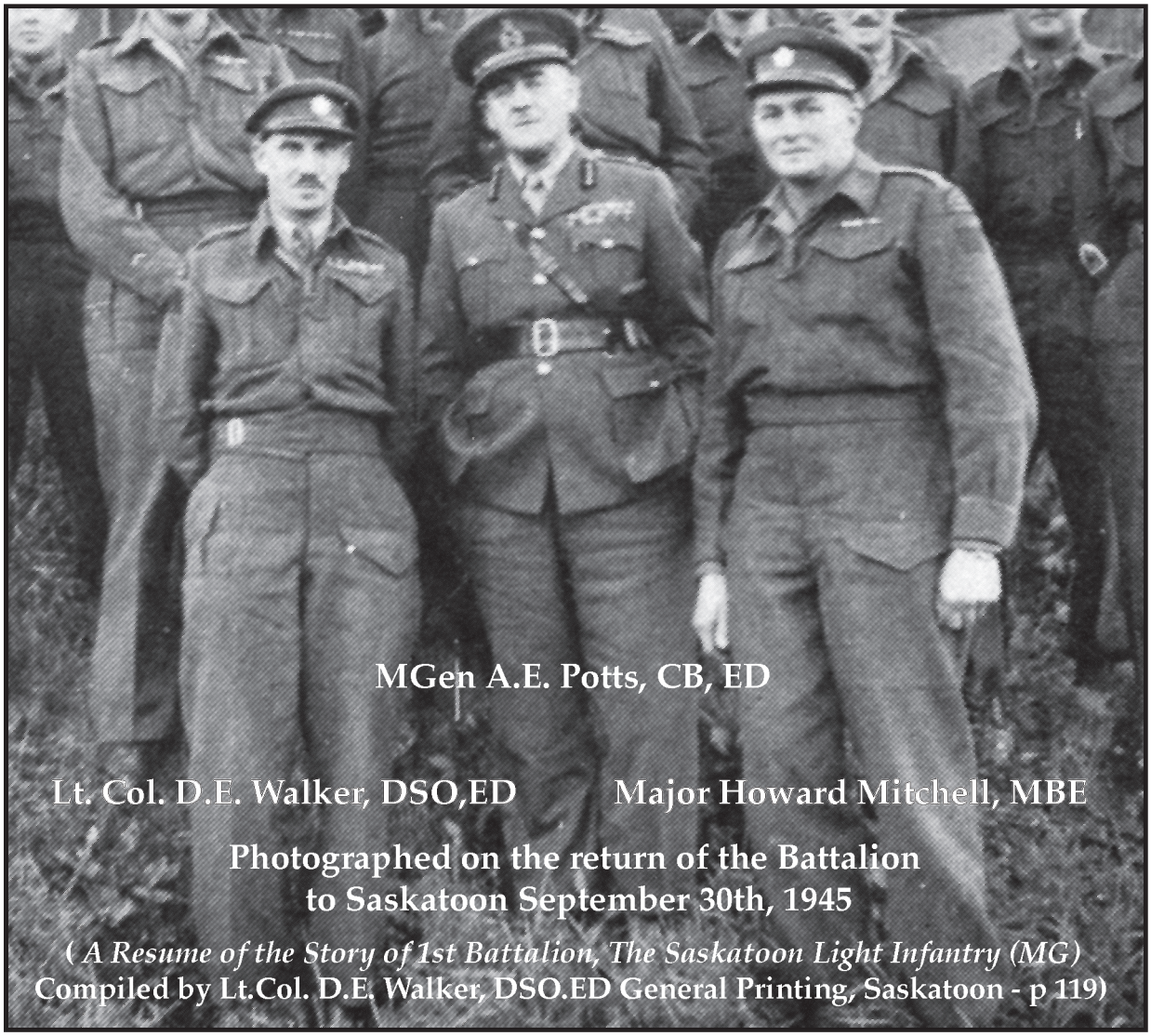
The Wartime Exploits of

Major
H.C. Mitchell, MBE



MGen A.E. Potts, CB, ED

Lt. Col. D.E. Walker, DSO,ED Major Howard Mitchell, MBE

Photographed on the return of the Battalion to Saskatoon September 30th, 1945

(*A Resume of the Story of 1st Battalion, The Saskatoon Light Infantry (MG)* Compiled by Lt.Col. D.E. Walker, DSO.ED General Printing, Saskatoon - p 119)

Foreword

This copy of Wartime Memoirs of Major Howard Mitchell, MBE is a reproduction of the original that was written and published by Major Mitchell some years ago. Major Mitchell served in the SLI (MG) a wartime unit which has been superseded by the North Saskatchewan Regiment.

Major Mitchell was highly decorated for his wartime exploits. The following is an outline of his service provided from the National Archives of Canada:

Name: Howard Clifton MITCHELL
Rank on enlistment: 2nd Lieutenant

Rank on discharge: Major

Date of Enlistment: 6 October 1939 (previous service with Canadian Officer Training Corps Saskatchewan Unit)

Date of Discharge/Transfer: 18 December 1945 (he joined the reserves)
Theaters of service: Canada, United Kingdom and Central Mediterranean Area

Medals:
Member of the Order of the British Empire (The Canada Gazette 15 December 1945 page 5734 continued)

Military Cross Class III (Conferred by the Government of Greece in recognition of distinguished service in the cause of the Allies.) (The Canada Gazette 17 January 1948 page 345)

1939-45 Star, Italy Star, Defense Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp

In addition to the original text I have added information about three individuals named in the book, the pictures and the citation for Major Mitchell's MBE and Military Cross 3rd Class (Greece)

Reproduced by:
LCol. Gerry Carline, CD, RCA (Retired)
September 2008

The Medals of Major Howard C. Mitchell, MC
L to R: Member of the British Empire, 1939-1945 Star, Italy star, France and Germany Star, Defence Medal, Canadian Volunteer Service Medal, Greek Military Medal Third Class

The medals pictured above were issued to Major Howard Mitchell, MBE for his service during World War II. The medals were found abandoned in a storage container and came into the possession of LCol. G. F. Carline, CD in July 2008.

When found the medals were not mounted as pictured. They were loose and not in good condition. The box that they were in contained a note written by Major Mitchell which said that the MBE had been presented to him by King George VI and that the Greek Military Medal Third Class had been presented to him by the King George II, King of the Hellenes (Greek King).

The box also contained three Royal Canadian Legion Medals - Past President, 50 Year Service Medal. and 60 Year Service Medal.

The Legion medals had Major Mitchell's name inscribed on the back of them and that made it possible to identify the original owner of the medals. The medals have now been properly cleaned, anodized and court mounted.

Through the assistance of Dr. Ian Wilson, Archivist for Canada and his staff at the Archives and Library of Canada and also LCol. Larry Wong,CD (Retired) former CO of the North Saskatchewan Regiment we have been able to uncover the story of Major Howard Mitchell, MBE.

Major Mitchell's own account of his wartime experiences follows.

We Shall remember Them!

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MY WAR

Major Howard Mitchell

Saskatoon Light Infantry (MG)

PREFACE

Modern wars involve everyone in one way or another. The memoirs of a general have a very wide appeal. Many were affected by the decisions of a general.

A general can win a battle or war because of the disciplined effort of many people. Individually those many may not seem to have done much. But because of what each did the event was possible. “When the roll was called out yonder” they were there. That was their important contribution.

Ex-service men form one of the greatest “natural fraternities.” We shared the boredom, the monotony and the loneliness as well as the excitement, the thrills and the laurels. We never tire of recounting when... These pages have been written in that spirit. I want to share some of the more unusual experiences that I had. It is sort of “worm’s eyeview” of the Second World War where the worm takes for granted that everyone knows about the daily routine and accomplishments of the Army. This is an important point to remember. Otherwise reading the following pages may lead one to believe that wine, women and song were our sole occupation and not just our favorite diversion.

This story is dedicated to the memory of those men and women who, in 1939, laid their lives on the line for a Depression-ridden Canada.

ORGANIZATION

A word about the organization of the army. Many Canadians, not having personal experience, find this to be very confusing. An army, in the field, must be able to carry on under any circumstances encountered without having to depend on local resources. Somewhere, in the army organization, there will be a unit to supply every individual need. Following is a very rough explanation of the organization.

In WW II the Canadian Army was patterned closely after the British Army.To begin with there is the base organization which recruits and trains the soldiers; specifies, procures and supplies all material; and sends up reinforcements.

The army in the field is an independent organization commanded by a general. It consists of two or more corps, each commanded by a Lieutenant. General, and a host of specialized units. Each corps consists of two or more divisions, each commanded by a Maj. General, and more specialized units.

In normal circumstances the division is the smallest formation used in the field. For special purposes a brigade may be used. For instance, the Canadian contribution to NATO forces was a brigade. But when that brigade was cut in half it became a joke.
There are armoured divisions and infantry divisions. They are similar in organization but different. My experiences were with the infantry.

An infantry division consisted of nine infantry battalions. These were organized into three brigades, each commanded by a brigadier. Also under the command of the division was a Regiment of 25 pdr. artillery; a regiment of anti tank guns; a reconnaissance regiment; a machine gun battalion; a medical unit; an army service Corps unit; and ordinance corps unit; and engineer unit..

Each battalion and regiment consisted of 800-900 all ranks and was commanded by a Lieutenant. Colonel.

Each battalion or regiment was organized into four combat companies, batteries or squadrons, and a headquarters company or squadron, each commanded by a captain or major. Each company or squadron was organized into three platoons or troops, each commanded by a lieutenant. Headquarter Coy or sqdn looked after supplies, etc.

Our battalion, the Saskatoon Light Infantry (MG) was mobilized and served until Jan. 1, 1943 as a machine gun battalion. We had 48 Vickers Machine guns. They were dubbed the “peanut artillery.” These were water cooled guns that could fire continuously. They were on a fixed mount which meant they could be used against unseen targets by using maps for calculations. We had two types of ammunition: ordinary MKVII .303 ammunition that the riflemen used. It had a maximum range of 2500 yards. Our MKVIII ammunition had a range of 4500 yards.

In Jan. 1943 our battalion was reorganized to meet the expected needs. We were given 20 mm. Oerlikon anti aircraft guns and 4.2 inch mortars as well as our Vickers machine guns.

We were called a support battalion. There was battalion headquarters which, in action, took command of the Divisional Maintenance Area and practically suspended connection with the battalion with the exception of Headquarters Company. The rest of the battalion was organized into three Groups. Each group consisted of a headquarters, one company of Vickers machine guns, one company of 20 mm. Oerlikon anti aircraft guns and one battery of 4.2 inch mortars. The 4.2 inch mortars fired a bomb that weighted

19 pounds. Its' maximum range was 4800 yards. We had high explosive and smoke bombs. It was originally designed for chemical warfare. Somewhere, no doubt, there was a store of chemical bombs. We never saw any. Within our range we could match the 25 pdr artillery for speed and accuracy - with one exception. Each bomb had a tail unit which stabilized its' direction. If the tail unit came off no one knew where it would go.

Because of allied air superiority it was found that the Oerlikon anti aircraft guns were not needed. So our battalion was re-organized again. The Groups were disbanded. We were organized into three machine gun companies and one mortar group of three batteries. Each machine gun company and mortar battery was assigned to a brigade with which it usually served. On many occasions they were all used together.

Chapter 1: Enlist

It might be said that my military career began one sunny day late in May 1924 when our school principal told us boys to be back at school at 1 p.m. We were issued with rifles and we reported to the school janitor out on the football field. We were Cadets. At five p.m. that same afternoon we were inspected by a lieutenant, from Military District HQ in Regina. In the interval the janitor had taught us the rudiments of foot drill and rifle drill. He was so effective that, after inspecting us, the young officer congratulated us in a speech that I have heard many times since, in fact, I have made it myself, on occasion.

That autumn, when my chum and I were enrolling at the University of Saskatchewan., we discovered that those students who took the COTC course were not obliged to take PT. In addition, two years COTC counted as a class. The final clinching argument - one got paid fifteen dollars for each year's parades.

We were known as Pottsey's Army and came in for a lot of derision on the campus in those days of pacifism. In the same way that a child cannot point to any achievements in a particular period, I cannot say now just how much that we learned about the Army in COTC. But it was our introduction to army life. Arthur Potts, and others like him, deserve the gratitude of the nation. In spite of ridicule and indifference they created the skeleton around which Canada was able to build her effort in 1939 - 1945.

On that fateful day in September 1939 I was combining wheat. The agent for some of the land that I was farming came to see me on business. He had a radio in his automobile. Almost within minutes of the outbreak of hostility I knew of it. It was inevitable that Canada would enter the war. In spite of the silly proposal of my political leaders, that Canada should make her contribution that of material, I thought it certain that Canada would send another Expeditionary Force overseas. I was single and so almost certain to be conscripted when that phase began. Besides any altruistic motives that I may have had, it was clearly to my advantage to volunteer right away, and take advantage of what training I had when trained people were almost non-existent. On almost the first day of war I resolved to enlist. I pressed on with the harvest and, when the wheat was all threshed, I drove into Saskatoon in my new second hand truck to offer my services.

The first thing that I did in Saskatoon was to buy a new hat. I had a very good suit of clothes, etc. but my headgear was disreputable. I wanted to make a good impression. Then I drove out to the University where I contacted Prof. Arthur Potts, also Brigadier Potts in the NPAM. How should I go about enlisting? Prof. Potts remembered me dimly. I am sure he did not remember much that was favourable, as I was not one of his star cadets. However, he was very enthusiastic about the need for a person from a mechanized farm in the newly mechanized army that Canada was going to create. He advised me to contact the CO of the Saskatoon Light Infantry.

Next morning, armed with my COTC certificate A, I presented myself to the CO of the SLI. He was very courteous but he had his complement of officers He arranged for me to see the CO of the 21st Bty The Artillery did not need an officer either Feeling extremely low, I reported my lack of success to Prof Potts He did some telephoning and I went back to the CO of the SLI This tune my reception was more favourable I was sent over to the depot for my medical and documentation After everything had been satisfactorily completed, I was duly accepted as an officer of the SLI. I was given two weeks leave to wind up my affairs I had passed a milestone It was 6 October '39.

This beginning of my association with Arthur Potts with something that no one in the Bn, besides he and I, understood. It was common knowledge amongst the officers that Col. Cleland had at first rejected me and then, at Potts' insistence, accepted me. The Adj.-Capt. Allan Embury, who, as an RMC graduate, was the one professionally trained officer in the Bn, was quite convinced that I had political influence. Eight years later, in an hotel room in Kindersley, Saskatchewan., he was flabbergasted when I told him that I had always been a C.C.F.'er of Depression days vintage.

It is hard to remember the situation of those days. I think that Potts was almost certain from the outbreak of hostilities, that he would take the SLI overseas, I am quite convinced that Potts was seized with the challenge of organizing a mechanized battalion. He knew that there would be many problems and he had no idea what they would be. A common boast of his during that first year was that most of his men had driven trucks and tractors on the farm and would be easy to organize into a mechanized Bn. I think he eventually had to eat those words. Certainly I changed my opinion on that point. A boy, who had learned to drive his father's truck, was often the most difficult to convince that there might be a reason for the way the army wanted him to drive.

I feel quite sure that Potts thought that I, a farmer who owned and operated his own modern machinery, was an excellent potential officer. My military background might be sketchy but I had considerable practical experience.

Looking back I like to think that I justified Pott's judgment of that time. Certainly during that first year, it seemed to me, a pattern was set that lasted throughout the six years that I was with the Bn. Whenever anything unusual came up, for which no one was properly trained, "Mitch" was given the job. He had no military background to sully if he failed and he usually figured out something.

Chapter 2: The Stadium, Saskatoon

At the end of my leave I reported to the Battalion at the Stadium in Saskatoon. Everything and everybody was in a turmoil. Recruiting was continuing. Quite a high percentage of the applicants were unsuitable. The provisions for training consisted almost entirely of one PPCLI Sgt. plus the NPAM Battalion. There was no equipment, no uniforms.

Everyone in the Battalion was a complete stranger to me. I knew how little I knew about the army. I did not know how little the others knew. It was a time of feeling my way around. In the process I found that a smart figure in a smart uniform was sometimes misleading. Most of the other officers had connections in the city and very few lived in the lines. Consequently it took longer to become acquainted. However we had our moments. One night that I remember was a ping pong game in the mess anteroom. Each player's drink was on the table. The player, into whose glass the ball was put, stood the round of drinks. The game was quite lengthy and hilarious.

The first time that I found myself coming to be accepted by the other officers was following a mess dance in the Barry Hotel. A friend from home, with whom I had often danced in the Old School House during the Depression days, was in the city and was my partner that evening. We thought the music was good and we really "cut the rug." My fellow officers were impressed. Of such are armies built.

I had been reared to loathe John Barleycorn. I found that was the first obstacle I had to cross in the mess. My patriotic fervour was such that I was willing to risk even that. To my surprise I did not go straight to hell. I did considerable experimenting but at least a year was to elapse before I began to really understand the good influence that alcohol can be.

One night a fire broke out in one of the Exhibition buildings. Maurice Dupuis was the duty officer that night. The person who discovered the fire had turned in the alarm to the city fire department. I think that our Battalion had a few pails of sand and water but little else of its own. However Maurice, who had had a couple drinks, thought that the duty officer should do something but did not know what. The Orderly Sgt. had rounded up the fire piquet. Maurice had them fallen in and then he proceeded to have them number over and over again. Fortunately a senior officer came along and spared the piquet the task of fighting a fire by numbering.
One of the Battalion's headaches at that time was one of our Indian recruits. Throughout my six years with the Battalion on active service, I was very proud of our Indian boys. But Big Bear could not stand fire water. And Big Bear was strong. Whenever Big Bear was allowed out of the barracks, he got drunk. And when he got drunk, he got into a fight and literally smashed up the house wherever he was. It was always necessary for the Orderly Sgt. to take his full piquet with him to retrieve Big Bear, and, on one occasion at least, he smashed the detention cell in the stadium and got out.

Early in November, Maj. D. Walker conducted a school for the Non Commissioned Officers and junior officers of the Battalion. There were about ninety of us. In three weeks we covered the rudiments of army life as for a machine gunner. I have always regarded that course as being the initial base upon which the record of our Battalion was built. It wasn't that we learned so much. It was the attitude to our job that we learned that was so important. We were the Non Commissioned Officers and officers from all Companies, of the Battalion. That course was the first unifying influence in our Battalion and it set the standard for our future training. Few men had a

greater influence on the SLI in 1939-45 than Drayton Walker.

I was attached to A Company commanded by Maj. E.J. Scott-Dudley. That was the beginning of a very unhappy association. He knew of how I came to the Battalion and, like everyone else, misunderstood the situation. He was a banker who despised his own farm background. On my part even his hyphenated name was repulsive. Characteristically the first good impression that I made on him was when I helped to fill out the pay books for a batch of new recruits. I printed, by hand, their name, etc., as any grade two child could have done. He thought that I did rather well at that.

One day in October, Brigadier Pearkes arrived to inspect our Battalion. It occurred to me that he was very annoyed at what he saw. The Battalion was terribly equipped. It wasn't a case of getting a uniform to fit - the thing was to get a uniform. Some were in civies. Some had ill fitting battle dress blouses and trousers. No belts, no anklets. Wedge caps that we didn't know how to wear. The officers only had field service dress uniforms, Sam Brownes, kid gloves, et al. Pearkes soon got us off the parade ground and asked to see some training. I do not recall what happened to the men but he got the Second in command of the Battalion to give six of us junior officers some gun drill and fire orders with our D.P. Vickers guns. Major Thomson, the Second in command was a 1914-18 infantry veteran who, since mobilization, had been worried sick about cooks, latrine buckets and quarters. He may have seen a Vickers gun before hand, I do not know. I know that I had only seen one a couple of times. Some of the other junior officers were more proficient. Nevertheless weird things happened in that period of training. I was one of the officers whom Brigadier Pearkes ordered to be eliminated.

The inspection party left and we got on with our job. That was my first real lesson that the army taught me. That debacle, far from being disastrous, welded us together. We had shared a crucial experience. I do not know what strings were pulled but no one was dropped because of it. We had become brothers in arms.

Late in November we were inspected by Major Gen. A.G.L. McNaughton, Inspector General of the Canadian Army. This time we were better prepared. We had a few uniforms and we had learned how to get on and off the parade ground. Things went reasonably well. That evening, in the mess, Professor Potts introduced Fred Dawe and me to General McNaughton. I was very greatly impressed. One of the General's first questions was as to whether we had finished our education. It was going to be a long war and he thought that our first duty was to become as proficient as we could in our own vocation.

Shortly after that inspection Brigadier Potts reverted to Lt. Col. and took command of our Battalion. Often since, I have thought that he was the only man who could have taken us overseas and made a going concern out of us. I still doubt that he knows which end of a machine gun the bullets come out. But he knew men and he knew the particular collection of men who made up the SLI at that time. A veteran of 1914-18 and a long time Non Permanent Active Militia officer he knew what we had to become to be effective and he knew what we lacked. His particular forte was being able to choose men to do a job and then leaving them to do it. I always felt that I knew exactly where I stood with Pottsey.

His impression on me, when he came on his first parade, was of an aging man in a sloppy uniform, being slightly ludicrous. But every man in the Battalion knew that times had changed. never got to know Lt. Col. Cleland. Those who had served under him in the Non Permanent Active Militia Battalion always spoke highly of him.

Later he took the salute at a march past as we marched downtown to board our train for overseas. That day he was very unhappy.

Plans for the Battalion to proceed overseas began to take shape. First came a series of inoculations. They were multiple things given to protect us from several dangers. We had three goes at it. Some men had a greater reaction than others. I still do not know whose responsibility it was for what happened but some terrible things occurred as a consequence. Our permanent force Drill Sgt. had an idea that the best treatment for a newly inoculated person was a brisk bit of rifle and squad drill. The unnecessary agony that that fool caused. Our final shots came a few days before we entrained. One of the men, in what was nominally my platoon, got so ill that he had to be taken off the parade ground. A Non Commissioned Officer told me about it and I rushed over to the Regimental Aid Post where I asked the Medical Officer to come and look at my man. He insisted that the sick soldier should be paraded to his office. We compromised with a stretcher. When the poor fellow got to the Regimental Aid Post, he was dead.

We did not have enough recruits to fill our complement. A group of ninety officers, Non Commissioned Officers and men were transferred to us from the Regina Rifles. The formal organization of the Battalion into complete companies, plus a re-enforcement company was undertaken. That called for considerable paper work and could not be finally completed until just before we got onto the train as we were to take an exact number of bodies. In a battalion, there is always a daily wastage.

Lt. Bradbrooke and I were the two re-enforcement officers. He went with the advance party. It was my job, the afternoon before we left Saskatoon, to sit in the Adjutant's office with my nominal rolls as each company commander went over his nominal roll with the Adjutant. All five Company Commanders came in, one at a time, harassed but in quite good humour. Each in turn, after his session with the Adjutant, left fighting mad. I have never met anyone who had the ability to antagonize people that Allan Embury had on that occasion.

His position can hardly be imagined. As adjutant and also as the one professionally trained officer in the Battalion he had been responsible for all of the paper work connected with the mobilization of the Battalion. During practically all of that period Lt. Col. Cleland was in command. I am sure that Cleland knew as well as Potts of the likelihood of Potts taking command of the Battalion. Losing the command was a terrible heartbreak for Cleland. It was almost inevitable that he would be indecisive under such circumstances. Indecision by the Commanding Officer made Embury's job impossible.

Chapter 3: We Leave Canada

December 5, 1939 we left Saskatoon in two trains. Lt. Col. Potts went with the first train and Maj. Charles McKerron, Officer Commanding of Headquarters Company, commanded the second train which traveled two hours later than the first. They were standard tourist coaches equipped with double windows for the winter weather. The windows could not be opened. The officials were afraid that we, untrained troops, could not be relied on and orders were given that we were to entrain and not get off. Farewells were to be said through the windows. The boys took one look at the glass that separated them from their loved ones. As though there was an explosion, every window on the platform side of the train burst out. By the time the second train was made ready, the windows had been loosened so that they could be opened.

There were two aftermaths to this window breaking. The first was that the boys in the coaches affected had to improvise window coverings to keep out the elements. The second, was that for a year or more the authorities tried to get Potts to pay for the windows out of regimental funds, which he cheerfully refused to do.

My military education continued on the second train. Maj. McKerron was a First War veteran. He laid on a daily routine for the train - including the Commanding Officer's inspection. Each of us officers was in command of a coach. I could hardly believe that these boys were the same western farm lads, who had enlisted in Saskatoon. I laid on that the coach, that I commanded, was to be cleaned. Entirely on their own the boys used their own brasso to polish the bright metal parts in the car and their own shoe polish to shine the black pieces of metal. I am sure that the conductor of that train had never before seen such a clean train. The coaches could not have looked better when new.

Enroute, one man, in my coach, developed scarlet fever. He was taken off the train and everything proceeded as usual except that whole train was confined, each to their own coach. When we got to Halifax, we were marched off the train onto the pier one coach at a time. With everyone carrying all his luggage it was a very cumbersome effort.

A guide lead me and my coach load into a large room in what I later learned was the Immigration Building. As soon as we were all in the room the guide locked a metal door which very effectively imprisoned us. Until that moment, I had not suspected a thing. No one wanted to run the risk of having a shipload of men contaminated with scarlet fever. We were in quarantine for two weeks.

From this distance in time, it is difficult to realize our thoughts. I had very little knowledge of the military and knew absolutely nothing about a ship. Had I known then, what I know now, about the loading schedules, etc. of a ship, I would have been in even greater despair. As it was I honestly thought it to be quite possible for the war to finish before we rejoined the Battalion. Those were the days of the phony war and everyone had a sublime faith in the French Maginot line.

The Officer Commanding of the transit depot in Halifax was Major Small, who worked for DOSCO in civilian life. He was the smallest man that I encountered in uniform anywhere. And he was the most perfect gentleman that I met anywhere. I understand that later he took a Battalion overseas of mostly Cape Breton miners. Later Lt. Col. Small was transferred to another Unit and a stranger was given command of Battalion. I was told that the loyal miner soldiers staged a sit down strike to protest losing Lt. Col. Small as the Commanding Officer.

Major Small made us very comfortable. We were

not allowed freedom but we were able to take route marches about the city and given equipment to do a bit of training. All of which helped to pass the time. His greatest contribution was that he got us included in the second troop convoy. Knowing now how carefully each ship is loaded, I do not understand how he did it. But he was well enough acquainted that he did get us aboard the Ship ALAMANZORA with the Royal Canadian Regiment who were commanded by Lt. Col, Hodson and whose Adjutant was Capt. Dan Spry.

The Alamanzora was a passenger ship equipped for travel in a warm climate. In December it was cold. We landlubbers were not accustomed to the close quarters one takes up on a ship. We were not always happy. The ship's wine cellar had its peace time stock. We officers had quite an adventure sampling the various kinds of beverage which we were able to order. The meals were good enough. Some men were horribly sick. Much to my surprise, I was not. One morning when I went in to breakfast, I thought that we had caught the stewards unprepared. There was nothing on the tables. However, before we finished eating we learned why. The sea got very rough and several times tables and chairs slid across the room.

We were at sea Christmas Day. The stewards gave the Christmas menu a big build up. When the Christmas dinner was placed before me I was ready to riot. I am sure that the turkey had been boiled. It was served with preserved peaches - no cranberries. It was a horrible let down for a farm boy.

There were about a dozen different units and detachments on board. One day, Capt. Spry called an Orders Group of the heads of each. It turned out that an enemy submarine was known to be near our convoy. We were ordered not to divulge this information to anyone, but to make sure that all necessary precautions were taken. My senior Non Commissioned Officer was Sgt. Booth. Almost immediately after the Orders Group, Sgt. Booth told me about the submarine. It seems that a junior Non Commissioned Officer in a signal corps detachment had read the semaphore message that had transmitted the information to our ship, as it was being sent by the flagship of the convoy. The net result of the security regulations enforced was that the only people aboard the ship who did not know about the submarine were the officers.

Another interesting angle on security measures. At that time the German ship Graf Spee was being pursued in South American waters. Daily newscasts mentioned that the French battleship Dunkerque was taking part in the pursuit. The Dunkerque was the senior ship in our convoy throughout the voyage.

As soon as we came to rest in Liverpool Harbour a tender came alongside. Amongst those who came aboard was a Major Luce of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (K.O.Y.L.I,). He had come purposely to welcome the fifty Saskatchewan. L. I.'s whom he had noticed to be aboard the ship register. I had heard vaguely about our affiliation with the K.O.Y.L.I. and I did have a faint appreciation of his interest and of his invitation to visit the depot in Yorkshire.

We landed at Liverpool. Everyone paraded on the dock where we were officially greeted by Anthony Eden and Vincent Massey. After the speeches they walked up and down our ranks. I guess that they picked on the greenest looking officer and stopped to talk to me. Eden asked me about the voyage and about myself. I was quite engrossed in the conversation when Eden said "now they will get your picture back home." I looked away from him and sure enough there was a complete semi-circle of cameras facing us. Our train was waiting and we got away without

a hitch. About four o'clock in the afternoon the train stewards came through and set up tables in each compartment in preparation for the evening meal. It was midnight when they served the meal. I do not recall what the hold up was. I do know that we were frantic. We had emergency rations with us of bully beef and biscuits. My civilian background did not allow me to understand the sanctity of emergency rations in the army. At 10 p.m. I instructed Sgt. Booth to distribute the emergency rations. The next day, when I reported this to our Quartermaster, Capt. Archie Gray, I thought that he would have a fit.

Chapter 4: England

We were met at Farnborough siding by Col. Potts and Lt. Maurice Dupuis on New Year's Day. Maurice took me to my quarters. There were very few people around the barracks as everyone had been given a one week leave. I was supposed to share a room with Lt. Vergne Marr. Dupuis very disgustedly told me that Vergne played darts. He couldn't have me with such a character. I must move in with him and Lt. Rob Irvine. Little did Maurice suspect that in six months time the whole 1st Canadian Division would be playing darts.

That room that Marr and I shared sticks in my memory more than purgatory ever will. It turned out to be a cold winter. I simply could not get warm in the English climate. We had a coal fire in the grate and I know now that we burned much more than the regulation allowance. In addition we had two electric radiant heaters.

As soon as the other officers came back I went on my leave. Of course I went to London. I don't recall how I happened to go there but I stayed at the Strand Palace Hotel. For my very first noon meal in London I went down to the dining room in the Strand Palace. The place was alive with people. Quite obviously second Lts. were a dime a dozen to the headwaiter. Equally obviously he was not tying up a whole table with one Second Lt. It took me about ten minutes to size up the situation. Waiting with me was an oldish English Second Lt. He wore a red armband but that meant nothing to me. I spoke to him and suggested that, if we went together, we might get a table more quickly. He was a bit hesitant but accepted. Almost immediately we were given a table for two. The Englishman was delighted.

His name was Beattie. It turned out that he worked in the War Office and that his particular line was fire prevention and fire regulations, etc., in all army buildings. He invited me to join him with his wife and niece to see a show the next evening. Of course I did. That evening was a revelation to me. It was a variety show. Such beautiful scenery, costumes and music. It was unbelievable. And so was the humour. I was never so embarrassed in all my life.

Beattie caused almost as much consternation as visiting royalty when, about a month later he, with his red armband, turned up at our barracks in Farnborough enquiring for me. I think he was a Capt. then. About a year later he was a Lt. Col. - Which was something in the British Army. I lost track of him after that.

My itinerary in London was typical I went to church in St. Paul's I was thrilled I visited Mme Toussaud's wax works I did not like them at all. I drove about the city on an outside seat on a two decker bus. Somehow I picked up a man who, for ten shillings, rode about with me, pointing out all the places of interest.

Probably the most enlightening observation that he made was about English women. He told me that they did not expect a man to spend a lot of money to entertain them. All that they wanted was companionship. His name was Piercy. He lived in London After our sightseeing he took me to his home for tea.

Sunday afternoon I went out to Hyde Park to see the soap box orators. That was really Something. There were five speaking that day. One was a woman and she could out talk them all. I was fascinated with her and stood listening when, to my horror, she stopped her Speech and publicly and personally bade me welcome to England and thanked me for coming. I moved on. Another speaker was a communist. There were about fifteen British Tommies in his audience. He was telling them what fools they were to be in uniform. The Tommies were in great spirits and un-

dertook to heckle him, which they did so effectively that he couldn't get on with his speech. Finally the communist turned to the impassive "bobby", who was on duty and asked for help. The policeman spoke to the Tommies "come now lads, let the guvnor have his saigh."

Listening to the next Speaker I found myself in conversation with a petite brunette girl. I do not remember how the conversation started but she was very pleasant. She was from Persia. Her brother was with the British army in Egypt. I suppose we talked for about ten minutes I was quite charmed. Finally she said, "You know there is a very nice Lyons tea house just across the street where we could have some tea." That was the first thing that she said to arouse my suspicions. I looked around and we were completely surrounded by a circle of people who were ignoring the speaker to watch us. I am sure that in another minute a "bookie" would have appeared from somewhere ready to quote odds on whether she would pick me up.

One evening towards the end of my leave I was getting quite lonely seeing London by myself. I went into Scotts for dinner. Again there was a wait to get a table. This time there was a woman waiting with me. I guess that I got some encouragement. At any rate, I asked her to have dinner with me. Later we went to a show. it made a good evening for me. After the show we took a taxi to her home. I did not know who was more dumfounded, she or the taxi hotel driver, when I said good night to her at her door and took the taxi back to my In February, I spent a weekend in London. Sunday morning I attended a divine service in St. Paul's cathedral I was thrilled. In spite of its' covering of soot, it was a beautiful building. The organ and choir were wonderful. I was not impressed by Westminster Abbey. I thought that it looked crumby. However the ceiling of the Henry 5th chapel was unbelievable. The fretwork in stone looked to me to be impossible, even in wood.

In the afternoon, I went to Hyde Pan and Green Park. Besides the speakers there was a model aircraft meet. Boys, with their fathers, had about twenty gas motor powered model planes. They were the first that I had seen. I was amazed at how the boys maneuvered them.

I closely examined one of the barrage balloons. Each balloon had a six wheel Ford truck on which was mounted a Fordson tractor motor to winch the balloon. In London there were hundreds of balloons.

Chapter 5: Aldershot

In January when I got back to barracks the others had had a week to get organized. Training had begun in earnest. Training areas were allotted. People were going on courses. The whole machinery went into gear quite well. It seemed that everyone trained except me. I was the junior reenforcement officer and whenever anyone went away I took his job. It was interesting but my formal military training suffered.

We shared the Tournai Barracks with the Toronto Scottish Regiment. Again it is hard to realize conditions at that time. The Toronto Scottish were a posh peace time militia Battalion. From a large centre they had a high percentage of people who were reasonably trained. Their officers were mostly men of means. Their uniforms were beautifully tailored. Contrast that with our uncouth mob. There was hardly a single uniform in the SLI that fitted. We came from everywhere in the West and very few of us knew anything about the army. The Toronto Scottish were sorely tried to be so near to us.

Right from the very first, our relations were strained. Both Battalions had arrived in the barracks just before Christmas. As a part of their celebrations the Toronto Scottish got several kegs of beer for their men. These were stored in a room where they mounted a proper sentry. A SLI man, by the name of Near, knew about this beer. Somehow he got into the store of beer and carried out one keg, which he got the Toronto Scottish sentry to watch for him while he fetched a wheelbarrow. He actually got away with that keg of beer.

We had been sternly warned, before we left Saskatoon, that this was to be a no nonsense war. We had a grim job to do and we had to do it without frills. So all of our band instruments and most of our bandsmen had been left in Canada. The Toronto Scottish were much wiser and brought their complete pipe band. Their day was ordered by the pipes. We came to think that they played the pipe so that they could breathe in unison. We got heartily sick of the skin of the pipes. Imagine my disgust in October, 1945 when the Battalion returned to Saskatoon. We were met at the station by the pipe band of the 2nd Battalion of SLI

Potts knew that we had a lot of training to do and he laid on long hours. The day began for the officers at 7 a.m., when we paraded for P.T. in the snow in front of the Officers Mess. For a long time it was dark at that hour and there was much muttering and mumbling. Maurice Dupuis made his criticism in his own unique way by turning out one morning with a coal oil lantern. But Pottsey was there every morning and P.T. continued at 7 a.m. as long as we were at Tournai.

The training day for the men finished at 4 p.m. when the officers had afternoon tea. This was a parade by which Potts intended to weld us together. Tea was followed by a lecture period for officers which lasted one hour. After that came the evening meal and preparations for the next day's work.

I had three pet peeves at that time. One was the cold. I didn't mind winter weather if I could just get warm once in awhile. But I actually felt more uncomfortable indoors than out. I did not get acclimatized until our second winter in England.

Two was the habit of the English to break for tea at 10a.m. and 4 p.m. That objection sounds amusing now. But in those days Canadians had not acquired the coffee break habit. I found it most disconcerting to be doing business with someone who would suddenly disappear for tea. In fact, I thought it frivolous. However, before long we learned that one could often transact business better over a cup of tea.

Three was the Army's method of training. It

seemed to me to be so absurd to break every movement down by numbers and to teach the boys as though they were stupid apes. It was my contention that if they gave each one the pamphlet and the weapon he would figure it out in the same way that one had to do when confronted with a new implement on the farm. It was quite some time before I realized that in the army the effort of the individual counted for almost nothing. The objective in the army was to concentrate the efforts of literally millions of individuals into one supreme effort.

The civilian had to stop thinking as a civilian and be trained to think as a fellow ant. I agree with the authorities that that process takes two years time; even with intelligent Canadian boys.

One of the first officers to go away on a course was Reg Rankin, the Intelligence Officer. I took his place. Under those circumstances the Intelligence Officer was really an assistant adjutant and Aide de Camp to the Commanding Officer. There was a great deal of organizational work to do and I did get a wonderful opportunity to learn about the organization.

Almost immediately on landing in England, Potts had taken Phil Reynolds, Officer Commanding of D Company, to be Adjutant and put Embury in command of D Company. Phil was a quiet operator and it was a pleasure to work under him. His wife, Jenny, followed us overseas and took a house in Farnborough. We officers spent many happy hours in their Farnborough home.

One of the first administrative problems arose out of the take over of the barracks by the advance party. Lt. R. Rankin had been in charge. He had been confronted with masses of documents by the Aldershot Command people. Amongst them was one itemizing barrack stores in the officers mess. There was supposed to be a complete line of tableware sufficient to serve an Officer's Mess formal dinner. This document that Reg signed transferred all the losses since about the time of the Crimean War to the SLI. Potts had another battle to fight in addition to the window-pane war.

That was an extremely cold winter by English standards. The drains from the bathrooms were all on the outside of the brick buildings. A routine was soon established. Each morning the Quartermaster would ascertain the drains that had frozen during the night. He would phone the Adjutant's office and either the Adjutant or I would phone the Command Engineers to have someone come and fix the drains. One morning the office of the Command Engineers asked to speak to our Commanding Officer. Potts got on the phone and found that he was speaking to the Commander of the Engineers. "Look here old boy, we'll fix your drains this morning but after that you will have to do it yourself." Potts exploded. He had retained enough of his English accent that it was not a case of a "Bloody colonial" speaking to an Englishman, but was one Englishman speaking to another. "If you people persist in being such damn fools as to put the drains on the outside you can bloody well bear the consequences." One day we were assigned firing ranges to do rifle practice. Potts sent me out to reconnoiter the route and range. I took a motorcycle. It was quite a pleasant day. On the way I found a green grocer. I bought some English grown apples. They were a bitter disappointment. All wormy and spoiled, only about half were fit to use.

Aldershot is a wonderful training area. In an area about fifteen miles square there are training facilities literally for an army. There are areas for manoeuvres. There are all sorts of firing ranges. Because so much is done in so small an area safety margins are cut to a minimum. And they work because, in the British Army, orders are obeyed. The ranges are used almost continuously. Different distances are accommodated in some

cases, by ranges crossing one another. I contacted the range officer. Our allotted range was Ash No. 4. I was shown the road into it. I made notes about the road and range. I reported to the adjutant. Nobody said anything to me about the Company's Commanders making a reconnaissance. However, after the Company Commander's meeting, at which my information was given, the Company Commanders decided to have a look themselves. One afternoon they all got together on motorcycles and, in a little cavalcade, started out on their own to Ash No. 4 following my route card. No one told the range officer about it. It so happened that an English machine gun battalion was doing an indirect shoot with their Vickers. Our Company Commanders just entered a wooded area as it was blanketed with a machine gun barrage. The motorcycles were soon deserted for what protection the bole of a tree could offer.

Except for some minor damage to the motorcycles, the party emerged unscathed. But I was not very popular. I am sure that that episode would have severed my connection with the Battalion were it not for Potts and McKerron. McKerron was a 1914-18 Veteran. I believe that that barrage revived memories and that he actually enjoyed it. At any rate I had been on the roll of A Company. Shortly after that I was transferred to B Company commanded by Maj. Drayton Walker.

One of our great trials, on arriving in England, was getting accustomed to the blackouts. Our interpretation of a good blackout quite often did not meet with the approval of the air raid warden. Vehicles charging about on a black dark night, with only pin points of lights showing from their headlamp, made driving very difficult. Amongst the anti-invasion preparations huge concrete roadblocks were constructed throughout the country. One night Pte. Rice, a Dispatch Rider of A Company, was riding his motorcycle. He came to two red lights on the road. He drove between them, headlong into a concrete block. He broke both legs. In 1947, I saw him in Vancouver. Before the war he had been a bank inspector. His bank hesitated to entrust him with his former responsibilities because of his physical condition. His case is typical of the many such sacrifices that were made in this period.

During the first month rations caused a great deal of trouble. The scale of issue was tremendous in comparison with what we lived on two years later. But the cooks were inexperienced and often food was wasted by being poorly cooled. Some rations were stolen. Whatever the reason the men often did not get enough to eat and they complained bitterly. However, this was eventually straightened out.

Recreation was slowly organized. Aldershot has long been an army area. The civilians there had all their fill of soldiers and certainly were not impressed by the Canadians. Although there were no real incidents, our reaction to Aldershot, after being their four months was that it might not be a bad idea to let Hitler have the place.

One habit of the local inhabitants that particularly annoyed me was their insistence on paying bus fares. We depended on the public transport for our recreational trips. Coming back to the barracks was nearly always on the last bus of the night. It would be a double deck bus, with a driver and ticket collector. The blackout was strict. The bus, both seats and aisles, would be jammed. The ticket collector would get stuck in the upper aisle. The civilians would refuse to get off until they had paid their fare and we would be worrying about the time that we would be checking into the barracks.

The Theatre Royal in Aldershot staged live productions. The management soon learned that a bit of music and a couple nudes would fill the house with Canadians. That lasted for about one

month after which we began to demand some talent. One show of this period featured a snake charmer. A nude woman had a snake coil itself about her. That show disgusted me. Maurice Dupuis was entranced by the snake charmer.

