

JOHN BATH

My life - or what I can remember of it



I was born on the third of January, 1918, the youngest of five children, to Rosina Bath. My sister, Olive, was two years older than me, my brother, George, seven years older, Stanley, ten years older and I am not sure how much older than these was my eldest brother, Fred.

You will see by the year I was born that it was during the first great World War. I never knew my father because he had been killed in action before I arrived on the scene. He had been a master plasterer by trade and ran his own little business, which employed a number of other men. As these were gradually called up into the forces my father went to work down Edlington pit as a bricklayer and eventually he volunteered to join the Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment. My mother later told me that six men had been laying tapes through a minefield and that one of the men had been wounded. My father had been bandaging this man's leg when a sniper shot my father in the back. The only one to have survived was the chap to whom my father had given first aid.

My mother brought five of us up alone from the time I was born. She had a war pension and used to get cheap coal from the pit where my dad had worked. From the earliest times I can remember, my mother rarely went out because she suffered from varicose veins and ulcers on both her legs. She could not walk very far at all and so we all had our little jobs to do. They were handed down as the elders started work.

Fred got a job at the local printing office as a type-setter. Stan was apprenticed as a bricklayer at Moore and Hooper's on the main road. George got a job at Pegler's brass works, at the bottom of our street, and my sister, Olive, after leaving school at fourteen years old, was made to stay at home to help run the household. My mother was very strict with us and I remember that she had a little strap and when we heard it crack, we used to jump and do as we were told or we would get a slap or two with it. Nevertheless, we were a happy little family and my childhood days seemed very delightful.

I was born at number 3 Queen Street, Balby, Doncaster. The street ran off the left hand side of the main Doncaster to Sheffield road about a mile from the centre of town. There was a grocery shop and beer-off (off-licence) at the top of the street and the back garden of this shop ran down Queen Street for about forty yards. The back door to this garden was in a passage rather than in the street, and our front door was right opposite this back door. The passage was wide enough to get a horse and cart up to the top of the backs (alley) to some stables where they kept about three horses and carts for selling coal. I shall always remember their names (or what we called them, at any rate) - "Mad Harry", "Mad Dick" and "Mad Tom" - these because they used to come running up the passage with their hooves thundering in order to get a run up the slope. Our back garden was a little higher up the backs and we children used to have to nip quickly out of the way when we heard them coming.

Our garden ran the whole length of the backs and my mother used to keep some chickens and fowls in a pen at the top of the garden; also a cockerel, which was very frightening to us youngsters. We all had to take turns in feeding them. It was a lovely long garden and we had many a happy hour playing in it. We also grew potatoes and other vegetables.

Our next-door neighbours were Mr & Mrs Wibberley who had one son, Bob. My mother's best friend, Mrs Collingwood, lived across the road, opposite. She had five children, too, about the same ages as our family. Edna Collingwood was at school with Olive and we all played together. Dennis and the youngest were a little younger than myself. Next door to them lived another Mr & Mrs Collingwood (related). They had two daughters, Mary and

Doris. A little further down the street my grandad lived. This was my mother's dad, Grandad Jebb, and he had my mother's youngest sister, my aunty, and her husband living with him. They had one little girl, my cousin, who was called Eileen Sanderson.

Next door to our house was the Prince Of Wales pub and next to that was a little general grocery shop which sold nearly everything we needed. Later on, when grandad died, Aunty Nellie and Uncle Billy took over the shop and did very well with it.

I remember a lorry used to deliver to the pub with beer barrels which they rolled down into the cellar. Once when they came, my brother George and some other lads were playing round about and for a joke they put George into a little crate or box affair on the side of the lorry which drove off with him in it. I ran screaming to my mother, saying that they had taken him away. Of course, they let him out at the top of the street, but I thought that I would never see him again.

Also down the street was a big yard where they had a haulage business. They also kept a lot of pigs in this yard. One day I was playing on my little tricycle when the pigs got loose and came grunting all around me. I dashed off home, frightened to death.

One of my aunties lived in the next street, Belmont Avenue. She was another of my mother's sisters, Alice. Aunt Alice and Uncle Albert had two boys, my cousins Albert and Ronald. Albert was two years younger than me and Ronnie four years younger. Whereas I went to King Edward Road School, they went to Hyde Park School, but we all used to play together and we had some good games of cricket and football in the backs. Mr Wibberley, our next-door neighbour, used to play with us and I remember he used to torment me. He was a professional footballer and he wouldn't let you get the ball, but he taught me how to play and we used to love him having a game with us. We used to knock on his door and ask if he was coming out to play with us.

I started school at five years old, going to King Edward Road School, and staying there until I was twelve years old. I then went to Oswin Avenue Senior School until I was fourteen. I loved playing sport and used to play in the school football and cricket teams. I was one of the smallest in the class but always got into the school's first teams. I had a trial for the Doncaster boys' team and they told me I would have been picked to play, only I was too small.

