

**My life story**

**ENGLAND**

**1935-1957**

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## TIDRIDGE GRAND PARENTS

I remember very little about Grandmother Tidridge; I saw her but a few times, she wore long dresses coming to the floor, I seem to remember they flared out like a Dalton figurine. She was very much the submissive housewife: grandfather Tidridge rattled a teaspoon in his cup for more tea and granny literally came 'a running'. Times have changed! Like most mother's at that time she lost at least one baby and lost a son in the First World War



The Tidridge family...before I came on the scene.

I remember about as much about Grandfather Tidridge as I do granny!! He died in 1941 when I would have been about six years old. I have this picture in my mind of him coming down Silverdale Road where they lived, very slowly, using a cane and with a beard. I recall he gave me a penny.

Granddad was a gardener and a sportsman of some repute. I am not quite sure what exactly he did for a living but it revolved

around gardening and the church. He was also heavily involved in the Southampton Football (soccer) Team, being the man collecting the money at the entrance gate for many years: He was also a champion lawn bowler, and was connected with the Hampshire County Cricket team as an umpire. He was important enough that the Mayor and his wife came to his and granny's wedding anniversary!

The Tidridge home was located on Silverdale Rd, #2 I believe. I do not know whether they owned the house or not. It was a terrace home, on a pleasant street. I remember that you had to go up steps to get to the front door: The wall outside the door was of tile and there was a picture of a man with a gun, a sort of hunting scene.

The house seemed to stretch way back, there were at least two rooms on the right hand side of the passage way, with the stairs facing you. I do not recall ever going up the stairs, but I think there were three floors. The passageway finished at the dining room and then continued through the dining room you reached the kitchen. There was a small, immaculately kept back yard, and the back gate led into an alley. I always remembered the entire house being dark and gloomy...sort of matched the Tidridge personality.

There were I think ten little Tidridges' A couple left for the United States where they raised large families. It would appear some turned to the Roman Catholic Church. At least one of the children became a minister in the Protestant faith. I met at one of the

American cousins during the war when he came over as a soldier. I have corresponded regularly with a couple of cousins, both way older than me. I have also corresponded with one of the grandchildren...just slightly younger than me!

Still living in the England home with my grandparents were Auntie Daisy and Uncle George both of whom remained unmarried.

My Dad was the youngest in the family.

## CLARK GRAND PARENTS



G-grandmother T's mum and dad...  
the Clarks



G-grandmother T's family,  
which included a set of twins

I saw neither of my Mum's parents; they both died some time before I was born. They lived on, what would be called a smallholding, a small farm if you will. I never thought to ask my Mum whether they owned the land or not. The house they lived in was called Harefield House and again I now wished I had asked more about the home and the name. I suppose one could surmise that it was so called because there were hares in the field where the house was!

Again, there were many children and again one son was lost in the First World War.

As I have stated elsewhere Hedge End figured prominently in my childhood!! We had many aunts and uncles in the area...Let's see, one of Mum's brother's, four of her sisters remained in Hedge End! They all seemed to produce lots of children so I had scores of cousins. All older than me...Mum was also the youngest in her family.

## DAD TIDRIDGE



My Dad

Walter Sidney (Sid) Tidridge (1905-1990) was my Dad, he was the youngest of a large family<sup>1</sup>, and was born in Southampton, Hampshire, England. I know little of his younger years except that he attended Western School, Southampton. Played soccer, was left footed. On leaving school he began to work at the Post Office. He was dissatisfied with either the rate of promotion or the possibility of promotion and joined the Merchant Navy. He was a steward. A steward is a person who is, to all intents and purposes, a servant who makes beds, cleans the rooms (cabins) and tries to make the sea trip for the passenger as comfortable as possible: This career most likely accounts Dad's habit of grabbing a duster when he came home and perfecting what Mum had already done in the way of housework. It would seem reasonable to believe that this did not do much for Dad's popularity!! I believe that Dad's career took him to France, South Africa, South and North America, and possibly Germany. I do not recall too much about his trips but he did talk of "crossing the line"<sup>2</sup>. Dad left his service under mysterious circumstances just before the beginning of World War II. I was led to understand he had been fired, but I never did find out why!! He would have been around thirty years of age. He served on the ship called the Asturias.



A 'Spitfire' one of the aircraft in the battle of Britain

Dad never did any military service<sup>3</sup>. I think he did not meet the medical requirements as he had severe ulcers on both his legs. The cause of the ulcers was attributed to several unproven happenings. One, the fact that as a telegraph boy<sup>4</sup> he wore 'puttees' and the bindings apparently caused constriction of the blood and caused the ulcers, or two, the many years he served as a steward on carpeted floors seriously affected the circulation with the same effect. But in any event, the ulcers were very painful. One consequence of this was that I never saw Dad swim, or even go into water above his ankles. But, in those days, not many Dads seemed to go swimming anyway!!

Dad seemed to have a variety of jobs, mostly semi-skilled. I recall that he was a riveter's helper, a warehouseman and lastly a stevedore<sup>5</sup>. As a riveter's helper he assisted

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1 You have, of course, checked the Family Tree so carefully prepared!!

2 A ceremony held on board ship when the Equator was crossed. King Neptune, King of the Sea would come on board and then some age-old ceremony occurred. This involved in soap, and shaving and dunking a pool. Or so I am told.

3 He was an Air Raid Warden during the war: this was an organization that helped during the bombing.

4 In those days when a telegram was sent and delivered by a telegraph person, who delivered it to the home of the addressee.

5 For you landlocked Albertans, this is a person who unloads ships!!



G-Grandparents T and me!

in the construction of Spitfires<sup>6</sup>, one of the most famous aircraft that emerged as the result of the war. The aircraft, and of the course the pilot's, were credited with winning the Battle of Britain which raged in the skies over Britain in 1940. The German air force was held off and this allowed the allies to regroup and to finally win the war: Even though it took another five years.

What was Dad like? There were many sides to my father. He was a good provider. We lived in a well furnished, well kept home. We went short of nothing that mattered. We vacationed every year I can recall right up to my sixteenth birthday. He worked hard. He was old fashioned, strict, probably moody, finicky, and opinionated. I would guess he found it hard to express his love for us kids (Auntie Jean and Uncle Ivan) apart from being a good provider. He could be fun, particularly at Christmas. He enjoyed sport and was a vocal (very) of the

local amateur soccer team and was once the same for the local Southampton professional team. He had strong opinions on how the game should be played.

He was also not above vocalizing his opinion of the referee. It was sometimes embarrassing sitting in the stands with him<sup>7</sup>!! I am not sure if any of his traits have carried on into the present generation. They certainly skipped mine!!

Quality Time<sup>8</sup> was an unknown factor when we were growing up. Parents did their thing and the children did theres. I can only remember two occasions when Dad showed up to watch me play, and, it seems that I played soccer or cricket every spare moment I had. One was at a school game and the other was when our Youth Club soccer played in the final and won. I seem to remember being quite pleased that he showed up.



The Asturias had some family connections G-G-Dad T Served on it and it brought me back from Cyprus

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6 There were of course several other aircraft involved, in the Hurricane. It was the Spitfire though that received most of the credit.

7 It seems strange that one would sit in the stands!!

8 We did not have contact with many other families, but judging from the lack of spectators at my sporting events, parents did not turn out for sporting events etc.

## MUM TIDRIDGE



Mum (Frances Ethel Clark) was born December 23, 1906, at Hedge End, near Southampton, Hampshire, England. She died December 25, 1991, at Ashurst Hospital, near Lyndhurst, Hampshire. She was same age (85) as Dad; I think that she just gave up, became too tired to carry on.. My Mum's maiden name was Clark.

She was a country girl, who, when she was old enough, left home to be 'in service'. This meant, as far as I can discover, 'living away from home', but still in Hedge End, in a gentleman's house where she learned all there was to learn about cleaning, cooking, waiting at table etcetera! She obviously picked up something about the finer things of life because like Dad, she had a classy way about her. I know she and Dad wanted the best for us kids. They seemed to realize it took a little class to get on in the world. (I'm not sure whether my Mum and Dad used a harsh "a" for such words as pass and grass or the soft "a" your Mum uses). Private joke: ask Mum, apparently it shows from which side of the tracks you originated! (February 20, 1993: So even in the world of white, there are light whites and dark whites!<sup>9</sup>)

Her parents were not rich, but I think they did own some land. I was born in a house belonging to them, Harefield House. The house was still standing when we visited in the late 1980's. I think Mum must have lived there when she and Dad were first married. You'll remember my Dad was at sea (not all at, but serving at). Mum and Dad either bought or were given as a wedding present a house in Hedge End. The house was still standing in 1991. Mum and Dad sold it to a family member, Ray Gadsby, and you all received a little of the proceeds. Aunty Edie and Uncle Ern<sup>10</sup> lived in the house for years. You won't remember them, but you met them in 1961 and 1971. Sarah, you won't remember, but you took to Uncle Ern, would have nothing to do with my Dad. It didn't go over too well. You would have all liked Uncle Ern he was, in my view, the epitome of what the middle class Englishman should be, polite, cheerful, honest to a fault, a fine gentleman. So you can see you come from a long line of rich property owners, ho! ho! ho! I do believe, though, it is that sort of background that decides your course of action throughout life. In this case my grandparents were homeowners, so were my parents, and consequently that was your Mum and my objective: to own a home. I'm a sure Mum's parents were the same. Some more on my Mum in service: the person she worked for was I, think, a Judge, and fancy dinners were held and the whole bit. OK for the host and family but a bit of a bind for the hired help. I think Mum worked for some real 'twerps', i.e., head cooks and butlers who were a bit of a bother to work for<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> As in dark green and light green

<sup>10</sup> Dimmock

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps they are still showing 'old' English films. The class system in the servant class was as bad, if not worse, than the one in the 'ruling' class.



Mum, because she was around most of the time, handled the discipline. She was quite 'handy' and 'a clip around the ear', especially if her wedding ring contacted your head, really got your attention. It made quite an impression. No pun intended. I remember when someone became too big (no names here) a small, wand like cane, was purchased.



My Mum's wedding day...

It meant Mum could reach further. I distinctly remember her chasing me down the garden path, cane in hand, making contact on at least a couple of occasions. The heinous crime has long been forgotten. The cane was 'accidentally' destroyed in a boisterous moment by yours truly and never replaced. The reason being I became perfect at a very early age!

Mum was kind and considerate. (February 20, 1993) Sometimes as we grow older our attitudes change and I guess parents can be a real pain. Aunt Jean wrote Mum developed into a bit of a nag: Jean, John and Dad being the recipients of most of her 'concerns'. I never knew her as anything but kind and considerate. I think Jean had some problems to resolve when Mum died. I'm glad to say, however, a couple of years Jean has kinder memories. Mum used to visit various little old ladies; you just didn't hop into a car and take off, it meant a trip by bus. So in effect, you just didn't drop in on a person. It made a daylong trip away from home. (February 20, 1993) We take everything for granted in Canada, although I fear with the economic position of this province and the country, things may get worse before they get better. Some things we take for granted may just not be available. (September 9, 1998) The economy returned to normal but not before many people lost their jobs. It was the era of down sizing. Fortunately, the down sizing did not adversely affect this family.

On occasion, when Mum was away, she would pack lunch for me. I would eat it, at the home a Mrs. Smallwood, probably a widow. She lived in a small house some distance away. She had two pictures that I remember... one was called The Wreck of the Hesperus... you will all remember at times being told you looked like, The Wreck of the Hesperus. Just to fill you in a little, as if you cared! As I recall the ship ran aground or sank not too far from shore, unfortunately the waters were filled with sharks, you can guess the rest. The other, a battle scene: It showed troops all lined up to do battle. Real cheery pictures to eat lunch by! Mrs. Smallwood, a member of the Women's Voluntary Service, sold savings stamps to help the war effort. That won't mean anything to you, but I stuck it in because that what she was and did! Savings stamps were sold to people during the Second World War; the monies helped the war effort.

Mum, along with Dad, was also a cleanliness freak<sup>12</sup>. No wonder I exhibited traits

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<sup>12</sup> But we only had one bath a week!

of Godliness! Necks, ears, behind the ears, fingernails all had to be cleaner than the original! Our clothes were always clean and repaired. A constant chore as far as I was concerned, I never was careful with my clothes. Underwear always had to be clean and in good repair, just in case you got into an accident. Funny, funny, funneeee!

I suppose you'll all know I was Mum's favourite: She picked out all of my clothes until I went in the Army at 18. She even picked my Wedding suit for me, after I came out of the Army! Your Mum was probably surprised she let me come to Canada: Just kidding. (February 20, 1993) I bet you all got a kick out of the last sentence. I never felt it strange that my Mother held such a firm grip on my life. She would probably have wanted to have selected, rather than approved of, my selection of the girl who was to become your mother! I suppose on looking back, my parents ran my life for me. I don't think they saw anything wrong with it. Money was tight; Mother knew best, I had no argument with the setup. I really believe that they were doing what they felt was best for all of us kids. I know you probably think you were kept in check; what with pants with maple leaves on them. You know what your Mum and I really thought? We were trying to bring you all up to be independent. We think we did a good job.

I have never, because of my family upbringing, found it too hard to follow rules or fit into a rules oriented occupation: For example, the army or the police service. That made life in both organizations much easier. Even now, some 40 odd years later I have no problem following most regulations. I enjoy trying to change some of them though. Never felt myself as the pet of the family, some pet! Never went through the rebellion stage, at least, I don't think I did. I was too busy working and playing sport.

My Mum used some weird expressions, such as, 'you look as though you have been dragged through a hedge backwards': 'Excuse me miss, your hair's a-twist, your petticoat shows your garter miss', and one that says it all 'you're as useless as tits on a boar'. The last remark probably used in desperation rather than normal everyday chatter! And, in a moment of weakness, taught us, 'polish it behind the door', which if repeated quickly will get you into trouble! Mum was not athletically inclined, but she did join in the odd game of cricket. No smart remarks about cricket being odd, and soccer, and would try the game of rounders, the original version of baseball. She was always stiff the next day. Sex was never discussed around the house, unless in the context that it was the number after five. Mum did give me a book on the 'birds and the bees' when I was around 12-13 years of age. I was pitifully ignorant on the subject. However, when I consider today's 'educated values' I'm not sure which was better or worse. I do remember Mum saying she thought that sexual intercourse was intended for a husband and wife. I have never had any problem with that idea.