Through Potts' direction we officers joined the Aldershot Officer's Club. They had a cut rate for about 12 shillings per month. Any time that I went there the place was full of Canadians and much too crowded. That was really a bit of windfall for the Aldershot Club. In 1942 when I was with the Holding Unit, I did attend one bang up function there which I enjoyed. Any other time that I belonged I considered it to be money thrown away. In September 1945, when we were on our way home, I dropped in there one afternoon to see if I would recognize anyone. There were a half dozen Limey officers who behaved very much as though I had the measles. I felt like smashing up the joint to work out my money.

One day I was in the office alone when Col. McCusker, the Senior Div. Medical Officer, dropped in with five invitations to a tea that Lady Somebody was holding on Sunday. When Potts came back he was feeling quite magnanimous and he told me to distribute them in the Mess. I kept one and gave the others to Rankin, de Faye, Fullerton and Dawe. We had a bit of trouble finding the right place. It was a large country home. The room in which the tea was held was about three times the size of the Hall in Fiske. There were check rooms for the clothing, etc. It turned out that the guests included the King and Queen of Siam, Princess Patricia Ramsey, the Naval Attache' to the American Ambassador and so on. Lady Somebody else, who had three eligible daughters there, invited us to visit her in her London house. On the whole we were a bit overwhelmed. Tommy dated the girl from the check room. But when we got back to the Mess we laid it on to Pottsey as to what he had missed.
The intellectuals in our Battalion were Ben Allen, Fred Dawe, and Reg Rankin. I think that each had his Master's degree. They had bull sessions nearly every night. Sometimes I would sit around and listen. But usually they were beyond my depth. One favorite topic was "fixing" the position of a machine gun on the ground by means of the stars.

Our affiliated Regiment in the British Army was the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI). Early in our stay in Tournai Barracks the Colonel of the KOYLI, General Sir Charles Deedes, visited our Battalion. He inspected our ranks on parade and spoke briefly to the Battalion. Afterwards the officers gathered in the Mess where they were presented to Sir Charles. Then the General took a KOYLI lanyard and placed it about Potts' neck and expressed the wish that our Battalion should adopt the KOYLI dress regulations. It was a great honour for our Battalion and few appreciated the honour as much as Potts did. I have never seen anyone so genuinely moved or more pleased.

After the proper authorities had given permission, our Battalion adopted the lanyard, buttons and green color of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. Quite a minor detail to a civilian. It was really a tremendous influence in the building up and maintenance of morale in our Battalion.

Phil Reynolds went on leave for a week and I took over as Adjutant. One day I just got seated in the office after noon, when a Major Guy Simonds came in. I don't think that I have ever seen anyone anywhere in such a livid rage. He literally radiated hate and anger. He wanted to know where Potts was. I told him. When Potts came back he was to get in touch with Simonds at Div. Headquarters immediately. Simonds was the officer at Div. Headquarters in charge of training of the three machine gun battalions. The Aldershot Command could train nearly a

whole army at once. But that was only possible because of careful planning and a high rate of utilization of the facilities. The rifle ranges were in use throughout the hours of daylight. Meals had to be so arranged that firing was continuous. It seems that, on this day, Simonds had decided to have a look at how the SLI were doing, "D" Company was at the ranges. He arrived there at noon.

Embury was Officer Commanding D Company. He deliberately set out to ingratiate himself with the Officers and Non Commissioned Officers of his Company. He had quite properly arranged to have the noon meal brought out for the men. But he wasn't having his officers and Non Commissioned Officer's treated like that. At 12 o'clock the rifles were stacked. The food was served to the men. He left the Company in charge of a lance Corporal, ball ammunition and all, loaded officers and Non Commissioned Officers in trucks and went back to barracks to eat like decent human beings. Then Simonds arrived at the range.

Potts was a long time at Div. Headquarters that evening. When he came back he told me to publish PT I orders transferring Embury back as Adjutant. There were further long conferences the next day and the day following I had to rescind the previous day's orders. Embury stayed with D Company but now he really was in the dog house.

Most of every Saturday morning was taken up by the Commanding Officer's inspection of barracks. I was always on that with RSM Quinn. Potts had dug up a great silver cup which was awarded each week for the week to the Company which he considered to have the neatest lines. After the range episode, D Company didn't have a chance. It was nearly a month later when Potts had chosen A Company as the winner.
On this Saturday morning I was sure that D Company was the best. When we got into the orderly room Potts announced A Company the winner. I think what followed was characteristic of Potts' method of command. Certainly it was of my relationship with him. Potts said A Company. I felt no qualms in speaking up and saying that I thought he was wrong and that I would choose D Company. Without a moment's hesitation he turned to the RSM. What did he think? The RSM thought that D Company was the best. Again without hesitation he turned to me and said, "Alright Mitchell, D Company," and he actually was pleased about giving D Company the honour. He held no grudges.

Shortly after Rankin got back MacDonald, the transport officer, went on a course for a month. So I became transport officer. Transport at that time consisted mostly of impressed civilian vehicles of all makes. One was never quite sure how long they would run. And the intricacies of an English made motor were quite a discovery for our boys.

The transport boys were a grand lot. MacDonald was not a very regimental type. His section were just a team of pals. I did not quite fit in but they were a good lot. One of my first days there, one of the drivers told of his experience the evening before. He had met this girl once before. She was really lovely stuff. So he dated her for the evening and some might say his intentions were not the best. He went to her home where he met Mom and Pop. Just when he was wondering how he was going to handle the situation, the girl suggested that they go for a walk. Fine. Only thing wrong was that he was strange to the country and she knew it intimately. She kept telling him of all the wonderful sights and they walked and walked and walked till they had covered ten miles. This was after a full day's parade. When the walk had ended all that he could think of were his feet.
The T. Office was in the same building and right next the RQM office. Capt. Archie Gray looked

after me like a father. He corrected the way I wore my uniform. He corrected my posture. He instructed me in the ways of the army. One day I had a Non Commissioned Officer to break. The fellow was unreliable and in my language "just no damn good." Archie showed me the military language "Not likely to develop into a good NCO."

Archie was a grand fellow. He should never have gone overseas. He was a First War Veteran. And he had done yeoman service with the Non Permanent Active Militia Battalion. He wasn't physically fit. Some papers must have been altered a bit just to give Archie the trip overseas with the Battalion as a reward for his faithful peace time service.

One Sunday morning, Archie and I were detailed to take the church parade. Those moments were really the highlights of his life. This morning he took over the parade from the RSM. In his thick Scots accent "Parade will move to the right in column of route, right." This was the First War Command. Nothing happened. Archie flushed and gave the order again. At the right moment I added the word "turn" and we were away.

One day I was working on some papers in the Transport office and Archie came striding in. I jumped up and saluted. "Come with me!" and Archie turned and strode out of the office. Archie was in a terrible mood. I followed him. We went to the Commanding Officer's office. Both Potts and Reynolds were seated at their desks when Archie and I paraded in. I still hadn't the foggiest notion of what was up. Archie was so angry that his brogue was very bad. Slowly I gathered that he had checked the barrack stoves in the men's mess hall and discovered that there was one coal burning stove missing. On enquiring he was told that I had taken it.
Nearly ten days before I had been in the shed that the Transport boys used as a shop. It was a plain corrugated iron structure with a concrete floor. There was no heat. It was unbearable for anyone to work in the cold on the vehicles. The Transport Sgt. told me that he had been talking about this to the Sgt. Cook. The Sgt. Cook said that there were four coal heaters in the men's mess hail and only three were ever used. I thought it was a good idea so we went over to see the Sgt. Cook. "Sure take the stove." So I told the Transport Sgt. to move the stove. Which he did. They had to cut a hole in the corrugated iron for the smoke pipe. The smoke pipe was cast iron and in eight foot lengths. They had to cut one of them. But they got the stove working and everybody was happy until Archie made his monthly check of barrack stores.

Both Potts and Reynolds were amused by Archie's anger. Their faces were very stern but as the story unfolded a twinkle came into their eyes. When Archie finished Potts spoke to me. "Mitchell is that right?" "Yes Sir." "Put the stove back." "But sir I can't. They cut the pipes." "Put the stove back, that is all," and he banged the table.

Archie and I marched out. I told the Transport Sgt. to get a new pipe from the iron monger and put the stove back. It cost me £1, 10s.

Sometime later Archie went to hospital. I visited with him in Connaught hospital several times. He was touched to think that I, the junior officer of the Battalion should think of him. Eventually Archie was sent back to Canada. He was the first to return. The officer's wives in Saskatoon had formed an association to console themselves a bit. Of course Archie had to talk to them as did each returning officer. Amongst other things Archie told one officer's wife what a fine boy her man was. The other officers were chasing around England after all sorts of girls but her man only went out with one girl and she was really lovely.

My biggest headache, at the Transport Office, was motorcycles and especially when officers were using them. The worst offender was Maurice Dupuis. One day I happened to go out to the training area and encountered Maurice riding a motorcycle. He had no business to have it. He was just tearing around the area with it. When I saw him he was riding through the trees. In this spot there was no underbrush and the trees were about six feet apart and staggered. Maurice rode through them at quite a speed. It was really a feat but one that could only lead to disaster, from my point of view. I reported this to Potts and Maurice was barred from using motorcycles altogether. Part of our barrack stores included Air raid equipment. In this equipment was a bicycle. Maurice got this bicycle out and rode it around the lines for hours on end just for Potts' sake. He could do almost anything with it. What I thought was the best exhibition was when he rode the bicycle sitting backwards, on the handlebars, and he crossed a three inch hose lying on the pavement without touching the hose.

Maurice was a very clever person. He was also a slave to alcohol. It was a great pity. He could be such a fine fellow. One evening at Jenny Reynold's house he was the life of the party with a two string toy instrument that belonged to the little girl next door.

One night, after a bout of drinking, Maurice decided to take a bath at about midnight. The bathroom on his floor was just across the hall from Potts' room. Maurice got into the bathroom and decided that he did not want to be disturbed, so he locked the door. I don't suppose that the lock had ever before been used. At any rate it stuck and at 2 a.m., when Maurice had finished soaking in the tub, he couldn't get the door open. So he yelled and roused Potts. They couldn't get the door open, so Potts took the fire axe out of its glass case and chopped the door open. Maurice's modesty caused more amusement than anything else about the episode.

Not long after this we were in the midst of a series of after tea lectures on machine gunning. Maurice got horribly drunk that afternoon. In the midst of the lecture he got sick. Without a word to anyone he jumped out of the window. He went on to his room and never said anything to anyone. Potts was present at the time. That was the end of Maurice. He had literally jumped out of the Battalion.

Quite characteristically of the army, just after Macdonald, the Transport Officer, went off on his long course to learn how the Army wanted drivers to drive, I, the acting Transport Officer, was called on to organize training for the drivers. Our only transport were two dozen impressed vehicles and some motor cycles. But we were to train and classify our drivers so that we would be ready to properly use our regular transport when it was issued.

I am neither a good mechanic nor a good driver. But I had once taken a short course on farm mechanics. Using that as the plan to follow and adding map reading and a bit on march discipline, we were away. We had five separate subjects and we rounded up quite a competent group of instructors in each. We had one hundred and twenty-five drivers to train. They had training in military subjects as well. It was all integrated into a master plan by Major McKerron. As I recall it, our "course" lasted three weeks. At the end of the course we had the various instructors give a series of tests and then Lts. Walsh, Rankin and myself took each driver out with a truck and rated his driving ability and his ability to read a map. One aftermath of this came six months later, when I was transferred to a platoon in the "C" Company. The driver mechanic of the platoon was a L/Cpl Green. Off parade the first day I overhead Green telling a buddy - "There is the SOB who thinks that l am a third class driver."

One night towards the end of our course we held a night convoy. We had nineteen motorcycles manned by Dispatch Riders. The boys had some twenty trucks in fit shape to make the trip, which was to be of some thirty miles. All of the trip was to be made with the strictest blackout discipline. We had no need for so many Dispatch Riders, but everyone had been training enthusiastically and we did not like to ground anyone.

So we took every vehicle that would run. It was the climax of our course and I asked Col. Potts if he would like to make the trip to see how the boys were doing. He would. Everything started out beautifully. We got to a railway underpass at Fleet where we were to make a turn. I got a mile down the turn and a Dispatch Rider came tearing up to say that we had lost half of our column. The Dispatch Rider on point duty at that turn had miscounted the vehicles and in his eagerness to be on his bike had left his station too soon.

In the blackout it took us an hour or more to retrieve our vehicles. Shortly after we had completed our "course" for the drivers Macdonald the Transport Officer came back from his course. He knew what the army expected of a driver but that phase of training had been passed and he was never given the opportunity to train the drivers that I had had.

The Colonel-in-Chief of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, our affiliated regiment, was the Duchess of York who became Queen Elizabeth, wife of George VI. She inspected our battalion on 8 April, 1940. King George had driven through our ranks very informally shortly after we had arrived in England. The Queen's visit was our first official recognition after we had had an opportunity to train. It was a tremendous event in the story of our Battalion. There was spit and polish with a vengeance for a few days.

Her Majesty inspected our Battalion on Queen's Parade between Aldershot and Farnborough. Then we did a "march past". After the "March Past" we officers fell out and were whisked back to our quarters where we quickly changed into service dress uniform. Then we were posed on the lawn by the official photographer so that we were already when Her Majesty arrived. She sat down and the pictures were taken. Then each of us were presented to Her Majesty. After that she had lunch with the senior officers of our Battalion and the Toronto Scottish.

Potts had spent a great deal of time and thought preparing for the Queen's visit. He had been most meticulous about the dress of the officers. For the picture, our Service Dress must include a dark coloured khaki dress shirt. Some of us did not have that particular type and it was with some difficulty that we got them all the same.

When the picture was developed there was Potts wearing a light coloured khaki shirt. During the "March Past", when doing "Eyes Right", I had noticed tears in Her Majesty's eyes That evening, in the Mess, I told Potts about it. Very gruffly, he replied, "Yes I know." The Queen made a tremendous impression. She was so genuine. So interested in everyone, so gentle, so deeply concerned about the web of events which had enmeshed all of us.

Toward spring, I began to get my fill of people. Everywhere that I turned there were so many. I wanted to get away by myself for a few hours so that I could sort out my thoughts and get a better perspective. If only I could have ridden around my pasture fence!

On Sunday I went, by myself, for a walk along the Basingstoke Canal. I found a secluded spot and laid down in the sun. In the hour or so that I was there at least one hundred people stopped and peered at me. A man lying in the brush

alone, was really something in England.
My second leave was Easter week which I spent in London. I attended one of the "off time" services in St. Pauls'. I was very disappointed. My real thrill was hearing Sir Thomas Beecham conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir as they performed Handel's "Messiah". It was in Albert Hall. There was a pipe organ as well. The performance was marvelous. Equally impressive was the sight of at least half of the great audience following the musical score as it was being played.

One Sunday, early in April, Potts laid on an excursion to the sea coast for the whole Battalion. We used all of our impressed vehicles and took nearly everyone to the seaside town of Littlehampton, which was quite deserted at that time of the year. It was not much of a day there, but the trip through the countryside was wonderful. In my memory lives a most beautiful picture of peaceful England. As we crossed the hogsback at Guildford, that sunny Sunday morning, we came upon a little ivy covered stone church sitting under the beeches and surrounded by the Crocii strewn green fields. The church bell was ringing and from all directions people were walking in twos and three times to the church. It is the happiest and most peaceful memory that I have of England.

"Oh to be in England now that April is here."

After Dunkirk, where there was a real possibility of a German invasion, normal tolling of church bells was stopped. The tolling of the bells was to warn everyone that the invasion had begun. During this time in Tournai we developed some very definite routines. The BBC news at noon came at 12:30 just as we ate in the Officer's mess.

Weston the biscuit manufacturer, had given our Battalion some portable battery radios. Potts always carried one of these radios into the mess which he switched on for the news. Those were the days when the "phoney" war gave way to the over running of France, We officers were frequently packed off to various meetings where some visiting general from the CIGS down would address us. Time and again we were told that the "Boche has missed the boat." "By not finishing off France before the onset of winter the Germans had missed their opportunity to win and given us time to prepare." This line was continued until the spring offensive made it ridiculous.

I can still feel those tragic electric moments when each day, the news would tell of some fresh disaster. At first we were casual and philosophical. But as army after army was swept aside it became unbelievable. When the news was finished Potts would shut off the radio. For a moment, everyone would sit, silent with his own thoughts. Then, to break the spell, Potts would jump up and, with a great commotion, leave with his radio. Work was the great comforter.

Chapter 6: Bulford Camp

During April we, and the Toronto Scottish, spent a month doing field firing and training on Salisbury Plains. Our camp was at Bulford. We lived in tents. A great portion of the time rain fell and it was most disagreeable. We lived under British army conditions. Some things seemed so senseless. I can still see the chief instructor's hands, one cold wet day. He had us out in the open doing some training. During all the time his hands were bare and a blue black in colour, from the cold. For some reason he did not wear gloves and it seemed so stupid to me.
Nearby was the town of Amesbury. One Sunday, Vergne and I walked over there and stopped in at a tea house for refreshment. I casually1asked for ice cream. I can still hear the waitress's retort. "Where do you think you are - in London?"

Near Amesbury the RAF had an experimental air station. They had some ninety different kinds of aeroplanes. The Halifax and Lancaster bombers were a revelation to me. It was incredible that such huge things could be lifted off the ground.

I was on B Company's strength. I had not done any training with the Company at Farnborough so I more or less tagged along with my platoon. As always happens, the platoon sergeant carried the load. The chief instructor, one day, quizzed me quite closely. I had spent my spare winter moments with the pamphlet. I guess I had memorized some parts. At any rate this instructor, who had written the pamphlet, was overwhelmed by getting the text back, verbatim.

The two Battalions trained separately under the same staff of the Netheravon Small Arms School. The climax of the period was to be a shooting competition between the two Battalions. During the training, the Company, the platoon and the section, with the best firing record was chosen to represent each Battalion.

That was one of the most memorable days in the history of our Battalion. Many explanations are given depending on whether the speaker is Toronto Scottish or Saskatchewan. LI.

The competition was held on a six hundred yard range. On a sand embankment, six hundred yards away, were a dozen or so steel plates which would bounce when hit with the bullets. It was a clear dry day and there was a gala spirit in the air. Both Battalions had trained very hard. Each were determined to demonstrate their merits.

Major McKerron was a machine gun officer in the First War. The evening before the shoot, he very quietly took the Armourer Sgt. and the twelve machine guns to be used, off to a range where they zeroed the sights. No one in the Toronto Scottish Camp thought to do so. That is a point that is rarely mentioned. The Toronto Scottish thought that zeroing the guns was not quite cricket. The instructional staff on the school were very happy to find that our Battalion was so competent. We were training for war. At any rate the actual competition was begun on terms that were not quite even.

For the competition the guns and stores were laid out on the ground, dismantled. The gun crew, on the command to begin, ran thirty yards, picked up stores, ran another thirty yards, and went into action. The first to hit the plates won. I have never attended a sporting event anywhere when the competitive spirit and excitement was higher. It was a very thrilling occasion. Company, platoon, section, Officers, Sgts, and Cpls. The Saskatchewan. LI won every event. It was a complete route.
After that period of training the Saskatchewan. LI. was chosen as the Machine Group Battalion for the 1st Division. The Toronto Scottish were slated for the 2nd Division. It was a wonderful finish to a hard cruel winter.

There was an aftermath to this famous "shoot" which had a very bad effect on the Saskatchewan. LI. After the successful shoot, Potts very properly praised all ranks for the tremendous effort that had been made in the winter training. He used the results of the shoot as proof of the superior effort that our Battalion had made. This was repeated so often that everyone, even the Company commanders, came to believe it implicitly. With some people it might not have mattered. But our Second in command, Maj. McKerron, was extremely sensitive about his achievements. He had been the officer in charge of training throughout the winter but of course each Company Commander had been personally responsible for his own Company and was not too anxious to share the credit. Then this personal contribution of McKerron's, in zeroing the guns, was casually overlooked even by Potts. I think that it was a major factor in undermining McKerron's ego.

Nearby to Bulford camp was a British A.T.S. training camp. On the last Tuesday that we were at Bulford, the A.T.S. staged a dance in our honour. We supplied the liquor. The A.T.S. looked after everything else. The Battalion had a grand evening.

One of the A.T.S. staff was Captain Gilmour. Her husband was a lieutenant in the Coldstream Guards. Capt. Gilmour's mother was Mrs. Christie-Miller who owned the nearby Clarendon Estate. Mrs. Christie-Miller invited the officers of our Battalion to have tea with her on the following Sunday.

The Clarendon Estate is the original estate of the Duke of Clarendon. It comprised of eight thousand acres. About the time of William the Conqueror, the king established a hunting park there. He built a huge castle - larger than Windsor Castle - as a hunting lodge. The Duke of Clarendon got his "start" as the keeper of His Majesty's hunting estate. The old castle is in ruins. The newer house of the Duke is a mile away from the ruins. Part of it was built in 1540. The newer part was built in 1850.

It was a long stone building, rather plain set on a beautifully grassed terrace. It was partly hidden by wistaria which was in full bloom. A couple of cedars guarded the house. Behind was a formal garden. The grass out in clear cut patterns. The yew trees were carefully trimmed. All the grounds were thick woods. Off the grounds, in the shelter of the tree there was a swimming pool with a thatch roofed bath house. From there you bus to see, about half a mile away, an artificial lake that was stocked with speckled trout. Major McKerron, our fisherman, caught two that weighed a pound and half each.

The most beautiful sight was the wild flower garden. It was in, what was called, a small coulee in amongst the trees. There must have been about acres in the garden. There was a variety of trees. There were oaks, pines poplars , beeches and more than I could name. Each was growing in a natural setting but each was placed so that its' neighbor enhanced the other's beauty. In amongst these trees, again in natural settings, were clumps of rhodendrons, magnolias, and literally dozens of other varieties of blooms in all shades. Again the colour harmony was perfect. I have seen very few pictures that even very faintly resembled such a scene.

Mrs. Christie-Miller had thirty evacuee children in her house. They were dressed colourfully and were playing in the garden.

We had tea and a "scotch" in the house. It was centred around a large foyer into which led a huge staircase. There was a leopard skin rug in front, of the hearth. There were oil paintings, suits of armours, and very old bits of furniture, The huge dining room was closed and filled with stored furniture.

The place reeked with tradition. Two of the oak trees on the place are listed in the Dooms Day Book. Nelsons' ship, the Victory, is said to have been built from timbers cut on the grounds. But the most remarkable feature is quite recent. The "coulee" was infested with brambles twenty years before. The wild flower garden was the creation of Mrs. Christie-Miller. Her husband had been killed in WWI. Her son had to leave before the end of our tea to report to his Guards Regiment.

Chapter 7: We Start On Our Way To War

We returned to Tournai Barracks. There were a tremendous number of refugees being brought into Britain from the continent. It was known that fifth columnists were amongst the refugees. As a precaution the 1st Canadian Div. was moved into Northamptonshire to be in the area where the refugees were being sheltered. B. Company, with the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade, moved to Kettering. I was in charge of the advance party for B Company. Pearkes commanded the Brigade. Keller was the Brigade Major and Gostling was the Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General. I reported to Gostling in the police station at Kettering. The city was divided up by city blocks for each unit. B Company were allotted two residential blocks. After our briefing from the Army, the Chief of Police told us to come to him if we had any trouble. This was in the morning. The Brigade were due to arrive during that night.

I at out to our area and found a very hospitable lot of people in very modest homes. One lady told me she wanted the officers to billet with her. So that was that. Every other place every person, without exception, said how glad they were that the Canadians were coming, but that they just didn't have any room to spare. I talked to every householder. Then I went back to the police station. The Chief instructed the constable normally on duty in my area, to help me. He knew every householder. I told him how many billets I needed and he figured out exactly where each was to go. Then we went from door to door. He did all the talking. "Good afternoon Mrs. Doe. You shall have two Canadians to billet tonight. Good day!"

At every place there were protests, but the constable never heard them. In two hours time we had our Company all arranged for.

The Company actually arrived at about four a.m. We arranged for breakfast at 9 a.m. and the first parade at 10 a.m. Then everyone bedded down in their billets. I was prepared for a storm of complaints on that first parade. This was our first contact with the normal Britisher. It was the first time out of the atmosphere of Aldershot. I was thinking in terms of what would happen in Canada were a bunch of foreign troops forced onto Canadian householders.

There was not a single complaint. I was amazed and questioned the boys. It turned out that at least half of them had been served tea in bed by their hosts and nearly one third had had an egg or something else to eat. When we had left Aldershot, we were almost prepared to leave England and let Hitler have the country. We were absolutely fed up with the Englishmen we met in the Aldershot area. But the ordinary Britisher, that we met in his own home, completely overwhelmed us. It was almost a shock treatment. Certainly any Canadian who was in England from May to August in 1940, formed many very dear friendships and fell in love with the country.

The move into the Northampton area had been by Brigade groups. After a short time there, we were scheduled to go to France. The Saskatchewan. LI were to regroup as a Battalion and move to Louisberg Barracks in Borden. Potts, with Reynolds, and Rankin, had been taken from the Battalion temporarily to head up another force while we were in the Northampton area. Maj. McKerron was in command of the Saskatchewan. LI with Percy Klaehn as Adjutant. I was called into the Battalion Head Quarters as acting Intelligence Officer.

The order for us to move to Louisberg Barracks reached Battalion headquarters from Div. Headquarters at about 1800 hours. Of course, by the Battalion grapevine, it soon spread to the whole Battalion. The procedure for the official order still

sticks in my mind. After the Battalion had been in action in Italy for six months, such a move would have hardly caused a second thought.

On this particular evening, Maj. McKerron, the acting Commanding Officer, was dining out. Percy and I did not think it necessary to call him in as we knew he would be back by 2000 hours and the Battalion move was not until 0600 hours the next day. We got out our maps and pamphlets and proceeded to draught the move order for the Battalion. By 2000 hours we had it all typed, ready for the Commanding Officer's approval. McKerron did not turn up until 2100 hours and he did not approve of what we had done at all. We got down to business again. The Dispatch Riders delivered the move order to the last Company by 0500 hours. Of course by that time, they were ready to move.

Potts and the others rejoined the Battalion at Louisberg. We were very bus, checking stores. Everyone was given a short leave. By this time there was a very real invasion scare developing. For the first time everyone was sent on leave fully equipped so that, in case of emergency, he would do his bit wherever he happened to be.

Seven years later, I learned of an incident that happened at this time. Reynolds was Commanding Officer of the Reserve Battalion and had asked me to explore the possibility of organizing a Company in the Rosetown and Kindersley area. I was in Kindersley sounding out local opinion. As I walked down the street of Kindersley, in civvies, a man, also in civvies, gave me a very smart salute. Without thinking I returned the salute. After a dozen paces I realized how silly the whole thing was. I turned about and followed the man into the Legion Clubroom. There I learned that he was Forbes, who had been with the Battalion. I told him of my mission. He volunteered to help me in any way that he could with one exception - he would not join. "You will do anything except carry a rifle." "What do you know about a rifle?" "Oh, not very much." "You know I didn't think that anyone knew about it but it seems the whole army does."

By this time I was aware that he had a story. After suitable priming he told it. He had gone on leave from Louisberg. One evening he was in a pub with his rifle slung over his shoulder. He was the only soldier in the pub at the time. He got into an argument with the "limey's". Something was said about the Canadians that enraged him. Without a thought he grabbed his rifle and loaded it. At gun point he forced everyone out of the building. "I'd have drilled the first SOB that opened his mouth." Then, all alone in the pub, he realized what he had done.

As quickly as he could he rejoined the Battalion. Of course he was back before his leave had expired. RSM Quinn put two and two together, and greeted him with an admonition to be careful about what he did with his rifle in the future.

The time approached when we were to embark. On the last night that we were together, the officers had an informal stag party in the mess. We drank toasts to everyone, praising the singular virtues of each. The next morning McKerron left with the advance party and put their vehicles on board ship at Plymouth. They were just going on board themselves, when they got orders to take their vehicles off again. France had been given up. What a terrible demoralizing time! We were not given much time to think about it.

In a way that was perhaps the most fortuitous thing that happened to 1st Canadian Division during the war. We were horribly unprepared for war. I have no doubt, had we moved into a static theatre, that we would have very quickly learned the ropes. But to have landed in France, when the situation was fluid, would have been an experience too horrible to imagine. The fortunes of war

gave us time to train so that, when we did contact the enemy, we were considered among the best of the shock troops.

Chapter 8: The Defence of Britain

The 1st Canadian Division was moved into the Oxford area where we went under canvas. For the move I was attached to Division for traffic control duty. We assembled beforehand and remained on duty until the whole Division had moved.

When I rejoined the Battalion I found that a Reconnaissance Troop had been formed in the Battalion and that I was to command it. This was one of McNaughton's ideas. There was a great possibility of an invasion both by sea or by air. Fifth columnists were especially feared. The Reconnaissance Troop consisted of 40 all ranks who were mounted on motorcycles and equipped with Bren and Thompson Sub Machine guns. They were to reach any point quickly and be prepared for anything.

The Reconnaissance Troop had been organized before the Battalion left Louisberg Barracks. Bobby Irvine had been given to understand that he was Officer Commanding. Some misunderstanding developed over a pass and Potts announced that I was to be Officer Commanding with Bobby as Second in command. I had nominally qualified in Saskatoon but nothing had come through Pt II orders. I was still wearing one pip. Bobby had qualified and served for sometime as a full lieutenant in the Non Permanent Active Militia with the Regina Rifles. He had come to the Saskatchewan. LI with the draft from the Regina Rifles that joined us just before we left Saskatoon.

Potts had laid on that each Company Commander was to transfer a Non Commissioned Officer and some men to form the nucleus of the Reconnaissance Troop. He was explicit that they should not be cast offs. On the whole they were a good lot. Naturally the Non commissioned officers transferred were not the best trained of each Company. A couple of them had been demoted for some misdemeanor and were being given a second chance by this transfer. Sgt. Edelman, who was Troop Sgt. was transferred from Reg't Provost. He was a good man but had very little military training. I did not even know anything about modern infantry section leading.

Commanding the Reconnaissance Troop was one job that I should have refused and I consider it to have been a mistake on Pott's part to have me put in the position that he did. Finally the Reconnaissance Troop nearly broke my heart. Looking back now I can see that I was very lucky to have gotten out of it as easily as I did.

The Reconnaissance Troop had a very important job to do. So important that within the year all the Reconnaissance Troops were gathered together and formed into a Reconnoiter Battalion - P.L.D.G.'s under Lt. Col. Harry Foster -a crack cavalry officer. The Reconnaissance Troop Saskatchewan. LI. should have been commanded by a trained officer.

My first problem - my relations with Bobby Irwine was resolved by Embury claiming him for his Company. They were very close friends. Bobby and I were not suited to each other and the circumstances surrounding the creation of the Reconnaissance Troop made things worse. On civvy street Bobby worked in a department store. He was a glib organization man -- the kind of person a farmer suspects of relying on his tongue to carry him rather than actual performance. Actually, later on, Bobbie served on Brigade staff and was considered a valuable man.

I had barely gotten myself settled in my ~w job when the Battalion was ordered to move to the Chipstead area. I was to command the advance party. The advance party consisted of one Cpl from each Company and Battalion Headquarters. We had one truck. We were to put the Battalion

into more or less permanent quarters under canvas in the area. The first thing that I looked for was water. Then there had to be room so that the tents could be concealed. There had to be good standing and concealment for the tracks. We drove around the area allotted to us and the spots seemed reasonably obvious. I contacted the owners. As in Kettering everyone was so pleased to have the Canadians come but they simply could not have them on their property.

I can still see one chap. He was the manager of the Head Office of an Insurance Company. Their Head Office building was in the centre of quite a large estate. There was a large expanse of green grass. A good gravel driveway bisected it and went around the back. Lovely shade trees lined each side of the driveway. At regular intervals were water faucets, located conveniently to water the grass. What a natural! That manager used all the powers of persuasion at his disposal trying to convince me that his property was not suitable.

We had arrived at Chipstead in the morning. The Battalion was to due arrive at 1800 hours. It was getting well on into the afternoon and we had not been welcomed anywhere. So we sat down and disposed the Battalion. I don't remember all of the Company's but we put C Company on the driveway in front of the Insurance Building and A Company back of it. Battalion Headquarters and Reconnaissance Troop went into pasture fields near Chipstead Church. We did an excellent job of picking Company areas. Everyone in the Battalion was well pleased.

Then I made a horrible mistake. The dispersal point had been laid on in Pott's order, What I should have done was to improvise a bunch of markers and blaze the route of each Company. Instead I took each Cpl to his Company area and back to the dispersal point where he was to get into the leading vehicle of his Company and guide it to the proper area. We were still very new to England. English roads were a great mystery, after the sign posts had been removed. We had spent so much of our time in talking to people that we did not have enough to enable each of us to learn his own route. The result was that even I got lost. What a schmozzle! We had Companies meeting each other from opposite directions.

Chipstead became our home in England. It was a pleasant rural part with good middle class residential areas. Besides the Headquarters of the Insurance Company, the Windmill press had an establishment there complete with a recreation hall for their employees. Every civilian felt an obligation to the soldiers. Every bathtub in the area was set aside for the troops for a few hours each day. Every household entertained the Canadians. Our most pleasant memories of the war are associated with Chipstead.

Shortly after we were established at Chipstead, Potts laid on a cocktail party on Sunday afternoon in order that we might entertain the local people. I can still hear one dowager talking about George. "George had been so useful and the wretched Home Guard had shot him." I kept trying to figure out what George could have been. It turned out that George had been a gardener who had doubled as a chauffeur. George had been challenged one night by the Home Guard sentry. George had not stopped.

We settled down to training. The Reconnaissance Troop were attached to Battalion Headquarters and came under the supervision of the Second in command, McKerron. We followed a training schedule which he approved. Each Saturday morning he inspected us very minutely Of course we soon learned what he looked for and were prepared.

One day the inspection went smoothly. There wasn't a thing that McKerron checked us on.

When he finished McKerron turned to me and asked me, "Mitchell, when are you going to realize that you are in command of real live soldiers."
"What do you mean, Sir?"
"Why are the Bren guns not loaded? You should be ready to fight any minute."

So after that our Bren guns were loaded. When we traveled they were on a fixed mount on the motorcycles. Our' training took us through all the surrounding cities. I often wonder what the good burgesses of Epsom, Purley, Croydon, etc. would have said had they known that there were live bullets in those Bren barrels that pointed at them. One day, after a training trip, one of the boys was dismounting his Bren and he accidentally discharged a round which went through Percy Klaehn's tent a half mile away. Percy was resting on his cot at the time.

Our motorcycles were Nortons. They were good bikes. We had ordinary solo bikes. And we had Nortons with sidecars on which were fixed mounts for the Brens. There was a lever which allowed the third wheel to be connected solidly with the main drive wheel. There was no differential. It gave the three wheelers great traction. They really could go through a lot. The only disadvantage was that when the third wheel was locked they were hard to steer.

Every Canadian imagines himself to be a natural on a motorcycle. There was a speedometer on the bikes. Nearly everybody had to see the needle at its' topmost position. I never did like a motorcycle. Under the best circumstances I found the noise of all those bikes intolerable. There were times that I thought I would go crazy. One chap I can remember.

Fleming was really a good cyclist. He drove a solo bike and was our best rider. One day he was on sick parade. So I detailed him to take a three wheeler and carry the other sick person to see the Medical Officer. They didn't even get out of my sight when the bike went out of control. The third wheel was engaged. He went too fast. He couldn't steer it and he drove over a compost heap on the roadside. When I saw them, he, his passenger, and the bike, were all above the roadside fence sailing through the air with the greatest of ease.

Chapter 9: Change of Command

A few weeks after we settled at Chipstead, Potts was promoted to command Second Canadian Infantry Brigade. McKerron was given command of Saskatchewan. LI. He took as his Second in command, Phil Reynolds. It was a good combination, in my opinion. McKerron was a master of the technical side of machine gunnery. He had had war experience and a great deal of Non Permanent Active Militia experience as well. Phil was a natural administrator. He never got flustered and he always came up with a good answer. But Phil was the junior major in the Battalion. Some Company Commanders were up in arms. Of course I was junior officer and was not supposed to know what was going on. But for one twenty-four hour period command practically ceased in our Battalion while the row was being settled. The Company Commanders demanded that seniority be followed.

There was only one solution to such an impasse. McKerron should have asked for a request to transfer from any Company Commander who was too unhappy. Instead he capitulated and asked Phil to step aside. Phil went to Second Canadian Infantry Brigade to be Pott's BM. It was the end of the road for both Phil and McKerron.

Of course from that moment McKerron's position was impossible. He was still Commanding Officer but he could not count on the complete loyalty of his Company Commanders. McKerron had an inferiority complex to begin with. He had only one recourse. That was the bottle. As time went on it was his only solace. Because of that he was continually getting into further predicaments. Rumour has it that it was the Padre Corps who proved his final undoing. At any rate, McKerron's lot got so difficult that his Second in command felt so emboldened, that he countermanded McKerrons personal command on a Battalion parade on the parade square of the Brigade of Guards at Caterham, What could be more humiliating to a former member of the Imperial Forces?

Scott-Dudley took over as Second in command and, as such came to be in charge of the Reconnaissance Troop. I went to him with my training program and asked for guidance. He said that he would look us over as soon as he got settled in his new job. Not another word did I get from him about the Reconnaissance Troop until the day was relieved of my command.

From the very beginning, McKerron adhered to a policy that earned him a great deal of resentment. He boasted of the efficiency of the Battalion. To maintain that efficiency he refused to allow any of his officers to be seconded for staff work. He commanded the Battalion for nearly two years. We were almost under peace time conditions throughout that time. That meant the almost complete stagnation of promotion in the Battalion. Ambitions in the Battalion were thwarted. Ambitions to do other kinds of work were blocked. And the Battalion actually suffered from the lack of fellow officers on Brigade, Division and Corps staffs. In my opinion it was the second major error that McKerron committed.

In the regrouping of the available forces that were in England, after the fall of France, the Saskatchewan. LI. was assigned to the Support Brigade of the 1st Br Armoured Division. I was in charge of the advance party which made the necessary reconnaissance of our new area. The Battalion was to be dispersed under canvas in the area around Ockley in Sussex. I reported to the Brigade Headquarters. The Deputy Assistant Adjutant and Quarter Master General was quite sure that the Brigadier Morgan wanted to meet me. I waited until he was free and was then introduced to Brigadier Morgan - later known to the world as Sir Frederick Morgan, the man who was in charge of the planning that went into the Nor-

mandy invasion. He was a big bluff affable man whom I was sure I would like. He had been through the evacuation of France. Our Battalion learned many valuable lessons from him. The divisional patch of the 1st Armed Div. was a Rhinoceros. From that time on we proudly displayed the rhino on our vehicles as a memento of those early associations.

We completed our reconnaissance and reported to McKerron. Very elaborate plans were made for our move to the new area. We were the only Canadian Unit to be put under command of a British formation. It is easy to understand McKerron's determination to make a favorable impression. Uniforms, vehicles and weapons were polished to a high degree. Almost on pain of death everyone was to sit rigidly at attention as we drove into the Brigade Area. The Reconnaissance Troop led the Battalion in the convoy. I was in the leading vehicle of the whole column. Everything went beautifully until we reached the dispersal point. There Brigadier Morgan and his staff waited to greet us. Instead of responding to our rigid formality with a correct salute he gaily waved both arms above his head and shouted, "Hello Mitchell, welcome to the Brigade." The results were completely disastrous.

This incident emphasizes the difficulties inherent in different peoples coming into close association. The British are thoroughly imbued with generations of class distinctions. Everyone quite naturally gives authority its proper respect. Montgomery, Morgan and all the others could dispense with rigid formality on their part and it was appreciated as a gesture of good will. Yet the British Tommy never lost sight of the fact that he was a private in the presence of a general. He conducted himself accordingly.

The Canadian tradition is that is you call me Bill, I will call you Joe. If the King himself appeared on the parade the average Canadian would pattern his conduct on the example set.

In the Canadian Army it is the prime responsibility of the officer to set that example. If he expects the troops to behave with rigid formality then he must first be formal. Of course, in the presence of the example set by Morgan, the precise behavior of our troops completely collapsed.

We soon settled into the routine of our new surroundings. At that time there were not very many combatant troops in Britain. Invasion was a real threat. Partly to reassure the civilians by the activity of the military and partly to thoroughly familiarize the troops with the country, each week we were given a series of roads to reconnoiter. We learned a lot about the country. I believe that I could still find my way through the winding streets of Canterbury in the dark.

I got a new re-enforcement officer - Rupert Leblond - fresh out of Officer Cadet Training Unit in Canada. I had a new route to reconnoiter. The following week we were to be fully occupied so I decided to do the reconnaissance on Sunday. Rupe was absolutely new to the country so I proposed that he came along. We took a three wheel bike for the trip.

My Troop Sgt. - Sgt. Edelman had a sister who was getting married north of London that day. It could have been a yarn but I still believe that mission was authentic. As Troop Sgt. he was equally responsible for knowing the various routes. It didn't stretch orders very much for him to go to the wedding. I appreciated his honesty with me. I gave him permission to go.

The Troop was still in charge of all the other Non Commissioned Officers. Sunday was our day off training.

When Rupe and I got back that evening Scott - Dudley was waiting for me -his first visit since

we came under his command. it seems that that day, after the noon meal, some of the boys had nothing to do and were a bit restive. They started tinkering with their bikes. Before long they had them running and had organized a race. They made such noise that the officers of the Battalion Headquarters investigated. That was bad enough - but the Cpls. were there and that still cleared me. However a short time later Battalion Headquarters received a phone call to the effect that one, Sgt. Edelman, was in a certain hospital with a broken leg following a traffic accident North of London, That was it.

The Reconnaissance Troop was placed under command of Headquarters Company and I was transferred to command a platoon in C Company. I was completely broken hearted, I had been with the Reconnaissance long enough that I had begun to feel sure of myself. We had some very good boys and we had learned a job from scratch together, I took my transfer as an utter disgrace.

Chapter 10: "C" Company

Major Reggie Lancaster was Officer Commanding of C Company. Bertie Thompson was his Second in command. They had no other officers. Over half of C Company had been in the Non Permanent Active Militia with Reggie. He knew them and their parents intimately. Reggie was a shortish dumpy looking person with a skin that blistered in the sun. He was a very hesitant speaker, it took him twice as long, as anyone else, to say anything. He had a most infectious laugh. He was one of the kindest, gentlest persons that I have known. He loved every man in his Company and they loved him. Ordinary army discipline was foreign to him. His most extreme punishment, in his opinion, was to tell the offender that he was going to write to his parents and tell them what an irresponsible loon he had turned out to be. But the Company ticked. C Company may have had their own way of doing things but they could be depended on to do them well.