I should have left school at Christmas, my fourteenth birthday being on the 3rd January, but at the time there wasn't very much employment and you were lucky if you got a job anywhere. My mother said I had to go back to school after the holidays but, on the first Monday back, we were marching across Balby Road to the school playing fields when I came past a shop with a notice up, wanting an errand lad. I asked my teacher if I could go in and see about the job and he said yes, so in I went and got the job, starting the following Monday. I went home and told my mum and she was very pleased and said I could start work.

The shop was a high class grocery and provisions store. Harry Hopkinson and his sister ran it. Miss Hopkinson used to do all their own baking, making bread, cakes and tarts. I thought it would just be a job to do for the time being until I could get a better one. The hours were long, starting at 8.00am, with an hour for dinner, half an hour for tea, with the shop closing at 7.30pm. We then had to wash and scrub the shop out and clean up. On

Saturdays we closed at 9.00pm, or sometimes 10.00pm or later. All this for nine shillings a week.

There were four errand lads and we all had a round each to do, riding a carrier bike and going round each day for people's orders. When we got back we had to pack the orders and deliver them on a big two-wheeled hand cart. Pushing it was hard work, boxes piled three or four high. Most people in those days had a weekly grocery order as well as the daily call for bread and cakes. We sold very good Danish bacon and at Christmas time we got commission on boxes of chocolates and legs of ham. We used to weigh out all the stones and half-stones of flour, sugar and butter. Butter was also packed in 1lbs.

When I was sixteen Mr Hopkinson asked me to stay on and work behind the counter. He bought a new Austin car and after I passed my driving test I used to go all round the town in it, getting orders and also delivering to outlying districts. I missed my games of football because I worked on Thursdays and Saturdays. When I saw lads with whom I had been at school going to their team matches, I used to envy them, but you couldn't pick and choose your job of work in those times.

We did used to go dancing, however. A group of us always went together, including my pal Squib Broughton, his sister Edna, Dora and Florrie Kirk, Jim Major, and my cousin, Albert Hurst. In those days dances were from 8.00pm until 2.00am in the morning. I could only go in the week as it was too late on Saturdays by the time I had finished work at 10.00pm, or sometimes 11.00pm. On Thursdays we sometimes went to the Lido on Bentley Road, roller skating. They had dancing until 10.00pm then skating until 2.00am. Friday was a long day for me, after a late Thursday night, not finishing work until 9.00pm. On Sundays we often used to go for a bike ride. I bought my first cycle from Oaks' Garage on Balby Road, a Hercules sports model, costing about £10 or £12 although we could pay two or three shillings a week for it. I also bought our first wireless set for a few shillings a week and I got it for my mother and sister, Olive. It was in a big plastic case about 18 inches square, but not many people had wireless sets in those days. It was lovely to listen to the dance bands of the day like Oscar Rabin, the Palm Court Orchestra and Billy Cotton and Joe Loss.

My first holiday was a week at the Isle Of Man. We stayed at Cunningham's Holiday Camp and it was marvelous. I had never been on a boat before and it took about four hours, especially if the sea was rough. This was in 1937. I remember, in 1938, I went to the same place on the Isle Of Man with Geoff Clark. He had a little mixed store, selling cigarettes and chocolate. As we worked on a Saturday, we flew from Doncaster at 4.00pm to Liverpool and caught the 6.00pm boat. The Dutch airliner used to land at the Doncaster airport at that time and it only took twenty minutes to Liverpool. Geoff's father paid our fare. He was a director of Sheard Binnington's, one of the large furnishing stores in town.

It was Geoff Clark who suggested joining the Territorial Army for week-end soldiering at a time when we were getting a bit bored and not having enough things to occupy our time. We tossed a coin to see whether we would join the Engineers or the KOYLIs, who had turned from infantry to light anti-aircraft. Anyway, the 53rd Light Anti-





Aircraft Regiment won and we both joined. My army number was 1444543 and Geoff's was 1444547. We had to report to Scarborough Barracks and complete a number of parades a year. We both joined the motor transport side but we had to learn how to fire a rifle and do drill, the same as everyone else. We used to go down to the shooting range at Cantley at week-ends, teaching people how to drive army trucks.

Our first week's camp was in 1938 at Cark In Cartmel, a little village at Grange-Over-Sands, near Morecambe. We still had the first world war uniforms, peak caps, tunics with gold buttons and puttees which you wrapped round your legs up to your knees. We were under canvas and, for us, it was quite exciting as it was different from the daily routine of local life. I was driving army trucks and instructing learners on different vehicles. I think we got about £5 for completing our full drill week-ends. Our Colonel was called Smith, of the mineral water firm, a First World War veteran.