Mum, taken on the lawn at 17,  
Treeside.

still waiting for her reply.

During the war when most things were scarce, we seemed to do well. My Mum kept chickens, for eggs and meat, and rabbits for fun and meat (sorry Trish and Sarah) Mum, as I have mentioned was from a farm background. My Dad was NOT. Mum didn't smoke, thought it to be un-ladylike. She tried it, I believe, but didn't dig it. Other ladies smoking did not bother her, but thought that it should be done in the house and not the street. I'm not sure where Mum was from a religious point of view. She believed in God, read her bible regularly, and probably said her prayers. I do not recall her sharing her faith with me. She was very much behind our attending church and Sunday School<sup>13</sup>. She must have talked about her childhood but I forget much of what she said. I had written to her in 1986 for more information. I'm

As for schooling, I do remember, both Dad and Uncle Ern kidding Mum and Auntie Edie about their attendance at Hedge End University, the village school. Mum had started left-handed but that was against the rules in those days, and she was forced to become right-handed. My Mum's pride was her garden: she was very good at it. She seemed to know a great deal about plants, how to garden. Our garden was always one of the best in the road. As I write this, April 24, 1991, Mum is 83 years old. She is not enjoying the best of health. In the last little while she has had operations on her eyes for cataracts, which, according to my sister Jean's last letter, were unsuccessful. While in hospital she fell out of bed and broke a hip. She is also becoming deaf. Mum is missing Dad, though they were not particularly happy in their later years. She is living in a good hotel/lodge for seniors and is well looked after. Jean and John visit regularly. I would rate her to be the best Mum's I have known!

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13 Church of England (Anglican)

## SISTER JEAN



Sister Jean

Jean Ann Tidridge, my sister, your aunt, was born March 4, 1938. At the time of writing, November 27, 1999 I cannot remember too much about Jean. That should not be construed as being negative!!

I recall she was very sick at times with asthma. She spent some time at Hedge End, because it was at a higher level, topo-graphically speaking. She was obviously smarter than me, as she finished up at a grammar school, Brockenhurst.

She married John Bathgate, an executive with the Telephone Company. Jean visited here with my Mum. As of today she has not returned, although her husband and Jean have visited the States many times. John and Michael are her sons.

Jean and John were the caregivers for Mum and Dad in their latter years. This meant lots of travel and a goodly amount of their time being given to this task. I think it took its toll.



John Bathgate

I have always, as far as I know, got along well with Jean.

When we visited in 2000 we stayed with Jean and John and they treated us very well.

## BROTHER IVAN



Ivan Charles Tidridge, my brother, your Uncle, was born August 19, 1940. The battle of Britain was raging when he was born. There is not Russian in my brother. Ivan the name of a person who was I think a Godfather, Ivan Elton. Don't ask anymore, I don't know any more!!

November 27, 1999. Again, I remember very little at this time about Ivan. He was, I believe, more outgoing than me, and rather fancied himself as a ladies man!! He also went to Brockenhurst Grammar School. He served his apprenticeship as a carpenter. Then he joined the police service, for the County of Hampshire. He and his wife, Phyl, later headed off to Australia. Alec and Sandra are their children.

Like me he missed out on having to look after Mum and Dad. It has been almost thirty years since I saw him last. We write occasionally, exchange phone calls with Ivan always managing to call (very) early in the morning. At the present time we hoping travel back to Jolly Olde and all met up again. I don't think we ever had any disagreements, although he was of the opinion that I was number one son with my Mum!! I can't think why!!

June 30, 2002: We, Mum and I, had travelled to England in 2000. Met with Ivan and his wife Phyl there; apparently he was under the impression I had said I was better than him because I was a Christian. Can't think how that happened: Don't even remember talking to him about Christian things. However, to cut a long story short, we are now the best of brothers and correspond regularly via e-mail. We played a game of golf in England, he beat me badly, but it was a very enjoyable day spent on the links.

July 2003, still e-mailing Ivan, on a regular basis, both letters and a discussion on Christian things: The Christian discussion died out after half a dozen or so letters...Ivan was happy with what he believed, which was the normal understanding of a distant God and no need to get too personal...

## CHILDHOOD



Me at 18 months

I was born at Hedge End, Hampshire, England<sup>14</sup>. Mum was Ethel, a homemaker, and Dad, Sid, in the merchant navy, a steward.<sup>15</sup> When I was eighteen months old, we, the family of three, moved to Totton,<sup>16</sup> Hampshire, into a brand new house at



17, Tree Side Ave.

17, Treeside Avenue. I remained there (apart from a spell in the army) until I left for Canada, married to your Mum. The house, small by Canadian standards, had a kitchen, living and dining room downstairs, three bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. Again, by Canadian standards the garden was small, however, it was well looked after, mostly by Mum. Later I helped.

I began attending school at five years of age. The School was Eling St. Mary, operated under the auspices of the Church of England. The school was co-ed. Mr. Rowlands was the headmaster. I remember the following teachers, my first, Miss Davies, then Miss Gray, Miss. Marks, Miss Rigby and finally Miss Telford<sup>17</sup>,<sup>18</sup> Mr. Hoff<sup>19</sup>. All were very good.



Eling St. Mary School

If you do your math, you will realize that I started school the year after World War II<sup>20</sup> started. This added some unique features to school life. One was that we took respirators<sup>21</sup> with us to school. These we hung on the back of our chairs. We practiced frequently for gas attacks. The air raid warning (like police sirens) would sound. If the alarm lasted longer than some set time, we were herded off to the air raid shelters. Sitting in the dark, we learned many old-fashioned songs. "My Bonnie lies over the ocean," "Clementine" and on and on. If the air raid warning lasted over the lunch hour, those with parent's permission were sent home for lunch. I always went home for lunch. I do not think I worried about the war, either because I was too young or because Mum and Dad never

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14 A family stronghold, four aunts, one Uncle, literally dozens of cousins lived in Hedge End

15 One who acts as your host on board a ship.

16 Alleged to be the largest village in England, too poorly planned to be a town.

17 An assumption on my part that most of the teachers were in fact Miss.

18 Lacking in humor, I once place a tin inkblot on the register (list of students) she was not amused!!

19 Had been in the Fleet Air Arm during the war

20 Lasted from September 1939-August 1945

21 There were child and adult versions. The child's version was called 'mickey mouse', because, I hope, of the colours rather than the quality.

seemed worried.

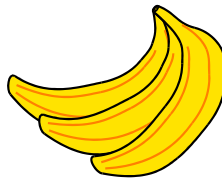
Although there were many bombings in Southampton<sup>22</sup>, which was about five (eight kilometres) miles away, Totton was almost unscathed by any actual bombing. As I recall there was a landmine (large bomb) which fell about two miles away. We knew nothing of that from the impact. The other occasion was when an Italian pilot lost his way, and bombed what we called the creosote plant, because that where we got creosote to preserve our wood. Apparently the pilot thought he had hit a gas plant of some kind because the land had several large tanks like you see along refinery row, here in Edmonton. My Mum and I saw the bombs drop from the upstairs window. He dropped six in all. Casualties were very light as it was lunch hour and nearly everyone was drinking tea! There one occasion when all the paper pasted onto the edges of the windows to prevent splintering, was blown completely off by a blast. Our home suffered no damage throughout the war.



Eling Quay, circa 2000

As a protective measure, air raid shelters were constructed in our street. These were like small houses, some end to end with a communal entryway. Others were like duplexes with a communal entry at one end. They were not very clean: they had no windows. The emergency exit, was simply a three feet by three feet (meter by a meter) section of the wall where the bricks had been laid using a sandy mortar. A handle was inserted into this portion during construction. To get out of the shelter in an emergency, you simply pulled the handle toward you and the bricks came away, leaving an opening. All the exits had been 'pulled' early and therefore the shelters were almost unfit for human habitation. The Tidridge family decided early, that if we were to be bombed, it was to be in our own home. We slept downstairs on the main floor, under a bed as I recall.

In spite of the war the although it was after the war or ice cream. Sweets (candies) what you don't have you don't vegetables, had rabbits for fun and meat. I think butter was pears and plums) were



family really did not suffer, before I had my first banana were scarce, but, I guess, miss! We grew our own and meat, chickens for eggs unheard of, but fruit (apples, available.

I think the attitude of my Mum helped me to be rather more tolerant of other people. She never spoke an unkind word about the German, Italian or Japanese people. However, she did say that all the leaders should be locked up in a room until they had

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<sup>22</sup> Southampton was badly bombed and severely damaged during the war, as it was a major port at that time.

resolved their difficulties. (September 9, 1998) It would be hard to convince me that the world is a much better place even now. There are wars in Africa, the Baltics, and political unrest in most of the countries that were part of the Soviet Union. Many other places have minor skirmishes occurring almost daily.

While I was not too tall as a youngster, I was branded once, as a 'trouble maker' at school. It happened this way: The film Zorro<sup>23</sup> must have appeared at the local cinema. The schoolyard immediately became Zorro's country. We divided into sides, wore our raincoats as cloaks and had pitched sword fights. Some one must have been hurt, because the headmaster<sup>24</sup> lined us all up, and I was picked out as a ring leader! No punishment was meted out, but I do think Zorro afterwards! I also was sent returned to California shortly afterwards! I also was sent to the Headmaster's Office for fighting. It happened this way; I was playing soccer in the schoolyard, and was in the goal, my favourite position. A lad, in the name of Brian Chambers, reputed to be the school bully, wanted to play in goal. I refused; we squared off, glared, and wagged our fists at one another. From a classroom window a teacher ordered us, to report to the Headmaster. I waited for a short while, he did not show, and I returned unscathed to my classroom. That was my last fight in school until I went to Southampton Technical School<sup>25</sup> several years later.



I played my first soccer<sup>26</sup> game in my last year at what would have been my elementary school. It was a huge success. The sports master told me where to stand and that is where I stood for the whole game. Honest. Somewhere along the way I must have learned differently and by the time I reached Secondary (Junior High) I was proficient at the game. These events stick in my mind regarding my first years at school: the Zorro incident, the fight over who should play in goal, and winning some war savings stamps for painting a copy of a poster of the landing at Normandy<sup>27</sup>. I remember being hauled to the front of the class, whacked on the upper thigh by the female teacher, for slouching in my desk while reading the Bible<sup>28</sup>, and, finally, standing on the same spot for the entire game in my first soccer match. I was no whiz at school but I did not do too badly, I was in the 'A' stream, always in the top third of the class. I do not remember any badly behaved kids. Nor do I remember any bad teachers.



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23 Been there, seen that!!

24 Principal

25 I was taunting another student about something or other, I was looking the other way and he gave me a sharp right hook to the jaw, which I deserved. The second time was after a cricket match. One of my own player's who did not get a chance to bat or bowl, thought that it was my fault, and thumped me, not deserved.

26 Called football in England.

27 The successful landing in France that culminated in the end of World War II.

28 Religious instruction was a daily happening, as was an opening assembly with hymns and prayers.



Parent Teacher Associations were unheard of. My Mum did visit the school once and was shown some of my work and the headmaster congratulated me on being able to spell 'eucalyptus'<sup>29</sup> correctly. He did not know, however, that I had written it out several times because I got it wrong the first time.



At age 11 I moved to Testwood Secondary Modern School, a co-ed school, which was modern when compared to the previous schools I had attended. I remembered very little about my time there except that it was enjoyable. We had good teachers. I was introduced to play-acting and performed in a school play called 'The Crimson Coconut, ' by Daphne

DeMaurier. All about anarchists bombs and stuff. I was a villain. In one scene, with my partner, I sat at a table eating soup. I was adorned with a long dropping moustache that got in the way. I remember pulling up the ends and eating. Got my first laugh! Go break a leg, eh! More sports, athletics, classical music, a trip to see A Midnight Summers Dream, by old Bill what's his name. A much-cherished trip to Wembley Soccer Stadium to watch the English boy's soccer team beats the pants of the Scots: Then a day trip to London to see the sights; a visit to an art gallery and a trip around the town, Southampton<sup>30</sup>.



Before coming to the school I wrote an examination to see if I was smart enough to go to a grammar school , I did not pass. However, I did well enough to start in the 'A'<sup>31</sup> stream at the Testwood School. Later I sat another examination that entitled me to go to Southampton Technical School. Testwood School was a mile or so (I wonder how accurate my estimates are!!) from 17, Treeside, uphill both ways, snow covered, windswept: An absolutely treacherous journey.



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29 I suppose I should have finished up in Australia and not my brother

30 A Roman times town, still partially surrounded by City walls, and containing many historic places. The port from which the Pilgrim Fathers left for America, and where the legendary King Canute proved to his subject he was not a god. They thought he could stop the waves, he showed them he could not.

31 Same stream as your Mum!



This building originally housed Southampton's workhouse. It was built in 1866 after the old workhouse, on an adjoining site, had been roundly condemned by a poor law inspector. After the Second World war the buildings were taken over the County Council and converted into a technical school. It became Southampton Technical College in 1965, and is now called the City College. Southampton City Council. SCC Libraries

The journey to Southampton Technical School had to be accomplished by bus followed by another lengthy walk (same sort of journey as to Testwood), or a bus ride. I walked most of the time. The school was in an older grimy part of Southampton. The school was also very old. It was Boys Only this time. I wore long pants for the first time, and heard for the first time, the expression, 'flood pants.'<sup>32</sup> I think the school would be classed as a junior version of NAIT. It was very well respected in the 'trades' and many students were apparently hired directly from school. In later years it was designated a College.

So, although the school taught carpentry, bricklaying, plumbing and painting and decorating, I really did not relish a trade. Possibly because I did not, still do not, feel comfortable, doing finicky sort of work. My dreams lay in market gardening. Mum and Dad made enquiries about my going to an Agricultural College. We learned, however, that this was very expensive and out of the families reach. There seemed no point staying in school so I left with three months to go. I had a job lined up; working fulltime at a place I had started at about two years previously. I was to work forty-eight hours a week for nine pence an hour<sup>33</sup>.

