

CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON BAGE

(23 July 1919 – 5 April 2004)



Chris Bage

Chris Bage and his twin brother Tommy, survived the difficult years of childhood living in the poor, industrial area of Tyneside, but who, in their teenage years, were drawn into a terrifying and destructive war. A war that quickly made the boys into battle-hardened men and gave those that survived chilling memories that they would never forget.

The Early Years (1919 - 1939)

Chris and Tommy were born on the 23 July 1919 in South Shields in County Durham. They lived in a flat in Mitre Street which was a very poor part of the town near to the River Tyne. Their father was George Heslington Bage and mother was Sarah (nee Clasper). Tommy was the first one of the twins, his brother Christopher Johnson following behind him into the world. They had an older sister Margaret Smart Bage who was twelve years older than they were. George was in work and Sarah kept house and looked after her family as best she could in those difficult times. Previous to the twins being born Sarah had given birth to five other children

who died at various ages, the oldest being 14 years old and the youngest 2 years. The time was a very difficult one, and the Flu Epidemic had been raging worldwide.



Chris Bage



Tommy Bage

The twins somehow managed to survive through those difficult years when poverty often led to disease that could so easily strike and wipe out whole families. George Bage had been through the Great War with the Durham Light Infantry and had been wounded in action. He was a very quiet, reserved sort of man, and his hearing wasn't very good, perhaps damaged in the war. Little did George and Sarah know, at the birth of Thomas and Christopher, that their twin sons would have to endure the ordeal of a long and bitter war when in the prime of their lives.

The boys grew up in the poor, rundown riverside area of South Shields. They attended St. Stephens Junior School and later went on to Baring Street Seniors.

Signs of War

The year was 1939 and it looked like war was imminent. Most plans made at that time would be drastically changed in the months ahead. Tommy and Chris were of eligible age for call-up to the armed forces and were very apprehensive about the situation.

War was declared and shortly afterwards the air-raid sirens sounded in South Shields for the first time, causing all the people to run for cover in the newly built Anderson Shelters.

Call to Arms

Chris was called up to the Army Medical Corps (R.A.M.C.) in December 1939. He went through his class 3, 2 and 1 Nursing assistant training then para training.



Christopher Johnson BAGE in the Group Photograph of 225 Parachute Field Ambulance, January 1944

(He is in the 2nd row from the back, 10th from the left)



Chris shown below arrow in above photo, taken from the main photo.

About January 10th, 1940, Tommy was called up into the army and told to report to the Training Camp at Auchengate, Troon, Ayrshire in Scotland. He took the train to Newcastle and then another to Troon where he spent about 12 weeks in training before joining the Highland Light Infantry. He was first of all sent to Ireland to a Transit Camp to join a battalion before being posted to join the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F.) in Rouen, France.

Some information about 225 Parachute Field Ambulance RAMC

225 Parachute Field Ambulance was formed at Castle Cary in June 1943, taking its name from 225 Light Field Ambulance, of Guards Armoured Division which had been disbanded in January that year. The 225 Para Field Ambulance would be attached to 5th Parachute Brigade, of the new 6th Airborne Division.

After extensive training, 225 PFA first saw action during Op Overlord, sent to Normandy in support of 5th Parachute Brigade. The Brigade had been tasked with seizing and holding bridges over the River Orne and Caen Canal near Ranville and Benouville, secondly to secure and hold the area around these two villages and that of Le Bas de Ranville, where 225 would establish their Main Dressing Station (MDS).

225 PFA dropped into France at about 0120 hrs on the morning of 6 June 1944. By around 0230, most had reached the unit successfully and joined the rear of the

12th (Yorks) Parachute Battalion heading for Le Bas de Ranville. Here they commandeered the local chateau and established their MDS by about 0400hrs, with the first casualties arriving soon afterwards. The Sections attached to the Battalions tasked with securing the Bridges (including the Caen Bridge - later known as Pegasus Bridge) after initial glider landings, had fared rather worse. Conditions were worsened by sporadic sniperfire around one temporary Aid Station, whilst another Section suffered relatively heavy casualties during the initial drops. Despite these problems Cpt Vaughan, a Medical Officer attached to gliders acting as the coup de main force, had successfully established an effective MDS in the vicinity which despite limited resources, dealt well with the relatively large number of wounded from the men in the area. In the first 40 hours, this MDS performed 43 operations with a pretty good survival rate, before the link with 8th Field Ambulance, of 3rd Division enabled the evacuation of casualties to medical facilities and at bridgehead established by the amphibious assault during D-Day.

(From <https://www.paradata.org.uk/>)

The following is from Chris' daughter Trisha; -

Dad never talked very much about the War years to us. If we got the photograph out (Dad is on the 2nd row from the top, 10th to the left) he was able to name many of the faces on it but sadly a lot of them had lost their lives and I think it was still too raw a memory for him to talk about it. It wasn't 'till Kevin my eldest was asked at Primary School during a school anniversary event to take in memorabilia or talk to someone who had been through the War years that we found out as much as we did.

