Memoirs of Ron Bromley

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

1 Life on the Farm

My brother Frank not long before he died researched the family history. He got back to his great great great grandfather Ingram Bromley.

Ingram was born in the adjacent village Capel-le-Ferne in 1728 but he came to live in Hougham early in his life. This is evidenced by the fact that in 1745 the Churchwarden paid him two shillings for 2 fox's heads (for killing vermin) and in 1760 he owned land to the value of £28.

No doubt Frank could have gone back further with the family tree but decided against this to concentrate on the Bromley family in Hougham.

The family appear to have lived and farmed in about the same spot adjacent to the church right up to 1999 when my younger brother died and Church Farm was sold. Thus ended the Bromley connection in Hougham which had lasted over 250 years.

Hougham is a small village in two halves sitting on the top of two chalk ridges running parallel to and about half a mile from the chalk cliffs which extend from Dover to Folkestone.

Church Hougham naturally had the church and in my youth a school and two public houses. Now just the church and one pub - a Beefeater or something - remains. West Hougham had the village hall, a chapel, a smithy, a building business, Post Office, shops, a windmill and one pub. Now only the village hall and the pub remain.

In writing one's life story one cannot be completely authoritative. One has to rely on what one is told during early days and at the close someone has to write finis to all that has gone before.


My mother, Flora Corine Bromley (née Golds)

My mother told me, and my birth certificate confirms that I was born at 6 Malmains Road, Dover on June 13th 1918. No 6 was the home of the local midwife. I presume my father could not look after

the household and run his business so my brother Frank, all of 2 years and 7 months, was farmed out to his aunt (mother's sister) and mum went to the midwife instead of the midwife coming to her.

There was another event in Dover on June 13th of more importance to the inhabitants. It was the day of the last Zeppelin raid of the war over the town. What lasting effect, if any, this traumatic event had on me I leave others to judge.


My father, Arthur William Bromley

I would like to claim I was born a farmer's son but I cannot as it was my father who was the farmer's son and we lived in a tiny cottage built on the side of the big farm house where my grandfather held sway. He was a strong character. Two of Dad's brothers left home very young (about 16 I think) to farm in Canada, another became a civil servant starting as a telegraph boy, a fourth was around but it was never clear what he did. My father remained with his father but to have some measure of independence at the age of 17 started his own milk delivery business in the town. So from 5 o'clock in the morning he worked on his own business, in the afternoon he worked on the farm, and in the evening returned to his own business, round books, accounts, etc. He had little time for his three children Frank, me and Mary who was 15 months younger than me. A walk round the farm on a Sunday evening in summer, and in winter he would play his accordion and we would sing hymns. I recall he kept order at meal times and saw we went to bed on time.

The only toy I remember was a soap box made into a farm cart with two wooden horses, one bought second hand and another made up I think by my grandfather (Mother's father). I used to harness them with binder twine to the cart and drive in my imagination to the places I had heard Dad mention. One which captured my imagination was Little London, where I used to take uncles and aunts when they called. They always asked for Little London. I was teased about it as I could not pronounce my Ls so it always came out as Rittle Rundon. Indoors I had a Sunny Jim. Four "Force" tops and one shilling I think was the price. We could play anywhere around the house and cottage but not the farm which was on the other side of the road. Often I used to hide up in a farm cart in the cart shed with a girl a year older than me. I never knew quite why.

We seldom left the village. We were taken one at a time to Dover with Mother to do the shopping. She used to spend some time in a haberdasher's shop where she once worked - talking to her friend. If we were lucky we were given 2d to go to the ice cream shop to get an ice in a glass to eat in the shop. It had to be Grille's as he bought his milk from Dad to make the ice cream. We always got a large portion. Dad could spare no time for holidays.

Mum would take us on one day trip a year to both Margate and Dymchurch to play on the sands. Of the two I preferred Dymchurch as it entailed a trip on the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Light Railway. Much better than making sand castles. On one occasion Dad did come to Dymchurch, and decided to have a swim. Having no costume he sought out a lifeguard and paraded in a swimsuit with "Romney Rural District Life Guard" emblazoned across the front (I think it was Romney). He looked the part as at that time he had a moustache and beard.

Some children never left the village and I heard tale of some who did not venture outside for the whole of their lives.

At the age of five it was time for school. No fuss, we just went. No mothers hanging around, you were just handed over to an elder brother or sister, or someone from next door and off you went. It must have been very dramatic for the kids who lived some distance from the school to be sent off early in the morning with just a jam or dripping sandwich to sustain them for the day. They had to walk 2 or 3 miles across fields not to return until late in the afternoon. We were lucky living near the school we were able to get home at midday. There was one event that marked the change for me was that I discarded my smock which I had worn up to then and donned short trousers and a pullover.

The school held about 60 pupils which seems an incredible number. Today a bus picks up about half a dozen to go elsewhere. There were two rooms, senior and infants with one teacher for each room. At the entrance to the infants room was a long narrow building with some 30 clothes pegs and an enamel bowl at one end which was the only supply of water. This was the boys cloakroom. Midday lunch was taken in the playground except when the weather was bad and then the boys sat on the floor with their meagre rations and cold tea. At the senior entrance was the girls' cloakroom similarly equipped. The girls had a small enclosed playground for their exclusive use. At one end was a two cubicle lavatory (earth privy I think). Just over the wall was the boys': one cubicle and a slab urinal which drained into the soil. It was a challenge for any boy to pee over the wall onto the girls. Only Tommy Appleton claimed to have achieved this, but there was a suspicion of lifting involved.

Looking back over the years one can only marvel at the achievements of the two teachers involved.

For example the junior teacher at the start of the year would receive 6 or 7 five-year-olds, break them in to school discipline, and start them off on their alphabet and numbers, whilst having at the same time up to 25 others in age from 6 to 8/9 to teach up to a good standard of reading and writing and at least addition and subtraction and tables up to 5 I recall. Plus a little religious instruction.

Perhaps it was even more difficult with the seniors as the curriculum was expanded to take in English, History, Geography and General Knowledge.

Taking History, I think the head teacher took periods of history. One period to be taught to the whole assembly for a whole year, and another period for the next year. So provided you stayed for the full five years you got a complete history but not necessarily in date order. Similarly, Geography was taught one continent for the year. The two must have been very gifted and hard-working. Miss Rowe who was head when I started must have had a degree as I remember her wearing a mortar board and gown in a school photograph. I cannot recall anyone leaving without being able to read or write.

As extra curriculum we entered the Bird and Tree Festival. Each pupil chose a bird and a tree to study for a whole year, and then wrote an essay on his (or her) observations. The papers were judged at school level and the best sent on to be judged nationally. We had some success.

We played football, cricket and netball - mostly for the girls, although I enjoyed playing. At cricket we played other schools, walking off after school up to 3 miles carrying our limited gear with us. Capel we could usually give a good game to, probably coming out on top, but Alkham which was larger with a male head was much harder to beat. Sometimes the village cricket club would give us some coaching and allow us to play on their ground. At school sport was only by courtesy of the local farmer who allowed us to use the adjacent field.

We had one bad patch when the head mistress who had a cottage attached to the school contracted TB and we had a number of supply teachers. They were awful and got progressively younger until it was suspected that one was having an affair with one of the senior boys. The school sunk into chaos, no lessons, absenteeism, etc. Then suddenly a Mrs Gardiner appeared. She must have been quite senior as she had a car - there were only 2 in the village - she also carried a brief case with a cane strapped to the side. She looked awfully forbidding, ample figure in "lion tamer" boots and heavy tweed suit. We were soon tamed. One lad wandering around outside put his head in the window to find out why it was so quiet. Asked what he was doing he said "I am left". To which Mrs Gardiner replied "Well, you have now - get out and never let me see you again". That was the last he saw of school.

My father was one of two "School Managers" and I always filled with pride when he came in to "Check the Register". This he said went back to his school days when he paid 1d or 2d a week for his schooling and it was a way of checking whether or not the head was fiddling the books.

We had an excellent attendance record and each morning and afternoon the numbers for the day were chalked up on a small wall board.

We paid no fees and in fact received 1/3 pint milk each day, supplied by A W Bromley at 1d a bottle.

I was always very attached to the farm and said I wanted to be a farmer. I was the only member of the family to ride a horse and had my own riding tack. Frank was never fond of the land except in holiday time. Even when we were quite young, 8 or 9, father paid us and several of our friends 2d per hour to work in the fields. A typical day would start at about 8 AM pulling weeds from the turnips and wertzels, while the sun was getting higher. Then we would turn the hay which had been cut with a mower and left in rows. This was to dry it through. Later if the sun had done its job the hay would be raked up and loaded into waggons; the boys on the waggons putting the hay in position. It was then carried to the barn or built into stacks. These were about 15 feet square and about 15 ft high. They were then thatched with straw to keep out the rain. The whole operation was very labour intensive. Wages were low. I do not know if overtime was paid but when we were haying or harvesting Frank and I were sent to the local pub to get beer in stone jars; never put them on the sunny side of the stack. Mother also had to provide some sort of tea for the men.

Later in the year it would be harvest time. Firstly men with scythes would cut round the outside of the

field to make a path for the self binder. The self binder meant that it bound the corn into sheaves before throwing them out onto the ground. It was the boys' job to "draw in" the sheaves into groups of 8 or 10 and then the men would stand them up propped against each other to form shocks. This enabled them to dry and the corn which was on top to harden in the sun. When they were "fit", and they had to be quite dry otherwise the stack (or barn) would get overheated and spontaneous combustion would occur and a whole year's work would go up in flames. The boys' job was "loading", placing the sheaves in the correct position on the waggon. This was necessary otherwise the load would "slip" and fall off. There was only a pole (stipers) at each corner to retain the load which was piled up quite high. Sometimes when the field was some distance away from the farm the load was "roped" on. Quite a skill was required to throw the rope over the load.

If it rained we were put in the barn tying together the binder twine in lengths that had bound together the sheaves of the previous year. It seemed always a problem to Dad to get the bond cutter on the thresher to cut the bond at the knot. The knot was then cut off leaving full lengths of twine to be tied together to form lengths of string to tie up hay in "trusses" when it was cut from the stack. This seemed always to take place in winter when it was blowing a gale and Frank and I, who were always called upon to tie up the trusses. Dad always used to cut the hay from the stack, and we used to annoy him by hiding around the stack out of the wind. The trusses were box shaped about 3 ft by 2ft by 2ft and weighed half a hundredweight and needed to be secured by two bonds.

Other jobs that I did about the farm were feeding, grooming and "mucking out" the cows and horses. Helping with calving and lambing; pigs needed to be left alone as they had a tendency to eat their offspring if disturbed at the vital time.

Weed pulling was rather boring so to relieve the monotony we used to gamble a penny (1d) a time on which bus would be the next to pass the bus stops by the Plough PH on the main road between Dover and Folkestone. Part of the field overlooking the road was always planted with turnips. At the time there were no less than 5 bus companies plying for hire on this route. It was very cut-throat, buses racing past each other to get to the stops first.

The East Kent were the most orderly. Others were the Silver Queen which took its name from the hanger at Capel which housed the Silver Queen airship during the first world war, Pullman almost a one man band, the Co-op and the maverick Cambrian. The last started up in a blaze of publicity, one stunt being reduced fares, 3d all the way from Dover to Ashford (20 miles) was one. I cannot recall if anyone actually got to Ashford, or if indeed did any bus. The fare from the Plough Inn to Dover (1 stop) was 4d, but the East Kent charged 5d. We all avoided them but Grandad Golds would get on and offer 4d and said that's all you are getting. I don't think that he ever got thrown off.

Over time the East Kent bought Pullman, the Co-op combined with the Silver Queen to form the "South Coast". Cambrian fell to the East Kent and later South Coast worked in partnership with East Kent before being absorbed. East Kent then grew to cover the whole of East Kent up to the River Medway area. Later when Dover Corporation gave up the trams the East Kent took over and ran a town service.

To us children the trams were great. We just loved to ride that last mile on the branch line into town

having walked about 2 miles from the Plough Inn on the Dover Folkestone road. The main line ran from the western end of the sea front (The Pier) through the main street and up the London Road to the borough boundary at River, passing through a field at one point, there being no road to travel over.

Dover Cricket week was a great event for us. Kent County Cricket Club played two other counties in 3-day matches on the Crabble Athletic Ground - almost at the tram terminus. The thrill being that the branch line offered "through trams" to the ground. It was of great interest watching the tram being transferred onto the main line - quite a performance. It seemed to us that if the pole carrying the electric cable was not transferred at the correct time the tram stopped and had to be towed round the curve.

Some of the tram drivers did not take to driving buses and were put on the country routes over minor roads. One route went through West Hougham. The service was twice weekly, so if you missed the bus on Tuesday you had to wait until Saturday.

It was not all work on the farm. We used to play cricket in the field next to the farmyard. Frank and I supplied most of the limited amount of gear and therefore had a strong say in all matters. I don't remember football, but hockey was played in the street as it was a better surface than the field and the hedge on either side made good side lines. Another popular game was nip-cat. The equipment was a stick about 2 inches in diameter and about 5 inches long pointed at each end and a stick with which to hit it. Two individuals or two sides could play. Firstly the nip-cat was thrown at a chalk circle in the road from a fixed distance. If the thrower managed to get it into the circle the striker was out. If not, the striker would hit one tip of the nip-cat which would spring into the air. The striker would then hit it as far as he could. He then estimated the number of strides from the circle to the nip-cat. If the opposition could not achieve this, this amount was added to the striker's score. If the opposition succeeded the striker was out. I cannot recall hearing of this game being played anywhere but in our area. Marbles was also played and it always seemed to me that the marbles season occurred when the ground was wet and muddy. Conkers was played in season.

About the age of 7 or 8 I was introduced to smoking by my friend Harry, later to be called Brickie when he was apprenticed to the trade. Both his father (before he became ill and committed suicide) and one uncle worked on the farm. Harry would be given sixpence and told to go to the pub (there were no shops in Church Hougham) and buy 3 packets of Woodbines (5 per packet). He was given a penny for his trouble and he would come to me for a second penny and then ask for 4 packets for either Dad or Uncle Peter. 3 would be handed over and we would retire to the fields to smoke the other packet. I never liked it. I did not like the taste and the smoke got in my eyes, and I dropped the habit when I ceased to play in the village after entering the County School in Dover.

Towards the end of the year that I was 7 I had a very bad spell. I was very ill but the doctor did not know what it was. I was in bed for some time gradually getting worse and I had reached the state of being unable to take solid food, and one day I could not take liquid. I remember Mum, Dad and the doctor around the bed. The doctor shook his head. Mother burst into tears and left the bedroom. Dad and the doctor followed and Dad being a careful sort of chap put out the light.

I lay in bed wondering what it was all about, and eventually the light dawned, they thought I was

about to die. I resolved then and there that I was not going to die. How long I rested there I do not know, minutes or hours, but some time later Dad came and asked me how I felt. I replied that I felt OK and wanted something to eat. Realizing this was out of the question Dad prepared beef tea in a feeding cup. It could have been a small teapot as it had a spout. I struggled to swallow, much went over the bed but it did not matter because the sheets were always with discharge from my nose and mouth. Somehow it revived me and I slept.

The next morning the doctor came ready with the death certificate - I would not be surprised - only to find me alive and almost kicking.

He then pronounced that I had diphtheria and I was carried off to the isolation hospital on the outskirts of Dover. As he was not too sure I was put in a room on my own and had no contact with anyone apart from the Borough MO and the matron (who visited once each day), the nurse and a young girl. I saw the girl mostly and she spent some time reading my comics. Of the family I saw nothing, not even looking through the window.

It was very lonely. All I could hear was the boys playing in the next room. One day I struggled to sit up and look through a small window and I could see them playing with lots of toys. They looked at me as if I was a ghost or some other odd creature.

After a fortnight I began to peel, and it was said I had not diphtheria but scarlet fever. I was then transferred from the green corrugated iron building to the red one about 100 yards away. I was still isolated but with no young girl to keep me company. Once I was wrapped up and sent outside to get some air. Both girls and boys were also out but I was not allowed to mix. I walked up and down in front of the boys' dormitory while the others paraded in front of the girls' dormitory. Some told me that I had been moved to make room for a sailor from the port who had sleeping sickness. He recovered but my little girl friend caught the illness and died.

After a fortnight in the red block I was pronounced cured and taken to the matron's office in the administration block about another 100 yards away to await collection. Dad came, and on the way home I said the matron had given me one of my favourite sweets which was very kind of her as I had not had one for a month. This annoyed Dad as he had brought me sweets (my favourite amongst them) each time he came to enquire of me.

The rooms seemed very small and low after the vast empty space I had got used to, and in one corner of the living room in a basket I found a baby brother born almost as soon as I went into hospital. I remember saying to Mum, "So you could not do without me and had to have a replacement". What she must have suffered in those last weeks.

I remained at home, but after having my tonsils removed I resumed school for the start of the summer term. At the hospital they did the operations en masse, and when I was brought in there were no beds, so I was put in a cot on the other side of the ward. I was most annoyed as the boys opposite laughed, and I said to the nurse, "Don't put the sides up". Fortunately I was taken home the same day dripping blood down the outside of an open-top bus, or was that when I had a tooth out? I returned to school after Easter having missed almost two terms.

I think it was Mother rather than Dad who wished to see her children receive a better education than that which would be provided at Hougham. There were two lines of thought, either Dover College or Dover County. The College would have meant at least a couple of years at a Prep school before taking the Common Entrance. This was ruled out by Mother as a boy on the next farm had been expelled, not so much for getting a laundry girl pregnant, but by having the temerity to have his picture in the local paper in his school uniform hand in hand with the young lady over the caption "College boy to marry mother to be". How correct the reporters were in those days. Not "pregnant laundry girl". Laundry girls were considered to be well down the social scale.

The trouble was the County was Kent County Council and a scholarship job. Frank took the exam and failed. On a subsequent interview however he was granted a place providing Dad could pay 4 guineas a term. He considered this reasonable. The fee for a day boy at the College was at that time just 8 guineas a term.

As for me, I was not allowed to take the exam as it was said I would disgrace the school. How I could do this to a school that had never had a pupil pass anything in the whole of its existence. Dad however, was at this time not only a School Manager but also Chairman of the Parish Council, and as such was known to Dover officials including the Education Officer. I just about remember visiting an office in Dover and putting my name on some papers and I was passed fit to attend the County School subject again to Dad finding another 4 guineas a term. Thank goodness the next year Mary gained the first ever scholarship for the school to attend the girls' County School. Dad filled in all sorts of forms claiming dinner money, uniform allowance and bus fares. The Education Officer sent for him and told him from the financial statement Dad had submitted he (the Education Officer) could prove conclusively that Dad could not afford the fees for his two boys. I think they settled for a compromise and Mary had her bus fares paid. Dad did not submit a proper tax return until after the 39/45 war. Before I think they assessed him on land acreage, and with a thriving milk business he was doing well.

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

2 Off to School

There was no fuss about me attending a new school, as a family we were never very demonstrative. I was just told I would be going, and although I realised my life would be changed I just accepted it. Up to that time I was devoted to the farm and spent every minute I could on it. There was just one thing I got a bit upset about. My uniform was to be one of brother Frank's "reach up downs" and as the trousers were somewhat worn from bicycle riding they were to be re-seated. I could not stand the thought of having a large circle of material on my backside. Fortunately mother relented (she pretended she had been kidding) and I was given a brand new set: black coat and waistcoat and pin-striped trousers, a black tie and an Eton collar. I am not sure whether the juniors wore the collar all the time or only for high days and holidays.

I thought Frank would be a great help to me in starting at the school, but all he did was lead me to the front door and say "You go in there". He then went off to the senior school a mile away. I found it was a convention that elder brothers had no contact with their younger "pests". No conversation even in the playground or tuck shop.

Everyone (brothers apart) was friendly and I settled in very quickly. In knowledge I was behind all the town boys who had been taught in classes with everyone of the same age and had specialist masters to teach them. With hard work and plenty of time spent with homework (something new to me) I struggled on not falling further behind but still remained at the bottom of the class with only one idiot keeping me above the floor.

In one way the first year was a disaster. Our form and French master was ill with TB and could not keep boys in order. In fact on occasions he seemed to pass out in his chair. Starting in form 2X it was the intention we should do the first two years French in one. In fact we learnt nothing. He left at Christmas and died soon after. He was not replaced and for the rest of the year we had any master who had a free period to teach us. French remained my "bête noir" the whole time I was at school.

Sometime during my first year I did an appraisal of my situation. I looked at what other farmer's sons had done and were doing. Generally I found they took things very easily. They seemed to have as much to spend as anyone and were always the first to get permission to ride motor cycles to school. Usually they left on reaching the school minimum departure age and returned to the farm slightly better educated than they would have been had they remained at the village school.

This was not good enough for me, I would show the "townies" that I was as good as them. I gave up anything to do with the farm, even telling Dad that I no longer wished to ride Charlie the grey horse. My whole time, except during school holidays, was devoted to school. It was either study or sports: cricket, soccer, rugby and cross-country running. My village friends seemed to accept the situation and we got on well during the school holidays, working on the farm still for 2d per hour.

The second year when we became 3B the whole school moved into a brand new building. It was large and built into the top of a hill and seemed to complement Dover castle which was on another hill on the other side of town. It was opened by the Duke of Kent who came with only one escort (no security in those days). His car was an MG and when we looked around it when the Duke was dining with governors and masters we were overcome by the smell of perfume.

It was a truly magnificent school. The lower level which was cut into the chalk hillside led out onto the upper playing field (he had used the playing field for a few years prior to the school being built). over this was the dining room, woodworking shop and the engineering shop. This was topped by the playground (please call in the quad). Here was the main entrance with two floors of classrooms to the left, in the centre a large assembly hall with a stage, a balcony with an organ.

The head loved assembly. We had prayers, speeches, notices and if the music masters could keep awake long enough to play the organ we finished with a hymn.

To the right there were science labs, art room and general studies room, also a tuck shop. We were very proud of our new school.

At the start of my third year we moved up to form 4. Five of us from 3B were promoted to 4A (the A stream). We were never told whether it was because we were too good for the B stream, or perhaps it was just to level up the numbers. The A stream took Latin and as it was too late to start us on the subject, during Latin classes we had private study in the subjects at which we were weak. Naturally I was allocated French. I was given a large volume of French idioms to learn by heart. The only one that I can recall is "Vèndre à condition" which means I think to buy on appro (approval).

I was making steady progress and in end-of-term examinations I could sometimes get the top mark in physics, chemistry, maths, history and geography. We were fiercely competitive and kept a tally of our marks as they were given out. At the start I could sometimes be leading everyone, but when the dreaded French results appeared (they were usually late) I would slip well down the order.

I passed from form 4A to 5A at the end of which year we sat our school leaving certificate. I obtained two distinctions, five credits and passed sufficiently well in French to be awarded matriculation. I was never quite sure what it meant, but I think it was a prerequisite to enter university. At this stage many pupils left to start work, but others passed into the sixth form to study for university entry. Normally we only had two classes of study, arts and science, but this year an engineering faculty was started and I elected to enter. I was never too keen on university, in fact never thought much about it. As a family we had no-one who had been to university and there was no-one to guide me. To me it seemed something just over the hill. Dad was no good; he paid for his boys to go to a good school and he expected the school to do everything. The master who was in charge of engineering was a good friend of mine but unfortunately for me he left before the term started and the form was left with no-one in charge. It was quite scandalous. Someone (the woodwork master I think) gave us some text books and told us to carry on with private study. The parents of all the other boys in the class either put their sons to other schools or apprenticed them to engineering firms. I was the only one to be left. Why? Because I told my father nothing but continued to go to school. We had a beautifully equipped workshop and I busied myself each day using the lathe and other equipment. I

obtained a reputation for making drawbar gear for motor cars. Caravanning was becoming all the rage and masters wanted to get moving as cheaply as possible. I got on well with the physics master (a) because I was good at it (b) I played rugby for the school and he was the rugby master and (c) he was in charge of the cadet corps and I joined very late as he found he was short of boys of my age who were required as NCOs. He was writing text books with a lot of new ideas. One was electricity and I did all his experiments, tabulated the results, drew the diagrams and generally helped him. He made certain I attended his classes but he was not too bothered on what else I did. One day I was paged on the internal telephone to go to the head's study. I ignored it, but was caught by his secretary in the boy's loo of all places. I was given an egg whisk to repair. I spend a good deal of time on it cutting out and shaping a new piece, drilling, tapping and screwing and produced the product almost as good as new. As a matter of interest I costed it out using a skilled fitter's wage scale. It came to approx seven shillings to repair something that had cost 6d in Woolworths.

In the afternoons I would help the junior sports master in the field if the weather was good. If not I helped the boys with their homework.

This went on for the two years and needless to say I did not reach the required standard for entry into university. The only subject I reached the required standard in was physics. When I told Dad he asked what I was to do next. I replied "I don't know". It was then he gave me the only piece of advice that I can remember, to the effect that I take off the stupid cap I was wearing and get on with some work, and what was it to be? I was just 18 at the time and still wearing a school cap, at least to pass through the school gate. I replied that I wanted to be articled to a borough engineer. Dad's reply: "Well you'd better get yourself articled"; end of conversation.

I wrote to all the borough engineers that lived in the part of Kent where we call ourselves "men of Kent". It seemed a forlorn hope as such favoured positions were sought after months if not years before entry. However, at Canterbury one lad had done very badly at school so his father sent him back to school for a further year. Mr Enderby - the City Surveyor - "the term surveyor is better Bromley, Wren was a surveyor and he built St Pauls", said he would give Dad and I an interview. "Interview for a job? I am a boss, no interview for me" exclaimed Dad. I then got erudite with Dad and said it was a tripartite arrangement. The surveyor would provide the knowledge, I would provide the diligence, and Dad the most important part, the money. He then agreed but said it would have to be in the evening, he could not afford time in the day.

I did a recce and found Enderby lived in a large new house in a good part of Canterbury overlooking the county cricket ground. I found a little side road in which to part the van in which we would be travelling. I thought it would look bad to have a five-hundredweight Ford van with A W Bromley Milk Cream and Eggs on the side parked in front of the house. Mr Enderby employed a full-time "live-in" maid and a gardener-handyman.

We were greeted by the maid dressed in a white starched overall and cap. She held out a salver and I thought Dad was going to disgrace us by putting his bowler hat on it - but he was restrained. He did however in my opinion create a faux pas. In the study in the fireplace was a Magico fire - two bars of electricity surmounted by imitation logs with a flickering light to simulate flames. What did he do? He knocked his pipe on it. How he came to be smoking his pipe in the first place I shall never know. I

wanted to get out and get home as soon as possible. Unfortunately at that time all commercial vehicles were limited to 30 mph and Dad put on the dash light and glared at the speedo the whole of the 20 miles home.

The next day - I think - I went to the Cadet Corps, my last school activity. The weather was good and I did my best to forget about Canterbury.

On open day Frank brought Mary and two of her school friends to visit. One I knew (probably the better Pat) but my eye fell on the other and I invited her to the cinema. She accepted and it started a two-year relationship, only to be terminated when I was buttonholed by her mother. The elder sister had got engaged which annoyed her mum as she told me she always wanted to see her girls married at a joint ceremony. I was in no position to get married for at least 4 years. When I explained this to Myrtle in the front porch of her house she passed out. This scared me a bit and I agreed to carry on, but I made myself so objectionable to everyone that when I did depart everyone was pleased to see me go. Rosemary's fiancee had I think already put out feelers with a lad at his office so Myrtle was soon fixed up, I was pleased to learn.

When I returned from camp I was told that I had been accepted at Canterbury. The only snag, it was Easter Saturday and I was to start on the Tuesday. Where oh where had my 7 weeks school holiday gone.

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

3 Starting Work

I started at 9:30 on the Tuesday [1]. We had very good hours, 9:30 until 5, which fitted in very well with the trains. It was 1936 and we were still in the depression with very little work being done, so everyone had plenty of time to give to me, and I got on with everyone very well. I remember being out with one of the engineers measuring up the roads in order to obtain an inventory giving overall width at about 200-yard intervals, details of surface, verges, footpaths, etc. It was of no practical use and never used. He spent the whole of one morning practising changing gear in his car without using the clutch. No redundancies in those days, you got the sack only if you raped the Town Clerk's daughter.

It was quite a small office. A chief clerk and two male clerks who did all the typing was all the administration. Two housing inspectors who also collected the council house rents and a building inspector who checked all plans submitted by private builders, and inspected all buildings during construction to ensure they complied with the Building Bye Laws (later to become Building Regulations). On the professional side there was the Deputy Surveyor, a chief assistant, a planning officer (we were one of the few boroughs who had adopted the 1933 Planning Act), two architectural assistants and three engineering assistants. There was a large outside staff as all work, other than council house building, was carried out by direct labour. Direct labour was a good thing from a training point of view, because not only did you design a scheme, you planned the work, ordered all materials and then supervised the work.

Enderby had a rule that you could not tell a man what to do unless you could do it yourself - a good rule, which I followed up and preached all my working life. I did some time on refuse collecting and what was worse cleaning and helping to repair the stinking vehicles.

Once I had mastered the intricacies of the level and the theodolite and got used to the drawing board and drawing instruments, I was given small jobs to do outside. I got on well with the men and could give them instructions without feeling embarrassed or bossy, and with the men accepting it without any "who is this stupid boy trying to tell us what to do?" I think my time on the farm helped as Frank and I were sometimes called upon to relay instructions from Dad. There was some sort of protocol. The wagoner, the cowman, the shepherd and handyman were always addressed as "Mr", the labourers were called by their surnames and the boys that I was with at the village school were still on Christian name terms.

I do not recall whether the handyman Mr Cook was ever on the staff as a permanent member. I first remember him taking possession of the carpenter's shop in order to make a lytch gate for the entrance to the churchyard. It promised to be a wonderful structure with carvings and lettering in the wood, all done by Mr Cook. It was the idea of Mr Evanson, the self-styled squire of the village. He lived in a large house and ran a small boys preparatory boarding school. Unfortunately he fell foul of others in the village, I think the vicar was one and a churchwarden, and the result was it was never erected and

sold to another church.

Mr Cook however was very useful in repairing the farm buildings and the house, and also the farm wagons, etc. He also helped out at haying and harvesting and at other times.

Ken, my fellow pupil, whose father was a schoolmaster, confessed to me the had great difficulty in giving orders to the men, so I took him on one of my highway improvement schemes. Some of the kerbs had been laid and backed up with concrete. In those days it was all hand digging - no excavators or diggers - so excavation was kept to a minimum. Kerbs were laid as early as possible as this gave you line and level and the road formation could be dug right from the start to the nearest inch. I did not like the look of the kerbs. Even in my early days it was said I had a good eye for a line of kerb. I told the foreman to take a pinch bar and a maul and directed him to move one of the kerbs then go along a little and move one back, and when it rolled over at the peak to take some of the concrete away from about four kerbs either side and tamp them down with the maul to take out the point and make a smooth curve. When this was done, I said "Now doesn't that look better?" He had to agree. I then said "You will not back up any further kerbing until I have seen it." Poor Ken thought "That's done it. How can he speak to a foreman like that?" Little did he know that he had only been "made up" that week and he would have done anything for me if it meant the difference between him keeping or losing the 3d an hour extra he received as foreman. I did not say anything to Ken. I really must confess to him sometime.