I was still working at Harry Hopkinson's grocery store and I used to go to all the Grocery Association's dinners and dances. The Master Bakers' Association mostly held their dances at the Lyceum Restaurant in the High Street. When Harry Hopkinson and his sister went there, they left me in charge of the shop. When they went on holiday, we had a young lady who served behind the counter and three or four errand lads to do the deliveries. I used to sleep there and open the shop in the morning, see all the representatives who called and also banked the money for him. In fact, he always sent me to the bank with the takings, so he must have trusted me, and he also hinted that, when I was 21 years old, he would make me a partner in the business.

Things were not now very peaceful in the world. Hitler started his expansionist ideas and rumours started about mobilization. Being in the Territorial Army, of course, meant that we would be the very first to be called up into the forces. I remember sitting at home, with my mother and sister, listening to the wireless, and hearing all about the peace talks. Very soon afterwards, a knock came on the door and I went to see who it was only to find there the Sergeant Major of our TA unit. He said to me "Get your kit Johnny; you're in the army now". I had to report to Scarborough Barracks the next day, where I became a full-time soldier, even though war had not yet been declared. My sister had to go and tell Harry Hopkinson that I had been called up and that was it. No argument!



We were delivered some Bofors guns that fired two-pound shells at low-flying aircraft. We had to take some of the guns, each having a crew of six, towed by tractors, to points around the coast, mostly the east coast, where radar was installed to protect them. We stayed in Doncaster for around three weeks and then we had to motor down to Thursley, near Godalming, in Surrey, to be properly fitted out with batteries of guns. All the lads who went were from the Doncaster area.

From the beginning, I was a driver in Battery Headquarters. It was 158 Battery - Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, the 159th Battery coming from the Denaby area. We also had some

regular soldiers posted to us. I remember that we used to have to sleep out in the open, with ground sheets, and only a blanket. The army uniforms were so rough, until you got used to the coarse material, and the heavy army boots too. We later slept under canvas, about six of us to a tent.

When we were fitted out and up-to-strength, we motored down to Southampton Docks to go across the Channel to France. Geoff Clark, myself, and four others volunteered to go on the cargo vessels, which sailed to Boulogne. We ate and slept with the crew and were waited on at the table, which we all thought was marvelous. Just before the boat sailed back to England, we had to join the rest of the Regiment. We drove down to Reims and ended up in a field with no rations, so we had to find some farmers and scrounge some potatoes and other vegetables to make some stew. I remember that the French farmers came out with some bottles of Cognac that were several years old. Some of the lads had a little drop too much, not being used to such strong stuff, but I think they had a good night's sleep!

In France I was given the 200 gallon water truck to drive and I had to supply the Battery Headquarters and the gun emplacements with water. My mate was called Tommy O'Connor and we both had to go and find water from fire stations, or even pump it out of canals and then treat it with chlorine to make it safe to drink.

We soon found ourselves on the Belgium border and all the guns were dug-in and sandbagged. We dug one underground dug-out for each gun, each containing six men, one Bombadier and a Sergeant and they were positioned there right from September until the Phoney War ended after Christmas. I found myself in billets, being in British Headquarters, and I had to drive around to all the gun emplacements delivering supplies and water and the weekly mail. We were in a small village where we made friends with the rest of the people and we used to go to the blacksmith's house and to a cafe for egg and chips (oeufs et pommes frites). I remember the cafe used to have a big iron stove in the middle of the room and we all used to sit around it, drinking rum and coffee and the weak French beer.

The weather was very cold, with snow and ice. The water taps on the back of the water cart used to get frozen up. When we went to Comines, on the Franco-Belgium border, we were guarding some steel works and they put an iron bar into the furnace to thaw out all the pipes and taps.

I got seven days' leave at Easter and my sister, Olive, was getting married to Doug Graves, who was later called up and served in the Green Howards (I will write more about him later). Olive still stayed at home to look after mother. Everything soon started to be rationed - butter, sugar, eggs, and the allowance per person was very small. People had to go to shops where anything special was available. Luckily, Mr Hopkinson used to let Olive have some special treats when available. She got a job in the Post Office so she did not have to go into the forces or onto the land to help the farmers. My brothers were in reserved jobs so they never had to leave home. Fred had a large family, Stan married a girl from Bentley, Muriel, and they had two children, Terence (known as Tex) and Jean. George married Dot and they had two children, Leslie and Derek. All of my brothers and my sister were married before the war started. They used to come to our house at week-ends to see my mother. My sister Olive used to play the piano and we used to have many

sing-songs in the front room. Sometimes they had to walk home at night. Stan and George both lived at Wheatley, which was quite a long way, especially with the small kiddies.

