

The Unknown Soldier

writings
to commemorate the lives
of servicemen and women

from
HMP Parc
2017

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>Mike</i>	5
<i>26 hrs in Helmand</i>	<i>Luke</i>	7
<i>Front Lines</i>	<i>Tony</i>	11
<i>Look, Duck, Vanish!</i>	<i>John</i>	13
<i>Please Don't Forget</i>	<i>Matthew</i>	16
<i>Andy's Story</i>	<i>Andy</i>	17
<i>An Experience</i>	<i>Gareth</i>	19
<i>The Descent</i>	<i>David T</i>	24
<i>Closure</i>	<i>Gareth</i>	26
<i>Dai Flip-flop</i>	<i>Gareth</i>	28
<i>Escape</i>	<i>Halo</i>	31
<i>Trundled Boots</i>	<i>Matthew</i>	37
<i>Fields of Battle</i>	<i>Ian</i>	39
<i>Coventry</i>	<i>John</i>	43
<i>West Meets East</i>	<i>Ruth</i>	47
<i>The Day We Went To War</i>	<i>Paul</i>	50
<i>Of A Moment's Fight</i>	<i>Andrew</i>	55
<i>Return To Yorktown</i>	<i>David O</i>	57
<i>Gone The Gay Bonnet</i>	<i>David T</i>	61

PREFACE

I'm pleased to be asked to introduce this book to you as a long-standing member of staff here at Parc and as an ex-serviceman, having served nine years as a younger man in the Royal Regiment of Wales. There is something about 'vets' that almost always means a common understanding or sense of community, regardless of what 'side of the fence' you're on, especially when you've seen armed conflict at first hand and put your trust completely in others.

I was an infantry soldier at the age of eighteen and visited Canada, Iceland and Germany and experienced two tours of Northern Ireland, the first in the early 80's, during the Troubles when petrol bombs were a part of life in Belfast, and later in County Fermanagh, commonly known as "bandit country". Going back to visit more recently, there were shocking reminders still to be seen: pebble-dashed houses with bullet marks across them; corrugated iron barricades, now referred to as 'peace walls'.

Lo and behold, you can take the man out of the army, but you can't always take the army out of the man. I was walking along Barry sea-front, ten years out of the army, when I found myself persuaded to join back up. Now I'm a commissioned major in the

Territorials. So as well as a busy life at Parc, I'm back on duty.

In these pages are all kinds of stories – from people who have served or who have loved ones who have served; from people who've experienced conflict as combatants and civilians. As an important representation of life in Parc, I recommend it.

With all good wishes,

Mike Clarke

Senior Operational Manager,
HMP & YOI Parc

26 hrs in Helmand

B Company 2nd Battalion The Royal Welsh

It was the 15th November 2010, eleven days before my 20th birthday and I was about to endure the longest night of my life.

It was 08.30 and I was on operations in Helmand province, Afghanistan. The sun had already risen in the sky and temperatures were already soaring when it all kicked off. I was part of 1 Mechanised Brigade, supplying an outer cordon for the Royal Engineers while they were tasked to clear a compound which, from Intel was a Taliban IED-making factory. We had been in position for two weeks, living out of the back of a Warrior AFV (armoured fighting vehicle). During the two weeks, the Royal Engineers found twenty-seven IEDs, but tragically they lost an R.E. search dog and had a triple amputee, along with the lives of two ANP (Afghan National Police) men.

On the 15th we pushed a patrol out to check the AO (area of operations) and make sure RE were secure. It wasn't until we were in the open that the Taliban attacked. Rounds were zapping past and the dust was kicking up in front of us. As they got closer, orders were given to get into cover and return

fire. As the GPMGs (general purpose machine guns) and Minimi's (light machine guns) were thumping rounds down range onto the enemy positions, one of the boys got shot in the leg. It went in his shin and out his foot. We dragged him into cover and applied an FFD (first field dressing). We then called in the RAF to extract the casualty, but the fire fight was too intense for the chinooks to land.

By now six hours had passed. We were in a waddy and our supplies were running out. Our water had run out and we were getting extremely dehydrated. Ammunition was critical, so we got the radio operator to contact an American A10 that was in our AO to come to our assistance. Minutes later the A10 came thundering through the sky, unleashed its 30mm chain gun onto the enemy positions, then circled for another burst. We extracted the casualty, re-bombed our ammo and mounted up in our Warriors to confirm the AO clear.

As a gunner of a Warrior I have a 7.62 chain gun and a 30mm Rarden cannon, a brilliant bit of kit. Orders were given to form a mounted patrol in the local village to flush out any remaining enemy. I was riding shotgun in the lead vehicle with the platoon commander when an RPG came blasting past. Contact! I traversed the turret in the direction of where the RPG came from and clocked two blokes about 300m away. "2 x pax with weapon systems. Clear to engage?" I shouted. "Engage!" replied the platoon commander. Then one of them ran into a compound with children in, knowing that the West follow the Geneva Convention and we wouldn't shoot at him. His lucky day.

We stayed on task until it was dusk, so the RE could extract safely. As we were pulling out of the village, our Warrior hit some soft ground and the 32 ton pressure slipped the track on the left side – xxxx’s sake! – leaving us alone, with no air support and no assets, and worse still, getting dark. The first thing we did was contact 3-2, the other half of our platoon. “Hello 3-2, this is 3-Zero. We need immediate assistance at grid 113-279. Over.” On 3-2’s approach, they quickly realised that the ground was too soft to take the weight of the trucks, so the vehicle commander of 3-2 decided to go west and try to drive through the village and reach us that way. That didn’t happen. 500 metres out of the village 3-2 hit a massive IED. The explosion lit up the night sky and shook our vehicle 1000m away. My heart sank and I thought the worst. Then my fears were realised when the commander of 3-2 came over the net. “Hello Zero, this is 3-2. Contact IED. I am T4, walking wounded. My driver T2, catastrophic injuries. Gunner T1, dead.” As he was giving his report I could hear the screams coming from the driver over the net. Then the commander came back. “Zero-3-2, cancel last. Gunner T4, walking wounded.” The sense of relief knowing the gunner was alive kept me positive.

But not being able to move was the most frustrating part. And not being able to help my mates made me hate my enemy. That hatred kept me awake that night. Sunrise was at 6.30, eleven hours away. We battened down the hatches on the Warrior so the Taliban couldn’t drop a grenade down the hatches and wipe us out. Myself and the platoon commander took turns

traversing the turret and keeping watch through the night-sights. We kept seeing shadows lurking in the shadows, as if they were looking for weaknesses in our armour. I honestly thought we weren't going to survive the night.

By 05.30 the sun was slowly coming over the mountains and it started getting hotter. Me and the crew were still battered down in our Warrior, wired, drained, but alive!

At 07.00 the casualties from the wreckage of 3-2 were air-lifted to Bastion. Later I saw the extent of the damage. The front drive, external armour, bar armour, track and the road wheels were blown off, leaving the shell with a gaping hole in the driver's tunnel. I have no idea how nobody died, but death had been very close.

By 10.00 we mounted up in our truck which had been sorted, and we left, ready to fight another day.

I hope you enjoyed an insight into just 26 hours out of a seven month deployment in Helmand.