As I recall this is what he told him. Dad did his parachute and medical training in Norfolk (I think). He was shot down over Dunkirk and taken prisoner. He was put in a cart and taken to a French hospital where a French doctor worked on his leg to remove the shrapnel and basically saved his leg. He was then transferred to Stalag IXC in Germany where he remained a prisoner of war until the end of the war and was liberated by the Americans. See Dog Tag Prisoner No. 53313.



The Prisoner of War tag that Chris was issued with at the German Camp



Shields Daily Gazette, 07 August 1944

Every thing is just about ready for Nov. 17th and I can tell you I feel a little scared at the prospects of having to go through a marriage ceremony but as I will have Milke at the end of it I think it will be worth it. I believe Johnny is home but his

An extract from a letter to his brother Tommy about the forthcoming wedding

ARMY FORM C2136 (Small) **MESSAGE FORM** Register No.

Call Srl. No. Priority Transmission Instructions

ABOVE THIS LINE FOR SIGNALS USE ONLY

FROM (A) Originator Date-Time of Origin OFFICE DATE STAMP

For Action *RP11-* *15-11-45* *Ord Sgt*

TO *Pto TF Bage 3318957 Bldg* (W) For Information (LNKO) Message Instructions GR

Originator's No. *Can you get 48 Hrs am getting married on Sat. want you as best man Chris*

THIS MESSAGE MAY BE SENT AS WRITTEN BY ANY MEANS EXCEPT WIRELESS IF LIABLE TO BE INTERCEPTED OR TO FALL INTO ENEMY HANDS, THIS MESSAGE MUST BE SENT IN CIPHER ORIGINATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS DEGREE OF PRIORITY

SIGNED *1* Time System Op. *THI or TOR 1916 L SG*

Time cleared *1*

Message from Chris to brother Tommy about him being best man. Tommy wasn't able to get leave and couldn't be there.



Chris and Millie were married in South Shields on 17 Nov 1945

Dad returned home where he married Millie our mam and after he was demobbed, he took a job at a sawmill in South Shields. With his background medical training he had received in the Army he decided to take up Nursing. He qualified as a State Enrolled Nurse at Preston Hospital, North Shields where he remained till he retired. At his retirement party Mam said everyone spoke very highly of him and he was well regarded by Senior Staff and Doctors alike.



Chris and his colleagues at Preston Hospital, North Shields

He always worked over the Christmas period saying that the nurses with young children should have Christmas Day at home. Little did we know at the time was that dad was the Hospital Father Christmas. It wasn't till we saw a picture of him all dressed up that we found out.



Chris as Santa at Preston Hospital, North Shields

Dad was very proud of his medals and my sister Linda told me he always took them on holiday with him when they went away just in case someone broke in and stole them. Linda and John took him and Mam over to France where he visited the Cemeteries. A time for him to reflect not only on all the sadness but to be proud of all they had achieved.

Dad's Medical Corps is mentioned on Page 23 of the book 'Go To It'

Chris' war time Memorabilia



His medals are the defence medal. 1939-45 medal, 1939-45 star and the France and Germany stars



Cap badge



Shoulder patch



Regimental Tie

[illegible]

Army No. 1365817 Present Rank AK RELEASE LEAVE CERTIFICATE Army Form X 202/A

Surname (Block Letters) BAGE Christian Name/s. Christopher James 4 - JUN 1946

Unit, Regt. or Corps No. 1, Coy. R.A.F.C.

Date of: *Last enlistment R. Dec 30
* Calling up for military service R. Dec 30
* Strike out whichever is inapplicable.

(a) Trade on enlistment Lawyer's Laboratory (c) Service Trade Working Orally: (one)
(b) Trade courses and trade tests passed Working Orally (d) Any other qualification for civilian employment None

Military Conduct: Exemplary

Testimonial: He has proved to be a very good morning orderly, and is efficient in treatment of patients and ward cleanliness

Place Catterick Camp Date 8 APR 1946

Officer's Signature [Signature] Signature of Soldier [Signature]

* Army Education Record (including particulars under (a), (b), (c) and (d) below):
(a) Type of course. (b) Length. (c) Total hours of instruction. (d) Record of achievement.
(i)*
(ii)*
(iii)*
(iv)*

* Instructors will insert the letter "I" here to indicate that in their case the record refers to courses in which they have acted as Instructors.

Signature of Unit Education Officer.....

POSITION OF SOLDIER ON TERMINATION BY RELEASE LEAVE

1. A regular soldier with Reserve service to complete will be transferred to the Royal Army Reserve, and will receive Reserve pay until his period of Reserve service has been completed. If on that date the Emergency still exists, he will cease to draw Reserve pay, and will then be transferred to Army Reserve Class "Z" (unpaid).
2. A regular soldier who has completed his Colour and Reserve service engagement will be transferred to Army Reserve Class "Z" (unpaid).
3. All other soldiers will be transferred to Army Reserve Class "Z" or Class "Z" (C).