After my army leave at Easter time I had to go back to the north of France, around Lille, Lens, Arras and Armentières. We got used to being out with the trucks and finding our way about. Tommy O'Connor and I still had to find a fire station or some place to fill the water cart, and treat the water with chlorine, then go around the gun sites to supply them with enough water for cooking, drinking and washing, etc. There didn't seem to be a war on yet - no action whatsoever - until the Germans started their offensive against Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. We then had to move forward into Belgium. After the war had really started, with the Germans beginning to hit the Belgians and the French, one of our troops (D Troop) moved up into Brussels and I was sent to D Troop with a lorry load of Bofors ammunition. The lorry was really a civilian coal lorry from Trowbridge in Wiltshire, England, and it was night time when I got to Brussels with it. I was immediately put on guard duty when I got there - four hours at a time - and I was told to watch out for snipers. In the morning we had to move out because we found that we were being surrounded.

I remember that we pulled into an orchard for a while and the Germans started shelling us there and we had to move out. I was the last one out onto the road and my lorry soon came to a stop and I found that some shrapnel had gone through the engine block, so it was completely out of action. The others had gone on and, being the last out onto the road, I was left on my own, so I took my rifle and haversack and started walking. I took the decision to walk in the direction they had gone. A short time later, I came across an infantry officer who gave me a lift to his Headquarters where a Battery despatch rider came looking for me. I climbed on the back of his bike and he took me to where the troops had gone - in a garage in Roubiex. Here we got ourselves another lorry and went back to mine, where I had left it in the middle of the road and we unloaded all the Bofors ammunition from it onto this new lorry, then we smashed up the old one so it would be no good at all for the Germans.

So, at this point, I was left without a vehicle, but an ordnance chappie, called Green, happened to have a motor bike that he didn't fancy riding during action, so I accepted it with pleasure and from this moment on I was classed as a despatch rider. The garage we were in at Roubiex was in-between two streets so we knocked out the wall at the back, in order to provide a means of escape should the Germans come either way.

I was now doing despatch riding with one Major Nutter. We had to go with two guns to a bridge across a river and stay there until the infantry had got back across, then the Royal Engineers blew up the bridge and I was finally able to move off. We then started back towards Dunkirk, travelling all night towards the coast. It was terribly slow progress due to all the refugees filling the road with their prams, horses and carts and all the possessions they could carry. We pulled into a farmyard at daybreak for a brew-up and some breakfast, then the Major came to me with a map reference in Dunkirk and he said that I had to go ahead on my own and find the Regiment Headquarters, to let them know we were on our way. I think he thought we might get left behind when everybody else left France and Belgium for England. It was slow going because the road was chock-a-block with horses and carts and families trying to get away from the war. The German Junkers JU/87 planes, called Stukas, were continually strafing the roads and bombing the troops and people, who were being killed all the time. The French people had just left their homes and farms to get out of the way. At least, on my motor bike, I could make quicker time than the large vehicles but even on the bike it was slow-going, especially with the Germans continually

coming over in their planes, bombing and shooting. Lots of people - refugees, soldiers and horses were killed in these raids.

I eventually made it to Dunkirk and found the Regimental Headquarters. When I reported in they were all fast asleep after travelling for so long. They had all the guns along the beach from Dunkirk to La Panne and at the back of the town. We were on the beach for about a week, firing at the German fighters and bombers. At one point, I found myself in the basement of an hotel, right on the front of the promenade, and there were soldiers everywhere you looked, all just waiting to get a boat home. All we had in Regimental Headquarters was a bren-gun and a First World War Vickers machine gun. I got into in a bomb crater on the beach with the Vickers machine gun and I and some of the lads took it in turns firing it and then filling up the pans with bullets. We fired at the planes that came to strafe the British Expeditionary Forces trying to get away on boats that were coming to rescue us.

One day the Major asked me to drive with him on a motor-bike down beside the sea, on the hard sand by the water. I wondered where we were going, as we seemed to be heading back to Dunkirk again, but we then came upon a dead sailor in the sea who was wearing a life-jacket, and the Major asked me to get the life-jacket off the sailor because he, the Major, couldn't swim. I had no idea about the nationality of the sailor, but he certainly wasn't English. Having got the life-jacket for him, the Major took me to Regimental Headquarters, at the back of the dunes, where he told me to follow him with my bike and with his driver and his batman, who were in the Major's truck with him. He parked it at the side of a house, next to a lorry full of ammo, and I left my bike against the gates of the garden. Just then, once again, the Germans started shelling us. One of the shells hit the lorry and set it on fire. I jumped into a slit-trench, with a young officer, and every time we looked out of the trench the Bofors shells were swishing over the top of us. Eventually, we were able to get out and I found that the garden wall had collapsed on top of my bike, so I had to leave it there.