One occasion with C Company under Reggie that I fondly recall. One day Archie McRae was a bad boy. Reggie awarded him extra hours of pack drill. Archie's current girl friend was manageress of the refreshment counter at a movie theatre some miles away. They had a date for this particular afternoon and the girl friend was to meet Archie at our gate after regular parade hours, The girl friend did not know about the extra "pack drill." So Reggie invited Archie's girl friend into our mess to await Archie. After the pack drill Archie and girl friend ate our evening meal with us in the officer's mess. Jones did not want to serve a private but Reggie insisted.

C Company was under canvas. There were two small bell tents for the officers to sleep in. When I arrived, Reggie and Bertie were in one and the other was empty. Reggie thought that it was too damn lonesome being alone in one tent so he persuaded me to come in with them. The other bell tent remained empty until another officer arrived.

Reggie was a dyed in the wool Conservative. He was not one to gad about much. Many the night he and I had nothing else to do, so we retired to our beds and talked. Nearly always we talked politics. Hour after hour we would talk. At about midnight I would begin to think that maybe I was making some headway towards convincing him, when all at once, he would repeat his original statement that had started the argument at 2000 hours.

Bertie had a batman by the name of Jones, who was the mainstay of C Company's officers mess. Jones came from northern Saskatchewan. He had lost part of his right thumb at the second joint. Rumour had it that he had lost it in an encounter with a bear. It was difficult for him to hold a cup. They only way he could be sure, was to put this stump inside the bowl of the cup. It couldn't have had much feeling for he invariably had this thumb stuck into our cupful of tea.

Sgt. Magee and Sgt. Bud Rae were the Sgts of my new platoon. It was a well organized and well trained platoon. The Sgts were quite indulgent towards me. They were prepared to keep full control of the platoon. We had a show down on the very first parade. They tried to present me with a "fait accompli." Much to their consternation, I overruled them. They took it good naturedly. After that we got on beautifully.

A few weeks after I joined the C Company. We organized a smoker for our platoon. As it turned out it was not a very exciting affair but it did establish me in the platoon and Company. I invited McKerron to our smoker. He agreed to come. In consequence everyone took more pains about the preparations. As it turned out McKerron did not show up but the air had been cleared a bit.

I suppose that Lancaster was quite happy with his Company without platoon officers. I imagine that his plan was to keep me from interfering too much with a platoon that was already working well. At any rate he assigned the Company billeting to me. We were under canvas but we were to move under a roof as soon as we could.

C Company was on an estate owned by Mrs. Adcock. There was a lodge at the main gate which we took as an officers' mess. The bulk of the Company were billeted on the second floor of the main house. Mrs. Adcock lived on the lower floor. How she tolerated those heavy boots I'll never know. There was never a complaint about the boys upstairs. Around a paved courtyard, at the back of the big house, were former horse stables, carriage sheds and a garage in which there were five automobiles. The pride of the family was the hearse-like Rolls Royce kept under a duster. Over all of these outbuildings were additional living quarters. We had Company stores in the tool house of the kitchen garden. The garden was enclosed by a high brick wall onto which some peach trees had trained to support themselves. Back of the tool house was a store room for the produce of the garden. In making my daily rounds I discovered that this store room was open and on some of the trays were carefully laid out the most delicious peaches I have ever tasted. I kept that as a personal secret and never took more than a couple per week. The door was never locked.

The Company Technical Storeman was L/Cpl Tiliman. I struck up a great friendship with him and had many interesting talks with him. I can remember one day when he advanced the theory that Churchill's speeches and the allied propaganda reminded him of a little boy whistling in the dark to allay his fear. Tillman wasn't far wrong.

During one of my visits to see Mrs. Adcock, her elderly aunt asked if she might talk with me for a moment. Someone had told the poor old soul that in Canada we buried our dead in the snow banks near our door step, where we left them until spring, when we could put them into the ground. She wanted to know if that was right.

There were a great many tales told to the unsuspecting English during those days. One tale that I heard was that you could hold a tumbler of water at head height and pouring it out slowly it would hit the ground as ice crystals. Of course many the lad told about the gopher ranch that he owned in Saskatchewan.

At that time there were not very many restrictions on civilian automobiles. A reasonable amount of gasoline could be gotten. Lancaster bought a car and Vergne Marr and I bought one together. Vergne and I got a standard 8 for fifteen pounds. We drove it for about three months until one Sunday, when after a full days outing, Vergne was returning from Aldershot and, right in front of the village hail in Ockley, he went to sleep and drove into the bole of a huge oak tree. We got fifteen shillings for the tires.

Soon after I went to C Company, Brig. Morgan spoke to the officers of the Battalion in the village hail in Ockley. I was in the depths of despair over my transfer from reconnaissance troop and so did not say anything at the meeting. But I was greatly worried and voiced my feelings later in C Company lines. We were actively preparing to counter an invasion. I suppose that Morgan was worried about having troops stand fast in the face of great odds. At any rate he told us that we had no idea how effective our Vickers machine guns were against tanks. He said we could strike the periscope and various delicate working parts and so partially disable the tank. Also, he said, the impact of the bullets on the metal of a closed tank turret would so raise the heat of the metal that the occupants would be forced to open up. I was

amazed to find a look of complete credulity on the faces of everyone of our officers. I found that astounding. But what I was really worried about was what the reaction of our men - practical farm boys - would be to such nonsense. Luckily we never had to put to test the confidence of anyone in that statement.

Ockley lay right in the path of the German bombers flying to London. We had grandstand seats for nearly every major air battle of that summer. We will never forget that hot Sunday when the GAF (German Air Force) made it's supreme effort and were beaten by the RAF. Even the drone of the massed flight to London made one uneasy.

Throughout all of these battles planes were shot down. We always had a duty platoon, one of whose jobs was to keep a picquet ready with a truck to go out and capture the pilots who baled out. That was a very thrilling experience without any risk to speak of.

Every night and sometimes in daylight bombs were dropped in our neighborhood. We had our Vickers mounted on AA mounts and one platoon's guns were constantly manned. Several times C Company gunners distinguished themselves by continuing to fire their guns while bombs burst nearby.

One afternoon Reggie, Bertie and I went to see a movie in Horsham. A stick of bombs were dropped. We counted one, two, three, four - the fourth shook the movie house violently. For us, who had counted, it was the last. However, the civilian audience reacted with panic. It was one of those times when one lives a lifetime in a second. As soon as the last bomb burst, the audience jumped up. One immediately became aware of a vile evil presence panic when humans ceased to act like humans I spoke up, "Hold it, hold it, hold it." Bertie jumped up on his feet and at the top of his voice commanded everyone to sit down In a flash the calm was restored and the crisis was over.

One of the most beautiful and awesome sights that I have ever seen occurred one night when Vergne and I were returning from a dance. It was at midnight that we stopped at Tattenham Corner, at the Epsom Down race track, and watched an air raid on distant London. We were close enough to see the planes, the explosions and fires and yet far enough away to see the whole thing as one.

From all over London searchlights sent out their converging shafts of light and picked up the aircraft. AA guns fired. First was the flash on the ground and then the burst in the air. Bombs exploded on the ground with a great flash, then a fire would develop on the ground. Gradually the fires grew and rose coloured smoke billowed up over the whole scene. Every once in awhile, the guns would make a strike and there would be a flaming smoke arc to the ground. It was tremendous.

Another memory of those stirring days was sitting in a crowded pub, with the girls, on a Sunday evening, listening to Churchill's famous broadcasts. One thrilled to the response of his fellow countrymen to his stirring words over the radio - "Some chicken, some neck."

One occurrence that never failed to amuse me. I would call for the girl friend to go out for the evening to a show or dance. While she was dressing, her father, who had laboured long and well during the day earning his livelihood in the City, would be donning his Home Guard kit in preparation to spending the night guarding some cross roads. He couldn't take an officer's appointment in the Headquarters as he did not have enough time for that.

No one will ever know all that the Home Guard did. They were a zealous lot. Sometimes we thought overzealous. One night Bertie and I were on our way back from a movie at Horsham. We stopped at the pub at Ockley so I could run in and buy some chocolate bars. As I jumped out of the car somebody shouted, "halt!" Over my shoulder I called to Bertie - "Answer that bloke, will you?" "Halt!" came again and I paid no attention. Then I heard the bolt of the rifle slide home. Every muscle in my body froze.

We co-operated with the Home Guard as much as we could. The local commandment was a fanatic known as the "mad major". I never came across anyone anywhere who was so strict about security, blackout and concealment. We went to see him one evening and got the lecture of our life for our conduct.

One of our jobs for the Home Guard was to construct a sand bag post near a cross road. That was my one and only venture with sandbags, during the war. We seemed to get along alright until the wall was half built. Then it seemed that the footings gave way and the wall started to lean. We should have torn it down. However, we corrected the fault with flying buttresses. The finished structure seemed reasonable but not according to Hoyle. Reggie was displeased but he never said anything.

Les Clough came to C Company straight from Officer Cadet Training Unit in Canada. He joined with me in wanting to smarten up the appearance of C Company. Hector McLean was the Company order room clerk. He was quite young and smart. He was a favourite of Reggie's. Some days Hector wouldn't even bother to put on his tunic. He was never reprimanded. Slowly it worked on Reggie and finally one day he gave us permission to start in on Hector. Before us, he ordered Hector to carry out our wishes. We got Hector out on morning parades with the rest of the Company and got the orderly room cleaned up. Things were a pleasure to behold for about a week. Then Lancaster started getting blasts from the Battalion Headquarters about returns that Hector had inadvertently messed up. Before long, Hector was in complete charge again.

The night we put on a party for the Company in the village hall. That night Clough and I started out on foot for the hall. The darkness was complete. We almost had to feel our way along in the blackout. As we were going along we heard a couple of high heels tapping on the pavement behind us. Feeling adventurous, we decided to slow up and investigate the high heels. It turned out to be a local girl on her way to the party for the Canadians. We offered to escort her. She accepted. We got as far as the pub and we decided on a drink. There was an air raid on and the blackout really was complete. The man in the pub had a bit of a light to make his change by and that was all. As we sat at our drinks we could only discern the outline of the person opposite. So we arrived at the Company dance without knowing what our girl friend looked like. Les pretty well summed the situation up when, as she emerged from the ladies room, he said - "Well, she is not Hedy LaMarr."

The Army bedding for the men in camp consisted of blankets, a ground sheet and a paliase. Paliase is another name for a straw tick. Being resourceful it was not long until our boys discovered something better - the seat cushions from the passenger coaches of the Southern Railway. Three cushions were just right for one man.

The drill was to be alone in a compartment on the return journey to Ockley. Then when you approached a nearby field you heaved the cushions out of the window. After alighting at the station you walked back and picked up your new mattress.

I do not know how the Southern Railway operated for a time. When orders finally came through, from Division Headquarters, that this practice was to stop and that the cushions were to be returned, it took a three ton truck to carry the cushions that C Company had.

Bertie Thompson and I arranged an evening in London with the girls from Kingswood. Bertie and I drove up in Lancaster's car after the parade. We had dinner and saw a show. We took the girls to their hotel, then we started home.

Bertie pleaded being very tired. He curled up on the back seat and went to sleep, so I had to drive back to Ockley. London streets are laid out like the spokes of a wheel. Which means you can hardly miss getting into the centre. But driving out you have a continuous choice to make of which fork of the 'Y' to take. Soon I was in trouble. It was after midnight. I guess the police thought that any military person who did not know the road would be in bed and that I could be a fifth columnist. At any rate the directions he gave me did not help me. I asked again. The same results. I had been driving more than an hour and I did not recognize anything. Finally I stopped and got out of the car. It was a starlit night. I found the North Star. I was heading North. I wanted to go South. until I got to a road I recognized I stopped at each intersection and looked for the North Star. We got home.

Nearly every week we were out on a scheme with some part of the British Armoured Division. Sometimes the weather was nice. Sometimes it was horrible. One night we were going along in convoy and Reggie made a mistake in reading his map. Within a half mile he realized that he was on the wrong road and stopped. The road that we stopped on was a very narrow graveled road. How to turn around. Next to my vehicle was an entrance to a hayfield. Bravely I lead my platoon into it. Within a minute my six trucks were mired up to the axle. The rest of the Company turned by backing and maneuvering on the roadway. I can still see the sorrow on Reggie's face as he spoke: "God I am sorry to leave you like this Mitch, but we must get on with our job and you will never get out." He showed me what he knew of the scheme and left.

He had underestimated his farmer boys. In one of the trucks was a long stout rope. One truck at a time we tied the rope on and with the aid of forty men pushing and pulling we got out. Then I disregarded the boundaries of the scheme and went straight to C Company's destination. We got there before the Company did. We felt very proud of ourselves.

Much of the time, on these schemes, the convoy moved at fifteen miles per hour. It was terribly boring for the boys on the motorcycles. One of Reggie's Dispatch Riders was Skollrood. One day Reggie happened to look into his rear view mirror and saw Skollrood on his bike behind, standing upright full length on the saddle of his bike. He had set the throttle and was steering by the weight of his body on the seat. Reggie was paralyzed with fear. He couldn't do anything until Skollrood got down. Then he did give him a lecture.

One afternoon Clough came into our little mess just bursting with excitement. He got me off into our room and asked if I had heard anything unusual. No I had not. Well he had taken his platoon out to do a platoon scheme on direct fire that afternoon. They had beautiful site in a hedgerow overlooking a little valley in which there were innumerable fields, trees, etc., and a lovely farm establishment. He went through the complete routine. The guns were properly placed and loaded. As the final part of his fire order he yelled fire! One of the gunners pressed the trigger and sprayed the farm house. For an instant everyone was paralyzed. Then "On truck!" Never

did that platoon move so quickly. The odd thing about the whole business there was never a complaint lodged and I doubt that Reggie knows of that episode even today.

Gradually our British made trucks were being replaced by Canadian made. One of the innovations of the Canadian truck was the large-sized tire. Its' large area and deep tread gave it very good traction. Somehow or other the rumour spread through the Division that it was puncture proof. Rumour had it that each tire contained some fluid that would immediately fill a hole. Considering the fact that the workshop boys, at least, must have had some of them off, it seemed absurd such a rumour should persist. But it did.

One night the boys in C Company truck guard got into an argument about whether the tires were puncture proof. One practical soul, who had great faith in the rumour, put his bayonet onto his rifle and jabbed it into the sidewall of the tire. It took considerable explaining to show how a new tire would have developed such a leak.

One night one of our chaps was killed in a traffic accident in the blackout. I was detailed to be in charge of the burial party. Interment was in the military cemetery at Brookwood, near Aldershot. During our stay in Aldershot I had been unaware of such a place. In late summer it was one of the most awesome, beautiful places I have ever seen. It's planned simplicity was almost unbelievable. Regardless of what one's religious experience may have been, Brookwood cemetery m. wake the most profound of feelings.

One day we officers visited a nearby RAF sector control centre. I do not recall exactly where it was. It was mostly below ground. We were in a gallery overlooking a huge map of the area on a table. Girls with headphones and long sticks moved markers representing the various aeroplanes in the air. The duty officers had their own gallery. It was all very business like.

Chapter 11: Scotland

My leave came in the 2nd week in October, 1940. It got my passage to Edinburgh. On my way there I was in London for a couple hours. I encountered the plight of the civilian in London during the air raids. It was pitiful. Cots had been set up in layers four and five high on the platform of the subway railway stations. These places were far underground and quite safe. They had been designed to handle large numbers of people to be passed through quickly. They were not designed to house such multitudes. When you reached the entrance to the Underground you almost reeled from the impact of the stench that billowed up. The ventilation was inadequate. I went below. The platforms were completely lined with bunks. It seemed that it was necessary for some one of each family to stay there all the time to retain possession of a place to sleep. Every few minutes the trains would rush in with a blast of air. Hundreds of passengers would change. What an experience for those old people and children who spent nearly all of their time by the family's cots!

In Edinburgh I registered at the North British Hotel. I had definite ideas about my leave. I wanted to see Scotland. I immediately went out and hired a Standard 8 automobile for a week at one pound per day. I got ration coupons for fifteen gallons of gasoline. That evening, after dinner I went into the bar in search of a companion for my trip. Very shortly I had teamed up with a Canadian Army lieutenant and a New Zealand RAF Pilot Officer. Before the evening was over we got into conversation with a Lieutenant Commander of the Royal Navy who was stationed near Edinburgh - a real old Scot. He outlined a tour for us and told us of all the places that we should see.

That was a wonderful trip. The weather was perfect. Warm and sunny all the way. The leaves on the trees had been frosted and had turned colour. We traveled seven hundred miles. Everywhere the people were hospitable and kind. Everywhere we found cleanliness.

The first afternoon we stopped for tea in a little tea house west of Glasgow. We were the first customers. There were a dozen tables in the room, each with its three tiered tray of scones, cakes, etc. that had just been taken out of the oven. We had not had much to eat since breakfast. The Scots girl who waited on us was quite shy and fled from the room after serving our tea. The scones were absolutely wonderful. Before we finished we ate everything in the room. With very straight faces we asked for the bill. The little girl had her pencil and pad in hand, looked at our tray to count what had been eaten. Of course there was nothing left. She just. happened to notice that the next table was bare also. Then she surveyed the room and gasped with disbelief. I don't know what happened to her regular customers.

We got gasoline in Fort William. The garage owner was a very sociable type who was in the Home Guard. He took us around and showed us his Molotov Cocktails and other defensive preparations. It was incredible to see how earnest his intentions were to be prepared for an invasion in that out of the way place. When we came to pay for the gas he told us to keep the coupons. "Lad, you'll need them."

My forbears are supposed to have originated around Aberdeen. The weather was a bit dull the day we were there. I am afraid I am not as loyal as I should be as I thought that Aberdeen was a rather dreary place.

Near Perth I was intrigued with the way the hay and sheaves were stacked and the potatoes put into the store for winter. At one lovely spot I stopped and took some snapshots of the stacks,

etc.

I had barely finished when a man, who was harrowing with a team of horses, came running across the field and demanded my camera. He was sure that I was a fifth columnist. After a bit of diplomatic talk I resolved the situation by taking a picture of him and the beautiful team of Clydesdales that he drove.

The New Zealander had to leave us before we got back to Edinburgh. The night we got back, my Canadian friend and I went down to the bar to find our Scots Lt. Commander. Sure enough he was there. We gave him our very sincere thanks for the assistance he had given. We had a wonderful trip. The Scot replied by saying: "Maybe you don't know it but there are five bars in this hotel. You two must have a drink with me in each." What an evening. We each bought a round of double whiskeys in each of the five bars. That was fifteen doubles in the space of a couple of hours. The deck was surely heaving when our Scottish friend bade us good night.

Chapter 12: Schemes

There was a very real danger of invasion. The formations that were equipped had to be kept in a constant state of readiness. One of the best ways to ensure this was to hold maneuvers on the weekend. Every week were out for two or three days. Whether we realized it or not we gained considerable training and experience.

One scheme that we held late in the year lasted for a week. I do not recall where the Adjutant was but Reggie Rankin was acting adjutant at the time. I was called into Battalion Headquarters to act as Intelligence Officer. The Intelligence Officer's special function is to know as much as possible about the enemy. On these schemes he became kind of an assistant adjutant and Aide de Camp to the Commanding Officer. On this scheme either Reggie or I were with McKerron all the time. At Orders Group, we took notes for him. We always had the necessary maps, etc. that he needed.

Each scheme would have some special point in training that the GOC wanted emphasized. As time went on we tried to make the schemes as realistic as possible. Some amusing things happened. Sometimes there were tragedies. It was on this scheme that some tank men were suffocated under their tanks. They had bedded down there and the tank had settled in the mud on top of them.

Every once in awhile there would be a new story of some tank ploughing into a cottage. The civilians certainly had their trials when we were about.

One funny episode occurred when Drayton Walker lost B Company. Drayton had gone off to an Orders Group. While away he had ordered his Company to move. Somewhere an error was made and the Company was not where Drayton expected them to be. Completely at a loss to know where they were he drove about to find them, only to have his truck break down. He arrived at Battalion Headquarters on foot. When Drayton is under stress he has a nervous habit of biting the nails on one hand while he scratches his crotch with the other. He was working full time that day.

It was during this scheme that I achieved a reputation, that has clung to me throughout the years, as a map reader. I usually sat beside McKay, McKerron's driver, and directed him.

We usually traveled at about 30 MPH at which speed I did not find much difficulty in following the map. McKerron had a station wagon. I guess he could not see very well from the back seat. At any rate he decided that I was a genius at map reading. He never failed to tell all and sundry. From then on I enjoyed an undeserved authority as a map reader.

One night, towards the end of the scheme, things seemed to have quieted down. Nearby was a delightful old rural pub that we had discovered. McKerron decided to go down there for a night cap. On our way back to Battalion Headquarters, our car was stopped by the British Armoured Division G.O.C. How or why he was there I do not know. McKerron got out to talk to him and said something that roused the Britisher's ire. Never have I heard such a scolding. McKay and I sat in the car. After a bit, McKay spoke up - "No human should ever speak to another human in that way."

Chapter 13: Brighton

Soon after that scheme we left the British Armoured Division and took over machine gun positions on the seacoast around Brighton. D Company was at Rottingdean. A Company was in Brighton, B Company at Worthing and C Company further on.

Out of the blue I was given a promotion to be Second in command of A Company under Reynolds. I never have understood exactly why but I had the impression that McKerron was making amends for my experiences with the Reconnaissance Troop.

And, I think that McKerron respected me as a man of means. A wheat farmer was a person of importance to him. A year later I felt this impression to be confirmed. During the summer of 1941 I was in London two and three times a week. I spent every cent of my pay on shows, etc. One day I paid for an army issue uniform by cheque. I think that it was for two pounds, twelve shillings. The cheque bounced and was sent to McKerron. I have always felt that issuing that cheque was the most grievous crime I could have committed, in McKerron's opinion. It completely altered his estimation of me. If he could see the red ink in my pass book today!

When I joined A Company it was in position from Rottingdean to Worthing. Two or three times each twenty four hours either Phil or I would inspect each gun position. Each gun covered the sea and beach. Our billets were in Brighton. Reynolds had taken over the position, while short of officers, from the Toronto Scottish.

It turned out that the Scottish had pulled a fast one on him and had improperly described the condition of the billets. For two weeks I prepared marching in states for the people to whom we would hand over. Of course I had to phrase each description as advantageously as possible.

One headache that A Company had inherited, from the days when Scott-Dudley was Officer Commanding, was the Company canteen. Under Scott-Dudley it had done a tremendous business. Cpl. Donnely was in charge. When I had joined the Company it had been discovered that the canteen fund was short a great sum of money. Nothing seemed much amiss. It had just been poorly managed from the beginning and small shortages had accumulated into a very big one.

The big question was how to operate the canteen to keep it properly controlled and yet not be too much of a nuisance. Phil and I spent much time talking it over with the CSM "Pop" Brain. One day Brain announced that a gunner, Pte Ostfield, had definite ideas about the canteen. I went out to the Platoon and brought Ostfield into Company Headquarters. In a very few words he outlined the set-up for the Company canteen. Ostfield was put in charge. From that moment the canteen ceased to be a worry. I have always thought of this as an excellent example of how a Jew and money get together. Ostfield did not want the job. He wanted to fight Germans.

The British Isles have long been divided into "Commands" for the administration and operations of the British army. Southern Command, which includes Aldershot has always been very important. In 1940 there was a very real threat of invasion. So South Eastern Command was organized and comprised those areas most likely to be invaded first. The primary concern of this new command was operational. Lieutenant - Gen. Bernard L. Montgomery was the commander.

One of Monty's first actions was to call most of the officers, of the rank of Captain and above in his new command, into a theatre in Brighton. I don't know how many were there but the theatre was full. One well placed bomb would have

made quite a dent in the Dunkirk impoverished army.

This was the first that I had heard of Monty. He came on the stage, a slight figure in shiny riding boots. He had a map on the stage and a long pointer in his hand. His first words to us were that he wanted complete silence. He gave us one minute to cough and blow our noses. After that for one hour there must be silence.

Army commands follow a ritual form so that there is maximum communication. Monty went through the ritual. Intention: to repell the Boche. Then he gave a complete summary of the probable German effort and a description of how he intended to meet any invasion, etc.

In the administrative sections is one about prisoners of war. Monty was quite clear. "There will be no prisoners of war. Any enemy who sets foot on Britain must die." Fortunately for all, no one invaded England.

Throughout the war the only serviceman that I heard wax enthusiastically about Montgomery was an American Sergeant that we met at Pompeii while we were on leave. We gave him a lift. He told us that Monty had taught General Patton all that Patton knew about war. British officers were embarrassed by Montgomery. This episode in the Brighton theatre partly explains their embarrassment. He treated his officers like children. He openly proposed on this occasion to violate the International articles of war. He sought to get dramatic publicity.

D Company Headquarters was in Rottingdean. Reggie Rankin had a favourite local pub. One midnight, after an evening in his pub, Reggie came tottering into D Company mess. He announced that he had tied up a barrage balloon. Everyone considered that a great joke. Next morning, low and behold, there was a barrage balloon tied to a stout pole.

A Company Headquarters was in an indifferent building. Inside it looked quite different. Phil and I each had a private bathroom connected with our bedrooms. His was entirely in black. Mine was in sky blue.

On one trip to London, on the train, an elderly man got into the same compartment as I at Hayward's Heath. We were alone. I made various attempts at getting him into a conversation. Finally we got talking about events leading up to the war.

This chap said that his company manufactured sewing machines. They had a factory in Germany He had been a director of the company, when in 1935, his company had been awarded a contract by the German government. It was a secret order. No one on the Company Board of Directors knew what was made. They were guaranteed a profit. When they inspected the plant, that part working on the secret order was sealed off, and they were denied entrance. This worried him. He made a point of cultivating the works manager. The next year, when they inspected the plant, the manager showed him that their factory was making machine guns for the German Army.

When he returned to England he wrote to the Foreign Office giving all details. Nothing happened. He wrote again inquiring after his first letter. He got a reply saying that they had received both. Thank you very much.

Because we were enroute, Christmas 1939 had been very unsatisfactory 1940 was different. Everyone received parcels from home. Among other things, my mother sent me a jar of homemade cranberry sauce. Friends had sent me many things. The postmistress at home, Mrs. J.A. Turnbull, had started a "Howard Mitchell Fund."

The Herschel branch of the Canadian Legion sent me candy, nuts and cigarettes. Herschel Legion established one of the best records of wartime service. During the nearly six years they sent every service person from the district parcels to the value of fifty dollars each year. I think that they had eight members.

The army provided turkey. H.M. Queen Elizabeth sent plum puddings for everyone in our Battalion. Altogether Christmas 1940 was a gala occasion.

We handed over our positions and billets to an English Machine Gun Battalion. The Company Commander had been through the phony war and the evacuation of France. He was a bit cynical. He told of how the division he had been with had gotten all of their vehicles bottled up on a road. They were told to leave them and withdraw to a nearby hill with only their personal weapons. Of course they were unable to put up any resistance and they withdrew in a shambles. "It must have been the right thing to do because the general got promoted."

Chapter 14: Coulsdon

From Brighton we went into evacuated houses in Coulsdon that were close to the main railway from London to Brighton. Across the railway, was a high hill on which there was a radar installation. We were there nearly a year. During that time I don't think that Jerry ever tried for the railway. But almost every night he would try to bomb the radar post. Many the night I have lain in bed, at Mrs. Gibbs, counting the explosions as each stick of bombs fell. Always the last bomb never quite reached our house, but after it exploded, a rain of gravel would fall on the roof of the house.

I think that it was during this period at Coulsdon that our Battalion became professionals. The invasion threat was not so great. We did not have to continually man our battle positions. McKerron set up Battalion competitions in all phases of our training. In addition we had our schemes, we trained at Bulford again and we had our "Colour Presentation" at Caterham.

I was in charge of the advance party for our Company. It was strictly a residential area. The houses were good and we had little trouble making everyone in the Company comfortable. The only drawback, as far as military accommodation went, was a parade area. We had only the paved streets, which were not very wide.

One story Brain told me. The day our advance party arrived in Coulsdon there was a girl, in a plaid skirt, pushing a baby carriage up and down the street all the while we were arranging things. It seems that our driver dated her first thing. That evening they went for a walk, had a drink in the pub and then back home. The driver thought that he had done pretty well for the first evening and bade the Scots girl good night in the kitchen. He turned to leave. All at once there was a strange eruption. He turned around to find the girl coming after him wielding a butcher knife. "I'll teach ye to spurn a Scot's hospitality."

Coulsdon was a wonderful location. There were electric trains into London every fifteen and twenty minutes. We were just thirty five minutes away from Charing Cross station. That was a period of liberal education for me. My partner knew London well. She and I explored it at least twice a week.

At the Grovenor House Hotel in London an organization sponsored a tea-dance every Sunday afternoon for Allied officers and partners. That was held in the large ballroom and was usually a tremendous crush. Great crowds were always there. It was a good place to meet people but was usually too crowded for real enjoyment.

Every Sunday evening, in the main dining room of the same hotel, there was a dinner dance for officers. This was the pet project of a retired English Officer. He was always there to supervise. He usually had some prominent society figure as a special guest. This was the very best entertainment that I have encountered anywhere. Those attending were strictly limited to the number that could be comfortably seated at the tables and served. The dance floor was never crowded. There just never was an occasion for rowdiness. An RAF band played excellent music. The charge for meal and dance was always fifteen shillings per head. We were there as often as we could be. Of course the meals were ordinary rations.

There were several Battalion officers mess parties in the ballroom at the Pub in Coulsdon. We in A Company had many parties of our own.

One time there was a stag party in Battalion Headquarter mess. Someone had been promoted. Some fourteen officers congregated. Before the evening was over everyone's promotion from the beginning of the war had been celebrated and

fourteen empty rum bottles graced the mantel on the fireplace. That night I made a discovery. Rum had little effect on me. By the time we went home, Phil Reynolds was in very bad shape. Four of us from A Company had come in his car. It never entered anyone's mind that anyone other than Phil should drive Phil's car. Phil couldn't see the road. So I sat beside him and directed him.

Next morning I was up as usual. I had my breakfast and went on parade. By the time I reached the parade ground the coffee had reached the rum in my stomach. I had very great difficulty in standing erect. I was tight all that day.

On the evening of 17 March, 1941, I took the train to Kingswood. I had no thought of anything other than an evening with the folks of my "adopted home." I was in battle dress. When I got there I found that there was a posh dance at the recreation hall of the Windmill Press. I wanted to go back and change but everyone insisted that I should not. So off to the St. Patrick's dance we went. We had a grand time. The trains stopped running at midnight so after it was all over I had to walk the five miles back to Coulsdon. It was after four a.m. when I staggered into my room and found Pop Brain sleeping on my bed.

Phil was away at the time and I was in command of the Company. We had gotten some fancy dress caps for the men which the CSM sold for 17/6. Some English women irreverently called them stud caps. They did brighten up the drab battle dress when walking out.

Pop Brain had about twenty pounds of this money in his room. That night he had discovered that someone had broken open his strong box and stolen the money. Pop was beside himself. He insisted that the whole Company be placed under arrest and searched. It sounded reasonable. So I drove off to see Reggie Rankin, who was adjutant. Reggie agreed and gave me a chit to Tommy de Faye of D Company. So at reveille, D Company sentries were posted at the front and back of each A Company billet and no one was allowed out. Arms were piled in the street. Breakfast was carried to each house. Looking back I can not but marvel at how splendidly the boys behaved. Of course they knew about the loss and everyone was just as interested to find the culprit as I.

The search seemed hopeless. We look everywhere. It was afternoon when I started to look through the Quartermaster stores. The CQMS lived with the CSM. Only the Technical Storeman L/Cpl Vick slept in the Quartermaster stores. Poor Tom Vick was dismayed when I started looking through his quarters. It was an intolerable insult to him. He was utterly dumbfounded and speechless when I found the money in a bag of beans.

Once we went into Norfolk. To get there we had to go through London. We were met at the outskirts by a Dispatch Rider from the Metropolitan Police and he guided us through the Blackwater tunnel under the Thames. I do not know what experience he had had, but it did not match ours. He traveled at 20 MPH. Our Company tried to keep proper convoy distance at first. That was terrible for we were soon separated by taxi. cabs and double decker buses. So we closed up so that no one could get between us. First we would be going 20 MPH and then suddenly we would stop. By the time we reached the northern outskirts of London we had to stop and straighten out every bumper.

During one week long scheme North of London I was an umpire. I rode a motorcycle some 800 miles that week. I never came closer to getting killed. One evening, just after dark, I was riding through Luton. I attempted to pass a car in the blackout. Just as I was even with the car I was

passing a woman driver attempted to pass the two of us. For what seemed like an eternity I rode between those two cars in the blackout. I could touch each running board with my foot.

On another scheme I was assigned as an umpire to Lt. Col. Harry Foster's Headquarters with the PLDG's. The chief umpire was a retired English general. I never did find out what I was supposed to do. The disconcerting part was that Foster didn't know either and he faintly suspected that I could be a kind of judge of his actions.

We had a plan for our local defence. Shortly after we had arrived in Coulsdon I spent several afternoons picking out gun positions, sentry posts, etc. One day I was trying to find a good spot to cover a railway underpass. I was climbing about, every once in awhile I would lie down on the ground to get the view from gun level. Suddenly a soft cultured feminine English voice spoke at my shoulder: "Must you really act like a little boy?" She was watching me from a deck chair on the lawn.

We had battle positions at Crowhurst on the country estate of Sir Charles Craven, who we understood, to be the managing director of Vickers Armstrong. It was really a beautiful place. We took complete advantage of our duty and explored every foot of it. However the inmates were smart enough to not speak to us any more than was necessary and we never did get into the house, though we were frequently on the estate.

Everything was in the Elizabethan style. There was a gatehouse built right over the driveway with wood panels and stucco. The house itself was a very large, low structure, tudor style, with a moat. Outside of the moat was an outdoor theatre. The stage was an embankment with hedges for the backdrop and wings. A beautifully tufted slope formed a seat for the audience.

We had some very well constructed positions at Crowhurst. General Pearkes gave us high marks for what we did. The day of the inspection there were a couple of staff officers with him. I remember coming to a wooden gate. Pearkes measured his distance from it and vaulted over. Clearly he wanted us to do likewise. I knew right well what would happen if I attempted such a feat so I quite sedately climbed over the gate. The others followed my example.

One hot summer day, when the sun really shone yet the air was most humid, Pearkes came to formally inspect our Battalion on a spit and polish parade. Somewhere the channels of communications went wrong. McKerron had us on parade in full battle order. Pearkes had evidently specified that the parade should be dressed in shirt sleeves. He refused to inspect the Battalion. He said that he would be back in thirty minutes. He wanted everyone in shirt sleeves. So the order was given to take off our tunics. However, three quarters of the parade did not have either a shirt or underwear on. It was a mixed lot that Pearkes inspected.

About this time I got a letter from Canada from a friend who wanted to know what officers did when we were not fighting. My reply was that the men loved their weapons and their vehicles. But the men hated garbage, dirty dishes and dusty floors. So in "peace time" soldiering an officer spent most of his time worrying about garbage, dirty dishes and dusty floors.

We were billeted in houses that had been evacuated. In amongst us were civilians who refused to leave their homes. One of these was a little old widow who had a black spaniel dog. One day, one of our drivers ran over this dog with his truck and broke it's back. Everyone was overcome with grief the driver even more so than the little old lady.

The CSM brought word to me to ask if I would shoot the dog. I always carried a loaded pistol so that it was a natural enough request. I agreed. We were to bury the dog in his mistress's garden. The driver picked up the dog, I, the shovel, and we made our way out to the garden, back of the house.

On occasion I had slaughtered animals on the farm. I was well aware of the difficulty involved in shooting a living animal. I had no confidence in my marksmanship with a pistol. I had no wish to experiment with this poor dog. When we reached the burial spot the driver laid the dog on the ground. I bashed it on the head with a shovel. That was that. Or so I thought.

But I reckoned without the owner of the dog. That poor woman was in her house with the curtains drawn - alone with her Maker - waiting for the sound of the pistol shot which never came. She was terribly upset when she learned what I had done. I am sure that she thought better of Hitler than she did of me.

On local defence we were to Liaise with the Home Guard. To tie in our two plans it was necessary for McKerron to visit the Home Guard area command. He took me along. The Home Guard Headquarters were in St. Margaret's School, which is in the shadow of the Parliament Buildings and Westminister Abbey. There we met with an elderly brigadier and transacted our business. After we left the Home Guard Headquarters I remarked to McKerron that the Press campaign condemning the wanton destruction of cathedrals did not seem so logical to me after seeing where the Home Guard Headquarters was situated.

On our way back to Coulsdon we visited the interesting pubs. In one a "broad" of about thirty-five years of age, became very interested in me. The instant McKerron noticed her intentions he dropped his unfinished drink. "Come on Mitchell let's go." Outside he lectured on the evils of such designing females. "Mitchell don't ever have anything to do with that kind of woman."

Our training included two weeks at Netheravon, midsummer, under the direction of the Small Arms School. I was looking forward to this. I was now Second in command of a Company and at times Officer Commanding. My technical training for the job was almost nil. It seemed that I was forever doing odd jobs. I was greatly worried about what would happen if we ever got into combat. I couldn't even visualize how one established contact with the enemy. I intended to take full advantage of my position, when we got to Netheravon, to pump the instructors.

Just as we were preparing to leave for Salisbury Plains word came that Potts had been given command of a special force. Part of that force were four officers and 80 OR's from the Saskatchewan. LI. Potts wanted me as one of the officers. I was very upset. I didn't feel competent to lead men into action. I couldn't imagine how any force that he would assembly could possibly be of tremendous importance. If I passed it up I could get the training that I needed. I told Phil Reynolds that. When McKerron heard of that he called me on the phone and delivered a terrible diatribe. He was through with a coward like me. I had Phil parade me before him and things were straightened out in a kind of way. Pott's force raided Spitzbergen.

However that marked a very low point in my army career. Not many wanted to understand my position. My relations with Potts came out a bit more clearly. Certain officers, who were mindful of political influences, became more outspoken in their criticism of me. And just about this time my cheque bounced.

Our training at Netheravon was very successful.

Having been there before we were prepared. The staff of the Small Arms School was undoubtedly one of the best in the world. The chief instructor, this year, had taken part in the fall of France with the Middlesex Battalion. They had covered the retreat with few casualties. They brought back their weapons. He set the tone of the training by pointing out that the only way that we could win the war was for each one of us to take twenty-five enemy.

I rally do not know why, but Phil and I got into some terrific arguments~ whenever we discussed anything that did not have a bearing on our job. Neither of us was very talkative. Before breakfast hardly a word would pass between us. But at noon, or in the evening, it seemed that we were, more often than not, intent on disproving something that the other said. We got into arguments about whether the daily toll of German planes were accurate or not. We argued about whether a protein supplement was necessary to raise young pigs. One day we really got angry over the number of tanks that Britain had sent to Russia. I cannot be sure of the figures now, but I think that Phil said that one thousand had been sent. I said that it was more likely two hundred. The subalterns hurried off to their work so that they would not get involved.

One anti-invasion plan called for us to man a section of the sea coast at Deal in Kent. To get convoy experience and to be ready for anything we took our complete Company equipment and transport. At Deal we constructed a wire entanglement one half mile long. There were many strands of wire. When we returned to our billets I reckoned the gas consumption. Five hundred gallons for one half mile of wire. I could never make a pasture pay with that kind of a fence.

I went to see Robert Morley playing the "The Man Who Came To Dinner," at the Savoy Theatre. During the intermission I walked back to the bar for a drink. As I turned a corner I came face to face with a young fellow in his twenties. His face had the most grotesque shape and was a horrible blue - black colour. I was startled and involuntarily showed my distress. In that poor boy's eyes was pure panic.

He was in the company of an older woman who could have been his mother. Obviously he was the victim of an air raid or an aeroplane crash. The woman was helping him to overcome the handicap, much of which, he would be doomed to carry the rest of his life.

On a Sunday, early in June, Vergne and I took the girls for a trip to Canterbury. We carried a picnic lunch. Just at 1 p.m. the sun shone beautifully. We spread a couple ground sheets. That was not enough for the lunch and all four so I spread my mackintosh to sit on. Then we went through the Cathedral. After seeing the soot-covered London churches, Canterbury looked so clean and uncluttered. The high pillars and arches were beautiful. Afterwards, we saw the WWI memorial. It was one of the most beautiful that I have ever seen. A formal garden, smooth lawns, stately trees, lovely flower plots.

We drove on into London to dine at the Cumberland hotel. It was raining and I was wearing my macintosh. On entering the hotel we passed an English officer. He said nothing but from his expression I looked at my macintosh. It was covered with chalk marks. It was most evident what he thought.

Once we celebrated a birthday of one of the girls in London. There were three girls, Leadbeater from the 48th, a medical student and myself. We had dinner at the Savoy. On the menu was corn on the cob. I was in my element. I had to have corn on the cob even though it was five shillings a cob The waiter brought in huge cobs, ten to twelve inches long. The kernels were watery

green and over all was a white sauce. I was tempted to force the waiter to eat them.

Sitting at the next table was Quentin Reynolds, the broadcaster, or rather he held court at the next table. I had seen quite a few people whom I had considered to be important. Never had I seen such regal behaviour before. But then, perhaps, I had never before seen anyone who wielded so much naked power. During the evening, people continually came up to him for a word or two. One artist unwrapped a huge parcel and showed some pictures.

In July, I went to Windermere on leave. Between trains in London, I went to the Savoy theatre to see the "Gondoliers" by the D'Oly Carte Opera Co. It was delightful. Good costumes and acting, familiar songs. Stepping outside afterwards, from the street, I heard the music, "There'll Always be an England." How proud I was to be a Britisher.

The source of music was one chap playing a trumpet and another, with a sign hanging from his neck, which read "subject to epileptic fits," playing an accordion. A third passed the hat. I suppose that even in Utopia there are gradations.

At Windermere, I stayed at the Beech Hill Hotel. I was the only service man there. One of the guests was Tom Snowdon. J.P. His brother had been Chancellor of the Exchequer. I am sure that he was not more proud of his achievement than Tom was of being a J.P. I took a bus tour through the homeland of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Ruskin, Walpole - and of John Peel. On this trip in the streets of Ambleside, we came upon a procession going to a "rush bearing meeting" at the church, This dated back to the time when the church floors were earthen and each year fresh rushes were laid on the church floor.

The first day at Windermere I went for a walk. A Mrs. Milne gave me a lift. She invited me to dinner at her home nearby. It was a huge affair on a beautiful location on the lake. They invited me to come back and spend a day with them. Mr. Mime showed me around. They had their own fish hatchery.

He owned three tarns or small lakes, into which he put the fingerlings. He, his fifteen year old daughter and I, fished for awhile. I manned the oars. The girl caught a fish. Helping her to land it I let it get away. It was not the best way to end a visit.