Continued under WORK.....

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32 As bad as maple leaves.

33 When I started work there were four dollars in a pound, twenty shillings in a pound and twelve pennies in a shilling

## SPORTING LIFE

Sports have played a large part in my enjoyment of life. Of course, my first experience related earlier about my first soccer game, did not forecast a huge success in



Totton Youth Club  
wins cup...

the sporting field. My love during the winter in England was of course soccer. I played at school, both on the field and in the playground with a tennis ball. I played for the Youth Club. I'm not sure how I came to the notice of the School (Testwood) soccer coach. In any event, he pulled me out of the line up of kids going into class and told me I was to play for the soccer team. I suppose I played in all positions but was going to play full back for the school. My wish was to play in goal but they had a very good goalkeeper. I was in the first year at the school so had to play where they wanted me to play. Our team did not win many matches. I recall however, that we had fun<sup>34</sup> playing together.

We won no cups, leagues or tournaments. Oh yes, beside school leagues there was also a house league where I also played for my house. Outside of school I played in goal, and it was in this capacity I played for Totton Youth Club. Our team lost only one game that year and that was to the team that we defeated in the cup final; a good end to our season. As I moved onto Technical School I again played for the school. My greatest wish was to play in goal, but again my quest for soccer fame was denied me. I played on the field, playing with a keeper who couldn't stop anything. Again this school team only tied one game during the season. My wish was to play goalkeeper, however, my skills as a full back must have been sufficiently noted and I was invited to try out for the City Boys Soccer game. I did not make the team. I also played, in later years, for the company I served in the Guards, and later with the Police Service here in Edmonton.

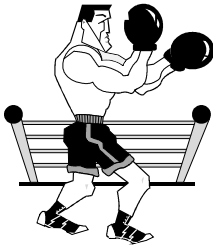
My soccer career ended rather embarrassingly here in Edmonton in about 1998. The church had soccer games of an evening. Mum was of the opinion that I was too old. The agreement was: If I hurt myself I should quit, some when during the game, I was in goal, I caught the ball, and it hit the end of my finger, and, as I later learned, broke my finger. What a sad end to an illustrious career.

Cricket was also a part of my growing up. I was pretty good<sup>35</sup> at it. I played for the Technical School and again tried out for the City team. I played for the battalion in the Army. I did not play in Canada although I did consider doing so.

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34 Fun, like in enjoy!!

35 Modesty does not list high on my priorities.



At Youth Club I learned the fundamental of snooker and billiards, table tennis and boxing and tennis. I thoroughly enjoyed table tennis and became reasonably proficient. I played even in Canada, table tennis not ping-pong!! I started boxing at about thirteen years of age. My first bout was a disaster. The Youth Club formed a team and we headed for our first tournament. In the changing room there was a fellow who was pounding away in the corner getting warmed up. He had muscles on his muscles. It was rumoured that he was from a Reform School (YDC). I just hoped that he was not my opponent. Unfortunately, when I climbed into the ring, who was facing me, that's right, Mr. Muscles. He made short work of me and the referee stopped the fight in the first round. I spent most of the time in a crouched position protecting as much of me as I could.

My next fight was in a place called, Alton, a small town in Hampshire. I fought a fellow about my size; we pounded each other for three rounds. The fight ended in a draw and it was declared the best event of the tournament. I didn't try boxing again until I joined the army and the battalion was in Berlin. I was entered into the Battalion Open, restricted to members of our own regiment, and won, I think, three bouts, two knockouts, before reaching the final. I think my opponent and I were fairly evenly matched in size and weight. We completed the three rounds and he won on points. I think his name was Stephens. The next tournament I entered was the Berlin Open, which allowed any soldier in Berlin to compete. Again I had three bouts, winning all of them, before reaching the final. And, guess who my opponent is? That's right Stephens... and, he beat me again. I have not fought since. I finished up with a marginally impressive six wins, one draw and three loses. Visions of being light heavy weight champion of the world never even entered my mind.



In Canada I learned to play racquetball, badminton and squash. I modestly concede I was reasonably good at all of those sports. I also took up golf. The first game I played was at Victoria. This was around the early to mid-sixties. I did not play regularly for several reasons, it was expensive and time consuming, and, probably more honestly, I never really mastered the game. The number of times I played between my first game and the time when first Steve and then Trevor invited me to play, could be counted on the fingers of both hands. November 1999. I am hoping that I will be able to play more frequently now; it is my hope to break 100.



I have really enjoyed all aspects of sport, even if golf does really try my patience. I have found that it has kept me fairly fit so that I can enjoy life.

It seems to me as I write this on January 17, 2004, (I have still to break 100) that I must add my most famous exploit at golf: It was at the Fort Saskatchewan Course. There

was a threesome, Steve, me, and a young lad who knew how to play golf. All went well until we reached a certain hole and had to pause to see that no one else was ahead of us. The young man sat down on one end of a park bench, I sat on the other. About to take his turn, the young man stood up, and the bench just rolled backwards, me with it. I finished up sprawled behind the bench, being trapped against it so that I could not move. I was completely unhurt, but because I was laughing so hard I could not speak. Number One son was sure I was having a heart attack. These performances take great skill.



Mike Kelsey, Bill Longland, JT Greg Chapman, not remembered Charles Ferguson  
Nr Goodall? Derek Hurst Snellgrove? Nr



Rear: Fisher Williamson Foulkes Rooks Shutt Dean  
Front Mosley Guest Blowers Allen Tidridge  
Winners Inter-Company Competition  
May 21, 1954 British Army Over the Rhine 44

## THE FARM

Hedge End, Hampshire, played a large part in my early childhood, probably that's because Mum was born there and it was where most of her sisters lived. She was the youngest of a large family. Her sisters were Lil, Martha, Lizzie, Amy, Elsie Ada, and her brother was Ernie. She lost a brother, Charles, in the First World War. Our family visited Hedge End often. I don't think that my Dad was too impressed. I'm sure it was a cause of disagreement between Mum and Dad. Many of my summers were spent with Uncle Fred and Auntie Liz on their farm. I think they rented the place, but that

doesn't really matter. I have no idea how many acres the farm was in total. It was undoubtedly small by western Canadian standards. They did a little bit of everything. They grew strawberries, lettuce, carrots and wheat; Kept ducks, chicken, pigs and cows. A real mixed bag. The farmhouse was old and seemed big compared to our house at Totton. Thatch (it's funny, but I have since learned that the roof was not thatched!!<sup>36</sup>) covered the roof. If you are interested, thatch consists of several layers of straw all running the same way held in place by, I think, hazel wood strips, which were doubled into "u" shaped pieces and forced down into the straw. Straight strips of the same hazel wood ran parallel across the length of the roof. When the "u" strips were forced down



HEATH HOUSE FARM UNCLE Fred and assorted (probably) cousins. Circa mid thirties

like any of thousands that appear on plates and postcards of English cottages.

into the thatch the strips held the straw in place. Thatching<sup>37</sup> is a skilled task, but not a growing trade.

From the outside the house looked

Entering the front door you were faced by the stairs. To the left was the parlour, I only recall being there once, and I don't recall the situation except that Uncle Fred played the accordion and sang. To the right was a huge living room and as you entered you could see a huge fireplace in front of you and to the left. Directly as you entered the room and facing you was an Anderson Indoor Air Raid shelter. I remember this as being a table made of iron. It was intended that the family stayed underneath this to be protected in case the house was hit during a bombing raid. This was during the Second World War. I have tried to remember where I slept. It must have been upstairs. I do remember that I

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36 A great grandson of Auntie Liz contacted me about the farm. He asked if I had any memories. I sent this article and then learned that there was not a thatched roof.

37 1999 read somewhere that England was sending thatchers to Japan... they needed help!!

slept under the shelter at least once, woke needing to visit the bathroom, being scared to go outside and, instead, urinating in a tea cup that was on the top of the shelter. As best as I can recall no one ever mentioned the incident. May be I was not the first to seek an alternative method to visiting the biffy after dark!!!

There was no electric light, so paraffin lamps were used, this gave a very gentle light, did not illuminate a very large area, but allowed good shadow making on the walls. I recall that the furnishings were simple and well used. A huge dining room table dominated the room. There were two pictures I remember, they were on the wall opposite the fireplace. Both pictures showed a sailor. In one he was returning from the sea, the other returning to it, well to his ship anyway. The caption read on the appropriate picture, 'Jack's the Boy for Work', and, 'Jack's the Boy for Play'. Neither picture was in colour. I can remember no other pictures in the room. One other piece of furniture comes to mind, the bureau, a writing desk with shelves, with a draw out leaf, and drawers. I don't remember exactly where it was in the room but it had all kinds of papers in it. On top of it was teacup that had small change (pennies and halfpennies) from the milk run in it.

The way into the kitchen was via a doorway on the other end of the wall from where one had entered the living room. I remember the kitchen as being huge, having a paved, uneven floor. In one corner were two buckets of water. A daily chore I occasionally had was to fill these from the pump. A table was against the left hand wall. Above the table was a picture showing dozens of different roosters and chickens. A butter maker was also in the kitchen somewhere! It was a machine that had to be turned by hand and after much labour, butter was produced. Eggs, chicken and/or duck, were invariably on the table. Uncle Fred also kept two double-barrelled shotguns in the kitchen. They were in the corner in the far left hand side of the room. A window, above a waterless sink, looked out over the kitchen garden. The window was to the right as you entered the kitchen. The back door was on the right as well, between the window and the entry from the living room. I have little no recollection of the upstairs of the house except that one window overlooked the side yard. This side of the house had the pear tree trained to it. You could reach the pears from the window.

To me it seemed the farm was miles from anywhere. Of course in fact it wasn't, as we discovered when we visited in 1971. It appeared that most of the farmland around it had been built on. This is a sad loss of some good agricultural land. The farm was some distance from the hub of our Hedge End life that was Auntie Lil's grocery store. Having walked, I suppose a mile, from Auntie Lil's along paved roads, one then turned into a gravel lane. This led to the farm. And, while distances shrink when you revisit as an adult, it still seemed like a mile to the farm. When you reached the farm the lane continued down to the left of the farmhouse. The farm drive led up to the farmhouse. It was quite picturesque. Two iron gates accentuated the driveway. I think the gates were closed occasionally. On the right as you approached the house, was a garden, with all kinds of flowers, backed by a trellis. During the summer this trellis was covered with rambling roses. There also a lawn, which started partway down the driveway. The trellis bordered both the lawn and garden.

I don't remember the sort of flowers grown. I do remember however, two huge flowering shrubs that attracted hundreds of moths and butterflies during the summer. A flowerbed was also on the left hand side of the driveway, this ended halfway to the house. Just before the border ended and some 4-5' in, was the water pump. Beyond the end of the border and set back 6-8 ' were two buildings. One was the dairy where the milk was handled. Next to it, was a storage shed of some kind? I remember seeing bicycles stored there and the smell of paraffin.



The driveway became two paths just as it reached the front of the house. One branched to the left - the other to the right. Using the pathway to the left it dropped sharply and there was border to the left as you descended, made of rocks: To the right a border of shrubs and trees against the house. These shrubs and trees extended along the front of the house. As you reached the end of the house, following the path to the left of the front door, the path branched again. If you continued on it took you out of the garden to the lane used to reach the farm, and to a huge barn. A car (an MG) and a tractor were stored in the barn.

Turning the corner to the right you were confronted by the outdoor biffy. Even though I remember it being attached to the house, there was no water. Memories still exist of early morning and late night visits. Always making me wonder what might be lurking in or around the shrubs. As I re-call, the whole area was laced over with trees. It was pretty gloomy, even in the daytime. Avoiding the biffy, the path way continued around the house and reaching another corner, the path branched again. If you kept to the left, following the path, you would come to the lane again. The other branch took you along the back of the house. It seems to me that as you moved around the back of the house the path branched again. The one to the left led out into the fields through the back garden. The other led along the back of the house, up over steps, and then continued on to the other side of the house. Here you could either go straight on or go along the side of the house. If one travelled along the path to the end of the house, one came to a fairly large open area. This I will cover later. However, if you followed the path around the house you could not help but notice the huge pear tree, mentioned earlier. By following the path you reached the end of the house again a branch in the path. One led to the left to the open area, the other if you turned right, along the front of the house.





While I recall that the front garden was always very good, the back yard looked like a wilderness. I cannot really remember it being cultivated. It seemed to consist of a very high growth of stinging nettle. Uncle Fred would cut these once in a while to use as feed for his horses. He would cut the nettles with a scythe. A scythe is what you will see in pictures of Old



one over his shoulder. The long, curved, and kept very sharpened with a cigar shaped stone: Quite a lethal weapon in

being told to stand back when it was being used. Uncle Fred was something of an expert; at least it looked that way when he used it. To operate the scythe, the blade, held parallel to the ground, was taken from slightly behind you to the front in a sweeping motion, keeping the blade still parallel to the ground, but with the tip of the blade pointed slightly up. Depending on the skill of the operator a fairly wide swathe could be cut. Several large fruit trees grew in the garden. I don't recall if any of the fruit was ever picked or not, but I vividly recall seeing lots of plums rotting in the grass and weeds, covered with by wasps and bees.

The open area that I mentioned earlier brings back fond memories. I don't remember whom I played with, but there was someone. I do remember the old vehicle rusting away under the trees. It had a van body, with a cab. In the cab the remains of a seat, a steering wheel, with controls of some sort. I drove that van thousands of miles. Another interesting feature of the area was the trees. They overhung the edge of the area that dropped off sharply some 4-6 feet. I spent hours in the trees climbing up and down, hanging and swinging from the branches.

I suppose because of my young age I had no specific chores, although getting the water was one, occasionally. This required using the water pump. It had to be primed. Priming is pouring in a small amount of water into the top of the pump, and then pumping like crazy until you sucked up the main flow. The skill in using a pump, in my view, was that you had to pump expertly/quickly enough to make sure there was an unbroken flow of water from the pump to the bucket. An even greater skill was getting the full buckets to the kitchen without spilling the water.