Luke

Front Lines

Tony Gale is a First Line Manager here at Parc. Every employee at Parc knows Tony and the work he does; what they might not know about is his background in the armed forces as a combat medic.

“In 1981 I joined the parachute regiment. I was 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ years old, though I knew I wanted to be in the army since I signed up for the army cadets when I was under age, at 11. My mother always said I was destined to join the armed forces.

I was Northern Ireland at 17, though I couldn't go on the streets then as I was too young, and it wasn't officially a war zone. I had injured knees from being a parachutist so had joined the Royal Regiment of Wales and at 18 I was in effect in combat with people who looked just like me.

My first thought was I was going to get shot by everybody, but often I would spend time drinking a cup of tea in somebody's garden! Sometimes I'd be in the countryside, wandering around with the sheep and the cows, watching a building, sometimes for days; perhaps an old lady would invite you into her farm for cakes and biscuits and you wouldn't believe the Troubles were going on. But the cities were different:

posters and murals and sometimes people spitting at you. There always has been corruption: prostitution, drugs and money-laundering...

I did five tours of Northern Ireland, varying from 6 to 18 months. On the short tours you wouldn't have your wife and kids but on the longer tours you could have your family; you had a house and would go off to the barracks every morning as if you were just going off to a normal job. You could be patrolling one day and shopping the next, though not in the same area in case you were recognised. Short hair and tattoos could be a dead give-away. The Welsh would fit in well, but if you were English or Scottish you would immediately come under suspicion.

After Ireland I was in Germany for seven years, as well as Hong Kong, Canada and other postings. I left the army in '95 and between then and coming to Parc in '97 I built on my army medic experience in nursing, though I didn't fit into the stereotypes that many people had about male nurses!

I've had friends who were blinded or had their legs blown off and having had experiences like that makes it easier to deal with the pressures of my job now. I'm still old school in many ways and I certainly can't get the job out of my system.

I know the names of people who are my responsibility.

I still polish my boots and wear a tie."

Tony

Look, Duck, Vanish!

The time: early evening; the date: four days after Dunkirk. The three men knew each other and came from the same village; they had joined the LDV, the Local Defence Volunteers, commonly known as 'Look, Duck, Vanish!'

Invasion was expected. The whole area had been in turmoil all day, the police directing those farmers with big fields to pull harvest wagons and other unused vehicles to block landing grounds. Anything mobile would do.

The speed at which the Germans had crossed France had been seen on the newsreels at the cinema. People were now very frightened, but the government had calmed them; everybody had to do their bit, old and young. The Scouts, of course, and Guides were all doing something; the Women's Institute had made an inventory of everything in the little town of Painswick and on nearby farms. Nothing else could be done. German invasion was now a real possibility. The W.I. concentrated on food, bandages, or anything to carry water in, including prams. The roads would not be blocked, allowing the police and army to move about freely.

A hit and run plane dropped two bombs, neither exploding. One fell onto a stone roof and smashed into the tiled floor. The lady retired, immediately phoned the police station and asked the sergeant, who was an old soldier from the First World War, to remove it, which he did in his wheelbarrow.

In the night time, Arch, Bert and Dennis were very frightened. It was a lonely spot with woodland all around. Mr Mason from the Well Farm below had been cutting hedges. In the daytime he had burnt the cuttings and let the fires die down, but suddenly Bert saw a flash; a puff of wind had reactivated the fires. Soon there were flashes all around the field and they hid in a dwell, a kind of dip where stones had been dug out to build walls, believing they were surrounded by paratroopers. As each saw a flash he got more frightened and they asked one another what they could do.

“Stay out of sight!”

Now it started getting cold. They dared not move, still believing they were surrounded. As dawn crept across, three very cold LDV shuffled home without saying a word. Having done as they had been asked to do, all over Gloucestershire cold, fed-up men went home for a cup of tea and then got ready to go back to work all the next day.

*

This story came to light because I had bought a small pony or donkey cart, a two-seater. A neighbour saw it in my pick-up and told me the story of the Cranham donkey.

At that time there was no road to the pub, only access across the common; hence the need of a donkey cart to take the beer to the pub in the village, the Black Horse.

The same week local DVD heard a noise in the mist and challenged. No reply. The man in charge said "Fire!"

Then they discovered they had shot the pub donkey. They panicked and started to bury the animal. It being stony Cotswold ground, they couldn't dig very deep, but by folding the donkey's legs they were able to fill in the hole.

The donkey was soon missed by the landlord and the police were called in. As the sergeant rode his bike past the filled-in hole, the donkey's legs shot up through the ground.

The LDV had to find another pub to drink in for the rest of the war.

*

Three feet high and painted green, the unexploded bombs stood for 30 years outside the Painswick police station until a new station was built and they were taken away for scrap.

And even when Churchill renamed the LDV the Home Guards and they had uniforms, they never shot anything else but rabbits.

John

Please, Don't Forget

Please, don't forget
that I once
stood on this red grass
and thought of an England
that was free.

Please don't forget my
mother.

Please, don't forget
the tears
that have
burnt our skins
like mustard gas.

Please, don't forget
what me and my mates
have died for.

Matthew

Andy's Story

My name's Andy Vaughan and I've worked at Parc since it opened – a lifetime!

I joined the 1st Battalion of the Royal Welsh Guards in 1981. After training I was sent straight to the Falklands – I was just 17. At that age you just think it's an adventure but it turned into an experience I'll never forget. It wasn't pleasant but it makes me proud to know I was there as a Welsh Guard.

I then came back to do ceremonial work in London, standing on guard and patrolling outside Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. Of course the kids would try to wind you up from time to time but it was just good banter! My most embarrassing moment was when I was asked by Princess Anne to look after the corgis, and there was also this Jack Russell – I've no idea who he belonged to. Anyway, I didn't have any control over them and they were running about in and out of the bushes – they wouldn't come back for me at all. The terrier went missing and it was pandemonium! The lads always took the mickey out of me after that!

I was two years in London and took part in Trooping the Colour which was a great experience.

I then went to Bergen in Germany on a 4-year posting as part of the NATO forces based there. We marched through Bruges in Belgium to commemorate the liberation of the city by Allied forces in the Second World War; there were lots of dignitaries there as well as local people – it was very moving.

Well, I've done many things at Parc and now I teach ESOL – English as a second language – to foreign nationals; the group includes people from countries as varied as Vietnam, Somalia, Lithuania and Romania, all mixed together in the same class. I like to mix these students in with English speakers learning Essential Skills, so the non-native speakers are speaking English, and are not so tempted to revert to their own languages.

It's a varied job and I enjoy it. I'm sure my army background stood me in good stead for it!

Andy



An Experience

I have just finished lunch and am making my way back to the block for a bine and a quick go of the playstation before parade. Me and all the boys are chatting, waiting for the Company Sergeant Major of Rear Party to come and brief us.

“Platoon, platoon-tion!” The order comes and we brace up. “Relax.” So we do. Instead of giving us some bullshit job to do round the camp, the CSM has a concerned look on his face and starts to tell us some bad news that will live with me forever. My butty Williams has been killed in an RTA (road traffic accident) out in Iraq. The sinking feeling I get is horrible. I feel so helpless.

