

WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, DAD?

Personal experiences of the years 1939-1945

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I had been commissioned in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment of the Territorial Army in 1932, but four years later the Battalion was converted to a Regiment of the Royal Artillery (Heavy Anti Aircraft guns) owing to the growing need for this kind of defence. By the time of the outbreak of war I had risen to the rank of Captain.

Neville Chamberlain had spoken to the Nation on the radio at midday of 3 September 1939 and we had been informed that we were at war with Germany. At the time I had been seconded from my Artillery Regiment to the 4th Anti-Aircraft Division who shared an H.Q. with the 12th Fighter Group RAF at Hucknall near Nottingham. Between them they were responsible for the Air Defence of the large section of England which stretches from just north of London to the River Tyne.

The Air Defence at Hucknall was controlled from an Operations Room occupied almost entirely by a large table with a fully blown-up map detailing the area under our control and on which discs were being manipulated by WAAFs to indicate any approaching unidentified aircraft, relayed to them through their headphones. Along one side was a glass-fronted gallery where I was positioned in telephone communication with all the main gun sites in our section. Next to me were the Fighter Group Staff in likewise communication with their fighter stations.

Not surprisingly, we in the Services were anticipating going into full action immediately upon declaration of war. The following incident on the day war was announced demonstrates how jittery we all were.

I had come on duty at midnight. A glance- at the large central map in the Operations Room showed that all was clear. But suddenly we were alerted. A 'WAAF using her rod had started moving a disc into position showing that an unidentified aircraft was in the vicinity of The Wash. Another disc was added, followed by more discs until these formed a straight line approaching Hucknall. Silence reigned; we all held our breath. Did the enemy, through their spy network, at this early stage have knowledge of our Operations Room and could this be a secret weapon on its way to destroy our Centre? Almost paralysed, we watched disc after disc being placed and finally one upon Hucknall itself. Outside in the town I could hear the air raid sirens in full action. I alerted the General; the RAF contacted the Air Vice Marshall and both hurriedly made their way to the Operations Room. The atmosphere was tense as we waited for the explosion. More plots appeared on the Operations Table, the aircraft was now making for the Humber and I phoned through to the gun sites in that area. By this time dawn was breaking enabling our gunners to identify the plane. Who would have thought that one of our on aircraft straying from patrol over the Continent could have created such a turmoil in our newly established Operations Room!

Contrary to what had been anticipated, the first nine months of the war turned out to be a quiet period and consequently my job as Liaison Officer at Hucknall proved to be very inactive. It could in fact easily be carried out by an older man and after a period of 2-3 months I was allowed to return to my Regiment in Birmingham.

However, I had not been back for long when I was selected to attend the first War Gunnery Course to be held at a new School of Anti Aircraft Defence near Tenby in South Wales. Upon arrival we found that the buildings had not been fully completed, course members therefore were being put up at a hotel in Tenby and here we lived in the lap of luxury. During the day lessons in theory were held in huts and practical experience was gained out in the field at Manorbier where we fired at targets in the air, trailed by RAF aircraft.

I remember the extreme cold of that winter with large areas of the country blocked by snow and ice. However, I did manage, in spite of the difficult weather conditions, to travel to Birmingham in January 1940 to act as best man to my brother Lawrence at his wedding to Biddy.

I had fallen in love before the war with a girl from Bergen in Norway and at Easter 1939, with my brother Lawrence and a friend, we had gone to Paris where Lolla was learning French. Things developed and on my last night there on a bench in the Bois de Boulogne I proposed to her. She later spent some time with us in England when we discussed, before she returned to Norway, a spring wedding to be held in her country.

But, when a few weeks later in September 1939, England entered the war, the possibility of such a wedding became very remote. With Norway still remaining neutral during the autumn of 1939 and winter of 1940 we were able to correspond, though not as fully as we would have wished, all our letters both ways were being strictly censored.

During this quiet winter, from a military angle, I made several applications for permission to travel to neutral Norway to get married, but of no avail. For a young officer on active service whilst there was a war on this could not be granted, I was told.

Having completed my Gunnery Course in Wales I was once more back with my Regiment in Birmingham when early one morning, at 7 o'clock on 9 April 1940 to be exact, I switched on the radio to listen to the news as I always did at that hour. The clear and distinct voice of the newsreader came over the air announcing Hitler's most recent move. Imagine my shock and horror at hearing that in the early hours of that very morning Norway and Denmark had both been invaded by German forces. How could I now possibly get in touch with my fiancée and what would happen to her

under enemy occupation? My first reaction was to try and put through a call in case some lines should still be open, but the answer was "Impossible, they have all been disconnected".

In England, through the radio and the press, I followed closely events in Norway. England sent an Expeditionary Force which landed some distance south of Trondheim; they penetrated down a wide valley where they met intense German resistance, but they were no match for the Nazis with their superior land force and efficient air support. Not long after the British were compelled to withdraw and hurriedly returned to England a most disastrous Expedition, not least because of the effect of the defeat on the morale of the Army.

I had again been moved, this time to Liverpool where I had become Instructor in Gunnery at a new A.A. Divisional School. For many months now I had been wondering what would happen to the future wedding plans - no longer any letters from Norway, only complete silence. Then, one morning in late September 1940, one of my fellow officers handed me a letter. I immediately recognised its handwriting. How could it be from Lolla, a letter bearing a British postmark and stamp? I tore it open and began to read: "If all goes well", she wrote, "a friend from Bergen will carry this letter to you. He will come across the sea. I too tried to escape with the party but there were many, too many for the boat to also include me. I had to let the boys take priority. I cannot now", she continued, "see any hope of getting away and the war looks as if it will go on for a long time". It certainly did seem final, with no prospect of a foreseeable reunion.

But this was not the end of the story. Some six weeks later another letter arrived from her, also posted in Great Britain, to say that now, having been allowed inclusion in a larger party, she had landed in the Shetland Islands after a rough crossing in a fishing boat. Ten days still elapsed when she was being detained by the British Authorities for numerous interrogations, before she was granted her freedom.

Following a whirlwind of preparations, a mere week after our reunion, we were married. Lolla came with me to Liverpool where I was granted a pass to 'live out; and for a while we spent a fairly normal married life as husband and wife. But later she felt she ought to be doing something useful for the war effort and went to work for the Norwegian Army which was forming up in Dumfries.

At the Liverpool School we ran courses of 2-3 weeks duration for officers and other ranks in various subjects on Heavy and Light A.A. gunnery, there was a mixture of theory and practical handling. All sorts of characters came on these courses, some pleasant and some less likeable, they were by no means all easy to handle. One such

person was a Captain Edwards who behaved rather like an overgrown schoolboy and who gave me a lot of trouble. But oddly enough I was to meet him later in the war after he had learned to act in a more civilized manner and we became the best of friends. Another officer on my course, much more senior in age, was a Major Overton; he was to become my C.O. in the latter part of the war.