That said, all engineers must be truthful and accurate in all that we say and do. We are not doctors, we cannot bury our mistakes. I made some errors during my articles which in some ways were good and made a lasting impression and made me always mindful of a saying of our old woodwork master at school. He repeated it often: "Measure twice to cut once."

The first concerned the Little Barton Estate, a large private estate (2 to 3 hundred houses) on the trunk road A2 leading out of Canterbury to Dover. To avoid lots of openings into the trunk road, the council built a service road about 1/2 mile long. I don't know if the estate owners contributed. I was given the job and after designing it, in accordance with Mr Enderby's edict I got to work with pick and shovel, laid some pipes, and built a manhole. The road was to be surfaced with 6-inch concrete slab. The concrete was to be consolidated (tamped into shape) using a large heavy beam of wood spanning from kerb to kerb. I was to be at one end and the 6-foot plus labourer at the other side had a very funny sense of humour and worked like fury the whole day. Oh, my muscles. I went home completely exhausted. This was not all, what suddenly came to me was the level of foul sewer. The surveyors for the building firm were in London so to avoid them coming down I did all the levelling and setting out for them. The foul sewer terminated in the trunk road to connect to a new main sewer which was being laid from the town centre. For my level I had used an ordnance datum bench mark. What if the main sewer, which had probably used another ordnance datum, was found to be too high when it reached my outfall? I had not co-ordinated with Jack Catigan who was in charge of the new truck sewer. Jack being a typical Irishman just said "No bother." I frantically levelled between my outfall and Jack's sewer as far as he had reached, and everything was just right, only a very slight adjustment in Jack's last length. It was sometime afterwards I had the thought that the very experienced engineer had himself checked up and said nothing to me. A typical Jack trick.

From what I can remember my second faux pas occurred when I was working for the electricity dept, which the City Council owned.

We were pulling down a small street of about 12 houses under slum clearance procedure. The City Surveyor had been asked to provide a large store and workshop on the site. In his usual cheese-paring way he said it would be a good thing if the two back walls on either side of the street were left standing to form the two long sides of the new building. Preformed steel trusses would then span from what were the two rear walls of the houses where they would rest on piers built into the walls, which were flint. The roof would be clad in asbestos big six sheets so positioned that a big six roll on the sheet would lap over at the gable ends thus avoiding the use of a special gable end capping. I think I spaced the piers at 13'-3" centres, and the purlins were being delivered cut to length and drilled. Before we started building the piers, the foreman asked me what I was going to do on the North wall. When I asked what was different North to South, he said that the North wall was some six inches shorter than the South wall (which I had measured and put the dimensions on the plan). Was the plan to put the difference ie six inches in say the end bay or divide it up over the whole length. In measuring up the building before demolition I had assumed the site was a regular quadrilateral and had drawn it thus on my drawing board. Oh dear, oh dear. It meant that the big six sheets at one end would have to be cut on the skew which meant they would not close the gaps and special end capping would be required. Thus went some of Mr Enderby's saving and the contingency sum had to be eaten into. "Not a very clever thing to do Bromley, omitting to measure up all round a very old building." I thought it looked much better with the purpose-built capping. The Electrical Engineer was very pleased with the result as by using the existing walls he obtained a much larger building than he had anticipated.

In my second year I was made responsible for repairs and alterations at the mental hospital. Canterbury being a County Borough, we had a duty to provide one. It had a rather pleasant and domestic name "Stone House", but it was far from being pleasant or domestic in character. There was no obvious occupational therapy. It seemed to me that the inmates just walked around an exercise yard, one for men and one for women. The staff were more like prison warders than nurses and walked around with keys hanging from their belts, opening all doors before you walked through and closing them again once you were through. Some of the male patients were quite amusing. One marched constantly up and down another always removed his shoes and socks however many different knots the staff tied in his laces. Another claimed to be Jesus Christ and frequently tried to get me to be one of his disciples. Charlie, who would help me by holding the tape when I was measuring up, claimed to be an architect who had been incarcerated by Alderman Askington who was a prominent architect in the town and wanted to exclude competition. Charlie would show me very crude, child like drawings of houses he had drawn. Unfortunately the only material which he could get freely was toilet paper. Another, George, tended the gardens of the Chief Medical Officer and the Matron. They were both always a picture. One day I noticed that gardens looking rather shabby and no George. A few months later I saw him again and he was getting the gardens back into shape. I asked him what happened. He told me that a new Medical Officer had said that people like him who could do a job should not be in the place and he discharged many to the community. Few people could afford or wanted a jobbing gardener, and there were already many unemployed, so George finished up in the Workhouse, which he did not like at all. So how did he get back to Stone House? "I just fooled them" he said. I had difficulty imagining how someone would act the fool to get himself incarcerated in a lunatic asylum. I hated working in the women's quarters as they were really

pathetic. They all wore long black dresses. They seemed to have long black greasy hair, and walked around looking miserable.

There was a problem with the constant locking and unlocking of doors, as there was a constant stream of people wanting to return from the exercise yard to the wards to visit the toilet, so I was instructed to build toilets in the two yards, one male, one female. Needless to say they had to be as cheap as possible, so I designed them with 4½" walls and a flat concrete roof. WCs for mental patients are made as complete units with a pipe connecting the overhead flushing tank to the pan. I obtained details of height, etc, and made the height of the building just sufficient to slide the unit in. Just before he put them in and after he had put the concrete roof on, the foreman pointed out to me that there was not sufficient head room to change a ball valve. What was to be done? The concrete was too "green" (new) to jack up and insert a couple of courses. The foreman's solution was to take the units down to his yard and cut out 6" of the pipes and weld them up again. The units were made in that fashion to avoid having chains exposed so that the patients would not get ideas about stringing themselves up. The problem was solved but again the contingency sum allowed was swallowed up.

It was sometime in the last half of 1938 that I got very despondent with life and it all came about because of an event that I should have been very pleased and proud about. Both Ken (my fellow pupil) and I were placed on the staff of the Council, something that no pupils had gained before. Pupils were articled privately to the City Surveyor (Mr Enderby), and rather than receive payment, fathers had to pay a premium of £50 per annum for the privilege. Possibly as expensive as University. It came about in this way. When a new Kent and Canterbury Hospital was built the Council bought the old building and planned in conjunction with Kent County Council to provide a Technical Institute for the city and surrounding area. Canterbury was to alter and extend the building and Kent were to equip the classrooms, laboratories and workshops. It was hoped to get a "temporary architect", one that would probably come from the unemployed and return there once the job was completed. In 1938 things were looking up. In spite of Chamberlain's remarks about "peace in out time" the country was preparing for war and there were few professional people in the construction industry out of work. No one suitable was found, so Enderby decided to give the job to Ken and I jointly.

The salary was the princely sum of £108 per annum. "We won't pay any more as it would then mean you would be liable for income tax, Bromley". I replied that I would be pleased to contribute something to help the country , and not for the first time I was accused of being a very cheeky pupil. At that time, I was doing very nicely moneywise. Dad gave me £1 per week and with my private work, drawing plans for local builders, I was as well off as the junior engineers, as they had their "digs" to pay for. I did not mind Dad ceasing to pay the £1 per week although Mother started to make noises about buying some of my own clothes. £1 down and £2 up seemed OK, but when the deputy surveyor said that no more private work was to be done it was an entirely different story. I had so many commitments that it was impossible to manage. I was heavily involved with the cricket club. I had been Secretary since I was 16 which meant I did practically everything except act as Captain, and in 1939 I was elected to that job as well. Everything came my way: fixtures, teas, equipment (a big job as the local lads could not afford pads, etc). I used to deal with Hubble, Ames and Freeman from Maidstone ... handled all money. Our treasurer was the village blacksmith and all he did was to hold any surplus money we held. I kept accounts and went to him from time to time to give or get money from him. Each time he would retrieve a little black book from behind the clock on the mantelpiece

and after a check up he would tell me how much he was holding, never more that £50. Every year I reported to the President (the self-styled squire). Once satisfied he would give me his donation of £1. I then wrote to our MP the Hon JJ Astor asking if he would be Vice President and his secretary would sent me half a guinea. To boost our funds I would run whist drives and socials in the winter. Other activities for me included darts in the local pub, motor cycling - we once tried our hand at grass track racing. We gave this up when one sidecar passenger who was practising on the farm had a track marking stave through his bottom.

I also for a time had two girl friends (as well as flirting with the waitress where I had my lunch), one known and welcome at home, and another - a bar maid - not known until she sent me a Christmas card with love from Margaret. Mother thought it was either for Mary or Ella, but Mary had to blow the gaffe instead of pleading ignorance. One less card to decorate the wall. Life was getting me down, I was weighing only nine stone something, much too light for rugby, one could so easily get injured.

What I wanted to do was to get away from everything for a while and start again, Little did I know my prayers would be answered. With the threat of war, the government introduced conscription for the first time in peacetime. Leslie Hore-Belisha gave up putting orange beacons on all our roads and became Minister for War - or something like that. He decreed that every male reaching the age of 21 would do 6 months military service, and the first batch to be called up was those born in the first half of 1918, which included me. I fondly imagined that I would be posted miles away in the North of England or Scotland, away from it all.

[1] 14th April 1936.

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

4 Preparing for War

The medical was very thorough, no less than 8 different people to see, dentist, optician, as well as doctors. The doctor testing urine was writing up his notes when I was second in line. He said to the chap in front of me "just urinate in that receptacle". "What?" After three attempts he said, "Oh, just piss in that pot." "Eh - can't go." "Just wait." "Can't stop." "Nurse, bring a bucket". When the nurse appeared the poor chap swung around and sprayed the doctor and all his papers. It was then I heard for the first time a phrase that became very popular for a time "Some mothers do have 'em". I passed A1 and awaited my call up. Imagine my surprise and disgust to find I was posted to Shorncliff camp not more that 5 miles from my home.

I arrived early on the Saturday, together with a lad from Folkestone - one Charlie Swain. We were met by a Sgt Elliot, who was to become my Squad Sgt, who showed us what was to be our temporary quarters as our huts were not ready. They were brick single-storey huts that had last been used as officers' quarters in 1923. The ivy was puller off the wall and the shutters opened and that was that. Some rooms still had the marble topped wash stands used by the officers. Later we were disgusted to read in the "Evening News" that the militia at Shornecliffe were lucky, their quarters were not ready so they were temporarily housed in the Officers' Mess.

The main body were expected to arrive on a special train from London later in the day, so Sgt Elliot took us into the NAAFI to pass the time. the place was full of reservists - all called up for training and having nothing else to do on a Saturday morning but hang around the NAAFI! Two people were on the dart board and taking on all comers. It seemed the drill was you remained on the board until knocked off. These two were taking a light ale or 4d from everyone until they ran out of challengers. They looked at Charlie and me and without consulting, just looking at each other, we took them on. The throw was nearest middle for starters. The opposition got 25, but Charlie followed with a 50. We remained on the board all that session, in fact in the 7 weeks or so until war broke out we were only beaten once. I discovered that Charlie was either the winner or runner-up of the SE division of the News of the World national contest. I was only average, but I played on the 19s and Charlie on the 20s, and this combination is very useful in doubles play.

The whole day was pretty relaxed. Once we were all assembled we were allocated to a Sgt. We were divided into four squads of 30 men each. Sgt Elliot took our 30 and pointed out our bed spaces and issued us with three blankets and "two sheets". We were then given a meal and then addressed by the Colonel. He told us we were attached to his Regiment for training. The 22 Field Regt was up to full strength, mostly reservists, and if the "balloon went up" we would be sent elsewhere to continue our training. How right he was to be. We were then allowed out - still in out civilian clothes. I went into Folkestone and bumped into a barmaid I had said a fond farewell to just a few days before.

Sunday was spent in the issue of equipment. Everything down to I think a toothbrush. Certainly a clothes brush (which I still have), boot brushes and a tin of boot polish. We were shown how to

burnish the toe caps of our army boots - plenty of polish and a hot spoon to start with. It was surprising how enthusiastically one carried out this stupid task; everyone trying to get the best shine. Perhaps it was the army's way of reducing everyone to a common denominator so to be better able to instil in us the elements of soldiering and war.

Our battle dress was of superior cloth, not quite officer quality but almost. I kept mine throughout my service. Plenty of polish and blanco, but fortunately we did not have much cause to use it as most of the time we wore boiler suits. PT was an exception. When everyone had been issued we were shown the highly polished floor at the entrance of the NAAFI and told we had to have our quarters looking like that in, I think, three weeks. It was an awesome task; when all the dirt had been scrubbed away the grain of the wood was exposed to some depth. This was filled with a thick coating of polish covered with newspaper and left overnight to harden. Then a bumper, a heavy weight inside a thick cloth, was pushed up and down on the end of a broomstick. This was done daily until a reasonable surface was obtained. After that it meant everyone doing his own bed space each day with the bumper.

Needless to say that soon after, our own billets were ready and as they were left by the builders in an even worse state than our first abode, the whole process started again. Trust the army to manage things thus.

Life was quite easy for me. I had my share of square bashing at school in the cadets, and as for the parts of a rifle I knew them all from tip to butt. "Tip of the butt, head of the butt, butt plate, butt trap", etc, etc. Things were taken very slowly as we were below average intelligence. Many of the age group had their call-up deferred. University graduates, articled pupils, apprentices serving indentures, carpenters, bricklayers, etc, so we were left with a high percentage of unemployed, seasonal workers, "stop me and buy one" ice cream salesmen with their three-wheeled bicycles. One was a "busker" playing to theatre queues in London, a deck-chair attendant, a plumber's mate from Tunbridge Wells, whose every forth word began with the letter F. He did not know many long words, but these he would split up and insert the dreaded 'F' word. I had first hand experience as he was in my room and in my gun crew.

One poor fellow was un-coordinated and could manage very little. One good move he could make was to shoulder arms, but alas he always got the rifle on the wrong shoulder. When he marched he always swung the right arm with the right leg. A born sanitary orderly but a thoroughly nice chap. I met him after the war in a small brickworks, happily barrowing bricks into the kiln and then out again, stacking them for collection. One man arrived three days late between two military policemen. He could not, or would not, do anything, in spite of individual tuition. I heard later he had been discharged as unfit for military service. A well-planned ruse? I did wonder. For gun drill we had 25-pounders. Mounted on two large wheels, they would be towed behind a vehicle at normal speeds. There were 7 or 8 men per gun crew, but only three needed to have any brains. The No 1 who was in charge and relayed the orders to the remainder; No 2 who set the range and fired the gun; No 3 had to manage the dial sight which set the line on which the gun fired. Our gun was No 1 gun, right of the line. I was No 1 with two excellent men at No 2 and 3. We soon established ourselves as being the slickest of the 16 guns and were always pushed forward to give demonstrations to visiting generals, etc. It was a good day out from London to have a look at the sea and pay a visit to the 22 Field Regt. There was a temporary hitch when it was decreed that we must change numbers so that all would be

able to do all duties. Chaos resulted, but I devised a plan. We lined up behind the gun to "tell off" and move round to new positions. When we received the order "Take post" we would run round for a bit to confuse and then take up our original positions. This scheme was short-lived. I was given a message from the Colonel via the Sgt, "If I'm bright enough to spot it, one of the visiting generals would, given time, so cut it out."

I came up against the CO (Col. Ambrose Pratt) a bit later on. Every Friday we had fish for lunch and it was always stinking and quite unfit to eat. One Friday we refused to move from the cookhouse until we were given something we could eat. No-one could move us, the orderly sergeant, orderly officer, sergeant major. While this was going on, the CO passed by in mufti exercising his dog. As we were still in the cookhouse (or dining room) he came in to enquire what was going on. Mouthy me was on my feet at the time and he asked if I was making the complaint on my own behalf or for everyone. "Everyone Sir." His reply was to the effect that is was a good job we were not at war yet, otherwise it would be mutiny and he could have me shot. He then tried his dog with the food and it was refused. He then told the NCO in charge to give us the "Tea element" (our tea - cheese, tomato and beetroot) and he would arrange to have other rations provided for tea. He solved the problem by posting the Sgt in charge of the main mens' mess to our cookhouse. He thus received all food at our establishment, took out what he wanted to feed us, and the rest went to the main mess where the bad food got mixed with some of the good.

After about three or four weeks all training suddenly stopped. In the middle of the night we were got out of bed and told to pack all our kit (why do all panics in the army always happen at night?). As we boarded the trucks we were each given five live rounds of ammunition. We were taken to Dover where we were split into small groups and positioned at the entrance to all railway tunnels leading into the port. We climbed over or through fences to gain access. I knew exactly our position, at the top of Templar Street, because on one of the milk rounds (which Frank and I had to help on when men went on holiday) the only house we served in that area was 10 Templar. The night passed quickly and at first light I walked through the tunnel which was quite short and reached Dover Priory Station where I had a wash and shave in the loos. After each man had got cleaned up and the restaurant was opened we enjoyed a cup of tea and a piece of the famous railway cake eh!

I had the idiot boy with me, who was caught trying to load his gun from the muzzle. Stupidly, someone loaded it for him. What did he do that night? He shot at the visiting officer. No warning, no procedure, just bang. Fortunately he missed and I withdrew his remaining four rounds.

I was then withdrawn to HQ, Dover Marine Station. This was an enclosed area, as well as the railway terminal it included point of embarkation etc for the cross channel boats, also customs and immigration depts. To get to the tunnels or into the town meant the awful business of going through customs each time. To avoid this, my pal Norman and I were put in charge of a side gate so we could avoid the bother of customs etc.

It seemed war was inevitable and everyone was flocking back from the Continent including long term residents. Instead of the one or two cars on each ferry there were very many and this caused chaos in customs and immigration with queues of cars stretching right along the whole length of the pier.

Everyone was very fed up with the delay. Norman or I would pick a car owner more agitated than most and we would tell him to follow us. Remember we were in uniform with a rifle. He was taken round the corner out of sight and when the necessary paper money had changed hands our gate was unlocked and he was away. I don't know if we let in any spies but we were much too naive to think about that and the term "fifth column" (from the Spanish Civil War) was not general knowledge.

About the end of August [1939] we returned to Shornecliffe where on Sept 3 we heard PM Chamberlain broadcast that we were at war with Germany. This was followed by an Air Raid warning and we went to the shelters. It turned out to be a false alarm, but it was the only time I went into an Air Raid shelter throughout the war. Ambrose Pratt immediately went off to become CRA (Corps Commander Royal Artillery 1st Corps). These were the first troops to go to France. The 22 Field Regt did not want to be impeded by the Militia so we were disbanded. Eight of us went to Larkhill (Salisbury Plain) to train as Surveyors, half of the remainder to Dover to learn signalling, and the remainder also to Dover to train as ordinary gunners. At the Survey Training Regt at Larkhill it was chaos. New regiments being formed, men posted in, men posted out. To try and keep an account of numbers we paraded every morning and the permanent staff moved down the lines taking everyone's name, number and religion; the latter seemed important and I found out the reason later. After this and a little marching up and down we were dismissed, and that was that for the day. The whole thing to be repeated on the morrow. At these parades you were asked if anyone knew anything about theodolites, trigonometry, logs, etc. One raised arm and you found yourself posted to a regiment bound for France. I remained silent, and after exhausting my knowledge of the various religions I one morning decided to remain in the billet and read the paper until the NAFFI opened. (NAAFI is a kind of pub for the troops where you could buy drinks and food and play darts and billiards). Who should walk in but a brand new Sgt Major. You could tell he was new by the way he swung his arms to display his bright new badges on his lower arm. I was asked what I was doing. "Billet Orderly, Sir". He was not to be fooled. On spotting my Lance Bombardier's stripes he said "Since when have we had non-commissioned officers as billet orderlies? Name - look on orders this evening." This I did to find I had been appointed in charge of the NAAFI for the next fortnight. Not in charge of the serving girls, but opening and closing times, cleaning and general discipline. On duty from 5:30 am until 11:00 pm, worse than being on "jankers". My first job was to get four reservists out of bed to clean up the place from the night before. As soon as this was done, Costain workmen came in for breakfast with their muddy boots; they were building on site. They arrived in buses each day with clean shoes; why they had to change into dirty boots before coming in I will never know. Clean up again, and again when the place closed at 2:00 pm. I knew I would never see them if I let them go until next morning when I got them out of bed. They would say that they had been "grabbed" by another NCO so could not come to clean up. I solved this by locking them into an upstairs room until after the two o'clock clear up was done. My next task at 6:30 am was to get the duty driver with his truck and go to the old garrison church. This was a large tin hut being used to house ATS girls and I was to collect 14 cooks to prepare the breakfast for the whole of the camp. Being a well trained Militia boy, I expected to see 14 well-dressed girls lined up, waiting for me to give the order to load up. Not a person in sight. I opened half of the Gothic type door and went inside. It was first light and I could just see one girl who said "Looking for the cooks? First seven down each side," and there they were, still in bed. There was nothing for it but to pull down the clothes and slap the first part of the anatomy that came into sight. Some were tastefully dressed in pyjamas or nighties, some had their "army bafflers", khaki knickers with elastic top and bottom, some had nothing at all; one bed was empty and one had two in it; I was learning fast. I told Busty Ellis the driver about it on the way back.

We was quite excited and asked if he could get them up the next day. I said yes, but nothing about the revolting smell as the place had been sealed up all night on account of the blackout. Busty enjoyed his new role. If he noticed the smell he said nothing. After that I left him to carry on each day and having found one of the cleaners I thought I could trust I gave him the keys to the NAAFI and for the rest of the fortnight remained in bed until breakfast. At the end of the period the pay Sgt tried to get me to pay for damages which he said occurred while I was in charge. Fortunately I had foreseen something like this and had obtained from the Sgt major a signed statement of damage existing before I took over so I thus refused to augment the pay packet of the clever little pay Sgt.

With some more of my pals from Shornecliffe (my special pal Norman included) we were formed into a squad to train in Survey and Sound Ranging. We had a rather corrupt Sgt Instructor which turned out to be to our advantage. We had driving instruction, and I was made an instructor for lorries. We did not cover many miles as I was instructed to drive to a farm on the plain. There under a haystack I would find empty petrol cans which I was to fill up siphoning petrol from the lorry. I then disconnected the speedo cable and completed the vehicle log sheet to roughly correspond in mileage to the petrol "consumed" and endorse the sheet "speedo not working". We then retired to the nearest cafe for the remainder of the session. This was beneficial to us as the grateful Sgt would sometimes use some of his ill-gotten petrol by picking some of us up at Salisbury when we returned from London on the "paper" train at about 2:30 am. We also passed our trade test to become qualified Sound Rangers at the first attempt. This meant our daily pay was increased from two shillings to three and threepence. Each week I drew £1 for my week's spending and 2/9 went into my credit. Strange as it seems today, £1 was adequate. It was the equivalent of 60 pints of beer.

At some time we ceased to be Militia and became part of the Royal Artillery with the rank of "Gunner", the equivalent of a "Private", the lowest rank. I lost my stripe as an unpaid NCO and became subject to fatigues rather than being in charge. One nasty one was coal fatigue in the officers' quarters. The young officers' wives were just awful and had us doing all sorts of jobs, "empty the ash bins, bring in the coal, stoke the boiler", etc. It dragged on into the afternoon when puffing and blowing on the Battery bicycle the Battery orderly appeared. He and I got on very well; his name was Sidebottom, but he liked to be called "Siddy-bottoome", so I addressed him as such whereas others called him "old side arse". He was thus keen to find me with a message that the colonel wanted to see me at 3:00 pm. I said it was impossible even if I ran all the way back. The only solution was for me to have the bicycle and he should walk back. This he agreed and I just made the interview but I had little time to smarten up. The interview was not going at all well. I was kept standing at attention, and the colonel's huge dogs were sniffing at my heels. I was pleased I had not been at the cook house, as should they have sniffed blood instead of coal dust I swear they would have eaten me.

It was then that two magic words set me on a course for my army career. When asked what my father did, I replied "Farmer, Sir". The whole atmosphere changed. The dogs were called off and I was stood at ease. Then followed an animated conversation on the respective merits of Shorthorns and Frisian cattle. I did not think it necessary to point out that my father's little cabbage patch in Kent would be lost on the colonel's three thousand acre estate down in Dorset. The conclusion was "Look on orders." There I was pleased to see I had been posted for "Officer Training". Not at any old OCTU, but to our Colonel's exclusive Survey OCTU. I merely had to change billets, where I was pleased to find many of my friends including Norman. We were D Squad and the first to be formed of "other ranks". The first three squads were from the OCTUs of Oxford, Cambridge and London

Universities. We wanted to be noticed so we devised a little plan. In the Militia our walking out dress was grey flannel trousers, black blazer, black tie and beret to be worn with a khaki shirt and army boots. Colonel Pratt did not like it at all and instructed Burtons at our first fitting to take them away and not hurry back with them. We were thus permitted to wear our own mufti when off duty, whilst at Shorncliffe.

On leaving we were handed them in a parcel to be changed at Larkhill for a second battle dress. The Quartermaster Sgt did not like Militia boys so he said he had no battle dress and issued us with second-hand brass buttoned tunics which we never wore. Having polished the buttons to sparkle we wore them on our first parade. The look of disgust on everyone's face was a joy to behold. We were rushed into the stores where surprisingly enough there were piles of battle dresses. Moreover, we were allowed to try them on for size rather than have the quartermaster shout out "3 top 4 bottom" as we walked past to have them thrown at us by his assistant.

Life was very easy, we were qualified in survey and either "flash spotting" or "sound ranging". So all that remained was "how to be an officer", etc. Twice a week some dear old colonel came along to tell us about uniform, equipment, etc, details of joining our first regiment and how to write to the Adjutant. Our visiting cards must be engraved, not printed, and the prefix to our name was "Mr" and not "Lieut". How long after joining your unit before you deliver your card to the CO's wife, etc. We could never find out his name so we called him "the buck shee colonel". On passing out we had dinner at a hotel in Salisbury and invited all the officer instructors. Some came, including the buck shee colonel. Nigel (an architect) and I prepared a menu card of which I had 27 copies done at the Council Offices in Salisbury. The back was left blank for everyone to sign his name. Now we will find out the colonel's name. He however had his ear to the ground and he signed all our menus "The buck shee colonel".

The next day we were told we had no postings as some bow and arrow blimp at the War Office had decided no more Survey Rgts were to be formed. We were all sent on indefinite leave until postings were obtained. I can not remember exact dates but I know I was a cadet on my Christmas leave 1939 as I told Dad I must have a bank account before the end of my leave. I drove him to the Westminster in Dover where we were waved past the counter straight into the Manager's office. He knew everything, when I would get my first pay cheque, uniform allowance, etc. "I think a starting balance of £40 will be adequate, Mr Bromley," and thus I became the proud possessor of a bank account. Details of this I handed in on my first posting and everything worked smoothly from then on. About the only thing in the Army which did, fortunately. A short time on we received a complete list of our postings. We had been split into groups of four and posted to four other OCTUs.

I was one of the top four on the passing out list and we were posted to the 121 OCTU at Aldershot. Peter Moody, our top man, did not come as he remained at Larkhill as an instructor. A second, Michael, was soon posted to a Jewish Regt, so it left Pat Tucker and me.

Passing out dinner menu, front page...
...and inside pages (1940-05-03)

We were given nothing to do; we used the mess for eating and sleeping. We spent the time around the

town, or playing squash. We joined the officers' sailing club and Pat taught me to sail on a large lake.

I am not good on dates, but I have found a list of the postings dated 4th May 1940. My personal number being 130266 was the third I had received in my short time in the army. My Militia number was 10075010 and my other ranks on transfer from the Militia to the Royal Artillery (sometime about Oct 1939) 135166.

Our lazy time did not last long. I was sent for by a Major Siggars (later to become a general). He gave me a map, a map reference, and a plan of a tented camp. I was to go to the map reference, there I would meet a Sgt Major with 20 or 30 recruits. I also found enough canvas to build the camp. The Sgt Major tried to assume command "We will start at this end and work through". "No, no, I responded, a waste of manpower in so large a group. We will split in two and start at each end and meet in the middle." He replied "But, but I must show you how to erect the tents". I had plenty of experience in the school cadet corps so we proceeded my way. What he thought of a kid officer taking over I don't know, but my team pleased to be free of the Sgt Major put their backs into it and we finished well ahead of his party. At one point he sent one of his men to ask me if I knew the difference between a "store tent" and a "marquee", and I was able to enlighten him. On completion, the arrival of Major Siggers with one other officer and a few men almost coincided with the first batch of evacuees from Dunquerke (Dunkirk). They were a "rabble", no command, no discipline, all they wanted was to go home, like a lot of lost school children; some in fact were crying. They had thrown away their rifles in France, which was probably just as well as we were armed and could thus enforce a little discipline. They were very bitter on account of the RAF providing no cover and one RAF boy, who somehow got mixed in, had to be confined to the guard room for his own protection. I began to feel grateful for having the Home Guard.

Our job was to register each one, feed and issue essential things, washing kit, essential clothing, etc. Then once we had a reasonable group, say of "Green Howards", we would put them on rail for their headquarters. The Buffs to Canterbury, the West Surrey Rgt to Guildford, etc. If they had any equipment, rifle etc, this was collected and sent to "Ordnance" for redistribution. It really was pathetic. Hitler could have walked all over us at this point. As the troops that had been nearer to the front line arrived, morale and discipline improved but it was not until General Alexander's Guardsmen that had fought the rearguard action that we saw true soldiers. I had always imagined guardsmen as Buckingham Palace sentries. Our last intake was the last to leave Dunkerque. The time was approx 2:00 am and when asked who they were everyone clicked their heels and replied "Guards, Sir". They were commanded by a Warrant Officer 1st class - they had lost all their officers - Mr Green (never call a WO 1st class "Sgt Major", always Mr). He stood 6ft 6in in his stockinged feet, and he was in his stockinged feet as he had kicked off his boots the better able to swim out to the last ship to leave towing his wounded companion. All the men had picked up an additional rifle on the beach. This was fortunate for me as it meant I collected some equipment without prejudicing my safety by attempting to part a guardsman from his rifle. When registration was completed, Mr Green asked when was first parade. I told him we had no parades but breakfast will begin at 09:00 hrs in a store tent which I pointed out to him. Before time he had inspected all his men and the walls of their bell tents were rolled up, an unheard-of thing in the camp.

Later that morning I put up a "terrible black". They were being fitted out in the stores with essentials when the storeman said to me "The WO takes size 14 in boots and we haven't any." I replied "That's

simple, just give him two size 7s." The look Mr Green gave me, it expressed "Oh where, oh where do they get Artillery officers?". I sent a special messenger into Aldershot to get him a pair of size 14s.