On 23, August, 1941, I took 70 all ranks to the Canadian Corps sports final that was held in the Command sports grounds in Aldershot. Some were contestants. Some were spectators. It was a holiday for everyone. The PT school has a football field with two sets of bleachers on one side of the field. 1st Division had one, II Division had the other. Across the road, on Queen's Parade, there were huge marquees for officers, Non Commissioned Officers and for the men where refreshments were available.

There was considerable rivalry between the Divisions. 1st Division had been in England longer and posed as the experienced soldiers. As a matter of fact we had very little difference in our experience. However the G.O.C. II Division ODLUM, had recently given an unfortunate Press interview, He was pictured carrying an "O" group on a scheme, quite unperturbed by an air raid.

There was to be a ceremonial opening of the games at 2 p.m. First, the Prime Minister, W.L. McKenzie King was to inspect a guard of honour that had been supplied by the Black Watch. They were smart.

At ten minutes to two, the MC was testing the public address system. He read through the program. As soon as he mentioned the name,

McKenzie King, there was a thunderous boo from the 1st Division stands. This quietened down. At 2:05, McKenzie King, escorted by Gen. McNaughton rode into the grounds. The command was given: "General Salute Present Arms." The National Anthem was played. Everyone in the stands stood at attention - all of the officers saluting. King inspected the Guard of Honour. As the inspection party withdrew, someone called out - "When do we go home." Both King and McNaughton laughed. The events proceeded as planned.

That evening, when I got home, I gleefully told Reggie Lancaster about the episode. "By God Mitch, that is not right. I don't like McKenzie King, but he is Prime Minister."

The next day I talked to an officer from Corps Headquarters who had not been in Aldershot. He assured me that in fact the troops had openly booed McKenzie King in person. Andy McNaughton deserved better than that.

Since the war I have read many versions of this affair. My only conclusion is that most of those reporting the incident were actually drunk in the marquees on Queen's Parade at the time.

Chapter 15: We Get Our "Colours"

After we came back from Netheravon we began training for the ceremony of the Presentation of Colours to our Battalion by H.M. Queen Elizabeth on the guards parade ground at Caterharn on 24, Oct. 1941. For about three months beforehand a Guards CSM was attached to Battalion Headquarters and a Guards Sgt. to each Company to instruct in the training. It was a wonderful experience. The boys marched up the street and they marched down again. Day after day. It was surprising how eagerly they trained. It was a smart Battalion that paraded that day. But it was marred by the change in command that took place. On one of the rehearsals on the Guards parade square Scott-Dudley countermanded a command of McKerron's. McKerron quickly asserted himself. But it was the last parade that he was to command. McKerron was sent back to Canada and Scott-Dudley took over.

It took even longer to make the "Colours" than it took the Battalion to prepare for the ceremony of the "Presentation." The City of Saskatoon paid for the making. McKerron conducted the intricate arrangements connected with the college of Heralds and with the firm of Hobsons, who actually made the "Colours". I went with him on several trips into London to see Miss Miller, of Hobsons. One day she took us through their "factory" on the upper floors of their main building. Never have I seen anywhere, such a collection of Heath Robinson gadgets as they used to make the gold braid, etc. I am sure that some had been designed one hundred years ago.

In dealing with Hobsons one got the distinct impression that this war time activity was but an episode in the life of the firm. They were geared to handle the normal volume of peace time business. It seemed that they refused to upset any of their normal arrangements just because there happened to be a war. Early in 1943, I called in there to get some lanyards for our Battalion. The waiting room was jammed with waiting customers. One poor American officer was particularly frustrated but manfully refrained from criticizing. An English woman war correspondent was waiting for some gold correspondent insignias which had been promised much earlier. She had a train to catch in order to reach her boat. She apologized, to the room in general and to this American officer in particular, for the bumbling inefficiency of her countrymen. They used the difficulties of wartime conditions as an excuse to hide their incompetence. Then turning to Miss Miller, the lady journalist really poured out her invective.

Miss Miller was quite unperturbed: "Madame you are going to make yourself ill. You cannot possibly do any good by carrying on like this."

One of the preparations for the actual ceremony of the "Presentation of Colours" was arranging for the defence of the parade. The parade was held on the square of the British Guards home depot at Caterham. I was sent to co-ordinate with them. The defence of the Depot was in charge of an elderly Guard's Captain. He showed me around and suggested what we might do to supplement the usual Guards defences. We put in some Vickers on AA mounts and some sentries. The Guards had permanent protection from a Bofors' A.A. battery. The old captain gleefully told me that one gunner had solved maintenance of his Bofors' gun barrel by covering the end with a "french letter." Evidentally he did not tell his pals and they wrecked the gun.

Chapter 16: Change of Command

Soon after he took command Scott-Dudley came over to A Company and had a long talk with Phil. He asked him to be his Second in Command. Phil was elated. Nothing was to be said until it came out in orders. Sometime later, Part II orders arrived. P.C. Klaehn was Second in Command. I do not think that I have ever seen anyone so dejected as Phil was that day.

By this time the invasion threat was becoming quite minimal. We were practically peace time soldiers. Any weekends that we were not on maneuvers, only the duty platoon and duty officers stayed in the lines.

One Saturday at noon Rupe Leblond and I were wondering what to do with our free afternoon. Someone suggested the greyhound racing at the White City Stadium. Neither of us had ever seen a dog race. We decided to go. We only had 19 shillings between us. So we bought return tickets on the train and bus. We had 11 shillings when we walked into the Stadium.

What an afternoon. This turned out to be a strictly working class event. We, Canadian officers, were almost as much of an attraction as the dogs. The place was jammed with people. The track was surrounded with pairs of bookies. We were intrigued by the way they kept in touch with their pals on the other side of the track and were constantly aware of the betting trends by means of hand signals.

Rupe looked to me, the farmer, to pick the winners. Looking strictly for the hungriest looking dog, we bet on seven races. We won on five and our first win paid fourteen to one. On the spot we decided to go into London and spend our winnings before we lost them.

In London the best that we could do were two seats dead centre in the orchestra row of the Comedy theatre. By the time we had bought our tickets it was 6 p.m. and the show began at 7. So we crossed the street to get some refreshments at a pub. When the show began we were in good form.

We enjoyed the show and did not hesitate to show our appreciation. The girl, playing the piano in the orchestra, sat just in front of us across the barrier. She did her best to get us to be quiet. We decided that we liked her and during the first intermission we smuggled in a drink for her from the bar.

This was just a week or so after Russia had declared war on Germany. Churchill had delivered his speech welcoming the Russians as our allies. The show was a variety show and one of the skits had a very belittling remark about the Russians. Rupe and I took exception to their reference to our noble allies. We very loudly booed. The usher came up to us and asked us to please be quiet. If we had any complaints we should speak to the manager afterwards.

That sounded very reasonable. During the intermission we had another drink on it. After the show, completely plastered, we looked up the manager. He was a very short, slightly built Englishman. We were carrying loaded pistols. We took our pistols out of the holsters. “See that! We carry these pistols so that we will be prepared to deal with fifth columnists. We think you are just as bad as a fifth columnist.”

Had we been in any other place in the world that would have been our Waterloo. Those wonderful Britishers! That little Englishman told us how proud he was to think that the defence of his country was in the hands of such capable fine young men as we were. He really poured it on. No one ever left Buckingham Palace feeling more proud than we were as we parted from that man-

ager of the Comedy Theatre.

Going home we shared the train compartment with an English Army officer. I didn't realize the condition that we were in until I saw the disgust reflected in his face. We had about a quarter of a mile to walk from the station to get home. That was a nightmare. I was tired. Rupe kept pleading with me to let him lie down and sleep - just for one minute. My anger with him kept me going.

Shortly after we arrived at Coulsdon I acquired two girlfriends, Anne and Jeannette, aged eight years. Their fathers worked in London. I don't remember about their schooling. They had a "crush" on me and it was reciprocated. At every opportunity they would meet me as I left the mess. Hand in hand we would go to the parade or the office.

One evening, in October, they came to the mess to see me. They had a stick of gum that they wanted to share with me. They were all agog about a parade that the local War Loan Committee was having the next day. A band and a detachment of soldiers from the Guards at Caterlom were taking part. The Home Guard, ARP, Land Army, Boy Scouts and all would be there. The girls wanted to know if I would be parading. Anne spoke up, "If I were a Boy Scout I could take part in the parade."

Another leave I spent on a minesweeper doing escort duty with coastal convoys. The skipper was a banker in private life. Before the war he had sailed a yacht for pleasure. At the outbreak of war he found himself in the navy as a Reserve Officer. He had a happy ship and I enjoyed my five days with him. One day we sighted a floating mine. The skipper ordered out the army rifles and he and I undertook to shoot down the mine. What a job. Both the ship and the mine were constantly moving. The target was never where you shot and there was no way of knowing which way each would go.

Another time a magnetic mine exploded in front of us. The ship it was near was damaged. Our ship took the impact straight on the bow. The ship just suddenly stopped for an instant.

Chapter 17: Hove

That fall we moved back into the Brighton Area. Battalion Headquarters was at Steyning. A Company moved into some new houses beside the park at Hove. The houses had never been occupied before and were quite modern. We had defensive positions to occupy but only in case of an emergency. There was a range nearby and we were right on the edge of the downs. Training facilities were very good.

And always we established close contact with the local Home Guard. As usual they were commanded by a "Mad Major". One Sunday they invited us to witness a demonstration of their molotov cocktail projectors. They were a length of pipe with a spring that shot the bottle about 100 ft. They had four of them lined up. We were all around examining them when all at once they fired them. Never did Canadians retreat any faster.

One day, while I was Officer Commanding, the "Mad Major" came around with a proposal that we should have a training competition. It sounded like a good idea to us and we agreed. We were to compete in map reading, signaling, marksmanship, rifle and squad drill, etc. It provided a tremendous stimulus to our training. The boys really tried. However, the competition was really not even. The Home Guard Company drew from all of Brighton for its strength. Their drill sergeant wore a long service ribbon of the Indian Army. Their signaler was a telegrapher. Of course nearly every Britisher has served his time with one of the forces.

We had a tough time in our competition. And the unfortunate part was that the "Mad Major" made a point of visiting Div. Headquarters and boasting. When Phil came back to the Company he was quite annoyed and terminated the competition at the first opportunity. To get things back into perspective Phil arranged a poker game between himself, Potts, the "Mad Major" and a couple of others. My job was to get the "Mad Major" tight. Which I did. He proceeded to make a fool of himself at the poker game. Potts was completely disgusted with him. Which was what Phil wanted. With that accomplished I took the "Mad Major" and poured him into his house.

We shared the truck standing, on the driveways in the park, with a British tank regiment. When we each had all of our vehicles there it was very crowded. It seemed that the British always had a number of tanks away at workshop. So the tendency was for our boys to spill over the demarcation line. It really was not very serious. But it did necessitate us occasionally moving a truck when fresh tanks arrived. One day the British Colonel strode into my orderly room. I had never seen him before. Without any preambles he began: "You know old boy, I love you like a brother but if you don't keep your trucks out of my area, we are going to have an awful fight."

Rupe and Russ Nicks occasionally met up with some of the Tank Officers in the pubs. They were invited to drop into the Tank mess on Cambrai Day - the anniversary of the first time tanks were used. They were there for a short while but left as soon as they decently could. They were completely terrified. I have never been able to understand it but British officers can, on occasion, go absolutely berserk and no one seems to mind. These Tank Officers had many drinks in the mess. Then a couple took Rupe and Russ out for a car ride. It was a small English car with a sun roof. The officer, who drove, stood up with his head out the roof and pretended that he was driving a tank. They went on the wrong side of the street, they went on the sidewalk, they tried to run down pedestrians. It was absolutely crazy and no one lifted a hand to stop them. What finally got Rupe and Russ out of the car was when they drove up the tank loading ramp at the railway.

There was not a flatcar there and the driver stopped with only an inch to spare.

While we were in these billets the Battalion was scattered over quite an area. The Medical Officer held sick parade at each Company Headquarters. He was always with us at noon. J.D. MacKintosh was quite a talker. I suspect that he got talking with Scott-Dudley one evening about A Company's lovely billets - it is only a surmise on my part. At any rate at one Battalion Orders Group, Scott-Dudley jumped on me about A Company's morals. He knew that the men were having women sleep with them. It was quite typical of the spirit that prevailed in the Battalion at that time. I tried to get something to work on. He had no facts - just someone had told him and he would not say who.

When not on duty, Rupe and Russ were usually out every evening. There were several good pubs in Brighton. The favorite was the Old Ship. One night they pleaded with me to go along. They felt sorry that I wasn't having more fun. There was no reason for not going so I went. They bought me a drink and it seemed like the beginning of a very good evening. All at once the air became electric I turned to see a couple of big, muscular Canadian Officers come in. They came over to the bar and spoke rather curtly Then one said something that I did not think was called for and I remonstrated. The chap made a rather crude reply. Then I felt someone pushing and urging to sock him. It was little Russ Hicks, I immediately became suspicious. It turned out that Rupe and Russ had gotten into a row with these two the night before. They had brought me along to add a bit of strength to their argument I made a very hasty retreat.

Russ Hicks was a barrel of fun. He had never really grown up. He had to be handled with a very tight rein. But his platoon loved him. When he put his mind to anything he could get results. He left us to join the Paratroop Battalion which was training in the Southern States. His first letter said that he was doing alright - he had a Georgia peach in each arm. That was typical.
One Sunday evening we were at the dinner-dance in London. We stayed later than we really should have. When we got to the hotel entrance there just was not a taxicab to be gotten. We had little time to spare to catch the last train. We were getting desperate when a cab drove up with seven RAF officers in it. They refused to let their cab go. I entreated with them to help us out. They agreed that we could use the cab if one of their number came along to hold it for them. They drew lots and away we went.

Our benefactor, who came along, was an American who had joined the RAF in 1939. He was plastered. "Tonight I am a belligerent. At last I can be proud of my country. America has declared war."

That was the first that we heard of Pearl Harbour and the U.S.A. declaration of war. Six months later the American troops arrived in our old stamping ground at Chipstead. I was curious about them and asked my good friend what the American soldiers were like. "Oh charming. They are just like you Canadians were when you first arrived at Chipstead. So obviously new recruits."

In December there was a pantomime playing in the Brighton Theatre. Jill Manners played the lead as Robin Hood. She had a tricky forest green costume and sang a couple good songs. We saw the show several times. Eventually we got up courage and invited Jill Manners and some of the others up to the mess one evening. Jill's husband came along. He was her manager and was twice her age. We thought that that was terrible. But we still thought that Jill was pretty nice and we had several parties for her.

In the New Year, Vivien Leigh played in Shaw's

"Doctor's Dilemma." By this time we were really organized for parties. We decided to entertain Vivien Leigh. One evening - during the intermission, Fred Tessman and I went backstage and invited Miss Leigh to come to our next party. She accepted. Of course, after that got out we couldn't keep Jill Manners away. However, we were still loyal to her. We had two silver cap badges made up as broaches and engraved - one for Vivien and one for Jill. I don't know what Miss Leigh thought of the evening, but we thought that it was grand.

As part of the preparations for entertaining Vivien Leigh, I had cautioned our officers to not question her about her work. However, we had no control over our English girlfriends. In no time they were asking all sorts of questions about "Gone with the Wind," etc. Afterwards, I apologized to Miss Leigh. She said that she did not mind. It showed that they were interested in her work. However, she did feel like pulling hair whenever anyone suggested that she, Personally, was like Scarlett O'Hara.

My impression was that she was a very hard working, sensible person. A footnote. We learned that the Royal Naval establishment at Roedean School where there were about one thousand people, had invited Miss Leigh for the same evening. She couldn't go because she had promised the Canadians. So she spent the evening with our party of a dozen.

One night I got a phone call from the civilian police in Brighton. Was Pte so and so Number so and so one of ours. Yes he was. Then send someone down here for him. This soldier was one of the quietest and meekest persons imaginable. He rarely spoke above a whisper and when anyone spoke to him, he always kept his eyes on the ground. It turned out that on this night he had gotten drunk. Then, all by himself, he wandered down into the restricted area in Brighton where no one was to be after curfew. When the police found him he had kicked in every plate glass window in the store fronts in one block and was half way down the second block. There were thousands of pounds damage.

This was the beginning of a trying time for the Canadians overseas. Threats of invasion were becoming less real and had been talked about so much that everyone was bored. The boys knew their way around now and all sorts of pranks developed. Of course every misdemeanor had to be punished and recorded on the person's Conduct Sheet. It seemed to me that the penalties prescribed by the Army did not exactly fit. So I developed a code of my own. "Do you accept my punishment? "Yes Sir."

Then for the minor misdemeanors I would award so many hours digging in the garden. This was very satisfactory except on one count. Winter was the time for digging gardens and it meant that the lots occupied were ready for the summer. It was a punishment that had the desired effect on the individual and it meant that his conduct sheet was left clean. The orderly sergeant, whose duty it was to supervise the punishment, could sit by the window, in the warm. The only people who objected were the old ladies who lived in nearby houses. They thought that it was a disgrace and that I was an insufferable brute to force those poor boys to spend their free hours, Saturdays and Sundays, digging, rain or shine.

The army issued leather jerkins for the use of Dispatch Riders. These were beautiful sleeveless leather coats. One day, while checking stores, we discovered that five of them were missing. They were useful for anyone and made wonderful contraband. Our investigation lasted over a period of time. I do not recall whether we traced all of them or not. However, ten years later, at a Battalion re-union in Saskatoon, Smart got well oiled and proceeded to give me hell. Evidently I had

suspected him.

In Feb. 1942, I went on leave to Northern Ireland. Several of our boys had gone there, changed into civvies, and slipped into Southern Ireland where they had had a good leave. I didn't have any civilian clothes so I did not intend to go to Southern Ireland. I chose a very poor time to visit Northern Ireland and I got a very bad impression. The weather was dull, wet and cold. Everything seemed dreary.

I was greatly impressed by the shipyards in Belfast. I did not go through them but shipyards are hard to conceal and they looked tremendous. On the docks I saw a heart warming sight. A little old fellow had a wagon loaded with iron ingots. He had a huge Clydesdale horse hitched to the wagon. The horse was having difficulty in starting the load to move. The old fellow was sitting on the front of his load He leaned forward and stroked the horse's hip with his hand and spoke encouragingly The horse got down so that his belly was only inches off the pavement. With a mighty heave he started the wagon rolling

Things were rather quiet in Belfast so the next day I took the train to Londonderry I enquired in Belfast as to the best hotel in Londonderry I registered and was shown to my room The sheets on the bed had not been changed since the last occupant. I went out and looked over the town. My hotel was the best.

Londonderry had been chosen as an American naval depot. Everywhere I went the place was cluttered up with drunken American sailors. It was altogether disgusting. After dark I ate, went to a movie and arranged to go back to England next day. I spent the rest of my leave with my friends in Kettering.

On my walk around Londonderry I saw a gang of men loading a barge with grain. There was a foreman who wore a bowler hat and a velvet collared top coat. He had twenty-five men. They filled sacks with grain from a bin. The sacks were loaded into a cart and carried across the dock to the barge. There the grain was dumped loose into the barge. I asked the foreman why didn't he put the loose grain into a box on the cart and then dump the cart into the barge. His answer, "We don't do it that way."

In Londonderry I saw several American work parties. They wore a very sensible uniform. The enthusiasm with which they did their work was a great contrast to the local workmen. I liked the American private's walking out uniform. About the best dressed serviceman that I have ever seen was an American Sergeant.

The American officer's walking out uniform was ludicrous. One had to have a laundry handy to even keep it clean. It emphasized the merits of the British officer's field service dress. It could be taken out of a bedroll. You polished the buttons and leather and looked presentable.

In March, I attended a Battalion officer's cooking course at the RAMC barracks near Aldershot. There were only two of us out of sixty that were Canadians.

The other Canadian's name was Kendall. As soon as he learned that I came from near Rosetown he told me that he had been there in 1932 with a group of six planes that barnstormed the prairies as a circus. He had flown the "herald's" plane.

I did not see their exhibition in Rosetown. But I remember that the next morning I was cultivating my summerfallow with an outfit of horses. All at once they had acted strangely. I didn't notice anything to frighten them. Then I looked up and directly overhead were six light aeroplanes.

On one scheme when I was at 2 Canadian In-

fantry Brigade Headquarters waiting for an Orders Group that was to take place as Soon as Potts came back from Division Headquarters, General Crerar drove up.

The previous week there had been a picture of Gen. Alexander driving his own jeep in all of the press. Gen. Crerar was driving. It was obvious that he had poor eyesight and was a poor driver. I sympathized with the uncomfortable driver sitting beside Crerar. The driver was responsible for the vehicle.

However, Crerar soon demonstrated his talents. We were each introduced. On learning that I came from near Rosetown he mentioned the names of some of the officers in the 67th L.A.A. Battery. Crerar had come to 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters to tell Potts that he was to take command of a Division back in Canada.

Chapter 18: Steyning

Early in the summer of '42 the Battalion drew together around Battalion Headquarters at Steyning to live under canvas. We had spent most of our time since the days of Tournaj in separated positions. It was really a good thing for us to live together as a Battalion.

A Company were allotted one driveway into the estate. I had impressed it on the boys that we had to prove that A Company was the best Company. Everyone did a grand job. Tents were put up in concealed positions. Trucks were put under trees as much as possible and then covered with camouflage nets. Several of the other officers of the Battalion complimented me on the job that was done. That in itself was unusual. When I walked into the mess, the first time, Scott-Dudley accosted me and, before everyone bawled me out for the sloppy job that A Company had done in concealment. It seemed that we just couldn't work together.

We had a Battalion sports day at Steyning that was very successful. Running, jumping, shot put, tug of war, etc., baseball. It was a full day of athletics and everyone enjoyed it.

One Sunday we were visited by the Senior Protestant Chaplain in the Canadian Army and his deputy. He was an old man just over from Canada on a tour of the forces. He didn't like what he saw and heard. And he told us so on the Battalion church parade. I was standing beside his deputy from Canada. I never saw anyone so full of consternation and amusement at the same time as the deputy. The old man really poured it on, mincing no words. He told us that some of the things we were doing were a disgrace and that everyone of us should be ashamed. I had seen a lot of padres trying to do some good and meeting with a lot of resentment. This old man, who was old enough to be father of everyone and grandfather of most, was listened to and respected. I cannot say how much good he did, I do know that everyone listened to him without resentment.

While we were at Steyning the Canadian Corps took part in the famous Tiger Exercise under Gen. Montgomery. The exercise took place in Surrey, Sussex, and Kent and lasted for a week. It was to test our ability to maneuver for a long period with limited supplies. Some great distances were covered.

All ranks carried one blanket each. There was to be no other bedding. Actually it wasn't such a great hardship. Everyone had a ground sheet and a greatcoat. Rupe Leblond was my Second in command and we alternated on duty. So when one of us slept we had the other's blanket. The second night out, Pop Brain came to me in a great state. Cpl. Powell had a bedroll. Powell's bedroll was confiscated. Actually his bedroll took up the same space as a blanket. Under actual warfare no exception could have been taken. But the condition of the scheme had been laid down by order. Powell had broken those conditions.

At the end of Tiger Exercise and while awaiting our turn to join the convoy home we had our Company Headquarters at Church Farm near Etchingham Sussex. The farm was Operated by Mrs. McRae and her son Thomas. Her husband, was Commodore McRae of the Royal Navy. He was one of the commanders of the merchant navy convoys that sailed the Atlantic. It was one of his convoys that the Ministry of Information filmed and circulated throughout the world in the early days of the war.

At the end of the exercise we had chosen the outbuilding of Church Farm for our Company kitchen, etc. Mrs. McRae invited us officers to sleep on her living room floor. She had a wall to wall carpet and we were comfortable. As the ex-

ercise was over we had no urgent business. I suppose that Mrs. McRae was keen on getting us up off her floor. At any rate at about 7 a.m. she came into the living room with a tray of glasses, a jug of water and a bottle of Eno's Fruit Salts. "It will not do you any harm and it may do you some good."

Eno's Fruit Salts had always been a standard remedy in our home so I dutifully drank a glassful. However, Rupe was true to the medical traditions of his home and he refused to take any.

That was the beginning of a fine friendship for me. I spent a couple leaves later on at the Church Farm. One day I limed a field for Thomas with a single horse hitched to the fertilizer drill.

The day that I limed the field was at the end of a leave that I had in June. I had gone to a small seaside hotel in Cornwall. I was the only serviceman there. On Sunday the fall of Tobruk was announced. For me that was absolutely the "low time" of the war. It seemed to be utterly hopeless. Most of the other guests seemed to share my opinion.

For the private soldier it was a frustrating time. One day at Steyning, Smythe, who was helping the Battalion shoemaker, came up to me as I was inspecting our lines. He saluted and said, "Arrest me Sir, I'm through soldiering. I won't do anything more. So arrest me."

Such an encounter was entirely irregular. The army has a formal procedure for anyone to voice a complaint. However, I was as unorthodox as Smythe. I took his hand and said, "Come with me." We went back to the shoemaker's tent. I greeted the sergeant, "Sergeant, if you let this man out of your sight during parade hours, I am going to put you on charge." So the situation was solved. But I sympathized with Smythe.

All the while that we were at Brighton and Steyning we used the Downs for some exercises both with and without troops.

The plans I helped to lay out utilizing every weapon. One day I was out with my Company officers doing a Tactical exercise without troops. An aeroplane flew low overhead. We had been reading about a new American plane - the Mustang - and we thought that this was one. A nearby Bofors AA gun opened fire at this plane that we thought was a Mustang. We walked over to the AA post. It was manned by a British gun crew. I asked the sergeant what kind of a plane that he thought this one had been. "I don't rightly know, Sir. Planes are not supposed to fly low over here anyway. We really didn't aim at it very well. You see last week a Messerschmitt flew over this post. The gun crew that was on duty that day did not fire and each got fined ten shillings because the plane flew on and bombed the gasometer at Brighton. We fired to make sure that we didn't get fined like they did."

At about this time it became definite that our Battalion was being given an additional weapon - the 4.2 mortar. Training courses for officers and instructors had been organized and our Battalion was given an allotment of places on each course. I had been in the Army for some time now. Since we left Saskatoon I had not had any special training. Others had always gotten the "Courses." Without boasting I knew that I was doing a good job as Company Commander. I felt that I was within my rights in asking to be considered to be sent on a 4.2 mortar course. Which I did. Scott-Dudley's reply was, "If you are not satisfied with the way that you are being treated as an officer you can always resign your commission and join the ranks as a private soldier."

In the middle of the summer of '42 the Battalion went back to Netheravon for a Machine Gun field firing and training period. We were under the su-

pervision of the Small Arms School but we did all of our own instructional and administrative work. The Battalion Second in command together with the Company Second in commands formed the nucleus of the training staff and organized the "school." It was a most successful training period. A Company excelled themselves. I was proud of the Company. At the conclusion of the "concentration", but before the Battalion left Netheravon. I changed Company commands with Reg Rankin. He had been commanding the Saskatchewan. LI. Company at the Machine Gun Holding Unit at Crookham Crossroads in the Aldershot area.

Chapter 19: Crookham Crossroads

The tour of duty at the Holding Unit for the Company commanders was four months. I can truthfully say that those four months were one of the most instructive periods of my army career. It was almost like a "course" in Army administration.

The role of the Holding Unit was to hold and train reinforcements for the Battalion in the field. Each field Battalion had it's Company in the Holding Unit. Everyone, who, for any reason, was struck off the strength of the field Battalion came on to the strength of the Holding Unit. These then gathered at the Holding Unit, the recruits from Canada, the people from long Army Courses, the people from hospital and especially the bad eggs from "detention." They made quite a mixture.

The officers of the Holding Unit consisted of the rotating commanders of the reinforcement Companies and a permanent staff of officers. Some of these permanent people, no doubt, were people who had gotten themselves into a soft job for the duration. They were partly responsible for the bad name the Holding Unit had with the field Battalions. But a lot of the friction was caused by plain childishness on the part of the officers in the field Battalions.

Most of the permanent officers in the Holding Unit were men with distinguished First War records. They would have given anything to be with the field unit but they were just too old. Some of the instructors were held because of their particular ability. After a period of time they were usually granted their wish to get up to their own unit.

Of course the Holding Unit had its share of the oddities of human nature. Because no one liked it's static atmosphere the presence of these oddities was sometimes overemphasized.

Lt. Col. John Christie was the Commanding Officer of the Machine Gun Holding Unit. He was one of the finest gentlemen that I have ever met. He was a Company Commander with the Toronto Scottish during the days at Tournai Barracks. I hadn't known much of him then but I came to I have a great admiration for him during my tour with the Holding Unit. John could not help loving the Toronto Scottish. He was man enough to admit his Partiality.

One of my first jobs at the Holding Unit was to nominate an officer for a 4.2 mortar course. I put my own name in. Christie vetoed that. He sympathized with me. He put it slightly differently. In the Toronto Scottish they had officers, like me, whom they just couldn't do without and, like me, never got away on a course. I couldn't leave the Holding Unit for that would defeat the purpose of my coming.

Those were the days of the phony war in Canada. It seemed to us that the chief concern of Canadians then were cost plus contracts, higher wages, farmer's march on Ottawa and zombies. Reinforcements were very scarce. Each field unit was under strength. On the roll of the Holding Unit were many who seemed eligible to go to the field. Why did they not go?

The War Establishment of the Holding Unit provided for a bare minimum to operate the Unit. Fatigues and routine duties, which increased with the numbers, had to be done by the "transients". In actual practice that meant that many people were detained at the Holding Unit to do these jobs which, very largely, were not recognized by the W.E.. I, in my naiveté, contended that more of these men should be sent on to the field units. It so happened that the Toronto Scottish Company Commander changed a few weeks after I came. The new chap was a splendid young

fellow whom John Christie worshipped as if he was his son. The new Toronto Scottish chap sided with me at the Company Commander's meeting with the Commanding Officer. The Officer Commanding of the Headquarter Company, Major Bolsby D.F.C. - another Toronto Scottish - told us that we just didn't know what we were talking about. He must have the fatigue's that he had. However, Christie made a great effort to be fair. He authorized the Toronto Scottish Company Commander and I to make a survey of the camp. The next day we went through the camp with a notebook and listed the work that each person was doing. We compiled the results and reported to Christie that at least one hundred men could be spared. Bolsby hit the roof. But Christie was convinced and ordered our plan to be adopted.

We were elated. But how naive we were. Within two weeks the old order was re-established. The thing was that when someone came down from CMHQ and saw a few cigarette stubs on the parade square there was hell to pay. When the field units were under strength a few men no one in the rear echelons were disturbed. Liaison between the rear and forward echelons was so poor that the complaints from the field never registered.

Dieppe was a horrible experience at the Holding Unit. Field returns report all casualties to the Holding Unit immediately almost before news of the raid came out in the press. We were getting reports of killed, missing, wounded and prisoners. Many of the chaps we had known well. The thousands that were reported was shocking.

The Adjutant of the Holding Unit was Dennis Fusedale, one of our original SLI. He and I made many sorties together in the evenings. There was a little rural pub a couple miles away which we visited occasionally. There we met only the local farm labourers, etc. Over a pint we would talk about the crops, weather, etc. About four miles away was a more elaborate pub that had a dance hall in connection.

One night at the pub, I forget what the occasion was, but we were celebrating something. In the course of the evening we drank a lot of liquor. When it came time to go home, Fuzzy and I could barely stagger. In fact much of the way Fuzzy held on the belt of my MacKintosh and I towed him.

The evening of a mess party I got a rude shock. For nearly three years now any feminine company that I had been in was English. That night a group of Canadian nurses, who had just arrived from Canada, came into our mess together. Their shrill, hard voices were horrible.

From the Holding Unit I went on leave to Oxford. The Auxiliary Services had arranged for officers to stay in the University buildings during the time that classes were not in session. We stayed in New College for a week.

Every morning there were two or three lectures. Each afternoon there was a tour arranged to some place nearby. We attended a play in the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford on Avon. We went through the Bodelian Library. We boated on the river. One afternoon I went to the Aylesbury market. There I met a farmer who took me to his home for tea. After tea I went out and drove his Massey Harris combine around the field once.

One evening an Oxford Women's organization arranged a panel discussion on some topic of the day. I forget what it was about. They had a couple British officers, two American officers, a Canadian nurse and they came to me to see if I would approve their choice of a Canadian officer. Of course I did. But this was another occasion when I failed to understand the English. They had chosen Capt. Ted Leathers. He stayed on in

England after the war and became an MP. I had heard of Leathers, he was an artillery officer. I did not really know him. But one glance classified him for me. He wore riding breeches and boots - a uniform which, even in the British Army, only a general wore at odd times. He affected an English attitude and accent. Those English women swallowed it hook, line and sinker. The last that I heard of Leathers, Heath appointed him Governor General of Bermuda.

I met the Canadian nurse again two years later at the officer's leave hotel in Amaalfi, Italy. Another acquaintance I made was a French Canadian RC padre. Six months later I met him in London. He asked me if I was busy at noon. "No." "Could I join him for lunch?" He was eating with an interesting couple. I did.

The interesting couple were a Free Frenchman and his wife who had come to London for a leave from Algiers. In Algiers they did radio broadcasting to France for the Free French.

We ate at Prunier's. We handed the Frenchman the wine list and told him to order for us. He did so very expertly. The luncheon lasted for well over two hours. We had several wines and they were all pleasant. That morning I had bought a map of the world for my current affairs class. It was on stiff cardboard. It folded but it was still as large as a storm window. After the luncheon I left the restaurant with this map under my mackintosh, to protect it from the rain. After I had gone a few blocks I realized that I had lost my map. Only then did it register with me that I was horribly drunk.

The party consisted of the French couple, my padre friend and a second R.C. French speaking Canadian padre and myself. The second padre told us that, when he arrived in London the first time, his English was not very good. The clerk at the hotel asked him if he wanted his room "with or without." He was mystified but he decided to say "with." Later that evening when a comely young lady rapped on his door, he understood what "with" meant.

This caused our serious young Frenchman to observe that in wartimes, morals always suffered, His demure young wife spoke up, "What a pity that there should be a rubber shortage at the same time."

One Sunday Fuzzy invited me to go with him to spend the day with his sister at Oxey and Bushey. That is a station on the Underground on the outskirts of London where the railway comes above the ground. We had a very pleasant day. Sometime after tea we went down to the local pub where we had a few drinks and a game of darts. When it came time for us to return we walked down to the station - Fuzzy with his sister and I with her daughter.

When the daughter and I got to the station, the train was pulling out with Fuzzy on it. There was another in ten minutes. But it was the last. When it arrived it was full. I walked down the platform looking into each compartment, always full. Finally the train started, I opened a door and was about to step in when a guard slammed the door shut. This was serious. This was the last train and English trains pick up speed quickly. I had no time to argue. So I gave the guard a heave and climbed aboard the train.

At the next station our train stopped and waited until that guard walked to it and then searched the train to get my name. What was John Christie going to say when he heard of this? He never did. Someone in the Underground management understood.

One day my CSM went on leave. The next senior Non-commissioned officer was a smart young sergeant just over from Canada. Because he was

so able he had been held in Canada for two years against his will. He was experienced in handling troops in Zombie Canada. The first day that he was acting CSM I came on to parade and found only about one quarter of our Company strength mustered.

"Where is everybody, Sergeant?" "Well sir - -", and then he enumerated where everyone was. The boys, most of whom were old soldiers, had sized up the situation immediately. There were all sorts of reasons why it was just intolerable that they should go on parade that morning. I told the sergeant that we would postpone our Company parade one hour and that I wanted everyone on it. They were.

I have often heard a lot of nonsense about relations between officers and other ranks. In every Company that I ever commanded there were many men whom I knew that I could rely on when the chips were down. There were always a few in each Company that I knew had to be watched and shepherded into action. But in the normal dull routine of army life, very often the opposite was true. The men who were resourceful and dependable in a pinch were the first to cook up some devilment to add a bit of excitement to life, that was one of the first lessons that I learned from Potts. An other rank was responsible only for what he had been ordered to do. An officer was responsible for every contingency.

Most of the incorrigibles in the army congregated at the Holding Unit. They would get sent to detention from the field unit. From detention they came into the reinforcement stream at the Holding Unit. There the great worry was to keep them on the straight and narrow path long enough to get them back up to the field unit. Quite often this was impossible.

The G.O.C of the rear echelons was as concerned as anyone about the morale of the troops. Orders came out to crack down on the Absent Without Leaves. One of the bad boys was a Toronto Scottish private who had just returned to the Holding Unit after an extended holiday by being Absent With out Leave for ninety days. After being away 28 days he had been declared a deserter. So a Court Martial was set up to try him. Whom did he want to act as his defending officer? This fellow was an experienced hand. Who was the last Company commander to arrive at the Holding Unit? Major Mersereau of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa. Then he would have Major Mersereau to defend him. This was arranged.

John Christie had just received a blast from CMHQ about deserters. He felt that he had a paternal interest in this Toronto Scottish private who was one of their original number. So Christie called Mersereau into his office and told him that he wanted a fair trial for the deserter, but he also wanted that an example be made of him. He didn't want Mersereau to upset the Court Martial by some technical point.

This aroused Mersereau's ire. He and I roomed together. He vowed that he was going to get the deserter off. How could he possibly do that? The chap had freely confessed.

Mersereau went to the Canadian Neurological Hospital at Basingstoke and got a psychiatrist to examine the Scottish private. This psychiatrist testified, before the Court Martial, that the deserter was sub-normal and not responsible for his actions. The Court Martial dismissed the charge. When this went through Part II orders the paymaster was obliged to pay the deserter for the full time that he had been AWL. I thought that John Christie would go crazy.

Col. Christie had a Great Dane bitch. Huge, ponderous, fat, old Bess worshipped John and followed him everywhere. All day long she lay at his feet beneath his desk in the Orderly Room.

Fusedale whose special charge was the maintenance of the dignity and decorum of the Battalion Orderly Room, used to get furious about old Bess. On the most awesome occasions, Bess would let off a tremendous fart. In addition to the noise and stench, Christie would further shatter the solemnity of the occasion by stopping and saying, 'Shame on you Bess."

Saturday mornings the whole Battalion would parade on the square where we would do Battalion drill. Rumour had it that John would turn around and ask: "Do you want to see them march around again, Bess?" To which attention old Bess would happily bark. Then Christie would march us around the parade square again.

One day word came from the SLI. that there was to be a Mess dinner and that the Commanding Officer wanted all SLI. officers in England to attend. We all went. The Battalion was due to be reorganized in the near future. That meant that it would be greatly enlarged, Embury had been away for some time doing staff work at Corps Headquarters. Irvine had been on 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade staff. They both planned on coming back to the Battalion. They arranged to speak at the Mess dinner after everyone had had quite a lot to drink. Embury set the pattern in his speech when he went out of his way to ridicule and insult the Holding Unit. It was one of the most vicious performances I have ever witnessed. A case of building up Battalion morale by ridiculing someone else. At that moment the Mess dinner degenerated into a mob scene. Scott-Dudley sat there like a happy Buddha. I have never felt so helpless and cowardly in my life.

In the condition that everyone was in, it was very unlikely that anyone would have paid heed to anything that I might have said. It was quite likely that by speaking my mind I would have only made a bad situation worse. The next day I could only apologize to John Christie for what was said.

While at the Holding Unit I came into contact with one of the most gratifying ventures that the Army ever undertook. It was found that in every Battalion there were a few men with a very limited education. It was almost unbelievable but there were some native born Canadians with no schooling at all. In conjunction with the Auxiliary Services, the Army set up a classroom, at the Holding Unit, where a group of these men were given from three to six months to complete their elementary school education, It was a most inspiring experience to witness the pride and satisfaction of each of these men the day that he wrote his first letter home. I am sure that all of those who were connected with that work are very grateful for the opportunity that they had and proud of what they accomplished.

One day a group of officers from the Holding Unit were invited for lunch by the management of an aircraft factory in the Oxford Reading district. I do not recall the name of the company, They were making plywood training aircraft. We toured the factory. Most of their plywood came from Norway. Some from Canada. They said that they were able to work to specifications almost as minute as with metal. Their pride was a master lathe that had been made in Switzerland. It was kept in a special room where the humidity and temperature were controlled.

At lunch the managing director spoke to us. According to decisions made at the level of Roosevelt and Churchill, Britain was to concentrate on making fighter aircraft, both operational and training. The bulk of the bomber aircraft would be made in the U.S.A.. Bomber aircraft was the most likely to be converted to civilian use. The result would be that after the war, Britain would lack the facilities, expertise and experience most needed for peacetime
They had plans on their drawing board ready to

build a 200 ton plywood freighter plane but were not allowed to build it. We sympathized - what else could we do?

Bertie Thompson was to take over the Holding Unit Company after me. He came to look around. Robinson was in the district on leave, Robbie was well acquainted. We cooked up the idea of a party at the Aldershot Officer's club that evening, Robbie was to arrange for the girls. Bertie and I were to meet Robbie with the girls at the home of General Hill. I had been there once before, but that night I got lost. We turned into what I thought were the right gates. The driveway lead into spacious grounds surrounding a palatial home, I knew that I was lost. I rang the bell and a butler answered. I asked for directions. The butler went for the phone book. I called in Bertje so that he could see. As we were concluding our directions with the butler, Princess Patricia came into the hallway and went upstairs.

My tour of duty at the Holding Unit came to an end. In checking out I had to clear my kit with the Quartermaster. At the beginning of the war, officers had been given a sum of money with which to provide themselves with a pistol, binoculars, etc. At this time the policy was changed and officers were issued these things. Now those binoculars, which were in short supply, that had been purchased privately, had to be turned into the Quartermaster stores to be appraised. After their value had been set they were to be returned. I had my doubts about the returning part, I objected to turning in my binoculars. John Christie was even more obdurate than I. He would not allow me to leave the Holding Unit until I had turned in my binoculars I did so. And, as I thought, I have never heard of them since,

Chapter 20: Frant

When I got back to A Company in mid December they were billeted in a boys residential school, Hazelhurst It was a grand set-up. Kitchens, dining room, dormitories and gymnasium all in a lovely grounds, with playing fields, etc., out in the country just a mile or so from Frant. The Company was in great shape.

During all the time that I had been at the Holding Unit the Battalion had been taking very strenuous physical training. The objective was to travel on foot cross country with fighting kit, ten miles in two hours. It was part of Montgomery's hardening process It was one of the fortunes of war that I missed all of that period, In any normal going I have always been able to do my full share. I think that four months of such strenuous training would have been too much.