Winter of 1941 was a period of the war when, doubtless in preparation for the invasion of Britain, the only bastion remaining in Europe, Hitler's Germany made a concerted attempt at annihilating Britain's armament factories and strategic installations by ruthless bombing of her large industrial cities. Night after night for months they came, large formations of heavy German bombers, dropping their loads in the dark. British fighter planes took to the air to try and intercept and the anti-aircraft defence went into action. It was a grueling winter. Serious damage was done by the enemy, as much to civilian property and lives as to strategic targets.

In Liverpool, the port, Speke Aerodrome and munitions factories were the constant aim of the enemy. Every man was needed for the defence of the country and so it was decided to close down the school. I was posted to the A.A. Brigade Headquarters situated at Sutton Coldfield on the outskirts of Birmingham, to assist the Brigadier in command of the A.A. defence of the Midlands. Here I was also able to 'live out'. I rented a furnished house and Lolla joined me.

The German bombers came over in great armadas at night and our guns went into action. I spent some of my time travelling round the gun sites with the Brigadier, checking guns and ammunition and giving advice where needed.

At Brigade H.Q. an operations room had been set up, similar to the one at Hucknall. From here we plotted the enemy aircraft as they approached and directed the firing of the guns to create a barrage at the estimated point in the sky of the bombers. We devised a number of methods and with the use of Radar, then very much in its infancy, were able to alert our gun sites well in advance. Officers from every gun site in the area were called in to our H.Q. and here I lectured to them on the new procedure.

As the German nightly air attacks grew in their ferocity, the enemy added firebombs to their explosive ones. First to be dropped were the incendiary bombs to help guide the explosives bombers to their targets. For the civilians whose homes were liable to be set alight, this was a terrifying experience. One particular night stands out in my memory. I had been up on the roof extinguishing several of the firebombs that had landed. The whole sky and the streets were lit up, the sirens had sounded and each and every person had taken on the role of vigilante. I had to return to my H.Q., only ten minutes away by car, to help direct the A.A. defence. I said to Lolla, "Jump in the car with me, I dare not leave you alone on a night like this". And so we drove, literally on a bed of flames, trying to dodge the bundles of firebombs as they

dropped and scattered all around us, hoping that none would land on the roof of our car - a real Guy Fawkes night, but a far more sinister one since it could have such dire consequences.

Next to the H.Q. one of my fellow officers lived with his wife and two children and in their basement shelter Lolla passed the night. At 6 o'clock in the morning, after the All Clear had sounded, we drove home, but still sufficiently awake to observe the havoc that had been caused in the night. Seeing the deep crater in the golf course opposite our home made us realise how lucky we were to still be alive.

England was fighting for her survival. I do not think the Germans managed to achieve in those dark winter months what they had set out to do. Our wounds were deep, but so also were the losses to the enemy aircraft and trained pilots, and with the lighter and shorter nights upon them, after many months of ceaseless bombing, the enemy withdrew.

One late spring day of 1941 the Brigadier sent for me. "Wilson", he said "I have decided it's time you move up. I intend to recommend you as a Battery Commander with the rank of Major". This was the beginning of a series of rapid moves from one station to another. I joined a new unit, the 102 L.A.A. Bty. R.A. at Stone in Staffordshire. Shortly afterwards the unit was moved to Mirfield in Yorkshire and then a little later to Norfolk where we defended RAF stations.

Lolla, having no permanent home in England and no relatives of her own in the country, moved with me for a time. She often said in those days, "My home is our little Morris Eight car and in it are housed all my worldly belongings". She decided in the end, as the moves became more and more frequent, to seek work with the exiled Norwegian Government in London.

We at first rented a flat in Kensington and I visited her there on all available leaves. It was after some months in Kensington on one of my leaves that she said to me, "I think I am expecting a baby". My cousin living not far away, kindly took Lolla to see her doctor who confirmed that she was pregnant.

Living on the 7th floor of a modern Kensington flat was hardly an appropriate place to bring up a new infant in wartime conditions. So we decided to look for a more suitable accommodation for her and were lucky to come across a flat, more a maisonette in Wimbledon, which was to become our permanent home till well after the war.

My Regiment was being asked to nominate an officer to be posted as a Battery Commander to another Regiment which was getting ready to go abroad. The C.O. sent for me and we talked the matter over and then decided to put in my second in command for the post. He was a fellow whom no one liked very much and who had

never fitted in. We thought this was a good way of getting rid of him! A few weeks later the Adjutant phoned me to say I had been posted by the War Office to the same Regiment and much against my own will I was forced to go to Blandford where they were practicing mobile training.

I shall never forget arriving there one night in the dark in pouring rain and meeting my new C.O. in the Officers' Mess; with him was Major Overton. I discovered that they too had not taken to the officer we had sent and that they had sent for me as his replacement, Major Overton having remembered me from the A.A. School in Liverpool. But this was not the full extent of my surprise. When introduced to the officers of my new Battery who should turn out to be its senior Captain but Edwards whom I had so disliked in Liverpool. However, in the Army as in life in general, one has to learn to get on with all sorts and, strangely enough, as we got better acquainted, a friendship began to foster that grew and became a lasting one throughout the war and long after.

The Battery had been equipped with Bofors guns and at Blandford we learned to move quickly and accurately, how to get into action in the shortest possible time, as well as many other aspects of mobile warfare. From Blandford we moved to Southend-on-Sea where we mobilised, ready to be transported overseas. Here we received further equipment to bring us up to full establishment. Naturally we were anxious to know where we were heading for. One thing was certain, we were not destined for any European theatres of war for we had been issued with tropical kit which indicated the Middle or Far East.

In March we were granted Embarkation Leave and this was to be the last time I was to see Lolla for the next 3½ years.

Having embarked at Liverpool under the strictest of security, we formed up in the largest convoy to date in the River Clyde off Glasgow, and from there we sailed well into the Atlantic before turning southwards. This was all necessary to avoid interception by German U-boats. Germany and her ally Italy, at that stage of the war, were in occupation of both sides of the Mediterranean and therefore troop-carrying ships for the Middle and Far East had to make the long journey via South Africa.

Our first port of call was Freetown in Sierra Leone where we took on fresh supplies and then set sail for Cape Town, here we were allowed ashore. We were made most welcome by the white population who extended to us an almost embarrassing hospitality.

I had never been a good sailor, in fact the slightest rough sea used to upset my stomach. Strange as it may seem, this long voyage changed all that. The men of my Battery were quartered low in the ship and very far forward so they felt most of the movement. Soon after leaving U.K. I had three men up on paltry charges which I had

to deal with in their quarters. I told the Battery Sergeant Major to be quick about it or I would be ill. We only just completed the proceedings before I had to run for safety!