I cannot remember the camp breaking up. The next thing I can recall is joining up with the 16 who were at Larkhill as cadets together with the next group to pass out, E Troop, at Filey in Yorkshire. We had been collected together at 125 OCTU to train (as they said) to be real Gunners and not Surveyors. The CO, Col Sebag Montifiore, did not seem a bad chap, just a "pistol in each hand and a sword in the other" type of fellow. In his talk he spoke highly of anti-tank gunnery and if anyone on completion of the course applied to go to Survey he would brand him a coward. We all applied for Coast Defence and without exception we were posted to Medium Regiments. These units had guns of 4.5-inch or 5.5-inch diameter barrels, the largest mobile units in the Army. It was with the 125 that I played one of only two games of cricket throughout the war. It was a trial game, Officers v Cadets, to find a team to represent the Regiment. Although we were officers we were not admitted to the Mess (we were billeted in hotels) but we were included with the officer instructors to swell the numbers. Three of us played. We did not bat well. When I went in at No 7 to join "Jimmy" - I can't recall his surname, he was a member of of E Troop - we were 24 for 5. In the allotted overs we did our best to make a respectable total. Jimmy was in his eighties and I had, I think, 55. Fielding was no better until Jimmy went on and he took six wickets of which I caught four at silly point. About this time the whole unit moved to Ilkley where we were again in hotels. We were surprised to find that neither of us had been selected to represent the Regiment.

During the first week I met Lieutenant Kent who seemed to be in charge of cricket and he told me to be ready to leave for the match at a certain time. I told him I had not been selected. He then said the staff had realised it was a long weekend, Whitsun I think, and some wanted to go away, hence the need for Jimmy and me. I told him quite forcefully that we had realized the date sometime ago and we had both made other arrangements. Jimmy was taking his car to Bristol to lay it up for the duration, and I was going to Leeds. Kent tried the seniority lark (he had two pips being an instructor), but I was adamant so he concluded by saying "Do you have to wear your hat at that angle?" I replied "No, but I like it that way." How the team, or indeed Lt Kent fared, I know not.

One little incident I can recall from my time at Ilkely: a Lady Starmer adopted the Cadets (and we were included); she organised a library service and ran a dance most Saturday nights. Nigel, the one who designed our dinner menu, was a very large, ginger-haired man. Sober he was a gentle giant but get alcohol inside him he was a monster. At one dance he made himself a nuisance, so we organised him into a taxi with instructions to the driver to take him to his hotel, the Stoneyleigh. On the way, Nigel discovered he had no cigarettes, so he told the driver to return to the dance. When the driver refused, Nigel threatened to flatten him. On his return, he fell flat on his face in the middle of the floor which was very noticeable as there was no dancing at the time. He rose and went to the bar and ordered from Lady Starmer a scotch and twenty Players. The Lady tactfully declined to serve him, saying the bar was closed. Nigel banged his fists on the counter and said he would keep the "so-and-so" bar open as long as he wished. It took four of us to get him into the taxi. The next morning I walked to the Stoneyleigh as I had either been orderly officer on Saturday or I was on duty on Sunday. Jimmy Brittain and I often got mixed up. I was just above him in the passing out list but he was before me alphabetically. Whilst talking on the lawn, the adjutant arrived and demanded to see Nigel Mould. I had to box clever as I was in mufti, not allowed as an orderly officer, and one was not allowed out on the street at any time so attired. Fortunately, Jimmy Brittain took control (he was

resident at Stoneyleigh) and took us to Nigel's room, where we found him asleep on his bed in the nude. The adjutant aroused him with his cane, stood him to attention still starkers, and put him under arrest. Apparently Lady Starmer was a friend of General Adam of Northern District Command and the phone wires had been busy early in the morning. The General was very kind to Nigel and gave him a reprimand and advised him to get posted abroad as soon as possible.

At the completion of our course, we were again sent on leave to await a posting. I was posted to the 4 Medium Regt at Ringwood. It was a disgusting Regiment, morale was as low as it could be. When retreating to Dunkirk with their heavy guns at 5 to 10 mph all the officers fled on in advance leaving the men to their fate. The guns were blown up on reaching Dunkirk and the only officer who remained with the Regiment was killed on the shore. He was the Survey officer and was a hero to the troops. The others when they returned to the Regiment were despised by the men. I arrived in the middle of a sherry party, taking place on the lawn in front of the officers' mess, a large guest house cum hotel which also had civilian guests. I soon entered into the spirit of the thing and had a good introduction to my fellow officers and their lady guests from the town.

I got talking to a major. Odd for a second lieutenant, but I knew him from local government pre-war. He was TA, which accounted for his high rank. The time passed and I got very hungry as I had only 3 bottles of light ale for my lunch which I consumed with a fellow officer on Waterloo station. The major said they never had dinner on sherry party days, usually going on to Southampton if the booze ran out. Saying he thought it might be getting short, he went into the kitchen and came out with a full bottle of Plymouth gin. We sat on the garden roller by the tennis courts and talked until we had consumed the whole bottle. I had no thoughts then of eating and only wanted my bedroom pointed out to me. Someone pointed to a window on the front facade, and I attempted to climb the virginia creeper that clad the wall. This is all as reported to me the next day. I was told there were stairs and my room was the second on the left. They either forgot to say, or I misheard, it was the second floor. I went up one flight, then the second on the left, and fell upon the bed. I woke up next morning feeling quite OK. I was dressed in my pyjamas, my tunic was hung up and my clothes neatly folded on a chair. In the dining room a maid was surprised I wanted breakfast, I was the only one present. When I started on the cornflakes I thought that the staff must have had high jinx as well, as they tasted of Plymouth gin, but when the bacon, eggs, toast etc, all tasted the same I realised it was not the food but my taste buds. This persisted for 2 or 3 days and I have not had the courage to try Plymouth gin since that day.

I was the only officer on parade and when I handed back the battery to the Sgt Major he dismissed the two Troops and then said to the HQ section which remained, "A new officer here wants a batman, two paces forward for any volunteers." Normally on such occasions one could expect one or two to step forward, probably on "jankers" and hoping to get off pack drill, etc. About half of the section stepped forward, such was the morale of the Regiment. The Sgt Major detailed one and turned to me and said "He is no bloody use, but he will suit you." Actually he was right. He was a reservist who when serving had spent the whole of his time as a batman (no proper soldiering). His boss was Lord somebody and when they both were retired before the war be became the Lord's valet. On mobilisation the servant was called back to the colours but not the major. The servant was absolutely lost having to serve in the ranks, but he was jolly useful to me. He had a habit of collecting more from the laundry than he sent, and looking at the various laundry marks on my shirts one would conclude I was a well-travelled officer.

My job was Wagon Line Officer, which meant I looked after the stores and the transport, also as we had no barracks I was responsible for billeting the men in private houses in the town. My predecessor would draw money for this on Thursday morning and pay out all day Thursday and Friday with a few to do on Saturday. I was finished by mid-morning on Friday. I wonder why he took so long with the grass widows of the many naval troops who come from Ringwood. We were still receiving vehicles to replace those lost at Dunkirk. They were generally not army vehicles but any old rubbish they "bought up". They broke down and you could not get spares. I got so fed up one day that I rang the Ordnance Depot and demanded to speak to the officer in charge. I gave him a good wigging, implying that he was making a fortune by collecting anything from scrap dumps. He was most upset and said, "Do you know who you are speaking to? I am the colonel in charge of this unit." When he paused for breath, I said, "And do you know who you are speaking to?" Reply, "No." I said "Thank Christ for that!" and rang off. I knew I was in trouble if he had the guts to answer my charge that he was supplying rubbish. Fortunately, something happened that diverted attention elsewhere.

For some reason or other, the officers of the Regiment were given 3 days extra leave every year, I think it was something to do with events in India when the regiment was serving there. They took it all together, and as I was the most recent recruit I was left in charge for the three days. I was to occupy the adjutant's office full time, sleeping there and only being relieved for three 1-hour periods for breakfast, lunch and dinner. It was very boring. It was the last day, I think, Sunday, when the phone rang. When I picked it up all I heard was "Blackbird, blackbird, blackbird." Even I was intelligent enough to realise it was a coded message, but what did it mean? I had no files, as they were locked away. No use ringing Corps HQ as they had probably sent it. I rang the Home Guard on a local land-line we had with them. I turned and turned the wretched handle until a sleepy voice answered "Have you been trying long? Had a party last night, so we were a bit late signing on." They did not know the answer to my question, but promised to ask around. Later they came back and said they thought it was the codeword for the invasion of the UK, but they were checking with their HQ, at Southampton. Some time elapsed before they came back to me, "Yes old boy, it's on, the balloon has gone up. Good luck old chap, good luck."

I had only one phone number, that of the adjutant who was having a naughty weekend in Christchurch. I knew it wasn't his wife as she had rung up earlier from Richmond in Yorkshire.

He returned very quickly and started to get the Regiment into action. It had to be in action some distance away in order to bombard the coastline should the Germans land.

A depleted and sorry-looking Regiment went off quite some time after they should have left according to the sealed orders and by the time it arrived it was discovered to be a false alarm and they all came back looking more unhappy than ever.

I had remained in the adjutant's office which was fortunate as I received a posting back to a survey regiment. Such was the efficiency of the unit they would probably have lost it. I was so pleased to get away I did not wait for transport but caught a Green Line bus to Amsbury and taxi to the School of Survey at Larkhill. There I met up again with Pat Tucker and after a day or two briefing we were sent to Eythorne, a village about 5 miles inland from Dover. Here we were to join the Sound Ranging

Battery of the 1st Survey Regiment, which was deployed along the Kent coast from Deal to Dungerness. The task was to locate the German guns on the French coast who were being such a nuisance to shipping in the Channel and to Dover and the surrounding area. We were met at Shepherdswell station by Lt Butterwell who did his best to paint the CO as an ogre. He even had us taking off our boots before walking past his bedroom door - it was about 2 a.m. Our bathroom backed onto the CO's room, so Pat agreed with me not to pull the chain of the WC until the morning.

We were up promptly and much to our surprise greeted by a very affable CO who insisted on Pat and I being served first with breakfast as we had arrived first. After a couple of days, Pat I think was posted to West Base and I to Centre Base. The Battery was split into 3 Troops, one at each base, A Troop with HQ at Eythorne, B Troop (Centre Base) at Sellinge between Folkestone and Ashford, and C Troop (West Base) at Appledore down in Romney Marsh. Pat may have been with me at Sellinge, for it would have been difficult for him to get from Appledore when we played squash at the Conservative Club in Ashford. The Battery had been hastily enlarged and deployed soon after Dunkirk and as the Battle of Britain was raging things were a bit topsy-turvy.

A little about sound ranging might be appropriate at this stage. If you have two listening points on an accurately-drawn grid such as an Ordnance Survey map and a gun sound is recorded at both points such that the time interval between the sound reaching both can be recorded, then it is possible to draw a certain curve and the gun lies somewhere on that curve called a hyperbola. If we now have a third point and the time interval between points 2 and 3 is found, we can draw another hyperbola, and where the two curves intersect that is the gun's position. It was usual to have five or six positions to get greater accuracy. The gun sound was recorded by using fine wire in the form of a grid through which a small electric current was passed. When the gun wave strikes the grid the wire is cooled, the resistance of the wire increases and the current passing is reduced. The wire is in a circuit reaching back to HQ. The change in current is recorded in a complicated apparatus (my excuse for not explaining it) with the result we have another wire suspended in the jaws of a strong electro magnet. When there was no sound and therefore no change in current the two magnetic fields - the magnets and that surrounding the wire - are in equilibrium. A change in current in the wire, the balance is disturbed and you get a kick in the wire. The wire is photographed on a continuous run of film, so when it kicks it is recorded on the film. The film has time intervals photographed on it so that by filming all 5 or 6 circuits on the one film the time intervals between the sound reaching the listening posts can be read off and plotted on a gridded board. To avoid having to plot curves, the asymptote to the curve is used, an asymptote being a straight line which touches the curve at infinity, the two practically coincident at the distances we were at. There were corrections to be made for wind, temperature, etc. For this we used graphs. In peace time there were 50, but we got down to a more practical 12 in war time.

If you are clever enough you can get a lot more information from the film recording of the gun sounds, but to do this we had to call upon Professor Bragg at Cambridge University. One of our officers was on the staff at Cambridge, so we were well-positioned to provide any information required. The guns installed by the Germans at Calais etc we knew to be quite advanced. They could fire many rounds with sustained accuracy, and over a long range, 22 miles and more. Another method of finding out about the guns was to examine an unexploded shell, but uniquely they all seemed to explode. It can be 3 out of 10 do not go off with normal guns.

For Professor Bragg we collected three lots of data from one firing on a single film. The gun sounds, the shell wave (when the shell accelerating away from the gun broke the sound barrier - a la Concorde) and the fall of shot at the target. From this he calculated the length, weight, ballistic coefficient etc, but he was anxious to get it confirmed by the recovery of one. The 100 per cent record was a mystery to us. One day, however, we got news that one had been found on the beach between Dover and St Margarets Bay, and the Royal Engineers were recovering it. By this time I was adjutant at Eythorne and Col Eastwood and I went hell for leather along the beach only to find the shell dangling over our heads as it was being hauled up the cliff face. We hastened back and drove along to where a white-haired Captain was supervising the hauling in of the shell. It really was ironic. He and his men risked their lives every day in bomb recovery, but he was just like an old hen with chicks, telling his men to be careful, he did not want them falling over the cliff. Once landed, Uncle pulled rank on the Captain. Before the Captain could touch it, I sat astride it, measuring it up and noting all the markings etc, and Uncle sketched all the details. Professor Bragg was 100 per cent correct. The mystery of the near 100 per cent explosion was simple when one knew. There were two fuses, one to activate on impact, and a second timed to go off a second or two after impact. Had I known that I would have put my ear to it to ascertain if it was ticking.

I took up the post of Adjutant and Quartermaster to the unit, which had been split from 1st Survey Regiment and called the 1st Independent Sound Ranging Battery, on [Sunday] Nov 17th 1940. My predecessor was a bit slap-happy having won an MC at Dunkirk. The only money we handled (apart from men's pay) was a "Imprest" account. On this we could spend money, so much per month, on such things as cleaning materials, labels for blankets, shoe repairs, and something I never understood, an allowance for cake for the Sergeants' Mess. The items were specifically mentioned, and expenditure on other things forbidden. "Tubby" took no notice and bought such things as a kettle for making tea for the office, a cycle tyre repair outfit. "Pay no attention," he said, "we are at war, it will never be audited." Within one month of me taking over, the books and receipts were called for. The only thing I could do was to get a close friend at each base to get some blank bill heads from the girl in the village store and write out some for Vim, soda, etc. I wrote out a new account book and some invoices for HQ on bill heads from the local Post Office. After I had sent them off I realised some invoices and the account book had been in my handwriting, and the account book going back before I took over the job as Adjutant. I had a very uneasy six weeks until the book came back with certain items I had left in ringed round in green ink with a warning not to repeat the offences. The same thing happened with vehicle work tickets. These give details of all journeys, petrol consumed, etc. They are not used in theatres of war, but we were classed as home forces. I again prevailed on friends in each Troop to provide me with the necessary records going back to the time immediately after Dunkirk. One Troop Commander refused to play, or was just incompetent, and after many requests the CO (Uncle) was being threatened with a demand for payment for petrol used. I could not stall any longer, so I put all I had into a tea chest to be sent off. The BQMS made out a movement order for them to be sent from the East Kent Light Railway in the village and not from the Southern Railway on the main London to Dover line. I found out the reason many months later when the BQMS (now a Lieutenant Quarter Master) was about to be demobbed. His driver knew the porter in charge and to help him, weighed the tea chest, got a signed receipt from the porter, and put the tea chest in a closed wagon for him. The wagon was at the end of the line, and the chest was pushed across the wagon and a second man took it off into a closed van. On return to camp the whole lot were burnt. I could however produce the receipt when we had a further demand some weeks later. I was very suspicious when I asked why Eythorne Station, and was reminded by BQMS Bissell that a recent Army Council

Instruction had ordered a tightening up on petrol consumption (he would be the last to bother about this). He later became our Lieut Quartermaster in the 9th Survey. I think "Uncle" secretly realised his "talents" and did not mind profiting by them. Bissell's driver Gunr Baker was a self-confessed burglar. When I asked him why he did not say that was his job on joining up, he said it was not accepted and the second thing he thought of was taxi driver. When we had a spate of petty thieving in the camp, Baker was accused. He came to me in great indignation. "I don't rob my friends, that would not be right. I steal from old ladies in Tunbridge Wells who don't always miss it they are so loaded." On setting a trap - a marked 10/- note - the thief was found to be a man thought highly respectable with a double-barrelled name: Wilson-Hasley. I got him posted. For ever after he was known as "Wilson f--g hyphen Hasley". I learnt after leaving the Independent that Baker finally got caught, fortunately acting on his own behalf and not the army. We were changed over to fresh milk and as Baker always collected our rations very early in the day, the milk had not arrived from the farm. He said he would collect it at 3 o'clock. This was too late for the staff who wanted to be either in bed or out of barracks by this time. It was agreed a side gate be left open. This was "open sesame" to Baker. He was found to have a garden shed in the village full of tinned food. I was pleased I had left as I felt certain I would have been asked to be his defence council.

Now, in 2002, I wonder, how having lead, I feel, a fairly blameless life, I allowed myself to get caught up in the shady deals. Perhaps it was because that sort of thing was endemic in the whole army, so what was one to do? Often, you were ordered to carry out the crime by a superior officer; refusal to carry out an order would itself be wrong, eg supplying petrol from army vehicles. It seemed that the only recognised crime was to be found out, and probably the reason that a long service and good conduct medal was recognised as "21 years of undetected crime". If you cannot beat them, join them. I rest my case.

Life at Eythorne was very restricted, Uncle wanted nothing more each evening than to play Mah-jong. Paul Dykes would only compromise by playing Monopoly on alternate nights. There was no social life as Uncle would not allow women around. One seldom got out as transport was a problem, and I as Adjutant was expected to be by Uncle's side at all times. I don't suppose I spent much more than 3 or 4 evenings at home on the farm. Work was interesting at first, but one soon got into a daily routine 7 days in each week. This was very noticeable once we had fixed the cross channel guns and with Cambridge University found out their secrets. Nothing - or very little - seemed to be done, such as taking action to put a stop to their firing. The four guns which we had under command of the Royal Marines seemed quite useless. They fired few rounds and then were worn to such an extent that they could not reach France. I heard of no bombing raids into the French coast, we heard nothing of them attempting sabotage on the guns. There were units in Dover who carried out raids on the French coast. We occasionally drank with them in the pubs in Dover and learned how they sometimes had to leave men behind. They were quite confident however they would pick them up on their next raid.

I got quite restless. Before the war overseas travel was very limited and I saw an opportunity to see some of the world at the army's expense. I had little to attract me in England. After the war I could see that the furthest I would get would be three or four days at Blackpool as an extension of the Municipal Engineers Conference. Every time I volunteered Uncle turned it down saying that I was uniquely qualified for a unique one-off job and my talents should not be wasted as cannon fodder in India or elsewhere.

I had hopes when Uncle was posted to the 9th Survey Regt in Durham, but he was succeeded by Major Meigh from the School of Survey. Although a headmaster of a London school he had a long association with the army going back to the First World War. Unfortunately for me he had the same idea as Uncle about my leaving. Life however was not as spartan and we got around a bit more and even entertained some ENSA girls in the mess after they had done their show. Harry tried to run the battery like a school which did not go down too well with everyone. In one thing he annoyed me intensely. Any idea I put forward he would turn it down but a few weeks later he might put it forward to our troop commanders' weekly conference as an original idea of his, and I had to sit and listen in silence. Socially however we got on quite well except that I had to change to bridge every evening. The only concession I won was not to play for money, just points.

Sometimes, when making a visit together, on our return we would drop off in Dover, have a cup of tea and go to the cinema, coming out in time for a drink, then bus back to Eythorne in time for dinner. On one occasion he came to Canterbury on a Thursday when I went to collect the money to pay the battery on the Friday; he wanted to get a haircut. From Canterbury we went to Sellinge (Centre Base) for a meeting and had lunch there. In Dover we dropped off to have tea and the cinema. On going into the cinema Harry asked me about the money. I told him Smith the driver had it and he will give it to Cameron, the pay clerk, to put in the safe. "Cameron has a key?" "Yes, to guard against me losing mine." This so worried Harry, or perhaps it was the film, he pulled so hard on his pipe that it burnt through and ruined his trousers and gave him a nasty burn. Without stopping for a drink we caught the first bus to Eythorne and I was dispatched to check on the money. I found it in Cameron's desk. He had left the office before Smith arrived. I put it in the safe and reported "all was well". It was not good enough for Harry. After that I had to hand the money to the guard for safe keeping overnight. In my opinion a much more risky business, as the guardroom was isolated at the end of the drive some distance from the house, but that was Harry showing his authority.

I did not spend too many weeks playing bridge, as in February 1942 Uncle got me posted to his regiment. Strange how it was no longer essential for me to remain in the Independent now that he was no longer in charge. I joined the 9th Survey Regt at Coxhoe, a mining town about 6 miles south of Durham. After being briefed I was posted to the Sound Ranging Battery which was situated way up in the Pennines some 22 miles south-west of Coxhoe at Middleton in Teesdale, about 3 miles down river from the famous High Force waterfall, and about 9 miles north-west of Barnard Castle. I was not popular at Middleton. It was quite obvious that I was considered a plant by Uncle to assist him in trying to bring the regiment up to his requirements. In truth it was in a pretty bad state, especially the Sound Ranging Battery. In charge was Major Farrow, an ex-ranker who had risen to the highest rank of Warrant Officer Class I. He also held a most important post of AIG (Assistant Instructor Gunnery), very high profile with red bands in their hats and in fact did all the instructing. What part the junior officers played I know not, but they were held in very low regard by the AIGs, and the feeling was mutual. And Uncle found one, now a commissioned officer and one of his seniors. Not a very happy state, and it did not help that Farrow was not a very efficient battery commander. In fact it was chaotic. C Troop commander had left (I took his place) and the troop was just left to rot. Capt Cleaver (one time friend at Filey and Ilkely) had D Troop, and it seemed all the officers and men. He (Chopper or Gil) was to my mind much under the influence of a Lieutenant who thought he should have had my job and things were just not right. On arrival a very small and rather scruffy lieutenant set off over the snow-covered terrain to introduce me to my troop, which should have consisted of

about 100 men. I saw the stores with one man and some billets - empty, the vehicle park - some very sad-looking vehicles, and then I was taken to my office. This was a very bare-looking place with no fire even though it was several degrees below freezing. There was no-one around, then little Willy Wright said "Well that's that, I am now returning to D Troop," and off he goes leaving me alone. I waited around and a Lance Sergeant appeared and said he was Lonsdale and had just returned from his honeymoon. Apparently I said to him, and he often reminded me "Well that means you will be no bloody use to me for the next fortnight, but you can start by getting a fire in here and an orderly to look after the place and at least keep the fire going." Gradually more men appeared from the woodwork and I had some sort of troop. The two officers assigned to me had both been sent on courses, I think to get them out of the way. They could have stayed away, as they were quite useless on their return. I found a junior sergeant (Sgt Holmes) hidden away in HQ, someone Uncle had posted from the Independent and then forgotten about. I promoted him No 1 of the troop and he remained with me until he was demobbed. The recalcitrant lieutenant was posted and Cleaver and I got together again and as the battery's two senior officers began to pull it into some sort of shape.

Things improved at least in our relations with Regt HQ when Major Farrow was posted. Adjutant Humphrey was promoted to Major in charge of our Battery. He was a young keen regular soldier who had gone from a boys' boarding school directly into the army and knew nothing of life; in fact I did not have a very high opinion of him. He was a senior officer in a Survey Regiment and could not read a map. It was reported that when adjutant he was leading the colonel around Bedford when Uncle snatched the map away from him saying "We have passed that pub over there three times already." It did help enormously to have a CO who was pro-colonel rather than anti, and Humphrey was very pro, a good amplifier. If the colonel said PT to be done every day, Humph would say "PT every day at six o'clock in the field in bare feet." Similarly if we were ordered to march 13 miles in two hours we would be told to do it in full pack and fight a battle at the end of the march. After a period of training we were kitted out to go overseas but whilst on embarkation leave apparently the colonel of the 8th Survey convinced the War Office that his regiment should go before the 9th, so we returned from leave to find everything cancelled and we were to be a training and reinforcing regiment. What a waste of time and money. I do not think anyone was too disappointed as we were all very happy in Middleton. Throughout the war I don't think any village had taken a unit to heart as much as Middleton, practically every soldier had his feet under the table somewhere. Humphrey was about the only exception, being something like Uncle he was lost in the company of females. Chopper and I teamed up with the two daughters from the Talbot Hotel and had several pleasant weekends in Newcastle; we stayed at the Red Lion and the girls with an aunt at Jesmond, all very correct. I recall dining in a well-known restaurant, the Criterion I think, where there were little private dining rooms for 4 to 6, rather like old-fashioned stalls in church. Should you order a mixed grill, it was served on two plates, they rather liked their food in the North of England. In time we began to hear rumblings that we were to join 1st Corps which had been selected to be the spearhead of the attack on Northern France. The first signs of our new role was a reorganisation of the Sound Ranging Battery which took place in February 1943. We were made up to full strength and a switch took place. I with Sgt Holmes still as No 1 went over to D Troop and Chopper took over C Troop. Why it worked like that I don't know. After a little wheeling and dealing I found myself with a very good troop.

With Sgt Holmes I had two excellent sergeants as next in line. Sgt Watkins - a schoolmaster - was well suited to the more static role in charge of HQ with the recorder and the plotting gear. He worked well with the more technically-minded sound rangers. The field sergeant was Sgt Drinkall?, like me a

militia man, who took his trade test with me at the beginning of the war at Larkhill. A very quick and sound fellow who took charge of the survey work and getting the microphones into position. These three were the backbone of the troop, I could not have wished for anyone better. I did not worry too much about who my two lieutenants were to be, but here I was lucky. Little Willie who introduced me to the battery in 1942 took over the HQ with Watkins. With a university degree in maths he was a wizard in looking after the recorder. He rather treated his men as playmates which had to be kept in check, but he was extremely popular. In charge of the field section was Charlie Simpson. Before being commissioned he had been my sergeant-major when I was training at Larkhill. Sometimes I think he thought it not a good thing serving under someone who had taken orders from him, and he had a bit of a chip on his shoulder. His work however was excellent, and I do not know of anyone as a surveyor who had a better appreciation of ground than Charlie.

After about sixteen months at Middleton the inevitable happened. At the end of April the whole regiment got its marching orders to join 1st Corps in Scotland, and our resting place was to be Alyth, a small town in Perthshire about twenty miles NW of Dundee. Here we had further changes. We were no longer to have three batteries, one for surveyors one for flash spotters and one for sound rangers. There were to be two Batteries each containing one survey, one flash spotting and one sound ranging Troop. I with my D Troop was to be in B Battery still under Major Humphrey. This was a much more logical split as the two SR units never worked together being allocated to separate divisions (a division being the next split down from corps). Tactically the troops almost always worked away from the regiment, coming under command of the Divisional General. In fact during the invasion I must have worked under almost all of the divisions in the British army and also with the Polish division and an American one the 72nd Timber Wolf Division and some sort of Jewish brigade.

We spent our time up to the beginning of December in Scotland preparing ourselves for the assault on France and getting used to operating in our new formations. We had a little distraction. D Troop was sent down to Moffat to survey an artillery range. It took a fortnight of very strenuous work, I was up at first light (May time) and did not get to bed before midnight as I had a certain amount of admin work to do after surveying was stopped for the day. On completion I gave the boys the option of rushing back or leaving the next day on a leisurely drive. They chose the former. Arriving at about 4 o'clock I was immediately drafted into a 7-a-side rugger tournament being held in the village. I was very tired, but also quite a fast runner, and when we reached the final after about three games, everyone was about spent. We had a Rugby League player who proceeded to flatten the opposition. He could not run but gave the ball to me and I ran in about five tries. On the final whistle I collapsed to be dumped in a truck, taken to the mess and put in a bath with the tap running and left until I could find the strength to get out. What strenuous effort fighting wars demands.

Another little episode occurred which was so secret we were not told where we were going, and no maps. We were just told "You will be working hard day and night so do not take any smart kit, just overalls." I was not to be parted with my possessions, so I took everything. An escort of Military Police lead us from Bellahouston Park in Glasgow through the mean streets until we reached an isolated stretch of the River Clyde. Three or four LCTs (Landing Craft Tank) drew into the bank and the bows came down and formed a ramp and we loaded up. Each one held, as far as I can remember, something like six vehicles and fifty or sixty men. After a long trip down river we landed on an equally desolate shoreline, mountains, heather and not a crofter's hut in sight. We drove along the coastline and gradually found civilisation to end up in the harbour of a small town. We were told it

was Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. It was a bright, warm, sunny day and the world and his dog was on show all in their Sunday best. Apparently it was holiday week in Kilmarnock and it was not at all like war time. The officers were billeted in a hotel with civilians and I swear we had cream cakes for tea. There was no tea time orchestra, but two girls, both around 19 or 20, entertained us on the piano and violin. It was interesting to watch the antics of the married officers flapping around the girls, turning their music over and generally being a nuisance. Between tea and dinner, Griff (the only other single chap) and I indulged in our own strategy, and it was a joy to see the expression on the faces of the married men when after coffee the four of us (Griff, I and the two girls) got up and said we were off out. Did they have cinema on Sunday in Scotland? I was pleased I had brought all my kit with me.

On the Monday we learnt the purpose of our visit. It was to prepare us for the assault landings from ships. Basically we drove down a ramp at the bow of a LST (Landing Ship Tank), about the size of a cross-channel boat, into a maximum of 3 to 4 feet of water, and then we drove the vehicle under water to the shore; try to avoid the pot holes, you might disappear. Other joys included scrambling up and down nets, rowing large boats, in fact anything to get us extremely wet.

In the harbour was a submarine mother ship with 4 submarines. One we were told was the "Thetis", renamed I think "Thunderer" after being salvaged from her disastrous sinking on her trials just before the war. She was reported missing while we were at Rothesay. Between rowing boats on the beach were large cigar-shaped objects which we were told were one or two man submarines. To cap it all on the promenade there was a photographer snapping everything in sight and handing out cards which said "Get your holiday snaps from the Hole-in-the Wall after 10am tomorrow." I had a photo of me walking hand-in-hand with Molly (the better-looking of the two sisters). Over time it seems to have disappeared. Perhaps Lena objected to the hand-in-hand bit. I wonder what she was doing in the WRNS at that time? After this pleasant interlude Molly returned to work and I and the rest of the party rejoined the regiment.

With more toughening up schemes, the "assault party" was introduced. The idea behind these words was this. It was realised that in the event of the troop taking an early part in an invasion it would be impossible for the whole troop to be landed at once (all disciplines would be required at the start). Therefore the troop would have to be thinned out to about 40 percent of its full strength consisting of men necessary to get the troop into action and to keep it going without reinforcement for I think up to four weeks or until others arrived in various waves. After several trials the SR assault party was generally made up of 44 men with six vehicles. We continued to train on these lines until the 9th November [1943] when we said goodbye to Alyth. We travelled south to our last resting place before venturing on the assault of northern France.