We got into the house and I soon heard the Adjutant shouting up to the bedroom window that he must have words with the Colonel. The next thing I knew was that we had to go to a point on the beach at 8 o'clock at night, ready to try and get a boat that would take us out to one of the larger boats that were further out to sea. We had driven all our vehicles into the sea to form a kind of pier so that the small boats didn't have to ground in the sand.

Many troops got away in the armada of boats that came across the channel to help us. Eventually, as a small metal whaler approached, we climbed over the roofs of all the trucks and got into the boat. We found there were only two sailors in the boat so about a dozen of us had to row and the Colonel was standing in the bow, shouting out to keep us in time with one another. We made it to a ship anchored further out in deeper water and we were finally picked up by this larger ship in the channel. I cannot remember much about this ship, or its name, as I and all the others were so dead-beat, but I will always remember the white cliffs of Dover appearing and me thanking my lucky stars that we had managed to get away.

We landed at Ramsgate and we were rushed into a transit camp for a good meal, then straight onto a train up to Rugby in Staffordshire. They gave us a card to send to our families before we left, to say we were safe and home again, but I learnt later that it didn't arrive for about two weeks and my family thought I was still in France, probably a prisoner of war. All the way to Rugby the train stopped at many stations and the women of the



Voluntary Aid Detachment gave us fruit pies and cups of tea and biscuits. They did a grand job in restoring our morale.

It was a Saturday at the beginning of June and we only stayed in the camp over the weekend. I had no kit of any kind, not even a razor, and the only clothes I had were those I stood up in. I walked into the village nearby and I asked a policeman if he would buy some cigarettes off me so that I could buy a razor to have a shave. He wouldn't accept the cigarettes but gave me five shillings instead. Eventually, I got a bath and some clean clothes then, on the Monday, we were all put on a train to travel to Penhale in Cornwall, right on the coast, in a large camp, where we were interviewed regarding anyone whom we knew had been killed or wounded, to get the records of our losses, etc. I was there about a fortnight but I got a 48 hour pass home and then I had to return to Sturminster Marshall, near Wimborne, in Dorset. There we started to refit our unit with new guns and other equipment to replace that which we had lost in France. A Sergeant gave me another lorry to drive but when the Major came around inspecting, he asked me what I was doing on a lorry. He said he wanted me back on a motor-bike, to stay as a despatch rider; I served with him all through the war in Battery Headquarters. He once asked me to go on the guns and to go for promotion but I didn't want it. I felt better and more independent on my own and making my own decisions.

We stayed in England, both on the South Coast and the East Coast, while the Battle of Britain was being fought and we also had a troop guarding the King and his family at Sandringham. I had to go there two or three days a week and had a special pass to get into Sandringham. The two princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, used to come around the gun sights to talk to the lads and have a cup of tea with them.

The officer in charge of this group was Lt. Wilkinson of the Pontefract cake people, but he was killed on the way back to the unit; he was riding a motorbike and crashed into a ditch. He was the only son of the family and his mother used to send us food parcels when we went overseas again. When we were refitted, in Dorset, we got some militia lads from those who had been called up. One of these was Frank Sims, who came from Swindon in Wiltshire. He could ride a motorbike so he became pals with me and with Wilf Pearson, who was older than us - in his forties - and all three of us were in Battery Headquarters as despatch riders and we stayed together nearly all the way through the war. Our nicknames were Sideslip Sims, Pile-up Pearson and Broadside Bath. Frank Sims, by the way, was my best man, when I got married after the war, and I was the best man for his wedding.

In 1942 we handed over our guns to another unit and we had to go down to Eastbourne on the south coast prior to moving to Leek, in Staffordshire, to catch a boat overseas again. We didn't know at the time where we were going but we stayed in Leek, just doing training and route marches. I remember meeting Anne, the wife of Dougie Shuker; they lived not far away in Uttoxeter. Doug was our motor mechanic, the best in the regiment, and he and his wife tuned out to be our best friends (I will write about them later).

We embarked at Liverpool in one of the biggest convoys ever to leave England - hundreds of ships, two aircraft carriers and lots of destroyers. We had to sail right out into the Atlantic because of the danger from German submarines. We slept in hammocks, down below decks. Luckily, I got a job running the deck canteen with a chappie who had been an under-manager at Woolworths. There were such long queues for the ship's canteen, he asked if we could run our own, on our deck, and they agreed, so I was asked to help him with me being in the 'grocery trade' before I had been called up.

The weather in the Atlantic was very rough and the boats were tossing and swaying. Our boat was Dutch, of about 1700 tons. We had long mess tables that seated about twenty and we had to take it in turns to fetch the food. We baked our own bread and it used to be quite warm when we got it to the tables. We also had plenty of butter too but with the rough weather a lot of the lads developed sea-sickness. I remember that, on one occasion, there were only two people left at our table, so we could eat as much as we wanted.