Getting the cows in from the fields was another chore I helped with. Very little skill was involved as the cows were usually waiting at the gate. They knew their own way



back to the barn and which stall belonged to them. If you have a chance, get a cow to run for you. They cross their back legs, and when running present a very strange sight. That's how English cows do it, strange but true. As I said earlier, the cows knew which were their stalls and need needed no direction from humans. The milking came next, all by hand. Milk can be squirted with great accuracy and one was in danger of getting a milk shake, unasked for, if one stood around doing nothing. My milking experience was

limited. I never did find a cooperative cow!

I supervised the ploughing. That is I followed my Uncle or his son, Ernie, in the single furrow created by the single share plough. Later, when the horses were replaced with a tractor, I stood in the tractor. It was after a days ploughing with horses that I had what I felt was a narrow escape from injury. After the horses had been unhitched from the plough I was seated on one of them (Ginger). It was sent off in the direction of the barn with me on its back. The horse forgot about me, and, if I had not had ducked going under the barn door I would have been dead meat!!!! I never developed into a farm boy, but at least my experience helped when we came to Canada and we started on the farm at Genesee.



There were several incidents, however, that will always remain with me. One, helping on the milk run, a one-horse wagon, loaded with milk churns, was trudging up a slight incline. Then one of the tires (tyres) punctured, with a load bang, away goes the horse at top speed. You have to realize that driving this horse meant holding the reins and clicking occasionally just to let the horse know you were still there. The horse knew where to stop, and started when you got back into the cart. Fortunately there was no other traffic on the road, the horse was not naturally disposed to long distance races and the fun was over almost before it began. Thank goodness.

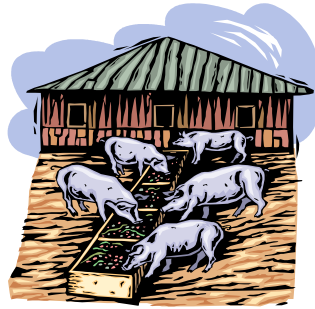
I remember eating cow cake; cylindrical shapes 1-1.5 inches long, dark brown, made as I learned later, of mostly bran and linseed oil. They tasted good, but oh, boy, what that does to the stomach!! It seems I made several rapid trips to the biffy for a couple of days. During the Second World War, still on the farm and going to a concert, people singing, telling jokes and etc. and coming home very late, for me anyway. Riding Joan's, my cousin's bike, along the lane to the farm and thinking I heard the tire go down rapidly. Stopping, finding nothing wrong and turning round to find Joan had made the noise from a piece of grass between her palms. She found it very funny, but, as someone else has said, I was not amused.

I wanted to go to the market with Uncle Fred. Finally, getting a "yes" and then, the horse, the same one that I was riding and almost ran into the barn door with: refusing

to move when the cart was loaded. Being encouraged to do so by Uncle Fred, the horse reared on its hind legs. I later learned it had bitten Uncle Fred. I think they finally got the horse moving, but I was not a passenger. I never saw an animal born on the farm. I had to wait until coming to Canada to see that on Greenhough's farm. I do remember being saddened at the sight of three or four young foxes Uncle Fred had shot. They had been laid on the lawn in front of the house.

One chore I do remember I had to clean out a pigsty. It had not been cleaned for years, and the manure was 2 feet deep. If you don't know what the smell of pig manure is like, don't bother to find out. My relationship with the material was not renewed until we came to Canada. Canadian pig manure is as pungent as British. During the summer swallows and martins (one or the other or both) were found in large numbers around the farmyard. Some nested in the cow barn. I climbed the rafters and looked inside and was (quickly) struck by the fact that the birds, with their mouths wide open, looked like snakes! I did not linger for a second look.

Uncle Fred his double-him once. I was quickly and fired at and just kept a Fred was not too don't remember children, or Uncle Fred being dragged along behind a calf that he had roped and was trying to pull the calf in the opposite direction to the one the calf had in mind. I could not believe that an animal that small, was that strong, but believe you me they are, even a few hours after birth.



(according to him) was a crack shot with barreller gun. I only went hunting with probably too young before. He saw, and a rabbit. The rabbit rolled over and over running. I kind of remember that Uncle pleased. However, he did not swear. I ever hearing adults swear around children swearing!! I remember seeing

I received my first taste of Army discipline down on the farm. Jim, Joan's husband, Uncle Fred's and Aunt Lizzie's daughter, was a member of the Black Watch, a very famous Scottish regiment. He made me clean my one pair of shoes several times before he was satisfied. As I recall it was the last day of my holidays. Just the day before, I had set a snare for a rabbit. Of course, the snare was set out in a field and my shoes got very muddy when I went to check the snare. No, I didn't catch a rabbit. I do remember, Jim, insisting that I clean my shoes and that I had to clean the welts; the portion of the shoe between the uppers and the sole. Strange man. Some 10 years later, when I was in the army, the lesson learned came back!!



Do you know what ferrets are? At one time in Edmonton they were all the rage as pets. That was in 1989-90. Anyway, they are quite small, about 15 inches long from head to tail, and look like rats. Are you any the wiser? Uncle Fred kept a couple in the stable. They were used for catching rabbits (sorry for the rabbit stories, Trish and Sarah!!). They were taken to the



warren, a place where rabbits live, naturally. Not in apartments (ha). One or perhaps several of the exits from the warren were covered with sacks and nets, the ferrets were sent down the burrows to 'ferret' out the rabbits: Hence the term 'ferreting out'. Then, I suppose, the rabbits were used for things such as stew. Lovely. These animals, the ferrets, not the rabbits, were considered to be ferocious and I was constantly warned not to put my fingers in the cage in which they were kept. That is why I could not understand why people would want them for pets. They are not pretty looking creatures either. I remember (must have been a bloodthirsty kind of guy!!) being involved in the massacre of thousands (well dozens) of field mice. These always (apparently) congregated in the base of haystacks. On this particular day the last remains of the haystack was removed revealing the little monsters. We then thoroughly enjoyed ourselves by beating the poor little animals to death with sticks.

On occasion Uncle Fred must have hired extra people to work on the farm. I remember hearing them discussing that one should use short handled hoe as opposed to standing up with a long handled hoe. Heavy stuff this, but the answer was, use a short handled hoe. Stay down for as long as you could, getting up as infrequently as possible, and you would not get a backache. There now you have the secret to sell, if people still hoe. Uncle Fred and his son Ernie always seemed to wear long sleeved shirts, even on the hottest days of summer. When questioned, the amazing response was, "What keeps out the cold, keeps out the heat". Remember where you first heard this!!! One point of interest and I'm sure a source of amusement to over washed/showered Canadians. I don't recall ever having a bath on the farm. I only recall brief encounters with bowls of water. There were no underarm deodorants in those days for the common folk, either.



I have very few memories of Auntie Liz except she always seemed to wear a smock and a summer hat. I don't recall being disciplined while down on the farm. This will confirm what you have been told many times, I always was perfect. I think Auntie Liz was 'chapel'. This meant she was anything but Church of England. It probably meant she was a little more serious about her religion. I did not notice anything different. All the family were just decent people. Listening to Uncle Fred, one learned that he was probably the world's greatest fast bowler (cricket). I remember my dad telling me Uncle Fred was very fast but terribly inaccurate: Probably why he was still farming. He taught me one very forgettable verse:

John, John, the hens have gone,  
The cock don't crow no more  
You went to bed, you sleepy head  
And forgot to lock the door.

I remember he played the accordion (three cheers for the accordion!!). He played fairly well, and sang. He was closer to Willy Nelson than Pavarotti. Perhaps God erases bad memories, because I only have good memories about the farm. The people all seemed friendly and very kind. The life style was relaxed, even though the war was going on. I saw Uncle Fred for the last time in 1971. You kids were in the car. He remembered me, and that was after over a 25-year gap!! Uncle Fred and Auntie Liz had three children. You wouldn't have known or seen any of them. They all seemed a pretty fair bunch. There was one incident you might get a chuckle out of. I was a pageboy at Joan's (one of the children) Wedding. I was about 5 years old, wore a pink silk suit, at least it started out pink, but was a definite black at the end of the evening.

All in all, I would not have missed being down on the farm.

## ARMY



In the fifties (1950's that is) every young man in England, was required to spend 18 months in the armed forces: The exception being if he were still in school or an apprentice, or was in a special job. This meant joining either the Army or the Air Force. The Navy was fussier and would not take men on National Service, the name given the period of service. This presented no real problems for me, apart from natural apprehension; it was just another phase of life that one had to go through. That sounds really corny, but people never seemed to make such a fuss of the 'phases of life' or whatever, as they do now. We never had the time to discover ourselves. Back in the old days, you were born, went to school, went to work, did your time, (National Service!) got married, retired and then died. Life was less complicated.

Shortly before my eighteenth birthday I received my call up papers telling me I had to go to an office in Southampton. I'm not sure which came first, but there was a Medical and an interview with a sergeant. Because of the interview, I decided to join the Grenadier Guards. I signed on for 22 years, with the option to leave as each third year occurred. So, at 18, I had a career. The medical came next, lines of young men standing around in their birthday suits, coughing in all the right places. The result was, I passed the medical with 'flying colours', fit to serve in the furthest flung corners of the Empire, doncha know!" The doctor found, and marked on my medical that he found fleabites on my shoulders. Mum, no she didn't come with me for the medical (!); however, she was horrified when I told her. You have to know that having fleas was a sign of un-cleanliness and gave all those bad impressions Mum was so worried about. The doctor found no fleas. It would not have been surprising if he had as I worked on a market garden where there were animals. All the animals were carriers of fleas.

It seems that 'signing on' there marching orders. and I was to report Caterham, Surrey. trip is peanuts, to away from home.



Further, I had no idea how to get to the place. It meant changing trains a couple of times, culminating in a bus ride. I distinctly recall receiving many looks of sympathy when I asked for Caterham Barracks, the Training Depot for guardsmen. I should depart from this discourse at this point to tell you something about the Grenadier Guards. It was, and still is, recognized world wide, as a fine regiment. The training is one of the toughest in the world. They say, and it is true, once a Grenadier ALWAYS a Grenadier. The Regiment was formed in 1656, and since then has won many battle honours and awards. Don't let the Americans convince you they did it all. They just blow their trumpets louder. The Regiment, along with others of

the Household Brigade are, during peacetime, responsible for Guard duty at many of the tourist attractions in London. This includes Buckingham Palace, Tower of London, St. James' Palace, and I believe, still, at night, the Bank of England. In wartime they are usually shipped to the trouble spots. They have served more recently in the Suez, Northern Ireland, Falkland Islands and the Gulf.

Now back to my story: On arrival at the gate I approached a sergeant, (this much I knew about the army) he was a fellow from good old Totton. He chose not to recognize me. I quickly learned that exist, except to be shouted can assure you, but by their minds to. He that he was looking down about 5'11". He shouted, uniform, appeared from guardroom. He obviously instructions to follow him at a pace I was not yet slouch.



trainee guardsman did not really at and 'driven', not in a vehicle, I everyone else who took it into managed to give the impression at me, even though he was only "Piquet" and a body, dressed in what I later was to learn was, the knew where to go. I was given so took off after him, travelling used to, though I was never a

I forget much There was a long episode being yelled at. Utter confusion. At some point in time there was an aptitude test. I remained a guardsman, so obviously I had made the right choice. Ah, well, that's life. A hair cut, one of many I was to endure in the next several weeks, was fitted in somewhere in the hurly-burly. It seems to me there were five barbers, same number of chairs, and twenty-five or so of us. Fifteen minutes later all of our hair had been cut. Real punk, but no safety pins. I remember one lad crying as they cut off his wavy hair. What was under the hat was yours, what was outside was the army's. The barbers assumed our hats would just sit on the tops of our heads.

about the first several days. of filling in forms and generally

We were billeted in a large hut for about three days, while they, the Army, we later learned, was securing enough 'victims' to form a squad. I always remember my Mum telling me that guards-men were gentlemen's sons. This illusion was shattered at the first meal. It was absolute bedlam, survival of the fittest. If you sat in the wrong spot on the table you didn't get any bread. You quickly learned! What I discovered later was that it was the officers who were the gentlemen's sons! Needless to say they didn't eat with the un-washed. The life of leisure did not last long. We were assigned to a squad, and a barrack room that would be our home until we graduated from the Depot. There were about 20 of us. Some were regulars like me; others were common National Servicemen whom we looked on with some unwarranted disdain. We were all in the same boat and we would sink and/or swim together. Most of us were 18 to 19 years old, although a couple were quite ancient at 26 years of age: Mostly from a working class background. If I only tell you half of the things we went through you will all wonder why we put up with it. Quite simply, we were prisoners of the system. Literally, whom would you complain

to? All people at the Depot, apart from your group, were part of the system: a system that had been in place for probably a hundred years. It was a system, which worked to mould green (light and dark!!) recruits into a cohesive, military unit. It worked before, it worked then, and it still works now.

In spite of the dumb things we had to do and had done to us, there actually did come a day in the life of the squad when you knew you had arrived. At that point everything fell into place, and junior squads accepted you as a guardsman and; although you had not yet completed the training. The instructors knew that you had made it, because they had helped you arrive and they felt some pride in a job well done. It arrived in week 8 of the 12-week training period. There was not too much room for individualism, though you were expected to be self-reliant. You ate, slept and drank as a squad. You suffered as a squad, you rejoiced as squad. (Sounds like church... but I can assure you that was where the similarity ended) You learned very quickly you had to stick together. Those who didn't fit in were removed, sounds terrible, but one day they were there, the next day they had left. We had one fellow try suicide, not very successfully; they found him standing in front of a mirror, dragging his razor across his throat. It was enough to get him transferred to another unit. Another was transferred because he never did learn his left foot from his right. He appeared to have been a card short of a deck. I think he was sent, 'in disgrace', to learn to drive a truck. In retrospect, we marched everywhere, he would have driven. I'm not sure who was the craziest. I mentioned, we were now in our assigned barrack room. The room was one of several in trained soldier was, was a trained guardsman, but he certainly could have been the Deity or someone from a warmer clime.