Me and Will were in B-Coy together for a while. I had been in battalion for a little bit when Will came to us, and he was exactly the same as me; we clicked instantly. We did a lot of things together and we took a lot of shit together as well. I remember one night we were all up the Naffi; I know it was a Thursday because it was karaoke night, and the new boy tradition is that the boys have to pick the campest song ever and they have to sing it and neck a drink of their choice. We went out and got absolutely smashed that night, I will never forget it. We became really good

friends in the end even though I had gone to A-Coy and Will stayed with the dark side. What a shame, he was such a lovely boy.

As I am getting my breakfast down me, one of the Corporals comes over to me and mentions that Will's funeral is this weekend and asks if I want to go.

When they carry him out and play his song, which is Tracey Chapman, I can't control myself and start to cry. His mother and sister are devastated; I want to go over and say how sorry I am, but I don't want to disturb her in her mourning of her son.

*

Christmas time, and I have drawn the long straw. I got to go home before my first tour of Iraq. Spend some quality time with my family and friends. I had a great Christmas, New Year and 18th birthday party – what a night!

All my kit has been issued to me and my flight is tomorrow. All that is on my mind is what is waiting for me in the Middle East. Stepping into the unknown is a scary thought. I walk down the corridor of my block to one of the boy's rooms for a quick hair cut before I deploy.

The morning of the flight, I am up earlier than usual, no surprises there. All my kit is ready to go and I make my way to the pick-up point where the bus is waiting for us. It's about an hour or so bus drive to the airport. Now the process of getting to the airport and dropping your kit off and then waiting in the departure lounge is a long and gruelling time.

The plane is cramped as it is, and with me being

6ft 2, space is hard to find. As we come into Iraqi air space we have to do certain procedures: one is turning all the lights off inside and outside the plane, then we have to put on our helmets and body-armour; it's all just in case we get seen from the ground by insurgents and shot out of the sky with a ground to air missile.

Thank God, we don't get seen and we make a good landing into Basra airport. I am met by C/Sgt Baggie, Lamby and Gaz. "Davies!" they call as I walk over to the open back Lannie. They issue me with my rifle and tell me to get on the back and go to cover as we drive back to camp. It is late at night so I don't get to see much of the city. But I will.

We slowed down and went over a small bridge, which was made by the Engineers when we first went in. We stopped in front of these to big metal gates. As we went through them there was a sanger, sentry post, to my high left. "7-4 boy!" one of the boys shouted down. I couldn't see who it was because of the cam net over the sentry post and the darkness of the night. I gave a small wave as we pulled up into the heart of the camp.

The first thing I notice of the camp is the high wall of the hesco basian. Now the hesco basian is designed as a blast wall, to take the impact of mortars, RPGs , suicide bombers, and small arms fire, that sort of thing,. It is a very large cage-like frame in a kind of half cylinder shape. Behind the cage frame is a grey material to keep in its contents; it is then filled with earth, sand, stones, anything like that. The camp itself is an abandoned school or police station, with

the hesco added to the back of it for more space. The hesco was built up about 5 feet high and then another 5 feet then another 5 feet, going back in steps to the top so you could climb it.

I am bunked up with a guy called Moore with really thick lips from Newport; the odds of this guy picking up a book was no chance. The room can fit no more than 2 ½ double beds in it; we had 5 bunkbeds with lockers and one little window that didn't close properly; it was a wicked breeding ground for bacteria. I set all my kit up ready for the morning and got my head down.

In the army you have to shave every morning; it's a rule and a very big one at that. So I am looking in the mirror and the thought comes into me: Will I be here tomorrow? Will I be alive? Very daunting and not the sort of thing a 18 year old lad should be thinking really, but those sort of thoughts were with you a lot; you just had to ignore them and get on with the job at hand.

I am all cleanly shaved and my belly is full; I am ready for anything. I get issued all my ammunition, 180 rounds, which is 6 full magazines, an L1-11 hand grenade and a white fos grenade. I meet my section and we get ready for my first patrol on the streets of Basra.

The first thing you noticed about Iraq is the smell; some days it wasn't pleasant at all because of the slaughter house practically next door to our camp. On an average day like today it was a mix between petrol or oil and dirt, like a fusty smell; that, mixed with

the heat burning the concrete and tarmac. I didn't breathe clean air till I landed back at Brize Norton after my tour of duty, which was still 5 months away.

Basra city centre wasn't very big like a normal city with huge buildings and skyscrapers everywhere, it was more vast with open spaces, but busy. Holy shit, I had never seen anything like it in my life. We would go down some streets where they had just set up their own little markets and we couldn't even get our vehicles down there; they would be heaving with people, animals, cars and bikes trying to get through, just absolute chaos.

After being on patrol near enough all day, we made our way back to base camp. As we pulled through the main gates I had a sense of relief but also a gutted feeling because I hadn't had any action. All my years of watching war films of Vietnam and World War 2, the D-day landing – I was expecting that sort of war, but that sort of combat didn't exist any more: we are now fighting terrorism and guerrilla warfare. Like me, I think a lot of men joined the army expecting to punch a Nazi in the face at Normandy.

I would soon learn that this was a different, complicated war.

Gareth

The Descent

The nurse, clips holding a white paper hat upon her black hair, wore no make-up, her pale complexion and tight lips giving her authority.

How I cursed her.

White, everything white: the nurse, the floor, the walls.

A fluorescent light almost as long as the room itself, square tiles spotted with moisture as if sweating. And the bastard bath.

Tap, tap – water drops to the flat metal flat bottom, smashing each round taper to smithereens.

The harness holding my fractured morsel hovering above its open mawr clicked a ratchet that inched me to the centre of the bath.

A cool draught escaped my mouth, misty swirl like rolling fog. My legs red rimed, split scarlet skin, shell-flakes hanging in patches.

The ice shards gnarled in the frost buckets, ready to pour when I had been lowered into the silvery mercury water.

Cold so cold, clicked a ratchet.

Her eyes shone, carefully, slightly, intense, with compassion maybe. She turned the wheel operating the cradle. I barely felt the sensation of motion.

Clicked a ratchet.

My foot entered the water.

David T

Closure

Time does its thing
but where does it go?
It gets to a point
where you don't want to know.

So much builds up
to him there's no limit
so self-destruct
seems inevitable.

No-one understands,
pretending they care,
but no-one knows
the things he withholds.

Why can't he say
what he wants to say?
Because he believes
there is no god to pray to?

It will take more than time
to heal his scars
so he asks himself why
does he bother with life?

He needs closure
but he has to earn it,
take courage from somewhere,
grab, clinch and proceed.

Gareth



Dai Flip-Flop

My nickname is Dai Flip-Flop. How I came to get that name is a story a lot of people want to hear.

It's 22:30 and I have just come in from a four-hour foot patrol through the city of Basra. It was a peaceful foot patrol but still very hard; at night the temperature still reaches into the 30s. Not only was I walking point on the patrol, the most dangerous position, but I was carrying the LMG (light machine gun) fitted with a 200 round bag and about 600 rounds on my back, and a 351 radio which was about 12kg on its own.

So after four hours of cutting about this concrete jungle they call Basra, my body and especially my feet are killing. I give my body and feet a good soak in the lukewarm water that spits out at me of the cheap makeshift showerhead. I wrap the towel round my waist, put my body armour and helmet on and make my way back to the tent.