Thereafter my duties kept me busy and I completely overcame the seasickness I had suffered from all my life.

Life on board was a tremendous change from the hustle and bustle of getting ready in England for overseas service. I shared a cabin with two other Majors, both Battery Commanders in the same Regiment. Thus we had ample opportunity of getting to know one another. The men lived in Mess Decks and slept in hammocks slung between hooks in the ceiling. The temperature in the tropics was considerable and many suffered from heat exhaustion. We held a parade each day and in the hot weather each man drank a mugful of salt sea water - salt was supposed to reduce the risk of heat exhaustion.

When we were off the East Coast of Africa one of my Bombardiers started to run a fever at midday. By 6 pm his temperature had risen to danger level. He was moved to the hospital ward where they placed ice packs round him but without success and shortly after midnight he died. The following day we buried him at sea. It was a most moving and also sad experience. This was the first man I had lost and burial at sea seemed to me something very final, one moment one saw a familiar face, and the next that same person being pushed over the stern into the depths of the sea.

We had reached Madagascar when part of the convoy, including one of my Troops, was diverted to capture and occupy the island which belonged to France and could have become a German outpost. The mission was accomplished without casualties.

Being a Light A.A. Battery we were responsible on board for manning the A.A. defence guns. As a diversion and exercise while we were at sea it was arranged that we should hold a demonstration and that another ship in the convoy should tow a target in the air for us to shoot at. This was to be an exhibition piece, with all the Infantry as spectators ready to criticize our efforts. Fortunately I realised that a towed target, though moving, was the same as a stationary one to us as we were moving at the same speed. I ordered the gunners to fire straight at it, not aiming off in front to allow for movement. The first round hit the target which disintegrated and a cheer went up from the watching assembly. Little did they realise we had not carried out our proper practice!

Upon reaching Mombassa in Kenya we went ashore for a march to stretch our legs. It was here we first learned that our destination was India and not the North African theatre of war. Our journey across the Indian Ocean was uneventful and after nine weeks at sea we finally docked in Bombay harbour not far from The Gateway to India.

After we had berthed the disembarkation officer came aboard to tell us where to go. The Regiment, less my Battery, were to move to Secunderabad and await further

instructions. My Battery was to stay in Bombay and come under the command of another Regiment and take up gun positions for the defence of Bombay against any aerial threat from the Japanese. We went into Transit Camp whilst I located the sites that my troops were to take over.

The Commanding Officer of the Regiment that I was to join was a Lieut. Colonel Yorke who did his best to make my life in Bombay a real misery. Bombay is a very large sprawling city and, like most of India, had dire poverty alongside affluence.

On our first day Col Yorke took me round the area and we visited all the sites my men were to occupy. Some were existing sites manned by Col Yorke's men, others were virgin areas, most of them were glorified rubbish tips inhabited by millions of flies and vermin. When I suggested it might be better that I established new sites leaving existing troops undisturbed, I was told to mind my own business. It was quite clear that the worst sites had been hand-picked for my men. However, I was allowed to set up my own H.Q. I requisitioned an empty house on the sea front in Worli Parade which suited us very well. Having toured Bombay with Col. Yorke we had lunch at the Yacht Club and then went to his H.Q. Here I followed him into his office expecting to continue our conversation. He seated himself then turned to me and asked what I was doing in his office, if I wanted to speak to him I was to ask the Adjutant to request an audience! I quickly realised what sort of a man he was, in fact one of his Battery Commanders told me that he had served many years in the ranks and comparatively recently had been promoted to Lieut. Colonel. This had gone to his head and he was unable to stop showing off and throwing about his new-found weight. I am sure he disliked me and my Battery because we had the extra 'mobile' training whereas his Regiment was 'static' and therefore that bit inferior.

In spite of Yorke, life in Bombay settled down for a time. My men on these awful sites suffered; they were not allowed to leave their guns and had to endure the appalling conditions with very little to relieve the monotony. Soon, on 16 June 1942 to be exact, the monsoon broke and the rain came down in torrents day after day. Col. Yorke ordered that the Bofors guns should not be covered with tarpaulins to protect them against the rain because the tarpaulins were liable to damage the sights. I duly passed this on to my Troop Commanders who in turn passed it on to the Sergeants in charge of each gun. A day or two later I called at two gun sites and found the guns covered. On enquiring why, the Troop Commander whipped off the tarpaulin to demonstrate how easily the gun was ready for action. His Sergeant had made a wooden frame that fitted over the sights and protected them from being damaged. Obviously this was a good idea as it kept the guns dry and free from rust. I commended the Sergeant and told them to carry on using the frame.

Unfortunately, shortly after I had left the site Col Yorke passed by and discovered the tarpaulin-covered guns. He immediately sent for me and I had to explain the reason. He was furious with me for disobeying his orders. I told him I had been trained in my

own Regiment to use my common sense and that I thought he was an old fool or words to that effect. We both became heated and all the time his Adjutant was taking down the gist of what was being said. A day or two later I 'was being summoned to appear before the Bombay Fortress Commander and whilst I stood to attention I was given a sound telling off for disobedience of orders and insubordination. I was not allowed to say a word in my defence, perhaps fortunately, I was told that if anything of a similar nature happened again I would be Court Marshalled. I was also told that as a punishment I was to visit my gun sites twice by day and once by night. It took three hours by jeep to tour all sites, even without stopping, so it was quite clear my time was thus fully taken up and I would be unable to carry out other orders I had received from the Chief Commander Royal Artillery at Southern Army H.Q. in Bangalore. These were to act as Leader of a West Coast Training Team and to check on readiness for action and other gunnery matters at all the R.A. units on the West Coast of India. I telegraphed him informing him of the situation. He ordered my real C.O. in Secunderabad to send for me and to produce for him a report on the situation. This was done, as a result Col. Yorke was sent home. I was told he broke down and cried after this incident. My Battery was moved to Madras.

During our long voyage out none of us of course had had any news from home. Therefore, soon after we had landed in Bombay I tried to find out if any mail for the Battery had arrived. I was directed to a Base Post Office situated near the docks where I went with one of my Sergeants. The sight that met us was one of letters lying about piled sky high and no one doing thing about it. The Indian in charge said he didn't know what to do for he did not have the addresses of the Units concerned. My Sergeant and I then set about sorting through the mountain of mail picking out all the ones destined for the Battery. Amongst them were also many telegrams, one of which was for me from Lolla and this was how I first learned that I had become a father. Lolla and her baby boy were safe and well. This was indeed great news, but what a chance that I should lay my hand on it amongst that mammoth pile of mail from England!