It took some time as we called at several places, principally to call on Canadian gunnery regiments. It had been decided that tactically we were to form part of the 3rd Canadian division who with 3rd British division were to be the two parts of 1st Corps who were to be the advanced formation of the assault by British troops. Later when Montgomery came from the Middle East to take charge of Operation Overlord as it became known, he wanted to involve his precious 30 Corps which he had commanded in Africa, and the whole scheme was redrawn with 30 Corps on our right next to the Americans and 1st Corps took the left flank with airborne troops on our extreme left.

It was our battery, B Battery, which was to work with the Canadians. A Battery was to be with 3rd British division. At the same time the whole regiment was under command of 1st Corps Troop. Quite a tricky job for Colonel Eastwood.

We finished our travels at Fairmile Common, a large area of scrub land next to the A3 (London to Portsmouth) about two miles SW of Esher and three miles NE of Cobham, in Surrey. The camp was Nissen huts placed randomly among the trees and undergrowth, and frequent were the cursings with men wandering around to find their hut in the blackout. At Cobham things began to sort themselves out in real earnest, ready for the day which was to come. I found that my troop (D Troop) was working more and more on its own, and I began to feel much more responsibility for the 100 or so troops under my command. A sobering thought. We honed our skills in waterproofing our vehicles and equipment and testing our driving and the waterproofing in a large pond on the common. Vehicles were loaded and weighed, small schemes were carried out to ascertain if we had packed what we needed and if we had enough consumables to last for 4 weeks without replenishment. On one scheme one truck crashed into a tree and the driver Callick was fatally injured. It was not a happy time for me attending his cremation and meeting his wife and young children, particularly when she fainted on seeing her husband, and all this because her father-in-law thought she should have one last look. I had my brandy flask but I still had to almost carry her into the crematorium.

It was not all work. A good number of my troop came from a TA unit in Durham and they enjoyed exploring London. A lot of the others seemed to live in or around London so the trains from Esher and Oxshott were well used. The first time I arrived back at Oxshott I had not walked the area before and it was a severe test of my ability as a surveyor to find my way across the heath after a cursory look at a map before leaving camp. Weekend leave was restricted to one-third of the troop at any one time. I did not enquire too deeply into the workings as my thoughts were that in a few weeks time we may all be blown into oblivion, so let's savour the moment. At the time I did not appreciate how extensively the boys had interpreted my thoughts. The Battery Orderly would make out two sets of passes. When Lt Wright appeared in the office he was asked to sign the weekend passes. Then later Lt Simpson would be asked to sign the second set. Then No 1 Sgt could sign day passes for men not on duty, and if both Saturday and Sunday were free one could have virtually a week-end pass. The place must have looked a graveyard. Fortunately, Uncle's Regimental HQ was some three miles away so his afternoon walks did not extend to Fairmile. Major Humphrey was probably doing his press-ups. As for me, I was seeking to get away from the dull routine in a pub in Esher, now fortunately demolished and built over. The landlord owned a boatyard on the Thames which had been taken over by the navy. He took a pub, and to drink, and became an alcoholic, who was then taken off at intervals to be dried out. He lived with his girlfriend and I befriended her daughter. I thought it would be scary when Pet was taken off with me the only male around. The potman came in the morning to do the cellar work. The place was always seething with Canadian soldiers, but when they knew the score they were as good as gold, no tales of the limey officer being beaten up by Canadians in a pub brawl. In fact I remember one about 6ft 8in tall lifting the clock from the wall so that I could adjust it to summer time.

It was a pretty relaxed time and Christine and I spent many hours cycling around the area (me on her mother's bike) visiting friends, drinking innumerable gin and oranges (tonic was not available) in the local pubs and at the Upper Deck, a swimming pool and club at East Molesey, with I think a little bit of a reputation.

A Mr and Mrs Large kept the Bear at Esher (both very large) and I used to annoy the landlady by asking for a further gin in my glass as I could not taste the berry. One day she banged both bottles on the counter and said "Help your bloody self, I can never satisfy you". In those days there was no need to pander to customers.

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

5 War

On May 18th [1944] the assault parties of the whole regiment loaded up our vehicles (D Troop had 6) and leaving the rest in Cobham departed with a civilian police escort into the unknown. The journey took us around London and we finished up at Purfleet in Essex. The camp was run by permanent staff and we were allotted bell tents at the bottom of an old chalk quarry. The dining tents, ablutions, NAAFI, etc were at the top which meant climbing a vast number of steps cut into the face of the chalk, a very tiring business as the weather was boiling hot. On May 26th the camp was sealed; this meant nobody was allowed in or out and all mail was stopped. This was a signal for extra activity. We were paid out in French francs, there was a new issue of battledress labelled "anti-gas", also sweet and cigarette rations, "Mae West" lifebelts, emergency iron rations and 24-hour ration packs. The anti-gas treatment to the battledress made it very smelly and very rough to the skin, I washed mine to make it more bearable. As to the 24-hour packs, they were calculated to sustain one man for 24 hours. The contents consisted of concentrated meat extract, porridge in a block which had to be grated, hard biscuits, compo tea and boiled sweets; with it went a solid fuel cooker, all packed so well that one fitted into a mess tin. In order to ensure potable water we carried tablets to purify doubtful supplies.

On 1st June we left camp and, after spending a night at another camp, on the 2nd we moved slowly to Tilbury. At this point I left my troop, a severe blow, as I was to accompany Major Humphrey as an advance party. I still feel it was just an excuse as Humph could not read a map. In fact we played no significant part.

At the docks we were told to hitch up a trailer full of ammunition and take it on board in order to tow it ashore. As we were already loaded to the gunwales I protested, but it was no good. I made a note to unhitch it as soon as we were aboard. The ship was a "landing craft tank" about the size of a pre-war cross-channel ferry boat or a bit larger.

We knew it was American as soon as we drove up the ramp as at the top we were stopped by two Yank sailors who whispered "Got any booze for sale?" All American ships are dry. Having secured the jeep on the deck I met the first mate, who introduced himself as Bill. He said a lot which I did not quite understand, and I went below where the officers had terrible quarters with anchor chains rattling all night. Next day Bill seemed upset and said why did I not come to share his cabin. I apologised and said I did not understand, neither did I know where his cabin was. He then took me to a large, well-laid out cabin near the bridge. After allocating the top bunk to me, he took me round and introduced me to all the senior crew and said I was to have the run of the ship. I forgot all about Humph down below and enjoyed walking around and spending a lot of time on the bridge.

When loading was complete we sailed down to anchor off Southend pier where we waited a few days for the rest of our particular invasion fleet to board and line up with us. I had a very relaxed time. Sometimes when Bill returned from his duties I was on the top bunk reading. He would sit at his large desk, open the right-hand cupboard which was full of American cigarettes. He would select a packet and light up. He would open the left-hand cupboard which was crammed full with chocolate. He would select a bar and throw it up to me saying "Have a candy, kid". He seemed to have no papers. On the day of the 4th June he came into the cabin armed with loads of papers and maps (sorry, charts in the navy). He then asked me where North Foreland was; I told him. South Foreland ditto, followed by the Goodwins, Dungeness, Beachy Head and the Needles. Then no more. "What's next, Bill?" "We steer at 178° (or something like that). I knew then the invasion was really on, and we were not practising any more. The reason for the charts was that the captain retired sick to his cabin and was not seen again and Bill was in charge. He was an ex-deck hand and knew nothing of navigation, hence the questions re Beachy Head, etc. I asked him how they managed to get across the Atlantic in the first place. He replied to the effect that they just followed the others. We sailed through the Straits of Dover on a gloriously sunny afternoon. On the bridge I tried to pick out the German guns that had been such a nuisance to us when at Dover. I saw nothing and not a shot was fired. On turning to the English coast, Bill said "You look a bit sad, Captain." I replied, "See that church spire? If that fell in a certain direction it would fall on my house." A bit of an exaggeration but he got the gist. "That's sad, want me to row you ashore?"

As night fell I donned my gear for landing and checked my Mae West for leaks. I had fixed this under my tunic, and had to be careful as if it was too low you became top heavy, your legs went up, and your head down, not much of a life preserver.

I then lay down and slept. The anchoring of the ships woke me and I went to the bridge. All hell was let loose, shelling, bombing, mortar fire etc; fires had started burning on land. Men were going ashore, some wading, some rowing, and some in tanks and other vehicles. We were very badly placed immediately in front of HMS Warsprite, a battleship that was firing broadsides continuously right over our heads. My hearing did not get back to normal for days in spite of earplugs. We were due to land at H+4 (four hours after the initial wave, about 0900 hours). The time went past and no signs of us landing. Bill explained that we were waiting for the "Rhinos"? to arrive. "What are they?" I asked. They were a large raft, made I think of oil drums lashed together. The plan was for us to drive down the ship's ramp onto the thing, bobbing about on the waves, and then move in to the shore and land dry. I could not believe what I was hearing. This was quite contrary to what we had planned for so long. How could such a blunder be made? I seemed also no-one had ordered any Rhinos because none arrived.

Later in the day, someone must have realised the mistake and ordered our ship to ram the shore so that we could land in the way we had trained. This threw the senior crew into confusion as not one knew what to do. Fortunately the most junior officer spoke up (he had joined the

ship after completing his enlistment course, coming off Southend pier straight after being flown across from the States). Soon after, the message went out over the ship's Tannoy "Now hear this: to get these Limeys ashore we have to pump all the water out so anyone wanting to take a shower better take one now." Just imagine showering during an invasion. I was on the bridge, and the boatswain asked me "Will there be any water for the coffee?" "Yes," I replied, "I guess there will be some for the coffee." It was about this time my driver approached me. He was quite an old man, over forty, being in the last group to be called up. He explained that before the war he had no need of a car and could not drive (he was a learned scholar and composed Latin verse and wrote articles for the Spectator). I however had insisted that every man should drive, and he had enjoyed my classroom lessons. What's more, I took his passing out test myself, which gave him confidence, as did my accompanying him on his first drive through water. He would however be very pleased if I could see my way to driving the Jeep ashore. I assured him he would be OK, but before he had a chance to change his mind I agreed. My mind being focused elsewhere I forgot to cast the trailer adrift so the powers that be got their precious ammo ashore.

Ashore it was surprisingly orderly; land that had not been cleared of mines was taped off and a sign confirmed we had landed on the correct beach. Signs to the various rendezvous were all correctly aligned; they just pointed inland. I found our spot, which had me worried as it was an empty field; a second assessment and the arrival of Lieut Rodwell (a flash spotter) confirmed my judgement. There was plenty of activity going on around us with jeeps fully loaded with supplies going forward and then returning with the wounded. A rack had been fixed on each vehicle on which three stretchers could be placed. The lesser injured rode in the body of the truck. Did I spot the stretcher cases being covered with a cover displaying a Red Cross?

No further men arrived and when it was quite dark Roddie and I decided to turn in together using our single blanket (one each) to give us better cover. We chose a ditch with the jeeps visible alongside; in the hope that tanks might see them and give them a wide berth. We each had a bottle of Scotch and Roddie wanted to down his, but I told him it might be required for more important treatments later, so we each had a good draw on his and fell asleep. When we woke my troop had arrived and was busy dewaterproofing. Roddie was surprised they had not wakened me. My retort was they knew what to do and they would not be thanked for spoiling my beauty sleep.

Some time later Humph arrived following some of our vehicles. I would not care to speculate how much was by chance and how much by design that we had got separated. My troop and I had been on different ships as I was to accompany Humph as advanced party (almost certainly to read his maps for him). He immediately asked why I was not doing my reconnaissance. "What reconnaissance?" "The one for which we did a T.E.W.T. (paper exercise) on board ship." I pointed out it was quite pointless as (a) we did not know if the ground had been captured, (b) whether the Germans had any guns to fire, (c) whether we had any guns to fire back and (d) we had no orders to deploy. He made all sorts of remarks such as dereliction of duty so just to shut him up I set off on a motor cycle. There was little room on the road for jeeps etc, and only one man would be exposed. I threaded my way through the chaos and reached more peaceful areas. It was a fine early morning and the birds would have been singing in the hedgerows if the natives had not eaten them all. Then it got eerily quiet so I stopped in a village square to sum up the situation. I was immediately surrounded by gabbling schoolboys. My school French was well behind me, but a man appeared saying he was a schoolmaster and he spoke good English. I asked the inevitable question "Are there any Germans about?" He said they had all pulled out the afternoon before. Just then some more boys ran to me from the opposite corner of the square. I thought they said there were some Germans behind the wall, but the schoolmaster said that they said there was a German stronghold but no Germans. Just at that moment all hell was let loose, machine gun fire etc, and a Canadian Bren carrier burst round the corner and joined me. One of the crew was badly injured and barbed wire was wrapped round the tracks. I pulled out my revolver and was about to shoot the schoolmaster but he had disappeared into the village. I wanted to go after him but the Canadian Capt was wiser than me. He said if no German soldiers remained there would be soldier's wives (German and French) and I would not come out alive. He explained that he was a forward scout for the Canadian Div and was spying out the land in preparation for the next attack, and we were definitely in enemy territory. So the best thing for me was to come back with him and report. This I did only to be railled at by Humph with such things as "desertion", "cowardice". My move was to say "Sod you, I am off to see the Colonel." On reaching RHQ the temperature was raised still higher as Uncle, rather than being seated on the grass preparing his 24-hour emergency rations, was at a table eating a cooked meal with knife and fork (probably from the farmhouse). I told him what I thought of his battery commander, but he did not rise. Instead he pushed his moustached upper lip forward and said "I have received orders from Corps. We are to give up our role as surveyors and become infantry men. The job was to clean up all territory already captured so as to have the real infantry to prepare for a new assault." Then he said to save time he would give me my own area. What he really meant it would avoid me having to take orders from Humph. I withdrew thankful that I had not been arrested for mutiny, only to find on return to the troop that Roddie (my night companion) had had his foot blown off by an S mine (anti-personnel) and the Germans had captured him. We were told they were holed up in a cave in the side of a hill, so we brave British soldiers persuaded some French Canadians to raid the place. It was not a cave but a tunnel and the Germans ran out at the far end leaving Roddie behind. We were able to get him stretchered to a Canadian field hospital for transportation back to the UK. His treatment was delayed and I think in the end he lost the whole of his leg.

The next day we were ordered to march inland 4 miles to the village of Fontaine-Henry a hell-hole of a place, metal being fired at you from all angles from rocks, caves and wherever. We did not stop long, the French Canadian infantry decided to withdraw and we concurred, going back about 2 miles to Reviers and digging in. It was a mystery who gave the orders to advance. The Troop thought it was Humph's map reading skills and composed a song about the ill-fated venture. It was often sung at concerts, but Humph seemed to show no sign of embarrassment. All I can remember now was the last line of the chorus "On to Fontaine-Henry where no-one's been before." On June 12th [1944] (the day before my birthday) we moved forward again and prepared for a SR deployment. It was at le Fresne-Camilly and our first under battle conditions. It was not our fastest taking just over 2 hours. Most of the outstations had a very nasty time, and had to withdraw for some periods at night. Laying and maintenance of cables was most trying; there was so much traffic, especially tanks. Also troops were not familiar with our listening posts which looked like large beehives and they often got blown up by our troops. In the 30 days it was in operation we recorded 193 locations of which a good number were A or B (A was within 100 yards or better). This base also marked the first

receipt of letters from home, the arrival of our 60% party, and the issue of compo food packs. These were boxes containing 14 men's rations for a day or 14 days for one man, mostly tins, a welcome change from the emergency packs. They also contained sweets and 70 cigarettes (5 a day) which was to be our ration of cigarettes right through hostilities.

There was an unfortunate incident at this base which under anyone other than Uncle (our CO) might have been curtains for me. Immediately behind us was a very important Headquarters. Division? Corps? or maybe even Montgomery's HQ. The area was constantly being hit by large artillery shells. Naturally they thought it was coming from the front and we being in front should be able to pick them up. It must be remembered this was our first working under battle conditions. All previous work was on ranges without the disturbance of mortars, machine guns, as well as other artillery. This was all recorded on our film which made picking out individual gun sounds difficult, and we were unable to find any big guns. In fact we were so sure there were none we said so. Humph came into HQ and implied we were inefficient and ought to do better. I gave him some film. I knew it was a useless exercise. We would have got more from it if we had put it in a pianola. I visited C Troop on our left who were looking at right angles to us across the Caen canal, but unfortunately they had suffered heavy shelling and sustained several deaths so I got nothing there. Likewise when I visited the Sound Rangers on our right. When he (Humph) returned the next day with similar comments, but this time saying Uncle was also unhappy and was hinting at making changes, I saw red. "Why doesn't he come himself to tell me?" I marched off to the RHQ to confront him. His HQ was in a walled garden and when one closed the door it was like passing from hell to heaven, it seemed so quiet and peaceful. I let rip at Uncle telling what I thought of his battery commander and concluded by saying that I would not be sorry to go but if he was thinking of promoting Willie or Charlie to my post forget it as they were as fed up as I was. I turned on my heels and left expecting the adjutant to be sent after me to place me under arrest. When I got to "hell" and was driving back my thoughts dwelt on the good times I'd had with Uncle, especially our time at Dover. Then a thought struck me. What if these guns really were long range; could they be the same guns as we faced at Dover? At this point things probably get into the realms of fantasy. Did it happen or did I imagine it and over the years I have come to think of it as fact? To continue: when I got back to HQ I ordered a new plotting board to be made, but facing the coast, with the Straits of Dover guns still in mind. I looked for the characteristics on our films of the cross-channel guns which I could remember as very distinctive. We managed to get a plot on the coast about 22 miles away, outside the theatre of operations, just the range of the guns at Dover. It was fortunate that Uncle had been with me at Dover as he agreed we may have found the gun (or guns) troubling the important HQ. For some years I thought the facts were as stated, but I cannot recall any action being taken, probably our situation changed and new positions taken up. There is now no-one around who can confirm or deny this story and I think I am coming round to thinking it was just me fantasising, very probable given the circumstances.

From this time onwards we seemed to be constantly in action, it got quite routine. I am not going to record every deployment in detail, it would be much too boring and probably not understood, and it is set out in much detail in Sgt Bod Watkins account "From Knock to Mehle". I will just pick out incidents which I feel may be of interest.

We were kept fully engaged being passed from one division to another, in fact we must have worked with all of the divisions in the British and Canadian armies plus one American, the 72nd Timber Wolf Division.

I think our work was appreciated and our name got around. Unfortunately it was known as Bromley's Troop. We had confirmation of this almost at the end of the campaign. We were at Tilburg. The Regt received orders for D Troop to go up to beyond Nijmegen to help a division that was having a rough time. I was in the UK on leave, so Charlie led the troop. When he went to receive orders he was told by the General (or his CR) that he had asked for Bromley's troop, not his. Charlie had to explain, and he even told us about it. It must have taken something for Charlie to tell us bearing in mind the little chip he always carried on his shoulder. We had one piece of luck which enhanced our reputation. The troop was ordered to deploy on a second base whilst we were still in operation on the current one. This was a pretty tough order and it was required to be operational immediately as the new division was getting very heavy shelling particularly at night, and there is nothing more upsetting to the average Tommy than to have his sleep interfered with. At nightfall we went into action on the new base. It was not fully complete, two of the six microphones (listening points) were only on map spots and not surveyed in, and some were on radio and not line. Believe it or not, not a round was fired that night and everyone, including the senior officers, slept well in their trenches. We had worked a miracle and we were revered by everyone. If only they had used their brains. No German guns fired so we obtained no locations and no Allied guns had replied so as to keep the German heads down. For some reason the guns had been pulled out or had remained silent. Fortunately I think it was the former as the troops did not get troubled again. My boys were too clever and enjoyed the praise too much to let on.

On July 23rd we were called upon to set up our third base (the second only lasted a few days) at Giberville, which was by no means a healthy place. Apart from shelling and mortaring, we had to contend with numerous dead and decaying animals which in turn brought swarms of flies and mosquitoes. The cattle were blown up to an enormous size, so to try to reduce the volume of digging shots were fired into the stomachs, but the smell was awful so we tried burning, but the smell was even worse. Worried about dysentery, I used to inspect the men's mess tins and eating irons before their meal. This did not go down too well with such people as the university graduates but at least it kept us pretty free of stomach ailments. How the Germans could have lived in that filth I cannot comprehend. Maybe they had too many of their dead to bury in the hard ground.

We travelled west, setting up a few bases until we arrived at Maneglise a few miles from Le Harve. This was no great distance from Fecamp the home of the Benedictine monks who produce the wonderful liqueur of that name. Although the monks wanted to do business with us they did not wish to deplete their stock too much and limited supply to "un soldat une bouteille". It was ingenious the disguises some of the troops adopted to get more than one bottle.

Le Harve held out and certain troops (D troop included) were left behind to take the surrender. We were on the east side in a perfect position overlooking the harbour and with a favourable wind, in the eight days we obtained 83 locations of which many of accuracy A or B. I think it was Willie and I who visited the town on its fall and could find only four gun positions we had not picked up, and there was no certainty that they were not put out of action before we arrived.

By Bod Watkins diary, we packed up at Le Harve on September 12th; we were well and truly behind the main battle lines and we marched straight off to Belgium. I was terribly disappointed as I had hoped to travel up to and through the channel ports in the Dover Straight so that I could have a good look at the guns that had played an important part of my life from the summer of 1940 until February 1942. If the towns of France were very dull and run-down, Brussels by contrast was like Oxford Street during the Christmas rush, bright lights and everything in the shops. Life looked very normal and I swear that the trams in one town (if not the capital) ran from our lines and on into the German territory. In fact on one occasion I went by tram to visit one of our Advanced Posts and when I alighted the tram just went on. I think the Belgians learned how to live with the Germans. I found no difficulty in buying a bottle of Chanel No 5 to send to Christine at Esher. The wrapping paper I used was recognised by Pete (Christine's mother's boyfriend, the pub landlord). His comment was that in the first world war it was brown and much coarser. It was lavatory paper, and as all paper had to have a number, it was known as "Army Form Blank". In our day it was about four inches square, white and smooth, and if you could get a Bulldog clip it made a handy message pad.

Staying back at Le Harve we rather lost the thread of things and we were not back into action for 14 days. Time to clean up and check our stores, run a few passion trucks into local towns and find time to beat our survey colleagues E Troop 5 goals to 1 at football. Bod in his history even reports we had an issue of blanco. What were our feelings on leaving Normandy? I found it very much like my native Kent, arable farming, livestock and orchards. The natives were not hostile, but not (with exceptions) exactly friendly. Some complained and said why did we invade when it was time for their harvest. Our reply was to the effect that we were not too anxious to come when the snow was on the ground. I vowed that I would never drink Calvados - that strong spirit made from apples - again. It was not due to suffering from an excess of it as you might imagine, but the result of seeing it being made. On one farm near our waggon lines, when the apples were ready, the farmer chased the chickens from the barn and swept the presses with a yard broom to clear away the hay, straw and chicken droppings. The presses were then filled with apples straight from the orchard and put to work. The first juices made a good job of cleaning out the troughs, but I was disgusted that it was not run to waste. Perhaps it was reckoned to improve the flavour. It reminded me of Church Farm when we went to use the mills and cutters with which we prepared cattle food.

From the Brussels area we pressed on towards Antwerp and the Dutch border, and beyond. Place names such as Baal, Oostmalle, Westmalle, Camphout and Vosselaer spring to mind. At these and others we established bases. While at the last in off-duty moments we could get into Antwerp which I found a much better place for the off-duty soldier than Brussels. At Baal we stayed just one night but it coincided with an annual fair. Every family had to provide a cake or something. We all joined in and it was most enjoyable. I had the privilege of taking the daughter of the cafe owner where we billeted for our stay. In Antwerp I was lucky to escape getting into trouble. Gerry (our RAF meteorological officer) and I visited a bar (the Blue Lagoon I think). It had a reputation and was out of bounds for all troops. It was this that made it attractive. Unfortunately whilst we were there it was raided by the police, Belgian civil police together with US and Canadian army police. Guards were put on all exits. At one door, Gerry and I were the only British, and it seemed we were the only ones in the place, but we could not be sure there was such a scrum. The US sergeant said we posed a problem as the British police (the red caps) had failed to turn up. After chatting for a while I suggested his problem would vanish if he would just open the door for 2 seconds. He saw reason and Gerry and I were quickly in a back street. It was full of hoses and fire engines. There had been some sort of air raid while we had been inside - a flying bomb or a rocket. In spite of its attraction, Antwerp was a dangerous place to be, and one's pleasure was often spoilt by falling masonry and shattering glass. Everyone however tried to live as normal a life as possible and I remember in one village I had the odd experience of seeing a farmer putting glass in the front of his house while shelling was blasting them out at the rear.

We tried to get into Holland towards Tilburg by attacking, with the Polish division I think, up through Turnhout. The going was very hard although we got good results at our base at Hegge. I cannot recall the exact circumstances, but the Poles either withdrew or were held up. Meanwhile we were moved westward and joined a Scottish division and got into Holland via Roosendaal. From here we turned east and reached Tilburg via Breda. We did not realise it at the time, but Tilburg was to be the last days of sound ranging for D Troop.

Reading this it seems very bland, as if nothing much was happening. In fact it was quite the reverse, in some respects the toughest in the campaign. Strange to think Antwerp was close by where we enjoyed the odd hour in the cafes and bars.

It was for my efforts in this area that I was awarded the Military Cross. They were traumatic times and I cannot remember too much about it, and am at a bit of a loss to explain things in detail. I have often been asked for details, particularly by my friends in the Rotary Club of Walton. For their enlightenment I penned an article for their magazine and it might be appropriate to insert it at this point. As I say, on some things I am vague but what is written is the truth and not my imagination.

From Villain to Hero in Four Weeks

"D" Troop 9th Survey Regiment, Tilburg 1944

We arrived at Tilburg on 12th November 1944 and did not leave until 28th May 1945. We had three bases laid out south of the river Maas, the job of the troops being to prevent the enemy from crossing the river. C Troop (our opposite number in A Battery) were stationed in Breda and between us we manned the bases as required. Working in shifts gave us a certain amount of free time and we quickly integrated with the population. For us it became somewhat similar to Middleton as many of us had our feet under a Dutch table. In fact I think we had as many weddings as we did at Middleton. Charlie wanted to organise a dance and I agreed subject to a partner being found for me. He was billeted with a family with three grown-up girls who had plenty of contacts. The one they dug up for me was plain, stodgy, well-corseted, and complete with phrase book. I am no dancer but I spent my time dancing round her. After that experience I said no more, unless someone better could be found. Charlie's partner said she had been misled by Charlie who referred to me as the old man, a common term for any immediate boss. Having met me she knew exactly the one for me. How correct she was. As soon as I rang the bell at No 100 Nieuw Boscheweg a vision in white glided out of the door and into the jeep. We got on like a house on fire, she was much like Lena who I was to be lucky to meet later on, perhaps a little more vivacious, bold, cheeky? She had a very nice family, mother, father and two younger brothers, and apart from anything else it made a nice, civilised sanctuary away from military life. It was not all sitting on the settee and talking to mother. The Canadians opened a night club and most nights when I was free found Annette and I there. There was a live band, dancing, drinking and some food; this was a useful supplement to Annette's meagre Dutch ration. Her mother once told me the meat ration was just about enough to make the gravy. Annette was an excellent dancer which was good as I was very poor. It is said poor dancers always got on well with a really good dancer as she always had her feet in the right place to avoid those of her partner. We did all the steps and some not in the book. Occasionally we even did an impromptu solo much to the amusement of the band leader.

Annette

It was quite a severe winter and when a large lake froze over and this was followed by snow, the troops packed the snow up into a large pile in the middle of the lake and Annette taught me to skate. Once she and her friend took me in hand in order to speed up my skating. We certainly speeded up and as we approached the pile of snow, one went one side and one the other, leaving me to crash into the soggy mass, much to the enjoyment of the troops.

It was at the time of the Ardennes offensive (the Battle of the Bulge) when the Germans made a desperate attempt to break through and push towards Antwerp (I think). It did not affect us except we were ordered to carry arms even when off duty, and evening activities closed down a bit. Annette and I thought we would try another club which had opened at Nijmegan. It was no better than the one in Tilburg, but a change. On the way back there was a very long column - mostly tanks - moving in the opposite direction off to repulse the enemy. The tanks had paddles sticking out from their tracks, I guessed it was to reduce their bearing pressure to assist over boggy surfaces, or maybe something to assist in snow. There were of course no lights, but somehow I suspected that a tank was coming up using our part of the road in order to overtake. I pulled to the side as far as possible alongside the ditch and amongst the trees. No sooner had I stopped than the tank rushed past, and one of its paddles caught a tow-rope which I had tied to the side of the jeep. The rope was thrown into the air and came down on the

bonnet of the jeep. It was Annette's side, but you could not see daylight between the two of us as we pressed against the opposite side. We remained like that and not just for the pleasure of it. I thought afterwards what a news story that would have made, British officer and Dutch girl crushed to death under an Anson tank. We stuck to Tilburg after that.

Our relationship became quite serious, and Annette tried to work a scheme to get to England. I told her how to find Church Farm, but goodness knows what both parties would have thought when a sophisticated young lady who had never done a day's work since leaving school came up against my mother. About the time of my leaving Holland for Germany we both began to see sense. It would not have worked. I would have no means of supporting her for at least three years after demobilisation and then probably not as well as she could expect in her own country. What was more was the fact that her family were Catholic, of which there are few in Holland, but they are (or were) very devout, perhaps bigoted, and I could foresee Annette being ostracised from her family which I am sure would be difficult as the family were very close. I could not picture life in England for her alone in a foreign land. The matter was in suspense when I left, but it was cleared up on the first occasion that I returned from Germany and we agreed we would remain good friends for the rest of our lives. We still exchange news and a Christmas card each year. I am pleased to say we both made excellent marriages, and I have no regrets whatsoever. I was invited to daughter Nicole's wedding (the family now live in France), but it was on the same day as that of Frank's granddaughter Sara's first wedding.


Annette

As a keepsake for each of us I was taken to a grand photographer (a friend of the family) to have a portrait done. I was pushed around, my hair was altered, angles carefully considered, and it was the end when Annette took out her compact from her handbag and powdered my shining nose. I sent mine home for sake keeping. Mother never said much except farming news in her letters, the sting usually came in the PS. This time no mention of the photo until the PS "Thank you for the photo of the good-looking officer, but who is it?"

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

6 Aftermath of war

I think it was the 4th of 5th of May [1945] that we heard of the capitulation of the German army, but official VE day for us was May 8th, when we really let our hair down.

It was May 28th when we said farewell to Tilburg and travelled NE crossing into Germany at Eschede. We passed through the bomb-damaged Osnabruck and travelled mostly on minor roads, the autobahns we were told were unusable. On the 31st we reached Westenholz on Lunenberg Heath, quite near Belsen concentration camp. Here we were in contact with Russian forces but did not get on too well, and after 2 or 3 days living in 2-man tents the powers that be decided we had come too far and we retreated south passing through the damaged Hanover, and after a quiet stay at Hunnersruck we finished up at Sarstedt, a small town midway bewteen Hanover and Hildesheim. This was our last stop, other than the breaking up camps.