We had lifeboat drill every day. When the alarm went off you had to dash to your station. We also ran on the deck in the mornings, to keep fit. We used to count the ships to see if any had been torpedoed and we saw the porpoises popping up out of the water and they seemed to be following the convoy for the food that got thrown overboard.

Our first port of call was Freetown, in Sierra Leone, West Africa, where we had to go in for fresh supplies of food and water. We were not allowed to go ashore but the bum-boats used to come out to the ships, trying to tempt the lads to buy the fresh fruit, etc. However, we had been warned not to buy any because of the possibility of getting a dodgy tummy. The natives would dive into the sea to collect coins that the lads threw into the water; the water was so clear they could see the money as it sank down to the bottom.

We then sailed off again, out into the Atlantic, to avoid the U-boats. The weather was getting much warmer now and we had to don our khaki shirts and shorts. It was also very hot below decks as we lay in our hammocks, and we perspired all the time. I remember that the lads on the bottom decks nearly mutinied because they weren't allowed up on deck and nor were they allowed to smoke after dark because of the chance of being spotted by planes or U-boats.

Our next port of call was Durban. When we came into port we were told we were allowed to go ashore, into the town. Whenever ships came into harbour a lady used to come onto the dockside to sing songs to the British soldiers. We arrived about lunchtime and managed to get ashore about 4.00pm. I went with a few mates into the town and it was good to feel solid ground beneath our feet once again, after spending a month or so on board. I remember that we tried to get into a show at a theatre; the manager said at first that they were all booked up but he came back just before the show was due to start and he showed us into a box - the best seats - and on top of that he wouldn't let us pay. The South Africans were really pleased to entertain us. We got back to the ship about midnight and were told that we would be stopping there for four days so, the next morning, we had to march about five miles to Clarewood Camp, which was like a school. We marched with full packs and it was so hot they arranged for a lorry to follow us, to collect those who couldn't make it. After being on board for so long, and not wearing boots, it was a hard slog.

We could go into town at night but we were told to keep to the area for 'whites'; some of the lads didn't obey and they got mugged in the native quarter. On the march back, one or two had got drunk and they got thrown into the ship's gaol and had their heads shaved.

Our next port of call was Aden but we couldn't go ashore there; instead, we just stood on deck and watched while supplies were loaded. We then sailed up the Red Sea to Port Tufiele, in the Gulf of Suez, and landed at a place called Kabrit, not far from Cairo and Suez. Here, we were under canvas, with plenty of space around us. They had open-air theatres for us to visit for a few piastres but the trouble was, the films kept breaking down

and, on one occasion, the lads set fire to the canvas walls around the stage. You could tell when the lads had just come out from Blighty because they hadn't got their knees brown; but it wasn't long before we got brown all over; we just wore shorts and our backs got like leather.

We then started getting our Bofors guns, lorries, jeeps and motor-cycles. We had to practice in the dark, following one another, with just a light on the differential at the back of each vehicle, so we would not go off the tracks into the mine-fields.

We first went into action when Rommel was pushing to try and take Cairo and Alexandria and we found ourselves in a mine-field; but we managed to hold up Rommel until the actual battle of El-Alamein. I was driving a jeep, carrying Major Nutter, and to get out of the mine-field the Brigadier in charge commandeered our jeep to lead the troops back through the mine-field, and I had to drive to his instructions. Luckily, all went OK and that was my first bit of action in the desert.

Then the battle of El-Alamein began; Montgomery had more guns and equipment than ever before. The big guns started firing as soon as it got dark; the noise was terrible. I think we were deaf for a few days afterwards. We were in the 7th Armoured Brigade and we met stiff opposition and couldn't break through. Even our own planes bombed some of our columns and set fire to some petrol wagons.

Wilf, Frank and I had a jeep and we saw a German tank dug in; but all the Germans had been killed and we went and got some German rifles and ammunition. Then Jerry started shelling us so we had to make a dash for it and get out of range but we carried the rifles all through the desert campaign.

Whilst at Kabrit I found out that my sister's husband, Doug, had been wounded and had lost the sight in one eye; a letter from Olive told me that he was in a hospital near to where we were. I got permission to go and see him but when I got to the hospital I found that he had been moved somewhere else, so I just missed seeing him. Our mail came in batches but took about a month to arrive but it was good to get a pile of letters from my relations and I used to write back a lot when we were stationary.