In Bombay we had been indenting for equipment of many kinds to complete our requirements but with no result. I therefore decided to make the journey to Kirkee Arsenal in Poona, almost a day's journey away, who were responsible for the supply of all army equipment. I took with me the Battery Quarter Master Sergeant and the Motor Transport Sergeant. Since my cousin Eric Hart was stationed as a Captain at Kirkee I decided to first call on him and to ask him to put us up for the night. I was able to locate him quite easily but he politely refused to give us a bed, much to my amazement. In a place like India one always finds space to put up friends and unexpected callers - let alone a relation; but I am afraid that was typical of Eric. We stayed in a hotel in Poona and called at Kirkee the next day where we loaded up with our requirements and returned to Bombay very pleased with our efforts.

A small village called Padapai near Madras was to become our next home and here we joined the 19th Indian Division. We took up our position at Padapai in defence of its small air strip against possible air attack, the 19th Division being responsible for the defence of Southern India. I deployed the guns round the landing ground and made my H.Q. in a small wood near the village. The wood turned out to have a religious significance for the local villagers. On one occasion when someone in the village had died the menfolk kept marching round the wood all night beating drums!

Close to our Camp was a company of Sikhs who were responsible for the ground defence of the air strip. I remember how amazed I was to see their rations arriving 'on the hoof', live goats which they insisted on killing themselves.

Later on in 1942 the rest of my Regiment arrived from Secunderabad and also joined the 19th Division. Together we took part in several exercises testing our ability to repel a landing along different sections of the coast. I also organised Battery exercises and I deliberately picked some interesting places to defend, such as a typical Indian town called Conjeeveram. This gave everyone an opportunity to see a bit of India after the exercise was over.

I suffered very few medical complaints during my years in India, but one rather painful one, whilst at Padapai, was a skin disease that I contracted round my anus! I went to see the M.O. who recommended painting the area with iodine. This was easier said than done. Back in my tent, armed with iodine, a brush and a mirror and bending down looking between my legs, I set about my painting task much to the amusement of my fellow officers who came to watch but, needless to say, a lot of pain for me.

My Battery's next move, shortly before Christmas 1942, was to Bangalore. Here I was told to defend the Hindustani Aircraft Factory from any ground attacks as well as from the air. I was also allocated a company of Mahrattas for this purpose. We dug slit trenches and prepared perfect defence positions. The first time that this was put to the test I was in the Command Post and the Mahrattas in their trenches. The enemy attacked across the runway in extended line when the defending Mahrattas yelling war cries, leapt out of the excellent protection of the trenches and rushed across the open ground to take on 'the enemy' in hand fighting. There was nothing I could do to stop them. This was my first experience of Indian troops and of the dangers of bad or no communication; it was fortunate it was a mere mock attack.

In Bangalore my Battery H.Q. was housed in a summer residence belonging to a wealthy Indian family, surrounded by a beautiful garden with all types of exotic fruits. One day an uproar started. We were told that a deadly snake had been seen in the garden but had temporarily gone to ground down a hole. To bring it to the surface the gardener turned on his irrigation pumps flooding the hole and, sure enough, the snake appeared. I got out my revolver and shot it through its head.

On another occasion an Indian man came to see us and reported that a tiger had been seen near some villages where it had caused a lot of harm to people as well as to animals, and would we come and shoot it. Edwards, who was still my second in command, and I said we had no suitable rifles or guns for such a purpose, whereupon the Indian produced a sporting gun but without any ammunition. "Give me ten rupees," he said, "I will buy you some; meet me in the village tomorrow morning". Edwards and I duly turned up at the appointed place and time, but no Indian. We had been taken for a ride!

In March 1943 we were back again in Madras, quartered on the race course in the jockeys houses. Everything smelt of horse and the flies were a menace. We had not been there for long when I was ordered to take my Battery complete with guns and sixty-five vehicles, right across Southern India to Cochin on the western coast - a journey of about a thousand miles. We had been provided with no maps for the journey; the only one I possessed was one I had bought upon arrival in Bombay and this came in most useful. Edwards and a couple of men set off in a truck forty-eight hours before the rest of the Battery, in order to arrange for petrol supplies, rations etc. at suitable places along the route and to leave messages at each place naming the next one that he would proceed to. This worked very smoothly and we arrived in Cochin two weeks after we had set out. Close to the journey's end Edwards had even arranged for a railway bridge to be closed to rail traffic and had 'decked' the tracks so that the bridge was suitable for vehicles and guns to pass over it.

Shortly after our arrival in Cochin the Commander Royal Artillery from the Southern Army flew in to tell me we had been sent there by a mistake and that we must return to Madras!. But we were allowed a two week rest period.

We made the most of this time. We went swimming in the pool of the British Club who had very kindly made us honorary members. We taught everyone in the Battery who couldn't swim, how to swim, as one never knew when that might come in useful.

Cochin was situated in Travancore where females walked about topless, old women as well as the young. This was long before the 'topless age' in Britain and we admired the beautiful young girls. But not all sights were pretty. I remember going to the market one day to buy some shrimps. As the old girl leaned over the shrimps to reach for a container, her 'razor straps' swung through the shrimps! It almost put me off buying them.

We returned to Madras, St Thomas' Mount to be exact, where we joined up with another Battery and shared an H.Q. in a delightful bungalow. But this was not for long for in August 1943 with my Battery I was moved once again back to Bangalore to join up with another Regiment under the command of the 70th British Division fresh from active warfare in the Middle East.

A somewhat unknown officer had recently hit the headlines; he was Brigadier Orde Wingate. During the previous year he had led a Brigade, split up into 'columns', into

Burma behind the Japanese lines thus causing much havoc to their communications. On returning to India he had been sent for by Winston Churchill and had accompanied Churchill on one of his meetings with President Roosevelt. The outcome was that Wingate was given the best part of two Divisions to employ in a similar role the following year. These new troops, including the 70th British Division, had to be reorganised into marching columns, trained to operate in the jungle without support troops; they had to be maintained by air and provided with mules to carry stores and arms suited to jungle war fare.

Soon after my Battery had joined the 70th Division, General Wingate came to visit us and personally interviewed all Field Officers, Majors and above. At my interview he decided to place me on his H.Q. staff and shortly after this I was moved to Agra where his H.Q. was forming up, later moving to Gwalior which was to become his permanent H.O. I was selected to take charge of administration of the Chindits Training Wing as they had become known. My C.O. was a Colonel Anderson and our first task was to find a suitable place in the jungle near a river for water training purposes, and also served by road.

We made contact with the Maharaja of Gwalior who gave us a very good lunch but did his best to put us off using his territory. Finally we found the ideal spot at Dukwan Dam, some fifty miles from Jhansi. This place, surrounded by jungle, was close to a big river. It even had a Dak Bungalow (a rest house built for visiting engineers and inspectors), which we made use of. The bungalow consisted of one main living room and two bedrooms, one on either side, plus a wide verandah. The C.O. took over the one bedroom and I shared the other with the senior instructor. The Training Wing was designed to instruct in jungle warfare officers and N.C.O.s from many units, British, Indian, Burmese, American and even Chinese. Thus we had to have facilities for coping with their special requirements such as food and even separate latrines for each different religion! Attending our courses was a change for the men coming back from their jungle exercises. I felt it necessary to provide them with comfortable quarters and good food and drink, and it gave me a lot of satisfaction to do this.