After I fold my combats up and lay my LMG down besides me, I can feel the softness of my sleeping bag beneath me. Already my eyelids feel heavy and I can feel the gonk-monster choking me and pushing my head down towards my little travel pillow. Then I am sound asleep – even babies don't sleep this well.

“Quick Dai get up, we are getting mortared!” Jones shouts about a millimetre from my left ear. “Jesus Christ!” I think to myself, “Say it any louder?” Then – BOOM! – another mortar hits, just outside our camp. It’s the fourth mortar to go off; I had slept through the first three, I must have been fucked.

Though I’m half asleep, I’m suddenly thinking quickly. I slide on my flip-flops, throw on my body armour and helmet and pick up my LMG. I burst through the flap of my tent and in the darkness I can make out people running everywhere and orders being screamed from every direction. My camp had turned into an ants’ nest that a child had kicked over.

Now, the drills of the camp are that if we get mortared, everyone is to get their fighting kit on and make their way to the outskirts of the camp, look over the hesco basian and look out for any passing or static vehicle with a mortar fitted. If you see it you open fire and destroy the enemy.

Orders are coming from left and right; it reminded me of the saying “too many chiefs and not enough Indians”. I could see the majority of the boys already out and up on the hesco, looking through their sites.

BOOF! I tripped over my own bloody flip-flop. As I lay winded and with a mouthful of dust, another pissing mortar comes over. I brace up with my hands over the back of my neck. I pray that it goes over the camp and doesn’t land within killing distance of me or my boys.

It doesn’t, it lands outside camp again. These bastards are the worst shot ever – thank God. I drag

myself up off the deck and sprint as quick as I can in my flip-flops to the hesco. I clamber to the top of the hesco, mount my LMG and look sharply through my SUSAT (sight unit small arms trilux). With its x4 magnification I scan the buildings and ground to my front.

It's all gone quiet, the mortars have stopped and everyone is on pins waiting for their fate to be sealed in the shape of a 51mm mortar. My heart is still racing at a thousand beats a minute, I am awake now. The order comes in the high pitched scream of the Sergeant Major: "Stand down!" I let out a giant puff.

As we make our way back to the tent, nobody really says anything. They never really do after an incident; it wasn't till the next day we would laugh and joke about it.

06:30: I am up, just finishing my morning routine. I look in the mirror just before I leave the washroom and ask myself, "Is today my day?" I make my way to the cook-house for scoff.

I'm eating my jam on toast when Browney shouts across the cook-house, "Oh! Did you see flippin' Dai last night with his flip flops?" Everyone laughs.

"Yeah!" somebody said. "Dai Flip-Flop boy!"

Gareth

Escape

It was 1995 and I was a six year-old kid growing up in Iraq-Kurdistan. My father worked on a stall, my mum was a housewife staying at home with my two sisters. While my six brothers were trying to get jobs, me and my little brother were just starting school. Everything was getting harder and food was getting more and more expensive. My dad wasn't getting a lot of work on the stall because shops started opening up.

We stepped into a new year and our family was breaking apart. Because we had no money and times were getting hard, two of my brothers decided that they were going to try hard to get to Turkey to see if they could get some work. There were about thirty of them altogether. They headed out one morning and walked across the border. Of course it was illegal for them to do so but they took their chances anyway.

A week went by and there was no news of them. There were rumours going around saying that they had arrived and that they were okay. Of course we didn't have a phone then, so we didn't have any news at all until one day word got out that they had all been captured and executed. Three days later bodies were arriving back. All the bodies together added up to 28, including one of my brothers, and all the bodies had

bullet holes in them. Some of them had been shot in the head. There was still one missing: it was my older brother.

Then one day it was like a nightmare; I came home and there were all the families of all the people that had died shouting and screaming at my mum and dad saying it had all been planned and that it was my brother's fault: he probably traded their lives, including my brother's, for his. They wanted revenge. We asked our dad, "What are we going to do?" He didn't say anything. I think it was because he didn't know what to say or do.

We tried to get on with our lives but we were all scared of what was going to happen, what the families of the people were going to do to us. One day I came back home from school, dropped my books in and was going to go out and play football. It was just my mum at home, cooking dinner for everyone. About half-an-hour later I heard a lot of commotion and my friend told me there were lots of people outside my house shouting. By the time I got back my house was on fire and I could see my mum through the flames trying to get out of the house. The doors were blocked off by fire. I tried to run in there to try and save her but my neighbours stopped me. There were no phones or phone-boxes to try to get help from anyone so we just had to wait while people tried to put the fire out with buckets. It wasn't much use really because not long after that, the fire had got to my mum and I couldn't see her anymore. By the time it was out my mum was dead.

A week later, after staying at my brother-in-laws,

my dad got really sick and said, "Get your brothers and sisters". So I went and got them. We all sat down and my dad said, "Kids, I don't think I can live to see anymore deaths. The best thing to do is split up and get as far away from this place as possible". He said he couldn't look after us anymore so me and my little brother looked at our brothers and they said, "We can't look after you". And one of my brothers said, "I can take one! So I said, "Take my little brother".

He told him he was going to have to go and try to live with our uncle in Iran. Then I thought, why don't I try and go there? So I went to town and went to a café where the smugglers hang out and I heard one of them saying he had some people to take to Iran in the morning and he was leaving early. I went and packed some food and water and I went to the café and slept out the back till the morning.

Then people started showing up and there was a big coach. Of course you would have to pay one of the smugglers before you got on the coach but I didn't have any money. I sneaked onto the back of the coach where there were a couple of families with kids. After a while we were ready to leave so we set out a few hours later. We got to some long road and some mountains. The coach stopped and we got out. The smugglers said, "Okay, it is time to walk". We started walking up a mountain to go round the border to get out of Iraq and the guy said that if anyone stopped they'd be left behind. There were people getting tired and the guy said, "Okay, we need to hide, to get out of sight of the soldiers". When he said that I got really scared and hid, because I thought if they saw us

they were really going to kill us all like they did my brother and the rest of them.

We hid till nightfall then we started walking again. A few nights of walking and we got to a village where everyone bought more food and water. I was very hungry so I started picking up what they couldn't eat and were throwing away. We stayed there for a day and the smuggler said, "There's a very steep mountain ahead. If anyone's not very well or unhealthy they should rent a horse for two nights. They cost ten dollars." This was quite a lot of money but a few people rented them anyway and we set off the next night.

We came to the mountain and for those who had horses it was okay but I couldn't go any further. Yet if I stopped no-one else would stop to help me and the smuggler would notice that I wasn't part of any family and leave me. I asked one of the women if she would help me. I begged her not to say anything to anyone. She was kind enough to help me and let me get on the back of the horse with one of her kids.

Another two nights went by. We got to Iran and crossed the border safely. Then the smuggler got us all to Tehran, to a flat, then he left. I asked someone why we were staying there and he said because we were going to Turkey in a week and we were to stay there and rest. Then I went to see the woman who had helped me and thanked her. I went to town, to the market and asked if Omar, my uncle, was working round there. One man pointed out where his stall was. I saw him but I wasn't sure if it was the right Omar or not so I was a bit scared. I said hello to him.

He said, "If you're not going to buy anything, don't hang around!"

