas dinner, but they were short of Dutch money for buying their liquor. I remembered that my ammunition pouches were full of Dutch money that I had gathered up during our trip to clear up the Scheldt. Since I had no place to spend it, I gave some of the money to the sergeant in exchange for a bottle. I thought that it was a good trade.

On one of our excursions to Nijmegen, I noticed a lot of activity going on in the city square. There were a few signs posted that said that "IT" was coming to town. No one seemed to have any idea what "IT" was all about. Finally it was announced that a free hamburger joint was going to open up. On opening day, there were several thousand soldiers lined up waiting to get a hamburger, when our movie star, Field Marshall Montgomery, went by in an open vehicle, waving to one and all. I guess that must have been the reason for the free burgers.

It got pretty cold in January and the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada network seemed to be working pretty well as we started receiving boxes of scarves, socks, and gloves, that had been sent over by some kind ladies who were connected to the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire. I never did find out who they were, but we sure

appreciated the items. We usually wore our socks for a week or two at a time and when we moved to Nijmegen, some other organization started sending socks over by the hundreds, all hand knitted. From then on I changed every week and left the dirty ones where some civilian could find them. I was too lazy to wash them. At least they wouldn't be wasted.

Pass to Brussels

In mid-January, a bunch of us were given four-day passes to Brussels. The trip there was quite an ordeal, since we all rode in the back of a 60 hundredweight truck, with no heating and with the exhaust fumes coming in under the truck flaps. It's a wonder that we survived.

When we arrived, we were all billeted at a large hotel and even had private rooms. What a luxury! I headed for a liquor store called "Simone Simon". That's, a strange name but it was the name of the owner. I asked him if he had some good Cognac and he started opening some bottles. When I asked him what he was doing, he replied that one should always sample a bottle of wine before buying. I bought five bottles of the best.

That night I went out to see the town and ended up at a large dance hall, with a full size orchestra playing. As was usual in that part of the world, they played fast and loud, almost like a marching band. They drank a couple of my bottles of Cognac and played Strauss waltzes for me all night.

The next morning I was awakened by a loud pounding on the door. It was the maid coming to make up the beds, another surprise. I had been warned to leave a tip or else the maids would likely steal something. I left a twenty franc note, and when I returned that night everything was okay. Some of the boys had some equipment missing.

That night we went to a cafe for a drink and the first thing I knew the female in charge came over with ten lovely looking gals and for a price we could take our pick. I picked out a pretty dark haired gal who was a little nervous. I guess she was just an apprentice. It was a waste of money. I went back to the dance hall to listen to the music.

The last night saw us back at the dance hall again and I had my last bottle to finish. Two ladies came in and sat at my table. It was a mother and her twenty year old daughter. After they drank half of the bottle of Cognac, they started to get friendly. They couldn't speak English and I didn't speak French too well, but we got along okay. I told the old gal that I wanted to have a go with her daughter and she laughed and with her hands made a motion to mean that her girl would get pregnant. I threw some condoms on the table and after a while she said that it would be alright. So I was invited to spend the night with them. It was a lot of fun. The daughter must have been practicing because it was quite a session. The next morning, her mother brought us breakfast in bed.

Since all good things have to come to an end, I got dressed and made ready to leave when the doorbell rang. It was the girl's boy friend, an English soldier, coming to visit his girl. What a laugh! The mother explained that I was a friend who had just dropped in to say hello and was leaving. I couldn't get out of there fast enough. It was a long trip back and I had a hangover.

A small village

Near the end of January, we moved to a small village called "Nebo". Here we stayed in houses. This was a welcome change from sleeping outside or in barns. Some of the boys went out, discovered some empty houses, and returned with a pile of mattresses. The next item that was

borrowed was a piano and it was pushed down the main road and set up in one of our billets. One of the guys could play very well and thus we had a little entertainment.

A week later we moved again, this time closer to the city. The billets were a lot better. Some of the civilians let us use the basements for cooking and even let us use their dining areas for taking our meals.

Being closer to the city meant that we could go out and look around the place. Nijmegen was a nice place with some damage from the shelling and bombing when the airborne troops had landed. The place was full of soldiers and we knew that this time out wouldn't last long.

A lot of 5.5 inch guns were being brought in and placed at about one hundred yard intervals. All were aimed to the east. There was one just outside our house and the gun crew stayed in the basement. Outside there were huge piles of ammunition for the guns. We knew that something big was going to take place very soon.

More recruits started arriving again and the whole battalion started battle drill courses. This was necessary to give them some ideas of what was coming up. What a time for this exercise, with the snow coming down and the whole place like a mud hole. It was a case of grin and bear it. The only good part was that we were still able to stay in some of the houses. One of the guys disconnected the gas line to the kitchen stove, turned on the gas, and lit it. The flame shot out three feet and warmed us up. It was a wonder that the place didn't burn down.

Since we were using some of the house facilities such as toilets, washing, and heating; it was decided to keep track of the water, gas, and electricity used. I had the job of going around the dozen houses and checking all the meters. At one place I met the prettiest girl that I had ever seen and she took me down to the cellar to show me where the meters were. She could speak a little English and I guess we must have taken too much time because her father came down and gave her hell in Dutch. I couldn't make out what he said but he looked kind of mad. One of the boys used to write to her after the war, but I don't know if anything ever came of it.

We had a great time for a week or so, playing cards at night and drinking some of the good Dutch gin. Everything was in short supply so we gave them whatever we could do without. The people sure appreciated it and when we finally had to pull out, it was almost like leaving home.

After nearly three months stay in Nijmegen, it was rumored that there were five hundred girls pregnant. I wondered who the lucky guys were. I think that some of the citizens were glad to see us move out.

During this period of rest and overhauling of the equipment, I was sent to Ravenstein, along with six other soldiers, to take a course on operating the new radio sets. Ravenstein is twelve miles from Nijmegen and is a pretty little village. The first thing I noticed was that the citizens swept off the sidewalk and road in front of their houses and places of business.

We had three days of instructions in operating the sets and then we strung a wire about four blocks to our billets. I had the headset hung on a nail by my bunk and, in the morning, I could hear music coming out from the earphones. It seems that the long wire acted as an aerial, so we put the earphones in a tin dish and you could hear the music all over the barracks.

One day while walking around the village, I met a pretty young lady and was invited up to her home for a meal. What a surprise; she had nine sisters. Her father was the local high school principal. I don't know how her mother managed it, but she put on a great meal. Afterwards the girls took turns playing the piano in duets and also three at the same time. The father taught music at the school and that was how the girls got their love of music.

The village people were so nice to all of us. They thought we were heroes or something. I asked the officer in charge if we could have a small celebration before we left and he was a little curious as to what I had in mind. I suggested that we could invite the town folks and have some

music and coffee and doughnuts. He said to arrange it with the cooks. When I told the cooks what we were planning, they said they didn't have any supplies. I had seen them taking food out to the black market at night to sell and make some money for themselves. When I told the cooks about this they were mad at me but in the end agreed to supply the coffee and food. Everyone had a good time and the people really went for the food. I still have pleasant memories of that village and I have a photo showing all ten girls lying on the river bank. All too soon it was back to Nijmegen and the big push into Germany.



Sylvie, Josephine, Prudence, Philo, Agnes, Florentine, Amy, Rieta, Angela, Yvonne

Push into Germany

The battle plan was to be carried out in two parts. Part one was to clear out the enemy in the northeast sector along the Rhine River and the second phase was to clear them out of the Siegfried Line and the Hochwald forest area, to the southeast. The Siegfried Line consisted of a great number of concrete piers that were intended to keep out the tanks.