On my first visit to Jhansi to arrange for supplies of all kinds of requirements for the School I felt I should call on the Area Commander, a Brigadier, to explain why I was there and what we were doing. I was very amiably received and at the end the Brigadier asked me to dinner which I gladly accepted and then he said, "By the way, we don't dress for dinner". I said, "Right oh, Sir", but could not resist a smile. He was an elderly Regular Officer who had been left behind by the war, I think he still thought the War was a great game.

One of the Course Instructors was a doctor (M.O.) who had been on Wingate's first expedition. This man was very fond of the bottle and I can remember him reporting at the Camp for the first time utterly drunk and 'out' in the back of his truck. I had him unloaded and put into his tent but I did not report his arrival to the C.O. It took

forty-eight hours for him to recover and finally, after a swim in our river, he was fine. He remained sober until New Year's Eve when he started boozing again. This time he missed taking some classes and was reported absent without leave. Wingate saw him later, but cancelled his Court Martial on condition that he went into Burma with the next column. This M.O. did a magnificent job behind the Japanese lines, even forming a make-shift hospital where badly wounded men could be flown out and back into India.

Life at the Training wing at Dukwan Dam was not all teaching and I can recall many little incidents.

We used to watch the crocodiles sunning themselves on large flat rocks in our river. "What wonderful skins they have" said our Senior Royal Engineers Officer. "I should like to be able to send home to my wife one of those skins, for a handbag". Some of us said, "Why not?" So one day we got hold of a boat and rowed out to where a crocodile lay docilely in the shallow water, shot it dead and then towed it ashore. Here we duly stripped off its skin, but I was the one who was left to dispose of the carcass - not a very pleasant task. I got out a truck, towed the carcass down the road, then drove into the jungle where I jettisoned it; soon after I watched the vultures devouring it.

One of my many duties was to run the Officers' Mess and needless to say we got through quite a number of bottles each week; some empties were returnable, others not. My job took me to Jhansi once a week by truck in which all empties had been loaded up. On the journey I sometimes sat in the back of the van sorting out the bottles throwing out all unwanted ones. On one such occasion, having carried out my multitude of business at Jhansi, on my way back to camp I discovered that my signet ring was missing. How could I have lost it? I was most upset for it was one that Lolla had given me shortly before our final parting and it meant a lot to me. I felt most depressed and during the jolting truck-journey back I kept thinking, how could it possibly have vanished? I came to the conclusion that it must have slipped off my finger whilst I was throwing out the useless bottles. I had more or less given up the ring for lost in the jungled countryside. Nevertheless, on my next visit to the wine merchant I enquired, rather half-heartedly, if he should have come across a ring of my description, and to my profound amazement his answer was "Yes, Sahib, we found a ring in one of the empty bottle boxes". It was mine alright. But what a chance in a million - well worth the ten rupees reward for the man's honesty.

Early in 1944 'We were honoured by a visit from Lord Mountbatten accompanied by General Wingate who both stayed the night. I gave up my room to his lordship and Wingate took over the C O's room. That evening I laid on a very special dinner for about twelve of us, which was a great success. We were lucky in that we had an excellent Indian cook who was able to do wonders with very second-rate ingredients. I am quite certain that Lord Mountbatten enjoyed his visit with us. He was in great

form telling lots of stories of his experiences in the Royal Navy. After dinner Wingate and Mountbatten stayed up very late discussing plans for the effective deployment of the Chindits.

As the months went by most of the training was completed and the columns went into Burma. I had less and less to do and I felt the time had come to make a move. Edwards too, who was on the strength of one of the columns not yet departed, wanted to return to our old Regiment. It was fortunate that I was on very good terms with the Assistant Military Secretary at Wingate's H.Q. in Gwalior and there I went to see him. The result was that the next time the A.M.S. visited G.H.Q. in Delhi he arranged for our postings, along with our loyal batmen.

I had spent about a year with the Chindits when Edwards and I were posted back to our Regiment who were stationed at Maad Island, north of Bombay, where they were doing combined ops. training. In the meantime Col. Overton had become C.O. of the Regiment. He was very pleased to see us but was somewhat taken aback as already he had a full establishment of officers. However, this was all sorted out and I took over the command of one of his Batteries.

The humidity in Bombay was almost intolerable; to walk a mere hundred yards felt more like five miles. Nevertheless, our training had to continue; we were making preparations for the invasion of Rangoon from the sea and we practised driving vehicles through water with our heads just above the water level. However, this invasion never took place. Instead we were moved to Nasik Road, much further north of Bombay, preparatory to going into Burma by land rather than by sea.

Col. Overton had decided to make some Regimental changes. He made me his second in command which meant I had to give up my Battery. I soon found that being second in command was not much fun; I was usually the last to learn of any new orders or plans as the C.O. dealt directly with his Battery Commanders and quite unintentionally I was left out. During this period I did, however, go to Rawalpindi on a course on loading an aircraft which I found most interesting. We learned how to stow into the old Dakota all kinds of equipment such as jeeps, guns, ammunition and even mules. The latter were very obstinate creatures and caused us much trouble. It was quite an art to get the load evenly spread to give the aircraft the correct 'trim', but after the two weeks I had absorbed enough to impart to the Regiment upon my return.

In August 1944 the Regiment travelled to Burma, at first by train via Calcutta; the journey took ten days, the troop train travelling very slowly. It had no feeding facilities onboard and therefore, every now and then along the route, the train stopped to allow the cooks time to prepare a meal at the track-side. I shared a compartment with Col. Overton, the Adjutant and one Battery Commander and every

evening we had the same argument: was it getting darker earlier because we were moving farther north, or because we were travelling east? We never settled it! After Calcutta the train took us to the banks of the Brahmaputra where we embarked on a river steamer and then travelled for forty-eight hours to Dimapur. Here we changed on to road transport that took us to Kohima and later to Imphal.

General Slim, Commander of the 14th Army in Burma, upon our arrival in Imphal, called a meeting. He was full of enthusiasm and explained to us many of his tactics. It now became clear why at Nasik Road our A.A. guns had been removed from our Regiment and instead we had been provided with anti-tank guns and 3" mortars. The British held the air superiority, General Slim went on to explain, and the most useful role that we could play in the campaign that lay ahead was by employing the 3" mortars in close support of the infantry - something we in fact did throughout our fighting in Burma.

The Japanese had actually penetrated to Kohima and Imphal in India but had been repulsed and forced to withdraw towards the river Chindwin.