I said to him, "I don't have any money to buy anything!"

Then he slapped me and said, "Go away! I don't want any tramps around"

I cried and said, "I'm Osman's son and I want to know if you're my uncle".

He crouched down and said, "Yes I am. Why didn't you say anything? I'm sorry, I have heard what happened. Let's go home".

He packed the stall up and I helped him, then we went back to his house. His wife and son were there. I had a wash while his wife cooked us all dinner. My uncle asked, "Does everyone know you've come here?" I said no, so he wrote my dad a letter to say that I was okay and that I was living with him. He asked where all the others were and if they were okay. We went to sleep.

The next day he said that I had to go to school but I said, "No, I want to go to work and get some money to send to my dad". He then insisted I would have to go to school but I just told him no. But there were no jobs for a kid like me, so I worked with him for a while. It was okay, we were selling fabric to make clothes. Then we got a letter off my dad, saying he wasn't too well and that everyone had disappeared, he didn't know where to. He was renting a room and having a hard time paying the rent. I had saved a hundred dinars and I sent it to him. We were keeping in touch. Everything was okay.

I was working with my uncle for about two years then I lost touch with my dad, he just never wrote back. We assumed he had died, probably got killed like my mum, but still we tried to find out what had happened to him. We were writing to him hoping that he would write back but he never did. After a while my uncle said to me that the stall wasn't doing too good so I couldn't work with him anymore. I said, "Please let me stay and work, just dock my wages", but he said no, so I had no choice. I asked him if I could still live with him. He said if I find a job and help him out, then yes, why not? I agreed.

I started looking for a job. I couldn't find one though. Then I saw people shopping by at the stalls but the stalls didn't have any bags to give to people. That gave me an idea: I should start selling bags round the stalls. I bought a bunch of bags then I started selling them. I went home one day and my uncle had packed my stuff. I said to him, "What's going on? What are you doing?" He said that one of the brothers of the boys who died in the accident is walking round town and he didn't want him to know because they would come and kill all of us. He didn't want anything to happen to his family so I had to go. I asked him where.

He said he knew a smuggler.

Halo

Trundled Boots

Trundled boots ripple mud pools.
Gurgling engines rip the sun day,
they are seen, stomping in green jackets.
The parents, the lovers, the children watch only sky.

“We are greyed hands, shivering eyes.
Our country asks for our lives.
Five years they have had in my blood and breath.

Stand us forward to the French Alps,
our party grows greedy for a fight.
Our blaring tanks shall fill their quiet eyes.

Who will miss us?
The radio will replace our voices.
Those of us who fight best, kill most.
I wish only that I may not have married,
for then no-one would miss the love I gave for my
country.

My dream is that no more shall people stand as I do
under fading grass and think that he too can make a
world, by killing it.

The heroes have forgotten us, they died in the Great
War,

and now we shall join them, though their voices tell
us our mistakes were theirs.

Green mud,

red mud.

We shall not see rain hit our faces."

Matthew



Fields of Battle

Sheila thought to herself, "That's the problem with Suffolk you know, you just can't depend on the weather. When it's expected to be hot and dry, it pours down, yet in winter you can get some really good sunshine". She chuckled, thinking how she was becoming just another typical Brit, always moaning about the weather.

But these days, the weather was more than just a source of chat and complaint, it was of real significance. Today it was cool enough to feel a chill when you stopped work, and warm enough to raise a sweat. Certainly when you put your back into harvesting the rich, green vegetables that were so important. War time. Dig for Victory. All that.

All their efforts would be worth it, or so the Prime Minister kept telling them on the radio. George said he wasn't even sure how much you could believe about what the Jerries were getting up to over there. "It's not just their side that do propaganda, you know." Lots of horror stories about how bad it was last time, the shelling of the east coast down as far as Scarborough. Stories about those Zeppelin things dropping their bombs just up the coast in Norfolk. Sheila needed no reminders of what war could do, as she told him when

he was going on about it in bed last night.

“The truth is, I don’t think they really know what’s happening, let alone what’s going to happen, any more than we do.”

“I am sure they’ll do their best for us, and for now we’ve just got to get on with it,” was all he replied.

She’d met George five years ago, and it really was love at first sight. He’d swept her off her feet at the dance in Ipswich, and once she felt those strong arms round her, she was sure there was no-one else for her. They’d married in the summer of 1938 and had been hoping to start a family, but then Herr Hitler and his plans upset their plans.

Sheila stopped, shook her head to get the dirt from her hair, and wiped the sweat from her forehead. “Ladies perspire, men and horses sweat”, she told herself. “Well, these days I work like a horse, or at least like a man.” Thankfully it wasn’t raining today; those wet days last week made her yearn for the peacetime of three years ago and her cosy, snug, boring, typing job in nearby Ipswich. She thought to herself how she’d not reckoned on being there this year anyway. The only difference was she thought she’d be pushing a pram down to the village shops, not pushing an old battered handcart containing the drinks, up from the farmhouse.

The rows of cabbages seemed to go on for ever. Occasionally she and George would swap places and she’d tackle the cauliflowers in the other half of the field. George’s father had taught them that trick, to change to something requiring a slight variation in technique, slightly different muscular movement.

It relieved the boredom and reduced the aches. And improved the output from his labourers, of course. The young couple exchanged a quick hug as they swapped.

George's face was set hard, brown streaks across his cheeks where he'd wiped the sweat with his stained hands. She knew all too well what he was thinking, worrying about. His big brother Henry had turned down the chance to stay and work with their father on the farm. He had signed up last year and had been "over there" somewhere for more than two months now. The boys were close in more than age, and neither blamed the other for their different difficult decisions. Henry was single, the young blade gadding about town – well, gadding about anyway, you couldn't really call anywhere near a town, but at least the boys had made use of their father's old car to get to the dances. Sheila grinned, remembering the evening she'd met George and how they wanted to stay late and "get to know each other". He'd had to admit that he was depending on his brother for transport home. So Henry had played gooseberry and driven Sheila home to Capel St Mary first. The young couple looked longingly at each other, just visible in the rear-view mirror of the old Humber.

"What are you smiling at?" George asked. "Remembering", she said. "Remembering September the sixth, 1936"; George managed a smile at that too and they hugged a moment longer, both knowing who was uppermost in both their minds.

It was the same when they met at the drinks cart two hours later, with the sun just starting to fade, their shadows starting to lengthen. Sheila wondered,

“How long will this wretched war last? Will I start to fade too?” Neither of them believed that much in fate, or that history always repeated itself, but the threat and then the outbreak of war that had caused them no hesitation in putting their baby plans on hold. Sheila’s mother, who’d died just before she and George got married, had been a war widow from the so-called Great War, the “war to end all wars”. As the youngest of the four siblings, Sheila never knew her father, although she had often been shown a faded, creased photo of a proud, uniformed man with a thick, black beard holding a shawl bundle that she was assured was herself at six months old. Six weeks later, in one of the last battles of that awful, destructive conflict, he was dead. Her mother had made Sheila promise that “When you and young George have a boy, you are to name him after your Dad, Albert William”. “I will, Mum”, she thought to herself. “We will.”