Trained Soldier  
Ron Dancer

He, however, controlled our destiny, night and day, for the next 12 weeks. You did not even move without asking him. He was the original!!@\$#%&! He was well over 6'4", probably 220 lbs plus, and, as Jim Crouche would have said, "meaner than a junk yard dog" (and then some). In another country he would have qualified for the Gestapo. Or at least we thought he could and probably was, only with an English accent. If you don't believe me, take a look at him in the photo, he's DANCER, and I can assure you, no Fred Astaire. Looking back almost 40 years later, it is easier to appreciate his position, and to understand to some extent, his attitude. He was responsible for teaching us recruits to survive. He taught us how to spit and polish boots (officially the polish was forced into the boots to fill in the cracks and pimples, and solidified with spittle) but everyone knew the leather was smoothed down with a hot iron or spoon, and then shoe polish was added in quantity to the smooth surface along with the essential ingredient, spit. This, with the addition of elbow grease, lightly applied, did indeed, create a sparkling surface. It was mandatory that you could see your face in the shine. He was responsible for us learning all the strange things associated with barrack room behaviour: How to lay out a kit inspection (all the equipment, clothes issued by the army). And, they did issue everything, right down to dark green under drawers, possibly stolen from the French at the Battle of Waterloo! He



taught us how to lay out lockers for inspection, how to make up your bed. If we screwed up too badly, he got the blame.

Let me quickly list some of the things we did. If you wanted to leave the room you had to go to the door, bang your feet in a drill movement, and say, "Leave to fall out, (i.e. leave the room), Trained soldier." Simple enough, however, if Dancer was in a bad



Regimental Colours with Battle honours

mood you might have to do this several times, before he would even acknowledge your presence. You could then get remarks like, "are your feet sore, I can't hear you?", indicating you had not stamped your feet loud enough; or, sometimes a straight 'NO'. The next poor slob would do it exactly right, based on Dancer's remarks about apparent lack of sound, only to be told "I'm not @#%& deaf, try it again". If you had running shoes (plimsolls) on, your movement was not loud enough, if you were wearing boots, too loud. You had to go through this rigmarole every time you left or entered the room. He 'shared' in your food parcels, and let me tell you, two things were evident in your life. You were always tired, and always hungry. Not necessarily because you were underfed, or did not get the required amount of sleep, but you were always on the go during the day. You were always moving at a very quick rate of speed, arms swinging, and, as they constantly yelled at you, "dig your heels in". He 'allowed' one of the fellows go to the canteen to get snacks, if we collected enough to give him some. He was a brutal person, it was not unusual for him to strike recruits if they flubbed up on some small thing they were required to do. There was no recourse; you couldn't even show a retaliatory response. Or at least we didn't; having said that, I really don't bear him any grudges. I didn't like his style, but he was respected throughout the Depot, as one of the best. This was of course, not based on how he got the good results he did, but on the good results.

Let me run (and sometimes we did) through a day. Wake up was at 6.30 a.m. but we were always up long before that. There was washing and shaving, always with cold water, to be done. The cold water was not punishment; I really think the place was so old there just was not any hot water. The only time we experienced actual hot water was in the weekly shower. That in itself was an un-forgettable experience. The words of command were, "Get undressed, get in the shower, get out of the shower" Expletives all deleted. And it seemed like the amount of time allowed was about as much as it has taken me to type this portion, i.e. the words of command!! Why up so early you say, there would not have been enough time to do what we had to do before we were scheduled to go on parade!! First a fair hike to breakfast and back: The last minute cleaning of boots, badges and belts, and, for heavens sake, the setting up of the room. The room had to be set up just so. Let me explain, if I can remember. By now, the equipment in the form of belt, ammunition pouches, haversack and backpack had all been issued. It had to be blanched, blanco was a green substance applied wet to the outside of the equipment, which presumably preserved it, but was also camouflage. The equipment, minus the belt, had to be squared off with cardboard and had to be set out just so above your bed. Each

piece had several brass attachments. The brass had to be cleaned everyday. Somewhere on the large haversack you hung your nameplate<sup>38</sup>, made of brass and had to be shined everyday. Along side of the bed was a locker; this was left open during the day for inspection. Every item in the locker was on display. Knife, fork and spoon, eating for the purpose of, mug, enamel, drinking, for the purpose of: A housewife, which was not a French maid, but a small satchel in which was a needle and thread, wool, and thimble. And one of those wooden toadstools you put in a sock when you darn it. In the bottom portion were your best boots, shined. To one side was your rifle, somewhere else your great coat, properly folded and all the buttons shined.

Every morning beds had to be made as follows: The mattress was folded in half, and the crease side placed at the end of the bed. One blanket was folded to be a wrap around. The sheets and other blankets were folded and then, wrapped around with the first blanket you had set aside. The sheets and blankets were in order so you finished up with a product looking like a layered cake. Again, everything was supposed to be square and straight, and, well you get the picture. I know you are probably saying what was the point? Think about it. It was one way of ensuring the beds were aired, and perhaps, discovering those that may have need medical attention for problems that had not come to light earlier. Then, and I don't believe this myself; the beds on either side of the room were lined up in two rows. They remained in the same location, but the ends of the beds were actually lined up by stretching a piece of string from one end of the room to the other. Each pile of blankets was also lined up. Beside your bed was a kitbag, which if you were moving anywhere would be full of clothes. It was about 9" in diameter and 3' long. The material was quite stiff, which was just as well, because you had to stand the kit bag up, empty, and line them all up. Then the handle, which was of rope had to be twisted to stand up, straight! The dumb part about this whole exercise was that in time you actually enjoyed doing it, and, in effect, in your own mind, defeating the system by doing these ridiculous things, well. However, in actuality losing, because not only were you doing what the system wanted, but you were actually enjoying it!!

Then, of course, there was the floor, made of hardwood, which had to be shined every day. You had your own bed space to do, plus a portion of the floor. The floor was shined with steel wool, and buffed with a blanket. It required the cooperation of everybody, the `scivers<sup>39</sup>, those who sluffed<sup>40</sup> off, were quickly determined and they were made to do their share. All the responsibility for teaching us these earth-shaking duties fell on the Trained Soldier's shoulders, and large as they were, it sometimes, I think, laid heavily. The Trained Soldier survived 13 weeks with us. I don't suppose he was any more pleased to see us leave than we were to leave him.

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38 <sup>38</sup> I lost the original, but there should be a new one around somewhere.

39 Lazy soldiers who always managed to find a way not to do what they are required to

40 The art of skiving!!

The first sergeant we had was a 'gentleman', and I suppose, based on the results of our first pass out inspection, four weeks later. We undoubtedly took advantage of him, although, unbeknownst to us, it was to our detriment. You have to understand that a Trained Soldier, although actually only a guardsman, was, at the Depot, a person of authority. As recruits we had to stand to attention when we spoke to him. A (lance) corporal, wearing



L/Sgt. Bunny Whitehead

two stripes was even higher, and the (lance) sergeant, who had three stripes, was thought to be able to walk on water. Let me insert a little of Brigade of Guards history here. In all other army units within the British Commonwealth a lance corporal wore one stripe, as did lance corporals in the Brigade of Guards, way back, even before my time. Apparently Queen Victoria saw a guards (man) being posted, not mailed, but taking his position at his post. This was not a wooden stake, but the position he would remain at for the next two hours<sup>41</sup>, by a lance corporal, with one stripe. She was not amused by the one stripe he wore to signify his position, and ordered that in the Brigade of Guards; lance corporals were to wear two stripes, Corporals three. Next there was a colour sergeant, who wore three stripes and a crown and so on and so on. Those of higher rank, very seldom acknowledged our existence, unless it was to administer some kind of discipline. Where was I, what has the above to do with the downfall of the sergeant. Basically it was because he

found it hard to accept the required, strict separation between recruits and non commissioned officers. He would visit the barrack room in the evening and chat with us. Somehow we must have picked up that he was not tough enough. Consequently we did not learn our drill procedures as we should have done. We flunked our fourth week inspection. Had we passed we would have been entitled to our first weekend pass. Quite a disappointment: In addition, the sergeant was returned to the battalion, in disgrace. We were to pay the piper for the sergeant's downfall.

The next sergeant we had, and I might add the last one, was a sergeant Whitehead. Dancer, in comparison, was a wimp. Whitehead was only about 6'3", not as heavy as Dancer, but mean, again, look at his picture. You will know the meaning of esprit de corps. This came into play as soon as Whitehead took over. It appeared that everyone who had any authority of any kind was going to get in the blows against this squad that had done so miserably, and had their sergeant back in disgrace to his battalion. The fact that basically it was his fault had no bearing on the issue at all. As the expression went, our feet never touched the ground for the next several weeks. We certainly paid the price

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<sup>41</sup> A sentry is allowed to patrol up and down by his sentry box, he does not have to stand in the same place for the two hours.

for the sergeant failing, as it implied he couldn't cut the mustard with a training squad. By never allowing our feet to touch the ground meant that we were doubled everywhere, continually yelled at. Any free time was cut to a minimum. Any sign of slacking off meant an immediate journey to the drill sheds where we were (illegally) marched to the beat of a drum, and let me tell you that could be very fast.

Each morning started with a drill parade, but more about that later. You would have dinner, it was a little more relaxed after lunch; at least you could stay on your beds



**22545749 Recruit  
Guardsman  
Tidridge, 18 yrs.**

now that the room had been inspected. We made extra-ordinary use of our beds; they were our beds, tables and chairs. There was no other furniture in the room apart from the beds and lockers, and a table for ironing uniforms on which we were not supposed to do, and didn't incidentally, the Trained Soldier did though. The mid morning parade, gave those who had the privilege of doing it, time to inspect the barrack rooms. By the way, we were in a barrack block that housed several squads of men. One quickly determined whether the room had passed inspection. If the room was not up to

standard, you could expect to find your bedding in a heap on the floor. Contents of lockers thrown all over and boots dumped in the water in the fire buckets. Like I said, it was quite the system, but who was to argue? More military stuff in the afternoon. In the evenings a jolly time was had by all. It was equipment-cleaning time. And of course, equipment was never clean/shiny enough for Dancer. It could cause you, if you didn't reach the required standard to spend time in the washroom, after lights out, which was also illegal. Checks by senior sergeants did not occur often, probably just often enough to say checks were made on a regular basis to fulfil some regulation ensuring soldiers were not required to stay up beyond lights out without good cause. I doubt if any member of the squad failed at one time or another to burn the midnight oil in the washroom. Needless to say your instructions, which you had to deny you had received, were to say that you just wanted to look better and that you chose to spend time in the washroom. Back to the equipment cleaning: You used your bed as a bench, except for any water assisted cleaning of the belt and pouches. You sat for a fixed period of time. Ninety minutes comes to mind, straddling the bed, with suspenders down. Goodness knows why. While cleaning, you were expected to listen to, and become familiar with, the bugle calls that were sent across the Public Address system. There is a bugle call for everything in the army. Well almost everything. The bugle calls, played by a drummer, included calls to get up, go to bed, pay parade, alarms, ad nauseam. In addition we were expected to learn and remember all the battle honours of the regiment. There were around fifty when I was in. The sergeant would occasionally visit, and normally, at least with Whitehead, they were not social calls until we were well on our way to graduating. Again, no trips to the canteen, except for one person, who took a long list for the squad, and one for the Trained soldier, who had to be fed.

At ten o'clock, 22.00 hours, the cry "Stand by your Beds" was heard and you had

to stand on the end of your bed, pants rolled up to the knees, suspenders dangling. The picket, occasionally spelled piquet, sergeant who was the duty non commissioned officer for the period, arrived shortly thereafter and determined that everyone was in, there was really nowhere to go, unless you were sick, or absent without leave. Generally speaking, at this time of night they were much more human, and would joke around a bit, just to let you know there was an end to the training. As you progressed in your training so the strict regulations were relaxed, just a little. Please don't the impression it was terrible all the time. What the training did was to get you to share with others, and develop a philosophy covered, in Canada, by the letters, d l t b g y d<sup>42</sup>!!! You have to remember that it was the squad that graduated, not a group of individuals. It meant that those who picked up the system quickly helped others. Of course, some of the methods would make your hair (I had some then) stand on end. Depending on the circumstances, help was either pleasant or unpleasant. If it came to cleaning equipment those that could do it better helped out the others. The Trained Soldier helped as well. Remember you graduated as a squad, so it required all the squad to pass the inspection.

However, there was the Obstacle Course. This would be a lay out in a field with walls and barriers and water and things like that. Every squad had one or two men that couldn't swing like Tarzan and would let go of the rope too soon and fall in the very slimy water. Or, unable to climb the wall or jump down from a six foot log fence. This, in the view of the system and the other squad members, showed any individual weakness that had to be corrected. It could mean the difference between survival and whatever, and it had to be an individual effort. Those who could were always able to complete the course sat down and waited for the inevitable. Not recommended these 'politically correct' days and it didn't really help in those days either.

You shared food parcels with the fellow next to you and with the Trained Soldier if he heard the rattle of paper after lights out. Our Trained Soldier, in retrospect was not very smart, he had one of the guys write his letters to his girl friend, but he did try. He would take the odd weekend off. He would broach the subject by saying.. "I have the opportunity to go home for the weekend but I'm broke, if have to stay here then your lives will be as miserable as all get out", that was the general drift of the message. A passing around of a hat always resulted in enough 'gifts'. Soliciting funds would have been illegal. We didn't begrudge it and we only received a pittance for a salary. I remember on one occasion he explained he was going out to tie one on, get drunk, we decided we would get a measure of revenge. I don't recall it as being malicious in any way; after all, Dancer had most of the answers to the questions for us to get out of the Depot. We simply made an obstacle course from the door to his bed, which was in the far corner of the room, with kit bags. He made the bed, with some difficulty, and took it all in good sport.