From El-Alamein we broke through to Mersa Matruh, with the Germans retreating but leaving mines and booby-traps to drive over. Lots of our lads were killed or injured when they were unlucky enough to drive over a mine. Also, Jerry planes, Stuka dive-bombers came screaming down on us, firing their machine-guns, and other bombers dropped their bombs around us. When we heard them coming we used to turn off the engine of the jeep and dive out, trying to get into a hollow somewhere. Sometimes we drove for days in echelons about a hundred yards apart and in long columns so that Jerry had a difficult target to hit. We always carried our own rations so that if we did get left behind we could survive until the B-echelon caught up. I remember having to go back on one occasion to pick up a pal from our unit who had been on his own for about four days. When I saw him, he was just a speck in the vast expanse of desert and scrub-land and he was very worried, thinking he had been forgotten.

When we got to Mersa Matruh it was dark and we drove into a circle and guards were placed around, in case of a surprise attack. The Major sent me back with a Captain to try and meet the ration truck that was coming behind on the track. We came across Eric Richardson, who was also from Doncaster; he was the Quarter Master. The trouble was

finding our Battery going back because it was pitch-black, until I heard the noise of the generator truck and recognized the sound it made, so I managed to get back OK - huge relief!

At Mersa Matruh the Germans had retreated so quickly they had left a large camp with about six big tents that were full of equipment, German officers' kit and soldiers kit-bags. We found a lot of things that were useful and I got some German vests, with the eagle and swastika on them; also a radio, still in its original box. We managed to find room for it all on the jeep. Wilf, Frank and I got a bell-tent and we each carried part of it for a long time; when we got to a wadi we would put it up and with three primus-stoves we would have a good 'nosh-up' with food we hadn't had time to eat, mostly tinned meat, bully-beef and tins of fruit.

We had to follow the Germans, all the time, to Sollum, Tobruk, Derna, Beda Littoria, Benghazi, and Ajedabia, then on to Tripoli. Rommel dug in at some points and another battle would start but we were stronger now and had better supplies. When we got to Tripoli our battery was put on guarding the docks and various positions around the town and we stayed there for a month or more. When we were relieved we had to go into Tunisia, to take Sfax and Sousse and we were then with the 101 Guards Brigade.

I remember going into Sfax, where all the docks had been bombed and where the water had flooded the streets, and where there were millions of frogs all over the place; so many, you couldn't help stepping on them.

Once I had a lucky escape; I was driving a Captain, looking for some of our guns that were supporting the 101 Guards Brigade on the front line. We were driving down the road and came upon a tank, a British one, at the side of the road. The Captain got out of the jeep to ask where the Battery was, leaving me in the middle of the road, when "woosh!"; three or four shells came screaming past me and hit the tank, which had been trying to take on a German 88 mm anti-tank gun. Another fifty yards forward and I wouldn't be writing this. I got behind the tank and got away.

The Tunisian countryside was much more civilized and more green, with plenty of trees, which was a lot better than the dry sand and scrub of Libya and Tripolitania. However, this gave more cover to the Germans. Then came the Mareth Line, where the Germans had formed their last big stand. We were held up for quite a while as they brought out a new six-barreled mortar gun which fired six shells all at the same time, which made a hell of a noise. We were then with 30 Corps Headquarters. Wilf, who was an ex-miner, had dug a really deep dug-out into the hillside so, luckily, we were fairly safe. I remember that, one day, a German bomber came flying over, only about 100-feet high, right over us. One of our guns opened up and, with only a few shells, hit it directly, and the plane dropped straight down like a stone. Only an hour later, another bomber did the same thing and it, too, was shot down. All the flying crew were burned black-bright and just looked like mahogany figures.

We got ourselves a new Colonel taking over and he wanted to go out to one of the guns, which was on the front line and acting as an anti-tank gun, but it was under observation by the Germans. One day I was driving our Major in a jeep and the Germans started shelling us, so the Major told me to stop. However, the Colonel said we were to keep going. Anyway, we got to the gun but we couldn't get back until it got dark because of the shelling. The same day I was driving the Major around the guns and just as we got to one

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a Stuka came over, diving at our gun. I was on the outside of the gun-pit and cannon shells were hitting the sand-bags all around me. At the same time, a cook and a driver were carrying a dixie of tea to the lads on the gun and a bomb dropped right on top of them, and both were blown to pieces.

Our Battery had to join with the New Zealanders to go right/around the left flank of the Germans. We drew about four days' rations and travelled right into the south side of the war. I remember driving through one town that had on all of its lights. They didn't know that there was a war on. Then we came to the Kasserine Pass, where the Americans had made a tank attack. This had failed and they just got out, having to leave behind all of their tanks.

When we got to the centre of Tunis, the Germans had just about had it and we were recalled to Tripoli to get a boat back to Alexandria to prepare for the invasion of Sicily. I remember that we had captured a big German Zundapp motor-cycle and side-car, with a machine-gun on it. With a four-cylinder engine, it cruised at about 100 miles per hour. We ditched the side-car and rode it all the way back to Tripoli, but in transit to Alexandria someone else pinched it and I never saw it again.

