

My great grandfather was Albert Burroughs, these are stories he told his son, Keith, my grandfather. I was called Albert after him.

Albert, when he was 19, moved from Liverpool to join the Coldstream Guards, in London, on 21st April 1941. He was based at Regent Park Barracks, Albany Street and by June 1941 he was part of H. Houghtons squad. (see photo, back row, second from the right).

His father had died in an accident on Liverpool docks in 1936, so it was just him and his mother living in Liverpool. The family (his five aunts) were not happy that he had joined the Coldstream Guards, so his great uncle, Robert Banks, a colour sergeant with the Scots Guards, came down to try and persuade him to move to the Scots Guards. He refused.

The three companies switched between guarding Buckingham Palace, guarding Churchill at Chequers, Buckinghamshire and Regents Park Barracks.

While at Buckingham Palace, the princesses Elizabeth and Margaret enjoyed going through the doors they were guarding, which made them come to attention and then stand easy. They would do it again making them stand to attention again, they found it quite funny.

Walking back to Chequers one day he came across some prisoners of war having trouble with some horses. He had helped his dad on Liverpool docks with his horse and cart so he understood how to put on the harness etc. He realised the POWs had put it on all wrong, which was upsetting the horses, so he calmed them down and put them on correctly. The lady who ran the farm was impressed and gave him a sack of potatoes. His superiors at Chequers didn't believe him and thought he had stolen them. They finally got in contact with the lady farmer and realised he had been telling the truth, she asked whether he could help on the farm on his days off, which he was allowed to do.

While at Chequers they were not allowed to move about in the open in case it made paths across the grass which could be seen by enemy planes. He also remembered being invited, with other personnel, into the cinema room at Chequers. Churchill would sit at the front with his whiskey and watch all the latest films, so he could decide if he would let them be released to the public. On leave back in Liverpool, his mum asked if he wanted to see the latest film that had just been released that day. His mum couldn't believe that he had already seen it with Churchill. On an errand for his mum to the nearby shops, he was approached by a lady and given a white feather. Men in civilian clothes were given white feathers as a token of cowardice. He rushed home and changed into his uniform and went back to the shops and stood behind her in the queue, she was quite embarrassed.

At Chequers, the whole squad refused to come off parade as a protest about wearing pumps in the winter, they were not keeping their feet dry in the snow. Churchill was being kept awake when the soldiers were marching up and down during the night. It was decided to put down coconut matting on the hard surfaces so their boots would not make a sound when they were marching up and down on guard. After this the squad was broken up.

Albert was sent to the Caterham Guards Depot, South London, where he met up again with his friend Peter, who had been sent there a few weeks earlier. If you were stationed at Caterham, day passes only allowed you to go locally, but as Peter and Albert had been stationed in Regents Park they were allowed to go further afield. Peter had found a local church (YMCA) catering for soldiers, which had a pretty girl he thought Albert might like, so on the next day pass they both travelled to Purley, where he met Marjorie Lake, who was working there supplying teas etc to the troops.

Marjorie worked for her father delivering animal feed across South London and the South Coast. She drove his small delivery van. She never took a driving test, as they were suspended during the war, so she was just issued a licence. She always had to have a gas mask with her when she was outdoors.

From Caterham Barracks Albert was transferred to Pirbright, Surrey as an instructor. Pirbright was a Rifle Range and Training Depot for the Brigade of Guards (see photo from July 1943, Corporal A. Burroughs Squad).

He was then sent to Italy, via Liverpool, where he met his aunt's husband, Louis Tremnor, who was a chef on the ship. Unsurprisingly, he ate well on the trip. In Italy during World War 2, he was with Platoon No 5, 3rd Battalion, in the 24th Guards Brigade, part of 56th Division.

The Allies invaded Italy with an amphibious landing that took place on 3rd September 1943, at Salerno. The operation was undertaken by General Sir Harold Alexander's 15th Army Group (comprising General Mark W. Clark's American Fifth Army and General Bernard Montgomery's British Eighth Army). Heavy losses were inflicted on the Allies. They then fought their way to Cassino.

The battle for Cassino took place between 17th January to 18th May 1944. At one point Albert was taken by his commander to observe a squad trying to cross a river at night. The squad, with canvas canoes, went down a ravine to the river. Unfortunately, on the opposite river bank, a German position had machine guns trained on the ravine. They opened fire when the squad was getting into their canoes; most of them lost their lives. Albert's commander told him to go back to his squad and prepare them to do the same thing the next night. Luckily, a couple of our planes bombed the German positions before Albert had to get across. They crossed safely, but when the squad was moving up a trench, waist deep in water, they realised the Germans were on the other side of the hedge. They stood there for two nights in waist deep water with very little food, before the Germans moved on and they returned across the river. He vowed he would never be hungry again.

He was wounded in Italy and was sent to a hospital to recover. Peter came to visit him on the day they were taking some of the walking wounded to visit the Pope. Peter was a catholic, so Albert told him to get a hospital gown and join the group going to see the Pope, which he did.

His best friend, Peter Lewin (21) 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards, was killed on 14th November 1943 at Cassino. The battle of Cassino resulted in 55,000 Allied deaths with German losses estimated at around 20,000 killed and wounded.

He was asked to stay on at the end of the war as a member of the Allied Military Government. He spent his time drill training the Italians at Treistre and then the Kiwis at Florence, which was in preparation for General Alexander's victory parade, before he came home to Liverpool.

Marjorie Lake finally became his wife on 9th April 1949. She had a white silk wedding dress made from a parachute.

This is the story of my great-grandad's war adventures. I am very proud to be named after him.