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42 Don't let the blighters (!) get you down

As I said earlier we failed our first pass out parade, miserably, and everyone seemed to know about it, the instructors, the other squads. You really suffered. However, after a week of Whitehead we tried again and made it. All seemed to be forgiven. We had now been prisoners of the system for almost six weeks. We were anxious to get home. The system, however, had not done with us. We got dressed and as a squad were marched to the guardroom to be inspected to see if we were good enough to get out of the barracks. It was about a mile, or so it still seems, to the guardroom. We were marched to the guardroom, almost, turned around and marched back again almost to the barrack block. I swear we did this at least 6 times. Finally we were stopped at the guardroom and inspected by the sergeant who sent every one of us back to the barrack room because our shoes were dusty. I kid you not, I know, I hear you all saying they wouldn't do that to me... wanna bet!!!

While I remember, a couple of things stand out in my memory, the first, shortly after we were settled in as a squad, the question was posed, "how many of you are confirmed" (in the Church of England). Those that were not were sent on the appropriate course and in time were confirmed. I had been. It had nothing to do with Christianity. It was just something that they army was 'concerned' about. The second of the things was not really related but when you had time to think, which was infrequently, you knew just how hungry you were and just how tired you were. You ate anything and everything you could lay your hands on. Army food, as I recall, was barely one step above pig swill, and the cooks, who must have shuddered if they had actually been taught to prepare meals, seemed to ruin everything they tried. I have eaten roast, boiled, and stewed corned beef. If BBQ's had been available we would have had that as well. As for the tiredness, if you received class instruction you were always in danger of falling asleep. And it was dangerous, if you were caught, you finished up in the clink.

You learned several Grenadier traditions, which will mean absolutely nothing to you but which I am going to tell you about anyway. Everyday at 16:30 hr., and usually as you made your way to eat; the drummer (bugler) would sound 'retreat'. Now, Grenadiers do not know the word retreat, so, while everyone else around you marched on, you stood still. You never said, "Yes" either, goodness only knows why, so if the Sgt said, Tidridge you are a dumb cluck, right? It would be wise to answer, smartly and sharply, "Sergeant": Which was always pronounced as Saaarnttt!!!! (It was never wise to argue with a sergeant). Just one more and then I am finished. In drilling with a rifle there were several orders that included the word Arms i.e. rifle, however, Grenadiers did not say the word, "arms", so it was anything, more or less, that followed the direction, such as slope.....



**L/Sgt. Potter**  
**PE Instructor**

The physical training was fairly intense, not very imaginative. There was no slacking off but at least most fellows could run and jump and keep in time with the fellows in front. If you couldn't you could always hang on the wall bars until you thought you could. I think the 'drills' they did were dreamed up

long before my time and I doubt very much if they have changed. When I joined the Police Service we did the same kind of things. I thoroughly enjoyed physical training, PT as we used to call it. You might think that as we were going to PT we would change completely ready for it. However, that was not the case; you were in vests, shorts, socks and regular marching boots. Your running shoes were wrapped up inside of your towel. If it rained or was cold you wore the same stuff, but wore a greatcoat as well.

Coming back after the first 48-hour pass brings back no negative thoughts.

When we started training and were marching we had to swing our arms up shoulder high: Which is OK as long as you are not moving too swiftly. At some point in time, and you had to earn the honour, you were allowed to swing your arms waist high. That, of course, marked your squad as having achieved something. Let me tell you every little credit earned was earned and appreciated. Somewhere along the line we also began to use rifles, (Lee Enfield 303) not only for marching with but for firing as well. One learned it was almost a fatal mistake to call a rifle a gun. The serial number was quickly learned as very often you had to place your rifle among many others. At first the rifle seemed heavy and we were awkward handling it. Exercises had been developed for strengthening the wrists and arms and pretty soon you were tossing them around without any problem at all. One never handed a person his rifle, it was thrown, properly, so that he could catch it. The wooden part of the rifle had to be polished. This meant, over a period of time, building up a layer of polish on the rifle so that it could be spit and polished. This was a messy job and you can imagine that the shine did not last long once you starting drilling with it. You can perhaps imagine too that there were several exercises that could be turned into punishment with the rifle, the best (worst) was to have to hold the rifle out at arms length, or to march with the rifle above your head, all very jolly, but I suppose it served the purpose. Don't get me wrong, very few of us were perfect and some days nothing went right. The squad just didn't jell as it should and a couple of chases sure got you limbered up quickly. `Warming up' they call it in the athletic world.



I was trying to recall some highlights of my stay at the Depot. The one that comes quickly to mind was the coronation of Elizabeth II. We were given the day off, the Colonel of the Regiment, a very distinguished elderly gentleman visited us, had dinner with us. We received five Woodbines, very cheap and nasty cigarettes and a glass of warm beer. We watched the service on television screen (TV), on a huge screen. This was the first time I had ever seen TV. I was eighteen years old. There was another day off, for Grenadiers Days, and we had the day to ourselves. I believe we actually saw the inside of the NAAFI, the canteen. Saturday was supposed to be a half a day off. It turned out that after drill you had lunch and then were paraded for fatigues, i.e. extra duties. Some-times you were lucky and received a job that took but a couple of hours, sometimes, and depending on the non commissioned officer that supervised, it could last

for the rest of the day: Sunday. A couple of us learned if you went to church<sup>43</sup>, you received a late breakfast and this meant double helpings. You also missed the fatigue parade, so you had the rest of the day to clean kit or just lay around. Not a very good reason for attending church.

The most dreaded chore was to work in the cookhouse. Not only because it was usually all day but also because it was the cookhouse, with greasy pots to wash and spuds to peel. You did, however, get extra portions of food. Unfortunately, after working in the cookhouse all day the last thing you wanted was food: Especially army food. I remember being assigned to the cookhouse and being told to fill a huge copper boiler with vegetables for stew, about a third of the copper was full of custard. The sergeant who simply poured the new ingredients in with the custard quickly resolved the problem of removing the custard. Strange but true.

We also received lectures on not cavorting with strange women; they probably included strange men as well now, and all the terrible things that could happen to you, if you wandered from the straight and narrow. The lecture was given by a senior non commissioned officer, and, at least he seemed sincere. I would guess the armed forces had its share of venereal diseases (VD) and other problems. Another joy was 'Kit inspection'<sup>44</sup>. This exercise entailed setting out your kit on a bed in a particular order. The kit had to be squared off, with your regimental number displayed on each item. My number was 22545749. Standing at the side of the bed you awaited the inspecting officer. A shirt held by the shoulder lapels in each hand and, over the other arm, a pair of socks, your hands up and touching your chest, and with your feet apart. When the officer approached you brought your feet together and said something like this, and, at the same time holding out the shirt, turning it around for the officer to see then throwing it over the arm that didn't have the socks and at the same time extending the arm with the sock so that the officer could see them, "22545749 Recruit Guardsman Tidridge J, washing at the wash". This would account for some items not being displayed. You can appreciate every item of army equipment you owned was displayed and laid out on the bed. In the early stages it was a pain to have to do this. On one occasion the Officer left, the sergeant remained behind and told us to face our beds: Then, to grab the edge of our beds and to tip them up. Apparently the inspection had not gone according to plan. Ah, the joys of army life. It seemed that everyone in the squad was charged with one or two minor violations. Presumably this exposed you to Army discipline. I was charged twice, the first time for dirty flesh. During an inspection, where I had my rifle over my shoulder, at the slope, four fingers of my left hand were visible, along with my thumb. Let me first explain the system: When you are on parade and the officer approaches you, you have to

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43 I learned this after attending church not before!!

44 There were several reasons for this exercise: to make sure that you had sufficient kit, and that it was in good condition.



yell out your name. Then the inspection begins. The officer noticed some polish on one of the fingers. Now, the Officer didn't say, "dirty flesh" he merely pointed it out to the Senior Non Commissioned officer following him: He then yelled, "Guardsman Tidridge, dirty flesh Sir", acknowledging the officer's remarks. Then your own Sergeant, who would be bringing up the rear, would also yell out your name and the offence. Seemingly, each person added volume to the yell. Fortunately there were usually only a couple of yells. If (and it never happened to me) the officer found two things wrong, then they would be yelled out, and it was then a sign for the Senior Non Commissioned officer to have a look as well. If he found something, the next yell would be, and you must remember that some times there would be over 200 men on parade, and generally when the yelling started everyone listened for the next phrase which would be, "Piquet Sergeant", and, a sergeant on special duty, waiting on the edge of the parade ground would suddenly appear by the poor guardsman. He would hand his rifle to someone, the command would then be, "Put this man in close arrest", and the poor fellow was marched off to spend the next little while cooling his heels in the guardroom. Later, he would be marched in front of an officer to receive 'his just reward', usually in the form of extra duties of some kind. The second time I was charged, it was along with several others. We had been practising, standing at ease, this meant moving from a position with your feet together to one requiring you to bring up your right foot about 12" and then slamming it into the ground so that it finished up 12" away from the left. Apparently we had moved our feet less than the required distance, and we were charged with 'being idle on parade'

Being charged meant having to be marched in on Company Commander's Memorandum. On both occasions we (the accused) were marched in as a group. The charges were read out, we were asked if we had anything to say, we didn't. We were given a stern lecture and then marched out again. While I did not have to appear often, I did several times, and always for minor offences. On one occasion I was charged for having dirty greatcoat buttons. The coat was hung on my locker and was inspected as part of the room inspection. In my own mind there was only one dirty button, not the other dozen or so that were on the coat, these were clean. After I had been marched in and the charge was read, the officer asked me if I had anything to say. I responded in the only acceptable way, "I thank you Sir for leave to speak". This was followed by an immediate, "Shut up", from the sergeant who had charged me, also standard practise. The officer, however, let me speak, and I won. The sergeant didn't hold it against me. During the thirteen weeks I also earned my Army third class certificate of education, which taught me among other things to read a map... funneee!!! At the end of thirteen weeks we graduated, and, I don't remember for sure but I think we had some leave.



Then we reported to Pirbright, for Field training. Life was much more relaxed; they were more interested in making you able to defend your country rather than to march around it, although you had to be fit. The food at Pirbright was better and in larger portions. Which reminds me, at each meal an officer visited, he was the

duty officer, and a sergeant, the duty sergeant, accompanied him. The men were asked if the food was alright (compared to what) there were seldom any complaints. We were always so hungry we always ate what we were given. At Pirbright we learned more about different types of weapons, including the Bren and Sten guns, hand grenades. We were shot at, just kidding. They sat us up on a hill and sergeants took shots from a distance toward us so we would know what a shot sounded like. It seemed we did a lot of marching, and then lot of exercises so that we could know how to charge and stick bayonets in the enemy. We were taught to yell when we charged. To me it seemed rather uncivilized and one needed to take a more definitive, thoughtful approach. After all, it seems unlikely the fellow, in real action, would just stand there and let you run 8 inches of steel through him, however, yell you did!! When we did march we were given the opportunity to sing or double. Usually, before you could think of a song the sergeant made you double and then when you were slowed down you were too out of breath to sign, so you doubled again, great sport. The intent was the same, to make you fit and able to carry on. The good thing was that generally, the sergeants had to run with you. You quickly remembered all the slow songs when you did sing, like 'High Noon'

We were exposed to such things as tear gas. Sent through a tunnel, which seemed to be very long and it was only about three feet high so you had to crawl through it. It had water in the bottom. While this may seem OK you we also had equipment on and carrying a rifle. We also had to crawl under barbed wire and do all the things you see them doing in war movies. It was, however, all great fun and I would not have missed it for the world. Somewhere in the middle of the six weeks we all went off to Yorkshire, a place called Pickering.

Again all kinds of good training including several days in the field: attacking an imaginary enemy, capturing prisoners and getting a chance to swing at the sergeant if he was in the attacking force. Much more to my liking. As I recall the food was fantastic. It was in Pickering that I first saw margarine applied with a brush. I'll hasten to explain. Each morning as we left for exercise we received a couple of sandwiches, you grabbed a couple of slices of bread, and the cook painted it with margarine, and slapped corned beef between the slices, lovely!! I would guess someone had discovered if you warmed up the margarine it could be applied more easily than spreading it with a knife. The period in Yorkshire was finished by a 22-mile route march, miles is not really that far. However, we had been out without sleep for a minimum of 24 hours. That was part of the test.



I nearly got into deep evening a mate and I, 'walked local village and innocently chips and began to walk down eating them. From out of nowhere a sergeant appeared, chewed us out really good. He also threatened to lock us up for disgracing the regiment, and etc ad nauseam. He finally

trouble in Pickering. One out'. We went out to the street, in uniform,

told us to dump the fish and chips in a nearby garbage container and to be thankful he did not have the time to take us back to the barracks and lock us up. We returned to Pirbright and finished our training, this too finished in a route march that had to be accomplished in a certain time period that did. We had now completely vindicated ourselves. Looking back on the training it was tough but I think most of us enjoyed it!! I don't think there was another way to mould an untrained bunch of kids into a fit, well-drilled and trained squad. I have pondered quite seriously the training methods and I really don't think there is another way.



The squad was then split up to report to one of the three battalions. The choices were not left up to you. Along with several others, I was sent to the 1st Battalion and assigned to the Queen's Company. More about this particular company later. My start at the battalion was not too encouraging, although I escaped unscathed. We were paraded in front of the adjutant, quite a high-ranking officer. As he was talking my gaze wandered outside of the office, looking through the window, country boy in the big city!! In no uncertain terms he brought my attention back to the matter at hand. He was not very encouraging when he suggested that agricultural workers, which I had been, usually finished up as cooks. Talk about stereotyping!! Fortunately for the Grenadier Guards I never did make it as a cook, never sent to try either. The Queen's Company was the elite of the elite, every man over 6"2", all very keen on spit and polish. While other companies had officers as Company Commanders, the Queen was ours, albeit in name only. She did apparently take an interest in the goings on of the company. She did not show up while I was a member. But it was a unique situation. Having to always be well "turned out", the expression used for being neat as a pin etc!! It was rather a odd place for me to be. Although I nearly always passed inspections, the idea of being always neat and tidy was not my cup of tea, never was, never will be. While in the company I volunteered for the Guards Independent Parachute Brigade, that didn't work out, apparently I was too tall. However, the army had other things in mind for me.