The ground through which we were moving was very steep and also densely forested. The general plan was to bring forward an Armoured Brigade consisting of medium sized tanks. It was obvious that these could not move through such a jungle, nor would they be able to pass along the track we had used for our vehicles because of its sharp bends. The Regiment, therefore, was assigned the task of turning our track into a road suitable for tanks. Each Battery was responsible for preparing a length of track and we worked like beavers hacking down trees and cutting through hillsides. It was a most arduous task particularly as simultaneously we had to make certain that the enemy was not about. The work was finally completed and the road duly opened for the tanks right down to the Chindwin which we crossed and then formed up in a bridgehead on its eastern side.

We in the Far East were frequently labelled 'the forgotten army' - true in every sense of the word. Men fighting in other theatres of war closer to Britain did in fact achieve the occasional leave home, but such leave was pretty impossible for us fighting out in the East.

It was at this time in Burma, most of us having been separated from our families for 2½ years, that the 'bombshell' was dropped. A directive arrived from Divisional H.Q. to say that in order to boost the morale it had been decided to allow a very limited number of officers and men home on 28 days leave. This caused a tremendous excitement and raised hopes amongst all of us. But how could the choice be made fairly? It was finally concluded to hold a lottery. I remember the build-up of tension when our turn came to draw lots for the one and only officer from our Regiment. And would you believe it, the lucky devil Edwards won it! He was at first utterly speechless but it was not long before he was on his way home by air to wife and

family. For him it was indeed a 'lucky dip' though this selection of the few did engender a great deal of envy amongst the troops which took quite some time to dispel.

From our bridgehead we moved south in Brigade groups. The Indian Infantry Brigade (of which there were three in each Division) consisted of three Battalions - one British, one Indian and one Gurkha - and they took it in turns to lead the Division. My Regiment 'was directly under Divisional Command and usually we had one Battery in close support of the leading Battalion in each Brigade, so our troops were kept very busy. At night each Battalion formed itself into a 'box' or defence area with infantry all around on guard while the others slept within. This was where we scored because we did no guard duties and unless disturbed, got a good night's sleep.

It was clear the Japs were withdrawing towards Mandalay which was exactly what Gen. Slim had planned. He had let them advance purposely to within the Indian border and then, when their lines of communication had become stretched, he went into action and kept them on the run. We gave them no time to re-group or create defensive positions but ceaselessly kept pressing them southwards.

Most of our supplies came by air, dropped to us by parachute at a prearranged 'Dropping Zone' (D.Z.). They consisted of food rations, petrol, ammunition and all types of supplies including medical. I can even remember water supply being dropped at one time. It was a superb organisation and reflected great credit on the RAF and the American Air Force who seldom failed and rarely made mistakes in identifying the appropriate D.Z. - quite a feat when all they could see from the air was jungle. Amongst the medical supplies were Mepacrine tablets which we all took each day to prevent malaria. We were living 'rough' and had no chance of using mosquito nets; without Mepacrine there is little doubt that a large section of the Regiment would have succumbed to the disease; some, however, did suffer dysentery and dengue fever, etc., also prickly heat from time to time, but this was not dangerous.

By December 1944 we were approximately half way between the rivers Chindwin and Irrawaddy when I received a signal that I was to go on a course at the School of Artillery at Deolali in India, just north of Bombay. To get there I was to report at a map reference where a light aircraft would take me back to Imphal. Here I would transfer to a Dakota which would land me at Calcutta, and then by train to Deolali. Imagine my feelings, I had spent months getting to where I was and in an hour or two I would be back where I started. I was fuming, to put it mildly, and most reluctant to go, but orders were orders and so away I flew and spent a month of luxury living at the Officers' Mess at the Deolali School of Artillery. I can remember we actually had cream with our porridge each morning. What a contrast to my life of jungle warfare.

After the Course which was wasted on me because we were no longer using guns in our battles but mortar bombs, I returned to Calcutta and made enquiries as to how far my Regiment had advanced. I found they had reached the banks of the river Irrawaddy near a place called Schwebo.

Soon upon my return I was sent out on a patrol to find a suitable gun site for the Divisional guns which were to be used for firing across the river at heavily defended Jap positions. We had no knowledge as to 'whether any Japs were still remaining on our side. Thus we went fully armed and moved with great care through the dense jungle. At one clearing we came upon the bodies of a previous patrol who had been ambushed and this filled us with apprehension. However, our mission was completed and we returned to our base the next day, without any mishaps.

The Irrawaddy is a very large river. At our position along it was over a mile wide and there was no hope of crossing by day in the face of Japanese gunfire. The Royal Engineers, therefore, set about making rafts from tree trunks lashed together and then fitted them with outboard motors which were being dropped by air. The rafts were used to ferry some of the infantry across by night at a place upstream. These troops then attacked the Jap position forcing them to withdraw, thus they were able to form a bridgehead. Thereafter, little by little and day by day, others were ferried across widening the area held on the other side until a firm base had been secured. I was responsible for seeing our Regiment across and this took all of one night. The raft work was magnificent, I do not remember one of them going wrong. The following morning I was so tired that I fell asleep sitting upright unsupported on a rock - without falling over!

Our close support of the Infantry with 3" mortars had been a great success; the trajectory of the mortar bomb was high, rather like a howitzer, so it was possible to fire them from a clearing in the jungle and they fell almost vertically on their target with great effect. However, about this time we were getting alarming reports that our gunners were 'firing short' and some of our bombs were falling on our own Infantry ahead, many with fatal results. I spent a lot of time investigating the reports. I came to the conclusion that the fault could not be ours since the gunners were not setting the wrong range on the mortars but suspected that it had something to do with the design of the bombs. These events were causing much despondency amongst the troops, the Infantry complained bitterly at being in our firing line and the morale of our gunners was seriously affected.

With Col. Overton's agreement I set about investigating. I arranged for a team of gunners to set up a mortar, complete with a supply of bombs, on the banks of the Irrawaddy and I explained what I was going to do. We inspected the bombs to see if there was any difference in their design. A bomb is shaped like a pear and on its tail are three fins which steer the bomb on a set course. On examination we found that some bombs had fins fixed by one spotweld each whereas others had two welds. I

decided to test them and discovered that all those with two welds performed normally but that a large proportion of bombs with single-welded fins fell short of their target.

I reported my findings to Divisional H.Q. who immediately instructed the Royal Ordnance Corps to examine all bombs and only issue the ones with two welds per fin. It was a long time before they complied with the instruction. In the meantime we ourselves sorted out the bombs and we used only the safe ones. I have often since thought that quite a few lives must have been saved because of my investigation.

It was inevitable that as a result of my bomb-exploding experiment in the Irrawaddy river, a large quantity of dead fish came floating down some of which were promptly eaten by the Indians. I am quite certain that many of our troops regarded me as an eccentric, firing bombs into the river!