Then, as she reached for her drink, Sheila laughed out loud. She thought, “Lemonade for the ladies, beer for the men, and cider for....who, exactly?” This war had changed everything, that was sure. “How long,” she thought, “How long before George and I dare think about our future, a proper home, a family? Will this field ever be a football pitch again? Will Henry be back to show off his medals to impress the girls, tell us all his tales, and cuddle his godson Albert William?”

She drank her lemonade, trying not to smell the cabbage stains on her hands and arms, and headed back to the field of battle.

Ian

Coventry

The weeks after Dunkirk were eventful as it was thought that the Germans would invade within a short time with only the channel to stop them. They had by then taken France and acquired landing fields near Cherbourg. Overwhelmed by their success they had developed a plan so clever it took years to discover. It was simple: a beam was switched on at Cleave, near Aachen on the German border, directly pointing at Birdlip in Gloucestershire, and another was located at Cherbourg; the Cherbourg beam could be moved and rotated when switched on. These beams were guides. The system involved very little equipment that could reveal how it all worked; later, the only evidence they found was a thing looking like a car coil in a shot-down aircraft, nothing else at all.

However Bletchley Park had ears everywhere. In a conversation between two POW pilots, one was overheard saying, "They don't know about Konigsbein at all!" This was a new piece of information. A little research found that it meant 'crooked leg' and was derived from the name of the raven in the story of Wotan. They found out that a bomber raid was being planned, but there was a problem – they could not do anything about it without giving the secret away that

they had cracked the German code. Liverpool and Belfast had been bombed; they now had a date for Coventry, but Coventry could not be warned.

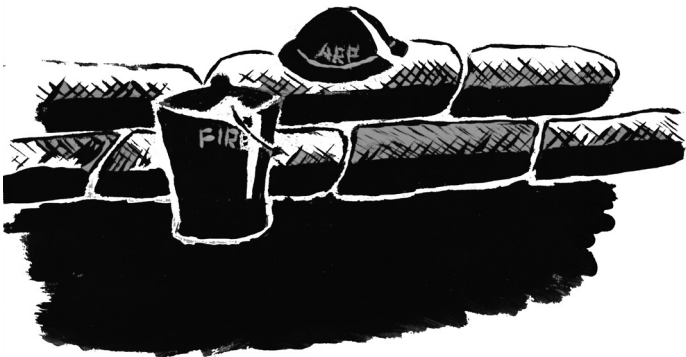
So how were the Germans going to find Coventry in the middle of England? Night flying to unknown places with no lights on was almost impossible in those days. The Germans turned on the signals as the planes took off from St Omer, another abandoned French airfield. The coil turned out to be a buzzer; as long as you stayed on the beam it hummed; if you strayed off it, it buzzed loudly until you got back on track. The Cherbourg beam bisected the Aachen beam and went up to Coventry. The planes followed the beam to Birdlip, when the note changed. The planes turned right and followed until the signal was switched off at Coventry, and there they dropped their bombs.

My father at that time worked as a millwright at Priday and Metford's North Mill in Gloucester Docks. In the afternoon they had been phoned by Kunzel's Bakery, Broad St., Coventry for 15 tons of flour, their usual order – but a day early, very urgent. They had no flour at all.

Loading was not a problem at North Mill; their wagon was a sentinel 6-wheeler steam. They did not know what to expect on arrival, as everything was being censored. Father volunteered to go to stoke the boiler, the usual mate having gone home. A Mr Sid Peach was to drive with another man as helper. In those pre-motorway days, the road was cross-country via Evesham.

When they arrived it was dark and they only had small side lights on. Sid of course had been many times before and pulled up expecting to see bakery men. The wagon boiler blew off steam with a shrieking noise and a policeman ran across to them swinging his lamp in a panic, shouting to stop the steam. Rocking between two square chimneystacks of the bakery was a large parachute mine, powerful enough to blow up an entire square of houses. They backed up slowly and were directed to a school where hundreds of people had been gathered by the Civil Defence to be fed. Temporary ovens had been built from rubble, the people having had no food for a day at least.

The trams, parked in the depot for the night were completely destroyed, as were a fleet of new fire engines ready for delivery. The tar-covered wood block road surface between tram-lines had caught fire. From then on, such heavy bombing was said to be "coventrated". Later, when they left for Gloucester, my father remarked that "Coventry was gone."



He joined the 10th Gloucesters and I never saw him again until 1947; he was in Burma all of those years. The steam wagon still exists and goes to rallies. Like Dresden, a famous black and white old town had disappeared along with over half of its people, but Father never talked about the dead people in the streets.

Never.

John

West Meets East

Ruth Birch is a well known face having worked as the Community Liaison Advisor here at Parc, liaising with prisoners from diverse backgrounds and cultures. She joined Parc as a member of tranche number one, eighteen years ago.

Prior to that, Ruth was in charge of production at a manufacturing company called Robertson's Associates; she then went on to be a technical author with GQ Parachutes, writing and amending manuals for the packing of parachutes and survival aids. Ruth says "I was ex-army working among ex-RAF; let's just say I had to learn to stand my ground!"

She goes on: "I was in the army for eight ears, from age 19. I took a general exam and then offered a job in the Intelligence Corps. (I know, I know!) Then there was six weeks basic training as a WRAC (Women's Royal Army Corps) followed by the men's training – which, needless to say, was very tough – at Ashford in Kent. At that time, only women in the Military Police or Intelligence Corps were given weapons training; later on in my Army career I actually ended up being one of only five women who were trained to take personnel on the firing range and I was also classed as a marksman. We had to pass the same fitness levels as the men, includ-

ing combat fitness, involving lots of running in boots, carrying a heavy load. Then I went to Loughborough to do further trade training, ending up as an analyst in the Intelligence Corps.

My first posting was to West Germany, to a town called Birgelen, and I was there when the Berlin Wall came down two years later in 1989. There was a gentleman who shall remain nameless, also currently working at Parc, also stationed there. Now the parade ground at an army barracks is sacred: you can't play on it or even walk across it. So when a group of us tumbled out of the NAAFI one day and started a game of volleyball, the guard commander had us sent straightaway to the guard room. We were placed on restrictions of privileges and another punishment was being made to wait on tables in the officer's mess and doing the washing up till four in the morning!

Around 1988 we went up to Berlin for a rounders competition; this involved travelling through East Germany on the Berliner train. Berlin had been partitioned after World War Two, and the whole city was surrounded by Communist East Germany. This map shows some of the sites we would pass on the train line; we could keep a look out for a Soviet Tank Repair Workshop, or the Soviet Combat Support Unit! It was a world of greys and browns, like something from the 1950's. I remember the old cars. I also remember the checkpoints where our documents were checked.