Someone had hung up some signs advertising that this was the famous Siegfried Line. Some clothes and rags were hung up on a line with a sign stating that this was the washing hanging on the Siegfried Line. At the time there was a popular song out called "Oh, we'll hang out our washing on the Siegfried Line. . . ." et cetera.

On the morning of 8th February, I was awakened by the noise of the big guns that were outside our billets. It was around 0330 hours. I watched them for awhile and then went back to sleep. I woke up again around 0700 hours when a loud bang shook the house. One of the 5.5 inch shells had exploded in the breech of the gun and parts of the barrel were peeled back the way you would peel a banana. The sergeant in charge lost his leg and two others were injured, but no one was killed. There were 1200 guns of all sizes firing for eight hours, along with the 3 inch and 4.2 inch mortars.

Also, for the first time, "Monty's moonlight" was used. Large searchlights were turned on and aimed towards the enemy sites. The beams were deflected off the clouds. This lit up the area for the attackers and partially blinded the enemy. It was still scary for the infantry to go forward. The Germans had flooded a large part of this area. This also meant that they were stranded on isolated bits of ground, and these pockets were blasted by the artillery and bombers. Some of the smaller towns were wiped out completely.

By the 11th of February the water was so high that most of the troops were taken out by the Buffaloes or by the American DUKWs. The DUKW was a truck and boat combination that worked well on the water.

The next phase was started with almost the same type of bombardment and the attack was started on the morning of the 26th of February. Monty's moonlight was used again. It did prove effective and may have helped some. We could see some of the action and it was tough going for the infantry.

The new mortar platoon commander wanted to spot the mortar fire by himself, which was okay by me, so I stayed with the battalion headquarters group. We kept going towards the front as the forward line moved up. There were shells flying all around us and it was a wonder we weren't hit. The sniper fire was the worse. When you heard the whine of the bullet, it was too late to duck. It had already gone by.

We were a mile or so back of the front. We could see and hear the artillery fire accompanied by the attacking Typhoons. There were a few small towns being defended by some of the toughest German troops. I guess that this was to be their last stand before the Rhine River. Some of the buildings changed hands several times due to the fact that the platoons were down to less than half strength, and could not hold on when counterattacked. One particular group of houses was in Major Dunkelmann's sector. The enemy had just re-taken some houses from them and they were in danger of being overrun. I heard later that Sergeant Aubrey Cosens went kind of wild and talked a British tank driver into attacking several buildings. The sergeant, aided by some riflemen, managed to clear out the area and save the day. Later while he was going around checking on his men, he was killed by sniper fire. Sergeant Cosens was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously. I heard one officer say that he thought this action was the worst since D-Day.

On March 3rd the attack was started through the woods called the "Balberger Wald". It was a mess with tanks running over land mines, that had been planted all over the area. When the infantry stepped off the roads, they would step on small anti-personnel mines that could blow your foot off.

The carriers were left behind and a sergeant from the mortars and I were going through the woods when the shells started dropping all around us. I dove in one of the tracks left by the tanks and the sergeant fell on top of me just as an air burst occurred overhead. Some of the shrapnel bounced off his back pack. I think that he saved my hide that day. It was pretty bad just following along behind the infantry and I wondered how the chaps ahead of us were surviving.

Some of the tanks were stuck in the mud and one threw a track just as the enemy started a counterattack. They were, however, beaten back and the rest of the tanks went forward clearing out several buildings.

The colonel came up in his carrier with two men from the platoons and he told me to jump in. The battalion was moving up to consolidate the ground covered by the tanks. The two men were dropped off at two points to await the arrival of their platoons. The colonel and I went up a short distance, got out, and started walking up to a section of high ground. Just as we got near the T section in the road, we heard the moaning minnies coming in, and the colonel yelled "Hit the ditch". The mortar bombs fell all around us but the blast went over our heads. Then I was told to go up the road to a small group of buildings and the colonel went the other way.

I felt uneasy going up the road alone with just my Sten gun for company. When I reached the first house, a German soldier came around the corner and, just as I was about to shoot, I noticed a Red Cross arm band on him. There was a bunch of German civilians beside the house who were in the process of burying four people who had been killed by an incoming shell.

The shell had gone in the cellar window and killed the four and wounded nine others. I went down to have a look and it was not a pretty sight. I knew that I was not very welcome there, but explained that some first aid people would soon be there to help them out. The German soldier was very cordial. The war was over for him.

When our mortar section arrived, I showed the lieutenant to a house that I thought would do for the night. It wasn't good enough for him, so he looked around and picked out another one. He might have been a hero in the rifle company, but he didn't have too much personality.

When we were separated from the unit, during these phases of battle, we were pretty much on our own in preparing meals. The lieutenant didn't like the way we looked after our ration boxes and thought that they should be under someone's watchful eyes. I got the job. When I mentioned to the gang what he had said, Dunkelman's former batman pulled out a 45 calibre automatic and pointed it at my stomach. He said those boxes are staying right here. I looked him in the eye and said that if it bothered him that much, he could leave the fucking things there. I turned on my heels and walked out, fully expecting to have him shoot at me. He was an oddball and I don't think he had too much upstairs either which made him a dangerous foe. I heard later that he was supposed to be the son of some Huron chief. I had never trusted him from the first time that I had met him in France, so I steered clear of him from then on.

Leave in London

This operation had cleared the enemy out of the west side of the Rhine River from Nijmegen to Wesel and the Americans were crossing the river south of our positions. It was time for the battalion to regroup and some trucks arrived to take us back to the Reichswald Forest for a rest.

Everybody started looking around for old boards and pieces of tin, so they could build some temporary shelters to keep dry. It looked like a shack city but it was better than sleeping on the wet ground.

Since we would be out of action for a while, some leaves were granted and I was lucky to be given a seven day pass plus two days travelling time. There were about twenty of us and we were taken to Nijmegen and put on a train for Calais, France. As usual the cars were full up and, since it was an overnight trip, we had to sleep wherever we could. I crawled up on the overhead baggage racks and had some sleep. We were a great looking sight when we got on the ferry to Dover, England.

On the way across our pay sergeant mentioned that he was going to London to get married and wanted to know if any of us would be going there also. It seems that he wanted a Queen's Own to be his best man at the wedding. Since I wasn't going anywhere in particular, I mentioned that I would be available.

His future in-laws lived in a lovely place in the west end of London and they gave me a nice welcome. I had not had a haircut for six months and I looked scruffy so I asked his future father-in-law if there was a barber around. There were all closed so we went to a friend of his who had a barber shop. He gave me a nice trim, since it was for a special occasion.

The wedding was held in an old church and it was a very nice ceremony. The strange part was that, after the wedding, we all boarded the train at Victoria Station and went to Brighton on the south coast for the reception. It was a really fancy dinner and dance and the first such party that I had ever attended. Someone had decided that I should be paired off with one of the bridesmaids but, stupid me, I had an eye out for another one. I found out later that she was already engaged. I think that I had a few too many drinks that night. A couple of times I wandered the halls

looking for the young lady's room and the lady of the house kept steering me back to my room. The next day she told the others that I was sleepwalking. She was a fine lady!

After we got back to London, I headed for Aldershot to look for my brother. He had been wounded in Italy and had been shipped back to England for repatriation back to Canada. When I found him I had another surprise; my brother-in-law had just arrived with a batch of reinforcements from Canada. Being married and working in an industry that was making tank parts, he had been exempted. I guess that the shortage of cannon fodder meant that all who could be spared were being shipped over.