I was told I was to become a Bren gun carrier driver, and, along with Reg. Mann, another one not too keen on spit and polish all the time type, I was sent to back Pirbright. More on this episode later. I should report though, that while in the Queen's Company, and later with Support Company, I did do some 'Public Duties'. Public Duties is simply a word for doing guard duty at Buckingham Palace, St. James' Palace, the Tower of London or the Bank of England. I did my duty at all but the Bank. Must be a message there somewhere!! To you kids all this about Public Duties means very little. Actually it did very



**Buckingham Palace**

little for the guardsman either. Let me explain. First it meant that you were tied up on the duties for two days. If the Queen was 'at home' it meant

two

hours on guard and four hours off, and when you were not on duty you were confined to a separate guardroom at the location. Interestingly enough the 'old soldier', the guardsman with the most seniority, did the least duty and ran a little canteen on the side. So I'm used to the alleged privileges of seniority. The duties started off with a parade, and when it was our turn it meant nearly everyone in the company was involved. You were paraded by detachments, inspected by an officer. He checked each man to ensure they were properly turned out. I never did get to wear the red tunic because it was during the winter

when I did public duties. I did though, wear the grey greatcoat and the bearskin (hat). When he approached you yelled, Guardsman Tidridge (if that was your name) Buckingham Palace Detachment (or St. James' Detachment or Tower of London Detachment) of the Queen's Guard Sir. When you were new at it you held your breath while he inspected you. You were taught quickly, by those in 'the know', that this was a dead giveaway. The officer knew that you knew or were concerned, something was out of place, and he would look for it. What you learned to do, when you were more experienced, was to actually dare the officer to find something wrong with you. It is hard to describe how you did it, but you learned!! It was a rotten way to start guard duty by 'losing your' name as they (humorously) called it, which happened if the officer found something wrong with your turnout. I did not lose my name once. 'Losing your name' meant that, say for instance, you were marching and not holding your rifle correctly, the non commissioned officer in charge would say, "What's your name", you'd give it, and he would say, "You've lost it". If you were unfortunate, someone would place your name in the charge book and later, you would receive, after hearing, extra duties. Fortunately you



St. James Palace

really had to be noticed several times before they would 'book you'. It was seemingly worse when they learned your name, then it would be, "Sergeant Tidridge, you're idle on parade, do this or that, or you will lose your name." After a while, as sergeants, we felt they, the person directing the parade, would call a name, whether that person was doing anything wrong or not. It just grabbed your attention and you automatically checked to see if you were doing things right.

My memory is a little hazy here, but it seems that some detachments were driven to their place of duty, some marched. It seems likely that those on Buckingham Palace duty marched to the Palace as there was the ceremony of the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace. Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace is a world-renowned ceremony. Hundreds of people watch it. I suppose it is all steeped in history but basically all it is the handing over of the Palace to the new guard. But, they march and play the



band and all kinds of things: All very interesting and enjoyable both for those taking part and watching. While to those looking on, the process is very formal, and it is, for those taking part and who are used to the process, a lot of fun. There is a fair amount of chatter going on, telling those out of line, to get in line, so that the show goes off properly. It is a real team effort. The changing of the Guard and this applied, as I was to learn later, to changing the guard at any Guard's facility, meant the forming up of the new and old guards. Doing a little marching, getting on parade, a few arm (rifle) movements, and the officers handing over, and probably discussing the state of the facility, the new guard staying and the old guard leaving. For some reason, all the guard duty I did at Buckingham Palace was while the Queen was a way, so it was

relatively simple. You were marched to the sentry box and read your orders, and because you were on your own, rather than 'double sentry duty', you marched up and down when you felt like it. You had to watch out for officers so you could salute them, it got to the point where you saluted every man in a pin striped suit and bowler hat, with a rolled umbrella. This was an officers' off duty garb. If you missed seeing an officer, you could lose your name, again, sometimes. I guess now as I look back, the strangest sight would have been watching us 'get on parade' after ten o'clock at night. We had to carry out all the proper drill movements, lifting our feet off the ground, but making no noise when putting our feet back on the ground again. The NCO gave all his orders in a loud whisper, so that he would not wake the residents of the nearby homes. Ah! That's the Guards for you! While you were at the post you would be visited by the Duty Officer who would ask you questions about the regiment or any thing else he wanted to. Again, if you were not on the ball, you lost your name; you could also lose it every time you went on parade. And, any passing member of the public who felt you were not doing your job could report you for being idle on your post.

Guard duty at the Tower of London was different; you were there to guard the Crown Jewels and actually had a loaded rifle. You also had a fair amount of time off because there was limited duty during the day. At ten o'clock in the evening you took part in the Ceremony of the Keys. Again, a very well known ceremony watched by the public. As I remember it, the ceremony went as follows. On being approached by the Head Warden and his Party, the sentry on duty would come to the 'on guard' position, which was rather ferocious, with the sentry facing the oncoming party with his rifle, with a fixed bayonet, and yelling:

"Halt, who goes there?"

The party would halt (stop) and the Warden would reply,

"The Keys"

The guard would ask, sternly of course:

"Who's Keys?"

The Warden would reply:

"The Queen's Keys,"

To which the guardsman would reply:

"Advance the Queen's Keys, all's well."



This was followed by another short ceremony, a prayer and hymn, and I think the playing of "Lights Out", by a drummer on a bugle. I can assure you guard duty at the Tower was a little different. The place is older than the hills, all kinds of ghost stories. Anne Boleyn who walks the Bloody Tower with her 'ead tucked under her arm', is the most well known. It's dark, damp, dreary, and you can hear the water of the River Thames lapping against the walls, and of course, the older soldiers didn't make it any easier by relating their 'terrifying' experiences while on guard duty. But hey, not many

other have done it. We heard stories of guardsmen dressing up as ghost to scare the sentries. I'm not sure what my reaction would have been. I did have one small problem when I was on duty. People that you stopped were supposed to know the password, if they didn't know it there was bell<sup>45</sup> in the sentry box that you rang and the sergeant would come running. Anywho, I'm doing my thing when this man and woman come towards me. I believe now the man was the worse for a night on the town. Anyhow, he didn't know the password, neither did his wife. It needed the sergeant to allow him on his way. St. James' Palace guard is not much to write home about, but again, not many have done it and now live in Canada. In retrospect, the whole guard system was a bit of a farce. I'm not sure we were actually guarding any of the places, particularly when you consider that a fellow was able to get over the walls of Buckingham Palace and get to the Queen's Bedroom. The Police didn't do a much better job either.

As you will recall I said that earlier I was then sent to Pirbright to learn to drive a Bren gun carrier, a Bren gun is a machine gun. A Bren gun carrier was a small tank that



looked as though the top had been taken off. Not very big, not particularly safe, but at least I was taught to drive at the government's expense! Incidentally I never did see a Bren gun installed in a Bren gun carrier. We used ours to carry three-inch mortars. But that's the British army. The time at Pirbright was different, relaxed, no drill parades, and, as I said, we were being taught how to drive. I remember only a couple of incidents. If you stalled the motor you had

to get out and insert a starting handle, some 5' long. It was inserted into the front of the vehicle and obviously went someway back into the vehicle. The sergeant would keep the motor turned off until you had cranked it several times. Then he would turn it on. Remember the dumb things they did to us in training, same principle. It worked. You really had to work at turning the crank, and the motor could cause the occasional kick



back, and getting in and out of the seat was an exercise in itself. The vehicles seemed to be designed for people under 5'6", and the driver's seat for Mickey Mouse, however!! And, of course, if you screwed up while driving, the sergeant would turn off the motor, and out would come the crank handle. Another trick, to teach you to be able to start and move a vehicle off on a hill without it rolling back at all, the sergeant

would find a hill, you got out and put your cigarettes under the rear track. You then had to start the vehicle, move off, without rolling back. To most of you this would sound strange, having mostly experienced automatic transmissions. However, by careful, skilled

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45 The sentry box had an electric doorbell which sounded in the Sergeant's quarters if rang.



Wellington Barracks

manipulation of the hand brake and clutch, you quickly learned how to do this tricky manoeuvre.

The first sergeant we had was a friendly type, however, when we all went for our first driving test, conducted by an officer, this alone threw a scare into us, we all failed: A planned tactic, maybe? However, a tougher sergeant then arrived, he was the Sergeant of the Camp Police, bit of a twit. However, we all did pass the second time around. One other incident stands out, again this will be strange to you, but the gear stick was moved through the gears in a gate. This sergeant was demonstrating how easy it was to change gears. He insisted quite vehemently, that one could use one's little finger to change gears, and in a casual manner he tried to change gears. But it just didn't work. Finally, he had to resort to "ramming home" the gear stick. We had great fun repeating the episode to any one who had the time to listen. All mimed to perfection!! After the training we returned to the battalion waiting to be shipped to Berlin, Germany.

Berlin was our overseas posting. In London we were billeted at Wellington Barracks. These buildings had (apparently) been condemned for years, they were so old. I was there in the fall of 1953. All the toilets froze up. We had to go out of the barracks if

The boat that took the battalion to Germany, via the Hook of Holland. On the back I wrote, "Sailed from Harwich 11 o/c Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> (54) arrived Hook of Holland 9.30 Feb 4<sup>th</sup>. "Blimey, what a crossing", was also added.

we wanted to do more than urinate. So much for good old Blighty!! Before I moved to Germany, I was part of

the Honour Guard for the 1954 Opening of Parliament. Nothing spectacular, but something else not many people have taken part in. All we had to do was to march to Buckingham Palace which was not far from Wellington Barracks, and then form up to be inspected by the Queen. Funnily enough, I don't remember the inspection. The Honour Guard was formed up in a court yard inside the Palace. I remember we arrived early, not unusual for us then or me now. We were allowed to "stroll" up and down the courtyard until the appointed hour. We were formed up, inspected, I think it must have been the Queen, and perhaps, only the front rank. Then we marched passed the Royal family, as they stood on a doorstep. Most of those around at the time were there, The Queen, Prince Philip, Margaret, and several other lesser lights.

Shortly after that, the battalion moved to the British sector of Berlin and in to Montgomery Barracks. The name itself must have been a continual embarrassment for the people living nearby. It not the name used when occupied by German troops I can assure you. What a change from Wellington Barracks in London. Smaller rooms, well kept, showers, we were in seventh heaven: Huge garages, buildings for the different companies. Not businesses, a battalion is broken down into companies. Remember, I mentioned the Queen's Company. On returning from Pirbright I was transferred to Support Company. Support Company, which as the name implies supported everyone else, in a military sense, machine guns, 3" mortars, heavier artillery. The Barracks complex came with playing fields, acres and acres of playing fields.



Our barracks were on the edge of the Russian zone. One day the Russians held one of our units of about three men. They had apparently strayed into the Russian territory. They were released unharmed. Russia was not considered a friendly nation at that time. In fact, if you were charged with a minor offence, say, dirty boots, the charge would read, while on active service, etc. While in Berlin I saw the Brandenburg Gate that used to divide east from West Germany. I visited the huge sports arena where Hitler made a lot of his speeches. One of our duties was to carry out guard duty at Spandau Prison. Here the seven war criminals convicted at the Nuremberg trials were detained. They were the leaders of wartime Germany. They were all alive at the time. They did not lead much of a life, nor did they deserve to: Each month the Guard changed, one month it was the British, the next the Americans, then the French and then the Russians. The prisoners lived at the same standard as the guards; apparently the Russian standard was terrible, followed by the French, then the British, and the best, the Americans. We also did joint parades with all the other nations. It was quite a unique experience.

We also spent a lot of time fighting imaginary enemies. This was great fun and we all prepared to fight whoever that enemy might be, probably the Russians. Allegedly, though, we were all part of the Peace force for Europe. After year in Berlin we moved to



Düsseldorf, and somewhere in between I had returned to England to be taught to be a driving instructor. This was great sport and made a real change. I was taught to drive a non-tracked vehicle, and to instruct others how to drive. The course passed very quickly, with only one incident that I recall. It was my turn to drive, we were in a three-ton vehicle, and the passenger door that I had to exit from was a considerable distance above the ground. As I tried to get out I missed my footing and I guess I just disappeared from the instructor's view, because, not only was the door high off the ground, there was a ditch parallel to the roadway. I landed in a ditch. The same basic skills of this fabulous performance have since been repeated on golf courses and in swivel chairs.

I conducted several driving courses with my pupils all passing. We actually drove a jeep called a Champ, five gears forward, and then by throwing a switch, five gears in reverse, plus four wheel drive. Powered by, get this, a Rolls Royce engine!! While driving a Roll might have been great, however, whenever we went onto the Autobahn, we were the slowest vehicles on the road. Our vehicles were governed, so that about 72 mph was the top speed. There was no speed limit on the German highway. We experienced our first really slippery streets on one trip. We had (no not me!!) several minor tail-enders, and of course, being British, the accidents could not have been our fault. It was the road you know! Again we spent a lot of time training and dashing madly around the country. Much, I'm sure, the consternation of the German people, who did not treat us too



badly considering we were an occupying force.

One other little bit of information. We "Trooped the Colour" in Düsseldorf. There was a wide spread strike in England at the time and the Guards stationed there were doing the regular jobs to keep the country going. So, we had the honour of carrying out the parade in Germany. We had the R.A.F. Regiment and the Lincolnshire Light Infantry with us as part of the parade. The public was invited and I can tell you the Germans are an enthusiastic military minded lot. Every time we did a military movement they cheered and clapped. We were a pretty smart lot anyway, and it was great sport. They finally had to be told to wait until the end. The 'Trooping of the Colour', I think, merely showed that the Regiment(s) were remaining faithful to the Monarch. Tradition don't you know.