Once we had settled down we found that the Russians (or so it appeared to us) did not want to mix with the other allies and the boundaries between us were marked out and a fence created similar to the Berlin Wall. I had to peg out a short length of boundary in our area. The first day we walked the line. We found it ran through properties, so we agreed we would bend it so as not to separate a family house from the outbuildings etc. On the following day when we came to drive in the posts I found the Russian had received contrary orders overnight and the line had to go in according to plan. By his attitude you would think he had not been with me on the previous day. One farmer had his house in our area and the farm buildings in the Russian zone, so he had to make up his mind would he keep his house or would he go to the other side and exist without a house. There were hundreds of acres of sugar beet, but as the factory for processing it was in our zone it rotted in the fields as no traffic was allowed through the boundary, and as all the transport as far as I could see was bullock carts it was much too far to any factory in Russian territory.

There was an official passing place north of us which was strictly controlled. Trains went from here to the British zone in Berlin. A guard had to be provided otherwise the Russians, the Germans or perhaps DPs would loot it. There was little communication with the Russians although one soldier did hand up to one of my NCOs a woman to comfort him on his long journey. My man ought to have had more sense, as on reporting sick on his return found that she had given him more than just comfort. The time was never convenient, but I regret that I did not get around to making the trip.

Whilst at Tilburg, Major Humphry left to go to the staff college in India, Chopper became Battery Commander in his place and I became Battery Captain (his 2 i/c). Soon after arriving in Germany, Chopper became 2 i/c (second-in-command) of the regiment and I became a major in charge of B Battery, later on to fill Chopper's place as 2 i/c when Uncle was posted to Italy. It was then that I put up a terrible black. Uncle asked me to go with him to Italy. I pointed out I had little time before I was due for demobilisation; Uncle said he was thinking of a permanent commission. My reply was something to the effect that there was no point in that now that the war had been won. His retort,

"You do realise Bromley that I have been a regular soldier since 1916." I prayed for the earth to swallow me up. How I remained a friend until he died I will never know.

Our job was to police an area about county sized. At first we made up the rules as we went along, but slowly the country was returned to as near normal as possible when Allied military government took over. Allied staff were commonly known as "green linnets", on account of their green uniforms. Our first job was to hunt around to find important Nazi personnel who had attempted to slip back into civilian life and not face the consequences; also SS personnel. We would surround an area, say a village at curfew, and cross-examine anyone trying to get in or out. At first light we would enter each house and do a search. It was an awful business. Everywhere was overcrowded and very smelly. Mostly I spent my time with the Burgermeester who seemed to have the only records of people, just a name in a book. For a country so highly militarized it all seemed odd, no-one had an identity card, and birth certificates seemed unknown. One strange fellow was brought before us; my chaps could not get a word from him. The Burgermeester laughingly pointed into his book, he was a deaf mute and branded the village idiot. We did not pick up any of Hitler's cronies.

We were also the judiciary. I think the Burgermeester looked after minor offences; the intermediate court was presided over by a major with the help of a captain and a lieutenant. The maximum penalty was 14 years. The senior court which had the power to give the death penalty was led by a colonel or above with a major and captain as junior members.

One had to be careful not to become too bigheaded about one's position. It was quite a responsibility having power over someone's liberty or life, and for the most part we were quite young. The scene was impressive. The courts were the normal law courts and as you made your entrance from behind the judges' bench the lawyers in their black gowns (no wigs) and the rest of the court would stand and more or less bow to you. The senior judge would then salute a large union flag occupying the whole of the rear wall, and then having taken our seats the senior would signal approval for the remainder to be seated with a perfunctory wave of the hand.

Fortunately I did only one high court and that with a brigadier who was also a barrister. We had two cases who could (or should) have received the death penalty for being in possession of arms. The first was a German who had spent practically his whole life in the USA, and getting near to the end of his days returned to pay his final respects to his native land. Unluckily for him he got caught up with the war and was interned by the Nazis. When it was over he was a natural choice to be made a Burgermeester; he could speak English (or at least American) and he was very anti-Nazi. It was his job to supervise the arms amnesty and hand over all weapons to us, the army. Later he was found too old for the job and we replaced him. Someone must have had it in for him, for a rifle was found in his garden shed and he was imprisoned. Court procedure was very tedious, as evidence had to be given in the natural tongue of the accused. This was then put into German; the official language, and then into English for the judges. In this case it started in English, it was then reported in German by an inscrutable lady who throughout the day her only obvious movement was to endlessly pass her pencil through her fingers. Then it was put back into English for us. Our reply was picked up by the American prisoner who immediately responded in English. This was just too much for the German protocol. Our chairman ruled that it would be sufficient to carry on in English, the interpreter translating into German for the records. He seemed a dear old boy, and the crime unintentional, so we gave him 4 months in jail, this was the time he had already done so he was free to go. His praise for

the British sense of justice was overwhelming - he would have kissed our boots if he could have got at them. He was escorted out of court. The second "capital" case did not end so well. Two Germans who had been lifelong friends fell out over a game of cards and one reported the other as having a pistol. He had - a family heirloom which his great-uncle had carried when with General Blutcher at Waterloo. We gave him the same sentence, 4 months. This did not please him as he had done only 3 months and had to go back for a further month. The court was very busy as we had a lot of DPs (displaced persons) living in camps. They had been taken by the Germans from all over Europe to work in the factories and on the land. There's was a hopeless plight, and in consequence they had little respect for the law. The brigadier was upset as we had to sit on Saturday morning. In the robing room he expressed his dislike and said "and we haven't even given one death penalty, you will have to do better than that, Captain Wright." Poor Captain Wright (our junior member) really turned white at the thought. I suppose it was a heart-rending decision to make. Colonel Eastwood ("Uncle") once had to give the death penalty. He seemed upset for some days, and he was a soldier who had served in two world wars.

I had another interesting, if heart-searching, job. I was sent down south into the American zone to be a member of a tribunal composed of a representative from America, Canada, France, England; whether there was a Russian I can't remember, but I think not. It took place at a large DP (displaced persons) camp. There was some query or dispute as to what was to be the nationality of the personnel of the camp, either Polish or Russian. We had a set of rules and after interviewing each DP gave a decision. It is interesting that even so soon after hostilities had finished no-one wanted to be Russian. One lady DP who spoke good English brought us coffee, which was made from acorns, three times each day. She seemed quite certain she would be Polish but she was very worried about her husband who she had married in the camp. He had said if made Russian he would shoot himself. An empty threat we thought as we were told the camp had been "swept" of all arms. The next we learnt one man had shot himself, so we held up proceedings whilst the whole camp was searched a second time. After that the Canadian and I felt more relaxed when we had to make the husband Russian. Imagine our chagrin the next time we were served coffee. The lady, without emotion, told us her husband was dead. He had hanged himself in his own braces.

We had one tragic event at Sarstedt. On the morning of the 16th June the whole town was rocked by a huge explosion, part of an ammunition train in the sidings of the railway station had blown up. Buildings were damaged and there were many dead and injured. Alongside the station was a building housing a large number of Latvian displaced persons. Whilst re-housing them, a second explosion caused further damage and some injuries to us. It was then noticed that there was still a portion of the train that might blow up at any moment. One of our Troop, Gnr George, walked to the end of this portion amd uncoupled the trucks so that they could be driven away. For this action he was awarded, appropriately enough, the George Medal. For our help the Latvians invited us to their Midsummer Eve celebrations when they all dressed in their highly-coloured national dress. To ask someone to dance one tapped the lady with a rush, and if she accepted she made a similar tap with her rush. A good time was had by all long into the night.

Once we got into the swing of things as an occupational force, life was pretty easy and we found time for sport and opened a club or canteen at the Kippet Restaurant where regular dances were held. It was at this time I played my best rugby, mixing with international players. I was certainly not in any way up to that standard, but rugby in the army is rather officer orientated and once you got in you

were there for keeps. Or perhaps no-one else wanted to play hooker, a much more dangerous position than it is today. For a number of games our captain was, I think, Duncan Shaw, who was captain of Scotland in 1939. He knew the game well and was a good captain, but to me he seemed always a yard behind the pace. Somehow I had managed to keep fit and reasonably fast and his speed puzzled me. Later I was to find, or think I found, the reason. Early one Sunday morning I was sent for by Uncle, who sent me to a Brigade Headquarters to carry out urgently an enquiry, and on arrival I was to report to Major (or was it Captain) Duncan Shaw. The HQ was in a large castle and I could find nobody. It was Sunday and according to custom men were in bed or out of barracks. I found the officers' mess and went in uninvited and reached the sitting room before encountering anyone. The only person there was a glamorous blonde in uniform of American cloth (superior to ours) and silk stockings, a sharp contrast to our girls' lisle. I apologised for intruding and asked if she could help me in locating Maj Duncan Shaw. her reply was to the effect that the last time she had seen him he was still in bed. My question of fitness seemed to be to be solved.

The enquiry did not take long. A man had died during the night. He was celebrating his de-mob and his friends put him to bed on his back. The fools should have put him with his face down over the edge of the bed, immediately over his boots - an old army trick. He suffocated in his own vomit. What one does in such cases is to act as a Coroner would in civilian life, ascertain by interviewing witnesses the cause of death, get a death certificate from the Medical Officer, and make arangements for the disposal of the body, either a military funeral or return to his family. I had done one previously at Eythorne so I knew the drill, quite straightforward. The one at Eythorne was from the Irish Free State which was a bit tricky.

Somewhere in Holland or Belgium our Battery captured a riding school of about six horses, and somehow we managed to cart them around with us, complete with a Dutch groom who was with us to the end of the Regiment. I could already ride and had the fastest and most unruly to ride. It was half Arab and half Hanovian, a colt which one of our sergeants from the days of horse had broken in. I spent a lot of time riding, it was good open country and we did not always respect the wishes of the farmers, we just went. When we came together in Sarstedt, Major Gair took command and organised a riding school. To ride, everyone had to join his school, and he was a sadist and gave us all a terrible time. He tried his best to get me to fall off the lively colt, riding without reins or stirrups round the ring, but he did not succeed. I finished round the horse's neck from time to time, but not off. No-one was allowed to ride out without him or the groom until he had passed us out, which he never did.

I rebelled and had quite a dust up with him, telling him I could ride before him; I took out my horse without being passed out. Later, when Gair left, I took over his horse Marion, a much older and somewhat slower mare, but an armchair ride.

On the advent of winter, demobilisation started. I do not remember the method of calculation, but a combination of a person's age and his length of service gave him a number from 1 upwards, the lower the number the earlier you were discharged. My number was 25 (or was it 23), the same as all the Militia called up in July 1939. It meant nothing to me, however, as for some reason or another it was ordered that officers were to be held on to for up to six months past out demob date.

This gave me another problem, as I could see the Regiment being closed down during this period

which would have meant me being posted to one with a longer life. I was anxious to get to a regiment which had a vacancy for a major. Officers were only of substantive rank in the one below their present rank. This meant that if no vacancy for a major existed I would have to revert to captain. Not too drastic, but for the fact that the gratuity on leaving was much higher for a major. I had a good friend at Corps who dealt with postings, one Len Wright who was at Shorncliff with me and took up my post as adjutant when I left Eythorne. He secured me a post as second-in-command at a CIC (Civil Internment Camp), a sort of of British Belsen. It was on Luneberg Heath, a forbidding sort of place, but it was to be for only a few months. On arrival I could find neither the CO nor the adjutant, so I went to the officers' mess to await their arrival. When the officers gathered for lunch, the CO was pointed out to me and I approached him at the bar. I took an instant dislike to him; he was not even civil to me saying he had no need of me as he had obtained his second-in-command direct from the UK. I said in that case I would have some lunch and go. He said, "I don't know about that, we are short of food." In reply I reminded him that as I had been officially posted to his outfit, he was responsible for my welfare and turned and left him. Visiting at the camp was a captain who was known to me as I had, when down at Eythorne, forgotten to send him, then a sergeant, to General Montgomery for an interview to assess his suitability for officer training. I rejoined him, and when the staff sat down to lunch there were two seats vacant, so we occupied them. A sumptuous meal was served, but when it was almost over the adjutant and the MO (medical officer) appeared; we had eaten their lunch. There was no shortage of food and they were quickly provided for. Later on in the loo the MO told me they had been delayed holding an enquiry into the death of six inmates. He stated the cause of death in medical terms and added "in your language that's starvation and exposure." Maybe it was Belsen. We were only a few miles away from what had been the notorious concentration camp. After the staff had departed for their duties, I enquired for the CO's office. There I found him and the RSM bullying half-a-dozen old men, some wrapped in blankets to keep warm, to carry heavy furniture as he (the CO) was moving his office. After a few choice words I left and returned to the 9th Survey. I then phoned Len at Corps and asked him to have another try. I gave him 10 days as Gil, who was acting CO, issued a leave pass for me to the UK.

The 10 days certainly cleared the air as far as my future was concerned. I had taken a correspondence course with the Army Education Corps and found study much harder than pre-war. Then all I had to do was to read the text with a few worked papers. I thought maybe I would ask to join Dad and Chiz on the farm to avoid a lot of study. I had grand ideas for expansion as most of the nearby farms had been taken over by the War Agriculture Committee, who would want to release them as soon as they could after the war finished. I found neither Dad nor Chiz were in tune with expansion. Dad was still on the animal side whilst Chiz was all for the mechanical, acquiring machinery much too uneconomic for the size of the farm. They seemed on different wavelengths. In the pub over a quiet pint Dad would say, "He will never make a farmer." Chiz, who never went near the pub, once said to me, "If only he was out of the way we could get on with the job much better." I could see a third would only add to the turmoil and went to Canterbury where I was assured there would be a permenent job for me on my return. This surprised me, as although employed before joining up the position was only temporary.

On my return, Len had done his stuff and I was to join an ex-Territorial Ack-Ack Regiment which had been sent out to Germany at the cessation of hostilities. Here I was given the same treatment as at the CIC, "We have no vacancy for a major, so you would have to revert to captain". I knew this was wrong and told the second-in-command that my friend Maj Wright at Corps had not only assured me

that there was a vacancy, but had sent me a copy of the authority for the posting. I then acted rather rudely and reached across for the phone saying I would phone Len and get it sorted out. At this the 2i/c retreated and asked me my seniority. I was senior even to the CO in service, as a captain and as a major. Being TA they had several older officers who were being demobilised and they were promoting themselves hand over fist. In fact one poor man had been promoted the day before I arrived, well after the receipt of the authority from Len. The poor fellow wore his crown for about 36 hours, and the powers that be were insensitive enough to post him to me as my Battery Captain. He was in fact one of the nicest officers in the Regiment, being ex local government, in fact coming from Esher where I was later to work. Most of the officers were busy trying to improve their image and had taken to bridge, and on the first evening I witnessed then coming down to dinner with their Culbertson under their arms. This book was the "in method" for bridge at the time. There was one very crude officer, one Major Pincher Martin, who claimed to be a timber importer. I could just imagine him running down the gang plank with a plank of wood on his shoulder. This was the normal method of unloading timber in the London docks before the war, or so I am told. He said to me you do not want to get involved with bridge, which indeed I did not after my experience at Eythorne. He took me down to the mens' quarters, to a dance. We had taken over a bomb-making factory so there was plenty of covered space. He plunged into the crowd and came back with two German girls, and after one drink he disappeared with one, leaving me with the other. We had a dance or two and a drink, when the vehicles were ready to take the girls back to their village. Pincher was not to be found, and my girl would not go without her friend saying something may have happened to her. I told her the time that they had been away it was too late to worry about that. Eventually they were found in the RSM's quarters where she had been sick on a valuable Persian carpet that the RSM had looted. Pincher said we must get the girls home but as his transport was out of action could he have the use of mine. I had no idea what I had, I had arrived at 3 o'clock that afternoon, but he could certainly have it. He went off and came back with a closed-in Jeep. I was putting the girls in but they insisted I came with them. I got in the back and we drove off into a snow storm. After about ten minutes we arrived at a housing estate which appeared to be mostly 5-storey flats. We went in and Pincher and his girl disappeared. I said goodnight to my partner and settled down alongside a large all night burning stove to keep warm. I cannot recall how long I waited but a third female appeared, warmed some milk and put it in a baby's bottle. We just exchanged nods. When Pincher arrived he said I must drive as he was too tired. I took the wheel and said, "Which way?" Although he was driving on the way out, he had no idea. I turned through 180 degrees hoping to see our tracks but a new snow fall had obliterated them. I drove on and came to a level crossing, and I sent Pincher to enquire of the gatekeeper. I could see him through the snow pointing up the railway lines. After we had repeated this twice more, we may have been going round in circles, I could not see the man manning the crossing clearly from the Jeep. At the third attempt, I turned the wheel and we bumped our way up the line until we reached our HQ. On Pincher's directions I parked the Jeep. It was first light, and when the guard saw two majors he called out to the guard to present arms. I was mortified to find that the NCO in charge was the only other rank I had spoken to the day before, and he was the NCO in charge of what was to be my battery office. I can only wonder what stories he told of the battery commander who arrived at 3 o'clock in the afternoon one day, and the next morning came back to barracks bumping up the railway line.

It really was an awful place. I cannot recall what our job was, just to keep an eye on the natives I think. There was no sport and no horse riding. I spent a lot of time doing a correspondence course. I got friendly with the MO, who like me had been posted from an infantry regiment that was to be

broken up. He also held the MC, so we thought ourselves a little superior to the rest. I was troubled with a bad shoulder, the result of trying to keep two huge props from breaking out of the pack when playing rugby. I said I wanted a cure but not using the "witch oils" commonly prescribed as they made you smell and ruined your clothes. He gave me a chit to take to the Hermann Goering Luftwaffe hospital which was nearby. A wonderful place. Goering certainly spoilt his boys in blue. A British nurse read the note and just said, "Wait over there." There I was sitting amongst the other ranks. This never bothered me much, but generally as an officer you were given preferential treatment. In time the place became empty, all six or seven physiotherapists packed up and left (they were operating in a large room). There just remained me and the girl who had received me. She then said quite offhand, "I suppose we must now look at you," then went on to add, "Oh, I think it's tea time." I was nearly ready to explode. Having kept me waiting for a long time she was now off to have her tea. She pressed a bell on the wall and a German girl appeared with the largest silver tray I have ever seen. It was laid for tea for two people, complete with cucumber sandwiches with the crusts cut off. We sat over tea discussing things in general for a bit, and then she said, "I think we will just take a look, perhaps a little massage, and decide on future treatment." This she did. Time was getting on, and I said, "Well that's the day gone, what about the evening?" We fixed things up, I think it was the cinema. I attended the next day, and we went out again in the evening, and thus it went on until my de-mob came through. I discovered I knew both her father and uncle. They owned a sewer pipe making factory and took turns on the road selling their wares around civil engineering contractors and local government. They were always helpful to pupils like Ken and I, not like some travellers who only wanted to see the senior staff. Johnson was the name, I cannot remember her Christian name. She had a fiance, a doctor, who was posted to India, so she volunteered for overseas hoping to be posted to India, but she got sent to Germany. I consoled her by saying she would never meet up in a large country like India, it was very dirty, and once her time was up it would take six months to get back to the UK, not like three days from Germany. We travelled around a lot. I was not officially allowed to use my transport, but I never bothered and no-one questioned me; I was just supervising the area. It was such a terrible posting, it was only this chance encounter that kept me sane.

It was April 1st [1946] that I said farewell and left for the UK. I travelled light as all my gear had been sent home by RTO (Rail Transport), just a hand bag made from the seat cover from a half-track vehicle and a portable radio set.

The radio has its own story. It was an Army Welfare set, given by the Americans to British army units, and I "liberated" it from the 9th to compensate me for a wrong which I believed had been done to me. Whilst 2 i/c to the 9th I did various things before absolutely necessary to facilitate the closing down of the unit. I had both battery imprest accounts and did all of the financial side myself from Regimental HQ. On pay day I drew money from the bank, always in brand new notes in tidy bundles. I gave to the two battery captains what they had asked for to pay the men in their battery. This they signed for. On one occasion, one captain after signing came into our mess for a drink; what happened to the money then and whilst he was at lunch I do not know. After he had "paid out" he found he was 600 marks short. He insisted he was given short measure and refused to make up the deficiency. Chopper, who was now the commander of the regiment, declined to give a decision, and ordered an enquiry. This was sent to the Brigadier in charge of Brigade HQ. Nothing was heard for some time, and I was getting anxious, as I could face difficulties if it was not cleared up before the Regiment was disbanded, or indeed if my demobilisation turned up. I asked Chopper to tackle the Brigadier, which he did. The Brigadier said he was too busy to deal with it, and asked who was the imprest holder. On

my name being given, he said "Bromley will pay". I was required to write a cheque for £15. Please note the rate of exchange, 40 marks to the pound, and also note that £15 was a lot of money at that time, about a week's pay. I was determined to get some compensation and the radio seemed the most obvious at the time.

We took the quick route home via Calais and Dover. This presented a bit of a problem as I knew from pre-war that the powers that be always put recruits in the Customs Hall at Dover, it being the busiest port in the UK it gave them an oportunity to cut their teeth. When we docked, however, and the porters came aboard to carry the officers' baggage, I had an inspiration. I had no luggage for them, but I asked one of them if he would carry a message to Mr Frank Ellis that Major Bromley would like to see him (rank does help on some occasions). Frank, who was in charge of all the porters in the docks, was well known to me as we used to play darts together in the Plough Inn at Hougham. He readily agreed to take the radio to avoid me having to lug it to Aldershot and back. I said that I would collect it from his house, but it was at Church Farm before I was.

The customs men had targetted the officers, leaving the other ranks to stream through. When I declared just one roll of film, he almost demanded to see the camera, "You must have one as you have film". My reply, "Don't you have cameras in England any more?" This upset him, and he asked to see my wrist watch. This had a broad arrow and a number on the back which signified that it was government property. I said, "You can see that was not purchased abroad." He pulled out the contents of my bag, but found nothing - a very despondent customs man.

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

7 Back at work

I can not remember how long I was at Aldershot, just one night I think. I went off towards home carrying a large parcel containing my issue of civilian clothing, we were given a hat, a raincoat or similar, a suit and a pair of shoes. I can not remember if we were given shirts and underclothing, I can not recall wearing any. The raincoat and suit I found useful, but the last I saw of the trilby was the father of a girl friend wearing it. On the way home, I decided to call at Esher to test the water with Christine. Everyone was pleased to see me, but I could see the whole lifestyle of Elsa and Christine had changed in the year since the war finished. They had joined the set that, as they had enough to live on, did nothing useful. This was not my scene, as I was going back to what I was seven years earlier, and had a lot of hard work ahead of me to catch up.

There were no flags out at Church Farm, in fact on occasions I got the impression that dear mother wished I was still in the army. Chiz had the room previously occupied by Frank and I (nothing wrong here), but in the front of the house our parents had one room and the remaining two were designated by mum as Ella's and Mary's. I could understand Ella, but why Mary should want a room I could not imagine as she was married and living in RAF married quarters. In my absence in Germany both Frank and Mary had got married. Frank married a local girl, Hazel. She and I were inseparable for some time when we first started school at the age of 5, but come 18 I was pleased that Frank had picked up with her. Stan was my bosom pal at school. Mary said she could not stand him, and blamed me every time (and it was quite often) that he showed up at the farm. Stan joined the RAF in 1936 and when in 1940 he arranged via his aunt for Harrods to send Mary an expensive 21st birthday present, she stormed into Harrods and demanded that the shop either send him the present or refund his money. Imagine my surprise when mother wrote to me in Germany asking if she should get a wedding present from me to give to them. She chose a fire screen that converted to an occasional table. When I first saw it, not realising it was my present, I commented to Mother what a terrible thing it was. I was not very popular.

I realised something had to be done about accommodation, so I set about making the second rear bedroom habitable. It was the old apple room made larger when the middle room was made into a bathroom. It was a veritable junk room, but I dumped the larger stuff in the carpenter's shop, by this time itself full of junk, and the smaller items into a large cabinet, about six foot long, which I pushed into one corner. Where the sparse furniture cane from I cannot remember, but mother was considerate enough to provide the bedclothes. I noted later when the house was sold that the lampshade I made to brighten the place up was still hanging from the ceiling light. Peace was restored and I was happy in my little den, which was not dissimilar to the normal army quarters.

There was nothing like family to bring one down to earth, but if I had any pretensions this was further dispelled by an electrician who was installing electric wiring into the farmhouse. There was no electricity in the village until 1946, and this was the only brought to the village on account of the Rural District Council planning to build council houses. Power was brought in and I think that Dad

had to make a contribution towards the cost. The electrician was a quiet little man going about his business with no fuss and as he said he was in the army we got talking and I learnt that he knew quite a lot of detail about the invasion of Normandy. So much so that I ventured the remark, "You must have landed very soon after D-day?" "No," he replied, "I landed four days before by parachute." Completely deflated, I retired to the local for my midday pint.

During my leave I thought I might risk another girlfriend, one who I met when in Scotland and had kept in touch by post. She was the receptionist at a hotel in Killen, situated at the south end of Loch Tay. I found her to be even more charming than my memory of her, and we had a wonderful time together. The only fly in the ointment was her mother who had a vehement hatred of the English. How she tolerated me in her home I will never know. On my part, on catching a glimpse of her poking a black-looking fire with a cigarette drooping from her lips, I thought how much like a witch she looked. When Betty and I visited Edinburgh, she ostensibly arranged for her son who lived in the capital to have a day off to show the two of us round the city, but in truth I felt it was to stop us legging it over the border. As much as I tried I could not get Betty to agree to come into England to spend a holiday some time, so I reluctantly struck another girlfriend from my list.

Another was the daughter of the headmaster of the school at Eythorne (or was it Elvington). Somehow he had my address and got in touch asking if I wanted to sell my uniform. He had a part-time job as gardening advisor to the troops in the area, and as he held an honorary officer rank he thought it appropriate to dress in uniform. When I delivered to his house, the daughter was much in evidence, but there was not a vestige of a spark within me, so for a time I gave Eythorne a wide berth.

I should explain that in my last few months at Eythorne, Harry Meigl was the commanding officer and as a headmaster made friends with the local headmaster and played snooker with him in the Tilmanstone Colliery Officials Club which was part of the complex of which we were a part. I was encouraged and invited to spend evenings with the daughter and his wife whilst the teachers endulged their pleasure at the club.

Thus I thought all my past amours were over, but it was not to be as I was soon to find out. I think I started back at Canterbury about the 1st of May [1946]. On my first journey it seemed that 7 years (almost) had not changed anything. Dover Priory station was just the same, all the wayside stations looked as time had not passed. At Canterbury East the same porter said "Good Morning!" and did not ask to see my season ticket. The only difference was that I was half-an-hour late for work, as the hours had changed and the starting time was 9:00 AM. As to staff, we had collected our first lady, a typist, and the architects had formed their own department. My friend Ken was back and there were four pupils who had served their time during the war, or perhaps Ray Brownjohn had already gone to Whitstable.

On my return journey in the evening I found things had changed a little, there were strange faces on the platform. Not surprising, as almost 7 years had elapsed. I did spy one familiar face, a young lady I had known before the war. I approached her thinking that she would now be married, I remembered her as a bit forward, one who wore her skirts an inch shorter than anyone else. I found Claire however much changed, very serious and grown-up. She was not married and did not appear to have a boyfriend, so we teamed up. She worked at the GPO telephone headquarters and although she

travelled to work on an earlier train we always caught the 5.13 home, so it was a convenient meeting point. Things went quite well, I became a regular at her parents' supper table, and Claire was sometimes entertained to tea at Church Farm. Things however were soon to change.

Every morning I travelled with two colleagues, Bill, who managed an ironmonger's shop in Canterbury, and a gentleman who worked in a bank in Faversham. He never told us what his exact position was, but vaguely gave the impression of being a manager. I suspected not. It was a slow train stopping at all the village stations, pulling up at the same position on each platform each day. Looking out at one I could just see the "well" of "Shepherdswell". Few people got on, but one day standing in front of "well" was a vision in a white raincoat, and she climbed into our compartment and settled in the corner seat opposite me. The pseudo-bank manager opened the conversation, but after a few introductory remarks all round I returned to my book. I always carried a text book as on the journey I did most of my studying. The next day exactly the same, same position on the platform and the vision was there. It went on for some days; sometimes I walked with her and Bill for part of the way to work. She also travelled home on the 5.13, but I was always with Claire.

It was Canterbury Cricket Week, the highlight of the Kent CC year. Hospitality tents surrounded the St Lawrence ground. Thursday was Ladies Day, when the Mayor entertained both the two cricket teams to lunch in his tent, and he generally entertained the ladies. Council staff were granted a half day leave on this day provided they attended the cricket.

In conversation Bill said that he hated Cricket Week as he did no business; the pseudo-bank manager just said he hated cricket. The vision said she loved cricket and often went to watch her brothers play. At this I pricked up my ears and took my eyes from my book and asked her if she would like to accompany me on the Thursday afternoon to the game. Lena - you must have guessed - readily agreed, and my fate for the next 40 years was sealed.


Lena Bartlett in WRNS uniform

We had a wonderful afternoon. I was not embarrassed as most men are when they take their girlfriends to watch cricket: "Why are some men carrying sticks?" and "Why is that man in a white

coat waving his arms around?" Lena knew all the terms, runs, wickets, wides, byes, etc, and recognised most of the Kent team, but no-one from the Somerset team although she was Somerset born. We had tea and drinks. I can not remember if we did anything in Canterbury after the game but I remember finding myself on Shepherdswell station. We spend some time on the platform and I am not certain whether on this occasion I walked to Eythorne and then caught the bus to Dover or whether I continued by train leaving Lena to cycle home. We arranged to meet again. I was in seventh heaven, but I had a problem. The morning train was OK, just Lena and I, but on the 5.13 there would be the three of us. [1]

I used to arrive late and hang about outside until the train was about to move off, then I would dash in and scramble into the last carriage, or more often than not the guard's van. The guard (always the same man) was very good about it, knowing what was going on. I think he deliberately planned my downfall. One night he held the last carriage door open until I jumped in and the train was away. When I got seated I found to my horror that both Lena and Claire were in the compartment. Never before or since has the Evening News been read so assiduously. The carriage emptied at Shepherdswell leaving just Claire and I. It was awful explaining to Claire, but I think she understood and took it without fuss. I sometimes think she must have found herself in the same situation before. I was very pleased to hear (from Lena I think) that she went to a young farmers' dance, got fixed up and became a farmer's wife, with family before Lena and I were enagaged. In fact we never did get engaged.

Lena got on with all the family, even Mother which was somewhat remarkable. Dad would normally address any girl I took home with the name of the previous one, but it was Lena from the start. They used to enjoy partnering each other at darts in the Plough Inn.

Meanwhile at work things went smoothly along. The Chief Assistant Mr Mills found difficulty in providing me with enough work, he said I finished everything he gave me so quickly. I think it was the difference between my army life and local government. In local government one took life quite comfortably, In think it was the result of the war, having little to do except the odd bit of clearing up of bomb damage. In the army it was always a race to get things done as soon as orders were given.