The pub in Frant was quite a pleasant famous old place, Abergavenny Arms. One of the first evenings there I met an elderly chap who was one of the editors of the famous magazine -- Punch. He traveled up to London by train each day. Two nights a week he did aircraft spotting duty at the local post. His tour of duty was from 24.00 hours to 4.00 hours, His routine was to start the evening off in the pub. When it closed at ll:00 p.m he went across the street to the officer's mess of a mobile bath unit, where he would stay till time to go on duty. After his time was up at 04.00 hours he would go home, bathe, shave, dress, have breakfast and then back to London.

Christmas Day we had a bang up turkey dinner for the Company. The boys decorated the hall and dining room. It was very festive. Christmas Eve we had a sing-song in the entrance hall. There was a piano and we had several good pianists. That was the Christmas season that Bing Crosby introduced the song, "White Christmas." Whenever I hear that song now my thoughts go back to Hazelhurst.

During all of the period of strenuous training there were three men in the Company who, because of their jobs, had been excused from parades. One was the Company Orderly Room Clerk, another was the Cpl. cook and the third was the Cpl. Driver Mechanic. Early on Christmas Eve these three had gathered at the Abergavenny Arms for a drink. I suppose that being as it was Christmas they had a few more or a few stronger than usual. It seems that the conscience of each was bothered by the fact that they had been excused the strenuous physical training. They assured each other that they were just as good soldiers as any in the Battalion. They each decided to prove it. On the way home from the pub they had to pass a duck pond. On this particular night there was a quarter of an inch of ice covering the pond. Like the good soldiers that they were, they lined up on the edge of the duck pond, and, at the given command, dove into the pond, greatcoats and all. We were singing White Christmas when this sodden, bedraggled and very sober trio stumbled into the hallway.

Chapter 21: Toward Castle

The SLI. went to the Combined Operations School at Toward Castle, west of Glasgow, to take BRICK training. This was in improvising a beach to land an army formation and to control the movement of that formation through that beach. I don't know why we were sent. In mid 1942, it was definite enough that we were to be a Support Battalion that we were sending people on 4.2 mortar courses. However the BRICK training was good experience. I am sure that our assault landing in Sicily went more smoothly because we understood how such actions were planned and controlled.

The BRICK consisted of the SLI. and elements from nearly every unit in the 1st Div. I was in charge of the advance party of some sixty, all ranks from our Battalion. The Div. order placed me in charge of all of the other advance parties as well. Of the other units, there were about forty officers. Our people had some preparations to make. All of the officers of all the advance parties had several days instructions on the routine and work of the school before the main parties arrived. I was a Captain. The other officers were mostly captains, some lieutenants. The Chief Instructor of the school, Major Graves, an Englishman, expected us to parade from class to class, from billet to mess, just as body of British officers would have done. We had a running fight over that with me in the middle.

This was a British Army school, like all formations of the British Army it was affected by the Parsimony of the British tax payer. The chief Instructor, who was the senior officer of the school, had to handle Battalions and Brigades, that is a major had to push around Lt. Cols and brigadiers. He should have held the rank of at least a full Colonel. The result was that, though Major Graves was a very competent man, he was a frustrated man. I am sure that his manner would have been less irritating were it that he did not have to spend so much of his time trying to persuade people to do things the way he knew that they should be done.

One of the techniques used at this school was to use a Dutch boat called a schut. This was a flat bottomed ship that was sailed, loaded with stores, at high tide, until it grounded on the beach. At low tide a metal mesh roadway was laid over the sandy beach to the ship. Then the stores could be loaded directly from the ship into the trucks.

One day I was standing on the beach watching the schut being unloaded. A voice spoke at my elbow: "Hello son, how are you doing?" I turned to see Frederick Morgan, wearing the uniform of a Lieutenant General and surrounded with staff officers of all ranks. I was even more happy to see him that he appeared to be on seeing me. "What brings you to a bleak place like this, Sir?" "Oh, they gave me a command of an assault corps. I heard that the Canadians were up so I came to find out how to do it."

Of course the job that he had been given, and was already working on, was the planning of the assault landing on Normandy.

The climax of our training was in doing a scheme in which troops and stores were actually brought in over a beach. What a hell of an experience. "A" Company had a Navy's job. We unloaded stores which in this scheme were thousands of petrol cans filled with water. They were cans that the school used on all such schemes. Some leaked. And all the night that the scheme lasted it was raining a real Scotch mist. In order to keep our end up the boys had to work steadily. Under such conditions I had to work with them. I was soaked to the hide, cold and had muscles aching all over my body.

The next night we had troops to bring through the beach as re-inforcements. For this part of the scheme 120 of Our SLI boys had been left back in Bexhill. They arrived in Glasgow that evening. Al Ewen one of the school instructors and I met them in Glasgow. They were to be fed in the main station at which they arrived. Then, carrying everything they had in the world, we were to march up hill to the upper level local railway. This would take us to a little rural station near a jetty, There we would load onto an LST which would carry us in onto the beach.

The time between the trains was an hour. The distance between was a mile mostly uphill with a cobblestone paving. The move was quite reasonable for one man. For one hundred and twenty it was a different matter. Each of us took charge of forty men. Al and I got ours fed and on the way. The boys had had a most uncomfortable train ride from the South of England. Their kits were heavy, it was raining and the cobblestones were slippery, About half way up we passed an old girl who was on her way home from an evening in the pub. She called out: "boys is your journey really necessary?

To understand the full humour of that remark one had to have experienced travel the millions of signs posted in Britain at that time to discourage unnecessary travel.

We were to travel on the last scheduled train that night on that branch line. Al and I got our boys aboard. The train pulled out without the school instructor and his party. We got to our destination, got off, the train pulled out. There was no settlement at all, just the station. We hadn't the foggiest notion where the jetty was. It was black, dark and raining. We phoned back to Glasgow and got in touch with the Transit Officer. Finally the instructor and his party joined us in trucks The scheme carried on.

On night five of us went down to the local pub for an evening. I do not remember who all we were except that Al Ewen was one of the five. On the way to the pub, Al asked us to stand his round for the evening as he did not have any money. The barmaid was a stout Scot of about forty years with an accent that was even more pronounced than Al's. The evening went along beautifully until near closing time. Then the barmaid planted herself in front of Al, arms akimbo "now it's your turn." She was upholding the honour of the Scots. In our Battalion that became the standard greeting whenever Al appeared

At the conclusion of the course our Battalion officers staged a party in the local pub in honour of the instructors and to celebrate the ending of a hellish course, The pub had quite a large bar. On the upper floor was a very good dance floor. We had good music. It was a good party. Major Graves and his wife were there. No one appeared to be taking any responsibility to entertain Mrs. Graves, so I stepped in. She was probably in her forties. Quite a fine woman, very respectable.

We had just finished a turn at dancing and were on our way downstairs to the bar for a drink. On the stairway we passed MacDonald. He spoke up;"Well, Mitch, how are you, doing?" Mrs. Graves turned to me, horrified. "Did you hear what that man called me? I am having a good time but I am certainly not that."

Chapter 22: Liphook

Early in the year some eighty all ranks were sent on an aircraft recognition course at the Artillery Depot at Liphook, I was the senior officer. The others were Al Ewen, Everett Bates and John Harry. It was a horrible course but it only lasted two weeks.

One day while we were there Bates and I looked up Harry McKenzie from Forgan. McKenzie's battery, the 67th LAA from Rosetown had been broken up for reinforcements to other units. He was feeling very low. Bates was very enthusiastic about what a fine officer that McKenzie was.

In Liphook is the famous pub called the "Anchor" where Nelson is supposed to have rendezvoused with Lady Hamilton. More recently Churchill and Eisenhower met there. We had several evenings there. One evening Ewen, Harry and I had dinner there. Afterwards we got quite drunk. On the way home John Harry got the idea that he wanted to play rugby. He would wait until Al and I had walked ahead. Then he would run and make a flying tackle. After one "Down" I couldn't find my fancy wedge cap which had a silver badge on it. We lit matches and crawled all over in the blackout. To placate me, Al threw away his issue cap. That night his action made me feel better. Even next day I couldn't find my cap.

Our move back to the Battalion at Bexhill was laid on by Army Movement Control. They landed us in Charing Cross Station in London on Saturday afternoon at 5:00 p.m., with just under an hour to get to Waterloo station. When we got off the train at Charing Cross the whole platform and station was one seething mass of humanity Everyone of us had his full kit with him. Baggage parties and the like were out, It was a case of everyone getting his kit out of the station to the trucks at the gate as best he could. Those were my orders. We officers rounded up a baggage cart and pushed our own kits out to the waiting trucks. John Harry was furious. The gross indignity of Empire commissioned Officers having to lug their own kit through the heart of the Empire.

Soon after we got back from Liphook I went on leave with the navy. This time it was on a RN destroyer that was doing convoy duty in the English channel. There were four naval officers on board and myself. This was a very efficient ship but there was not the casual camaraderie that I had found aboard the Naval Reserve Minesweeper. On this destroyer the only time that I could get the Skipper to open up and talk was when I mentioned Mountbatton' s name. Then he would wax eloquently in praise for a few minutes.

The third day out, I developed a boil on the back of my neck. There was no medical officer aboard ship and I thought that I was going to go crazy before I got off it. When I got back to the Battalion the Medical Officer lanced my neck. I asked him what caused my boils, "If you would wash your bloody neck once in awhile you wouldn't get boils," I don't know whether I have had a similar infection again but always since I have used generous amounts of soap and water whenever I felt something like a boil developing. Always it has disappeared.

Chapter 23: Bishop Stortford

Almost immediately on my return from leave I was dispatched on a War Office course for instructors on aircraft recognition - boils and all. There was a little WAC medical orderly there who dressed my boils daily. After the first week I was out of misery.

This was one of the crazy things that happened during the War. I had never had any training or experience as an instructor. I had had the recognition course at Liphook, but that was the extent of my knowledge of aircraft. This was a War Office course for instructors. I was the only Canadian there. There were two Americans. All the rest were Britishers everyone of whom had been engaged in the Air Defence of Great Britain for at least two years. They were instructors in Aircraft Recognition . The Canadian who should have been on this course was the instructor whom we had had at Liphook. I don't know how our Battalion was given the course opening, but I suspect that I was chosen because the course was described as being long enough that I would be struck off the strength of the Battalion, it was a smooth way of getting rid of me. However on arriving at Bishop Stortford I discovered how long the course was. I phoned the Adjutant Bob Wilson. He rescinded my SOS return.

That was my worst period in the Army. Just as a bit of a freshener they would flash pictures of wing tips, tail units, etc., on the screen for a few seconds we were supposed to identify them. There would follow long dreary sessions on lesson plans, practical demonstration etc. I spent every waking moment studying. I don't think that the Battalion ever did get a report on my performance. It Was likely too severe a strain on international relations.

According to the two American officers, who were on this course, it had been great good luck that the North African Assault landings had met with such little opposition. According to them, the first people ashore on one beach were the nurses. The Americans got into trouble on all the beaches because the first thing that they did, before leaving their ships, was, with true American disdain for physical labour, throw away their shovels. When they did hit opposition, they had no way to protect themselves.

At the conclusion of the course, the Chief Instructor talked with each of us, going over our particular circumstances and making suggestions for the bettering of Instruction in our Units. When I got back to Bexhill, I reported to Scott-Dudley. He suggested that I give my report to Embury who was now second in command. I went to him. He said he would call on me when he needed the advice. Then I was given command of a 4.2 inch mortar Battery in the re-organized Battalion, I never did shoot a plane with a mortar.

Chapter 24: Heavy Mortars

My Battery Second in command was Phil Staynor. Phil was one of the smartest soldiers that our Battalion produced. His father had been a pal of George Pearkes during the First War. Phil had joined the SLI. in '39 as a private. He was one of the first to be recommended for commissioned rank. After coming out of Officer Cadet Training Unit, Pearkes had taken Phil for a period as his Aide de Camp. Phil had just recently come back from a 4.2 mortar course at Netheravon. It was a peculiar set-up. My relations with Battalion Headquarters were well known. Phil could hardly afford to be too friendly with me. However, we got on well together.

Then followed a really phony period in our Battalion's life. We were reorganized as a Support Battalion with Vickers, Oerlikon AA guns and 4.2 mortars. We had four mortars without dial sights. Because they were not complete, Battalion Headquarters decreed that we would not do any mortar training. In spite of our protests this went on for some time. Then one day orders came from Division for our Battalion to move the Doune in two weeks time. All hell broke loose. For sixteen hours per day we trained with our mortars and got ready to move.

As we were now moving into action we had to shed much that we had personally accumulated

That June morning in 1943, when we left Bexhill for Scotland, I left my steamer trunk and suit case sitting on the lawn in front of my billet in Bexhill. The next time that I saw them was in Winnipeg in March, 1945, The kit storage people in the Canadian Army were among the unsung heroes of the war. They did a marvelous job.

At Doune, in Scotland, we were completely outfitted for war, We finally got all of our weapons, We still had not fired the mortars. We were given a range on which to practice. The day that our Battery was to shoot the Division Commander, General Simmonds, came down to watch. Phil Staynor had the platoon commanders with their OP parties. Scott-Dudley and Simonds watched at the OP with them, Embury came along also. Instead of allowing me to stay on the mortar line, Embury ordered me to accompany him. This was stupid and I should have refused. The officers at the mortar line were reinforcements They had never even seen a 4.2 mortar before. Two of the sergeants had had mortar training but since the officers and sergeants, were strangers one should not have expected them to work well together the first time.

Embury and I stood at a respectful distance from the GOC at the Op where Phil was coaching the Op Officers. They bedded in, they ranged on the target. Everything seemed fine. Then they ordered two rounds mortar fire. I thought that we had had it. Bombs dropped all around us. I don't suppose that Simmonds was ever exposed to greater danger. Embury and I went storming back to the mortar line. He raged up and down the mortar line. He was going to court martial the SOB who was responsible. The Poor reinforcement officers were terrified. What I could never understand was how Embury could have the gall to carry on like that, when it was so obvious to everyone that he didn't know enough to be able to say who was at fault. One trip down the mortar line and I could see with my naked eye that the right zero lines were not parallel. I whispered to Sgt. Brown to get the damn things right.

We were at Doune for about two weeks. I think that the leave business was handled very badly. Everyone was in a terrific flap. Then at the very last moment we got permission for a number of seventy two hour passes They were wonderful for those boys who had married in Britain.

A couple of days before we learned of these

passes some of our boys were AWL for several hours. It was a bit of stupid nonsense because they did not do anything. One of them was a Signaler. He was a confirmed Cpl. and I couldn't punish him. All that I could do was charge him, and send him before the Commanding Officer. The likely result would be that I would lose a good signal corporal. I didn't want to do that. So I simply told him that he was going to lose his next leave. Then we learned about the 72 hour passes. The Signaler came in to plead for a pass. His young wife had just given birth to a child. "You have had your Pass, Corporal. " That signal Corporal was one of the first in our Battery to be killed in action.

The night before we were to leave camp to embark we had a party in 2 Group mess. Embury dropped in. The thought occurred to me that we might never meet again, I thought that it would be terrible if we parted without having a frank appraisal of each other. So I arranged to get Embury off in a corner of the mess alone. Very quietly and without heat, I told him what a useless individual that I thought him to be. He listened to me very patiently. Then he reciprocated by telling me exactly what he thought of me. It was not complimentary. We had thought to get this over without disturbing the Mess, however, everyone listened in an awful silence

To embark we were separated into different parties. Our trucks and carriers went on transport ships. Phil Staynor and the left out of battle's went on another ship. I, with the pared down fighting elements of the battery were to go ashore in amphibious trucks called DUKW'S. These were driven by English Army Service Corps drivers. They were to leave us at the end of the first day of fighting, we were to go ashore with the assault waves of the 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade. However, the ships carrying the 2 Canadian Infantry Brigades did not have sufficiently strong davits to hoist our DUKW'S so we were loaded on the ship carrying the R22 Regiment of the 3 Canadian Infantry Brigade.

That was the beginning of a running fight with the Navy. The Navy was in charge of us until we set foot on land. A naval officer was to lead us ashore at the right spot. However, the Captain of our Ship couldn't see what difference it made where we got ashore so long as we got there. It was just as important to kill Germans in one spot as in another. I think that he suspected me of cowardice when I insisted that we must land on the 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade beach.

We boarded our ship in Glasgow. The DUKW'S and stores were all aboard when we got there our first discovery was that we had the wrong DUKW's. ICIB DUKW and stores had been loaded on our ship,

However, we were to do a full dress rehearsal of our assault landing the next day, We arranged to get things sorted out then.

Next day the trial landing went off as planned. We got our DUKW'S sorted out. Everyone seemed happy. To go back aboard ship we were each to report to the Embarkation Staff Officer. It was his job to arrange transportation back, We reported. "God I wish that everyone was as easy to handle as you people see that ship out there? "Well, that is Your ship. Good luck,"

The ship lay at anchor. It looked like about two miles away. Actually it was about six miles out, and our DUKW'S only carried enough gasoline for about 8 to 10 miles of sea travel. There was an odd wave but then land lubbers expected to see waves on the ocean. We struck out to our ship. The further out we got the rougher the water seemed to get. We bobbed about like corks. Finally we reached our ship. The Captain was furious. What kind of God Damned fools were we. Didn't we know that the water was too rough for

him to pick us up with his davits. He had to pick us up. We didn't have gas enough to get us ashore again.

Finally he agreed to take us aboard. I never realized what a tricky business it was. We got close and scrambled up rope ladders. With both the ship and the DUKW bobbing up and down, even getting started up that ladder was something, Getting the DUKW'S hooked on was terrible. When they were finally aboard most of the davits had suffered and one was bent, horribly. The skipper held me personally responsible for the damage to his fine ship.

Because of the davits we had had to load with 3 Canadian Infantry Brigade. Our packet of orders were on the 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade ship. So when the eventful day came to open the sealed packets We didn't have any orders or maps. Lt. Col. Bernatchez was Commanding Officer of the R22R. He looked after all of our' needs. In spite of the mix-up we were well cared for. That trip to Sicily was one of the most luxurious trips that I have ever taken. There was plenty of room for everyone. And the food was wonderful. The cook baked fresh rolls every day. I have never tasted such delicious rolls anywhere. Of course we had just left war rationed England with its whole wheat flour. Only the finest Canadian white flour was used on this ship. After the months of dull English weather it was wonderful to soak up the beautiful sunshine. Even the prospect of encountering the mosquitoes about which we were given dire warnings seemed pleasant

Chapter 25: The Assault on Sicily

It is difficult for one landlubber to explain to another the majesty of the convoy of ships that assembled in the Mediterranean on the 9th of July, 1943. Fast ships, slow ships, big ships, little ships, merchant ships, warships ships from America, ships from the ports of Great Britain ships from North Africa. In every direction, as far as the eye could see, there were ships of every kind imaginable. The magic of that confluence inspired confidence in everyone The mass of a great ship suggests an inexorable force that dwarfs the puny efforts of a human. A great convoy such as this one was suggestive of the universe itself.

The morning that we landed at Pachino was dark and windy. It was very early when the various detachments began taking their place to disembark. In Spite of the excitement there was an unreal dreaminess about the occasion that, even the irritating French Canadian accent of the staff officer, who was controlling the disembarkation over the ship loudspeakers, did not dispel. We got into our DUKW'S and were lowered onto the water, We hit it with a crash. Then we were off into the darkness bobbing about furiously. I wore a pair of hand made boots that morning. I stood on the outside of the craft and got them soaked. Later the treads rotted and my boots fell apart. Most of our boys were under the canvas top of the DUKW. They sat there, knife in hand, ready to slash their way out should the DUKW sink.

A Sub-Lieutenant of the RNVR lead us ashore We were to land when the immediate beach was cleared. The signal was to be a green verey light. it seems that the Italians and German had not been told. At least they did not co-operate as far along the coast of Sicily as we could see the enemy fired off green verey light. It was hopeless. A year later, while awaiting a zero hour, a group of our boys got talking about the time that they had been most frighten. Sgt. Goldsworthy said that that morning we landed at Pachino he had been very frighten. Turning to me, "and by God youse was too." I carried a rifle that morning. After we got underway, I released the safety catch so that I would be ready for anything. In my nervousness, I discharged a round. That was a very poor example to set but it was a good thing for me. It made me realize what a state I was in and thereafter I made a conscious effort to control myself. After we had set sail the bombardment began. That was terrific. First there was a flash from the warships that seemed to light up everything. Then there were swishes overhead. Then the whole coastline seemed to literally rise up momentarily to be followed by clouds of smoke. Then came the report of the guns on the ship to be followed by the sound of the explosions on land. It was stupendous as we got closer to shore geysers of water began shooting up around us. It took a moment for it to register that those geysers were enemy shells being fired on us. The little RNVR officer got lost. He turned to me to know if he could take us directly ashore. By this time I recognized some beach markers to the left. We sailed a mile further down shore and landed. We had gotten ashore at the right spot.

The DUKW's were wonderful vehicles. They were six wheeled trucks ashore They went up the sandy beach quite easily. Once ashore everything looked pitiful. Everything was so dry and dusty The trees were stunted. The house were pitiful little stone huts. As the day progress the air became chokingly hot. We quickly deployed and I went off in search of Brigade Headquarters. The first person I recognized was J.D. MacKintosh. He had an advance dressing station set up. As soon as he saw me he could only think of getting the mortars into action. He lead me off in search of targets.

That day our mortars proved themselves They did many shoots that demonstrated their worth to Brig. Vokes. It turned out that over one third of

our transport had been lost at sea. Newberry's platoon did good shoots with only one three ton truck as the sole platoon transport.

For my part, I was disillusioned by Brigade Headquarters intelligence. Besides the targets given to the platoons by the infantry I was getting targets from Brigade throughout the day. Three times, that day I was ordered by Brigade Headquarters to fire on a target, I investigated the target only to find that it was our own troops on the flank.

The last mistaken target given me that day was near Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry Positions. The sun had just set. The "enemy" were in a neighbouring grove of trees. They started lighting campfires Col. Lindsay and I concluded that only Canadians would do such a thing. They were Hastie Ps.

That evening Phil Staynor joined us. He came trekking across country on foot all alone. Such physical exertions in that intense heat were an ordeal for us.

We spent that first night within sight of the beaches on which we had landed. Later in the night Jerry raided the beach. There were terrific fireworks.

We did not get all of our transport until months later. Some of those who did arrive had great trials. Brady, who drove the Company Order Room HUP, had the misfortune to waterlog it. On his own initiative and with the help of the Sig Cpl, Griffiths he got a tow out of the sea into a secluded spot. There, with what tools he could scrounge, he took his motor all apart and washed the sea water out of it. Then he put it together and drove into Battery Headquarters only a day late. Pretty good for a couple of kids just out of school.

Vehicle replacements caused a great deal of trouble. Our Battery had left England with a light scale of transport. Over one third of it was sunk at sea. A month later we still had not had them replaced. I happened to visit Battalion Headquarters at the DMA. Scott~Dudley had just scrounged a 15 cwt truck and was having a caravan built on it for himself. The Canadian army Headquarters at all levels went caravan crazy. One could hardly accuse the people back in Canada with indifference when the rear echelons of the Army in action we so selfish.

The next day or so we did not see much action. We moved great distances in convoy. One time we made a night move. I was following a route of my own choosing on the map. I picked one road that was listed as a fairly good one. It may have been a good road in Nero's time. That night it finally petered out into a donkey path through great boulders. The centre of the path was a ditch from which all earth had been washed away. It was black dark and there wasn't room to turn a truck around. We had to wait until daylight to get out of that dead end.

On the 14th of July, most of the 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade gathered on parade and were visited by Montgomery, He warned us against the sun, and told us how happy he was to have us with him. Most of the officers were introduced to him, I was introduced as Brigade Mortar officer Monty's rejoinder was,"They are not very accurate are they?" Vokes quickly spoke up. "Oh you are wrong sir, we think that the mortars are first rate." One year later, after Montgomery had gone back to England we were inspected by Sir Oliver Leese who had taken over the 8th Army. He told us the background to Montgomery's opinion of 4.2 mortars. According to Leese, when Montgomery set up the Battle of El Alamien he got everything together that was in Egypt, that would make a bang. They had a battery of 4.2 mortars that were part of a Chemical Warfare

unit. The officer commanding these mortars told the 8th Army people that he could only guarantee which map square of 1,000 yards that his bombs would fall in, so Montgomery had written off the 4.2 mortars.

I did many shoots with 4.2 mortars, with one exception I was prepared to compete for accuracy and speed with the 25 pdr artillery. That exception was if a tail unit came off the mortar bomb, Then mortars were unpredictable.

There were not many roads in Sicily that were good. During our first moves tanks and trucks tried to follow the same roads. This slowed up movement a great deal. Then Gen. Simonds ordered that the tanks must stay off the roads and move cross country. I have often wondered how much that edict cost the taxpayer. In some parts of Sicily there were so many stones that stone walls up to eight feet high had been built around each little field. One night our convoy was stopped by a tank squadron at a cross roads. The tank commander was trying to figure out which wall he should break

One day, near Piazza Amerina, I was leading the Battery convoy. We stopped for a rest, Phil Staynor had taken the platoon commanders and gone on ahead to reconnoiter our new positions. deFaye and I went ahead to meet Vokes. While there Simonds came along in a jeep. It was flat bushy country and we couldn't see much. While we were talking at the roadside a Jerry mortar started bombing us. We huddled in the roadside ditch, then Vokes Spoke up, "Mitchell, where are your mortars?" "Just down the road a bit, Sir," "Get that bastard."

I had a radio that enabled me to talk to my platoon commanders and to Brigade Headquarters. But I could not talk to my mortar line, the platoon commanders had the forward link of that net with them. However, I had a Dispatch Rider and I sent a message back to Sgt. Brown to set up a section of mortars on a certain zero line. But then I had no idea where the mortar was in that flat bushy country. I was just trying to figure that one out, when a Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry private came to me: "Sir, I know where that mortar is. I was in the bush relieving myself when he fired."

What a Godsend. So I figured out the first ranging shot and sent word back by Dispatch Rider. It was close and the next corrected order was for mortar fire I don't know whether I scored a hit or not. But I silenced the Jerry mortar. Both Simonds and Vokes drove away satisfied. Just as we were finishing our shoot Phil Staynor returned sadly and patiently he explained to me, "Mitch that is not the way to use mortars."

After the cool moist climate of Britain, I found the heat and dust very difficult. I like warmth, but this heat, at times, was searing. My nose started to bleed. I couldn't stop it. I messed up all my handkerchiefs. Blood spilled over my face and bush shirt.

The convoy stopped for a twenty minute rest. I laid down on the road in the shade of the truck. Phil Staynor came up from the back of the company convoy. When he saw me stretched out and covered with blood he was sure that I had been hit.

I got over my nose bleed and got diarrhea. That was even worse as it was painful as well. In convoy, I couldn't stop, when taken with seizures. Several times, when the convoy did stop, I would get behind a bush and throw away my underwear. That, too, cleared up. Many of our boys were hospitalized before they were cured.

Most improved Italian roads were "grave1led" with broken up limestone that was like chalk. It seemed that one man would be in charge of a sec-

tion of road. We would see these individuals, sitting by the roadside, breaking up stones, into egg sized pieces, with which to repair the road. Unless rain was actually falling, any vehicle would raise a dust. To minimize the dust, vehicles near the "front" moved at fifteen miles per hour. In spite of all precautions, everyone and everything was covered with a pail of dust.

One of the moments of supreme physical bliss of my life was bathing at midnight from a pail of water after a day on the road in the hot sun.

After the beach, our first severe action came at Leonforte. The Brigade had been advancing as normal and were stopped here. A new plan had to be devised, I went to a Seaforth Orders Group. I got there just after a Jerry salvo had landed in the midst of the officers. The medical people still hadn't treated everyone. I can still see one officer. a fine young Canadian man, alive, lying on his side on the ground, shocked into immobility for the moment, his hands near his face, his legs and feet together, the only thing that was wrong was that his legs from below his knees to above his ankles were completely gone. Just as clean as could be. His clothes were not damaged and there was very little blood. His boots were even polished

Part of the plan to attack Leonforte was that we were to try to set fire to the buildings with our smoke bombs. It turned out that the buildings were nearly all of stone with a tile roof. Burning was almost impossible. But we did completely blank out the town with smoke and we interspersed our smoke with HE. They couldn't see much and we encouraged them to stay indoors

When we finally pushed on, it was the first time that I came into contact with putrid human flesh. On the approaches to Leonforte were many German dead who had been killed in the first encounter.

At Nissoria, I met Sammy Potts for the first time. He was a Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry platoon commander. He had quite a battle there, Phil knew him well and we spent an hour or so with him.

Agira was much more difficult. First go the Seaforths tried to take it and one of our mortar plans did a shoot in support of them. The shoot had to be done from a very exposed position. I told the platoon commander to do his shoot and then get out. This he did. The Seaforths got the idea that they were running away and complained bitterly. Vokes made a special point of seeing me. "Mitchell, don't you ever do that again."

Later I took de Faye to examine the mortar Position from where they had fired. There was not a square yard of ground that did not have at least one shell crater in it. I could understand the feeling of the Seaforths to have such a bombardment come near them. I was very happy that I had moved our boys out of that position.

One of our dispatch riders did a marvelous job in that show. Just before the shoot I sent a message with him to the platoon commander. As he rode down the road he was actually blasted off of his motorcycle. Unperturbed he got up, mounted his bike and continued on.

A Divisional barrage was set up to take Agira, Our mortars took part. We had our mortar line in a depression on the left of the main road. The shoot was at night. Because of our shorter range the mortars were in front of the artillery.

No one can properly describe a barrage. There are the flashes and explosions of the guns behind. There are the hissing and swishing of the shells passing overhead There are the flashes and explosions ahead. All mixed up in one continuous din. One cannot help feeling uneasy,

The shoot started on schedule. Because of the range, the mortars stopped after the first half hour. At the very beginning of the barrage I noticed that one 25 pdr was away off range and was firing directly behind us. Every few minutes that off beat 25 pdr came closer to our mortar position We finished our shoot and I ordered our boys off the mortar position. By this time the 25 pdr was really close. Each explosion lighted our Position. Then somebody in the reserve infantry Battalion behind us got into a flap seeing the shell explosions and seeing us running for cover, he opened up with his Bren gun. What an eternity I lived in those few moments. To hide from the Bren bullets, I had to get on Jerry's side of the rocks. By this time German shells were falling into our mortar position as well.

Which side's shells started it I will never know. But two of our trucks caught fire. Our vehicles were not too well dispersed. There was danger that we would lose several more. I simply had to get out of my shelter. I jumped out and called for help to save the vehicles, Sgt. Fortman our Signal Sgt. came to help me. He drove the vehicles to where I directed. Not until that moment did I realize that I didn't even know how to start a carrier, However, we got all the vehicles moved, save the burning two. By this time the fire was strong enough that mortar bombs were exploding. I dove into a nearby slit trench and then realized my mistake, Bombs were bursting and throwing other bombs up into the air. These bombs were falling all around me. Whether it exploded or not it wouldn't have mattered much had I been hit on the head with a 19 lb. bomb.

I was very pleased to see Fortman decorated by Montgomery for his job that night. Agira commanded a long view of the countryside. Our OP's were there for a couple days.

After coming off one tour of duty Ossie Newberry asked permission to take a motorcycle and ride forward to make a reconnaissance of the front. We never found out what happened him. He just disappeared bike and all. It was very odd as he had been working in close liaison with the infantry. He must have known their dispositions as well as anyone. Phil and I took a motorcycle and made a reconnaissance for mortar positions forward of Agira. While there, Jerry threw down a hate. We sought refuge in a farm house. There, children and chickens were running about the floor.

From under the bed came a whimpering that I thought came from a frightened dog. It turned out to be grandma. She was almost out of her mind with fright of the exploding shells.

Phil took the platoon commanders forward and showed them their positions. I brought the battery forward under cover of darkness. I knew the way well. We came upon someone with a light who was diverting the traffic. I knew that there was not a diversion. I suspected a fifth columnist. I drew my revolver and was prepared to shoot. However, it was a bona fide military provost guiding traffic around a huge shell crater in the middle of the road that had been blasted since I had traveled the road. That poor fellow never knew how close he came to grief.

The next town, Regalbuto, fell quickly, but we were held up beyond it for several days. Three days in a row, after Regalbuto had been taken, the American Air Force came over and bombed the town of Regalbuto. That was not funny. Some months later, while on leave, I learned what had happened, from an English officer. At the beginning of the action he and other British officers had been seconded to the American Air Force for intelligence duties, simply because the Americans did not have enough trained for that work. He said two influences worked against them. One was the disdain the pilots of any air force for the wingless wonders who gathered around base

Headquarters. The other was the reluctance of Americans to take an Englishman's advice. He said it took the personal intervention of Eisenhower himself to force those pilots to look at the map of the battlefront, that he had so painstakingly kept up to date, before they went out on a mission.

Soon after 1st Division went into a rest area. We were at Militello for about three weeks. That was a splendid break which enabled us to get our trucks and stores into shape. And it gave us an opportunity to brush up on weaknesses in training that had been found. We were authorized to do some range work with our mortars.

The problem was to find a spot in this thickly populated country where we would not injure any people. From our camp we could see a range of hills, some five miles away, that were covered with great boulders. That surely was the spot. When we got there, we found a large field covered with rocks as large as a truck. In between the ground was covered with stones the size of a man's head so thickly that you could hardly put your foot down without touching one. There, in that desolate spot, an old Italian and his two women were harvesting wheat by hand.

We chose a valley for our range. We arranged with the Carabineri that, at the time that we fired, the people would move out. They were all notified. They refused to move. We did our firing into the open areas and avoided the buildings. No one was hurt. Incidentally there was a road in this valley that was incorrectly mapped. The map was out nearly 19 degrees. That was the only error in the issue maps that I noticed in the Italian campaign.

While we were at Militello, Gifford Main joined us. Giffy and Reggie Rankin were great pals. They proceeded to get tight. Reggie helped to put Giffy to bed, since Giffy was new to the country and did not know the dangers of mosquitoes. Poor Giffy. Reggie plastered him with mosquito ointment, filling eyes, nose and mouth.

Every hovel and mansion in Sicily and southern Italy seemed to have an ornate bed spread whether there was anything else or not.

I wanted a Souvenir of the country. So I told Popp to buy me a bedspread. He got one for five dollars There may have been something else, but that was all that I knew of. We still have that bedspread on our bed. Afterwards I also got a goat herdman's horn. That was loot.

My batman driver Popp, found a saxophone. The reed was missing so he made one for it that was quite successful. Poulton was an officer who had just come to us from Canada. He had played a saxophone in an orchestra in Vancouver. He had his saxophone with him, but it needed a new reed. He asked Popp to make a reed for him. Phil overheard the conversation and reported to me in high glee. Poulton was just out of the Officer's Training course in Canada Popps reply flabbergging him. "Oh sir, I haven't got time to fuck around with such things."

During the Italian campaign I had two batman drivers, Popp and Joe Nault. Each was invaluable. Nault was a fresh young western Canadian boy whose morals were never affected, by military life. Popp was the same type, ten years older. Both were very versatile and, if necessary could do a reasonable job at almost anything. Each could speak Italian fluently which meant that it was never necessary for me to learn Italian well. Popp came ashore with me in Sicily. Until all of our personnel and transport joined us, he acted as barber, shoemaker and what have you.

Chapter 26: The Assault On Italy

2 Canadian Infantry Brigade crossed into Italy as the reserve Brigade in Reggio, we were bombed. That night I slept on the pavement because I didn't like the smell of the houses. The householders were shocked to see el Capitano in such circumstances. We then crossed over into the instep and our way up the boot of Italy. We didn't encounter much opposition until we got to Poteflza. The devastation of the railway, by aerial bombing, was terrific all along the way.

Road mines were an ever present danger. Usually there were simple mines with explosives in a metal container. The detonator was set off by contact. Our people had a mine detector. It was like a dish on the end of a broom handle. Electrical impulses set off a whine when metal was close, but there were variations in mines. Some were enclosed in wood or plastic which could not be detected. Some were detonated by a ratchet system which could be set to explode after a predetermined number of vehicles had depressed the mechanism. In one ten foot section of the road I saw three vehicles blown up the same day. A squadron of tanks had gone over the road. The second truck in the convoy was blown up. The engineers searched and found nothing. Fifty more trucks passed and then another explosion More searching, twenty more vehicles safely passed then another explosion.

Not only were there casualties. The effect of such uncertainty on morale was very great. We kept the floor of our truck cabs covered with sandbags Many times we had trucks blown up without anyone being hurt.

One of our platoons found a German kitchen trailer. It was a very ingenious vehicle. There was a place for everything that the cook used. To set up camp he swung open folding doors, opened up a canopy and he had a room with built-in cupboards in which to work. The platoon took it along. One day, in our convoy, the trailer hitch broke near a hair pin turn in the road. The trailer went over the bank and down about two hundred feet. Driving along we had not noticed any Italians about. Minutes after the trailer broke loose there were at least one hundred and practically everything of the trailer and its' load had disappeared.

Somewhere close to Potenza word came through of J.D. McKenzie's promotion to Captain. Almost the same day he discovered aste Spumanti - an Italian champagne. He bought two cases of large bottles before the natives raised the price. He wet his pipes for about twenty-five cents per quart of aste Spumanti.

North of Potenza was a very high village called Castel where we saw action. When we arrived there on our reconnaissance we found a German store of electrical equipment. There were several complete lighting plants and some spare parts.

The fighting took place beyond Castel. Because Castel was high it was the natural O.P. It was a very unreal set up. The front line was a mile or so further on, in the valley. On the side of the village facing the valley was the road leading into the valley which had a stone wall about two feet high and parallel to the front, a perfect vantage point. Our mortars were in a good position near the village. The machine guns were on a little hill in the valley near the infantry. Our AA Company, commanded by Wes Winters, had just arrived from Sicily. Wes had not seen any real action yet and was anxious to get his "feet wet." Gordon Booth was going forward to visit his machine guns. Wes Winters went along with him. McKenzie and I found a store of German ersatz coffee. We sat on the roadside wall grinding our coffee with a little hand grinder and watched Gordon and Wes. It was almost like being in a theatre. Simonds came along and JD and I had to hide our coffee grinder.

Gordon and Wes got to the machine guns without incident. But, while they were there, some damn fool, from the infantry echelons, drove right up beside the machine guns, on top of the little hill, with a three ton truck. Jerry shelled the hell out of that position. Wes surely got his feet wet. JD and I were almost beside ourselves with amusement.

On our trip up to Potenza we came across many German campsites. One position had been left in a terrible condition. There was refuse and tin cans from the kitchen and a great number of maps spread about. One of our re-inforcements was a Capt. MacRobie who was an RCR officer. In England one of our headaches had been taking over billets from other units. Surveying this mess, at the German campsite, MacRobie twirled his mustache and said: "I suppose that we will spend the rest of this war cleaning up billets after the Fourteenth Potsdam Regiment."

Almost as soon as our full strength joined our Battalion, Scott-Dudley laid on a Mess dinner for the officers at Benevento. It was held in the large marquee and was quite successful. For me it was memorable as it was the first time that I saw Embury after Doune.

"Hello Mitch! I never had much use for you but everyone says that you are one hundred per cent. That is good enough for me." How can you hate a person like that?

One night we had moved up close to Vinchiaturo Crossroads in a Group Convoy. We moved off the road and bedded down. Jerry began shelling us. One of Wes Winters men was struck with a piece of shrapnel. Wes saw that it was only a minor cut and went back to bed. Meantime MacRobie, Wes's Second in command, was wandering about and came upon the "wounded man." MacRobie started to scream for Wes. "What's the matter?" "One of our men has been wounded" "Oh, he is only scratched. That doesn't matter much." "No, but they can't do that to our men."

The Battalion Headquarters of the Saskatoon L. I. were in charge of the Divisional Maintenance Area. The next morning we were amazed to see Embury pass us with some big transport trucks from Divisional Maintenance Area. I guess that they must have been almost looking into the barrels of Jerry's guns before they realized where they were. They got out of the front line without serious injury.

Another story Embury tells. He was looking over some buildings that he had taken for Battalion Headquarters. In one room he came upon a British Army Sgt. having intercourse with an Italian girl. Embury is still indignant. "You know that SOB never stopped. He never even stood to attention."

After the crossroads were taken JD McKenzie and an English artillery officer went forward in JD's jeep, on a reconnaissance. After driving so far they got out and walked. When they returned to the jeep, they found their driver in the hands of a German patrol. Soon they were also. The patrol leader sent the two officers back to the German Headquarters in the charge on one soldier. This soldier proved to be rather sloppy. He allowed the officers to talk. They soon discovered that the German did not understand English. So they arranged a plan and took their captor by surprise.

I was driving back from the Seaforth's Headquarters when I saw JD running across country. He wore battle dress trousers and a bush shirt. With his huge mustache he reminded me of Joe Stalin. I couldn't help laughing at him. I took him to Brigade Headquarters. There Vokes greeted him by saying: "What did you do with the German? Why didn't you bring him back?"

The Seaforths were to take Baranello and our mortars were to help. The mountains on the right were supposed to be held by I CIB. Nobody had told the Germans. Our boys set up their mortars in a clump of trees right in plain view of the German OP. Fortunately they dug in well first. Then they did their shoot on Baranello. They finished and dove into their slit trenches. For nearly half an hour, Jerry shelled them. Bell-Irving, Second in command, of the Seaforths, told me I could move them. I said no thank you. They came out of their slit trenches, after the shelling finished, without a scratch.

After Baranello, JD McKenzie took his platoon with mules for transport, over land to help in the fight for Colle d'anchisse. They only took one day's rations, it was several days before we were able to reach them with transport. We thought that they would be in a bad way for food. However, when the ration truck reached them, JD's platoon had turkeys, chicken and calves on tether. They had eaten better than we had.

About this time Hoffmeister had taken command of 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade. At one Italian farm Tommy de Faye bought a bunch of turkeys. He sent them back to Roy Blake, the Quartermaster, for him to keep. Next day Tommy dropped into Brigade Headquarters "Would the Brigadier like a turkey?"

"Yes I would." So Tommy sent back to Roy to get a turkey for the Brigadier. Word came back from Roy that the turkeys had all died. Roy had a degree in Agriculture. Tommy reasoned that he must know about turkeys. So that seemed to be that.

Some months later, while we were in Ortona, a newsreel was sent out from England. One of the shots in that newsreel was of Roy Blake and his staff plucking turkeys.

After we left Potenza the hot dry weather changed. Once in awhile it rained. Very often at night a heavy mist covered everything. We were moving constantly and often in action. We would sleep and then roll up our bedding and go on about our job. That night the bedding would be damp from the previous night. Before long rheumatism was keeping me awake all night. I was just about ready to quit when we went into a rest area at the end of October.

Chapter 27: Food

Food - the soul of any army - was good. When we landed and for the first month we had a Composite ration - called Compo rations. They were in wooden boxes each containing fourteen days rations. There were the various foods for the morning, noon and evening meal for two men for seven days or seven men for two days. Nearly everything was tinned so that it kept in good condition. And it was good quality food. I think that there were seven different combinations so that the menu was varied. The Americans never had anything as good. A Compo ration made good trading material, when dealing with them.