After a few beers I caught the train for Brighton and then a bus for Henfield to spend a few days with the Greenfields. I had "picked up" a small accordion in Germany and I gave it to their son. I found out later that he learned to play it and also had a small band. I must have been a nervous wreck because I think that I slept twelve hours a day. I know that I felt better when I left them.

I spent a couple of days in London with brother Joe and Fred. While we were walking around Trafalgar Square, two of the V-2s came down about two miles from there and we could feel the shock of the blast. There was no air raid warning and no sound except the big explosion. At the end of my leave, Joe and Fred came down to Dover to see me off on the ferry boat.

The trip back was a repeat of the trip down and I got back all tired out. There was a lot of activity going on and the rumours were that we would be crossing the Rhine River for the final push.

The final push

A lot of cleaning up had gone on while I was away. The troops had bath parades and were given some new clothes so they looked like soldiers again. Trucks were checked over and some training started for the new replacements that had arrived. They even had route marches. I think that the object of route marches was to keep us all occupied.

Near the end of March, we heard that the British had crossed the Rhine near a small town called "Rees" and that a floating bridge had been placed across just east of there. On the 28th of March the Queen's Own Rifles crossed over on the new bridge, aptly named the "Lambeth Bridge". It was quite an experience driving on the floating span. The current was very fast and we kept thinking that the bridge would fall apart. After watching a tank go over we were reassured that it was safe. After crossing, the unit swung west towards Emmerich, Germany and took over a sector from another battalion.

On the 31st of March, just north of Emmerich, the enemy were holding out in a wooded area, and the mortars were brought up along with the artillery to shell the woods. While this was going on the lieutenant came over and told me that we had to go back across the river for more mortar bombs. I grabbed a 1500 hundredweight truck and after two hours we finally found the ammunition depot. On the way back, after crossing the bridge again we got turned around and, after cutting across some fields, we found the road again and discovered that we were lost. We ended up in Rees which had been taken by the British commandos but they had gone on through. The town was nearly deserted; the only person there was an officer in a scout car talking on his wireless. He yelled over and wanted to know what in hell we were doing there. The lieutenant jumped out and went over with his maps to find out where we were. Just then I spied a German flag hanging on a fireplace mantel in a hotel lobby. The front of the place had been blown out and I thought that it would be a good trophy to take home. I tore into the hotel lobby and looked for some wire to attach to the flag in case it had been bobby trapped. The lieutenant started yelling to

come on out and get going. I grabbed the flag and ran back to the truck. I think the lieutenant wanted it, but I kept it and still have it.

That night the mortar section stayed in a basement of an old stone house. We were lucky that we had it. Later that night the enemy counterattacked and all hell let loose, with incoming shells and mortar bombs.

Around 2000 hours, the lieutenant decided that he should go and find out what was going on. He had been in the rifle companies and I supposed he was looking for new orders. He looked around the room and told me to get dressed and go with him. I had just suited up and grabbed the Sten gun when he said that he would go alone. Lucky for me that I stayed behind. The lieutenant was only a hundred yards down the road when a shell exploded behind him and flipped him into the ditch. He was pretty shook up but was unhurt. That was one episode that I'm glad I missed.

The shelling lasted for several hours and we were on alert all night. It must have been serious for even I had to stand guard for two hours that night. When daylight was returning, I could see a dead German soldier about fifty yards away in the field. He might have been killed by his own artillery. We were happy to see daylight again. Night attacks were always a little hard on the nerves.

By noon the next day, there were no enemy around the area. From then on it seemed that the Germans were using delaying tactics. It made for slow progress and the battalion was broken up into separate fighting units to search for and destroy the enemy.

Back to Holland

Soon we were sent back to Holland to complete the liberation of the north of that country. The main delaying tactics employed there by the retreating Germans were blowing up the bridges over the many canals and rivers that we were now encountering. This meant waiting for pontoon bridges to be brought up and strung across. At one small town, instead of waiting, Major Dunkelmann and his company simply waded across under heavy fire. The big problem was that their weapons were all caked with mud and dirt. They had a lot of casualties clearing out the town.

After two days of fighting the place was cleared and we all rolled into the city of Zutphen. The place went wild, with all the good town folks running out and hugging anyone they could get a hold of. After four years, they were sure glad to be free of the enemy.

As we continued up the main road, one of the platoons captured a bridge and a short time later was counterattacked. Some of the men of the Queen's Own Rifles were taken prisoner.

The next large town cleared was called "Deventer". The welcome was tremendous and a real festive mood was starting to take hold. It gave us a chance to get washed up and clean our dirty uniforms. Everyone had a clean place to sleep that night. I'm not sure where all the booze came from but we sure had a wild time and a lot of headaches the next morning. To cap off the day we learned that our anti-tank platoon had knocked off a German tank. That was quite a feat.

We moved from town to town and it was strange that as soon as we took a place, the flags would pop up all over the place. The small towns were spotless and one could not help but wonder how the people had managed to keep their places so neat.

We were making our way northeast, through Holland and it soon became apparent that the conditions were getting worse for the people. The retreating Germans took everything that they could carry with them and the people were going hungry. In the city of Leeuwarden, the situation was so bad that truckloads of food were brought in. I remember handing out compo ration to the citizens and, as hungry as they were, they were very polite and very happy to see us. The land was empty of any produce or farm animals. It had a sobering effect on us all.

The battalion was still scattered all around the countryside, clearing out small pockets of Germans, who didn't seem to realize that it was over for them. A good many were cut off at the Zuider Zee area. The northeast section of Holland was cleared out and we stopped at Groningen, for a day and then headed on into Germany.

Germany again

Not too far inside Germany we came upon a prisoner of war camp. There were many French, Russian, and Polish prisoners there. When we opened the gates they came out in a swarm and were grabbing and kissing anyone that they could get a hold of. A couple of them grabbed Sergeant Corrigan and he stepped back embarrassed, and said that he would bop the next one that tried to kiss him. The poor people were so glad to be free and we gave them some rations to help them out until trucks could arrive to transport them away.

We were now starting to move up towards Aurich, and it was slow going. In some places the Germans had tied charges to the trunks of the trees along the road. The trees were made to drop across the road and in some places there would be ten or twenty of them to be cleared before we could go on. Another tactic that they used was to explode a 500 pound bomb every few hundred yards or so along the highway. This meant waiting for a bulldozer to come up and fill in the giant crater. In several places it was necessary to put portable Bailey bridges across to save time.

I think it was on the first of May when we pulled into a small town. The resistance had been fairly light, mostly mortar and sniper fire. We were in the east part of town and I was looking out a doorway at some buildings that were on fire in the distance. I heard something hit the door jamb. It was a bullet from a sniper's rifle. It missed me by about a foot. I guess that the sniper had forgotten to allow for the wind. I dropped down to the floor and got the hell out of there in a hurry. I was a little shook up that night.

Since we were now on German territory, we had to pay more attention to all the places that we came to. The people stared at us wondering what would happen now that the Allies had arrived. Whenever we stopped for the night, we would carry out a search, of all the buildings. The houses and farm buildings were all in one unit so you stepped from the kitchen or shed into the cow barn proper. I was in one such barn looking around in case some soldiers were hiding out when I spotted what looked like a storage area over the cows. I had one of the kids bring me a ladder so that I could have a look. The only thing that I saw were a bunch of chickens and a lot of eggs. I gestured to the old farmer for his cane, so that I could reach the eggs. I filled up my helmet with them. I sure got a lot of dirty looks from all those watching. I don't know why I left them the chickens. We had a good meal that night with fresh eggs for a change, instead of powdered ones.