One of the continuing jobs I had was restoring the playing fields and recreation grounds. At the beginning of hostilities, or even before, Canterbury, Dover, Folkestone and Ashford were designated Nodal Points that had to hold out in the event of an invasion by Hitler. Fight to the last man, no surrender. In view of this, trench shelters were provided for 100% of the population, and these were to be pulled out and the ground reinstated. To do this we were using prisoner of war labour and the troops that we were given were a very Bolshie lot, commanded by someone who I think was SS. Very little work was done, constant supervision I could not provide, and I suspected also that they had bribed or threatened the civilian driver to pick them up early each day. One day I dressed in my army trousers with a khaki shirt (without badges of rank) and caught them packed up and awaiting transport. I really gave them a going over. It did not seem to have much effect, and there was a lot of mumbling in German at the back. I did not understand a word, but I pointed to them and said, "If I hear another word like that I will have you shot." The message got home. Then the lorry driver turned up a full hour early. I threatened that I would get him the sack if it happened again. Productivity did increase but not a lot. All the costs involved were reimbursed by the Government as war damage, and the costing for the reinstatement was very detailed, time for ploughing, harrowing, seeding, rolling,

etc, and cost of fertiliser and seed. I priced one job and agreed with the garrison major to cost it on a standard rate at so much an acre. The same procedure was used in knocking down concrete blockhouses at so much per blockhouse. I was very conservative in my pricing and made enough money to buy a new compressor out of revenue rather than capital, in short buckshee.

To keep me more fully employed, Mills put me with one of the more recent pupils who was engaged in laying out the roads and sewers for a new council housing estate. Here again we also used German PoW labour, but they were a much better crew. They were not trained people and before each task ie laying pipes or laying bricks we had to teach them. Some were office workers, but they all joined in willingly. All except one, he was so ill he ought to have been in hospital, but his illness was concealed as he did not want to be parted from his friends. Gary put him in charge of their cookhouse as such it was. He heated up what food they brought with them and made the tea. In their time in camp they made wooden toys - typically German - and we broke the rules and allowed them to go off the site and sell them in the town. With the money they bought beer and cigarettes and what food they could buy off ration. They were really grateful and did not abuse our trust. Heaven knows what would have happened if they had taken the opportunity to escape.

In local government changes were taking place, particularly as regards conditions of service, etc. Rather than each local authority having its own conditions there were to be rules etc common to all. The first move was to have a common wage structure, salary scales were compiled for the various disciplines. Engineers, architects, etc, were all to be on APT (admin, professional and technical) grades, and one was put on a certain number (say ATP4), this grade to be such as to reflect his position and experience, juniors on APT1 and Chief Assisstants on perhaps APT10. Committees composed of councillors and staff examined the qualifications (examinations, experience, position) of every person. This person was then placed on a grade. In our department they were reaching to lower grades when Gary Brownjohn and I obtained jobs in London as senior assistants on APT grade 5. Mills our representative on the committee told its members and said there was no need to worry about grading us two. It was to be a choice of grade 1 or 2. One member then asked what grade Mr Mills as Chief Assistant had been given. When he replied grade 5 the chairman said, "I think perhaps it might be better if we placed Mr Mills on grade 6." It was not the only time in my career that my advancement led to improvement in salary for someone else.

It was quite a break going off to London but I could see it could be a short cut to a higher grade. The interview was a bit of a farce, as there were two people being interviewed for the four posts advertised. I think it was a full council - it was certainly in the Council Chamber with the mayor and chief officers raised up on a platform. Each candidate had to speak for, I think, 5 minutes, after which you were subject to questioning. A lady councillor who sat knitting told me I would find accommodation very difficult in Willesden. The Borough Engineer answered for me saying that as I was single it would not be a problem. She then came back with "Do you think you will find a young woman in Willesden?" "Yes," said the BE speaking up again for me, "but none he would want to marry." Interview concluded, post offered. I found a senior member of staff was at one time my house captain at Dover County School and he said he would get digs for me, so when I started I had no worry about getting my head down. It was alright for starters, but it was too commercial with 6 of us, the table at every meal reminded me of my time when I first started in the army. I also found that the son-in-law was using my room as a dark room when I went home at the weekend. I could not work out how my towel got brown patches on it - it must have been the developer. A change was

indicated. I went for bed and breakfast with a retired doctor who had a large house and a small income, so his wife let out two rooms. It was very nice and I was very well cared for. I had great difficulty declining the use of a hot water bottle. I had lunch every day with a number of staff. Two of us were studying in the office at night and my companion worked his charm on the managers of the staff canteen who provided us with a meal when the office closed. The place was kept open for councillors and staff working late. The pub which we used at lunchtime was not a very nice place, at night it was said to be the London HQ of the IRA - pamphlets were circulated freely.

Willesden was a large borough with a huge drainage problem. I have seen after heavy rain heavy manhole covers dancing two feet in the air on water jetting out of the sewer. There were 5 engineers, two trainees and a draughtswoman working full time on the problem.

I did one small scheme and was then given the job of culverting the River Brent in the Stonebridge area. I designed it as a twin box concrete culvert, each box I seem to remember being 8ft wide and 6ft deep, leaving room for some earth cover.

My time on engineering was soon drawn to a conclusion. On the 1947 Town Planning Act coming into force there was little work for the boroughs, most of the power being with the counties, so Middlesex took all of our planners into County Hall. We still had certain things to do, however, and one day Frankie Cave, the number 3 in the department, walked into the drawing office and approached Alan Masters the head engineer on the drainage and said "Masters, you have a planning qualification, you can take over the planning for the Borough." Alan protested at this pointing out that not only was he the head of the drainage section he also held classes for four assistants 3 afternoons a week. Owing to shortage of qualified staff after the war the Borough Engineer had taken on the four to train to become civil engineers. Masters said "Give Bromley the job, he knows all about planning." Admittedly at Canterbury we had administered the 1933 Act and I had assisted the City Engineer when he paraded his reconstruction plan for Canterbury following the damage during the hostilities.

I had no defence so I was saddled with the job. The two main tasks were the Willesden Report and the redevelopment of South Kilburn. The Willesden Report was basically a statement of the Borough as it existed, schedules of industry, office, residential areas, population, journeys to work, type of transport and distances, etc. We had a good start as the Ministry of Information, hard pressed during the war, now had little to do and had sent a team to Willesden to do all the leg work etc and collected a lot of statistics. When the Ministry dissolved the information was just dumped in a room in the Engineers' department. This I had to dig out and write up the report section by section, drawing innumerable pie charts and compiling complicated tables. The idea was that when completed it would form the basis for the Town Plan when it was drawn up. When I had completed each chapter, Frankie Cave would take them home, make a few adjustments and get his wife to re-type them with his and her references at the foot of each one. Needless to say when published Frankie got the acknowledgment and me nothing. I suppose it helped him get his chief's job at Northampton.

South Kilburn was a large area at the south east of the Borough, spilling over into Paddington. The estimated population was 25,000 and the plan was to reduce this to 15,000 with overspill to Harlow and Stevenage (I think - a New Town). Previously two people had had a go at it but neither were too practical. For example no account was taken of existing large high-pressure water mains or gas. Also

there were many lengths of important main electricity cables and telephone lines. The first requirement was to plot all these with the drainage pipes and then draw up a Street Alteration Map, preserving those larger routes which housed important services and showing those which could be dispensed with. One early plan showed the Kilburn Underground station moved. My scheme showed minor alteration to the entrance. A start was made before I left but progress was slow as it was being done using direct labour, ie Council workers.

Although I found work very interesting and instructive, I was never entirely happy with working in London. It made for a very poor social life. I could not play Rugby as if I joined a London club I would finish maybe in time to catch the last train to Dover, leaving time at home limited to the time of the last train on Sunday which got me in my digs well after midnight or catching the 6.08 am train on Monday morning just in time to get my name recorded in the "time book." Actually by courtesy of old man Simmington who recorded us in his copperplate handwriting. One day the Chief came round with the Chairman and demanded to see the signing-in book - it could not be found and we were told to start signing in. This resulted in "Simmie" signing us in as outlined above. Six months later the visiting pair asked to see the book. On seeing the same hand involved in all entries the Chief passed it off, saying "Look sir, this lot have learnt to write and they all went to the same school." The Council then agreed that signing in was old hat and the practice was discontinued. At this time I also had some thoughts regarding my relations with Lena. I can't recall why, but it meant that I think it was for two or three weekends I made some sort of excuse and remained in London. Another five shillings on the rent. Lena was not on the phone at home and communications ceased. Fortunately I soon came to my senses, but how was I to get back in touch? Stupidly I did not think of meeting her when she boarded her train at Canterbury East, she worked all day Saturday. Instead I gambled on the fact that once she thought everything was over she would resume her pastime that she practised before meeting me and attend the dance at the Town Hall. I stationed myself at the bus stop in Ladywell at the side of the Town Hall and waited. Imagine my relief when she alighted from I think the second bus. My approach was met with not exactly warmth but not outright hostility. I crawled so low my chin must have been on the pavement. Gradually she softened up and joy oh joy we were back together again.

The problem still remained that it was still only meeting at weekends but this was soon to be resolved. The Borough Engineer of Dover (Mr Marchant) approached brother Frank who worked in the Public Health Dept and asked after me - we had met at Kent Surveyors meetings and I had accompanied Enderby when he showed off his redevelopment scheme at Canterbury to the Dover councillors and officials - and enquired if I would like to work for him. I met him one Saturday morning and he had a wonderful job lined up, the reconstruction of the sewage system from the town centre to the pumping station at the Western Docks. Here there was to be a partial treatment works and a long sea outfall off Shakespeare Cliff. It was nice to be head-hunted and with a good job, but the snag was the salary offered was one grade below what I was on at Willesden. I summed it all up and thought that salary was not so critical as living would be cheaper as would travelling, so I accepted. The Borough Engineer at Willesden was not at all happy, and said I wanted my head examined, but it seemed to me at that time that all chiefs in the London area thought their job was the only one worth having. There was one big snag, before I took up the job, or at about the same time, there was a council election and the Tories regained control and with their penny-pinching policy suspended all work on the improved drainage. After getting over the shock I was not as disappointed as I should have been (the job would have set me up for my career) as I found the office most

agreeable. Apart from the BE, deputy BE and the Chief Assistant I was the only qualified person, so I could lord it over the drawing office picking what work I chose to do and what to hand on.

My first job was on the sea front which had been badly damaged by bombs and shells. The western half was handed over to the Harbour (they were a quasi local authority) and they decided to repair their buildings providing their offices, a hotel and flats. The Borough on the eastern half agreed to raze their part to the ground and rebuild with modern blocks of flats. My task was to reconstruct as it was on paper then cost out what it would be to reconstruct, and this figure would be the war damage claim to be met by Central Government. It meant a lot of detailed survey work being carried out on site, and on one occasion I was arrested by a young policeman on suspicion of recording items to be stolen during the hours of darkness. At the police station I was immediately recognised by an old copper, in fact a friend of mine who played in our cricket team at Hougham. My accusor was given a rough time and made to look a fool in front of his colleagues. I felt sorry for him. We had little to do with the site after my efforts as it was handed over to private architects to carry out the scheme.

I went on to do the first planning development scheme in the town, the Stembrook redevelopment adjacent to the Market Square. Not a large area but most interesting as it contained shops, a little industry, a site for a new telephone exchange and a prestige block of flats to be designed and built by the Borough. It was at this time I turned into a whistle-blower. The council flats were to be sited alongside the river Dour and facing Pencester Gardens, an excellent site. I did not have much to do on this part, but found some dodgy ground and suggested to the architect that some investigation should be done. He ignored my remarks as did his chief. I approached my chief Basil Goodman the Chief Assistant Engineer and his attitude was: "That's their bad luck, let them get on with it." I knew it would be fatal to build on the ground and if it was done without strengthening measures there would be trouble in the future. So I approached the Borough Engineer Mr Marchant who instructed me to carry out a site investigation. I engaged Le Grande, Sutcliffe and Gel (I think that was how it was spelt). I also dug around and excavated some ancient timbers. The museum people investigated and declared them to be Roman. We were digging in what had been the harbour used by the Romans during their invasion. Le Grande, Sutcliffe and Gel confirmed we were in silt and it was necessary to drive piles to a depth of I think 15 or 20 feet into the chalk below. It was Saturday when this report came in and it caused a little chaos. The Chief Architect's Assistant and my boss the Chief Engineering Assistant were sent for and Mr Marchant said he had intended to go to Committee on Friday next and say he was going out to tender for this long-awaited prestige block of flats and he had no intention of changing his mind. He would merely add that some bad ground had been found but progress would not be held up as we would be going out to tender for piled foundations at the same time. Basil came to me not best pleased and said "You got us into this, you'd better get us out." I said it would require help from him. I was prepared to start on Sunday but not Saturday afternoon as I was due to play cricket and we had no reserve. He looked out of the window and said it looked a good day for a sail (most people in the office had boats) and he would see me on Sunday. I spent the rest of the morning getting all the drawings, and had time to fix the pile positions and determine the beam sizes. Having secured a key to the office I went off to cricket. By the time Basil arrived on Sunday morning I had worked out most of the beam loadings. Basil said he would work out the amount of steel in each beam and then hand over to me to determine the rod sizes and detail position, bendings, etc. When I got the first calculation I could not fit the steel into my beam sizes which I knew from experience were about right, I questioned Basil about what constants he was using (steel and concrete strength). He replied that he did not know, as he used graphs. When questioned he said he used the graphs when

he was a pupil studying for his exams. I told him steel had improved immensely since those days and we should calculate using the new figures. Basil did not know, or had forgotten, what to do so I said I would work out a few and compare the results with his figures. This I did and said to Basil "You go on as you were and I will reduce your figure by one third before detailing" - this we did. Sometimes I wonder what an enquiry would have made of that if later for whatever reason the building became unsafe. "The Chief Assistant calculated the amount of steel required and then his assistant reduced the answers by a third." The flats are still there.

The most interesting job I did however was not one of civil engineering but structural engineering and architectural: the restoration and furnishing of the Maison Dieu House as a public library. The building, built in 1665, was used by the Agent Victualler to the navy until 1815, used by the Ordnance Dept until 1834, and after a spell as a private residence it was bought by the Borough Council and used as offices. Badly war damaged and ravaged by death watch beetle it was abandonned in 1949. It was listed as an Ancient Monument and the Council were under pressure from Central Government to repair it, but decided not to do so until it was agreed it could be put to useful work as a replacement for the public library destroyed by enemy action. It was a long and complicated job which was carried out by direct labour. Fortunately we had a first-class foreman, a Mr Hubbard, who was my right-hand man (more details of the work are described in an appendix).

Two further interesting points are worthy of recording in connection with the rebuilding. I tried all over the country to find bricks to match the 2-inch ones in which the north wall was built, without success. Then someone said to me, "Have you tried Hawkinge?" My reply was "I have never heard of Hawkinge bricks." "You should do, Hawkinge is almost the next village to you." I went to Hawkinge and not far from the RAF station I found a little brickworks making handmade 2-inch bricks which you could hardly tell from the originals. I also obtained a small quantity with which I built a fireplace at Church Farm to fill up the space in the living room when the kitchener was taken out. Also at the time we stripped the rear roof of the house to repair the roof timbers. The tiles were antique Kent peg tiles which Dad sold to Dover Corporation to be used in repairing the roof of Maison Dieu House, again an excellent match. The price obtained paid for the new roof at Church Farm on which we used new concrete tiles. I did not fix the price to be paid.

For the official opening of Maison Dieu House we needed a silver key which the person performing the ceremony would keep as a souvenir. We removed the wooden bound lock from the antique front door for the locksmith to make a key. On refitting the lock it would not work with the silver key. After several attempts we gave up. On the day of the opening I set the lock at open and stationed a man behind the door with a piece of string tied to his wrist. This was threaded through the window next to the door. When the wife of the Lord Lieutenant of the County said "I declare this Library open" I jerked the string and the man opened the door and concealed himself behind it until there were sufficient people in the room for him to mingle.

Another job that I was pleased with was one of sea defence. The littoral drift of shingle in the English Channel is from west to east, but when a block ship was sunk in the western entrance during World War I this was reversed within the harbour and the shingle moved from east to west. The eastern jetty at the entrance to the Eastern Docks lost all its protecting shingle and got into a very bad state. An attempt had been made to bring shingle from the Western, Clock Tower end. A railway line ran along

the sea front and it was used amongst other things to bring shingle to be dumped at the Castle jetty. A man used to walk in front of the train carrying a red flag. It was all in vain, and a length of sea wall also collapsed. Supervision was at odd times as the work was "tidal". At night I used my car and charged 9d each trip expenses: 6d return into town and 1.5d each way on the town service. The pay department did not want to pay, saying, "You have to come to work anyway." "Not at 3 o'clock in the morning you block heads." So I received the princely sum of 9d for having my beauty sleep disturbed for 2-3 hours. Today I would think it would be £50 to £100 per visit. At about the time the work was completed the block ship was lifted and the drift reversed and today shingle almost reaches the tips of the sea wall.

I was thinking it was time to move on for promotion to Chief Assistant. I could not see Basil getting a Deputy's job, and as to Mr Hill, the Deputy, moving, no. We had already got a new chief, Mr Bevan, replacing Mr Marchant who went on to Wandsworth. I was quite happy at Dover and Lena seemed content. She was spoiled at home, her mother doing everything for her. Every morning after preparing her breakfast she would hand Lena a clean handkerchief as she walked out of the door. We did give some consideration to trying to get rented accommodation (housing was very critical after the war) but when she inspected a flat in Folkestone Road she was so disgusted she gave up. I converted a house at the water pumping works into flats and Mr Marchant said he thought he could get me one, but when the Town Clerk got to hear of it he proclaimed that he had more important members of his staff, and the Clerk's work was law, so no joy for Lena and me. Before applying for a more senior post I really needed to complete my exams and become a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers. I was a Chartered Engineer having passed the examination of the Institute of Municipal Engineers, "Civils" was in my view a "snobbish" qualification but one that gave you an advantage when applying for top posts. The third and final part C comprised submission of plans, specifications, etc of your own work. This was followed by an interview mostly to discuss your work and this was followed in the afternoon with a three-hour essay on any subject the examiner chose to give you. I had a very nice examiner, the Borough Engineer of Southend-on-Sea. He was very interested in sea defence, more particularly as his Superintendent on this work had just been given time for using timber from the firm to make beach huts for sale. It was quite easy to write-off supplies with work of this nature: lost due to storm, high tides, etc. One man I knew started his own civil engineering business with plant that had been lost during sea defence work at Sandgate during the war. The interview did not start well. Firstly he pointed out that I had not strictly complied with the regulations. My reply was to the effect that the rules must have changed as I had complied with the instructions given to me when I was notified as having passed part B, four years previously. The rules had been changed. Next my drawings had not been signed by my boss Mr Marchant. He had had them in his office for weeks and it was at the last moment before the closing date that I got his secretary to retrieve them and I hastily posted them off without checking. All seemed to be forgiven and my selected essay was of a general nature on coast defence works. I had just read "Winds, Waves and Maritime Structures" by the man who built Dover Harbour so I had plenty of material. The next day Phillip Marchant asked me how I had fared. I said I thought I would fail as my drawings had not been signed by him. He immediately phoned the Secretary of Civils apologising and stressed that he hoped he had not prejudiced my chances of success. The next day the Secretary phoned to say that I had passed, thus I got my result 6 weeks in advance of the normal time. Phillip was always one to go to the top with his personal charm.

Returning to moving, I applied for three or four Chief Assistant's jobs, all offering housing

accommodation. At Barnes I had to talk my out of it, as the job was just nothing, no work worth wasting time on. Shrewsbury got down to two of us and we each had a second interview. Not much more could be said and I was asked what sport I played. "Cricket and Rugby," I replied. "No fishing?". Came my reply, "I have no interest in fishing whatsoever." "He would do if he pulled a 5lb trout from the Severn," the BE said to the Chairman. End of interview. At Lowestoft, Harold Wilson, the Secretary of the Board of Trade, was paying a visit which caused our interviews to be delayed until the afternoon. Being a "B" for Bromley I was first in and members, some quite merry, were taking their places as I spoke, and one entered the room as I went out. One member, a butcher, was furious about the procedure as be favoured me (apparently I was runner-up). He drove me down to the station which enabled me to get home that evening.

I was going by car to Esher and Lena had the day off to come with me. There were to be three interviews, one in the morning with the Engineer and Surveyor (Esher was not a Borough with a Borough Engineer), another in the afternoon with a committee, and the finalists with full Council in the evening. Lena and I teamed up with another candidate who knew me, but I could not recall where we had been together, and over lunch I had to ask him. "We were in the same class during the whole time we were at Dover County School," was his reply, and he did not seem too pleased.

He and I were doing quite well and got through to the full Council. He was quite confident the job was his, but he had one question too many. Charles Alderton the Engineer asked him when he passed his final exam (the Testamer) for the Municipal Engineers. He had not sat the exam, getting his membership by virtue of passing the exam for Civils. Alderton was of the opinion (with which I agree) that the Testamer was the only appropriate exam for a Municipal Engineer, and I was offered the job. When "any questions" came up, I asked about the promised accommodation. The Chairman laughed and said "We do not offer accommodation for single people." My reply was to the effect that I would be married before taking up the appointment. Fortunately they did not ask the date, but promised me a flat "of some description". Mr Alderton took me to his office at the end of the meeting and when we emerged into the car park in front of the office, Lena, who had been left alone as the unsuccessful candidates departed, approached and I introduced her as Miss Bartlett. "But you will be Mrs Bromley before coming to Esher," Charles Alderton said. I kicked Lena on the leg and she made a noise that could be interpreted as "Yes", and that was my proposal. A good deal of the time on the way home was spent on two wheels, we were both so delighted with events.

[1] 1946-08-08

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

8 Up the ladder

The next morning at breakfast was a different story. Mother asked how I was to live at Esher and I told her Lena and I were to marry and we had been offered accommodation. "But you cannot get married in the month's notice you have to give." "Yes we can, in a Register Office." Mother's face went black. "Only pregnant women and divorcees use such places." Lena was quite friendly with her vicar as she and David (her brother) played badminton with him, so I asked her to have a word with him. He had a word with the Bishop of Dover who referred us to a Canon Elnor in Dover who heard our story and said it would be OK. I seemed the important thing was the money for the licence, fortunately I had my cheque book with me. We kept the whole thing secret as we had no time to organise a wedding party, only close relatives knew. We both resigned our jobs on Friday and we were married on Monday July 7th 1952 at Eythorne church, the witnesses being my brother Frank and Lena's brother-in-law Jack Westgate. I had hidden my car with Mr Anderson who had a market garden next to our HQ when I was stationed at Eythorne. Frank drove us away from the reception to my car so we avoided having old boots, etc, tied to the back. We spent the first night at Sevenoaks in a hotel in very nice grounds, in which we spent some time in order to avoid being seen as possible honeymooners. Lena however found her case was stuffed with confetti.

Our wedding photo

I cannot remember where we toured, but on the second Wednesday we booked into the hotel on Taggs Island, which is situated in the Thames across the water from East Molesey, which is next door to Esher. The reason being I had been in touch with John Apps, the deputy at Esher who was leaving, and if he managed to move out as planned on the Thursday he would fix it with the Housing Manager that I could have the key to his ground-floor flat. All went according to plan and after a quick check Lena and I went to Kingston and spent a glorious day at Perrings buying all the furniture we needed. I had not spent the gratuity I received on leaving the army. We also spent a little money in Bentalls. Perrings effected delivery on Saturday morning which was convenient and very surprising. On the Friday we bought a gas cooker in the Gas Co showroom in Esher. When I suggested delivery on the Saturday morning the manager who was dealing with us was horrified. "Sir, if we have none in our Wandsworth store we will need to send to the manufacturers." "But that is the one I have bought." "Oh, no, that is the showroom model." On signing the cheque, I said, "That is OK, providing it comes on Monday at the latest," and walked out of the shop, leaving the manager gasping at us as we went

through the door. After receiving the furniture on Saturday, we drove to Lena's mother's to collect her "bottom drawer". We were leaving on Sunday evening, the old Singer loaded to the gunwhales, when Lena's mother hurried out of the house and dumped her sewing machine into Lena's lap, the only space available, saying you will need that for the curtains. Lena's father said, "That's the last we shall see of that in this house," and how right he was. With chassis almost touching the tyres we crawled back to Esher. In the morning the tenant in the first-floor flat offered us water to make some tea as we had no means of boiling any. When I took up a saucepan she said, "Why not just bring the teapot?" I replied we do not have one until Bentalls deliver on Tuesday. I went to work on Monday, and the gas man came, and miracle upon miracle he brought the necessary equipment to connect it up and Lena walked into Esher centre and bought liver and bacon, and cooked me my first meal of our married life. Perhaps that is why I am still fond of liver and bacon with fried onions.

I spent all of the morning with the Engineer and Surveyor, Mr Alderton. He had a desk piled high with files and from them explained what each entailed. I took them all away to my office and worked through them to get an idea of what work was on, or should have been in progress, and thus planned the drawing office programme. The drawing office was in a very poor state, there appeared no-one I could rely on. I was most unpopular as everyone thought one of the seniors should have been promoted, but this was the last thought in Mr Alderton's mind. Ray Maple the office "candidate" was far from co-operative in the office, but strangely enough outside of work we got on very well, we played cricket together, drank together, and shared an allotment.

The staff generally I graded as either incompetent or bone idle, things had been dealt with very badly. I once asked the Housing Manager to refrain from entering the drawing office as one member of staff, an Arsenal supporter, would argue for ages with him, a Chelsea supporter and part-time referee. Fortunately we had little serious engineering work to do, mostly housing estate roads and sewers, but it was good for me as it got me into management, good training for my future career as Chief Officer. Lena and I had a quiet social life, enjoying each other's company in our new life together. We did make friends with the sewage works manager and his wife, he was the only one in the whole of the council offices that had a TV. That first winter we spent many hours with them. I think the programme started at 7 o'clock, finishing at 11 or perhaps 12, with an interval about half-way through. It was significant how high the demand for electricity was at this time, everyone making tea or other drinks.

After almost two years, Nigel was born. We secured a place in a small hospital which had been Jewish before being taken over by the then new National Health Service. Some of the old customs remained. It issued each new patient with a brochure, one paragraph of which went something like this: "For boys, circumcision arranged with or without ritual. Glasses supplied, but not the wine." "If it's a boy, why not try a little ritual," I asked Lena, but she did not find it a bit funny and firmly decided to have nothing to do with it. It was a very good hospital and Lena was thoroughly spoilt, doing absolutely nothing except breast-feed Nigel. As a consequence, when she came home after more than a week she thought she could do everything. Unfortunately, she went down with breast fever. The first week was a nightmare with the doctor coming each day and the nurse twice. Each morning after attending to Lena's needs, who was confined to bed, I bathed and dressed Nigel, he continued fortunately to breast feed, and then wheeled him round to Mrs Renee Philpott, the sewage works manager's wife. At lunch I collected him and again attended to him and Lena. If someone was taking Nigel out in the afternoon I would leave him in his pram by the front door. Imagine doing that

today. In the evening I was again fully occupied. After about a week I was feeling very down, and when Ella, who was working at Richmond, came to visit and asked me if she could help in any way, I just said I would sit down and would she make me a cup of tea. [1]

Incidentally it is worth recording that Charles Alderton sent Lena flowers. We were the only members of staff to be so honoured.

Some time before Nigel was born we made friends with the Alexanders, Alex was the new Deputy. He had always been around the Richmond area and kept in touch with his old friends. We went to several very nice evenings, dances, etc, with Nancy and him. On one occasion when Lena was pregnant she wore a red evening gown and looked gorgeous, Alex was transfixed by Lena's appearance and later when we were going to a dance Alex would always ask Lena to wear the red dress. It made me a very proud husband.

As for work, there was not any exciting work to do - just one housing estate after another either to be designed and built for council housing or private estates to be supervised to ensure they were up to specification in order that we could adopt the roads and sewers for future maintenance once completed. I designed a bridge to connect Cigarette Island which was in the Thames opposite Hampton Court with our side of the river, but it was never built.

We had a very odd set-up in the Engineer's Dept, which was something left over from 1933 when Esher was expanded to take in East and West Molesey and Cobham. One of the senior officers who did not get the Chief's job, or retired, held the post of District Surveyor. As such he controlled all the labour on the highways and drainage, so apart from any new work I had nothing to do with it. Quite suddenly it seemed he upped and left and went to the Thames Conservancy. Adverts for a replacement brought in no fitting candidate. Meanwhile I was asked to take over the work. No-one in the drawing office I considered capable of doing the job, so I was saddled with it. It was annual estimate time which made me very busy, so a lot of the extra work was done at home. Lena was very helpful as she was good at figures and her adding up of long columns of figures was always correct. Estimates for trunk roads required a special procedure, as did classified roads for Surrey County Council. These were completed on time. I also had to supervise three area foremen, who controlled the work force on the roads and sewers. It was fortunate for the Engineer and Surveyor that I had experience of the work at Dover and Canterbury and everything went smoothly.

Unable to replace the District Surveyor, the chief got the Council to revise the Establishment and a No 3 for the whole office was to be appointed covering Architects and Planners as well as my section. I put in for the post but was not appointed, although given an interview. Alderton explained to me that the Committee (or perhaps him) did not think I had sufficient experience. Imagine my disgust when I found I had to show the man appointed how to do the job. There was nothing difficult about it, but I knew and he did not. In spite of everything I got on well with the chap appointed. Johns was his name, and we went to the Derby togther. We both had to work in the morning - we worked alternate Saturdays at that time. Lena had gone with the Maples and the Philpotts. It was the year that Gordon Richards won the Derby. I was not on him, but backed Pink Horse which came third. I heard later that Lena had won but the bookie tried to swindle her and Ray Maple had a stand-up row with him. Just up Ray's street.

The appointment of the No 3 however unsettled me. I thought I could not trust Mr Alderton after the incident and began to think about moving on with my eye on a Deputy's job.

I can not remember anything about short lists for this post. I get confused I think with interviews for Chief Assistant. I remember clearly however my short list at Leamington Spa. It was a very pleasant affair and I fell in love with the place from the start. It was all quite informal. In the morning we saw the Borough Surveyor and then we were handed over to Michael Pearce who was to show us the flat provided for the Deputy. I say we as Lena and Nigel came with me.

Lena had nothing against the move although I realised that she thought the Midlands were akin to the Frozen North and what is more twice the distance from her mother. She was however a bit taken aback when she saw the flat. It was part of a large house which after it became outdated for the upper classes had been a school. Taken over by the Council it had been converted to four flats for staff.