Oh, yes, I was not always the careful (slow?) driver I later I became. I nearly tipped my jeep over. I was driving it to a soccer match, not too far from the barracks. Was driving way, way too fast, and came to a corner that was sharp, and I mean sharp, I had to drive off the road, go into a farmer's field to finally bring the vehicle under control. I can assure you my passengers were not impressed. I also embarked on a criminal career during my time in the army. It happened this way: and all over ice cream. I was a sergeant and there were three other guardsmen in the jeep with me. We were part of a convoy of several hundred vehicles, we were moving very slowly and, in fact, as I recall, the whole move was punctuated by long stops. One of these stops was in a village. It was very hot and I thought it would be a good idea to stop and buy an ice cream. After all, how long could it take to buy four ice creams? However, I guess the guardsman who

volunteered to either couldn't note, was too story short, it the vehicles in up large ice cream. An arrest. This



go couldn't speak German, the storekeeper speak English, or perhaps the money, in a single large for him to change. However, to cut a long took ages to get the ice cream. In the meantime front had moved off and here we were holding numbers of vehicles so that we could have an officer came by and I was told I was in open simply meant I would be charged at some later date for holding up the convoy. I never was, but we never did get our ice cream: The hazards of war and all that kind of stuff. They took these exercises very seriously. Pretty soon my three years were up. I had started to correspond with a certain lady by then. But there was more to come. I'll probably tell you more about the period between my three years and my recall later.

In the early part of 1956 there was a disagreement over who should control the Suez Canal: Which was and still is a very important water way in Egypt, in the Middle East. When hasn't there been trouble in the Middle East? The President of Egypt at that time, Nasser, took back the Canal. It depends, of course, on where you were born, on who took what, however, the French, Israelis and British decided it was their Canal. I think the



French built it, the British had control of it and were under contract to hold it for several more years. The Israelis were afraid that if the Egyptians

got control of the Canal they would use it to invade Israel. It all sounds so very familiar. All three felt that the control of it was absolutely essential to the well being of the free world. Anyway there was a series of threats and counter threats. I suppose someone drew a line in the sand and someone stepped over it. The Israelis, Arabs and French and the British were the most affected by this issued.

The Americans were opposed to any new war and Foster Dulles their Secretary of State was almost anti-British. How did this all affect me? As I think back on the positive results that came out of it, obviously the good Lord had things in mind for yours truly. I had not really settled down in civilian life. No, I didn't grow my hair long or hang about. I had a job, but things were not settled. There were rumours of war and it was said that several thousand experts would be recalled into the army. I assumed this would leave me out!! However HM Queen Elizabeth had other ideas and I received a telegram indicating that I was to report back to Pirbright, and be prepared to serve again. So that's what hundreds of



us did. We quit our jobs and returned to the army. The jobs were to be kept for us, so off we went. We were very quickly issued our kit and uniforms. Then we were moved into Windsor Barracks, near London. Then about a week later we were shipped out to Malta, an island in the Mediterranean Sea. I suppose while we were all apprehensive, we never dreamed for a moment, though, there would be war or anything like that.

We must have been dumb; why else would they have called us all back again? We made out our wills before we left England. Very shortly thereafter we were on a troopship leaving Southampton. The regimental band played us out of Southampton, that's right, our troopship left from my home town, with 'Davy Crocket, King of the Wild Frontier', ringing in our ears. Frightfully British tune doncha know!! A bugler played part of the tune on a rifle, with the mouthpiece of a trumpet in the barrel of the rifle. We left Southampton in the Empress of Australia. I don't remember much of the trip out, uneventful I suppose. When we arrived in Malta, we were greeted with cries of, "get yer knees brown". This certainly annoyed some of our fellows, as they had only recently come home from an area where your knees did get brown, namely Egypt!! They had been released from the army only to be recalled for this crisis.



We were billeted in tents on an airfield, not grass, but concrete. As sergeants we had beds, the guardsmen had straw mattresses. We had to do all kinds of things to ensure the rain wouldn't get in under the canvas. Getting back to the airfield, it was the only one on the island and had been used during the Second World War and in fact quite famous. Again we embarked on all kinds of exercises. The worst part, of course, we did not know when we would be going home. I took my first aircraft flight in Malta. Our officer was a really good sort. It was only a small aircraft but it did give a good view of the

island. He also took us to the place where St. Paul came ashore after he was shipwrecked, and to the huge Catholic Church built on the spot where Paul met with some of the islanders. The weather was beautiful, and very hot: The countryside that we saw rocky, the people poor. We learned that there was so little soil on Malta that ship owners had to pay some of their docking fees in soil. Malta was probably the place where I was made aware that we are responsible for our own actions, and that one should not put too much trust in others. I think it has had both positive and negative effects on my life ever since. It happened this way. We were ordered to prepare for a drill parade. In order to do this one had to shine one's boots to a high degree of shine. Several of us sergeants were discussing the merits of this type of garbage and as a crew we decided that we would simply not spit and polish our boots for the next day's parade. We left for our respective tents. Next day only one sergeant had followed through with this pledge, which I suppose, in effect, was mutiny of a kind. It was me. I got dinged for having dirty boots on parade. This resulted in some minor inconvenience at a later time. Sure taught me a lesson. I was also arrested in Malta, nothing serious, but in the army it was close to mutiny. Let me explain. I had played on our soccer team and had injured my feet. You should have seen the boots they gave us. Anyway I was given, what they called, 'excused boots' this meant that I did not have to go on parade. After several days I reported to the medical officer and was given 'medicine and duty', which, as the name implies, meant I was required to go on parades and all those good kinds of things. There was a drill parade that same morning. I chose not to go on it as did apparently dozens of others. However, I was lying on the bed in my tent when one of the senior non-commissioned officers did an inspection, found me, and told me to put myself in close arrest. This meant marching off to the guardroom (tent) telling the sergeant I was under close arrest and he 'locked' me up in the corner of the tent. Actually I just sat on a chair waiting to be marched off in front of the Commanding Officer. This happened shortly thereafter. This additional story, all part of being in close arrest, probably won't mean anything to you; however, when you are in close arrest you are in fact a prisoner. In order to appear before the Commanding Officer another sergeant escorts you to the tent where the hearing is held. It was some considerable distance to the Commanding Officer's tent. A friend was my escort. We started off in grand style, on the double. We had to run about one mile. Halfway there we spot an officer, this required 'breaking into quick time', regular marching. We managed this OK, but my escort was so out of breath he couldn't give the command to salute. So I did: Much to the officer's amazement. He was one of our own company officers, so he knew us. We finished the salute, broke into double time and dashed off, ignoring the officer's shout that we return. He never did do anything about it. I received a very minor punishment, but by now I am a hardened criminal.

On one of our schemes I almost caught an octopus; at least it almost swam into the mess can I was cleaning. (A mess can was an aluminium dish about 5" square and 2' deep). We were issued two such tins. They were used for eating, drinking and washing purposes. (hopefully not at the same time) If one was short of washing-up water one could 'wash' them by putting sand in them and drying up the remaining contents and then throwing the residue away. They also had a dramatic affect on all foods that had grease in them. As soon as the greasy food, such as eggs, was placed in them, the food congealed

as the tins were always cold. Should mention to, that I had started off in another company, not Support Company, which meant that I would have been marching all over the place, and I did for a while. Then I was transferred to the machine gun platoon that meant we rode everywhere. If I hadn't been transferred then I would have missed the following. We were on a scheme, fighting an imaginary enemy, and judging by the way



the politicians were messing things up, it could have been anyone, including the Americans. We were ordered to return to our camp. The first thing they told us was that plans had changed and we were to board a minesweeper<sup>46</sup> for exercises at sea. Aha!! Then we had a kit inspection. This is where every piece of equipment you have been issued with is checked to be sure it's all present, very strange. Then when we went to the docks to board the minesweeper (HMS

Leverton) we took about 100,000 rounds of live ammunition. Something we had never done before. I guess we had been on board for about one hour when we were all called on to the deck. The captain simply said that we are now at war with Egypt any mail would be censored from this point on. I don't think anyone actually believed him at first, however, the message soon sunk in.



The trip across the Mediterranean was uneventful (if you call having everyone on board seasick, including the captain, uneventful) until we were just outside of Port Said (Egypt) harbour. Then we began to sweep for mines. We, the soldiers were told to stay out of the way; we did not need to be told twice. The sailors were quite happy because they received a bonus for every mine that was destroyed. We did not destroy any. I want to mention one little incident here and couple it with an incident that occurred when I was a kid, on the way to church. Together, while on the way to church, with a couple other guys, we came across the Fire Brigade, as we called them. They had their escape ladder up the side of a building. One of the firemen asked if I would like to go up the ladder. I declined. It was some 20-25 years later that I had to come down a similar ladder!! I had to help a young fellow down from the Calder water tower that had climbed to the top to attract attention about something or other. Now to the other incident: When we were on the minesweeper we drew alongside the supply ship. It was mail call. The other ship must have been over 60 yards away because of the rough sea. One of our sailor's shot a line to the ship, and rigged up, what I think it is called a Bosun's ladder. It's just a harness strung between the ships. A sailor merely seats himself into the harness and the sailors in the other ship pull him across the water. Again we were asked if we would like to try it, we, the soldiers all declined. I'm 59 years old now. I wonder when

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46 Both the minesweepers that I sailed in had been made at Southampton.

I will have to use one.

Although the war was almost over before we arrived, aircraft were still sending rockets into the city as we entered the harbour. At this point the minesweeper ran aground on a ship that had been sunk by the Egyptians. We were never told how much damage had been inflicted on the ship. At any rate, we were taken off the ship and stationed in a Brooke Bond Tea factory. I don't remember too much about the tea factory except that when we went to go to the toilet there was nothing to sit on. The place was all nicely tiled, with a flushing system, but no seats. There was the tiled floor with a tiled hole. That was all. I suppose one would get used to it in time. Although I don't know for sure, it had, I believe some religious connotation, something about a man having a baby. Again my criminal background comes to the fore. To backtrack just a little: When we came across on the minesweeper, we sergeants ate in the Petty Officer's mess. We lived like kings. We thought we would return the favour by taking some tea to the ship. A staff sergeant and about four other sergeants and I loaded a large, large bag with tea and made for the harbour: To get from the shore to the ship raised a bit of a problem, quickly solved when we saw an unattended rowing boat. We all took an oar, except for the staff sergeant, who yelled out the time for stroking the oars. Military training rushing to the fore here, and we rowed across the harbour and presented the tea to the somewhat surprised sailors. I supposed we could have been court martialled. While in the tea factory about four of us were sent to guard a small village. We spent 18 hours watching this place, no food except for some very green grapefruit we were given by some passing soldiers. It was a long day. The day ended with a patrol coming to relieve us, and us being chastised for failing to identify the patrol before we allowed them up to our position. Ironically the patrol made so much noise we knew who they were long before they arrived. It was a good thing that we were all on the same side!! The official record shows that the Allies won the war, the Egyptians<sup>47</sup>, however, still probably have their own victory parade.

It seems that very shortly thereafter we were to return to Malta and we boarded another minesweeper and headed back to Valletta, Malta. On the way the minesweeper caught fire, burned out a motor and we were towed home. I have never been so glad to get off a boat in my life. We returned to a deserted camp. The rest of the battalion had been shipped to Cyprus. We obviously had to follow. The journey to Cyprus was made in a smaller craft. The journey was uneventful; apart from the fact that I ate my first real steak on board. The steak was rare, very rare, but was it ever good. In Cyprus we were on active service. There was a civil war going on and the British were on one side. It's so long ago that I don't really remember all the ins and outs, but the Greeks and the Turks were involved and the leader of the Greeks was a fellow called George something or other and the leader of the Turks was Archbishop Makarios.



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47 History seems to vary in accuracy, depending on whose point of view is being shared.

I'm not sure that either of them liked the Brits too much. They both wanted home rule but neither wanted the other on the island. There were attacks, quite cowardly from what we were told: Like dropping bombs from trees into trucks, on the British troops and civilians. We were never attacked but we had to be on guard at all times. Thorough searches of the camp had to be carried out regularly to check for bombs. We were still in tents, but this time it was a little better arranged. There were wooden surrounds for the side of the tent, and wooden floors. It was December when we were there and while it was quite warm in the daytime it did go below freezing at night. We had but a little heater in the tent and the water we brought in for washing and shaving in froze over night. But we were tough. We really didn't have too much to do; actually we were waiting to go home. The hostilities had finished in Egypt. Initially we were to be flown home. However, some people with British passports took our places on the planes and it didn't work out. You would be surprised how racist one can become when you lose your seat on a plane to a person who has never seen England, but has a British passport. It was pretty boring, but we did do at least one early morning search of a village for terrorists: This meant being in position at about 4 a.m. All the men of the village were put in a compound, and we searched the village for weapons. We found none. I did remember going into one very, very poor place, seeing a four poster bed, looking under the mattress for weapons, only to find the spring was a series of boards: Probably good for the back but not very comfortable. Chickens roamed freely throughout the home. These people were poor.

We finally did get to go home; we had Christmas dinner on board ship in the Bay of Biscay, which was a very rough stretch of water. I arrived home in Southampton, only to learn that the dockers, my dad was one, were on strike<sup>48</sup>. We had to spend the night on board ship. I was twenty minutes from home. And that was the end of my army career, apart from having to send my army gear back to the regiment. This was accomplished in short order. I have no regrets whatsoever, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I still think that if fellows can be kept busy for their time of service it would do all young people good to do service in the forces of some kind, for say, 18 months.

I kept up an association with the regiment by joining the North American Guards Association. I may add more later. At the present time, January 1995 I am considering my options. Some when in 1995 I left the Guards Association. I became firmly convinced that they were a little bit of old England that I did not particularly like, class distinction and racism. Tradition holds firm and I rejoined the Association. It still is rather out of date, but I enjoy reading their newsletter. I kept some mementos and have acquired two very nice pieces of china, a guardsman in full dress and a 'head' of a guardsman. 1999. I have also acquired a cut out of a guardsman, some pictures and an article I wrote for the Edmonton Journal. I received \$50.00 for my efforts.

December 20 2001 Ire-affirmed my membership in the Associations I am not, however, convinced that it serves much of a purpose now. Most of the members are old.

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48 Not unusual, has far as I can recall Dad was often on strike for some reason or other.

There do not appear to be any new members. It's a shame really, but that is how life goes.