By now our 19th Indian Division had established themselves on the eastern side of the Irrawaddy and Mandalay. Our target, lay some 100 miles to the south. No other Division had crossed; both the British 2nd Division and all other Indian Divisions still found themselves on the western side of this wide river. From our bridgehead we commenced our advance keeping up a tenacious pressure on the enemy. In fact once the Japanese had suffered defeat and had begun to withdraw we never gave them a respite to form up again; their retreat soon became a veritable rout. On our side the sheer physical exertion could not have been kept up had it not been for the inspiration of our Divisional Commander. As we progressed, each night we set out our perimeter and posted our guards while we slept in our slit trenches. The advance was so rapid that each day before sunset we had to dig new nightly trenches - no mean task as the ground was mighty hard. At times we were lucky enough to take over positions occupied by the enemy only the previous night and on one such occasion we came across several dead bodies in a bunker. We disposed of them by pouring petrol over them and setting fire to the bodies. Gruesome as this may seem, it was the most expeditious method for us and besides, it suited the enemy's religious belief.

Not until we were approaching Mandalay in February 1945 did the enemy manage to hold up our advancing troops and this only temporarily.

The Japs had taken refuge in a pagoda situated on Mandalay Hill on the northern outskirts of the town. With its dominating position and commanding view it provided a real fortress for the enemy, and our leading Battalion met with withering fire from this hill post. We did our best to shell it but each time the infantry moved forward they came under heavy enemy fire. After having suffered many casualties it was decided to call in the RAF who made an air strike dropping Napalm, the liquid that burns so fiercely. The pagoda was finally taken and upon entering this stronghold we found that the whole of the hillside was a rabbit warren of cellars in which the Japs

had taken refuge, the Napalm having run into their shelters and the enemy having burnt to death.

Finally the battle for Mandalay itself was due to commence, with its ancient fortress, Fort Dufferin, one and a quarter miles square and surrounded by a waterfilled moat from the Irrawaddy. Around it had spread the town itself with a conglomerate of houses, huts, narrow streets and bazaars. The fortress walls were very high and thick and through its battlements the Japs were firing up and down the moat. The Division made a two prong attack from the north on either side of the fort trying to surround it and were close to meeting on its southern side. The enemy having realised what we were aiming at presented strong resistance to our forces joining hands.

Our infantry made several attempts at crossing the moat and scaling the fortress walls but were repelled suffering considerable losses. The gunners were then asked to try breach the wall with direct gunfire. Col. Overton and I arranged for a variety of guns to be positioned across the moat on the western side of the fort; we then fired at the walls at point blank range but were unable to make any impact on the stonework; nothing even resembling a breach or a hole was achieved. Later, after the enemy had surrendered, the reason for our failure was revealed. Earth over the years had been building up right to the top of the walls and in such depth, providing additional support to the stonework. No gun could possibly have penetrated.

In the meantime we discovered that some Japs were escaping at night between the positions occupied by our troops. Rather than plugging this escape route General Rees, our Commander, decided to ignore the gap. Instead he placed an ambush on the south-running track away from the fortress. In this way we managed to kill all the escapees, and those remaining in the fortress, not knowing of the ambush, walked straight into the trap.

But the fortress had still not been taken. Many remained within and continued to resist. At this stage it was decided to call in the American Air Force to bomb the fort and this caused the remaining occupants to finally surrender. They came out holding a white flag; thus Fort Dufferin had fallen.

Soon after the capture of Mandalay the airport was opened through which supplies could now reach us. ENSA who entertained the Forces during the war, were quick off the mark and we thought how clever of them to arrive just when the troops needed some entertainment. But ENSA said they could not stay to perform - all they wanted was a certificate from us saying they were the first of their organisation to set foot in Mandalay! Our Welfare Officer duly rejected them with 'No entertainment, no certificate' and off they went, no one having been satisfied.

After Mandalay General Slim put our Division into reserve and each Unit was sent on a two week rest period to Maymyo, the well-known local hill station in peacetime. Our Regiment was appointed 'house agent' and given the task of allocating

accommodation and making all other arrangements for the stay of each Unit in turn. What a grand assignment after such arduous fighting. We listed all the beautiful bungalows in this heavenly spot finding out how many each would accommodate. We even managed to lay on an open air cinema at very short notice and I had no doubt that everyone benefitted greatly from this change and relaxation.

By now some of the other Divisions who had advanced on the western side of the Irrawaddy crossed the river at Mandalay and they were being put in pursuit of the enemy southwards in the direction of Rangoon. Our men, after their rest period in Maymyo, followed in reserve, quite a change after the role of being the leading Division for so long, no trenches to dig and no perimeter defences to prepare. We drove on at a leisurely speed through Meiktila where the RAF had splendidly cut off the Japanese retreat. By March 1945 we came to rest for some months at Toungoo on the banks of the river Sittang.

Toungoo was quite a sizeable town by Burmese standards. I remember their bazaar selling excellent cheroots of which I smoked a large number. The Division made its H.Q. in the town and we took over a good-sized empty bungalow as our Regimental H.Q. Meanwhile, the other Divisions had fought their way south and had taken Rangoon thus bringing all Burma back to British rule. But the Japanese still put up resistance to any advances towards Thailand and we were instructed to march towards Mawchi.

Soon after arriving in Taungoo Col. Overton was repatriated back to the U.K. as his age and service had caught up with him. He had been a perfect C.O., good-humoured, just and quite fearless, but at the age of 49 think he had had enough. He had also fought in the First World War where he had won the M.C. and Bar and had clearly done more than his fair share. I was told that, with the approval of the War Office, I had been appointed to take over from him. I was promoted to Lieut. Colonel and became C.O. of the Regiment. This was indeed a proud day for me; I was just 31 years old.

Although shown as a road on the map of the Indian Sub-Continent, the communication with Mawchi was along a narrow earth track with dense jungle on either side, just wide enough to accommodate one tank at a time. It was therefore easy for the enemy to defend but difficult for us to advance along. When our tanks were being used enemy anti-tank guns could be sited at any turning of the road giving point blank sighting. With only room enough for one of our tanks to advance at a time these were unable to support one another. I have seen tanks being blown up and all the occupants killed. Similarly, infantry advancing along the track could come under fire or be ambushed. If, on the other hand, they decided to move through the jungle, this was extremely slow and tortuous. The Division sent one Brigade at a time along the track and each Brigade selected a Battalion who in turn chose a Company to head the advance. One of our Batteries of mortars was with the leading Battalion.

It was very slow going. We fought along that track yard by yard and met with strong Japanese resistance.