Once, as we drove up a farm lane, there were several buildings that we had blasted with artillery. In the yard, were the remains of a German soldier. He must have gotten a direct hit because the pieces were all over and some parts were stuck to the tree branches. It was a gruesome sight!

Several small towns were taken in the next couple of days without much opposition, since the Germans didn't want their places blown up. The end was getting near and the last battle was at a crossroads just outside a place called "Ostersander".

During the afternoon of May 4th, a Lieutenant-Colonel Haurumz and the burgomaster (mayor) of Aurich came in under a flag of truce. They surrendered the town of Aurich and all the area around there. One of the sergeants had a camera and wanted to get the colonel's picture, but we had been warned about taking photographs. Since it was raining a little, I had my gas cape on to keep dry. The sergeant gave me the camera. I stuck it out an opening in the cape and shot two

photos of the colonel, one with his flag and one of him on the motorcycle going back. We were then told not to fire unless someone fired at us.

The official cease fire came through at 0800 hours on May 5th, 1945. It was a shock to us and we all stood around looking at each other, thinking that somehow we had survived. No one said anything, that I can remember. I guess we all had our own thoughts on what we had gone through and seen.

The battalion held a church parade at some small town. I am unable to remember the name. I'm sure that all who could, attended.

The battalion was going to be dispersed around some of the small towns as an occupation force. It was decided to send some of us up to look for suitable billets, since we would be staying with the civilians. Our Sergeant Corrigan and I were chosen from the mortar platoon and we rode in the platoon commander's carrier, driven by Jim Tran. Someone handed me a sword with a piece of table cloth on it and we started our small convoy up to the German lines. As we drove along the road we could see the soldiers still lying in their slit trenches with their machine guns handy. They neither smiled nor waved as we passed by and they looked weary, dirty, and hungry and were probably happy that it was soon to be over.

When we arrived at the village, we dispersed and went looking for suitable houses. The sergeant and I went in one house and opened doors to the various rooms to see what was available. I opened one door and did a double take. There were two girls in bed around sixteen and eighteen years old. When I opened the door they sat up in bed and they were naked. They had beautiful breasts, at least that's what I thought at the time. I called to the sergeant to come and have a look. All the while I was eyeing the gals. Just as the sergeant got there, the girls' mother came running up and gave us hell in German and slammed the door shut. She couldn't figure out what we were doing there, since the German soldiers were right outside. Needless to say, we didn't get to stay there.

The war was officially declared over two days later, on May 8th, 1945. With the war over, letters of congratulations, came in from the King, Winston Churchill, and the generals in charge telling us that the Canadians had done a good job.

We spent a week, billeted in houses, and this gave us a chance to get cleaned up. With boots all shined up, with trousers ironed, and with haircuts we started looking like parade ground soldiers again. We were not allowed to fraternize with the civilians and they kept their distance, probably wondering what was in store for them. It was good to be able to sleep between clean sheets again.

I did a lot of walking around the city of Aurich, taking in the sights. It is an old city with a lot of old buildings, but in good shape. They had missed the bombing.

A week later, we had a visit from the brigadier who handed out some medals to some of our surviving heroes. A lot of good men were missing from the ranks. He also announced that the Queen's Own Rifles would be stationed in Holland while waiting to go home.

Early on the morning of May 15th, we started for Holland. We stopped for the night at a place called "Barneveld". The next day saw us arriving at Amersfoort, where we took over the barracks from an English Regiment that was heading back to the United Kingdom.

Photo of mortar platoon taken at Amersfoort,
Holland in June of 1945



Back row: Ross, Mitchell, Massey, Campbell, Gareau, Osborne, Chalmers, Derenzo, King,
Hanes, Warner, Marin

Middle row: Corrigan, Gray, Weatherstone, Pinkney, Eckert, Tran, Yule, Campbell, Scott, Wilson,
Smith

Front row: Wallis, Bridge, Dowds, Martin, Guiton, Deans, Coullrer, Catlow, Berry, Himmen

Chapter Five

After the war

Amersfoort was a very nice looking city. The entrance was through an archway, with living quarters over it. It must have been a fortress city in the olden days. The streets were wide and clean. This was typical of most of the Dutch cities we visited.

Our new quarters were in an old armoury similar to the barracks in England. They were made of brick and concrete. It was now summertime and the armoury was really nice and cool during the hot days. It was located near the centre of the city so it was handy for our evening outings. Most of the unit was scattered around in various places.

Shortly after arriving, we found ourselves on a different mission, escorting German prisoners of war back towards Germany. A lot of carrier units were involved. Each unit would escort the prisoners about twenty miles along the road and then hand them over to another unit who would continue on the same way. They had been sitting around prisoner of war camps and some of them were not in very good physical shape. After fifteen miles or so we had a lot of stragglers and we had to make a lot of stops. It was an all day affair and we were glad to get back to our barracks.



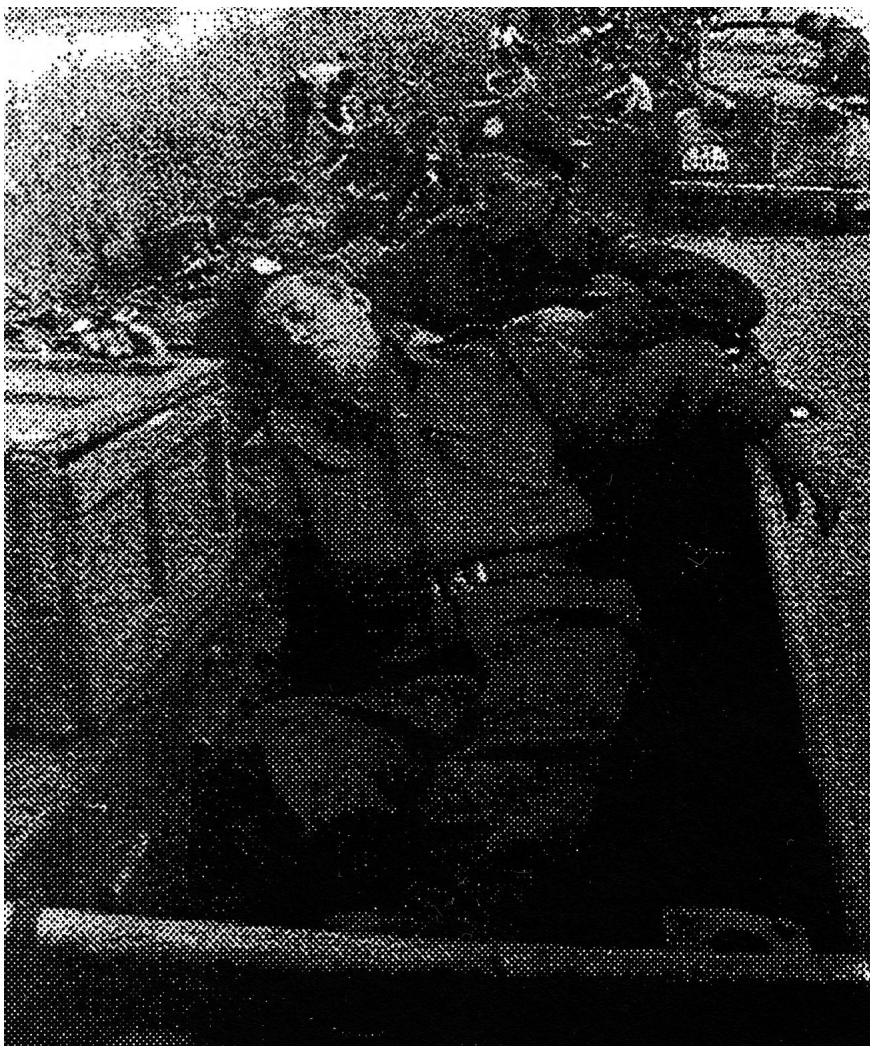
The author having a nap while on escort duty

Someone said that the brass had decided that the repatriation system was to be based on “first in, first out”. That might have looked good on paper but, in reality, it was a joke. Most of the draftees were home early in the summer, while the rest of us had to wait around for months. Some of the boys volunteered for service in the Pacific and they left at once for home. They were lucky that the war ended by the time they arrived home so they were discharged early.