After the first month we got dehydrated foods. Potatoes, carrots, beets, cabbage, mutton, beef, eggs, milk. In theory it was excellent. In the field, with only a hydra burner and a pot to work with, the cooks turned out exactly the same thing day after day. It was good but monotonous.

After the first six months we went on regular British Army rations. These were good. The Americans seemed to have a greater variety of foods. But more of their foods were prepared and highly seasoned. The first meal was delicious but, surprisingly soon, one tired of those prepared foods. The staple issue of the British rations could be treated as one wished. That way more people were satisfied. We had frozen boneless Argentine beef even in the hottest spots in the front line. Some of it was very good. The only real disaster was the mixture of butter and margarine they issued at first. In the warm climate the butter went rancid. After a few attempts they quit issuing butter. The only complaint with the margarine came if one got the wrong grade of margarine for that season. The hot weather margarine was just like tallow in the cold weather. The British army always issued tea. It was a really appreciated when the Canadian Army arranged a regular issue of good coffee.

The Army field kitchens were equipped with a hydra burner to supply heat for cooking. This was a large blow torch which burned gasoline. Petrol and cooks being what they were, these hydra burners were soon out of order with plugged jets, etc. The British Army cooking school made a great to do about an improvised burner which consisted of a long metal tube, a valve and a tank. This would burn used crankcase oil. It was alright but very dirty. The Canadian version of that improvised stove, was to burn gasoline in it. That worked quite well. It gave a dependable flame and was reasonably foolproof.

However cooks being what they were, these tanks invariably ran empty during the preparation of the meal. Quite regularly some damn fool would attempt to refill the tank with gasoline without first turning off the flame. Always there would be a fire, sometimes quite serious In spite of dire cook house warnings and threats our Battalion averaged about one fire per week in the Variety was achieved by living off the country. Stray bullets,“accidentally killed cattle, pigs, etc." This was discouraged as it depleted the civilian stocks. But there were many vegetables. One most highly prized, after war rationed England was onions.

I had a terrific row with Phil Staynor one day. He had persuaded the cook to put onions in our rice Pudding, That was a dish. There was much fruit. We got figs, oranges, lemons peaches and grapes. The grapes were ripening in Sicily when we landed. As we worked our way north in Italy the season was a bit later. So we had grapes for a long time. That was a special treat for me as I love grapes, I literally ate bushels of grapes. The intriguing part was that the grapes in every vineyard were slightly different. In one vineyard I found green grapes that had a flavour that reminded me of the smell of the blossom on the wolf willows back on the prairies. No one will

ever know what grapes can really taste like till he has picked a ripe juicy cluster off the vine, just before dawn, when the world is cool.

We were shocked at the way that Italians prepared their food. Trays of spaghetti and sliced tomatoes sitting in the sun to dry by the roadside, covered with flies and dust. But, whenever we got the opportunity we would get an Italian family to prepare a feed of spaghetti for us, using our materials. Of course they would put in their own goats cheese and sometimes tomato sauce. it never failed to be delicious. Since each vineyard had different grapes each district had a different wine. We became connoisseurs.

Sometimes we drank water. Of course we had many other needs for it. Water for us was supplied by a special water truck driven by Paul Gamble****. Paul was a veteran of Vimy Ridge. While we were in England we had received a directive to transfer those over a certain age to the Holding Unit. Paul was one of our most dependable drivers and we did not want to lose him. So he was overlooked. This meant that he did not dare to be transferred out of our Battalion even for sickness. Paul treated all of the water with chemicals it was an offence for any soldier to drink any other water. Paul served us well and nearly everyone else in the 1st Division.

Early in Italy, Paul acquired a tourist guide book for Italy of several volumes that was written in Italian. All through the Italian campaign he was able to tell us about what was on the other side of the hill and what we should be sure to see.

An experience that I had with the boys scrounging occurred in 1944 when I was with the Machine Guns. I am quite sure that the officers and senior Non Commissioned Officers were not in on the planning, though they learned of it before I did. The third time that we had fresh pork I learned about its' origin. Army vehicular convoys travel with a 20 minute halt every two hours. When we halted near a farm some boys would entertain the farmer's family giving them cigarettes and chocolates. Another group would locate the pig. Then a few minutes before the end of the halt every driver started up his motor. That was when the pig got it. It was thrown into the back of a covered truck. Another group completed the slaughtering while we were enroute.

*** #214594 Paul Byron Gamble, from Landis ,Saskatchewan. In WW1 he had enlisted in the 96th Bn, CEF in Saskatoon on March 28, 1916. At the time that he was serving as a driver in Italy in the SLI he was 48 years old.

Chapter 28: People

Perhaps it is the lot of an army to see the worst side of the people of a country. We certainly came to despise the Italians. The sight of a fat old slob of a father soliciting business for his daughter was enough to disgust the most callous Canadian. That we saw often. Pitiful little donkeys would be straddled by mature men, their feet dragging on the ground. Walking behind would be the women of the household carrying unbelievable loads on their head. Once I saw two women help a third get loaded. They had the root section of a tree trunk. It was so heavy that the two had difficulty getting it as high as the third's head. She got her head cloth in place and strode off quite easily. Ploughing was done with hoe like mattocks. The man with the most women to wield mattocks was the wealthiest. As a result the women aged in looks very early. It seemed that at thirteen or fourteen they were mature young women. At thirty they were old hags.

Education seemed almost non-existent. We even saw priests, whom I am sure had practically no education. There did not seem to be any way provided for the rural people to get an education. But everyone seemed to be musical. In every household there was a musical instrument of some kind. No matter how mean a man's circumstances were, he seemed to know and to be able to sing a part of the standard Italian operas. In spite of their poverty, when they had to live on what was left, after paying rent to the landlord, taxes to the state, and dues to the church, the people seemed to be happy. Life was not as sacred or valuable as to us. Every family had lost at least one child. But they were happy.

One day Brady was driving me to reconnoiter. We met an old woman and her fifteen-year-old son in a high two wheeled wooden cart to which they had three ponies hitched. The boy was driving. Brady turned off the trail, which was on the side of a hill, The boy turned off on the outside but, instead of stopping or watching where he was going, he kept on going and watched us. One wheel went over the side of the road and the cart tipped over. The old lady was so positioned that she went, head first, belly down and horizontal, through the air like a bird. She dropped about six feet and made a five point landing that knocked the wind out of her. Her landing made such a bang that I really felt sorry for her. The ponies were so light that they were tipped over by the cart. It was a terrible tangle. I jumped out to help. The mother was gasping and finally could moan "Mamma mia." The boy, who was really in no trouble at all, got scared and took off.

Chapter 29: Rest At Oratino

At Oratino we went into houses. It was a hill village. The ground sloped off gradually to the East but to the west and north it dropped almost straight down several hundred feet. I would judge that it was nearly a thousand feet above the valley. Looking west and north one could see twenty miles or more. For several days after we got to Oratino we could see the guns flashing away off in the distance. First thing in the morning the valley would be covered from view with either a cloud or a mist. It was really a beautiful location. But one can say that of all Italy. The scenery is marvelous, but always there are the people. The retaining wall, from where one got such a marvelous view, was where a good number of the natives had their daily eliminations. That would lodge some ten feet below.

One day I wrote the following: "This morning I stood on a hill and looked out on Italy. The rising sun, behind, cast long shadows on a sea of clouds which stretched out beneath my feet for miles and miles. Our own shadow was haloed with a spectrum. Across the valley rose peopled mountains." This was the land of the gods. Who, of those myriads of garden farms, could take his eyes off the distant grandeur?

On a nearby hill puffed exploding shells. From below the churning masses of mist came the rumble of guns and the Penetrating roar of a convoy, The spell of great heights and sweeping distances was broken. Nearby a native rises from his crouching. I am in shit strewn Oratino. While the destiny of the world is at stake, life moves on normally. It is morning in Italy, not the dawn of a new day.

One custom that seemed quaint to us. An old fellow, dressed up in an elaborate uniform, would go about the town, at various hours of the day, ringing a bell, to remind everyone of the time of the next service in the church.

Water for Oratino came from a well in the valley a couple of miles away. The well was cribbed with a stone wall about twelve feet in diameter and ten feet deep. Stone steps lead down into the water. Every morning and evening barefoot women would carry the water in jars on their head.

We had a party for the group in Oratino, several of our boys performed. Ed Hudson was the star of the show with his French Canadian dialect stories. One of his better ones was about "That God dam MacKenzie King and the Bull."

The officers of the Battalion had a mess dinner in Campobosso. It was a very fine dinner. Afterwards everyone reminisced. A crap game and a poker game got going. After awhile I got very tired, I was still feeling the effects of my exposure, Reggie Rankin and I had come to dinner together. I decided to have a sleep. I knew, that if I laid myself down by the entrance, that Reggie couldn't miss me, There was a row of single chairs against the wall, by the door, and I laid on them. There were provost on duty at the door. I guess that they had been warned to make sure that no drunken officer got waylaid or was left behind. The provost came and asked me if I was alright? "Yes." A few minutes later he asked again. "Yes, go away and leave me alone."

The provost got alarmed. He made enquiries. Phil Reynolds, Tommy de Faye and a couple others gathered and debated with the provost about what they should do. I had had a lot to drink, I was tired. I knew that they were afraid that I was going to start a fight I thought that that was funny but I was tired. After a few minutes, during which the debate had continued, Reggie Rankin came tottering along, so tight that he could just navigate. He was entirely oblivious of the audience. "Come on Mitch, let's go home."

"O.K." I got up and went with him leaving a very relieved group behind. I thought that that was very funny. But I was too tired to laugh.

While we were in Oratino, Brig. Hoffmeister gave a series of talks to the officers of Second Canadian Infantry Brigade. He talked of various things. He spent quite a lot of time on the principles of war. I thought it rather singular for the Canadian Army, when engaged in a war against Germans to have a man named Hoffmeister, dressed in a Seaforth uniform explain Clauswitz's principles of war.

About three miles west of Oratino there was a bombed river bridge. A unit of the Italian army was constructing a Bailey bridge over the river. It was laid on that we were to spell them off. We went down on three different days. The Italians swarmed over the bridge like an ant hill. They worked happily together and accomplished a lot. It was different with our boys. They soon got bored with the job. We had to have a roll call every hour to keep them together.

Chapter 30: Naples

From Oratino, Wes Winters and I went on leave to Naples. At that early date, leave centres were not very well organized. Wes and I were instructed to arrange accommodation for the officers of our Battalion. I do not recall just how we made the contact, but we found a very good apartment building that was almost unoccupied. The owner was in enemy occupied Rome. We made arrangements with the caretaker - Papa. I do not recall his name. He and his wife became know to our Battalion as Papa and Mamma.

I am sure that anything that we paid went directly into Papa's pocket and that the owner in Rome never got anything. Papa and Mamma were realists. Mamma could still get ecstatic thinking about love. But Papa was the complete cynic. One could arrange anything through him, for a consideration.

On my next leave, three months later, I went back to Naples with Crisafio, Papa and Mamma pretended joy at seeing me again. They got out a bottle of wine and we sat around drinking and talking. Quite casually, three girls from Papa's stable, came in and joined us. Two of them were married. Their husbands were prisoners of war in North Africa - one was a Major.

We talked of various things. A certain man's name was mentioned. The Major's wife started to hiss and spit like an angry cat. It seems that this particular man, who had been mentioned, had come to Papa's to spend his leave. Papa had supplied the Italian Major's wife. They had had dinner. danced, etc. and then came back to Papa's to go to bed. They got undressed. Then the Major's wife got coy and pretended to be hard to get. They ran around the room. The man, who had been drinking heavily, slipped and fell and passed out completely. That was the end of the evening. The Major's wife did not like that man. For souvenirs we bought some unset cameos.

Wes and I drove to Pompeii. Even there the national preoccupation of the Italians could not be suppressed. The prize attractions in the ruins were the concubines room in the home of the rich and the brothel house. In the brothel there were pictures depicting the various positions over each tiny cubicle. It was unnecessary for the patron to even to speak. He only needed to point to what he desired.

On our way back to Naples, from Pompeii, we gave an American Sergeant a lift, He was the usual talkative type. He was the first person that I had heard wax eloquently about Montgomery's ability as a general, According to this American sergeant Montgomery was one of the greatest generals of all time and had taught General Patton all that he knew about modern warfare

The average opinion of Montgomery at that time is something that may seem hard to appreciate now. Especially the British, no one was too enthused about Montgomery. Everyone felt that he was competent enough but that he had been extremely lucky to get his command at the exact time that the 8th Army really had something with which to fight. The English, thought that Montgomery was too much of an exhibitionist - too Americanized.

One marvelous spot that we found in Naples was "el giardina del arranchj" - which means roughly "the orange grove." It was a restaurant on the peninsula west of Naples, which curves around the harbour. There were tables set on an open tiled terrace, seated at a table, one had a wonderful view of Naples. In the beautiful bright moonlight one could just see the smoke rising out of Mt. Vesuvjus. One saw the complete circle of the harbour with all of the city light behind and riding on deep blue water were all of the various boats and ships. In my opinion it is one of "the

sights" in this world. Walking down Via Roma I was attracted by a beautiful bay horse hitched to a light rubber tired cart . The driver was dressed in the riding habit of a well to do person. He was waiting to cross Via Roma. There was a Caribineri on point duty at the intersection. The traffic on Via Roma was quite heavy. For some reason the Caribineri was not allowing the horseman to cross. They spoke to each other, each time a little more angrily. Finally the horseman got out of his cart, walked over to the Caribineri and struck him in the face. The Caribineri blew his whistle. Within moments six others appeared. Each grabbed a limb of the horseman and bounced him on the pavement. The others kicked and punched him. The arm of the law! Never was I more tempted to join in a fight.

Chapter 31: The Moro River

At Oratino I got John Harry as a reinforcement officer, John had commanded a machine gun company and was wounded at Leonforte. This was his first time back.

John had not had any training with mortars. Knowing machine guns, he knew the theory of fire Control. He soon learned the mortar procedures. The evening of his first day with mortars John came to me. "Mitch, is a barrel of vino part of platoon stores?"

"No, John, it is not." Next morning John gave his platoon twenty four hours to get rid of the vino, A week later I happened to be looking through Battery Headquarters trucks. I found the barrel of vino in one of my trucks.

In December, 1943, 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade moved into the front line to cross the Moro River. Because of the few good roads we were moved up behind the front at night, sometime before we were to go into action. The Italian coastline facing the Adriatic is a series of rivers and gulleys running down to the sea. We took shelter in some houses on the East bank of a gulley about a mile east of San Appollinare. There was a little thatched roof shelter dug into the side of the bank about twelve feet by twenty. These sort of structures were used by the Italians as store houses. The west wall of this was dug into the bank about four feet. The roof was a pitched roof of branches and grass with the west side sitting on the earth bank. The east wall was of some flimsy structure. Snuggled against that bank it looked like a safe spot. John Gebbie, myself and three sergeants bedded down in there. There was room to walk to each bedroll with a little area, four feet square, in the exact middle, free for standing room. We had just got into bed when Jerry lobbed a huge shell over. Some one of Hitler's finest had failed to do his job well. The shell did not explode but buried itself in the exact centre of that four foot free area. The crater was eighteen inches deep. We moved.

We were to support a crossing of the Moro River. This was John Harry's first engagement with the mortars. So I went along with him. We had a limited time to get into action but it was enough. According to the map, the logical spot for an OP would be in San Appollinare. There was a huge masonry building right on the lip of the ravine. It looked ideal, so John and I went into it. While we were there Jerry poured over a hate. One of his shells knocked the bell out of the belfry of the church. Our OP was too obvious. It was clear that Jerry would likely make it untenable.

"We have got to get out of here John." Outside we found the poor driver almost paralyzed with fear from the row that the bell had made. I decided that the safest spot would be in the olive grove that covered the ridge towards the sea. We found a good spot. We had two shovels and one pick. The OPA was Cpl. Walker. We started to dig in. I doubt if John had ever used a shovel before. He made very little headway in that stubborn soil. We had just nicely started when a Sherman tank pulled up behind us, fired six rounds and then drove away. It was deafening. Cpl. Walker and I knew exactly what was going to happen. We dug furiously. When Jerry retaliated we had the semblance of a trench for protection. Poor John had little more than a scratch in the ground. He kept looking at me expecting me to do something. Finally, "Mitch, they are shooting at us." What a revelation!

That and other shows petered out. For another do, we were to occupy positions on the same ridge much closer to the seacoast. I took Grant Amy and Jack Gebbie with me to make a reconnaissance, in the middle of the night. We drove through a farm yard where we saw a beautiful huge turkey gobbler. Christmas was approach-

ing. I spoke. "A word to the wise is sufficient," Both Jack and Grant chorused. "Enough said, Sir."

We finished our reconnaissance and drove back through the same farm yard. The gobbler was still there but now a sturdy Seaforth sentry, with fixed bayonet, was standing guard over him. Which shows that, even in war, essentials come first.

The infantry finally got a very small foothold in San Leonardo, across the river Moro. I went over, with my driver, in the jeep, to see what we could do. I expected to be there only a few minutes. While there the bridge over the Moro, was closed to backward traffic. We were stuck with no rations. That night I laid down on a pile of brush in the house, where the infantry Battalion Headquarters was, and tried to sleep. I was too hungry. About midnight a Loyal Edmonton private asked me if I would like to have something to eat, "I certainly would."
"Well sir, a shell killed a cow just outside the house that we are in so we butchered it." I followed him into a nearby house, all doors and windows were very carefully blacked out. Inside they had a merry wood fire burning in the fireplace. Nearby hung a quarter of beef. You sliced off your own meat and grilled it over the flames, the best meal that I have ever eaten!

Finally, all of San Leonardo was cleared We established our Battery Headquarters in a stone house on the western outskirts of the village. There was a Sherman tank alongside the southwest corner of our house, that a Jerry soldier had blown up with a magnetic mine. Our house had stout walls and joined a vineyard which made approach easy. We occupied it for about one week. All of that time an SOB of a Jerry sniper made our trip to our latrine, in the vineyard a nightmare. In the cellar of the house were huge tanks of vino. I reckoned that there were four thousand gallons of vino there. Besides, there were demi - johns of vermouth marsala etc. A direct hit might have drowned us. Otherwise we were quite snug and safe.

In Leonardo we had a terrible loss. One of the platoons used a house on the outskirts of the village next to the Moro, on the opposite side of the village from Battery Headquarters. A Jerry plane made a direct hit on the house, with a bomb. Italian houses have the second floor made of concrete The walls crumbled and this floor fell on top of the boys in the house. When I got there one of the wounded was becoming hysterical. I had to talk roughly to him to quieten him. Nearby troops helped and we soon got everyone out. When we got to him, we found Sgt. Brown*** sitting, back to the wall, just as natural as could be. He was dead. Brown was one of the best Sergeants that I have ever worked with. His loss was a great blow to our Battery. Besides the roadside wounded there were six of our boys that were killed. We buried them at the roadsise.

Slowly the front line moved. The infantry had reached the outskirts of Ortona The coast road to Ortona follows the coast at a low level till it is just below Ortona Then it follows a couple of switchbacks and joins the lateral road at the high level about a mile inland. Grant Amy and I were walking on the low level coast road looking for good mortar Positions. Between the beginning of the switchback and Ortona there was a donkey path that lead directly into town. This was covered by a Jerry minefield. A Seaforth party were heading up this path carrying rations on mules. One mule wasn't too enthusiastic. The private leading him Was the most profane mule driver that I have ever heard. I warned them that they shouldn't go through the minefield. Scornfully they replied that they had already made several trips. Grant and 1 waked up to switchback, We just got out of sight when there was a terrific explosion, followed by a huge black cloud from the vicinity of

the minefield Grant and I had no time to spare. We kept on but I left word at the Loyal Loyal Edmonton Regiment's. Regimental Aid Post that they Would likely find casualties at the minefield Then I went on into the outskirts of Ortona The first person that I met was the profane muleteer His face and clothing were blackened, that was all, He told me that one second he was pulling the mule. The next second he only had a bit of rope in his hand. The mule and his load had just disappeared.

This time we did a couple Battalion mortar shoots that were co-ordinated by Scott-Dudley. Another laid on was to be controlled by Drayton Walker. He sent orders to us to Rendezvous at San Leonardo crossroads. Jerry had retreated from this country and he knew that everything that crossed the Moro river had to go through that crossroads. He kept shelling, that crossroads so regularly and so accurately, that the provost directing the traffic there, did his work from a point one hundred yards away. As a point to Rendezvous the crossroads were alright. But to hold an Orders group there was another matter. Drayton worked on the principle that Jerry wasn't going to interfere with his plans. He got out his map board and started to outline his plan. Stu Wells and I took one look at each other. Then I spoke -"Sir, I am not standing here." We moved away and he had to follow.

In training I always insisted that, after the mortar was set up and before any firing was done, everybody should dig a slit trench. It was remarkable the amount of shelling that troops in slit trenches could stand. One of our platoons had set up their mortars near the church on the outskirts of Ortona. During one shelling, a Jerry shell dropped into one of the mortar barrels splitting it like a peeled banana. Gent was in a slit trench that was as close to the mortar as he could get it. All that happened was that he lost his hearing for a time.

During this action Grant Amy**** was killed. A shell burst near him and blew off the top of his head. When I saw him at the Aid Post, he was still alive. The Medical Officer had drugged him. That was a very low point for me. Wes Winters helped me prepare the body for burial.

Jack Gebbie took over Grant's job. It was then that I became aware of a problem that must have plagued every warrior since the beginning of time. Just where is the line between aggressive action and unnecessary risks? I could read the question in Jack's honest face, "Is this fellow a bit mad?"

It was the fortunes of war which seemed to give our 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade more action. From the first day at Pachino our mortars had been used and appreciated. I always felt that our boys were happier and less open to fear if they were working. We always used our mortars whenever we could.

*** L1302 Sgt. James Cameron Brown KIA December 16, 1943. Buried in the Moro River War Cemetery. Sgt. Brown came from Watrous, Saskatchewan.

**** Captain Grant Frederick Amy KIA December 22, 1943. Buried in the Moro River War Cemetery.Captain Amy came from Ottawa, Ontario

Chapter 32: Ortona

We got into the outskirts of Ortona. Lt. Col Jefferson of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment was coordinating the attack. He had his Headquarters in a flour mill. When the Loyal Edmonton Regiment left we took over that flour mill and used it all the time that we were at Ortona. I set up my Headquarters in a good stone residence on the outskirts. The SLI used that house throughout our stay in Ortona as well. That house was in the centre of a block of stone houses. It seemed quite a safe spot.

Fifty yards down the street, towards the water front, was an AT gun. For a week, day and night, that gun fired away. In 1952, on a refresher course in Winnipeg, I got into an argument, with an RCD lecturer about how close an AT gun should be to other troops. Had he been with me that week, he would have understood my argument better.

Nault and I were the first to take over this house for our Headquarters. Nault went about making it liveable. When I came back he was more excited than I had ever seen him. He had gone next door. There he had found two children, killed in their high chairs. The wailing mother was with them. The father and some other men were huddled around doing nothing. The children had been dead for some time. Nault who could speak Italian well, was heart broken, but suggested as gently as he could, that the children ought to be buried. The men refused, Nault loaded his rifle and kept the men covered until the Children were buried. He said, "By Jesus, Sir, I felt like shooting them but then I would have had to dig the graves myself." That was all in the life of a batman driver.

Col. Jefferson held his Orders Group regularly every day. At the first Orders Group he laid out plans to get to Pescara. The next day the objective was to take Ortona. The third day we had to reach a line midway through Ortona. After that for more than a week he would start off the Orders Group by saying, "Well, we will see what we can do today." It was marvelous how he bore up under strain.

Near the south edge of Ortona was an open square in front of a five story apartment building, This apartment was captured early in the fight. It was a natural OP. The building was built in two sections with two stairwells. A bomb or huge shell had wrecked the north stairwell. Of course it was on the north side that we wanted the OP. To get there it was necessary to climb to the pent house on the south side and then crawl over the roof to the pent house on the north side and then down into the masonry building. That was easily done, without danger, after dark. But several times I had to get there in daylight. On two occasions an 88 mm gun fired at me while I was crawling across the roof. I could hear the shell "whish" as it passed by each time.

On Christmas Day, 1943 fighting in Ortona was still savage. Each battalion made special preparations to serve Christmas dinner. Canned turkey and Pudding had been provided. The Seaforths used the church on the Outskirts. Half the battalion held the front line positions while the other half ate. Our boys alternated and ate in their platoon positions. It just happened that on that day I was extra busy. At noon Nault thought that I was eating elsewhere. I didn't get a chance to eat till evening and by then there was only bully beef to eat.

It was in this church on the outskirts of Ortona, that Chapman and Dick deFaye found a book of Shakespeare plays written in Italian. They spent many enjoyable hours reading to each other.

In his expeditions around the town Nault was finding many souvenirs. He began to feel sorry

for me. He brought me a cushion that was quite ornate I didn't think much of it but rather than offend him I took it and thanked him. We took the stuffing out and I sent it home. There the top was highly prized. It was shorn of its' ornate trimmings and mounted in a picture frame where the needlework roses and rosebuds look very nice.

This action was the first for Phil Reynolds who had just arrived from Canada. One day he was holding an Orders Group with his Company commanders when Jerry started to shell them. Rupe Leblond and the others were determined that a newcomer to the front, like Phil, would not show them up. Phil, on the other hand assumed that these fellows were battle experienced. They would surely know when there was danger so the Orders Group proceeded while the shelling continued.

Finally Rupe could bear it no longer. "Sir don't you think that we should get the hell out of here?"

Throughout the fight for Ortona, Montgomery was a daily visitor. There is no questioning the effect that his presence made on morale. We all felt that we were truly the front line.

Chapter 33: Counter Mortars

When Ortona fell all thoughts of going to Pescara had been forgotten. We were to settle down to hold the line for the winter. In the fighting up to Ortona the mortars of the Division had been used together three times. I don't know whose idea it was, Vokes or Walker's, but it was decided to try a new form of organization in this static role. Instead of each brigade having one battery, each of mortars, machine guns and AA guns we were to try controlling all the mortars as one unit. For the trial a temporary headquarters was set up with Drayton Walker as Commanding Officer and myself as Second-in-command.

We set up our Headquarters in the mill in Ortona. There we had radio links with the Batterys and telephone. I set up a sort of miniature Battalion organization. Rostand Lahaie was to be in charge of Intelligence. This proved a happy choice. I don't think that I ever actually saw Rostand do anything other than light one cigarette with the butt of another. Somehow we got his work done and he spent plenty of time thinking about it. He had many good ideas.

He and Walker developed many ideas. They got the mortars surveyed in. They registered enemy targets and gave them code names. Telephone lines connected with all formations of the infantry. A code word could bring mortar fire to bear any time day or night. They got the Artillery spotter aircraft to direct fire on special targets. They set up a counter mortar organization that was the pride of Gen. Vokes. We had visitors nearly every day, from corps, from 8th Army, and from England. A lot of the army's future organization, in that type of work, was worked out in Ortona, by Drayton Walker and Rostand Lahaie.

The 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade took up positions on the left flank of the Division. One position faced Crecchio which was just across a very deep gulley and only some five or six hundred yards away. Behind this hill, that the 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade infantry occupied, was another deep gulley. An excellent mortar position. It was within one thousand yards of the enemy front line and protected by a very steep bank. The 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade mortars moved into there. The Seaforths were in the front then and complained bitterly to Hoffmeister about those damned stovepipes being so close to their positions. Hoffmeister told the mortars to move. Ernie Jarvis was Battery commander and came to Mortar Headquarters. Drayton was away for a couple days. So I went to see Hoffmeister. He was adamant. The mortars must move.

As brought out a fine point in Army organizations. Supporting arms are usually placed in support of a brigade, rarely under command. The theory is that the Officer Commanding of the supporting arm is a specialist who knows as much or more about his particular weapon, than the brigade Commander. If the weapon is being misused by the brigadier then the Officer Commanding has a duty to question the command and to seek a final decision from the Divisional commander, I stated my case to Vokes. Of course he was a mortar enthusiast. "Is that a good mortar position?" "Yes sir." "Well, leave them in there then."

I have told permanent force officers about this incident. Without exception they have rated me a fool for having been so persistent That has simply served to confirm my belief that permanent force officer suffer from a very grave occupational liability Why should they jeopardize their army careers by antagonizing a Brigadier just to get their weapon into a good position?

We put our mortars into position within one thousand yards of Crecchio early in January By 24th of April, when we moved out, we had had one casualty on the mortar line after firing thou-

sands of rounds. I never heard of any complaint from the infantry. They appreciated the speed, accuracy and volume of fire that they had so close at hand. Brig. Hoffmeister and I never had another word about the incident. In fact I doubt if either gave it a second thought. Brig. Hoffmeister was a gentleman.

By the time that Ortona fell the whole Division was battle weary. Many loved ones had dropped by the wayside. Everyone was jittery. Why take an unnecessary chance? Our original mortar equipment had included night firing equipment. Some of this had been damaged, but the mortars made such a terrible flash at night that much of the night firing equipment had been deliberately lost. No one wanted to advertise his position.

Drayton's idea of twenty four hour Counter mortar operations hinged on having this night firing equipment. At his first Orders Group he laid on that we should be ready to do so. At his Orders Group the next day, he discovered that nothing had been done. The Battery commanders said that they didn't have anything. McKenzie who was Quartermaster, said that he didn't have any supplies. It was an impasse in which the whole mortar group was attempting to give Drayton the run around. No one wanted to fire at night. Drayton announced that we were firing the next night, If they didn't have proper equipment then McKenzie was to improvise with flashlights. We fired. And the marvelous part of it was that no one was injured in night firing all that winter. Some days five and six thousand bombs were fired, mostly at night and from fixed Positions that had been surveyed in. Of course we had ideal mortar positions. The thing was that to anyone near at hand the flash was terrible but at a distance it was difficult to locate. The mortars were much more easily pinpointed by their sound.

The most isolated spot on the front was known as Point 59 which was a low hill right on the sea coast. It was part of the eastern ridge of the same watercourse which the rest of the front followed. But because it was surrounded by low flat ground it was very difficult to reach without being observed by Jerry. There were no good mortar positions near it so that most of the mortar targets in front of Pt. 59 were beyond our range. Drayton's problem was how to engage those targets. He had an idea to get some DUKW'S with which he would take the mortars up to Pt. 59, after dark, by way of the sea, do the necessary firing and then bring the mortars back before daylight. Distance at sea, even in daylight, is very difficult to judge. Except if they were attacked by an aeroplane, the DUKW's would have been difficult to shoot. I think that it was a feasible scheme. However the DUKW's were not available so the idea was dropped.

However this idea started a terrific furore. Rumours in the army grow much more fantastically than any Ladies Aid gossip ever did. In a very short time the rumour was that Drayton's idea was to fire the mortars, out of the DUKW's at sea. I don't know how the range was to be computed to say nothing of how the thrust was to be counteracted. That was it. There was no use arguing. That was the crazy loon's latest idea.

Just as soon as we could, after we had set up our counter mortar organization, we had a mess dinner for all of the mortar group officers. It was an informal affair and we did not have any toasts. However, I thought that it presented a wonderful opportunity to scotch the rumour about firing mortars at sea. Before the dinner broke up I rose and said, "Major Walker and gentlemen. We did not intend to have any toasts this evening. But I think that there is one toast which we should have. I am going to ask you to rise and to drink with me a toast to the Admiral. Gentlemen the Admiral."

There were about twenty officers there. As soon as I said the word admiral each one of them except Drayton, gasped. Drayton turned to one side and then to the other, "Who is the admiral?" But no one would tell him. So we all rose, including Drayton, and drank the toast to the Admiral. That killed the rumour.

The 8th Army had an African Labour Battalion. They were brought in, immediately that Ortona was cleared, to help clean up the rubble. I have often wondered how much they actually accomplished. There was a pile of rubble at the entrance to Ortona. I am sure that for at least one week I saw the same huge black man, leaning on the same shovel, at exactly the same spot. He had on all the clothes that he could get, great coat, balaclava, steel helmet, etc. He couldn't possibly work dressed the way that he was. He had a happy smile for everyone.

The mill building in which we had set up Mortar Headquarters, had quite a large vaulted cellar built of stonework. Soon after we took possession of the building our Auxiliary Service Officer brought up his movie projector and set it up in our cellar. Some fifty were able to watch at once. One of the first films shown, was of "Duke" Ellington, the pianist. The conclusion of the film was a close-up of the Duke while he played the piano. That big, black, shiny face filled the screen. Then the Duke spoke: "One never knows, do one?" What a perfect philosophy for us!

Quite soon after Ortona was taken, the Auxiliary Services fixed up the local opera house. It was within shelling range all winter and the audiences were strictly limited in size. But films were shown there nearly everyday. The picture that I remember getting the best audience response was old "Union Pacific". It showed Indians attacking the railroad builders. When the cavalry came riding over the hill to save the day, the boys in the audience cheered: - "Here come the soldiers."

Soon after Ortona, a call came from England for a certain number of experienced officers to come back to take part in the channel invasion. Ed Hudson, who was doing a short stretch as staff learner at 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade was one chosen to go back. J.D. McKenzie, our Quarter Master, laid on a party. I think that there were six of us. There was a crap game . McKenzie had mixed up a punch. We always used water treated by the army. He had the ingredients of his punch sitting on the sideboard. Water was in gin bottles. After awhile the punch was finished McKenzie mixed another batch. This time instead of a bottle of water he got a bottle of gin into it. Within fifteen minutes of serving that "mix" the party broke. Everyone was hopelessly drunk.

Gordon Booth and Roy Blake had to drive in their jeep to their Headquarters NE of Ortona towards Pt 59. They couldn't get into their jeep. So Ed, J.D, and I attempted to load them. No matter how we did it we always ended up in a heap on the pavement. After a bit I could see that there was no percentage in that, so I left them on the pavement and walked home. I slept in my original Battery Headquarters house with eight other officers. All the way home and while undressing I kept chuckling and laughing to myself over the schmozzle I had left. Next morning, at the breakfast table, Ernie Jarvis, in his dry, hesitant voice said, "You know Mitch, I have never hear anyone that sounded more like an idiot than you did last night."

Four officers of Mortar Group Headquarters mess slept in a house on the next street east. While in Winnipeg, in 1952, I learned of a competition which they conducted amongst themselves. After dark each would expel the stomach gases from his rectum while an accomplice would hold a lighted candle to ignite the gas. The man who could shoot the longest flame was the winner for that night.

Chapter 34: Roatti

The Mortar group was a success and it was decided to group the other weapons as well. So the Brigade Group Headquarters were converted into Weapon Group Headquarters. I went back to my old job as battery commander with 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade. The front was static and static Headquarters were established. 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters was at Roatti on the left flank. We had a Brigade officers mess. The Brigade Intelligence Officer, Captain Gray was a bit of an artist. In his spare time he sketched murals on all the bare walls of the mess building. His one theme was nude women. No matter what Position was portrayed they bulged.

Brig. Hoffmeister ran a happy Headquarters. We developed a routine in which there was a set time for work, for volleyball and for bull sessions. Brig, Hoffmeister entered into everything.

My duties involved regular visits to my platoons to the infantry Battalions and to Mortar Group Headquarters. Jerry developed a routine as well. Certain spots were shelled every day. One was a crossroad that I went through everyday just before noon. Jerry always shelled that exactly at noon. And he always shelled the exact spot of the crossroad. Many the time Brady and I have stopped the jeep one hundred yards from the crossroads because it was near noon. Invariably he would shell the same spot. Then we would go on our way.

Within the Battalion we developed a bit social life. If we got something different we would invite one another over for a meal. At one that Wes and Gordon gave they made up menus and place cards. The menu was:

MENU:

Howard D'Oeuvres - (Howard Mitchell)
Supe Lablonde - (Rupe Leblond)
Lestro Beans - (Les Clough)
Hug-me Dolce Presto - (E. Hogg)
Coffee Rosso - (Rostand Lahaie)

On the 24th April, 1944, the 10th Indian Division took over the sector held by 1st Canadian Division. It was a revelation to me to see a modern army division, composed of people who two or three years before had only lived a primitive life. Some of the officers in each unit of this Division were British. All the rest and all the other ranks were Indian. One chap managed to tip over his jeep driving after dark. Otherwise their take over went smoothly.

The Brigade Headquarters arrived first. They set up their cook and he prepared a very sumptuous curry dinner in the Indian style for us. We stayed in position for twenty four hours until they got accustomed to the front. That night Flitcroft came into my Headquarters to see me. He was thoroughly frightened and white as a sheet. His OP was in an exposed position. He always walked the first short distance to the spot where his vehicles were kept. This black night he was walking, alone as usual, when, without warning, two vise-like hands seized him from behind. Not a word was spoken. The hands slowly worked up his arms, felt his shoulder and then his face. Again without a word he was released and his captor disappeared. That was sentry duty, Indian style.

Chapter 35: Lucera

Enroute from Ortona to Lucera I noticed a large wooden building of a size and shape that reminded me of some of the horse barns that had been built in Western Canada in the early 1920's. Coming closer I saw that it was a huge stock of wooden boxes containing corned beef. It was the 8th Army's dump of reserve rations. Even if all shipping was destroyed we would eat - bully beef.

The general plan was that the 1st Canadian Division was to make the break through the Hitler Line near Monte Cassino. For this action 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade withdrew to Lucera where it was to practice infantry cum tanks operations with the British Army 25th Tank Brigade. It was necessary for both Infantry and Tanks to get to know the other's techniques intimately. Equally important it was necessary for all ranks at each level to know each other personally. This training lasted for a week.

Towards the end of our stay at Lucera I laid on an evening for my Battery officers at the British officers club at Foggia. We had dinner there and afterwards sampled the wares of the bar. This was a traditional British Officer set up. Nothing elaborate. Mostly Army rations. But there were linen table cloths, silver tableware and chinaware and there was a fair variety to drink.

Some of the Tank Brigade officers were there as usual, British Army officers, when tight, tended to go berserk. There was one little thin undernourished inbred Northern Irish officer who was really objectionable. He persisted in getting up onto the dining table, linen cloth and all, to sing ribald songs. Time and again he was put off. Like a jack-in-the-box he popped up again.

One of my officers was a chap named McKay. He had come to us as a reinforcement at Roatti Like all of our new reinforcements he did not know anything about mortars. He was an accountant in civil life. He was tall, very slight, stooped, had a lined leathery face, a drooping mustache a mournful expression on his face and a very slow dreary voice. Every time I saw him my first inclination was to kick him in the rear to see if I could get him to stand upright. He studied the pamphlet thoroughly. He tried to follow it minutely even when not applicable. His platoon had been in action ten months. Instead of co-operating with his Sergeants he seemed to antagonize them. I visited him often at first because he was new and I wanted to help.

That soon changed to my visits being because I was worried about what was happening to the platoon. The Non-commissioned Officers soon sensed my thoughts and that made the situation even worse.

That was the background when we left the dinner table and started a game of darts in the bar. We drank a lot and everyone got tight. Towards the end of the evening McKay had difficulty in standing at all. He leaned with his back to the bar and held himself upright with his elbows on the bar. The mournful expression was gone. On his face was a happy simple grin. In that instant I knew that I loved the guy. That moment marked the beginning of McKay's great success in our Battalion, The next day when I visited McKay's platoon I was made aware of my different attitude to him by the reaction it aroused in the Sergeants. He knew that something had changed McKay immediately began to fit in.

We moved around to the west coast of Italy. One move was at night. We arrived at the western edge of the mountains about 0500 hours. The convoy stopped for a twenty minute halt when we were in a hill village overlooking a plain of wonderful farm land. Even at that early hour, our trucks were almost immediately surrounded by

Italians mostly women and children. That was a sight that I wish everyone in Canada could see. Women were carrying in their arms, cradled like infants, children two and three years old. They had match stick legs and arms, huge bellies and heads. One boy, whose mother said he was thirteen years old, was about the size of a normal seven year old. He too had spindly legs and arms, a huge stomach and a large wizened old man's head. It was one of the most gruesome and pathetic sights of the war. Obviously those children had suffered from malnutrition for a much longer period than the duration of the war and their home was right beside some of the finest soil one could wish for.

We moved down into the plain and bivouacked for twenty four hours. This was the area of one of Mussolini's pilot projects for the improvement of the lot of the Italian peasant. He had taken over this whole area, torn up all the little fields and made such improvements to the land as were needed. In the centre of the area he had built a fine little village with a church, a school, a little hospital or first aid post and a centre for an agricultural adviser. The farms were laid out in a uniform size of about 25 - 30 acres. On each, he built a new compact farm house, which, under one roof, housed the family the livestock, implements grain, etc. The farmers were given small horse drawn plows, seed drills, binders, etc. and a threshing machine. It was a tremendous step forward from the mattock and flail type of agriculture that we had seen everywhere else.

Chapter 36: The Hitler Line

The elements of the 8th Army concentrated in a narrow valley along the only main road. That was the road from Naples to Rome. Never have I seen such a conglomeration of stores, men and equipment. Luckily, the German Airforce didn't count for much then. A bomb anywhere in the valley would have hit an important target.

We were moved up opposite the remains of the town of Cassino. This little place had been one of the first "saturation targets" bombed by the American Airforce. They had dropped fifteen hundred tons of bombs in a single raid. They had raided it often. Still the American Fifth Army and some British Units of the 8th Army had not been able to break through the line.

This was a prepared position called the Hitler Line, 75 millimeter guns in Panther tank turrets had been embedded in concrete emplacements at strategic points. Machine guns were similarity placed. Fields of fire had been cleared of obstacles. Mortars, field guns of all types and infantry had well prepared positions. All targets had been registered. The Germans had been instructed by Hitler to hold this line and they were doing so.

In the first do the mortars supported the 1 Canadian Infantry Brigade,. The Polish Army went along the mountain ridge and captured the Abbey on top of Monte Cassino. Then on the 23rd of May 1944 the 3 Canadian Infantry Brigade on the left and 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade on the right made the attack. Our 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade right flank was along the west side of the main road which was the divisional boundary.

The Army Intelligence people had studied this area of the front for a long time. We were issued with maps giving the exact location of German infantry, guns, machine guns and mortars. This brought to light a basic difference between the German Army and the Canadian Army. No one in the German Army had issued orders such as Brig. Vokes had given to me at Agira. Our weapon pamphlets, issued by the Small Arms School at Netheravon, laid down the rule that supporting arms never used their defensive fire positions for any other purpose than defensive fire. That was the rule the German Army followed. In this action it was the German Mortars that were the most devastating. Some people have said that the Germans had moved in many more mortars. I am sure that all that happened was that the Germans had followed the above maxim faithfully. Whenever they had a harassing shoot, or a shoot in support of some action of the infantry to do, the German mortars moved to an alternate Position. Those were the positions that our intelligence people had so exactly recorded. Those were the positions that we poured thousands of bombs into. But the German mortars were in their defensive fire positions. Those Positions had only been used when our side had made an attack and when it had been almost impossible for our people to properly locate them.