At times we came to a comparatively large clearing in the jungle beside the track, which enabled us to bring up more mortars. On one such occasion we even had two Batteries crammed into a small clearing giving support to the infantry ahead. Close to the 25th milestone on the Mawchi Road we were ranging on a Jap position, which was getting the range correct by firing one mortar and observing where the bomb fell. In this particular case we were using a light Army Aircraft for spotting, which was in radio contact with my jeep close to the gunsight. The wireless operator in the jeep was working the set whilst I was standing close by the vehicle interpreting the reports, when suddenly there was an almighty explosion overhead. I began to run for a slit trench but my legs buckled under me and I fell to the ground. There was quite a commotion. After it had died down my batman came to see if I was alright and since I was unable to get up he fetched a stretcher from the First Aid Post. We lost quite a few men and more were seriously wounded. The situation had been made worse in that we had packed so many into such a small space. There is no doubt the aerial explosion had been actuated by the Jap shell having hit a tree, causing it to explode overhead and showering us with shrapnel.

I had two pieces of metal in my left leg but the serious one was lodged in my chest. It had entered just below my collar bone and penetrated slantways to the bottom of my left lung which made breathing difficult. I was taken by jeep ambulance to the Casualty Clearing Station (ccs) in Toungoo and put to bed. Here I was injected with penicillin every three hours, a very painful procedure, X-rayed and given aspirations. Most of the Regimental Officers kindly came to see me, but I wasn't up to having visitors and had to ask the Padre to warn them off. After 2-3 days in the CCS I was evacuated by air to Comilla Base Hospital where I remained a patient for nearly two months.

They decided at Comilla not to operate but merely to leave the pieces of metal in me. Doubtless, this was the correct decision. The critical one, the piece in my lung, is now firmly imbedded in its wall and has never caused me any trouble, only a great deal of amusement to me by the consternation that has arisen over the years whenever mass radiography has been carried out and I have had to explain that the shadow on the film is the visiting card the Japs left behind!

At the hospital I continued to receive aspirational treatment 2-3 times a week which consisted of me sitting on the side of the operating table, stripped to the waist whilst the surgeon, having given me a local anaesthetic, inserted a tube into my back and drained off all the fluid that had collected. I was always awarded a large brandy by the sister upon returning to the ward, for having been a good boy!

During my period in hospital I had the pleasure of frequent visits from a most attractive physiotherapist, much to the envy of my ward mates. One of the exercises she gave me to do for my lung was to blow a paper windmill. I am sure my mates

thought that in return for such a privilege I should suffer for, when the windmill treatment was due to commence, they all congregated around and made funny faces which caused me to laugh - and, oh, did it hurt!

By now it was June 1945 and the war in Europe was at an end. We were most envious of our brothers there who were able to return home. Things in the Far East looked very different. Admittedly, Burma had been recaptured but the enemy was still in occupation of the larger part of the territories they had overrun in South-East Asia. It looked very much as though our war might drag on for years. Little did we know we were so close to a new scientific discovery which was to change the whole situation.

As soon as I was fit enough I was discharged from hospital and was asked to take a 6 week convalescence leave. I decided to spend it at Murree hill station, north of Rawalpindi in the Himalaya foothills. It was whilst I was there that the first Atomic Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, which changed the whole aspect of the war. Murree was a very pleasant spot but the fact that I had become bored could only mean that I was fast recovering. Having spent a month at Murree I went to ask the local British Hospital people for their O.K. to end my sick leave. However, they were not prepared to officially grant my release. If I went they said, it would be at my own risk. But nothing could stop me for I was most anxious to return home.

I thought this could be achieved most easily via Delhi. I happened to remember that a one-time subaltern of mine had been posted to G.H.Q. there and to him I went in search of advice. By this time the second Atomic Bomb had gone off, this time at Nagasaki, which had caused the Japanese to surrender, and the Far Eastern war was at an end.

My friend's advice was that I was likely to return to England sooner with my Regiment who had been abroad for as long as 3½ years. He then arranged for my air flight to Calcutta, but from there to Rangoon proved to be much more difficult. Granted, planes flew daily, but each time I went to the airport to try get a flight I was met with 'Priorities only'. Finally I took on a job as a courier to secure a place; I was to convey important documents to the newly reinstated Governor in Rangoon. From then on it was easy. I cadged transport to Taungoo where my Regiment was still stationed. Here I learned that the Division had been busily engaged in dealing with pockets of Japanese resistance, men who had been cut off and who simply refused to believe that the war was over.

It is interesting to reflect that it was not the Atom Bomb which put an end to war in Burma for we had recaptured the whole of that country before the first A-bomb was dropped.

Returning to Burma did not, after all, lead to a swift departure for home. In Taungoo the Division had been told to wait, there just weren't enough ships, and in the right places, to convey home an army of thousands of soldiers all at once. And what was

more, priority had to be granted to the prisoners now released from Japanese war camps, most of whom were very ill and physically weak.

In order to pass the time we held military parades and spit and polish were once again the order of the day. Our Royal Engineers even built a chapel in Taungoo as a memorial to the time we spent there and I went to its dedication. I still harbour a deep desire to re-visit the place to see what it is like today.

It was clear that Lolla too was getting impatient at my delay in returning to England. One day I received a telegram from her, via the Royal Signals, saying the war was over and it was time I got back home! Unfortunately it made very little difference to the situation out East.

After a long wait the Regiment eventually received orders to move to Rangoon and hold themselves in readiness to embark for the U.K. Our spirits were high but we remained in Rangoon for another 3 weeks before we embarked in the 'Johan de Witt' and set sail for home. I made the most of my stay in Rangoon and amongst other places went to see the most beautiful Shwe Dagon Pagoda, considered Burma's most sacred shrine, which is covered all over with gold leaf. I found the bazaars fascinating and one day during my wanderings came across a merchant selling precious stones. From him I purchased some Burmese rubies to take home for Lolla. We later had them made into a piece of jewellery which she still wears.

One might almost consider the journey home as 'by express' in comparison to the 9 weeks the convoy out had taken. It was now safe to sail through the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean, and we docked at the port of Southampton after a mere 4 weeks at sea.

We had been anticipating dispersing there and returning directly to our respective homes. But that was not the way of the Army. How much longer could they drag out our 3½ years of active service overseas? . Overnight we were being transported by train right up to Whittington in Shropshire where we met with complete confusion. It took the whole of two days for Western Command to sort us out before we were finally free to set off on our disembarkation leave.

Having looked up trains I was at last able to phone through to Lolla; hearing her voice was like another world. When five hours later my train pulled in at Paddington Station she was there to meet me and had with her our 3-year old son Lawrence. I admit it was something of a disappointment to me that he did not immediately seem pleased to see me. I must have looked a frightening stranger to him. That apart, after so many years of separation and the many perils we had both experienced, it seemed almost incomprehensible that the war was over and we were together at last in what we hoped was going to prove a safer world.