Cabbagetown

To keep everyone occupied, the Queen's Own Rifles built a small shack town and called it "Cabbagetown". They elected a mayor, council, and everything that was needed to run a small town. The guys took their jobs seriously, but it was fun.

One of the first items of business to be carried out, was to have a canteen called the "Big 2 Club". Here beer and some food was sold during the evening. When we had the first dance that the civilians were invited to, I was looking after the sale of beer tickets. According to the rules, I was supposed to sell only one ticket at a time to a customer. After a couple of drinks, some of the guys wanted more than one ticket at a time, so I gave them all they wanted. Sales that night were almost ten times more than normal. Of course when the canteen closed, many went back to the barracks with tickets in their pockets. I don't think they cared too much about it. They all had a good time.



Corrigan (sleeping) and Tran with Germans resting in the background

I think that it was during the opening night that I spied a couple of pretty gals. I wasn't much of a dancer but I asked one of them for a dance. She turned out to be an excellent dancer, so I monopolized her the rest of the evening. I think what clinched it was that I told her that I was go-

ing to take her home with me. Her name was Aria. It was the start of a great summer, having someone to show me around the city and the countryside.

To keep us from being bored, we started having morning parades and drill exercises. Maybe it was a good way to sober some of us up in the morning. The afternoons were taken up with sports and vocational courses to keep us busy. It was a sudden change from what we had been doing, but we went all out to cheer our baseball team.

In June some of the old-timers were sent home on drafts and soldiers from other units were being sent to the Queen's Own Rifles. It must have been confusing for them to start basic training all over again. The top brass thought that they should be trained as riflemen. The unit was losing a lot of the veterans and it wasn't the same.

Brother-in-law

Word came down that the unit had to shape up for a big parade in June. Gallons of old paint arrived and we scrubbed down the trucks and carriers. Someone came up with the idea of mixing gasoline in the paint so that it would dry faster. It sure did the trick and the paint dried as fast as it was applied. It was a good thing that we didn't have any rain until after the parade. The first downpour washed it all off.

Some other units arrived and camped out in Amersfoort to get ready for the march past. I had heard that the Lincoln and Welland battalion was in town so I went looking for them. I located my brother-in-law, who had arrived in Holland sometime in April. He was surprised to see me. I don't think that he was overly fond of the army.

His unit was stationed in some buildings near the centre of town and it soon became a popular place for black-market sales. My brother-in-law was Dutch, having been born in the city of Terneuzen. He had immigrated to Canada as a young lad in 1928 but could speak the language very well. At night we would hang out around the black market area and listen to the civilians discussing how to cheat the soldiers. The civilians were short of everything and the soldiers were short of money, so anything that wasn't nailed down was sold. One despatch rider sold his motorcycle for the equivalent of 100 dollars and was charged 20 dollars for replacement value. It was a good bargain.

A couple of weeks later, I went with the girl to visit a sick friend. When we were in the bedroom, I happened to look out the window and there in the garage was the motorcycle, with the number "60" on the front. This was the battalion identification number. Back at the barracks, I reported the find to the military police and the bike was returned, with no charges laid.

A Dutch home

After a couple of meetings, the young lady took me to her home to meet the family. Her mother was a very pleasant lady but could speak no English. Her father was an engineer and had papers for the position of chief engineer for the large ocean going ships. He spoke very good English, which was required in his job as chief engineer at the local Lever Brothers soap factory. He didn't seem too keen on soldiers squiring his daughter around, especially when he found out that I was a Roman Catholic. It seemed that Holland was divided by the various religions. His next door neighbour was a Roman Catholic and they avoided each other. The problem was similar to what we had back home, but they carried it to extremes.

The day for the big parade finally arrived and it was to be held on the 6th of June 1945, the first anniversary of the D-Day landings. The parade was in the city of Utrecht and the salute was

taken by General Crerar. The Queen's Own Rifles had been practicing for the march past and they did so six abreast at 140 paces to the minute. This is standard for rifle regiments but is very hard to maintain. I was with the support company and rode in the carrier where I had a good view of the parade. I think that the proudest soldier there was our Captain (now Major) Dunkelman. I watched him strutting along, in front of his company, every inch a soldier. He was one of the few officers who had lasted all the way from the beach. Thousands of Dutch civilians lined the street and cheered wildly. It was a great day.

Doorn

Around the first of July, the battalion moved to the small town of Doorn, twelve miles to the west. Our platoon was billeted in a big old house that had lots of room and spacious grounds. The atmosphere was that of a summer camp. Trips were arranged to various places for swimming and fishing. Some even went sailing on the Zuider Zee.

Someone decided that we should build a small park complete with a concrete wading pool in a nearby area. Someone also lost the blueprints for the pool and it was a mess. I was given 25 “helpers” and lots of cement and gravel and told to fix it up. Back home I had done a lot of mixing, but didn't have too much experience in trowelling concrete. However we went at it and mixed and poured concrete all day. The pool was kidney shaped and turned out looking pretty good. I still have a photograph of it.



Pond and park at Doorn in July of 1945

I was transferred to the pioneer section and we made a few repairs to the building. As part of our recreation, someone started boxing matches between the units, so we then built an outdoor boxing ring. It provided a lot of excitement among the competitors.

The baseball team provided the most excitement, when they went on to win the Canadian Forces championship. I had never watched hard ball played before, but it was a great way to spend the day. Some of the guys even played golf, with a Queen's Own Rifles corporal becoming Canadian Army golf champion.

Doorn was the home of Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm, who had been exiled to Holland in 1918 after the first world war. He had lived in a large estate, that was now closed to the public. I stopped at the gate house one day to ask for a tour of the grounds. The caretaker agreed after I gave him a pack of cigarettes, but access to any of the buildings was not allowed. I did have some photos taken in front on the house and one beside his white marble bust that was mounted on a pedestal in the garden.

Part of our billet was used as a storehouse for equipment and blankets. When the rooms filled up a lot of material was left on the covered porch. I noticed some of the guys heading for town with blankets tucked under their arms. I found out that they weren't going to a blanket party, but that there was a good demand for them on the black market. The cooks also seemed to be enjoying a lot of fine liquor. The same thing was going on there.

There were a lot of rumors circulating about an inquiry on missing goods. Shortly after, one of the large storage places went up in flames. I guess that was a good way to balance the books.

We made a lot of friends in Amersfoort while we were stationed there, so a truck was laid on to provide transportation to and from there every night. I used to make nightly visits to see the girl that I had met. I happened to mention to her father that I had started learning to play chess while in England. I think our first game lasted about ten moves. He then agreed to teach me the opening moves and skills required to play a good game. His daughter told me that he had been a contender for the world's chess champion matches before the war, but had never won. We had a game nearly every night and of course I always lost. To repay him for the lessons, I usually bought some pipe tobacco for him.