That day was a nightmare. I had to constantly change our prepared fire plan in answer to pleas from the infantry to silence mortars of which we had no record. We fired on them but in the din and uproar our OP's had difficulty in observing the strike of our own weapons. The German fire Power was terrific, While standing on the ground near 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade Headquarters talking to Flitcroft a jerry flat trajectory shell whisked between us at what sounded like a waist height. The Seaforths and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry made the attack and bore the brunt. The Loyal Edmonton Regiment, was in reserve. Their forming up area was saturated with mortars. They were in just as bad a spot. That day I saw the 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade literally disappear.

After the show Lt. Col. Camy Ware, Commanding Officer of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, came to Brigade Headquarters. Brig. Gibson was very enthusiastic and praised Ware for the splendid job that had been done, The Canadians had done what the others had failed to do. But Camy was heartbroken. "Those were fine boys. They are gone, I haven't anybody left. They are all gone." The Brigade Major gave Jim Stone of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment an order to man the front line with the left out of battles. He made an error in the map co-ordinate and placed the Loyal Edmonton Regiment one map square east of where they should have been. For a couple hours the only people occupying that bit of the front were our mortars and machine guns.

But that did not matter, once the break was made our Fifth Armoured Division went into action. Twenty four hours after that flat trajectory shell had passed between Flitcroft and I out in the vineyard I stood on the same spot. Now it was a graded earthen road over which most of the elements of the Fifth Diision had already passed. Bulldozers and patrols had followed the leading tanks across the fields. The main paved road had been reserved for the British division.

History now records the antics to which General Mark Clark resorted to make his triumphal entry into the City of Rome. Amongst those who thronged the side walks to greet him were Rupe Leblond and Les Clough. The previous day they had taken a jeep through the back roads. When Mark Clark arrived they had already spent one night in a Roman nightclub.

Chapter 37: Piedmonte

We followed the fighting for a day or two and then the 1st Canadian Division was withdrawn from battle and went into a rest area near Foligno. Our battery of mortars reached our Battalion area near Piedmonte the first of our Battalion, we set up tents in a field. That first day Doug Rankin contracted with the farmer, on whose field we had located, for a supply of milk. Doug was one of those fine healthy specimens every mother dreams her boy will become. The farmer was to bring milk early every day. So every morning, before Doug got out of bed, he had drunk a quart of milk. One morning the milk did not arrive. Later the farmer appeared, Why no milk? Oh the cow she died. "Vache Morte." Doug is still healthy so I guess the milk was alright,

While here the AA Companies and the Group Headquarters set up were done away with. This left us three separate machine gun companies and the mortar group which became known as the mortar company, with the same firepower. I became Second in command of the Mortar Company.

We trained, refitted, had a sports day. And everyone went on leave. Gen. Burns, the Corps commander inspected us one day. It was a spit and polish parade for which we had spent a long time preparing. Gen. Burns just stepped out of his car when it started to rain. The inspection went on without a change. The rain just poured the full time of the parade. Afterwards we straggled back into our pup tents.

Those pup tents were a real convenience. As issued, one had to crawl into them on hands and knees. But with a bit of scrounging we got some heavy cloth and sewed on walls three to four feet high. Then one could stand upright in them. They gave good protection and a great deal of privacy.

Wes Winters, J.D. McKenzie and I went on leave to Amalfi. Nearby the Italian king had a country home. It was a beautiful spot in the Sorrento, Salerno area. There was a very precipitous coastline with only a few spots where there was a beach. Along a great portion of the coastline a roadway had been blasted out of the rocks. On one side was rock, on the other a low stone wall, a foot or so high, that marked the boundary between the road and the beautiful blue Tyrrhenean Sea some hundred feet below. The army had taken over an hotel at Amalfi and had set it up as an officer's leave centre. The accommodation was good. There were proper beds, good meals, and a bar that kept respectable hours closing at 2300 hours. One could boat and swim, there were movies and once a week a dance. Eleven miles west along the coastal road was another village. Positano, where two native nightclubs stayed open all night. We went there after the hotel entertainment closed down.

The three of us drove to Amalfi together in a jeep. By a majority vote Mitchell was rated a poor driver and, after the first effort, was not allowed to drive.

One interesting sight on the drive to Amalfi. The British and Canadian Army always erected Bailey bridges to temporarily replace those damaged. These were ingenious structures that could be erected to carry light traffic and then, without disturbing the traffic, developed to carry any load wished. They were made of steel sections. On our way to Amalfi we crossed several very fine bridges that the Americans had built entirely out of wood.

There were some Canadian nurses on leave at the hotel. One I had boated with on the river at Oxford. For the weekly dance the hotel army manager had invited some local Italian girls. I was introduced to one of these and to papa and mamma, who were along as chaperones. I cannot

imagine anything more respectable. The girl seemed to be very pleasant and a decent sort. I bought papa and mamma and the girl a drink. We had a dance together. Then I took the Italian girl over to where the Canadian nurses had congregated and introduced her all around. Everyone was very correct and then almost immediately melted away. Three times I tried to get the Canadian girls to be pleasant to the Italian girl for just one minute. Each time they unanimously refused to have anything to do with her.

I quit the dance in disgust and finished the evening at the bar.

McKenzie and I, with a Canadian nurse, drove over to Sorrento one afternoon. It was a grand sunny warm day with the lovely sea breeze blowing. We drove around the town, looked through the shops and bought a few sovereigns. Walking down one street I was on the outside with the nurse between McKenzie and I. An Italian prostitute really quite a good looking girl, stopped McKenzie and solicited some business.

Our Canadian nurse was a very fine woman with good Canadian morals. But it struck me that she was angry, not because of the moral aspect of the Italian girl's proposition but because of the implied criticism of her own sexual abilities.

One night after the hotel bar closed, we decided to go down to the nightclub in Positano just in case the nightclub should be short of drinks we took along a fresh bottle of rye whiskey We had a Canadian nurse with us. That was a beautiful drive silvery moonlight perfect temperature calm air, the deep blue sea and dotted on it were Italian fishing boats which used underwater lights to attract the fish to their nets. it was a wonderful sight.

At the night club we found a brigadier whom I knew. He was dressed in mufti and in the company of a striking platinum blonde. After a bit he came over to our table. "Mitchell can you speak Italian?"

"Oh a bit sir What do you want to know?"

"Well, I have been trying all evening to get someone to tell me how to say in Italian - I love you with a passion which is most dishonorable.

In the line of food the specialty of this nightclub was an omelet. They would take a single egg, add only a bit of seasoning beat it up as large as possible, and then fry it over a charcoal fire. Fifty cents a go. But they were delicious. We thought that it was a great bargain

The nightclub was fully supplied with drinks. So when we started home the rye bottle was open but still full. By now everyone was tight. So now, when everyone was tight, Mitchell who by majority vote could not drive when everyone was sober, was by majority vote elected driver. McKenzie and the nurse sat in the back,. Wes sat beside me holding the bottle of rye. Now I was terrified by the sight of the sea. I drove the full eleven miles in low gear, and all the way Wes kept Sucking on the bottle of rye.

We reached the hotel safely, but by this time Wes was very tight. He had reached the state where he regarded himself as another person and he undertook to put himself in bed. All the time he kept talking to himself. "Winters you yellow bastard don't ever kid yourself that you are going to get out of this war by getting malaria. You SOB you know that you take your pill. You know that you have to use ointment You know that you know that you have to have to sleep under a net."

He got himself his pill. He applied the ointment He very carefully made his bed and put the mosquito net in place. Then he tried to lift himself

into bed. He would pick up one foot and put it under the covers with his hands and then he would try to raise the other foot With his hands Always he fell onto the floor, This performance went on for nearly half an hour I thought that I him to bed was going to get sick from laughing50 much Finally he passed out and I put

Chapter 38: Florence

Early in August we went into action again. This time we were to go into the line near Florence. I had been transferred to Machine Guns and was once again with A Company. We traveled down the main road from Naples to Rome. We passed Cassino and the Hitler line. It was all tidied up but even as we drove along a British Army truck, that attempted to pass our convoy, struck a mine on the verge of the road and blew up.

Though we did not know it, the move into the Florence area was a ruse. We were in the front line only a couple of days. Just long enough for the German Intelligence to establish, beyond doubt, that all of the Canadians were there.

All of our outgoing mail had to be censored by the Company Commander. After the second day in Florence a lot of small parcels were put into the mail. They obviously had cloth of some kind in them. The parcels were all made up and I didn't feel like unwrapping and wrapping each so I franked them as they were. The next day there was another flood of the same kind of parcels. "Sergeant - Major, what goes on here?" "The boy's found a warehouse of silk, Sir. They are sending some of it home." And I never got a bit of it.

We moved back to an area, near Perugia, where we stayed nearly a week. Our camp was in a valley below the town of Assisi. Nearby was a little rural church. They were forever ringing the bell in that little church. What amused me was that that was the jazziest church bell ringing that I have heard anywhere. I don't think that there was more than one bell. But the rhythm of the ringing was really "hot".

Back in Saskatchewan there was a provincial general election. It was decided that the "boys over there" should have representation in the Legislature. That produced one of the most bizzare incidents in the army that started in our Battalion at Perugia. We had had reinforcements from all across Canada but most of our "originals" were from Saskatchewan. As the only Saskatchewan unit in Italy it seemed likely that the man we chose would have a good chance to win the seat. So we had a mass meeting at which the competitors from the S LI spoke and were later voted on. That was, to me, a very disgusting spectacle. We were an army unit on active service where the life of everyone was dependent on the discipline of everyone respecting the chain of command. It was utterly fantastic to think that ordinary humans could step out of that role for an hour and listen to the Commanding Officer of the Battalion compete against those under his command for a popular job. It was the most mischievous scheme that anyone could have concocted to undermine the morale that we had spent years building.

Embury won. He made an honest bid. He pointed out that he was a lawyer, a soldier, and that he had been with the Battalion throughout it's time overseas. He thought that he could be of some service to us in Regina. He wanted the job.

Late one afternoon several of us took a jeep and drove up to Assisi to see the Monastery founded by St. Francis of Assisi. We got there some minutes before sunset. That was one of the moments of beauty in my life. It was a warm sunny day. The sun was still strong but getting low. The Monastery is huge brick structure built on the lip of the hill. The valley below, a mat of vineyards, olive groves and fields, was in the shadow. All was peace and quiet. Then an organ began playing followed by a strong male choir. The words meant nothing but the music was beautiful. It affected me greatly.

I stayed outside to watch the jeep while the others went into the monastery. While I was standing there two nuns came along to go into the

monastery. They were leading thirty girls of all ages. They walked along in pairs. Each dressed in the same light blue, trimmed in white, uniform. Everyone of these girls was deformed in mind or in body. The setting and the music had raised me to a high plane. In the mood engendered by that beauty these girls were a shock. Could this really be Christianity? Keeping these poor creatures alive, who could never experience the life of God's creatures, without making any effort to help them out of their pitiful state. Incidentally, it was at Perugia that I was given the permanent appointment of major in our Battalion.

Chapter 39: The Gothic Line

This time we were to break through the Gothic Line. The Gothic Line was a prepared position of which the Foglio River was the central feature. We moved into the area and were given the genera' plan of attack. I went forward to make recce I got a good vantage point, looked, and fervently wished that my God would take me or do anything to spare me this. The Hitler line was in fairly flat country between two mountain ridges, this was different.

From crest to crest the valley of the Foglio River was about four to five miles wide. That meant that our supporting weapons, guns, mortars, machine guns, everything could not reach the German guns and mortars behind the other crest Without going out on to the forward slope. The Todt Organization of the German Army had cleared everything out of the valley of the Foglio River. There were no trees, no bushes, no houses, It was a bare valley and every inch of it from our side of the river bank to the far side of the valley was covered by everything the Germans had. The Hitler line was terrible. This could only be a stupid slaughter.

The attack went in at night. There was gunfire and aerial bombardment to support it. We drove through the valley without taking our machine guns off the trucks. It was unbelievable but there was very little fighting.

What had happened was that the Germans had captured a couple of Canadians around Florence, They had established that all the Canadians were there. The Canadians were assault troops. So the Germans had withdrawn most of their troops from the Gothic line and were prepared to meet a great thrust on the other side of the mountains. Good generalship had saved us many lives.

Just because we had crossed the Gothic Line did not mean that Jerry liked it. There followed the most aggressive action of the German Airforce that we experienced. I am very thankful that we didn't have more. We were moving a lot. There wasn't much opposition by day. But for several nights in a row the aerial effort came. First would come the parachute flare which seemed to light up the world twice as bright as day. The first time I thought that Hitler himself could see the colour of my eyes. Above the light of the flare was the drone of the aeroplane. But you knew that the sound was away behind the actual position of the aeroplane. Then, when the light of the flare and the sound of the planes had completely demoralized you, the bombs would fall where you had least expected them. One night Rupe Leblond and I got into some underground German shelters. There were a couple feet of earth over our heads. Then, in the midst of the blitz, the thought occurred to me that I might escape a direct hit from a bomb yet be smothered by the earth caving in. We got out of there. One night, during the air raid one of our boys lost control of himself and started running. Next morning he was found sliced by a machine gun.

During one of the reconnaissance that I made of the front I got into a farm house that was built on a bit of a hill. The walls on each side were gaping with shell holes. I guess that our guns blew in one side and Jerry's the other.

It was a modest building with the living quarters on the second floor. The furniture and cabinets were homemade, but they had been brightly painted in a much more imaginative way than was usual. While I was there a young man and woman, obviously man and wife, came in. Out of the rubble they gathered some snapshots and trinkets. What I remember to this day was the loathing with which they regarded me.

Chapter 40: Rimini

The opposition became severe. Fighting was savage at Fortunato Ridge and at Rimini. For this action the Greek Brigade, which had just arrived from Egypt, was put under command of the 1st Canadian Division. The Greeks were facing Rimini and were to undertake an aggressive holding action while the main thrust took place on the left, further inland. Rostand Lahaie, with his battery of mortars, and I, with A Company machine guns, were to support the Greeks in this action.

Very few in the Greek Brigade could speak English. At Brigade Headquarters there was a Greek speaking English officer of the British army who was chief Liaison Officer. He was a natural diplomat. His job was to understand both the British Army and the Greek Army as well as the two nationalities and to keep the Greeks properly informed. At each Headquarters in the Brigade there was an English speaking Greek. One, George, was attached to Rostand and I.

This British LO told me a story that I have never heard mentioned elsewhere. According to him, a Greek Corps formation had been trained and equipped in Egypt. This Corps was scheduled to come to Italy in the latter part of 1943. He said that the day before they were to begin to embark the Greeks posted guards on the quarters of the British LO's to protect them and then proceeded to fight each other over some Greek political controversy. This brigade was considered to be the only reliable one out of that Corps.

I feel quite sure that the Greek Brigade never properly understood its role in this action. For their part in the battle, the Greeks had one regiment of 25 pdrs, our mortars and our machine guns. All the rest of Canadian artillery, mortars and machine guns and all of the tanks suppored the thrust on the left. I don't think that the Greeks understood pulling your punches, when fighting. With them it was either all or nothing.

To begin with they did not seem to have satisfactory information at the Brigade Headquarters about what was going on. I sent Phil Staynor off to our neighboring 2 Canadian Brigade Headquarters from where he sent me information as he got it. Rostand Lahaie didn't always get that information. Ross swore that it was he who took Rimini. He said that the Greek Brigadier told him to bomb the Greek Positions. Ross did that so effectively that the Greek soldiers decided that fighting Jerry was the lesser evil of the two.

The first time that I went up to the front line for a look, I got into a house on the southern edge of the airport at Rimini and from the upper rooms I had an excellent view. On the other side of the airport at each corner, there were 75 mm guns mounted in panther turrets in their concrete emplacements. The Canadian Army just didn't have anything that could cross that airfield in the face of those two guns.

When I came down from having my "look" I found that Popp and Solari, my radio operator had been souvenir hunting, They had found a wooden walking cane that had a carved dog's head. With proper Gallic dignity and ceremony Solari made a brief speech and presented the cane to me, I still have it. It is one of my most treasured Possessions.

Solari was a French speaking Canadian from Montreal. The army signal code and procedure had been developed to obscure the sender and receiver of radio messages There was never much obscurity about Solari's speech. His French Canadian accent was far too pronounced.

I have often paid a silent tribute to the radio operators of the war. Whenever I was in a dangerous area I always like to walk on foot. Away from the noise of a motor and any other local distrac-

tion a person could usually hear the shells coming. In a truck you had no chance of hearing distant noises. But with both ears covered with the earphones of a crackling radio you couldn't even hear explosions that were right beside you. Once, when we were driving through a bad spot, there was a verbal explosion behind me from Solari, "Jesus Christ Popp. Don't look so God damned scared. You are making me scared."

I always found those danger periods a trial. There is nothing more contagious than fear. I always felt it to be necessary that I should appear calm and composed. There I sat, with the muscles behind my ears tightening to breaking point and my hair standing on end wondering just where the next shell was going to fall.

This house on the edge of the airport had evidently been a Jerry brothel. There were odd bits of German Army issue laying about. One room about ten feet square had the floor completely covered with bed mattresses. It stank to high heaven with perfume quite a roomy place to romp.

While we were waiting for the show with the Greeks to begin we got talking about the sacrifices that would likely be made. One French speaking Canadian got philosophical 'When I first went into action I was prepared to die. I did not want to die but I knew that my country was in danger. The way that my family and I had lived was being threatened. My country had called for my help. I answered that call, I was very frightened, but if necessary, I was ready to offer my life. The next time I went into action I was not quite so frightened but my thoughts were the same. This went on for some time. Then one day the thought occurred to me. Instead of offering my life to my country and dying wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to offer my life to my country and live, taking an active part in making it a better country.

The action that went in that night was not completely successful. Next day about noon I went up to the Greeks forward Company position with George, my interpreter. There I saw the most revolting sight of the war. The evening before, some of these Greeks had been clustered together when a "Moaning Minnie" landed. There were a dozen killed. Those nearby, including the company commanders were terrified. Shelling had been more or less continuous and when I arrived everybody was still huddled in their slit trenches. The dead were lying where they had been struck and the farmer's chickens were picking at their eyes, faces, etc. I forgot what I had come for and got the company commander busy with his burial party.

A "Moaning Minnie" was an ingenious invention. The Germans called them Nebelwerfers They were rocket propelled bombs. The bombs were about six inches in diameter and about eighteen inches long. They were fired in clumps of five from a Heath Robinson contraption on a two wheeled carriage.

A circle of five tubes was located about head high on this undercarriage. I believe that an electrical impulse fired them in succession so that they took off one after another and landed the same way. I don't know whether it was caused by their natural aerodynamics or whether some gadget had been added to make the noise, but they always sounded just like a freight train coming through the air at you. The sound was very demoralizing. However, they traveled rather slowly. One always had plenty of time to find cover. I believe that those poor Greeks were about the only casualties that I saw from a "Moaning Minnie."

One time when George and I were going up to the front we met three Greek soldiers taking two German prisoners back to their Brigade Headquarters Those two Germans were the only persons that I saw during the war who had bayonet

wounds. The Greeks walked behind them with fixed bayonets and every step or so jabbed their prisoners. I exploded. As well as I could through George, I explained myself.

As we walked away George spoke to me; “Sir, this war does not mean the same to you as it does to us. Each of those Greek soldiers had lost a relative during the German campaign in Greece earlier in the war. They could not be impersonal."

With the Greeks we had a rest for a day or so. We had some houses right on the waterfront at Riccione. It was grand weather Ross, Phil and I had a lovely furnished dining room for our mess. Wide windows opened to give us a beautiful view of the moon shining on the Adriatic. That evening Rostand and Phil were comfortably seated, drinking and talking. The windows were open. I was seated at a side table writing by candlelight. A bat flew in through the window. Almost as if they had carefully rehearsed the part, Ross and Phil dove underneath the table, screaming with terror. They kept it up until Wiener, Ross’ batman, who was “duty batman” that evening, came to the door to see what was wrong. Their terror was so genuine that Wiener took one look and fled. Of course this encouraged the pranksters. They cried for help. Finally Popp came to the door, he surveyed the situation, went back to the kitchen and fetched a broom, Popp entered into the spirit of the game. From the security of their haven beneath the table these two accomplished officers directed the battle with technical fire order “Range three yards, Picture of nude right two degrees, bat, one tap right and left, side wind right two degrees, rapid, fire.”

Next day the Greek Brigade had a formal parade in Rimini Rostand and I drove up to watch. The troops were all in formation in the square. There were cameras all over the place. The old Greek brigadier saw us and invited Ross and I to join the inspecting party. We did. I often wish that I had one of the many pictures taken that day. I have never seen any, H.M. the Greek King awarded Rostand and I the Greek Military Cross 3rd class.

Chapter 41: Another River to Cross

About this time, Gordon Young joined us. Gordon was an "original" member of the SLI. He had been sent to Officer Cadet Training Unit from England. This was his first time with the Battalion as a commissioned officer. I took him up to his platoon in my jeep with Popp and Solari, Gordon will never believe that I did not plan what happened.

Gordon's platoon was near the seacoast. The water front infantry positions were being manned temporarily by the RCD's. I dropped into Regimental Headquarters to find the latest front line positions. I don't know who they expected to deceive with their mapboard but I was one. They had their Troop Positions marked on the map further on than they actually were. There was an excellent broad road along the waterfront. I decided that we would drive along it, as far as we safely could, and then turn inland. We were wheeling along when an RCD trooper urgently motioned us to turn into the courtyard where he was. Popp turned without waiting to be told. Just as we passed under the trees, overhanging the gate, there was a "br-r-rt" and the leaves and branches a few inches about our heads fell. There was a Jerry machine gun mounted in a little steel turret fixed in the pavement about one hundred yards further on. The Jerry manning it must have been dozing. We were pinned down in the very front line. We had to leave Popp and Solari to bring the jeep out after dark. We walked to the platoon

Our work took on a routine. The brigades were rotated in the battle. So we were in action about a week and rested three or four days. The fighting involved crossing one river after another. Most of them had high dikes to enable them to carry the spring floods. Crossing the river meant going up a very steep bank, up twenty feet high, down the other side, across the river, up another bank just as high and then down the other side.

One day one of our platoons found five Jerry trailers. They were small. They had pneumatic tires and were designed to carry two or three hundred pounds I think that Jerry used them to carry machine guns, They could be trailed behind a vehicle but I think that they had probably been pulled by soldiers on foot. They were such neat little things. The boys were like kids with toys, Just as they were reveling in their find, a Major Brown of the Artillery came along and attempted to commandeer the trailers. I guess there was a row between the sergeant and Brown. When I came along Brown had taken two trailers and was coming back after the rest. I hunted up Brown and told him what I thought of him. We had some pretty sharp words. He didn't come back for the rest.

We drove on to have a look at the country. After I had seen what I wanted, I told Brady to go down the trail to a wider place and turn around. While he was doing that, I went into the vineyard and picked a cluster of green grapes about the size of a football. I put the whole cluster up to my face to bite one. A bee stung me just under the eye. Within half an hour the side of my face was as tight as a drum. Word of my row with Brown had spread. Immediately the row and my swollen face were connected.

The little trailers proved to be rather disappointing. They were too small and not quite sturdy enough to follow the fifteen hundred weight trucks. The boys gave me one. It was the only one that was really used. It was just right to trail behind my jeep to carry my kit.

This business of the Company Commander's kit was quite a thing. Both Popp and Nault followed the practice of keeping my kit and theirs together. Because of transport limitations the size of everyone's kit was watched quite closely. But the Sergt.

Major could never catch Popp or Nault. Whenever he demanded to see what was in a bag they would bring out a shirt, or a pair of socks or something that belonged to me. So long as they did not arouse my curiosity, by the size of the kit we carried, they were able to gather many souvenirs.

One day I was on my way back to Brigade Headquarters. Right smack in the middle of the intersection, on the road to Brigade, was a Sherman tank with one track off. With true British deliberation the English tank crew decided to brew up some tea before they tackled the track. I got after the Sgt. and told him that he just had to get his old tank off the road. This he quite easily did. He had just moved it when a jeep, carrying the area commander's flag, and driven by two provost, came by. One hundred yards behind came an open staff car. In the rear, seated on the left, very erect, looking so cool and calm, almost looking clean as well, sat Gen. Alexander. On the right, wearing a sun helmet, face beet red, streaming with sweat and caked with dust, in a rumpled army bush shirt sat a very uncomfortable but a very determined old man - Winston Churchill.

Brigadier Calder was up at a front line OP at that time. One of his LO's came up to tell him that Winston Churchill was in his area. "Don't be absurd." Calder went on observing. Then he began to wonder, Could it be that he was? By the time he got back Churchill had left.

The "brew-up" were quite a rite. Army biscuits were sent out in hermitically sealed light tins about six inches square and about eight inches high. The boys would take a salmon can, fill it half full of sand, pour in some gasoline and set this between a couple of bricks or stones. The biscuit tin was on top of the bricks, full of water, the gasoline was lit and before long you had tea. That happened a dozen times a day. Actually it proved to be the most refreshing drink that one could get on a hot dusty day, and it was there when you were cold and wet. The biscuit tin was soon covered with a coat of soot. Every truck had a tin hanging underneath - it was too dirty to carry in the truck. But one could make delicious tea in it within minutes.

Our brigade was to cross another river. It had high dikes. This time a new wrinkle was tried. Intelligence had closely studied the opposite front. At one spot, where the dikes were very high, there did not appear to be very many enemy. At night, without artillery or any other bangs our infantry stealthily climbed over the dikes and across the river at this lightly manned spot. After the immediate area was free, jeeps hauling six pounds AT guns were winched over the river and dikes. Twice that night I went in to see Brig. Calder. "How are things going Sir?"

"Splendid our whole party have gotten across without a casualty"

"The machine guns are ready sir, do you want them to cross now?"

"No, no, we will wait until daylight to tidy things up. When we see what the situation looks like, then we will cross." When daylight came a Tiger tank, in the security of the high dikes, did the tidying up. Everyone was lost. For the Brigade what was almost as damaging was that his Brigade Major had gone along with the patrol.

When we were in action, formal parades were impossible. So we made a point of having at least one spit and polish parade during each rest period. This particular time, the weather was disagreeable and cold. I came across one man, Joe, who did not have any underwear or socks. He said that he did not have any. I asked the CSM to check into it and report to me.

When questioned by the Quartermaster he

started to swear. Joe had just returned from leave and before going on leave the Quartermaster had given him a complete new outfit.

When confronted with this Joe explained. On this leave he had met a beautiful doll. His pay was soon spent on entertainment. On one of his last days on leave he communed with himself, "Joe you can't afford to wear sixteen dollar underwear."

Our Battalion went into a rest period at Riccione Our Company got there first, I met an Italian architect from whom I bought my camera. We got to know him quite well. For one week he came every evening to instruct us in the Italian language,

Chapter 42: The Savio River

Back in action again we resumed the old routine. Fighting was severe. After a couple of sessions our Company was told that we would have one week to rest. My jeep was in bad shape so Popp took it to the rear workshop for an overhaul. We got the dentist and he surveyed the Company and proceeded to fix teeth. My jeep was gone only a few hours when I got word that we had to go back into action. There was trouble at the Savio River and all of the machine guns were to be used. For a vehicle I ordered up a two wheel drive Bedford from the Quartermaster.

MacArthur was the driver. He had never been closer to the front than rear Company Headquarters. I reported at Brigade Headquarters where I was given the dope. Rupe Leblond had his company in near where I was to go and he described the road. The river ran diagonally across the main road. The side roads were parallel to the river. So the side road I was to turn down was at an acute angle to the main road. The trees were quite large and thick in this area. The ground was flat with many ditches for drainage. The main road ran to the river bank, then it followed a curve in the river for a quarter of a mile and then broke away parallel to the other side roads.

We drove along the main road alright. We came to a bit of a trail where our road should have been but not only was it a slightly used trail, but, also, right where it joined the main road, there was a huge shell crater in the centre of the trail. Rupe had said that the road was good. So we drove on. All at once the trees broke and there we were right on the river bank with Jerry on the other bank. MacArthur spoke. "Will I turn around, Sir?"

"No. For God's sake step on the gas." There were whole trees, with trunks seven and eight inches in diameter, lying across the road. The old Bedford never rode so smoothly or so swiftly before. We got halfway down the open stretch before the shells started to fall right in the centre of the road about twenty five yards behind us. I never said anything and MacArthur assumed that that was routine at the front. He was pleased when Popp returned.

The battle was very fierce. Smoky Smith earned his VC here. But we did not get across the river. Several attempts were made.

Jerry became quite aggressive. He shelled the whole area heavily and continuously. Another attack was laid on to cross at a different spot. I had to get new positions for the Company. This reconnaissance was going to be a hot one. It was quite likely that I would get hit. So I took Walt Hogg along. In case one failed to make the circuit the other could carry on.

We walked on foot. It was a case of running one hundred yards and then hiding in a drainage ditch. Our time was limited. We found suitable positions and marked each map. Then we went back to Company Headquarters where the other platoon commanders were to Rendezvous. We got to within one hundred and fifty yards of the cluster of buildings where Company Headquarters was. Jerry had the whole area blanketed with shellfire. We waited in the ditch. Time was running out. The more that I used the less the platoon commanders would have. We had to get there. There was a momentary lull. We ran and made it.

We reached Company Headquarters winded. Bursting through the door we were greeted by Embury: "Mitch, that Company of yours is on the bit. I gave the platoons their orders to move and they were all in position and firing within twenty minutes." He had picked up my orders at Brigade Headquarters, come on to my Company Headquarters, found the platoon commanders

there, and gave them their positions from the map. Gordon Young summed it up. “God! I bet you were mad.” We proved just how good the Company was by moving into the positions that I had selected in time to do our job.

Chapter 43: Riccione

We went into rest at Riccione again. Considerable training was done. Gen. Vokes, as Corps commander, visited us one day and announced rotational leave to Canada. That gave one a queer feeling. It was almost like getting a call to heaven. One was not quite sure to be glad or not. For it seemed certain that one could never re-enter this life again. That was when Vokes told us to make sure that the next generation included people like ourselves.

We had a good Officer's Mess in Riccione. We had a dance in the mess one night. For the occasion the mess secretary had contacted the Canadian Army hospitals in the area for volunteers from the nursing ranks. Then he posted on the bulletin board a list of the available nurses at each hospital and the officer who was to pick them up. I was to get a nurse from one location. She turned out to be a very pleasant Canadian girl of about thirty years. Entering the mess I got her a drink of the rum punch and introduced her around. After the punch I asked if there was any other drink that she preferred. "Yes, there is, Scotch is my drink. Please bring me a beer for a chaser." I got her a double scotch and a beer. Sandy Campbell, our paymaster, took me aside and asked, "Mitch, what do you say if I take your woman home?" "O.K. Sandy. Go right ahead."

The girl proved to be quite popular. She danced with many. From each officer she got a double scotch with a beer for a chaser. After an hour or so of this Sandy came back to me. "Mitch, for Christ's sake take that woman of your's home. No human can stand what she is drinking."

The party lasted another couple hours. My "woman" seemed unaffected by what she had drunk. The only difference, at the end, was that she was pals with everyone and did not hesitate to ask for a scotch with a beer for a chaser. I agreed with Sandy that no human could stand what she drank. But she did.

Five of us officers went on leave together in Rome. The Canadian Army had taken over a hotel there and dubbed it Chateau Laurier. It was a thrill to be in Rome. We were almost the complete tourist sight seers for one week. I had visualized the historic part of the city. After seeing Pompeii, I even had an idea what it looked like. I found the catacombs and underground passages intriguing. But I was not prepared for the ultra modernity of the modern part of Rome, nor for the magnificence and beauty of its' churches. The scale and perspective of St. Peter's is stupendous. To think that someone had that concept one thousand years ago, and dared to build it.

Ross and I spent one morning in an art dealers shop that was near our hotel. He was not busy and he got out hundreds of paintings to show us the various features of fine art. For our souvenir there was a painting of a lady getting out of her sedan chair that we both liked. We tossed to see who would buy it. I won.

That night in the Opera house I saw one of the finest things that I have seen created by man. In a sense it was a variety night at the Opera. This one offering was called, "Hymn to the Sun." While the orchestra played the music the appropriate scene was portrayed on the stage. It started off with a starlit night. All the night sounds. Then dawn gradually developed, the climax coming with the vaulting of the sun over the mountain top. It impressed me greatly.

One day I met up with an American officer He took me out to where the American officers leave centre was, They had taken over the dormitories that were on the sports grounds that Mussolini was building for the Olympic games when the war intervened. More modern buildings.

I think that I got a bottle of Whiskey for this officer. It was of little consequence on my part, but he felt under an obligation. Would I like to see Katherine Cornell and Brian Aherne in the "Barretts of Wimpole Street?" I certainly would. We went around to the American Red Cross office on the grounds. There I was introduced to a hostess. I was downright embarassed by the girl's manner. She was very good looking, tall handsome well fed and well scrubbed looking. I guess you might call her a personality kid. At any rate her enthusiastic eagerness to talk to me and her concern for my welfare seemed overdone. This girl gave me tickets to the play.

I don't recall the name of the theatre but it was the most modern I have ever been in. Of course the Players were superb. It was a splendid show.

We usually did our sight seeing in pairs, around midnight just before turning in, we always congregated in the lounge of the hotel, here, over a nightcap, we would exchange experiences. One night a sloppy looking old man, dressed in a battle dress without any insignia, came over and asked to join the group. We refused his proffered round of drinks and were very wary. He introduced himself as the representative of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada. He was in Italy to make preparations so that the soldiers could take part in the coming federal election. Had he been prepared to say no more everything would have been alright. Instead he immediately began to pour out a torrent of sympathy for us poor Canadians in the 8th Army. Canada sent equipment to the 8th Army. They gave that equipment to every nationality in their command. All up and down Italy he had met poor Canadian boys who were forced to drive English made trucks. He was certainly going to see that the right people heard about it. "Gee Whizz! I hope that they don't take away my Bedford trucks from me." It Was Rostand, I was furious to think of a fellow like that spreading such silly nonsense. Think of the unrest he could stir up. All those damned foreigners driving Canadian trucks and good Canadians doing without. I told him that if he didn't change his line I would call the provost. I don't think that he liked it.

We usually had our evening meal at a restaurant, at Villa Borghese. This night one man was missing. After waiting a bit we started our meal. Part way through there was a commotion at the door near the head waiter's station. The headwaiter was snapping his fingers. Three waiters came running to attend the approaching royalty. In came a lovely brunette dreamboat gilded in fur coat and all. In her wake followed our missing brother. We might as well have been back in Canada. Certainly, judging by his actions, we were not in the same room with him. He didn't see us. The regal party passed our table. Our brother warrior shielded his mouth with his hand and whispered, "fifty bucks." Had he written a book he could not have said more.

On Our Way to Rome we had been stopped at the Bailey bridge near Perugia to allow a Polish Army convoy to pass. There were several different Units. A week later, on our way back to Riccione we were held up at the same bridge by the same Polish Army units traveling the opposite direction. I walked forward to the bridge to watch them go by. There I met an English Lt. Col. wearing 8th Army staff insignia. I told him of the curious co-incidence. "Yes, I know." What had happened was that 8th Army alerted the Polish Corps telling them to be ready to move on a short notice. Without waiting for further orders they moved. Then 8th Army changed it's plans. The Poles were in the wrong place.

Chapter 44: We Get New Generals

When we went back into action times had changed. At a high level it had been decided to ration the supplies to our front in order that the operation in North West Europe might have the more. Our machine guns were limited to a monthly expenditure of 100,000 rounds of ammunition, We could easily fire off 9,000 rounds in one minute of normal action, That is our guns were limited to eleven minutes firing per month. Of course we carried our normal supply of ammunition. We went along for the ride so that if Jerry attacked we would be there.

The new Brigade Commander was Desmond Smith. He was a young permanent force officer. Because of his youth, I suppose, he built up a barrier between himself and the rest of us, the symbol was his corrugated iron privy which was toted around for his personal use. However, I came to have a great deal of respect for him. I admired his patience and firmness during one night attack when it was quite obvious that the battle weary infantry were not really trying.

We got a change of command at the top. Gen, Simmons and Gen, Vokes went to NW Europe and were replaced by Gen. Foulkes and Gen. Foster. They soon came to be known throughout the Corps as Albert and Leopold. They related every situation to what had been done on the Albert and Leopold Canals. Though I was in the Corps for three months I never did see Gen. Foulkes, Rupe and Les Clough were the only officers in our Battalion, besides the Commanding Officer who ever saw him. They saw Foulkes one afternoon in the Ravenna Officers Club Pre-viewing a floor show.

An action was laid on in which our brigade was to do a holding operation All supporting arms except machine guns and mortars were diverted for the main thrust. With a straight poker face, Brig. Smith asked me to lay on a fire plan for the machine guns. With great care I prepared an elaborate fire plan calling for the expenditure of 120,000 rounds over a period of ninety minutes. Smith looked it over, made a few suggestions and we pared it down to 100,000 rounds. Gen, Foster arrived at Brigade Headquarters. He looked over all the plans and said, "Fine, Fine. Everything is splendid." Smith never said anything. Everybody acted as though waiting for me to get going and doing. This game had gone too far. I was under the gun. I spoke. "Sir, there is only one thing wrong. I have no authority to fire that ammunition, our ammunition is rationed."

How impudent can a person be to a brand new general? Gen, Foster flushed but kept his temper, "There is no restriction on ammunition for offensive action." That was music to my ears, I did not argue with him. I went off and told my boys to fire their beloved Vickers.

Every morning at 0800 hours each company sent a sitrep into Battalion Headquarters giving expenditure of men and ammunition. The reports of the Battalion were on the Commanding Officer's desk for his information at 0900 hours. Next morning I made a point of being near my telephone at 0900 hours, at 0905 it rang. "Mitchell have you seen your sitrep?"
"Yes Sir."
"What the hell do you think you are doing?"
"General's orders Sir."
"Did you get those orders in writing?"
"No Sir."

For one month from that date our machine guns never fired a round. My boys were happy but in the rest of the Battalion my name stank. We had to follow the brigade around the battlefield but we could not fire.

That episode further hardened my contempt for the Permanent Force Army. The order rationing

our ammunition came from 8th Army and implemented a decision made on the level of Churchill and Roosevelt. Everyone at Corps Headquarters everyone at Division Headquarters, and everyone at Brigade Headquarters knew about it. But the end of the war was beginning to come into sight. Post war army politics were uppermost in the minds of the Permanent Force. No one at Corps, Division or Brigade wanted to be the one to suggest to these newly arrived generals that there might be some limits to their authority.

The PLDG's had taken over the infantry positions on one sector. To give one of their Squadrons Christmas out of the line the SLI was to put in a machine gun company. Embury turned to me first. That was one time that I talked myself out of a job. I had no desire whatever to attempt a job like that. I argued against it. Embury gave the job to Clough. Poor Les. I saw him when he came out. I don't think that he slept during those three days in the infantry positions.

We were in position doing our normal role over Christmas. We were out of the line, in scattered houses around Russi for the New Year 1945. Company Headquarters was in a railway station. Len Bastedo, my new Second in command, and I lived over the rotunda of the station, we had to climb about forty steps to get to it.

For this festive season all our Company had collected like connoisseurs. Wine of all kinds, cognac, whiskeys, beer, all drinks and many foods. It was going to be an occasion, the afternoon of New Year's Eve all seemed to be in readiness Early in the afternoon we decided to visit Battalion Headquarters. From there we would go to the mortars. During the evening we would visit each of our platoons and Company Headquarters. Then at midnight we would go back to Battalion Headquarters.

When we arrived at Battalion Headquarters we announced that the "fighting troops" had arrived. Everyone gave us a drink. The evening meal we had with Tommy de Faye at Mortars. Then we set out for our platoons. By this time we were in good humour and drank everything that was offered. The platoons had everything that there was. I do not remember the third platoon, By the time we got to Company Headquarters I wanted to sleep. Poor Len had to play a game of one, two, three up on each of the forty steps to get me to my bed. Luckily the Orders Group called at Brigade Headquarters next day was cancelled. I was a casualty.

Early in January 1945, Embury left to take his place in the Legislature. Drayton Walker became Commanding Officer. Always eager to solve any problem, Drayton solved our ammunition problem by getting bandolier Mk VII which we loaded into our belts by hand. Gun barrels were a problem too. We had one through which we had fired Mk VIII and a new one. Drayton ordered that we were to keep the new one for Mk VIII, should an emergency allow us to shoot Mk VIII, and that we fire Mk VII through our used Mk VIII barrels. I protested, This was contrary to explicit instructions that we had received from the Small Arms School at Netheravon. The Mk VIII ball is shaped differently and the Mk VIII charge is stronger. Mk VIII wears the barrel differently and at different places to the Mk VII. To miss the target was serious enough. But we fired over our own troops. To spray them with our ammunition would be unforgivable. The Commanding Officer persisted

I went back to A Company in distress. I called those Non Commissioned Officers in the Company who had been at Netheravon. They agreed with me. Then I called in my officers. I explained the Commanding Officer's orders and what I had learned at Netheravon. Then I told them to continue to keep their Mk VIII barrel for Mk VIII ammunition and to use the new barrel for Mk VII.

Within a week my contention was vindicated, every time the other two Companies opened fire their infantry immediately called to them to stop. Our boys fired over our troops many times. We did not have stray bullets.

A couple weeks after Walker became Commanding Officer I was transferred to command the Mortars. We were taking up static positions for the winter in front of Bagnacavallo. To ensure easier communications we buried our telephone cable. The ground was frozen just a bit. The way the boys solved that problem was to get four farmers each to put his yoke of oxen on one walking plough. A few packages of cigarettes and the line was buried. Rupe was my Second-in-Command. We had our Headquarters in Russi. We were quite comfortable. We had collection of pin up girls with which we decorated our mess. The centre of attraction and our idol was a sun drenched wench whom we called Rita.

At that time a new technique was being developed. AA searchlights were being used to assist the infantry at night. A beam shining overhead towards the enemy helped to keep direction, it made it easier for our boys to see and it was more difficult for Jerry to see when looking into the light. On a foggy night the effects were spectacular. The searchlight shone into the sky at about forty degrees angle. From its beam refracted rays, all colours of the rainbow, would drop down, like icicles hanging from an eave. It was beautiful. I took several pictures of it but on black and white film I lost the beauty.

Various techniques were being developed. One day I was checking registered targets with one of my platoon commanders. Three of his targets were exactly on the spot of the forward platoons of the R22R. The platoon commander was sure that they were the exact targets that had been given him at the R22R Battalion Headquarters. I went to see the Commanding Officer of the R22R, Lt. Col. Allard, "Sir, do you know that three targets that your people gave us are your own positions?" "Sure, we tell them to keep their heads down."