Special Note—Army Reservists are liable to recall to the colours, if necessary, during the continuing period of the Emergency.
Notes: (i) Further details of service and of medals to which entitled may be had on application to G.I. Records, accompanied by the applicant's A.R.64, Part I.
(ii) If this certificate is lost or mislaid, no duplicate can be obtained.
(iii) Any alterations of the particulars given in this certificate may render the holder liable to Prosecution under the Seamen's and Soldiers' False Claims Act, 1906.

THE ABOVE-NAMED MAN PROCEEDED ON RELEASE LEAVE ON THE DATE SHOWN IN THE MILITARY DISPERSAL UNIT STAMP OPPOSITE.

N.B.—A certificate showing the date of transfer to the appropriate Army Reserve (A.F. X 202/B) will be issued by the Officer in Charge of the Record Office.

Military Dispersal Unit Stamp.
No. 2
APR 1946
YORK

Brother Tommy received a letter from Chris dated 25.10.1945 when he was back in the UK and at Catterick Camp in Yorkshire. After the terrifying experience Chris had been through in France and Germany, he said in his letter he was feeling a little scared, “Everything is just about ready for Nov.17th and I can tell you I feel a little scared at the prospects of having to go through a marriage ceremony”

Continuing with his letter he sounds like he is still feeling imprisoned back in the UK. He said, “I have just finished a week’s fire-piquet. It was pretty deadly as we are not allowed to leave the vicinity of the hospital with the result I could not get to the pictures or even go up to Sandes Homes which are only about five minutes from the main gate.”

The Meaning of a ‘Fire Piquet’

Fire Piquet was considered a reasonable 'sleeping duty', providing it didn't go all Pete Tong and you didn't have to put out fires.

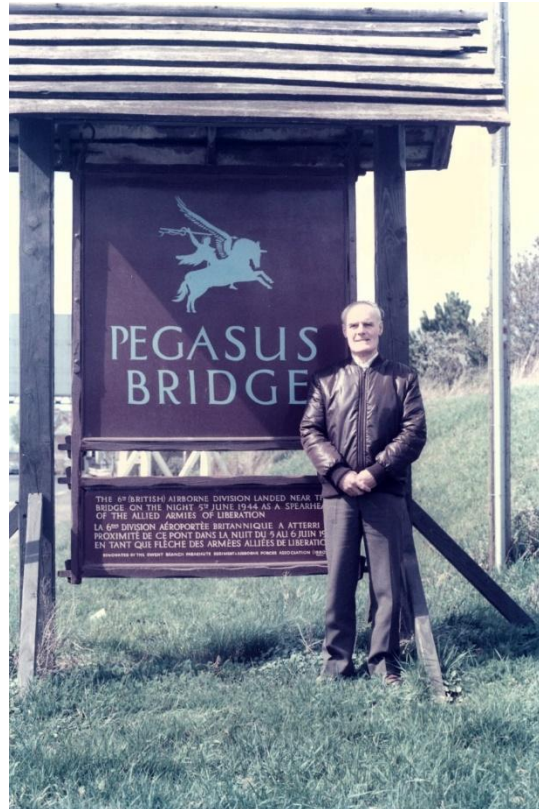
The fire-fighting equipment might consist of a two-wheeled wooden hand cart (flammable), several lengths of canvas hose (flammable), 4 fire buckets that were filled with 99% fag ends 1% sand (flammable), a foam fire extinguisher (u/s) and 6 fire beating brooms made entirely of dry wood (flammable).

Essentially the Fire Piquet would keep the fire going until real firemen arrived.

Note about Sandes Homes

Sandes remains faithful to the same vision of providing friendship and support for the military community as a witness and practical expression of the Christian faith.

The Centres fulfil a distinctive role being seen as a neutral, non-military space within the army camps. They provide catering and recreational facilities along with quiet areas for people to unwind and relax in a homely atmosphere.



Many years later and Chris on a visit to Pegasus Bridge

Once back home in the North East of England Chris worked as a nurse at the Preston Hospital in North Shields, Northumberland where he was highly regarded. Whenever a family member talked to a former patient of the hospital, they would give a glowing report about Chris. Every Christmas for many years an anonymous person would leave him a present at the Hospital Christmas tree as a thank you.

Sadly, Chris had a fall and broke his hip and was admitted to South Shields General Hospital. Shortly afterwards Tommy also broke his hip and ended up in the adjacent ward.

In his later years Chris developed Dementia and on 5th Feb 2004 he passed away at the Bamburgh Court Nursing Home, South Shields.

Tommy passed away in Ward 20 at the South Shields General Hospital, South Shields, on the 12th of Oct 2004.

~~~~~

Compiled and written by John Bage (Chris's nephew)

Copyright 2023