On one visit to their home I noticed a bump on his forehead, but he didn't tell me what had happened. His daughter said that he had put the strong tobacco in his pipe and had gotten dizzy and fallen off the chair while at his chess club. I had forgotten to tell him that he should have mixed it with his milder stuff.

Leave in Amersfoort

I had a leave coming due and was planing on going to England, when the old fellow suggested that I come and stay with them for the week. When I put in for my leave, I asked for rations for a week. The cooks got pretty snotty about it and started putting in a couple of potatoes, some vegetables, and some canned goods in a box. I got mad and told them that if they didn't come with something better, the major would know where the rations were going. That did the trick and I ended up with two full boxes and a Jeep to transport it to Amersfoort.

One of the cooks drinking almost finished him one morning. He arrived at the cookhouse with a big hangover and thirst to match. He looked around and spied a beer bottle with some liquid in it and thought that it might be stale beer. When he took a couple of swallows he realized that it contained some kind of disinfectant. He took the meat cleaver and split the top of a can of condensed milk and drank it down. He was rushed to the medical officer's office and the doctor told him that the milk saved his life by coating his stomach. He never drank again after that episode.

When we delivered the boxes of food, the mother started to cry, for she hadn't seen some of the items in years. Nothing was wasted and could she ever cook.

The Jeep driver dumped me off and promised to pick me up in a week. It felt strange moving in with the family. Although I had visited almost every night this was different, being part of a family again. They must have realized how I felt, as they went out of their way to make me feel at home. The hardest part was to keep from staring at their lovely daughter all the time. I had heard that in one part of Holland, if one took a shine to the daughter, a window was left open for him so that he could visit at night and become acquainted.

The first night her mother went all out and put on a great looking table. It had been a long time since she had cooked potatoes and as a result they were only half cooked. The old girl was embarrassed so I volunteered that she should have cut them up into smaller pieces. At that there was a great outburst of laughter and I couldn't figure out what I had said that was wrong. Later I found out that the word in Dutch means a lady's private parts. What a hard way to learn a language! This bit of merriment broke the ice and relaxed everyone.

The summer was moving along and the fruits and vegetables were becoming more plentiful. Since there wasn't too much to do around the city, her father suggested that we could take the two bicycles and go to an orchard for some apples. But first the bikes had to be fixed. The one bike had been taken apart and stored in the attic for years. It was pretty rusty and had no tires, just two old patched tubes. To solve the problem, some cloth was wrapped around the rims and the tubes put on. Next we took some two inch strips of old canvas and wrapped it around the tubes and rims, putting on several wraps. As long as the tire pressure was kept low, this worked okay.

The girl and I took off early one morning and my legs were soon getting tired, so I asked her how much farther it was. She said about twenty miles. I almost fell off the bike at that. We had to stop several times to pump air in the tires. After three hours we finally found the apple orchard. The apples looked very good and we filled up four bags, two for each bike and started back. My bottom got so sore from the worn out seat that I had to walk most of the way back. Of course the real reward was the wonderful pies that her mother made.

The highlight of the week came on Sunday afternoon when, after playing chess for nearly four hours, I finally won a game. The old boy wouldn't play any more games with me, but would let me sit in when he was going over an unfinished game from his chess club. I never knew whose position I was playing, but I didn't really care. It was fun.

On the last day of my leave, we went for a walk along the narrow canal near Amersfoort and were watching the many sail boats going by, when a machine gun opened up behind us. I gave a loud yell and three young boys ran out of a hidden bunker just behind us. It was so well camouflaged that it had been missed. We went over to have a look and the small bunker was full of weapons. They must have been left behind when the war finished. I reported the find to the military police and they turned the case over to the local police.

About this time we went to a local dance and I was not too light footed on the floor. A friend of the young lady suggested that I attend his dancing classes for lessons. Since there wasn't too much else to do we started going to the studio twice a week. The cost was a package of cigarettes per week. I took the lessons all summer and by fall I could dance pretty well.

Back at the billets someone started a photography club. We started taking pictures of everything we saw and learned how to develop the films. To keep the air out of the solutions, we put condoms on the bottle tops. The major in charge didn't think that the condoms were being put to proper use.

Holland to England

We had put in a very pleasant summer in Holland but in October word came that we were to start packing to go home. For some of us that had made an attachment with some of the people, it would be hard to say goodbye.

All the weapons, vehicles, and surplus equipment were turned in, during the latter part of October. The Eighth Brigade was officially broken up and, on November 1st, we left for England with a stopover in Nijmegen. Here we saw some of the families that we had met during our stay the winter before. They were sad to see us go but glad that we had survived. After a week's visit, we went by train to Calais, France and embarked for England. There were a lot of sad looking faces, as the shores of France receded.



Last look at Calais, France in 1945

It was a fine sunny day, with no wind, a sharp contrast to the trip we had the year before. This time we could enjoy the boat ride. After a short drive we arrived at Horsham in the south of England, not too far from where I had spent a month in the Canadian Army hospital, two years before.

The month of November 1945 was spent mostly with dental and medical parades and having a last look at the country. I made a couple of trips to my favourite city, London.

On one visit I found a tea house where chess players met to drink tea and play. When I went in a distinguished looking chap came over and asked, "Care for a game Canada?". I said okay and we sat down to play. I had learned a bit while in Holland and we had a very tight game. After three hours, I ended up the winner. He was a gracious loser and wanted another match. I was pooped out and lost after an hour of play. I don't know who the chap was but he certainly asked a lot of questions about Canada.

I spent a couple of days going around London looking at the old sites and some of the pubs. One favourite pub was called "Dirty Dicks". It was located in the eastern part of London, not far from the Tower of London. Inside it really was dirty, with dirt floors and wooden boards on the walls. Along the wall, over the bar, were hundreds of different types of coins and paper money from countries all over the world. I noticed that there were many names carved on the table tops

and also on the walls. The bartender said that that was the custom so I also carved my initials on the wall, along with the other soldiers who had been there before.

The “ladies” that were there left a lot to be desired, so I left and went up to the Russel Square area for a last look around. While I was standing there day dreaming, a young lady came along and said that I looked lonely. I told her that this was my last look at London and that we were sailing for home in a couple of days. She said that she was all done working for the day and would like to entertain me before I left. It sounded like a good way to spend the night, so I joined her and we went to her apartment. She cooked up a fine meal. I stayed the night. When I left in the morning, I wished that I had met her earlier. She was some gal!

Back at the camp, things were starting to move. We all had a medical inspection and one last look around the town and one last pint of mild and bitters, our favourite drink. Moving day finally arrived and we marched to the station and boarded the train for the trip to Liverpool. The station platform was crowded with the town folk who had come to wish us goodbye.

Back to Canada

As the train slowly pulled out, some half-wit blew up some condoms and pushed them out the train window so that they could float in the wind. I think some of the people were put off but most of them just laughed. After an all day ride we arrived at Liverpool and got on board a ship called the “Monarch of Bermuda”. It had been a pleasure ship before the war and it still looked pretty nice. There were about sixty war brides on board. They were quartered on the upper deck out of the way.

A party of three hundred of us were detailed for various duties and I was lucky to be on the bridge watch. It was two hours on and ten hours off. My shift was from 0300 to 0500 hours and from 1500 to 1700 hours. Before the ship sailed I had one of the dock workers buy a bottle of light ale for me to take home.

The ship sailed early in the morning of December 9th, on the morning tide. It was so foggy, that I don't know how they found their way out of the harbour.