The Deputy's domain was the only one using the front entrance which had a large portico with ionic columns. Then there were large double doors opening to an outer hall about 8 feet square. Then more double doors in a glass screen which brought you into the main hall, again 8 ft wide and about 30 ft long. On the left was the living room, 24 ft by 24 ft with a very large bay window and another 4 ft wide. On the right was the main bedroom 20 ft by 20 ft with another bay window 12 ft wide and again a second window. Next was a very large kitchen, followed by another large bedroom and at the end of the hall was the bathroom, just a large space in which bath, basin and WC were lost. Well not quite, as the WC was so placed that if the door was left open any caller at the front door could not avoid seeing it. All ceilings were 13 ft 6 high and to curtain the place required 105 yards of material. In spite of all this Lena did not demur even in face of having to make all the curtains. It was a lovely place in the summer, but with no central heating it was unbearable in the winter. In fact for the worst months we moved the two armchairs into the kitchen and closed down the living room. The kitchen had an open fire with a back boiler to provide the hot water.

I can only remember meeting the Chairmen of the Highways and the Water and Drainage Committees. There was certainly no Council meeting and I can not recall meeting any of the other candidates. There were some, as Michael Pearce said he had to show them the flat. I was told that day that I was appointed and we drove back to Esher quite happy with our day's work. "Bishops Move" gave us the best price for the move. The only snag was they wanted two days. They loaded up on Thursday and were due to unload on Friday. We spent Thursday night with the Philpotts who had moved from their council house to a flat in a large house which was very similar to ours at Leamington. We started out early, but Bishops were ahead of us. They obtained the key from the Town Hall and by the time we arrived they had put everything in place exactly as we wanted it. They were indeed experts. When we arrived they were sitting in the van waiting for the cheque. As they had done so much, including putting up the beds, we were able to settle in very quickly and found time on Saturday to go to Coventry to buy the curtain material from Owen and Owen. Rather cheaper than Leamington shops, but we soon got into the habit of shopping in Leamington. It was very good, and you only had to say you lived in the Kenilworth Road and you could get as much credit as you needed. There were a few Bromleys in the town, all seemed to be well off so I suppose we were regarded as one of the family by the tradesmen. Monthly accounts were sent out, and one was given a discount if it was settled within 14 days, and back would come the invoice receipted with a stamp.

We were definitely living in company of the upper classes. My Ford Popular looked out of place on the front drive. We quickly got into the swing of things. We were told before we moved that you are not accepted fully if you were not born in the place but we found in our case not so. Lena made friends with Margaret Pearce (wife of Michael) who occupied one of the flats. [2]

Most days Lena wheeled Nigel, and later Clive, the length of Kenilworth Road into the town centre - The Parade. There seemed to me to be two ladies' coffee circles, one at the Royal Pump Rooms, which was very top drawer, and one at Burgess and Colbournes for the lesser lights. Lena was definitely B & C.

At the office, work started at a much more gentle pace than at Esher. I was allowed to ease myself into the job. Most of the Engineer's department was situated on the ground floor of the Town Hall and in a nearby annexe which housed Planning and Building Inspectors. My office was on the second floor of the Town Hall with only the drawing office to keep me company. It was very isolated, the first floor holding the Council Chamber, Mayor's suite, committee rooms and a large assembly hall. Windows were high up so I could not see out, other than to view a pigeon or two who nested on the cill and looked in. Ideal for getting down to work with no interference. This was a good thing as I found a few problems to sort out. I did not form a good impression of my two predecessors in the post. The last one had obtained a post as managing director of a civil engineering company in the town which had been formed by the biggest building contractor in the area. For his last months as deputy his thoughts and energy had been with the new company.

One member of staff was absent from the office for some weeks. He was an architect who had designed new changing rooms for the Victorian swimming pool (all the locals called it a "bath"). There were also major alterations to the pool. The reason for his absence was the fact that he, in conjunction with a private quantity surveyor, was preparing the bill of quantities etc for the work. When he returned to the office he presented me with a very large volume which I worked through rather carefully. I spotted one or two things I did not care for but reasoned that they could be sorted out as the work progressed. One item however did surpise me. It said in effect "Allow the PC some of £5000 for the provision of pre-stressed and post-tensioned concrete balcony". This meant that a specialist firm was to design and construct this balcony at the same time as the main contractor was working; this amounted to about a fifth of the total contract. I enquired of the architect the name of the firm. His reply shook me to the core. He said he did not know. The engineering drawing office had designed one using in situ method but the Borough Engineer had rejected it as it would take too long and would obstruct the main contractor too much. The period of contract was from 1st December to Easter, all too short as it was. I asked the BE about it and he said he had done nothing as he thought my predecessor had dealt with the matter. In fact nothing had been done and we were going out to tender for a start in two months. Definitely an emergency. It meant all rules and standing orders would have to be by-passed. Things such as advertising for applicants interviewing and selecting of a suitable firm, acceptance of tenders, etc.

Fortunately I had got to know two young engineers who had graduated from Cambridge and being in a hurry to get to the top declined junior posts in a consulting engineer's office. They formed a limited company and as such could operate outside the rules of consulting engineering. They said they could do all the work and would get a firm capable of making and erecting the balcony.

When looking at their design I was skeptical about one right angle in the main cantilever brackets and said I wanted to have one tested to destruction. The two designers did not like this very much but I insisted. The architect and I travelled up to Leigh in Lancashire to view the test. The bracket failed at "safe load". In case this is thought satisfactory I would point out that in work of this kind one builds to three times safe load. The trouble was that at this particular angle there was not enough concrete to house the loops required in the steel reinforcing. The "bright" engineers spoke of the "classical loop" which referred to the Code of Practice which gave rules for the diameter of the steel bar which varied according to the loading. I was then told that many of the brackets had already been cast and what is more it was thought to be very difficult to amend the design to get the necessary strength. I cannot recall whose idea it was, the Cambridge graduates or mine, but a steel rectangle was designed about 15 inches square. This was bolted to the inside of the right angle in the concrete to give the additional strength. Fortunately they were disguised as the brackets for supporting the slatted seating which was initially for three sides only of the pool but had to be built into all four.

A short time into the contract, our achitect could anticipate further problems arising and got himself another post. I could not see getting anyone with sufficient experience to take over and decided to supervise the work myself. Many snags were found but fortunately we had a good local contractor. The job was satisfactorily completed but some way over the contract sum. This was forgotten when the pool was re-opened by our local MP Sir Anthony Eden. He did shake my hand and say something like "Well done".

It was about this time that Lena became pregnant and we (I say we) had to attend pre-natal classes. They were well-run and a midwife was appointed. At this time the policy was to provide hospital treatment for the first born or for mothers who had previous difficulties. The one allocated to us was very efficient and came to inspect the premises, and asked (no, demanded) to have additional heat in the bedroom and a table with a bare board top, no varnish or PVC. Fortunately our kitchen table was "utility" as was all furniture manufactured after the war and just fitted the bill. Going the rounds in the area was a lady who would come and help out in the house, say a fortnight before the birth, help the widwife at the berth, and then carry on with the housework and assisting with the baby for about a fortnight after the birth. The period depended on her next appointment. Mrs Fox was an absolute gem, very pleasant, very clean and looking very smart in her clean white coat. For the birth Nigel was well cared for by Margaret Pearce in her upstairs flat. I had the day off, but as was the practice (in fact the midwife demanded it) I kept out of the bedroom. Half-way through proceedings Mrs Fox appeared and said "The midwife wants the doctor". I phoned and he came almost immediately and asked me to boil water so that he could sterilise his equipment. He went in and came out after a while and asked me to boil up again. "All finished?" I said. "No", was his reply, "dropped the damn needle." The midwife was furious and words were spoken. I explain Lena wanted a stitch or two. Soon after the birth I collected Nigel and took him in to see his new brother. "How do you like your brother?" I asked. "Don't like it, put it back," was his response, as he stormed out of the bedroom. Thus was Clive's welcome into the world. After this things went very well; no complications this time and we were very fortunate as Mrs Fox stayed on for a fortnight.

Work went very well. I found the Councillors very easy to get on with and the BE let me get on with things very much as I wanted. Lena continued with her trips into town and made friends very easily; quite contrary to what we had been told about the locals. However her close friend was Margaret

Pearce. They played badminton together and went to evening classes. One year they did woodwork and Lena made a coffee table and a workbox. I think she played her cards right with the instructor as the joints looked much too good for a novice. Husband Michael and I used to go out to the pub quite often. We used to babysit for each other, but it was mostly Michael sitting for us. He said he liked it as he could get on with his studies. He had no TV as he said it was bad for the children and studies, but I found he always knew what was on ours when he "studied" at our flat. Lena insisted on a telly when Clive was born, "I cannot stand another cricket season without one". I found however she usually came to matches as they were a good crowd and Nigel and Clive behaved well. There was one little incident, at the Solihull club house a crowd of the home team were playing on the one-armed bandit with little luck. They paused to get a drink, Clive nipped in with just one coin, a sixpence or a shilling and got the jackpot, with money all over the floor. We hastily picked it up and headed for the door.

We met the Braebaums playing cricket and we became great friends, and we acquired another babysitter. Margaret and Michael were not very socially minded but we went out quite a bit with Roy and Edna. The Mayor's New Year Ball was always a great event. The Town Hall was always decorated up for the Mayor's Christmas Party and the decorations were retained for New Year. As a deputy I broke with tradition and was invited to the Mayor's party. This upset the other deputies and the next year they were included and also for the Mayor Making lunch.

It was not all pleasure as we were very busy particularly on the water supply side. This was the BE's favourite and he kept it very much to himself, but he got very involved with consultants on an impounding reservoir on the river Leam and a storage reservoir on the supply side. This was in my favour, as we still had a lot of work to do on the treatment side. We were taking more water from the river to keep up with demand and the work was designed in the office. The treatment works were on a very small site, one time just a well and pumping plant. This was still running with old-fashioned pumps powered by steam boilers. We had to squeeze in settlement tanks, pressure filters and tertiary tanks. It was a feat of engineering in itself to get in the 32-foot long pressure filters. A most interesting job and I used it to get elected a Member of the Institution of Water Engineers. There was no examination, you had to show your competence in design, construction and management. One also had to have passed the Civil Engineer's examinations including a specialist part in Water Engineering.

We also carried out major improvements at the sewage works. Michael Pearce was in charge. Very similar technique, just different water.

Refuse was disposed of in an incinerator and the heat raised steam which powered electric generators which drove pumps which pumped sewage from the town to an open spot about two miles out of town. Very economical when installed as every household burnt coal which produced clinker and ashes plus coal dust, but as coal changed to gas we had to supplement steam with electricity from the mains. This made my estimating tricky as we did not know how much we would need to purchase. When things looked bad I would have to have a word with Fred the foreman, but his answer was always the same, "You can't steam on bloody paper". The furnaces got into a bad state and had to be relined. This meant shutting down for a time and finding a site to tip the rubbish. The farmers I approached all seemed keen at first but refused in the end. I am not sure but I think I finished up at the Southern cement works where they were filling one of the quarries already worked out.

Returning to domestic issues, it was time to think about school for Nigel. We saw the headmistress at Rugby Road School, a state school, and she indicated to us that he could start in the new school year when he was four-and-half. I was shocked when she sent for us to attend, I found about six mums there. Mrs McDonald, I think that was the name, kept us waiting, and then said "I do not know why you are here as I have not any places". I reminded her of her promise some months previously, but it was no good. Had I left it and had a word privately I think I could have got Nigel in, she got on better with men than women. Nigel was most upset as he really wanted to go to school and he was not a joy at home; quite often I would come home for lunch and find Nigel confined to his room and Lena in tears. Fortunately at Christmas we gave him an electric train set and this kept him amused as he quickly found how to wire up the electric points and the signals. At some point in the new year he was admitted [3]. Everything seemed to go well. He always went off happy and was smiling when Lena picked him up. Imagine my shock when I asked his teacher if he could stay to lunch one day as Lena wanted to come somewhere with me. The teacher said, "It's all right if you want something but you never bother to see us when we are having trouble with your offspring". I did not apologise but was quite strong with her, telling her Nigel was always pleased to go to school and always smiling when he came out. It was her job to see us if she had a problem. Apparently Nigel had kicked and bit her. She gave way, and we became good friends. We were a bit worried when he reached the top class. The teacher was old and was said not to be very nice to the children, so after about two weeks Lena met her at the gate and asked how Nigel was getting on. She misread Lena's question and said, "You mothers are all the same. You have your children at school for five minutes and you want to know if they will pass the 11-plus. Well I can tell you that Nigel will either win a scholarship to Warwick School (a public school) or get to Leamington College". Nice to know, but not the answer to Lena's question. Apparently she was completely different with children in her own class.

[1] April 1954
[2] July 1955
[3] 1959

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

9 The top

I enjoyed my time at Leamington and therefore did not think of looking for promotion for some time. There was a lot of talk of the formation of a South Warwickshire Water Board, a combination of all the local authority works. The BE was very interested but only if he could be the Engineer Manager, ie the top man. The alternative would be an organisation on local government lines, ie with a Clerk and then the engineer would be second in line. I knew I stood a good chance of getting the BE's position if Innes Jones went, but there were too many imponderables. First the Board had to be formed with the Engineer as top man, secondly Innes Jones had to get it, and thirdly I had to get the BE's position. I could not risk it for too long as I was getting past the age when most top jobs got filled. I got hold of the Municipal Year Book and extracted the names of all the authorities where I would wish to work. Nothing north of Leamington. Lena never complained but I knew she considered anything further up the map as the frozen north. Also going south would be getting nearer to her mother. Population to be between 50 and 150 thousand with a full list of responsibilities: planning, parks, recreation and housing. I can not remember which authorities I put in for, I get confused with Chief Assistant and Deputy posts. With some hesitation I put in for Chertsey and was disgusted not even to get a shortlist. Tunbridge Wells comes to mind, where I declined to go for interview after Lena and I had looked the place over, housing, education, etc. I asked the clerk to give my apologies to the Committee. This he declined to do, just said, "I will just report that you have not shown up". Nice man, good escape.

Walton was completely different. I knew from the start it was the place for us. Not only did we already have friends, the Alexanders and the Philpotts, but everyone else was so nice. On the night of my appointment Lena (with Clive) and I had a very jolly party at the Alexanders with the Philpotts and we drove home late very happy.

Just before leaving Leamington I had a very different but interesting job refurbishing the Pump Room tea rooms. I had a builder Frank Wallsgrove as a consultant, he taught Art and Design at the Technical School. It was decided not to close the place, but as it was so large to do half at a time. It worked out very well as the dear ladies enjoyed watching the workmen as they had their coffee. In fact trade improved. It was a high-class job, I cannot recall how many books of gold leaf we used on the capitals of the columns. The wallpaper was some astronomical price, £5 a piece springs to mind. Compare this with maid's bedroom quality at one shilling. Frank and I visited what must have been all the carpet manufacturers in the Midlands before choosing Brintons. I took one of the samples home to show Lena and the remainder were collected without comment before I took it back. It made a very nice fireside rug. We also made several visits to furniture manufacturers in the area. We received many compliments on our work, most of it due to Frank's good taste. On leaving I established another first in that the Council gave me a leaving present, presented by the Mayor at a Council meeting.

Walton-on-Thames

Looking for a house in Walton was a bit of a problem, largely due to the high prices in Surrey compared with the Midlands, about 25% more. I did not appreciate this at first and at the price bracket I gave the agents we were offered some houses in roads that Lena would not even drive down. One morning before we moved, the post brought an offer that looked attractive and listed as in Oatlands Park. Lena, Clive and I dashed down to find it an old house badly refurbished with three new houses squashed in what was originally a fair-sized plot. Also it was approached from Oatlands Drive at the far end of Anderson Road, built 70 to 100 years ago and mostly terraced housing. I took the opportunity to call and see Mr Lister, whose position I was taking over. In the course of conversation he mentioned that his daughter June was moving and was selling her house in the environs of Burwood Park. "It is worth about 3½ thousand but she will probably want 4½". At that he called his deputy Samuel (Sam to all) and told him to take me to June's house. As soon as we drove into the road, Lena turned to me and said "Why have you not brought me here before?" It was May and the trees and shrubs were in flower, the road looked a picture. The house did not stand out, that is if you ignored the black front door, garage and side gate. Decorations were very mucky for a 4-year-old house, but Lena was blind to everything. This was the home she wanted. The price, however, was far from 4½ thousand, six thousand three hundred. On negotiation with the husband I got it down to £5800, which I could manage. The opening salary was £1750, which meant a £5000 mortgage was possible and I could find £800 as deposit. Things seemed to be proceeding OK when at one Council meeting the caretaker burst in and said I was wanted on the phone. I was furious and told him to take the number and I would phone later. When I did it was Jowett the owner wanting to put the price up as he had had a better offer via an estate agent. It was a small sum. I told him that he would be worse off as he would have to pay agent's fees which did not apply in my case as it was a direct sale, a fact that Jowett admitted. I said that £5800 was still my offer and I would phone him again in the morning when he had had time to reconsider it. It was not a very happy man who drove over to Ealing that evening (I was staying with Ella), perhaps having to tell Lena that we had lost the house she longed for. Thankfully the next morning Jowett agreed to £5800. The next problem was the mortgage. I went to my life assurance firm who had an office in Kingston, but he was not at all helpful saying money was short. I said that his firm when seeking business said it would be helpful the more insurance I had, and I would phone his boss in Edinburgh and complain. His reply was to the effect that he did not think it would help much. My retort was I think it might as Mr Wallace was an old army friend. He immediately sprang into action and came back in a couple of days saying he could get £5000 from a Leicester office. By this time I had secured it with the council at five-and-three-eigths percent fixed for 25 years. The insurance man said come with him as his interest is variable and the average over the years is under 5%. I declined any offer and the rate was never lower throughout the period, rising at one time I think to 15%. The Clerk of the Council Mr Hubbard did the conveyancing for me, he said to give his clerk a nominal amount by way of renumeration, so everything worked out well. Andrews, a local firm, moved us in one day for about £27, it would be over £3000 today. We moved in, put the beds up for the night, and to the surprise of the neighbours then went on holiday for a fortnight.

On getting back we quickly settled in. I have to confess that I did the inspection of the house, this saved a bit of money which was in short supply, but I failed to notice that there was no gas in the house. Fortunately Roy Braebaum was able to get an electric cooker from a friend in the business at a favourable rate which came to us still in its packing case. We fitted in very well. Having only one living room at Leamington helped although the one at Walton was somewhat smaller. Two loos and

your own back garden were great assets.

I had managed to get Nigel into Bell Farm School (our local) where I thought he would carry on from Rugby Road Leamington. This was not to be, more later. Clive was to wait two terms. At work, the Clerk seemed ready to help, not one to set the Thames on fire but sound on administration, no errors in the printing of minutes. My deputy Sam was a gem. Not as disappointed as his wife that he did not get the job, trustworthy and loyal. We could have a good night out together but everything was back to normal in the morning. My first problem was the Walton film studios site. It was one of the first, if not the first, studio to make films for public showing, but it had fallen on hard times and was closed down and the site was for sale. Edward Hubbard was very worried about it as the designation was for industry (of a sort) which would have not been a good thing so near the centre of a growing residential town. It already had Amalgamated Dental just off the High Street which was being extended and modernised. The site was west of the High Street and south of Manor Road. Immediately south the Council owned land to provide a link road from the High Street Church Street junction through to New Zealand Avenue, with shops on one side and a public car park on the other. Just imagine that!

Shopping centre

I had a quick think about it and curved the road northwards to meet Manor Road just before it reached the junction with New Zealand Avenue and Oatlands Drive, and the road to Walton Bridge. The area to the south would then be much larger and could accommodate a shopping pedestrian precinct and a multi-storey car park. "A multi-storey car park and a shopping precinct, what next?" A stunned Council accepted the idea and as Surrey County Council could not think of a better idea they agreed the alteration to the Town Map. The problem then was to come to an agreement with whoever bought the film studio to enter into a joint development plan. It was a touch unfortunate that we did not get the high-grade developers interested. A man whose name I cannot recall, who started life as a bank cashier and got tired of handling other people's money and set about getting some of his own. He managed a large loan with I think the Co-op, and with a partner who I think was a lawyer set up a company and engaged R Seifert and Partners as architect for the scheme. Richard Seifert had the largest practice in London and was doing the majority of the commercial work in the south-east. In my opinion, too money oriented.

Seifert managed the whole thing. The owner then did his sums and if he could not see a 10% profit it was not on and the architect had to think again. He was so insistent on 10% that I christened him Mr Ten Percent and it stuck. Eventually a scheme was approved and each side appointed London surveyors to work out the financial details. Walton appointed Gerald Eve and Partners and Mr 10% employed another well-known London firm. Hilary Eve, a young partner who conveniently lived in Burwood Park acted for the Council, so he ought to have had more than a professional interest. Sometimes I thought the opposition was getting the better of him particularly as we owned most of the land, but the Council accepted the terms. The Council were to own all the land and the developers were to develop the site other than the multi-storey car park which Walton would build. So that things would tie up, we appointed Siefert the architect for the park. He did nothing but appoint a structural engineer and then require the whole facade to be cloaked with tiles. I could foresee difficulties and suggested we chose other methods. Seifert was at the Council meeting and said to the

councillors, "What does he know about it? He is only an engineer, I am the architect". He got his way, and after the first winter's frost the lot fell off. He forced the tiling contractor to do the job again, saying he had performed negligently, and the tiles continued to fall off right up to the time it was demolished. The trouble was that water got behind the tiles from the back and the frost did the rest. Once started, the whole development was completed in good time but not entirely in good order. Councillor Bromhead being involved in the film industry secured one of the stars in The Avengers, Honor Blackman, to open it and I had the pleasure of sitting next to her at the lunch, which was held at the Anchor Hotel in Shepperton Square.

Town Hall

Another scheme revised at this time was the Town Hall. This had been introduced by the Town Clerk (Mr Harris) before the war. The site for this was to be New Zealand Avenue and all the frontage land of Ashley Park was bought by the Council under a local government act to provide for the Town Hall, a fire station (W&W were the fire authority at that time) and a replacement for the Playhouse (late 1930s but still going today). In fact the Surveyor was the Fire Chief and the hat-stand on which his fire helmet perched was still in the office when I took over. The Treasurer told the story to me of the Surveyor, having a troublesome visitor to deal with, being delighted if the fire bell went off; he would get up, take his helmet, place it on his head and say "I must go, more important things to deal with". He would then go into the street and commandeer the first pair of horses that came along to pull the fire engine. I have had no confirmation of this story.

Edward Hubbard was keen to get going and obtained permission to start preparing plans. Local government had changed during the war years and new plans were necessary. The same architects were chosen but not the Quantity Surveyor; apparently the two had differences of opinion which finished up in the House of Lords during the war years. John Brown, Hanson and Partners were the architects of which Brown had retired and Col Hanson was in charge although one of his assistants did the work and made a very good job of it. It looked good, it looked like a Town Hall, and it worked excellently as a Town Hall. The Clerk took over from his predecessor as the instructing officer so I had little to do with it. Just as well for me as there was a good deal of opposition to the choice of site. The public thought it to be part of Ashley Park public open space. The reason for this was the site was used as allotments during the war and was left in a very untidy state. My predecessor was told to tidy it up and it was then presented as the Council's scheme to commemorate some event or other, probably the Coronation. He made such a good job of it that the public wanted it retained.

Two things spring to mind. One was we were called upon to straighten up the boiler house as Hanson's boys had got into a bit of a mess and the second was proving that the roof of the canopy over the front entrance would take the weight of a party which the Clerk would have assembled there when giving the results in various elections for which he was the returning officer. The architect did not like it and resisted the insertion of a door as it would spoil the fenestration. I had some steps built so that you could walk up through the window and down on the outside. I can only recall it being used once and that was when Councillors etc waved goodbye to Princess Margaret when she opened the place.

The opening was quite a good day. One of Margaret's aides told us she was on one of her better days. Apparently she could be very awkward and bitchy when the mood took her. Each chief officer had to show her around a part of our department. My choice was the engineers' drawing office. We came out at a side entrance into the corridor right opposite the entrance to my own office and on looking in she saw a mass of orange which was my carpet. "How charming", she said, "not a bit like I imagine a local government office to be". She then called up her lady in waiting who was at the other end of a long corridor. "Have I to come?" the Hon Mary Smith responded, "my feet are killing me". She came and Margaret made one or two complimentary remarks. When asked who chose the colour of the carpet I said "My secretary, I gave her the choice of that or black". As soon as the Princess saw the Clerk's office her instant remark was "Just as I always imagined: dull with a dark grey carpet". Ted pointed out his black leather swivel chair in which he said he did his thinking. "And sleeping", was the quick retort. She then compared it unfavourably with mine. I was not exactly the flavour of the week with Edward. All this was relayed to me by a bystander.

All that can be seen of the Town Hall today is a tree, a native of New Zealand, which is in the Homebase car park. New Zealand is commemorated a lot in Walton as Mount Felix, a large house, was during the First World War a hospital for New Zealand soldiers, some of which lie buried in the local cemetry. We also observe Anzac Day each year.

Enough of work for the time being, let us turn to domestic matters for a bit. Things went quite well. We were very busy decorating from top to bottom; we tried our hand at wallpapering but once was enough, in the future we changed to emulsion. How I had the energy I will never know, but when light permitted I would come home, dig in the garden until dinner and then two nights a week return

to the office for a meeting, sometimes going on until midnight. The back garden had been hardly touched, it was just as left by the builders, and this for some years after completion. There were trees that had been felled and left, undergrowth three feet high, rabbits, squirrels, the odd adder and wasp nests. I do not think Lena reached the bottom of the plot for at least a year.

Clive eventually got to Bell Farm Infants. I took him, but as I walked into my office Lena was on the phone to say Clive was home. He had crossed two main roads. When asked why he said that a girl had been sick in his place and they did not teach him to read. He had been there all of three minutes. When he escaped a second time the teachers were wise to it and went after him, but he still reached home before they did. Meanwhile Nigel was very unhappy about schooling, he complained that they were trying to teach him stuff that he had learnt two years ago at Leamington. I was appalled how bad education was in Surrey compared with Warwick, or at least the part we knew. Fortunately a councillor introduced me to Kingston Grammar School which at that time had a Preparatory section. Nigel passed the exam and started at £33 per term. Clive was not doing well at Bell Farm, but when I tried private schools around you just had to mention Bell Farm and they did not want to know. Denmead in fact was quite rude with me. Eventually I got him into Arundel House in Surbiton. It did not have much of a reputation (and the most odd headmaster) but with its old-fashioned staff Clive did well and took to French and Latin very well. I knew an Alderman of the City of London who agreed to support Clive for entrance to the City of London School when the time came for the entrance exam. Clive took the exam for Kingston and failed to get a place. I don't know if this affected him but he said he did not want to attempt City of London but was keen to go to Rydens. At the time there was a rail strike, and when I saw on the TV the crowds milling around Waterloo station hoping to get a train home some time before midnight, I thought I would not like a son of mine to be amongst that crowd, so I reluctantly gave way. Clive was well into things in Hersham, especially the Scouts, and I think he wanted to remain with them. I found Mr Lee the architect and Alderman of the City very disappointed with our decision. As I discovered he was not only a governor of the school but also the Chairman. I do not think that Clive would have had much trouble getting passed in the Common Entrance.

Swimming pool

Mr Lister did not do a great deal in his last year and it took some time for me to get to know things. On my large desk there was a bundle of plans. When I got round to asking Sam what they were, he said, "They are the plans of the proposed swimming pool prepared by Arup Associates ready to be presented to the Council before going out to tender; Mr Lister said he would leave them for you to deal with." I looked them over and based on my experience with the pool at Leamington I was not impressed with what I saw. Full of confidence, but ignorant of the situation, I took the plans to Committee and suggested to the members that it was not a good thing to have a diving platform in the only pool and further a smaller learners' pool alongside was modern thinking. The Committee however had been well schooled by one of its members who was a Civil Engineer and friend of Arup. So nothing was changed. "This is what we said we wanted and that's what we're going to get." Strategically defeated, but there were technical points with which I was not happy. But how to achieve alterations with our Civil Engineer in the wings? Incidentally both he and his wife were quite charming.

All plans had to be vetted by the Government before the Council could apply for loan sanction. This was to ensure that the LA was not indulging in a worthless scheme but officials at the Ministry often saw an opportunity to get their own ideas into the scheme. This used to annoy me and I was usually opposed, but this time I thought I might use it to my advantage. The inspecting officer was a lady architect Miss Armstrong, and I let her know my misgivings on a number of points. She agreed with me and said she had one or two ideas herself, thus we were as one, quite a change. She suggested that we call the firm in to discuss the matter. It was great, me sitting alongside Miss Armstrong as she went through the scheme point by point. When Arup queried her opinion she would say, "But have you not seen the Ministry Design Notes on the subject?" and she would dig out notes from her drawer and give them a copy.

After an exhaustive examination, the senior man present (a Principal, and an engineer I was pleased to note) said, "I feel Miss Armstrong it would be advisable for us to take the plans away and have another think about it." Miss Armstrong turned to me and managed a wink without it being noticed by the designers of the scheme.

We did not achieve all we wanted but it was certainly an improvement. The roof was a concrete marvel, typical for a firm who were reckoned to be the leaders in the field. Between the beams they had planned to have blue transparent plastic to cast a blue tinge on the water, but the manufacturer could not get it satisfactory so traditional standard glazing had to be introduced at the last moment - it leaked.

The heating was not without its problems. The heating engineer chose not to use 35-second (gas) oil but 45-second, which did not need storing at a high temperature but had to be inside the building with a slight boost in temperature by using an electric heating cable around the delivery pipe. It worked with care. As soon as I could get money we converted to gas oil which meant we could store it in the open, and in the space released we were able to fit in a learners' pool. Not environmentally friendly but many children were able to learn to swim in safety.

In spite of our problems the pool was a great success and well used by the inhabitants and fostered an excellent swimming club. Deputy Sam swan every morning, so kept an eye on the place.

Sewage

Another problem very near the surface was sewage and sewage disposal. Not crisis, but not very far from it. Lister, my predecessor, obviously followed the line of thought of some concillors: "There are no votes in sewage". Much is buried below ground, and not visible to be admired: "That's what I have done for the ratepayers". I had a appraisal done and worked out a programme that would take 18 years. This I thought would soften the blow. When I was interviewed I was proudly told Walton had the lowest rate in Surrey. My response was it is not what you collect but what you do with the money. I reminded the council of this and the members agreed with my plan, probably thinking "All well in theory but we can still put it off for a good many more years". I also managed to get three extra staff to start on the scheme.

The worst element was Weybridge sewage disposal plant. These days called treatment plants but this could not be said of Weybridge - teatment nil. Had I seen the place on interview I would have had serious thoughts of not accepting the position. Initially it was based on land treatment - put into lagoons for air treatment and land drainage of the effluent to the river. The land used was a large area contained within the Brooklands race track. I think I can remember in the film "Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines" a shot of a pilot going out from his HQ in a car towing a small boat - just in case he landed in the sewage ponds. With a well-defined circular perimeter it was a very obvious target for German bombers during the 1939-45 war so emergency works were carried out within the works so that treatment could be confined and the lagoons put out of use. Vickers were employing thousands of people building aeroplanes at that time and did not relish bombing attacks. The works had one major attack with many killed.