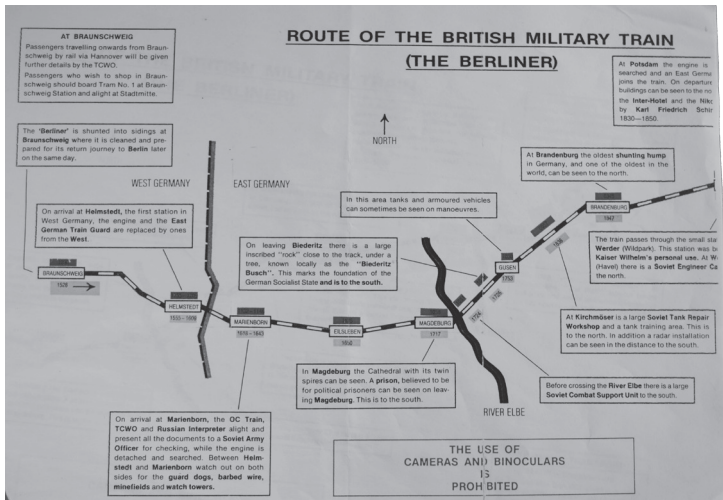
We paid a visit to Checkpoint Charlie, made famous in various spy films. It was still operational and there was a museum there, showing how people had escaped from the East using balloons and gliders. Families had

been split up. We'd wave to the East German guards and they would wave back at us.

Last year I visited RAF Cosford in the Midlands, where they have a Cold War museum. They celebrate the British Army of the Rhine, which I was a part of. After the wall had come down I revisited Berlin and realised that the very stadium we played rounders in was the Olympic stadium where the Berlin games were held and Nazi Germany was humiliated by the great black American athlete Jesse Owens in 1936.

We stood where Hitler had stood. It was a weird feeling.

Ruth



The Day We Went to War

War. It's August 1914. We were put on a war ship; there was me, Taffy, Tom, Pip, Lofty, Stripe and Buzz. We all looked out as the ship left Dover. It was night but with a full moon so we could see the cliffs; they were getting smaller and smaller. We were steaming for Calais, France. As we looked to the sky it was red; there was a big flash now and again then the boom. After a split second we all looked at each other; we all said "We will be alright, yep..."

Some of us were still asleep as the ship docked into the port. There was lots of movement on the dock, no lights just dark shadows moving around. Then a crane came over. The ramps came up along the side of the ship. There were shouts of, "Disembark! You units, look lively!" Then fleets of trucks came up with red crosses on them. They pulled up, then hundreds of men, some walking, some on stretchers, were taken on board. We said to each other, "Where will we end up?" Then Taffy said, "Looks like we're going to somewhere called Caen I think it's called." We were now on a truck. We could still hear the booms in the distance and the flashes. All Tom wanted to do was sleep. Stripe said, "When do we get some food?" Buzz said, "Soon, shut

up moaning." I just looked into the sky full of stars; I'd never seen so many.

It felt like forever till we reached Caen. Then the trucks stopped. "All out! Food! Hot food and drink!" Someone shouted, and then back on the trucks for the front. Mons – what would it be like? The streets were full of men, trucks, horses and all types of military vehicles. It must have been at least an hour till we pulled out. Pip said, "Oh well." Stripe was happy, he had been fed. Taffy said, "Blummin' hell, Don't them booms ever give up?" Tom looked at Buzz. I just winked at them. "We will all be fine. We will stay together." "Yes," they all said. "Right."

The truck came to a sudden stop. "All out!" Then we were all moved up to the front lines. No talking, no sound at all. Then we went down into a dip: the walls, then the sound of wooden planks. We passed HQ, then men running around, some cleaning their guns, some drinking out of their mess tins.

We moved closer. The booms turned into bangs, loud bangs. We could feel the power on our cheeks. The sky would light up, some flares going off, some red some white. Sometimes you could hear the sound of a rifle sounding off into the dark. We all tried to sleep. Then came the morning. Buzz said "Up!" Then there was a lonely silence. We all got up. Stripe said, "I'm hungry." We all said, "Shut up!" Pip said, "I hope it stays like this." Taffy said, "Don't bank on it." Then no sooner had he said it when the bangs came on; some whizzed past us and the ground thudded and the earth came pouring down on us. Stripe and Tom said, "Hell!" Well the day was mostly the same:

we had lunch, lunch turned into tea then night fell. "How long" I said, "Do we have to put up with this? When will it be our turn?"

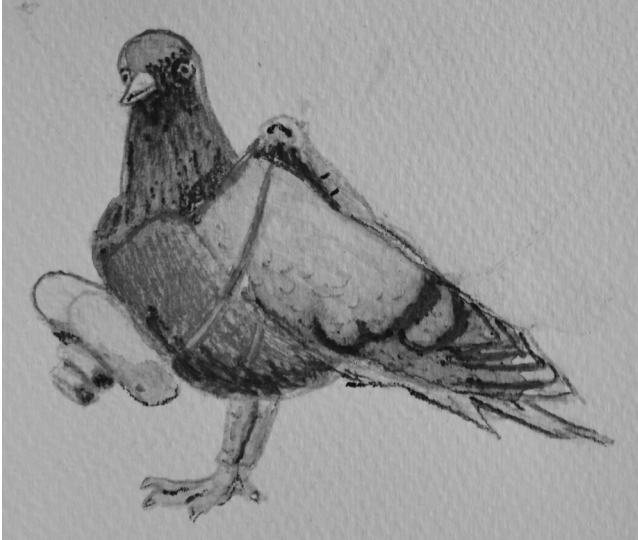
Then Stripe was taken. We all watched him go. Pip said, "Good luck!" He was off to HQ. Then the sound of gun shots. "Go on Stripe, move it!" Buzz shouted. Then the inevitable happened: Stripe was hit. The pact we had made on the ship did not last. Stripe fell out of the sky; down and down he went, tumbling and tumbling. I said, "We all knew this is not going to be a jolly..."

The sound of artillery and machine guns – it was hell. How long will it last? Who will be the next to take a message to HQ? Buzz said, "Chins up boys! We will do our duty, right? That is all they can ask of us. Just like Stripe; we should all be proud of him. I am."

It was about 5 o'clock. A low dew came over the battlefield. Thank God if you believe in him and all that but it was bloody good. My ears were still ringing. Time for some food and drink. Most of us just wanted to sleep.

Then in a flash Tom was taken out of the wooden-framed cage and it was his turn to get a message to HQ. "Good luck!" we all said. Tom said, "We'll do our duty." Buzz said, "Keep zig-zagging, don't stop for nothing." "Right, right," said Tom.

We watched him fly off. We were waiting for the gun shots. Pip said, "Fly like the wind Tom!" Taffy said, "He will make it boyo. We all want him to make it."



Flash – boom – flash – boom all started up. More men were coming up from the rear. The looks on their faces said it all.

I kept saying, “When is it my turn? Come on!” Pip said, “Come on where?” “No,” I said to Pip, “nowhere. It was me just speaking out loud.” “Oh,” said Pip.

All night the sky was red with its never ending bombardments. A soldier said, “The message got through to HQ. We move at dawn.” A big “Yes!” was shouted out. We could not believe it. “He made it,” I said to myself. “Bravo to Tom!”

Our spirits were high; we all worked to do our bit that night. We were thinking, “Where’s Tom? Having a well-deserved drink. Good old Tom!”

*

The PDSA Dickin Medal was instituted in 1943 in the United Kingdom by Maria Dickin to honour the work of animals in war. It is a bronze medallion, bearing the words "For Gallantry" and "We Also Serve" within a laurel wreath, carried on a ribbon of striped green, dark brown and pale blue. It is awarded to animals that have displayed "conspicuous gallantry or devotion to duty while serving or associated with any branch of the Armed Forces or Civil Defence Units". The award is commonly referred to as "the animals' Victoria Cross".