When a Jerry patrol visited these outposts, the infantry would call up mortars and machine guns for a few rounds. Then after we had dealt with them our infantry would go out and receive their visitors.

From Russi, Wes and I went on leave to Florence, Popp drove us. The Canadian leave hotel was called Hotel MacDonald. The hotel was good. We had a good leave in Florence but, of course, we did not find the variety of attractions that there were in Rome.

We visited the shops on the old Ponte Vecchio. That old relic had been spared destruction by mutual agreement of both sides. Florence is supposed to have long been the home of artisans of pierced silver jewelry. We bought some in a shop on the Ponte Vecchio. In Florence there is a "grass market" that has been in operation for a thousand years. There, all sorts of articles made from grass, are sold. We went all through that. I wanted a pair of bedroom slippers. We stopped at a stall run by an old woman who really was a saleswoman. She had some slippers. The soles were of woven grass. The uppers were of some cheap cloth. Somehow she tied the slippers in with a close weave crocheted hair net and sort of over blouse net sweater. There might have been two ounces of rayon yarn in the crocheted articles. The whole "package deal" was priced at thirteen dollars. I said that that was ridiculous. I would give her nine dollars. The poor woman. She wailed; she shed tears; she told me about her poor bambini. They were going to starve because I was so mean. Wes got into the scene: "Mitchell, you tight wad. Don't be so damn chippy. Give the poor woman what she wants. Think of her bambini. Come on be a man and pay."

I refused to pay and walked away. The woman capitulated. Because I was such a nice, kind, man she would sell me the package deal for nine dollars. I bought them, Wes decided that that was a good bargain so he bought a package deal also.

In Florence we always walked, Popp would report to us each morning. When all was well he would go on his way. The next morning, after we had been in the grass market, he arrived in a very good mood. "Sir, I sure made a good buy yesterday. I have all my gifts bought now." Just as soon as he spoke I had a premonition of what he was going to say. He had bought the same "package deal" that we had bought. Popp had paid five dollars for it.

Each evening, before going to bed, we gathered in the lounge to talk. One evening I was talking to an Army Service Corps officer from Division Headquarters. We were near the main traffic way in the lounge. A little West Nova Scotia Captain and two lieutenants came into the lounge. They were quite tight. As they walked by, one of the lieutenants struck the seated CRASC officer in the jaw. I jumped up. A leave hotel was the last place for a fight.

I went over to the little Captain and told him to get his fellows out of there. He was ready for anything. Putting his chin up against my chest: "Look Bud, you can't throw that crown around here." The lounge was full of officers, everybody roared. The drunks were literally laughed out of the place.

Back at Mortars we developed a daily routine in our static positions. Jerry did a lot of shelling. He had a variety of guns and reached far back. However, we had our daily inspections, weekly awards for the best mortar crew. We published a little news sheet. Rupe and I communed daily with Rita. We made a happy life out of warfare.

Chapter 45: Rotational Leave

Towards the end of February the Canadians started on the trek to NW Europe. Just before, I left for Canada on rotational leave. Two hundred and fifty of us from 1st Canadian Division gathered at Avellino to await shipping to Canada. We officers spent that time, which was about one week, in a little hill village near by.

There was very little for us to do. We went for long walks during the day. Once we visited a little mill where the Italians were shelling and bagging hazelnuts. I have never seen so many nuts at once. At night we usually hung around the bar. Darts, ping pong, crap, and drinking. Every night Hugh Hopper of our Battalion, would drink one too many and refuse to stop singing Operatic Arias. Every night Harper Prouse, of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment would drink one too many. He would take off his clothes, carefully pile them, and then announce to all the world that the Loyal Edmonton Regiment was the best fighting battalion in the world and that he was ready to prove it. Every night the officer in charge of the place would get Ted Day, of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, and myself to restore peace and quiet in the mess.

Our mess, in this little village, was on the second storey with a balcony overlooking the main square. Sunday, about 1200 hours, a brass band of about thirty instruments assembled below our balcony and started playing. They were still playing at midnight. Throughout that interval, bandsmen would break off and go home, newcomers would join the band. No one in particular appeared to be the leader. It seemed to be a spontaneous effort. They would play a selection. Then we would throw them a package of cigarettes. They would play another, more cigarettes.

This musical talent of the Italians was one thing that I admired and envied. It seemed that many had very little formal education. It also seemed that most Italians were trained or gifted musically. Nearby every household had a musical instrument. In every household one would hear operatic arias beautifully sung. I heard singing, in a humble house in Sicily, that I appreciated more than that which I heard in the opera houses in Naples and Florence,

The following was written by Sgt. McKay, one of our boys. It expressed my thoughts.

The Panorama of Italy.

If I were an artist with nothing to do,
I'd paint a picture, a composite view,
Of Historic Italy in which I'd show
Visions of contrast, the high and the low.

There'd be towering mountains, a deep blue sea,
Filthy brats yelling carmella at me,
High plumed horses and colorful carts,
Two toned tresses on hustling tarts,

I'd show Napoleonic Caps "The Carabinerie",
Disgusted old women with too much to carry,
A dignified old gentleman with a balboa beard,
Bare bottomed bambinis with both ends smeared,

Castles and palaces and opera house too
Hotel on a mountain, a marvelous view,
Homes made of weeds, brick and mud
People covered with sores, scurvy and scud.

Chapels and churches, great to behold,
Each a king's ransom in glittering gold,
Poverty and want, men craving for food,
Picking through garbage, practically nude.

Stately cathedrals, with high toned bells,
Recovers shelters with horrible smells,
Moulding catacombs, a plea for the dead,
Noisy civilians, clambering for bread.

Palatial villas, with palm trees tall,
An odorous hovel, a hole in the wall,
Free fringed lawns, swept by the breeze,
Kids wading in filth up to their knees.

Revealing statues, all details complete,
A sensual lass, with sores on her feet,
Big breasted damsels, wearing never a bra
Bumping against you, there should be a law.

Creeping boulevards, a spangled stream,
Alleys that wind like a dope fiend's dream,
Flowers that bloom on the side of a hill,
Sidewalk latrines, with privacy - NIL.

Two-by-four shops, with all stalls bare,
Gesturing merchants, arms flailing the air,
Narrow gauge sidewalks, more like a shelf,
Butt puffing youngsters, scratching themselves.

Lumbering carts hugging the road,
Nondescript trucks, frequently towed,
Diminutive donkeys, loaded for bear,
Horse drawn taxis, searching for fare.

Determined pedestrians, courting disaster,
Walking in gutters, where movement is faster,
Italian drivers, accident bound,
Weaving and twisting to cover the ground.

Home made brooms, weeds tied to a stick,
Used on the street to clear the slick,
Bicycles and push-carts blocking your path,
Street corner politicians, needing a bath.

Barbers galore, with manners quite mild,
Prolific women, heavy with child,
Ii Duce's secret weapon, kids by the score,
Caused by his bonus, which is no more.

Arrogant wretches, picking up snipes,
Miniature fists, various types,
Young street singers, hand-organ tunes,
Shoe-shine boys, a sidewalk saloon.

A beauteous maiden, a smile on her face,
With a breath of garlic fouling the place,
A listless housewife, no shoes on her feet,
Washing and cooking out on the street.

The night washing, a tattle-tale grey,
Hangs from the balcony, blocking the way,
Native coffee, Oh! what a mixture,
Tiled bathrooms, with one extra fixture,

Families dining from one common bowl,
Next to the fish store, a terrible hole,
Italian Zoot-Suiters flashily dressed,
Bare-footed beggars, looking depressed.

Mud-smeared children, clustering about,
Filling their jugs from one common spout,
A dutiful mother, with a look of despair,
Picking lice from her young daughter's hair.

Capable craftsmen, skilled in their art,
Decrepit old shack, falling apart,
Intricate needle work out on display,
Surrounded by filth, rot and decay.

Elegant caskets, carved out by hand,
Odorous factories, where leather is tanned,
A hosemaker's shop, a black market store,
Crawling with vermin, no screen on the door.

I've tried to describe all that I've seen,
Panorama of Italy, the brown and the green,
I've neglected the war score, visible yet,
But those are things, we all want to forget.

I'm glad that I came, but damned anxious to go,
GIVE IT BACK TO THE NATIVES, I'M READY TO BLOW!

We boarded two empty American Liberty ships at Naples, half on each. They were returning to New York, Our skipper was a miserable wretch who had been a deck hand before the war. He laid on stupid orders regarding black out, venti-

lation, and meal arrangements. We could only do as he bid. Lt. Col. Bell, of the RCAMC, was the senior in our party. I did not envy the role that he had to play in dealing with the skipper. The ship's crew hated the skipper even worse than we did. We stopped at Algiers for something. The skipper went ashore in a launch. As he was climbing down the rope ladder, in all his finery, the crew "accidentally" dumped a can of garbage on to him. A minor eruption followed.

We were twenty one days making the journey to New York. We traveled a southern route. We had beautiful sunshine and calm seas all the way. It was a grand trip. We had American army rations. There was lots to eat. And we liked it at first. But after a few days we tired of the seasoning and flavouring. Being an American ship there was no liquor aboard save what we carried. That soon ran out. After living with liquor, of all kinds, for so long, that seemed a real hardship.

As soon as we pulled away from the dock in Naples the deck hands set about cleaning up the ship. From the unloading operations there had been left, lying about the deck, several heavy rope cargo sling nets, many iron turnbuckles about an inch or so in diameter and various other odds and ends. Everything looked brand new to me. It likely was, as this was a new ship. The deck hands threw them all over board. We were shocked, such a callous disregard for the effort and dangers that people had endured to get such material into this area.

The sailor who cleared the deck by throwing everything overboard was a cornfed husky from the hills of Kentucky. One day I had tired of reading and I was lying in the sun on the deck with my book by my side. Cornfed Kentucky came by: "Why aren't you reading your book?" "Oh my eyes got tired so I thought that I would rest them a while." "That is just what I thought. I never could see much good in being able to read."

We docked in New York just before dusk. We saw the famous skyline. At midnight we were taken across the harbour in a ferry. There was a very thick fog in the harbour and that ferry travelled at a furious speed. I kept thinking what irony to survive, years of warfare just to drown in New York harbour.

But we did not. We boarded trains for Montreal. On the train we were divided into parties for the various parts of Canada. I was in charge of the group going to Winnipeg. We were to travel on the Transcontinental. We had an hour and a half to wait in Montreal.

As soon as I got off I telephoned Rostand's mother and fiancée and arranged to meet them. The rest of the boys set out to "see the joint". Fifteen minutes before our train was due to leave I walked into the Union Station. From the din in there one would have expected to see at least one thousand soldiers. We were only sixty-five. After three weeks on a dry Liberty ship they had soaked up a lot of liquor during the one hour in Montreal. They were singing. They were playing leap frog. They were horsing around. There were Army transit people, army provost and railway officials all trying to persuade these fellows to get on to the train. They were not having anything to do with zombies. Certainly they were not taking orders from them.

As soon as I appeared on the scene the boys gave forth with a cheer. I walked through the station and onto the train. Like a bunch of sheep they followed without question or without an order being given, after the train pulled out we counted noses. Two were missing. I informed the Transit people by wire. Next morning we found the missing pair asleep in the baggage car.

In Winnipeg very elaborate arrangements had been made to receive us. Offices had been set up in the station for documentation. What did I want

to do after my months leave, go back overseas or do home duty? I could not imagine serving in the Army in Canada, I wanted to go overseas again.

As we finished documentation we walked through a raised open doorway overlooking the main foyer of the station. It was like going on stage. A band was playing, the foyer was full of people waiting to greet their loved ones. It was March 22nd, 1945.

Chapter 46: Overseas Again

When I returned from leave the war in Europe was about finished. A force was being organized for the Pacific theatre. But there was to be an occupational force in Europe. I feared grave economic disturbances in the post war period. I wanted to weather them in the occupational force. The military authorities had no precedents to follow. My documents said that I was to go overseas. I wanted to go overseas. So I was sent overseas.

While awaiting movement orders, in Winnipeg, I was sent out to Camp Shilo to conduct an inquiry into the loss of a couple of hand grenades. That convinced me that I didn't want service in Canada. At noon, while eating in the mess at Shilo, I sat at the table with a couple of CWAC's. They were having a normal East West verbal duel. Finally the Eastern girl said: "Now let us be reasonable. Just take the district surrounding this camp site. Can you imagine anyone being satisfied to live around here?"

I spoke up: "My grandfather homesteaded at Douglas." That was just a few miles away.
Our shipload assembled at Debert, N.S. The camp commandment, at Debert, was a Lt. Col. Mitchell, who, in civilian life, was a Halifax business man. He was a connoisseur of lobsters. The highlight of our stay at Debert was the lobster dinner that was served in the mess there.

In the party that assembled were Major Harry Price, longtime 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade paymaster and Maj. J.D. MacKintosh. Of course we immediately formed a triumvirate for the journey. At each step along the way Price would look after the pay wrinkles, J.D. the medicals and I the ordinary disposition. We could usually go through any depot with a minimum of red tape.

One day we were sightseeing in Halifax. After an hour or so we decided that we needed a beer. There was only one way. We bought a case of beer and engaged a hotel room in which to drink it. That ended our sightseeing. All those restrictions were enacted in the interests of sobriety.

We boarded the Aquitania. All three of us kept our fingers crossed. Was this crazy thing of us going overseas actually going to happen? On the ships PA system came a call for Major Mitchell to report to the ship's orderly room. That was it. Our spirits sank. In the orderly room I was put in charge of all the lifeboat stations on the port side of the ship. When I reported this to Price and JD they were jubilant.

Lifeboat drill on that ship was difficult. The war was over. But the skipper insisted that there was danger from mines and from lunatic submarines as well as the ordinary shipping danger. Lifeboat drill and black out had to be strictly observed. He was right. But not many agreed with him.

Among the ship load were a group of RAF personnel returning from training duty at Canadian Air training schools. JD had command of one lifeboat load of these RAF people. JD insisted on a bit of discipline during roll call. They weren't having any part of this army business. I had to interfere to put them in their place. An onlooker to this episode was Dr. Coleman the Under Secretary of State from the Canadian External Affairs Dept. He was extremely worried lest this should develop into a clash of nationalities. But it did not. He was uncle of the Loyal Edmonton Regiment's Coleman.

Also on board were a contingent from National Headquaters in Ottawa going on a Cook's tour. Their missions were legitimate enough but they had been chosen, each. for his particular mission, as a reward for service in the hectic warfare in Ottawa. They thought that they knew the ropes well enough to get through the various depots. I

suspected JD of having some part in what happened. Maybe he didn't. At any rate the embarkation people were not satisfied and they all had to have their preventative shots again. Many were quite sick.

The SLI were at de Bilt which is near Utrecht in Holland. My journey there was quite direct. I crossed the Channel in an LST landing at Ostend. I got a train to Ghent and by various routes arrived at de Bilt. Going through Belgium I was fascinated by the beautiful big horses. I was also intrigued by the sight of a single horse pulling two wagon loads of hay, neither of them with a "shaft" or "tongue" to enable the horse to keep the load from running into him. It was a flat country and they were not needed.

The train that carried me to Ghent did not have a latrine on it. My Italian "funny tummy" had returned. I had diahorrea. I was in a bad condition when I got off the train. A provost directed me to the latrine. When I got there I found that the men's section was filled. I was desperate. The woman attendant noticed my agony. She beckoned to me, lead me into the women's section, wiped off the seat of the toilet, handed me some paper and closed the door. That was sympathy and service as well.

Chapter 47: de But

The night before I arrived at de But the Battalion officers had held a mess dinner. I just missed it. But Tommy de Faye, who was with the Occupational Force in Germany, was still around. I talked with him. There were definite rumours that the Occupational Force would soon be disbanded and returned to Canada. That upset my plans. If I was not going to miss the period of economic disturbance in Canada then my best plan seemed to be to get out of the Army as quickly as I could. I must return with the Battalion.

Drayton Walker had been appointed sports officer for the Division. His job was to create sports activity during the period that the Division was. awaiting shipping to return. He laid on that he would inspect our Battalion each Saturday morning. The rest of the time I was in command.

There was a multitude of most unmilitary activities afoot. The Battalion's entire equipment was being reconditioned and turned in. I understood that much of it went to our Allies, the Russians for use against the Japanese. Once that job was finished, then the situation did become unreal. It was hard to soldier without any equipment.

The most urgent matter was to keep up morale and to retain control. A great many "Zombies" with "box car numbers" had joined the battalion. These people had usually soldiered for sometime in Canada and had gotten accustomed to discipline as followed there. Few had seen any action. On the punishment side I had a rule of thumb. One day detention for each hour AWL. It seemed to work, especially with our older hands, the most impressive aspect of detention was having their hair shaved off. That was the supreme humiliation which they avoided at all costs. A lot of the Zombies found European liquor outlets too easy for them. Many were apprehended for misbehavior while drunk. Evidently in Canada to plead drunkenness had been a mitigating influence in army justice. I remember my first trial of a Zombie: "What is the idea of getting into trouble like this?" "I was drunk, Sir." "I was drunk last night, too, I didn't get into trouble. Why did you?" I thought the poor fellow's jaw would drop off.

But we did not have much trouble. We had two three ton trucks which we kept on the road touring the country. Tours were taken in turn the same as leave, There was generous leave to Paris, Amsterdam, Antwerp, etc. The Auxiliary services education officer laid on educational program for those who wished it. There were classes explaining the Canadian rehabilitation program. There were always billets to be cleaned. The Auxiliary service officer took over the local theatre, where he had movies every evening.

Before the theatre was available, the Auxiliary Service officer had set up in a tent. The first day that he was in the area he had gotten a new lot of records. He was trying them out on his record player. He had put on a stack of records and was carrying on with his work, He noticed a farmer standing listening to the music. He stood bare headed and tears were streaming down his face. The music was the Dutch National Anthem. After the years of the privations and indignities of Occupation, the old man was overjoyed to hear his National Anthem being played by a Canadian.

The Dutch Queen's home was just five miles away. Utrecht was close at hand. Amsterdam and Rotterdam were relatively close. It was a good location and neighborhood; we met many fine people and made many friends.

The Burgomaster of Amsterdam gave a reception honouring the liberation of Holland, It was a formal affair held in the evening. The women made a striking and beautiful picture in their pre war

finery. War time rations, I was told, had caused adult Dutch women to lose an average of three pounds in weight. But the men were laughable, I guess that this was the first time since the Occupation that they had put on their formal clothes. Almost every suit literally flapped, some were ridiculous. The great paunches that they had been designed to cover, had disappeared.

Food in the period of Occupations had become a serious matter. In many cases the people were reduced to eating the bulbs of their famous flowers. One lady assured me that the rare varieties did not taste any better than the ordinary. The adults had made a conscious effort to give their children the best diet possible. But that had not really been adequate. However at the first opportunity, after the end of the Occupation, the Dutch had set up an elaborate distribution system to give every child the foods and vitamins most urgently needed. It seemed that there was a child clinic at every street corner, that was in sharp contrast to what I had seen in Italy.

Incidentally it is my opinion that the emaciated condition of the Dutch male left the Dutch women sexually starved. As a result, I believe that there was a lowering of standards of conduct.

At this reception, in Amsterdam, I made the acquaintance of a family in Amsterdam which I adopted for my stay in Holland. Their daughter guided my sightseeing and was my partner at most of the mixed functions that I attended.

I could understand the importance of food. I am sure that I did not fully comprehend the love of the Dutch for art. All of the important pictures and works of art had been hidden in storage throughout the war. While we were there they were brought out and put on display. We attended many exhibitions and the galleries were always crowded.

There was a holiday declared to celebrate the Liberation. We went into Amsterdam to watch the parade of floats. It was the biggest of its kind that I had ever seen.

The Canadian Army held a sports day in the race track at Hilversum. It was a good set-up with a dirt track and grandstands. In a central box, in the stand, was a large gathering of notables of the army. Prince Bernhardt was there, General Crerar, General Dempsey and a third general commanding an army whose name I cannot recall, as well as lesser fry. Most of us had cameras but hesitated to disturb such notables. Brig. Wilkins came over to our group and pointed out the rare opportunity that was presented. Not often one got three Army commanders together with Prince Bernhardt. I took the hint and went out in front of the royal box with my camera just like, I thought a brazen newsman would do. General Crerar was properly oblivious. But General Dempsey was very disturbed. I caught his eye. It said, "For God's sake don't be so childish. Remember that we are all in uniform." I agreed with him completely.

We had a dance for the Battalion in the Zoological Gardens in Rotterdam. There they had a Quonset type building that was made of steel framework covered with glass. It was a huge building and at that time had very little in it. About one third way down the length of the building was a stage large enough for a normal dance floor. For our dance they set up another circular floor in the main body of the building. This was surrounded with tables and chairs, potted palms, etc. They had kitchens and distribution facilities in the building to handle huge crowds. We gave them canned milk and they made ice cream for everybody at the dance. The dance was a tremendous success.

The officer's mess was in a small roadside inn. Sleeping quarters were in nearby houses. This

inn had one billiard table and a bar. And there was a very nice dining room and kitchen. The owner had a large family and was in a bad way for food. In his china cabinet he had a complete set of crystal tableware for twelve which he said was two hundred years old. There were all sorts of glasses, side plates, finger bowls, etc. One day, in all seriousness, he made me a proposition. For so much food I could have the complete set. I did my best but I could not persuade him that it was impossible for me to give orders to the RQM to hand over food to a Dutchman and especially so on a deal like that. Later P.J. Kaag gave me a set for six. Gordon Young bought a set for twelve for me in Belgium.

Across the road were two larger inns. One we took over and fixed up as a canteen for the men. In the other we held officers mess dances every two weeks. One such dance was especially elaborate. We entertained all the local big wigs. We went to great pains to provide good food and drink. Good music was relatively easy to arrange. It turned out that that dance was on the night of VJ day. It was a great success. Mountains of food disappeared. The Dutch guests literally gasped at their first look at our supper table.

One amusing incident that night. I made it my job to see that all of our guests were being looked after. One healthy, well fed looking Dutchman, of about twenty-five years of age, continued to sit at a table all by himself, almost oblivious of the world. He was Baron somebody. I did my best to get him interested in something or somebody but everybody and everything seemed to be too inconsequential for him. I was dancing with a Dutch girl and I made a remark that I thought that "dopey was a bit conceited," Quickly she spoke up: "Yes I know that he is. He is my cousin."

My Amsterdam girl friend explained to me that class consciousness was a very real characteristic of the Dutch, She told a story that when a women walks down the street a Canadian whistles (this was a new part of the story); an Englishman wants to know who she married; an American wants to know how much money her husband has; and a Dutchman wants to know who she was before she married.

Whenever we were in need of extra rum we turned to the R22R. It seems that during the "Ardennes push" the German Army captured a British Army dump of SRD rum. The Germans didn't like rum. However, with true Teutonic efficiency, they kept every bottle properly accounted for. The "dump" was liberated by the R22R. The R22R quite correctly turned the clump of rum back to the British Army. However they always had a bit to spare.

One Saturday evening the 2 Canadian Infantry Brigade officers mess held a party which I attended. They had rum punch on the sideboard. I should have known better but once again I marveled at how little effect the rum had on me. After an evening of dancing they served supper. Champagne was the drink with supper. Again no effect. When we left the party we had had a wonderful evening but I was very sober. I almost felt virtuous.

The next morning, at 0900 hours, we had a big Battalion church parade. I got out of bed just in time to have a cup of coffee in the mess and then go on parade. The parade went off well. We were in the church singing a hymn. We were in the front pew under the baleful eye of the local Dutch minister. I stood between Drayton and Stu MacDonald, All at once the world started to heave. I whispered to Stu: "Get me out of here." Stu lead me forward around the pulpit into the minister's robing room. I passed out completely. The minister was not very happy. Neither was I.

One day I went to the old burgomaster and of-

fered the services of our boys to the farmers to harvest their crops. It was a bit early and actually we moved before the harvest began. However the burgomaster expressed the gratitude of his countrymen for our offer. "You know our own boys would not do that."

I think that that was one of the most tragic consequences of the Occupation. As soon as a boy was fourteen the Germans drafted him into labour squads. So the resisting Dutch hid their boys before they came of age. All sorts of ruses were adopted. In an apartment block in Amsterdam I was shown a couple of floor boards that had been carefully and cleverly cut so that they were not noticeable. When the Gestapo came around the boy was hidden between the floor joists. All of the rest of the time he had to live furtively. This went on all over Holland, in both rural and urban districts. For nearly five years that age group of boys grew with very little schooling, no recreation, no job to attend, in fact no disciplines whatever. The vitamins could be supplied to erase much of the effects of malnutrition. It will be very difficult to erase the mental effects of such an unnatural life.

We arranged a holiday for the neighborhood school children on August 1. Our original thoughts were in terms of Western Canadian Schools. We thought that we would entertain all of the public schools children that were close to us. We thought that we could handle five hundred. I went to see the Burgomaster to get a preliminary survey the situation. I explained our proposal. The Burgomaster spoke up: "This is a very kind gesture on your part but I am afraid that you underestimate our accomplishments." Restricting the invitation to the children of the eight, nine and ten year old age groups of the four schools in whose area our Battalion was billeted, the total came to six hundred and fifty.

The auxiliary service officer got children's cartoon films to show in our theatre. We set up a marquee and got a local circus to perform. We arranged some races. We got food, drink and candy for six hundred and fifty kids.

We asked Baroness Van Boetzelaer, Baroness Van de Borch, Mrs. Doude Van Troostwyk, Mrs. Hooft Graafland and Mrs. Steengrocht Van Oostcapelle to be patronesses. The day before we showed them around and explained what we proposed. Then we served them and the principals of the schools, tea.

Our boys picked up the children at their schools with three ton trucks. That was an adventure for both. First the circus performed. Then we had races. The outstanding event was an officers obstacle race. On the return trip each officer had to carry a Dutch child. Stu McDonald won, with Drayton second.

Because our theatre would only hold 350, the children were divided. One half to the show, one-half to the eats. Then the alternate. Everyone was trucked back to school. Everyone was happy - our boys more than anyone.

To repay some of our social occasions Drayton and I were invited to several private dinner parties. In almost every case it was the first formal entertaining that the hostess had done since the war. Their pre war formal gowns were beautiful. A butler and maid served. China, silverware and crystal had all been dug out of their wartime hiding places. Valiant efforts were made to procure food, sometimes two women would pool their food. It was delectably prepared. They were memorable evenings for everyone.

Everett Bates and I shared a room. He had been slated to go home on rotational leave. For some reason he did not go. So now he had to wait to go home with the Battalion. I think that he was the most homesick person that I have ever seen.

One afternoon I visited a farm where the good wife showed me how they made cheese. The water pump was in the centre of the courtyard and about one hundred feet from her dairy. The curds were washed many times and every bit of the water had to be carried from the pump. That was the way that it had always been done. The farmer showed me his new horse. The Germans had taken all of their horses. A lot of horses had been brought back from Germany the previous week and he had gotten one out of them. They were supposed to get as many horses of the same age as those that had been taken away. He wanted me to tell him how old this horse was. I didn't attempt it though I did look into its' mouth.

One Sunday we visited the island of Markham. The locals were dressed in their traditional garb. I got talking to one old lady. Her dialect was a mixture of German and English so that with some sign language I could converse with her. She had long full skirts. It was a very hot day. She showed me that underneath her dress she wore a petticoat made of thick blanket cloth. She explained to me "Goot rheumatics," Doctors have told me little that was better advice.

The situation regarding money was most peculiar. When I had arrived in de Bilt, as per instructions, I did not carry any money. I got Sandy Campbell to cash a five pound cheque for me. It seemed that I just turned around and it was gone. I got a second five pounds. As I was cashing my third pound cheque, I said: "Sandy I don't understand how our boys can carry on in this country. I can't afford to spend money like this."

"Only Zombies cash cheques." That was it. The money that everyone was spending so freely came from cigarettes. Each man overseas was entitled to buy from the Canadian tobacco companies, seven hundred and fifty cigarettes per month at a cheap rate. In addition many of our boys had friends back home who sent them cigarettes. Right after the Liberation cigarettes sold, on the black market, at fantastic prices, By the time that I arrived the price had settled to a steady one guilder per cigarette. At the pegged rate of exchange that was forty cents for one cigarette, Nault became my paymaster.

This craving for cigarettes was something that just couldn't be understood. People had gone without good tobacco for a long time. They were willing to give anything for a smoke. In any of our dealings with the civilians, regardless of the profession or vocation of the person, they did not want their own money. They wanted cigarettes. Cigarettes were a medium of exchange that was accepted everywhere. Their own money was not, This created great hardship. Our landlady had a little factory on her estate that made all sorts of wood screws. She paid her men who ran the factory three guilder per day. After the Liberation that meant nothing. That was a most impressive lesson in the evils of inflation, it is difficult to imagine the chaos that a lack of confidence in currency can cause.

Chapter 48: Leave

Drayton and I drove down the Rhine to Mainz and over to Frankfurt, Such a story book country. The Rhine was beautiful with its gingerbread castles. The bomb damage was the most extensive that I had seen. Cassino was worse but it was not very large. In Germany huge cities were devastated. Most everywhere we met sullen glances. We spent one night in the billets of a French Army outpost. I never did understand the setup as we never saw any officers, There were about forty men living there together, What amused me was when they bade each other good night. There were formal handshakes all around as though they did not expect to meet again for some time. As we said good night we asked what time was breakfast. My high school French has the word for breakfast as "café." They gave us an hour and one private said "cafe" at the same time made a circle with thumb and finger and made a clucking noise with his lips. I went to bed expecting a breakfast that was really something. Next morning we had only black coffee, There was a box of American Army biscuits on the table. I was the only one to eat any.

One weekend I drove up to Oldenburg to see my brother with the Occupational Force. We drove on to the naval base at Wilhelmshaven. There we were given a Royal Navy launch in which to tour the harbour. We flew the Union Jack. The duty officer on every one of those German ships in the harbour saluted as we sailed by. There were tremendous naval installations there.

I had reached Oldenburg just after sunset the sun set in that clear sky we had a glorious sunset such as we normally get back in Western Canada. I was homesick.

Our stay in Holland had been definitely limited. According to the way the leave roster was working Rostand, Lahaie and I would not get to see Paris. We took the initiative. We got permission to be away from the Battalion for three days. Without a leave pass, with no authority to convert currency, with no permission to take space or food in the leave hotels, Ross and I set out for Paris. We drove as quickly as we could and did very little sightseeing on the way. We got into Paris at about 1700 hours.

The Knights of Columbus had an office in Paris where one could arrange to get guides and information. Rostand's greatest worry was lest we should see Paris in the company of an ugly woman. We had no money, no food or lodging or permission to be in Paris. First things come first. We drove straight to the K. of C. office. There was a middle aged Frenchwoman on duty there. Rostand explained our need of a guide, not just any guide, she must be a beautiful guide. With a straight face and much sympathy the Frenchwoman assured us that we would be well cared for. She gave us an address where we would find two girls next morning at 1000 hours.

Our next thoughts were of food. The British Army had an officers restaurant in Paris. We ate there. While we were eating a War correspondent from Montreal, Dupuis, whom Rostand had known before the war, came in. He told us where we could get some French money. After that we were away. The British Army leave hotel gave us a room. We drove up to a British Army petrol dump and without question our jeep was filled.

While at this petrol dump a Russian jeep drove up. The Russian officer went into the office. The driver stood guard over his vehicle with his sub machine gun at the alert. It was different to any weapon that I had seen. I walked over and tried to talk with him. He couldn't understand. Then by sign language I tried to convey that I wanted to examine his gun. I reached for it. He pointed the gun at me with his finger on the trigger. My interest suddenly waned.

Our guides were beautiful. They were modest, well informed and sensible Parisian girls. They knew Paris well and made an excellent job of planning our brief visit. We saw all of the important places in and around Paris and in sequence so that there was no waste time. They told us what souvenirs we could buy and the best places to get them. Paris was very much as I had expected to see her. Versailles was much more grand and ornate. We were distinctly shocked at the nightclub. For some reason we did not go to Folies Bergeres. Our guide assured us that the Chantffly nightclub was as good. Even with our knowledgeable guides we were charged two prices for bad champagne. The place was jammed full of people. Our table was beside the stage and the chorus line literally danced over us. They had enormous bare breasts. Our guides assured us that most had been inflated. The faces on most of the girls of the chorus line, though pretty, were faces of savages. Rostand spoke up "Gee whiz don't let one of those girls get me alone"

Chapter 49: England Again

Our Battalion moved to England where we stayed, in the Aldershot area, awaiting our ship. While there we held a formal parade on which we were inspected by Col. Calder and Lt. Col. Bradbrooke. We boarded the Nieuev Amsterdam for a grand trip to Halifax.

We were in England about two weeks awaiting our ship. Generous leave was arranged for everyone. The Auxiliary Services helped to pass the time. One event that they arranged was a wrestling match. A ring was set up on the parade square and the match was held in the afternoon. My experience with professional wrestling was limited to watching two homesteaders while I was a child. It was a gentlemanly affair.

But this was different. Of course there was a good guy and a bad guy. The bad guy threw the referee out of the ring and did all sorts of evil things. I was all set to stop the match when someone cautioned me.

During my six years in uniform I had increased in weight by some thirty pounds. I knew that I was going to need a complete new outfit of civilian clothes. This was the best opportunity that I would ever have to get a well tailored suit. So I dropped into Conway Williams, our military tailor, and ordered two suits of clothes, A date was set for the fitting.

I had a cousin in the CWAC's who worked in CMHQ in London. She and I were having lunch together the day of the fitting. I asked her to come along to give her opinion of the new suits. I misjudged my tailor, As soon as he saw the woman with me he froze, The suits were not ready. I would have to come back again. Obviously he was not countenancing the opinion of anyone else of his handicraft.

One of the suits was not finished when we left England. Some weeks after I got home, in Canada, I got a card from the Customs port of Entry in Moose Jaw. If I remitted a cheque to cover the import duty to the amount of twenty five per cent of the value of the suit, they would give me possession of my London tailored suit. This duty was to protect our Canadian workmen from the unfair competition of the low standard of living enjoyed by my London tailor. Were it not so tragic in its consequences that was a real joke.

During our brief stay in England I visited as many of our old haunts as I could to say good bye to dear friends. We had all changed a bit. I had seen a great deal of actual fighting. They had experienced the V bombs. I think that my experiences had been the less harrowing. No one can ever know the strain of living with a threat of an explosion that could wipe out your neighborhood and that so often did.

At Kingswood I met the young husband who had spent most of the war in North Africa. I thought that his opinion of the Americans was grossly unfair. Only the circumstances of our meeting prevented a verbal clash. At Etchingham I told Commodore and Mrs. McCrae about how foolishly Dutch people prized cigarettes and avoided their own currency. Mrs. McCrae spoke up: "And who would be so greedy as to charge those poor unfortunate people such exorbitant prices for cigarettes?"

I visited my sister-in-law and her parents in Glasgow. I was in Glasgow on a Saturday night. You have to experience that, to know what it means. The streets were full of well lubricated young people singing at the top of their voices.

Dunbar took me to a soccer football me. I do not recall who was partying. It was the crowd that impressed me. They told me that ninety-two

thousand people were watching that game. Trains and double deck buses got everyone away within a half an hour of the end of the game.

On my last free day in England I had arranged to spend the evening with my cousin Ethel. It was an emotional time for me. The prairie boy had learned to love London. It was much too exciting, too complex, too sophisticated to ever become home. It was the closing of another chapter in the book of life. I was bidding a fond farewell to a separate way of life.

The dinner we had was poor food indifferently served. I do not remember what theatre that we attended, but it was a variety show. Jill Manners was starring in it. We had good seats and, during her first number, Jill recognized me. The next time she came on stage she wore the silver brooch that we had given her.

What I remember most distinctly was the community singing lead by a pert young thing dressed in a top hat, black coat and tights, twirling a cane. It was like the liturgy of a church service. The words and the music were the same that one had repeated often. But a change of circumstances gave a new meaning. "When the lights come on again all over the world,"and "The White Cliffs of Dover." It was as if that little girl had become a priest leading a service. As usual, the audience sang with gusto. But the message was different.

The audience voiced joy at the end of the war; they voiced satisfaction at the victory; they voiced weariness; they voiced sadness for the loss of loved ones; they voice impatience because of the restraints under which they still lived; they voiced a stupefying reluctance to accept the fact that the Britain that they loved could never be the same. At the time of Dunkirk she had stood alone. The whole world would benefit from the victory. The sacrifices had not been equal.

After bidding Ethel good night at her quarters, I was still too restless to go to bed. It was midnight. I remembered that they served coffee at midnight in the lounge of the Regent Palace. Maybe I would meet someone there. Almost the first person that I saw in the lounge was Janice. She was with a Polish LAC and was a bit chagrined. I had first met her early in 1940 in the company of Jerry. Jerry was a devoted family man. Janice was a "call girl".

I hesitate to call her a prostitute. She was too sophisticated, too sensible. Whether she ever became Jerry's mistress I do not know. Certainly when I first met her their relationship was platonic. I do not know how they met but they spent many happy hours together.

This night in the lounge of the Regent Palace, Janice was quite realistic about her future. She was not bitter. She loved Jerry, she loved his children and his wife, though she had never seen them. She was grateful for the opportunity that she had had to share a bit of Jerry's life. I was aware that I was in the presence of something that was holy. I did not quite know how to conduct myself. So I left Janice with her Polish LAC. I wonder what the senior Protestant Chaplain would have done?

Potts came aboard our ship, at Halifax, to greet us. Save for his uniform he had not changed a bit. Most of those who had come to us from Eastern Canada dropped off enroute. Rostand made the trip to Saskatoon. Only those who witnessed his reunion with his parents and fiancee on the station platform in Montreal, can know the intensity of his determination to learn about Western Canada when he rode on to Saskatoon with us.

Wes Winters joined us enroute with the details of the plans of the reception committee in Saskatoon. All arrangements were splendid with the sole exception that there was not a dance or party for the other ranks. The Saskatonians did not

want to take the responsibility of preserving order and a proper atmosphere at such an event. I promised to personally attend the other ranks dance and gave everyone assurance that all would go well. It did. Saskatoon gave us a rousing and sincere "Welcome Home." It was a great day on 3rd October, 1945.

We arrived by train in the morning. All friends and relatives were in the Stadium at the Exhibition grounds. We marched into the Stadium and broke off. In the afternoon we had a formal "March Past" at the Kiwanis bandstand near the Bessborough Hotel. Drayton and Embury took the salute. It was a rather cramped spot to parade a Battalion. After the "March Past" I "fell out" the officers and handed the parade over to R.S.M. Ferris for dismissal. I was the last officer to give a command to the Battalion on parade.

Some weeks elapsed before everything was wound up. We tried to publish a story of the Battalion's activities overseas together with an Honour Roll.

There was a considerable amount of money that had accumulated in the Regimental Funds during our stay in England. There were rather stringent regulations concerning their expenditure. We got the Honour Roll printed in England and paid for out of Regiment Funds. We were unable to get the Story compiled in England. In Canada we were not allowed to use the Regiment's. Funds.

.In Dec. 1945, I was "demobilized" I had served six years, two months and ten days. The war had been a tremendous experience. It was a bigger slice out of my life than I realized. It had been a very profound and thorough education. I recalled the words that Dean C.J. McKenzie had addressed to the officers of the Battalion, at a formal luncheon held in Saskatoon back in 1939. He said: "War is a terrible thing. Man must find a way to avoid it. But I would not have missed taking my part in the First World War for anything."

I can truthfully say the same about my part in the Second World War.

Appendix 1: Citations

Citation for the MBE

MITCHELL, Howard Clifton, Major - Member, Order of the British Empire Infantry (1st Battalion, Saskatoon Light Infantry) - awarded as per Canada Gazette dated 15 December 1945 and CAROl6276 dated 18 December 1945.

Major Mitchell has commanded a machine gun company since the reorganization of the Saskatoon Light Infantry (Machine Gun) in June 1944 and since that time his work has been characterized by his personal gallantry and disregard for his own safety.

During the advance beyond the Gothic Line in the vicinity of Cattolica and Riccione while in support of 1 Canadian Infantry Brigade, Major Mitchell was a constant inspiration to the junior officers and men under his command by his contempt for danger in almost continuous forward reconnaissances.

His example and determination gave such impetus to his company that their very close and active machine gun support materially contributed to keeping up the momentum of the advance. On 3 September 1944 at the River Fossa, Major Mitchell personally led his company over a temporary bridge under extremely heavy and sustained enemy fire. Immediately after the company had crossed, the bridge was destroyed and could not be replaced for 24 hours.

This intrepid action made possible the only support the infantry in the bridgehead had during that critical period. Throughout these actions Major Mitchell, when not on reconnaissance, manned forward observation posts, often directing fire himself

The will to get at the enemy which his ever-gallant actions inspired in his men was largely responsible for the efficient support rendered by his company to the forward infantry elements. During the period his unit was in Northwest Europe, Major Mitchell continued to display the same fine leadership and courage that he had shown in Italy.

Citation for the Military Cross, 3rd Class

MITCHELL, Howard Clifton, Major - Military Cross, 3rd Class (Greece) Infantry (Saskatoon Light Infantry [Machine Gun)) - awarded as per Canada Gazette dated 17 January 1948. Directorate of History and Heritage has a document (96/47 folio 123) which gives the above noted unit. This document (which bears no date) is signed by a Colonel Lamaris ("Chief of Staff,) and Colonel Th. Tsakalotos ("Officer Commander, 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade").

Because, as Officer Commanding of the Machine Gun Company attached to the Brigade, he has shown wonderful courage and coolness, and inspired his company during the successful and difficult battle of the Brigade that started on the 9th September [1944].

Note: These citations were provided through the office of Ian Wilson National Archivist for Canada.

THE OFFICERS , THE SASKATOON LIGHT INFANTRY (M.G.) C.A.S.F.
ALLIED WITH THE KING'S OWN YORKSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
ALDERSHOT, 1940

LT. R. C. Macdonald 2/Lt J. A. Quinn Lt. R. Irvine Lt. P.J. Mare Lt. R.R. Rankin Lt. J. F. Dawe Lt. W.E. Walsh Lt. R.B. L. Thompson
C.M. Cameron Lt. F.A. Clift Capt. R.B. Allen Capt. Duncan Croft 2/Lt H. C. Mitchell Lt. G. F. P. Bradbrooke Capt. A. O. Gray Capt. J.J. Middenberger 2/Lt. R.E. Fulerton Capt. T. de Faye
Capt. P.C. Klaehn Maj. D.E. Walker Maj. E.J. Scott-Dudley Lt.Col. A.E. Potts,E.D. H.M. The Queen Maj. C. McKerron Maj. P.E. Reynolds Maj. C.R. J. Lancaster Capt. A.W. Embury