Owing to boundary changes in 1939 a large part of the area including quite a lot of the Brooklands works did not drain to Weybridge but went to Byfleet which was owned by Woking council. When Woking carried out large improvements to Byfleet, Woking sought a capital contribution from Walton and Weybridge. Lister did not like this and said it could be done more cheaply by pumping the sewage to his Weybridge works. This he did by installing a compressed air plant at the works and using Shone ejectors air operated to get the sewage to the works. This exacerbated the situation and the final effluent discharged to the River Wey got much worse. Thames Conservancy, the responsible body, send adverse analytical reports to Lister about every 3 months and were even threatening to sue the Council. The file got larger and larger but Lister did nothing - neither did Thames Conservancy except threaten. The only clean thing about the place was lime, liberally strewn around to try and keep things a bit sweet. There was always a shed full of bags of the stuff which turned out very useful

one Saturday afternoon. I was at home nursing a cold and Lena had gone shopping with the boys. When they got home I was not there. I had been turned out as at the works an elevated culvert which conveyed sewage from the receiving chambers to the treatment works had collapsed - one wall was lying on the ground about six feet below. I looked around and my eye fell on the bags of lime so I decided that we would build a temporary replacement using one-hundredweight bags of lime. All pumping had been stopped and sewage was filling in the sewers of Weybridge. We estimated we had about three hours before Weybridge High Street became awash with sewage. I obtained a tarpaulin from Walton depot to line the culvert to try and prevent the lime getting too wet and sloppy. Needless to say it was raining the whole time. When it was finished and we told foreman Church at the pumping station to start pumping again he estimated we had about 20 minutes to spare. Strangely enough the air at the works cured my cold. Sewage works were always considered healthy places to work. At Canterbury we had father and son as pensioners.

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Memoirs of Ron Bromley

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This little episode at the works prompted me to look into progress and the planning of the works. I had already selected one of the three new boys appointed to be in charge and was waiting for him to come up with some preliminary proposals. A little detailed probing lead to the conclusion that this man was not up to the job, little (if any) progress or research had been done and enquiries among friends in the Consulting world drew me to the conclusion that to get a man capable of doing the job we would have to pay a salary in excess of my Deputy's and perhaps even mine. So no "in-house" unfortunately. I managed to get the firm I wanted, John Taylor and Son, who had a very good reputation and a very good senior partner, John Calvert. I had had a bit of a run-in with him before I knew him when on an Institution meeting we were inspecting a works which Taylors had just completed. We had a guide who was wearing a badge but you could not read it as it had turned round in the wind. I commented to him saying the walls of the drying beds looked a bit high. He made some sort of reply to which I retorted, "All adds to the cost and also the consultant's fees". I got no reply but at tea I was on his table, his badge turned and I read "John Calvert principal John Taylor and Son". Once he was appointed I apologised for my remark and we got on very well, as I did with his assistant Mr Haywood. I can't remember his christian name though we had both him and his wife at our home for meals.

Taylors recommended something I felt sure I could not get away with: moving to a new site, much easier to plan and work on. The Council agreed, which meant a delay in acquiring the site. It meant demolishing a farm accommodation bridge across the main London to Portsmouth railway line, and the building of a new bridge. Negotiations with British Rail were a nightmare. Every different part had its own boss and I could never get them to agree. The railway surveyor was the man with whom we carried out the main negotiations. However, if he did eventually agree something it was circumscribed by "You must however get the agreement of engineering", or the traffic controller, or signals, or whatever.

I was getting very frustrated when a new solicitor at British Rail took over. I got him to agree to convene a meeting of all concerned at Waterloo station. Calvert and I arrived early and when the others arrived I was introducing railway man to railway man. Both running the same show but had never met. We got possession of the line for one day, Christmas Day, in order to demolish the old bridge. This was agreed as there would be no trains running on that day. We were assembled ready to start when it was called off because one signalman did not turn up for work to put the signals in one box at "red", though there were no trains running on that day. I wonder what would have happened if trains had been running.

I was given Christmas Day a year on for the next possession. I kicked up a fuss and wrote to all and sundry and eventually got Easter, a delay we just had to deal with, but very frustrating. Bad enough having to build the new bridge with trains running a normal service. I think we obtained a night possession. Once that was done the work went on apace. I cannot remember the name of the

contractor but the whole works were carried out well and on time. History was made here as the commerorative plaque was the only one erected that had my name on it.

Looking ahead it was a good job that it was done in time as completion date was getting very near to the reorganisation of the local authority and we were to lose sewage disposal once we were amalgamated with Esher. Thames Water would be taking over. There was a certain date, something like November 17th 1973 after which we had to assume and act as if the new authority thought fit. I can't recall the exact arrangements. Calvert wanted to feed in the New Work a bit at a time. My reaction was to say "Have you no confidence that the scheme will work?" This bridled him a bit, but we agreed a date for complete switch-over. On that day I went to Council and got them to agree to transfer the old works out of the sewage account into its general fund. This meant that the land would be ours whereas Thames Water had to bear the loan costs of the new land and the new works. Thames Water appealed against our action and a hearing was arranged. The Clerk and the Treasurer went rather behind my back thinking they could manage without me. When I asked when are we going to see the barrister I was told it had all been done. I blew my top and as a result Jenkins (Clerk's dept) said would I like to come to the hearing up in London.

I went. The financial side was quickly dealt with in our favour but it transpired that from the sewage side Thames Water had a strong case. Franks (our barrister) had to stall all the afternoon session to get the hearing carried over to the next day. After lunch I returned to Walton and had about two hours to prepare a summary of evidence to present the next day. Franks had no time to study it as he was delayed and consequently put me straight in the witness box and after confirming my name and position handed me over to the opposition and I was subject to interrogation for about two hours. When giving his judgement the Inspector (not the right word) made a statement, which he was not called upon to do, that he was strongly influenced in his judgement by the evidence of Mr Bromley the Engineer and Planning Officer. The last value on the land that I can remember was £11 million, a nice bonus if I had been working for a private firm.

During this time things were going well at home. Nigel passed his 11 plus well enough to remain at Kingston Grammar (they always had the pick of the bunch). Clive did well at Rydens until the sixth form and then he had one if not two lady teachers that he could not get on with and his work fell off and he wanted to drop German (one of the lady's subjects). When I saw the new headmaster he said there was nothing amiss and Clive would do well at A-levels. He passed in one subject. I think you had to be a genius to get any more than one or two at that time at the school. Lena mixed well with the ladies and was always popular. I loved the way her friends and others were always discussing her dress, she was always smartly dressed and in the fashion. Being her trade, she knew where to go and what to buy. She found a "nearly new" dress shop in Claygate which always had a lot of German makes which were very good, very expensive and Lena's favourite. The ladies of Esher, Cobham and Claygate would not be seen in a ball gown more than three or four times as all their aquaintances would have seen it. Lena could talk "trade" to the two girls running the shop and could do a good deal with them. On one occasion, at Rotary, one of the girls said to Lena "That's a nice dress, I haven't seen that in Marks". "You won't" replied Lena, "it's a ...." quoting one of the best German makes which I cannot remember. Later her husband had the cheek to say to me that he could not understand how I could afford such clothes. For all they knew Lena could have had a private income. One year she accompanied the Mayoress on her social rounds in the Mayor's limousine. She enjoyed the year very much.

After all the new works, town hall, town centre, sewage works and swimming pool, things should have got less hectic but events did not turn out that way. For some reason never fully explained we were subject to flooding. Sudden flooding with no warning given. Edna and Roy were staying over the weekend and I was kept busy as we had a blockage in a surface water (SW) which ran through Rydens School playing field and along the back gardens of the bungalows off Rydens Road. It was touch and go with water diverting to flow through some of the bungalows. Access in the gardens was difficult with the sewer having sheds over it in places. We finally located and cleared the blockage and I came home very wet - it rained all the time - to see Edna and Roy off back home. I had hardly seen them all day. I went to bed very tired but got up early the next day Monday and drive down through Hersham to see how things were. I got no further than the Barley Mow Inn. The River Mole in flood had some resistance at Albany Bridge at the bottom on Lammas Lane and broke its banks and flooded over a good deal of Hersham, going though the two railway arches and on to north Walton not quite meeting up with the River Thames. From there on to Field Common and then West and East Molesey where it caused no end of damage.

Almost from first light depot staff had been giving assistance where required, many households had to evacuate their homes and many were stranded at first floor.

The first thing I did was to set up a control centre to co-ordinate all our efforts and to call on other firms etc to help us. The Clerk of the Council was away but his deputy Peter Cross did a grand job in looking after the domestic side such a getting the use of church and village halls to accommodate those we had to rescue. The main centre was the Playhouse and the WRVS under the control of a very efficient school teacher from Sunbury set up a field kitchen from which was fed hundreds of homeless persons with hot meals. Also I remember getting the bakers from Safeway out of bed to bake so that we could take bread and other food stuff to people stranded in their own homes. There was a big contingent from Field Common in the Playhouse who found it very convenient getting a breakfast and then the men going about their normal work of tarmacing drives etc and the women selling from door to door. With someone to look after the children they liked the life so much we had at the end to tell them to go home we were closing the centre.

Large firms, statutory authorities all co-operated and carried out flood prevention and restoration to an agreed plan so that no efforts were wasted. The Water Company lent us two boats and Mr Eric Lavender of Lavender and Son (gravel extractors) lent his very large tractor which was most useful in getting to places other vehicles could not reach. The water in Molesey Road was in full force and we were waiting for a suitable vehicle to rescue a family close by. Two policemen under pressure from a family volunteered to take a boat to collect them. The man in charge at HQ did not like the idea but gave way as it was the police. When they did not return we sent out a search party to look for them and found them. One had his arms round a lamp post and the other was holding his legs. Just one more rescue operation. The reason was the rush of water under Hersham station railway arch.

Meanwhile life at the Playhouse went on. The Health Dept. had called in the army - I think to deal with hazardous waste - and they were billetted in the Playhouse away from the civilians. In the night one soldier used to sleeping in the nude got up to go to the toilet. There he met a lady from Field Common who screamed blue murder and accused the soldier of molesting her. The efficient lady in

charge dealt with the matter and concluded her report to the Council with the following "On tackling the man he replied 'F... her, I wouldn't touch her with a b....y barge pole'". End of story.

As things quietened down, I began to look over a wider field. The Thames was very high but fortunately had not burst its banks, but I feared for the inhabitants of the island which although accessed from the Sunbury side was actually in our area. I took a senior engineer, Bernard Harber, with me and got as far as the bridge to the island which was submerged to about two feet. As we were looking a commuter from London approached. He said he lived at the extreme eastern tip of the island and he thought everthing was OK as his pregnant wife had phoned him earlier in the day and she was unperturbed. He invited us to accompany him. As the water was too deep for me, only having Wellington boots, Bernard went with him as he was in chest-high waders. He was gone for some considerable time and I became quite anxious about his safety, but my voice when calling for him just reflected over a vast expanse of water. When he did appear he was in a most excitable state and his record of what had happened was dominated by talk of a three-legged leopard he had seen. It was obvious that his companion, who I later discovered was an ex-naval man, had plied Bernard with a few gins, but when he got a little more lucid I learned that his story was true. The next-door neighbour was running an animal rescue centre, quite unknown to the authorities, and as the gardens were flooded the animals were being sheltered in the two houses, and indeed one was a leopard which had lost a leg. The two families remained safe and eventually the waters receded.

There were many meetings and enquiries following the floods and the Thames Conservancy came in for a great deal of criticism, and as a result carried out a great deal of improvements to the River Mole, some of which I considered a bit over the top. At one Council meeting we almost had a riot, as most of the flooding was fouled with sewage as the sewers became flooded and the public blamed the inadequacy of the sewers. At one point the Chairman had water poured over him by a member of the public in the gallery. He left his little bottle behind and we had the remaining contents analysed so I was able to assure the Chairman that it was just tap water.

The flood however did have a beneficial effect. I had prepared a plan of improvements which I had suggested as an 18-year programme. I suggested a long period as it is often said "there are no votes in sewage". It had been accepted by the Council, many members thinking it was too far distant to affect their chances at the polls. The flooding however had got them worried and I was told to reduce the period to five years.

I was anxious not to "farm out" too much as I wanted to keep enough to keep my own team with plenty of work (enough to keep them interested). I concluded that it could be achieved by dividing the drainage works 50-50 (Weybridge sewage works had already gone to John Tayor). This was agreed and the two teams worked happily side by side sharing experiences etc. Organisation-wise we must have got something right. Thames Conservancy was also working hard in the area and I can not remember one complaint regarding traffic hold-ups, congestion, rubbish, etc.

My first years at Walton had been ones of great activity and excitement. I experienced more in this period than many Borough Engineers enjoyed in a lifetime, and I was looking forward to a period with less activity and time for contemplation. This was not to be. Central Government had reorganised London Government and now turned its attention to the rest of the country.

This sort of thing was quite common, for central government to call for a review of the workings of local government. The last one had been in 1933 when Walton was joined with Weybridge and Esher had taken over Molesey and Cobham. On this occasion with the knowledge of what had happened in Greater London central government published a massive document in 3 volumes setting out its ideas of what should happen.

Fortunately the first question was quickly dealt with: was local goverment to remain two-tier or just become one level. Discussion on this would have been endless; just imagine the old boys at County Hall comfortable sitting in their canteens (or messes), too far distant from any electorate to be bothered by them. No, County Hall will remain.

The second tier was to receive many changes. Among them:

1. All districts to be of a size to be able to afford modern techniques to facilitate efficient operation. The size suggested was a minimum of 100,000. This would mean a good number of amalgamations.
2. Each unit would be of the same status. This meant that such terms as Urban or Rural District would disappear. Each unit would be a district.
3. Some responsibilities would be handed over to the counties and some would be dealt with by a new body to deal with a particular subject. Someone had the bright idea of bringing all water matters under one head. This it was thought would make it much more efficient, something like cradle to grave. Starting with the gathering of supplies - river, boreholes, etc; storage; purification; followed by distribution to houses and factories; collecting of soiled water sewerage; purificaton and disposal to rivers etc. Almost a closed circuit, although this was not mentioned.

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From Villain to Hero in Four Weeks

The year was 1944 the place somewhere in NW Europe on the Belgian/Holland border. I with my Troop was part of 1st Corps Troops under General Crocker. Our Regiment along with others known as Corps Troops (ie general service, not infantry or tanks) were not required for the time being and the General wanted the roads kept free so that stores, food, petrol etc could pass freely. We were thus confined to the fields, where we had come to rest.

I got news that some of the lesser Generals who normally hang around Corps HQ were planning to get back to the kind of soldiering they practised in peace time on Salisbury Plain. One scheme was to plan an organised march (in vehicles) to take us up to the front when required. This meant a chosen route with the Regiment marching as complete units one after the other. Not the usual mad rush when we received orders. The front vehicle in each unit was to fly a green flag and the rear one to bear a blue one. It may have been the other way round. All I know is that if you saw two greens together (or two blues) someone had made a mess of things and was probably heading in the wrong direction. There was to be a fixed interval between each vehicle and all to proceed at the same speed. The generals would then stand at the side of the road and observe the "March Discipline".

All this would take time to work out, so I asked one of my Lieutenants to go up to what was to be our new position and find a good HQ - a large building as I had grown tired of sleeping in haystacks or in the lofts of cow sheds - very warm as the heat from the cattle rose, but so also did the smell. Charlie was well pleased with his work having found a young ladies' seminary with the caretaker still there and who said he could provide hot water and loos not requiring the use of shovels.

The day came and we were ready to move with stop watches in hand when a D.R. (despatch rider) rode up to hand me a message saying that Corps HQ were taking our new found HQ, and we were left to find another. Charlie went off with not very good grace saying it was not his turn. My reasoning was he knew the area and would know where not to look.

When we met up with him in addition to his own jeep he was towing a dilapidated battle scarred one. This he said had been given to him by a Belgian White Army officer (the equivalent of the French Maquis). He had found it in a wood with 4 dead Poles. He buried the Poles and I think was hoping to keep the jeep but as he could not get spares for the repair decided to give it up. All he wanted to retain was an overcoat found in the jeep with other gear.

The jeep was quickly repaired and painted with our Regimental insignia. It was very useful as it meant every officer then had his own jeep, very useful particularly for sneaking away to a café or "what have you". Not as conspicuous as a 3 tonner or half track.

Some days later a Dutch Liaison Officer with 1st Corps came around making enquiries. His friend the Liaison Officer with the Polish Division had literally been caught with his trousers down in a "café" and his jeep was stolen from the car park. Apparently it was not uncommon for Polish soldiers to steal a vehicle and retreat to the nearest town and have the time of O'Reilly until all their money and

energy was spent. They would then return, filter through their lines and come in from no man's land saying they had been captured and escaped. Thus being thought of as heroes and not deserters.

I handed over the jeep and the gear found in it, although he said it did not matter as his friend would be so grateful just to get the jeep. He had been threatened with being shot by his General if the jeep was not found.

End of story. Oh no.

The next day a horrible Dutch Liaison Officer from the Polish Division turned up demanding to see the officer who had given his coat away and the one who had stolen his jeep. He was so offensive I had him thrown out of the camp.

Again end of story. No.

The next visitor was a Captain in the Military Police (Red Caps). I told him all and I thought he dismissed it as something of a joke.

Oh no.

Our Adjutant (i/c the office) sent for me and said he was to carry out an Enquiry into the whole affair. His report was sent to Corps HQ, then to Montgomery's HQ, then on to JAG (Judge Advocate Generals) Dept. Their report to Montgomery recommended that I be Court Martialled (similar to to civilian crown court but with senior officers as judges).

Monty however was his own man not given to accepting advice. He said Court Martials were to be avoided if possible in war time as being wasteful in time and resources. He decreed that subject to my CO giving me a good report and - this is what pleased me - subject to my permission I could be tried summary by General Crocker, 1st Corps Commander. This meant arbitrary punishment being handed out as would be given to an "Other Rank" being absent without leave, or writing B-- S-- in the dust on his bed space before inspection.

I thought about the punishment the General could impose

- (a) As we were on active service he could have me shot. A little drastic I thought.
- (b) I could be tied to the wheel of a gun carriage. Highly impractical these days with solid wheels (no spokes) and large pneumatic tyres.
- (c) Dismissed the service with disgrace. Not a bad option after five years service.

I chose to go before the General.

Resplendent in a new battledress with yellow blancoed belt and gaiters I was escorted up to the General. I do not remember whether or not my cap was removed. All "other ranks" had their hats off for fear of them concealing a hand grenade in it to hurl at the "judge". An officer was perhaps considered too much of a gentleman for such conduct.

I was asked, after the charge was read out, if I pleaded guilty or not guilty.

"Guilty, Sir".

"I must take a very serious view of this particularly as the jeep belonged to a foreign power" - the Poles - as much to say if it had been the "Buffs" or the "Green Howards" nothing more would have been said. "Under the circumstances I have no alternative but to award you a Severe Reprimand - March Out."

I thus became the possessor of Army Form 121 which is an officer's conduct sheet. Even in disgrace officers were not to be counted with ORs (other ranks) who had AF122. These sheets should follow you around and be recorded in one's discharge papers. Perhaps mine was not made out, or lost, or sent to the Polish General but I never heard of it again.

A month later I was again sent for to go before General Crocker. As soon as I booked in the brigade major (who was the same one as previously) said "You again. You will not get away with it this time. You are for the high jump". My reply was to the effect that I was not in trouble and the General wanted to compliment me about something. This did not please him. "I do nothing wrong, wait on the General hand and foot, never go on leave and I don't even get 'Mentioned in Dispatches'". My reply was something to the effect that he should put himself around and advertise himself a little. At this he almost foamed at the mouth. As I was led away, my escort said "you said the wrong thing there. In civilian life he has his own advertising agency".

I do not remember the exact set up but General Crocker was most pleasant. If he did remember me from my previous meeting he was too polite to mention it. He congratulated me on all I had done since landing on D Day and presented me with a piece of white-purple-white striped ribbon the size of a large postage stamp. Just enough for a strip on one battledress. He added that HRH King George VI would be giving me a more formal recognition at a more convenient time.

And that is how I came to be awarded the Military Cross.

I did not get to Buckingham Palace as the King had become much too ill to stand for longer than to dub a few knights or give a few KCBs. The metalwork came by post.

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Maison Dieu House

Notes on the Reconstruction

History

This building constructed in 1665 was used as the residence of the Agent Victualler until 1815 and by Chief of Ordnance Department until 1834. Purchased by the Corporation in 1904 and used as offices, it was evacuated in 1949 in order that structural repairs could be carried out.

Features

Despite the absence of the original entrance the front elevation is a fine example of the architecture of the period. Internally little of interest remains, but in three rooms the original panelling has been retained, and one fireplace reconstructed. The most important feature is the Jacobean staircase. Little but the newels and balustrade remain, and it would appear that it was not originally constructed for the building but adopted. The flights are not of equal length neither are the treads the same width throughout. The building has been scheduled by the Ministry of Works Department as a building of Historic Value.

Maison Dieu House, Dover

Repairs and Alterations

After the use of the building as an office was discontinued its future use was the subject of several reports to the Council, and it was eventually decided to render it structurally sound and convert to a Public Library.

A survey of the building showed that a small proportion of the repair work would be met by the War Damage Commission, but the majority of the damage was due to general deterioration and the ravages of the death-watch beetle. This insect which had probably been active in the oak timbers since the building was erected had considerably reduced the effective dimensions of the main oak beams, and had in some cases completely severed the 5" x 4" oak floor joists.

It was decided to retain the main floor beams, the average size of which were 12" x 10". Badly affected timbers were hacked away and the remainder was literally pickled with Cuprinol Furniture Beetle Destroyer. In order that the 1st floor would take the increased load rolled steel channels were bolted on either side of these beams, and new intermediate joists were carried on these channels. These intermediate joists were in softwood treated with Cuprinol S.Q.D Green preservative.

Repairs to the main roof were carried out without stripping the tiles and battens as these were generally sound having been renovated in the early nineteen thirties. In the north east corner, however, the roof and one wall was so badly damaged that the whole was demolished and rebuilt with new 2" bricks and new roof timbers. On the second floor short ends of 5" x 4" angle irons were bolted to the main oak beams, and the irons anchored to the main walls with rag bolts set in concrete. In order to assist in holding the whole of the front elevation together (this is badly bulged in some places) a reinforced concrete lintel was run along the entire front of the building immediately under the roof plate, and this lintel was anchored to the cross beams which in turn were fixed to the two large chimney stacks in the centre of the building.

The load bearing walls which in the main are two bricks thick were stitched together as necessary and where the beams carried particularly heavy loads these were carried down to the foundations by steel stanchions. Generally speaking however, no load bearing walls were removed (the majority of the internal partitioning was timber studding) so no heavy steel beams were required and a moderately uniform loading was preserved on the footings. This was particularly important as the ground is particularly bad and the foundations in the main consist of chalk blocks. The cost of suitably underpinning the whole building would have made the scheme prohibitive.

The structural work was started on 4th June and completed by 21st September.

Internal work consisted mainly of laying new floors and new wall plastering. As the walls were most irregular and subject to penetrating dampness the method used was timber battens, with Gyproc plasterboard and a single coat of plaster. Where possible the original wall panelling was retained, but it was necessary to dismantle it, treat the back with Cuprinol, and re-assemble. During this stage of the work the South Eastern Electricity Board were rewiring the whole of the building for light and power using screwed conduit throughout. The direct labour staff were installing the hot water heating system, and the cables were laid for both internal and G.P.O. telephones. During the progress of the

work it was found necessary to completely rebuild the main staircase, using new timber in treads, risers and carriages. Work on the restoration of the oak beams started in late November and continued to Christmas. In some cases these lovely oak timbers had been covered with successive layers of paint to a thickness of 1/8". This generally impeded the devastation wrought by the death watch beetle, and with careful staining a pleasing effect has been obtained.

As far as possible existing timber was used in the first and second fixings, but in all about 5 standards of soft timber were used in the restoration and conversion.

The decoration using the old joinery presented a problem, as much was split, badly holed and in some cases out of line. Burning off of old paint took a considerable time, and in all some 4,000 hours were spent on this and the painting. All walls in the public areas were painted in preference to distemper to give a surface which is not only easy to keep clean, but is lasting.

With the exception of the small counter all the existing shelving was transferred from Biggin Hall, but the majority of furniture on show to the public including both counters is new and was constructed by contract. Face wood is first quality oak, but backing is of "Agba" and the whole was treated with Cuprinol by the manufacturers as a precaution againt attack by the death watch beetle.

The floor covering of staff areas was carried out by Messrs. Flashman using 3.5 m.m. linoleum. In order to minimise the transmission of sound from the Lending Library to rooms below this floor was insulated using a Fibreglass quilt under the floor and a 5/16" cork floor covering. For uniformity and sound suppression this cork flooring was used on all floors accessible to the public.

Lending Library

The work which took twelve months to complete was carried out with the close and most cordial co-operation from the Librarian and his Staff, the War Damage Commission and the Ancient Monuments Department of the Ministry of Works.

Reading Room

Borough Engineer's Office,
Brook House,
Dover.
June 1952.

[Author: Ron Bromley]

Maison Dieu House, Dover

The very serious condition of Maison Dieu House, Dover, a red brick Jacobean house, situated on the Dover-London Trunk Road A.2., adjoining the Maison Dieu, formed the subject of a report to the Town Council recently submitted by Mr. Philip V. Marchant, A.M.I.C.E., M.I.Mun.E., the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, after consultation with the Ministry of Works Architect in Charge of Ancient

Monuments.

History of building

A few historic particulars regarding the fine old house, which is scheduled as an Ancient Monument, may be of interest in view of the fact that its future existence is endangered owing to the high estimated cost of restoration, although ways and means are being explored with a view to preserving the building.

Maison Dieu House was originally built as the residence of the Agent Victualler, Royal Navy, and was used by this official until after the Battle of Waterloo 1815, and subsequently by the Chief of the Ordnance Department until 1834. Later the building was disposed of as a private residence and eventually, in 1904, became the property of Corporation, since when it has been used as Municipal Offices, and is now used as the offices of the Borough Engineer and Surveyor's Department.

The Agent or Chief of the Victualling Office, was a much coveted office, the appointment being in the hands of the Lord Chancellor. The Maison Dieu, or Town Hall as it is today, was used as a Victualling Office for the Navy from the time of Queen Mary until 1834, after which it was bought by the Corporation.

Maison Dieu House is reputed to have been haunted like many other old houses, this belief being strengthened by the author of "Inglesby Legends", making the house the scene of his "Lay of the Old Woman Clothed in Grey".

In this narrative poem, it is related how an old woman in grey sits astride a barrel of wine, with a bag of gold held in her right hand, which she offers politely to all who happen to see her.

No-one amongst the Council's staff has yet been known to accept this generous offer.

Maison Dieu House dates from 1665, and externally, despite the absence of the original entrance doorway, the front elevation is robust and interesting of a rather rare type (Photograph No. 1), whilst internally there ia a very beautiful Jacobean staircase (Photograph No. 2).

Acknowledgements are due to Mr. B. A. Corrall, A.L.A., Borough Librarian, for supplying the information from which the historical notes relating to the building have been compiled.

[Another document about Maison Dieu House, dating from before the restoration. Handwritten date on typescript: 21 Feb 1948.]

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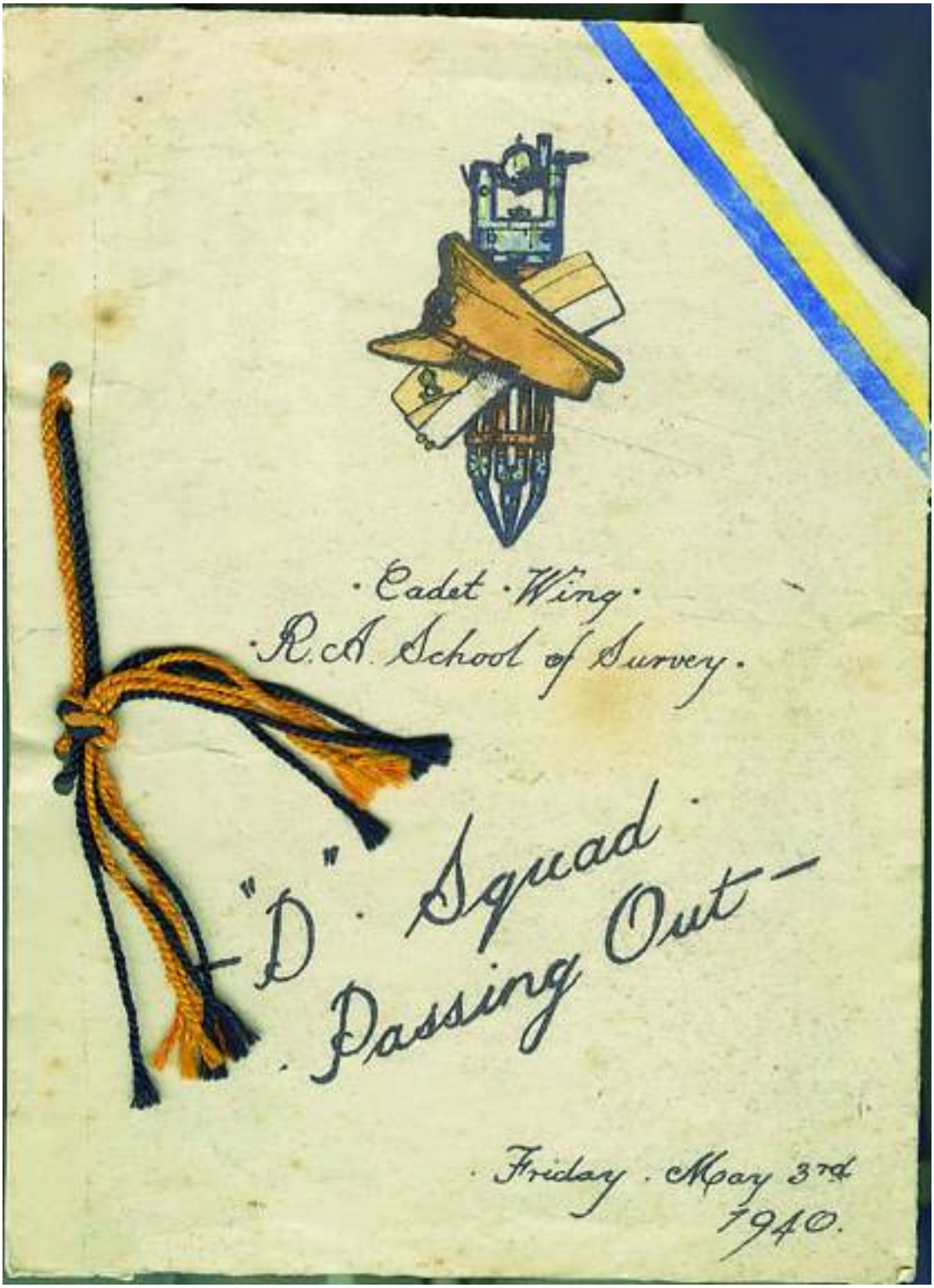

· Cadet · Wing ·
· R.C.A. School of Survey ·

"D" · Squad ·
· Passing Out ·

· Friday · May 3rd
1940.