Being on the work party meant that we slept down in the E deck. This was a good spot, for you couldn't feel any of the rough seas and it was quiet. I liked getting up at 0200 hours. Morning was the time that most of the day's baking was done. The small loaves of bread smeared with jam, along with bacon and eggs, made it a great way to start the day. I was on the bridge watch just to the right of where the wheelsman steered the ship. We were to keep an eye out for any lights that we might see from passing ships. I asked the captain all kinds of silly questions, but he didn't seem to mind and it made the time go fast.

Around the third day we started encountering high winds that seemed to get stronger every day. By the fifth day the waves were at least twenty feet high and the ship had to slow down to avoid crashing into them. A lot of the guys were pretty seasick and there were fewer people for meals every day. I never had that problem and I thought it just great that there was more to eat for the rest of us.

I think we docked at Halifax on December 15, 1945. When we docked, everyone rushed over to the side rail to get a look at the city and the ship started listing over so far that it was in danger of turning over. This was because there was a foot of ice all over the front of the ship, caused by the water spray. The captain got on the horn and had us move to the centre, to even out the ship.

After a short delay, we finally got off and formed up on the dock. Here an officer went down the line and had every tenth or so soldier step out of the line. They then had to empty all

their packs on the dock. I guess they were looking for guns and ammunition that we were bringing home as souvenirs. Lucky for me that they missed my pack as I had two pistols that I had found in the German slit trenches.

After this silly inspection, we boarded the train and the ladies from various organizations came alongside the train with apples, oranges, bananas, and sandwiches for us. We hadn't seen these items in a long time and they were welcome gifts. Later in the afternoon the train pulled out and we headed for home.

It was a long troop train and the cars were full. We had to sleep sitting up, but with all the excitement of being back in Canada, it didn't bother us too much. At most of the stops, someone would be there with some goodies for us. I thought that this was a nice way to welcome us back. During the second night, as the train stopped for water and coal at a station near Smiths Falls, one guy looked out and said that he lived near there. He threw his equipment out the window and jumped out. I guess he couldn't wait.

The train pulled into Union Station in Toronto on the morning of Monday, 17 December 1945. We filed out of the train and formed up on parade and, accompanied by four bands, we marched up University Avenue to the armouries. There, the 2nd battalion of the Queen's Own Rifles was lining the street.

We marched into the crowded armouries and stood there listening to some speeches from the former commanding officers. A chap standing next to me started crying and I asked him what was wrong and he said that his wife was standing over by the wall. I told him to go on over and when he left the parade broke up. That was the end of the speeches.

I had a great visit with some of the guys that had gone home earlier and were already back at work. I happened to look around and was I ever surprised to see my younger brother standing there, looking for me. He had been in the navy and been discharged earlier in the year. We had a good time that evening going to a girlie show. We caught the train for home at midnight.

We arrived back in Cardinal the next morning. When I got home, there was a lot of hugging and kissing and suddenly I felt tired. I sat down in the old rocking chair by the window and had a look at the river. I noticed the old spaniel dog lying under the kitchen stove. The noise woke her and she looked up for a second and was dozing off when suddenly the old dog looked up again and made a mad dash, jumping up on my lap and licking my face. It was sure good to be home again!



Uncle Armand, brothers Joe and Al, Uncle Tony, John Marin

Epilogue

I was discharged from the army on the 4th of February 1946, after 46 months of service. It had been quite an adventure and it should have been the end. However, while attending Queen's University in Kingston, I applied for the Canadian Officer Training Corps. I took the M test again and found out that I scored 204 out of 212 points. I spent the summer at the officer training school at Barriefield and it actually felt good to get back in the harness again.

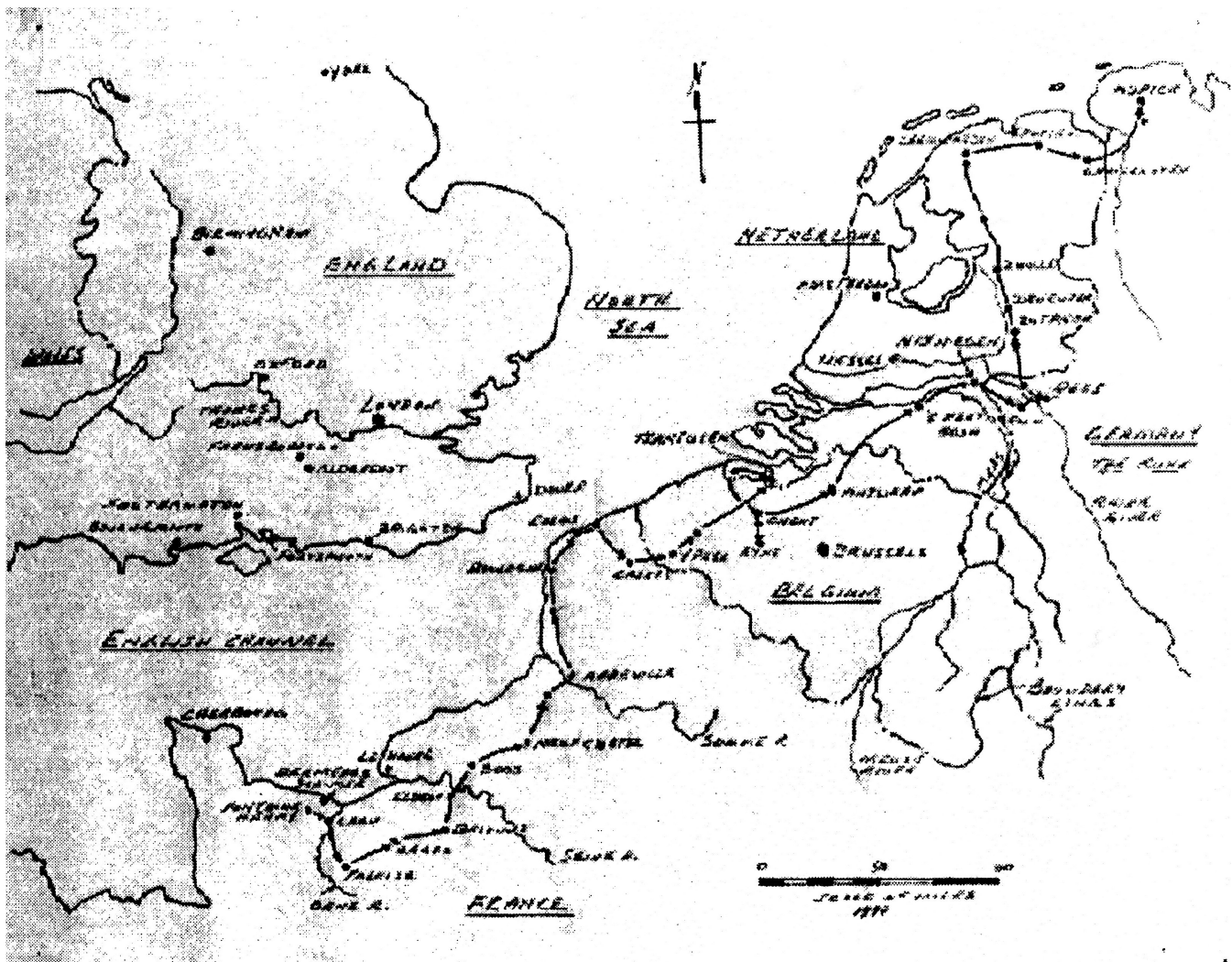
I had been away from school for too long and found it difficult to keep up my marks, so I left after the second year. This was also the end of the army career.