Paul

Of a Moment's Fight

A grinding butcher we hear
from this hold mud blown
stay low friend not fear
shelled to haven

Iron and steel crawling to tax them
direct as it fired speech faze
and flame and thus my shame for
sounded theirs in pain airs dirge

In bedded wet wait must we
crawling wheel squeak thrust
metal track squelch lay bone to mud

less forgiven numb white calcium cracks under
brown waters land a burial to some son
over she favour some
green box of hell's engine fire
cold to touch but not of hate

to them fateful sons rest your age
you can try so, they say dutiful
never much of this day washes away

Andrew

Return To Yorktown

1981 was particularly busy for the Band and Drums Platoon of the First Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers.

The drums platoon had no sooner returned to Lemgo W. Germany when preparations began for a ten-day tour of the USA to participate in bi-centenary celebrations of the victory in the War for Independence at Yorktown, Virginia.

The journey was subdued as the majority of the party were sleeping off the effects of the previous evening's RAF camp disco. After a short stop off in Boston, we were treated to a cloud-free and sunny vision of the city of NY and its surrounding boroughs; a truly memorable sight which stays with me.

Only I knew and fully appreciated the changes that my life had undergone to get to this point; the best decision I've ever made was to join the army.

*

The battlefield at Yorktown held an immense significance for our Royal Welch party because the Royal Welch Fusiliers were at the actual battle. The Royal Welch fought off waves of attacks by the American and French forces, and when Lord Cornwallis, the British Commander finally surrendered, the Royal

Welch Fusiliers were afforded the honour of being allowed to leave the redoubt with bayonets fixed, drums beating, because of the bravery the regiment had shown, half-starved, sleep-deprived and against overwhelming odds. The regimental colours were smuggled out concealed on the body of a junior subaltern and were not lost.

The actual celebrations were a long drawn-out affair. Speech after endless speech added to the agony of standing in the hot sun in thick scarlet tunic, a heavy ceremonial busby crushing down on my forehead. Ammo boots, thick studded and uncomfortable, choked my feet, plus the weight of a solid silver snare drum made from the melted down ornamental silver cannons captured at the Emperor's Palace during the boxer rebellion in China, didn't help.

That evening we were to perform in an American military-style tattoo called the Spirit of America. Held in a vast arena, President Reagan took centre stage amongst Messrs Bush, Mitterrand and a deluge of VIPs, politicians and famous US celebrities from around the globe. The stage end was transformed into an English castle, complete with fan-blown flying Union Jacks overhead and even moving white clouds projected on the scenery behind the castle's towers. Act after act performed to the great appreciation of the 85,000 crowd. This event was also televised across the US.

We formed up behind a hessian cloth-covered portcullis and awaited our cue. Through the hessian sacking we could see the vast arena; what seemed like a thousand camera flashes per minute filled our

eyes. Then silence!

Horse and rider entered the arena to a hysterical response from the crowd. Dressed in a three-quarter cocked hat and white powdered wig, the rider galloped around the arena shouting, "The British are coming! The British are coming!" He exited at the other end. The lights were dimmed to twilight and I could see the flames dance from the lamp affixed to the castle frontage.

The magnificent deep voice of the announcer filled the arena. Ladies and Gentlemen! For the first time in 250 years, they are back! This time on friendlier terms. The last British regiment to capitulate at the battle of Yorktown. Please welcome the oldest Welsh Regiment still in existence in the British Army –

The Royal Welch Fusiliers!

The crowd erupted, and I can now openly boast that I've experienced super-star welcome status in the USA. Once the cheering subsided two spotlights flooded the hessian-clad portcullis. There was silence, then sound effects of portcullis chains lifting the gate, click, click, click, click, heightening the performance. An assistant placed a live microphone to the drum major's mouth and he barked out his command to move off. In perfect British army fashion his commands were hair-raising.

Royal Welch – 'shun!

Royal Welch Fusiliers! – by the centre! – quick march!

The command echoed around the arena and caused an explosion of excitement. This was the proudest moment of my military career. We did the beating of the retreat ceremony and then we drummers broke away and formed up in single file in front of our principle guest of honour, President Reagan, to perform our drummers' solo.

If the fact of standing in front of such a formidable audience wasn't nerve-racking enough, the thought of completing a newly-devised drum-beating routine really scared us. To say it was intricate and highly impressive would be an understatement. With so many stick lifts and stick tricks to perform, we feared a cock up. However after a faultless performance by all, President Reagan was the first to his feet to applaud. His endorsement heralded the most appreciative reception I've ever heard: cameras flashing, TV camera men walking around us at every angle catching our stick moves and showmanship. It was beamed to large screens around the arena.

Awesome! Truly, truly, awesome.

I'm so proud to have been a part of such a wonderful experience. The hairs on the back of my neck took months to settle.

I wish you could have been there.

David O

Gone the Gay Bonnet

Bernard had been called up.

The yellow colour to her hands from the munitions factory – the stain that seemed, no matter how hard she scrubbed, as if it would never fade – held the few coppers, the right money for the journey home. Maggie was tired: a fourteen hour shift and one of the workers had lost a finger, a loose sleeve caught in a lathe; the blood had been awful, dreadful. Maggie, handing over the fare to the conductor, noticed his breath as he leered over her; he stank of onions. Maggie felt her stomach lurch a gripe, crippling; she was going to be sick again. Swallowing back the bile, she smiled at the man and handed over the money.

It was a fine day. In the green Clyne valley garden that slopes and winds its way to the bay of Swansea, a thin pebbled stream of water troubled its way, playing its own music. Picnicking on a chequered roll of cloth, Bernard told Maggie he had been called to serve in the fight. Maggie listened intently, her face tilted forward, irises brown through her long lashes. Suddenly a breeze struck up, raising her pink straw bonnet. She lifted a hand too late; the bonnet frolicked and waved as it made its haphazard way to the sea. Around them the wind played the leaves, flashing the pales reverses,

like small fish darting through a green sea.

Avelvy woods, the Somme. 6 o'clock morning mist rose wraith-like from the floor, the earthworks from the men themselves; above, the thundering, grinding, deafening cathedral of noise from the guns.

Captain Roberts, his shoulders stooped as if frozen in the way a man might stand to shelter from the rain, readied to raise the alarm, to go over the trench and advance toward the enemy.

Brown. Bernard didn't know his first name, nobody called him anything different, so Brown it was who first complained.

"Stale bread – it's a liberty man. 'Ow's a man to fight on second rate grub? Bet Haig himself would never have it, mun."

Brown's Welsh accent grumbled on.

"Come off it mate, yer Brown. Yer never passed a pie shop in yer life."

"I yer could lose a few pounds."

That raised a few nervous titters amongst the men. Brown cursed to know who had insulted him, but the trench was too tight with men for him to see.

Along the timber-lined walls, every so often broken by ladders, their rifles stood at arms-length, according to regulation, bayonets fixed and glinting in the sparkle of the rising blood-red sun.

Captain Roberts, ready now, a whistle to his lips.

The sky above reminded Bernard of torn lace curtains, crossed and crissed with man-made clouds.

The whistle burst its cry. Bernard only had time to

touch the letter in his breast pocket as he went over
the top.

All the trees were burning.

David T