In 1969 we traveled to Europe, with some 34 other former members of the Queen's Own Rifles on a grand tour of some of the former battle sites. The tour was arranged by an old mortar man, Jack Martin. We also visited some of the cemeteries of the Canadian war dead.

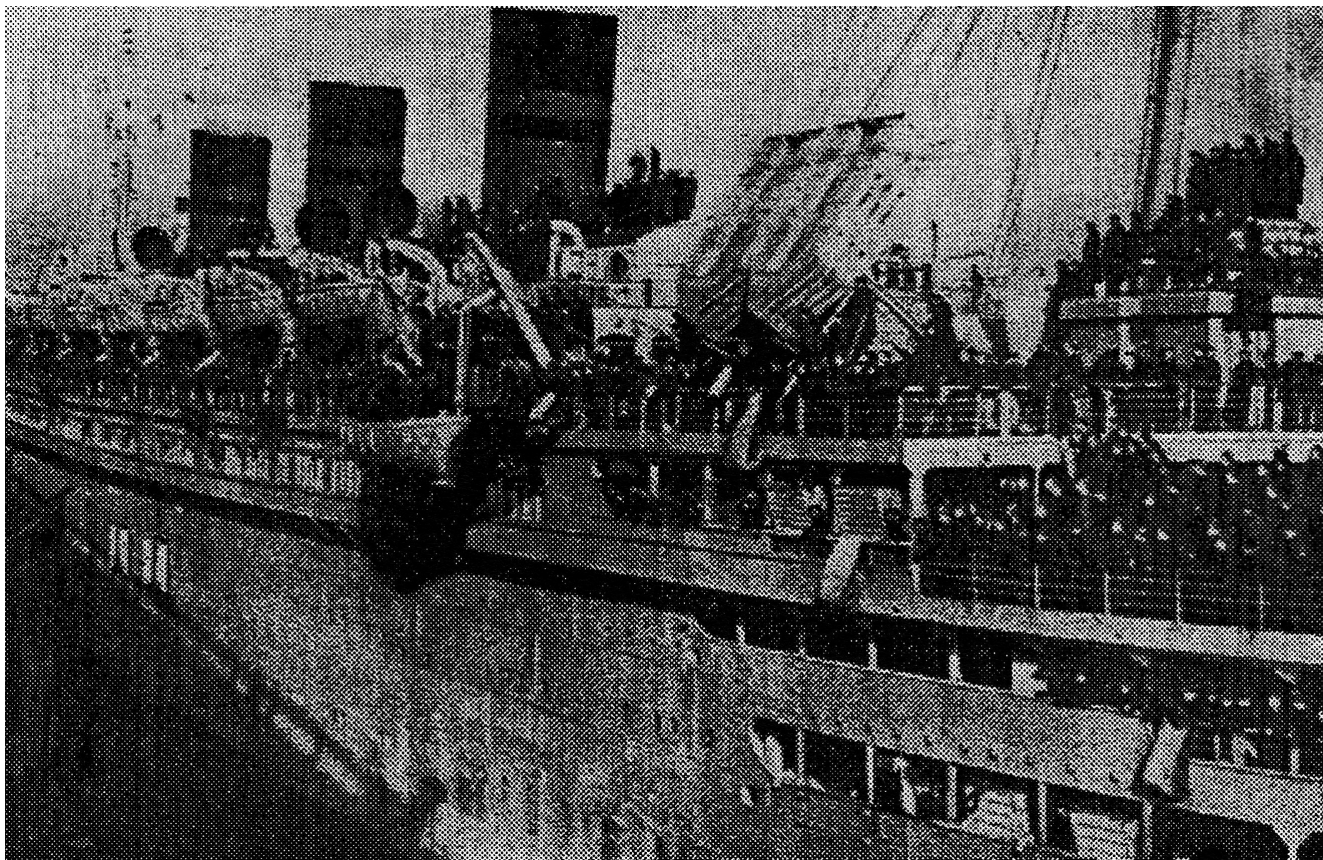
Wherever we went, the people still remembered us and made us feel welcome. One of the highlights was a grand parade through the city of Caen. It had been devastated by the bombing in 1944, but had been rebuilt and the city folks gave us a great welcome. The French government put on a big do for us and we had a great reunion with members of other units who were also there.

In Holland I managed to locate the young lady that I had met in 1945 and we traveled across the country to have a visit. We still exchange Christmas cards.

All too soon the trip ended and it was back home again, with many more memories.



Map of Northwest Europe showing the route taken by the Queen's Own Rifles



Newspaper clipping showing our arrival

Annotated bibliography

- Barnard, W.T. (1954). *A Short History of the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada*. Toronto: MacKinnon & Atkins.

At 22 pages, including the copyright page and introductory material, this short history is very short indeed and necessarily superficial. Printed in the form of a small pamphlet, 97 by 168 millimetres, it attempts to cover the entire two-century story of the regiment up to the immediate post second world war era. The second world war is covered in just six pages. It comes across as regimental propaganda and is much less useful as a source of the history of the regiment than are the books by Dunkelman, Marin, Martin, and Whitsed.

- Dunkelman, Ben. (1976). *Dual Allegiance. (An autobiography)*. Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd.

The nature of Ben Dunkelman's dual allegiance stands out on the dust cover of his book, showing a symbol, the left half of which is the maple leaf and the right, the star of David. His autobiography begins after his completion of high school when his affluent parents send him on a world tour ending in Palestine in 1931. It carries on through his return to Canada, and eventual enlistment in the Queen's Own Rifles as a private. By the war's end Dunkelman was a major commanding a rifle company. The last half of the book deals extensively with his involvement in the Israeli war of independence in the late forties. It ends with his return to Toronto but with continued involvement with Israel.

- Martin, Charles Cromwell. (1994). *Battle Diary: From D-Day and Normandy to the Zuider Zee and VE*. Toronto: Dundurn Press.

This book consists of a series of short vignettes arranged roughly in chronological order written by the company sergeant-major of one of the rifle companies of the Queen's Own Rifles, who was with the regiment from D-Day almost to the end of the war in Europe. He missed only the final three weeks because of wounds. His stories clearly depict the lives of those on the front lines and make it easier to understand why the infantry incurred 70 percent of the war's casualties. Martin mixes accounts of combat with personal stories about himself and the men he worked with. His 192-page book includes some general information, on slit trenches for example, as well as numerous photographs and six appendices. Although not a true regimental history, Charlie Martin's book may be as close to such a history as can be had for the Queen's Own Rifles. It is readable and worth reading.

- Stacey, Colonel C.P. (1960). *The Victory Campaign: The Operations in North-West Europe 1944-1945. (Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Volume III)*. Ottawa: The Queen's Printer.

This lengthy book (770 pages), one of three providing the official history of the Canadian forces in World War Two, begins with the preparations for D-Day and continues through to victory and the postwar disposition of Canadian troops in

Europe. Its considerable detail is supplemented by many fold-out maps, figures, photographs, and also appendices including a table of abbreviations.

- Whitsed, Roy J. (ed.). (1996). *Canadians: A Battalion at War*. (Canadians in the Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 1940 to 1945). Mississauga: Burlington Books.

Whitsed's book consists of an organized series of materials on the second world war mainly from veterans of the Queen's Own Rifles. They are organized chronologically when possible and otherwise more or less at random. Not surprisingly, there is a lack of unity and highly variable quality among the contributions to the book. Some are barely coherent while others are highly informative and even amusing at times. A standout among the latter are a series of excerpts from the diary of the regimental medical officer, Douglas Oatway. The editor wisely included lengthy contributions from Oatway.