On our way back to Alexandria we were on a troop-ship that had about four hundred German prisoners locked in the bow of the boat and we had to take turns in guarding them. When I was on guard the boat started dropping depth-charges as it was reported that a German submarine was after us. The boat was shuddering and lifting out of the water and the Germans thought we had been torpedoed - and so did I for a minute! Anyway, we made it and even picked up out of the sea an English airplane pilot, who had been shot down up.

We were given four days' leave on returning from Tunisia; we could go either to Cairo or to Ismailia. I chose Cairo and stayed in a Salvation Army Hostel. It was great to be able to go out for a meal and to see the shops, etc. There were places where they had an orchestra or a band on-stage, but they had to have a cage in front of them because the troops, a lot of them Australians, used to get drunk and bottles would fly all over the place.

I remember that there were about four of us having a meal in an open air cafe. At the back of us there was a wall, about four-feet high, with a trellis on top. An Arab started playing his flute and a great big cobra snake came out of a box in front of him. Also, the Arab boot-blacks would pester the life out of you just to shine our boots. They were a bloody nuisance.

Before I continue with the invasion of Sicily, I forgot to mention my pal Geoff Clarke, who was in a jeep in one of the battles in which we got engaged. He was dive-bombed by Stukas and got some shrapnel through his back that pierced his lung. He told me afterwards that he was lying on a stretcher and trying to call out to me, but in the din of the battle I did not see or hear him. He was flown back to Cairo, to hospital, but, pleased to say, he was able to re-join us some months later. We lost quite a lot of the lads between El-Alamein and Tunis; we lost a young officer at El-Alamein because he tried to be too brave, by not dropping down when the shells got near and one eventually caught him and killed him - poor Lieutenant Bagley!

We went on a troop-ship to Sicily and were some of the first troops to land. When we sailed into Syracuse Harbour we found there were no docks so we had to unload our own

guns and transport to lighter boats. I remember that, on one day, I was right on the bottom of the ship, helping to unload, when two bombers came diving at us. They dropped their bombs right between two ships, just missing us; I climbed up the ladder like a monkey; I was wearing jack-boots and I took them off, ready for diving overboard. I didn't need to do that but I got onto the next lighter boat available and made sure I didn't go back. We lost one ship full of guns and equipment on the next raid.

We moved to a forward aerodrome and placed our guns all around the landing-strip. The Germans put one of their last big bomber raids on the aerodrome, called Lentini. They simply plastered it. A lot of Air Force personnel ran for cover into a wood at the side of the landing strip but, unluckily, the Germans dropped their bombs amongst them and a lot were killed. Battery Headquarters was in a farm, just above the aerodrome, and I had to drive Captain White around, after the raid, expecting to see many of the guns out of action, but, by some miracle, none had been hit.

I got myself a little bivouac tent, just for two, and my mate and I got some vino; we drank it like beer, not having tasted it before and we both got drunk; when I had a drink of water for the next two days, I felt drunk.

Then another ack-ack unit arrived and stacked their ammunition all around a haystack for camouflage, but a chap was doing something to a motor-bike and he set fire to the haystack and everyone ran off and left it burning. I think I must have been still drunk because my mate and I got a car tow-rope with a hook on and we started pulling the shell boxes away from the fire and we managed to prevent a few explosions.

We found ourselves at the foot of Mount Etna, which has twice erupted since the war, then when the Germans were driven out of Sicily we went to Messina where we were put on invasion barges, to land at Reggio Di Calabria, which was right on the toe of Italy. We then moved up the heel of Italy to a big dock area in the gulf of Taranto. Most of the houses were empty and in one we went into I found a lovely little ladies' type pistol and some cartridges. I carried it with me for ages but, for the life of me, I cannot remember what happened to it. I also remember going fishing in a small boat at the mouth of the harbour. There were about six of us and we had some Italian hand grenades, which we threw into the water; they exploded and stunned or killed the fish. Wilf then got hold of one and said, "See! How do you use these?" and he pulled out the pin; everyone dived overboard and Wilf threw it away; it went off before it hit the water but no-one was injured.

Somebody noticed some fins coming towards the harbour; we thought they were sharks but they turned out to be sword-fish, about twelve feet long. Some sailors in the harbour stuck a spike in one of them and pulled it out onto the quay.

From there, we moved up to Bari and Foggia on the Adriatic coast, then we moved across to the west coast of Italy, to lend a hand at the landing at Salerno. Geoff Clarke's brother, who was an officer, was killed in the landing at Salerno. We then moved back again, through Campo Basso, San Severo and on to Termoli, on the east coast again. Any river we came to had to be crossed by Bailey Bridges because the Germans always blew up the road bridges before falling back. We went right up the east coast via Termoli, Pescara, right up to Rimini. Our regiment's headquarters was finally stationed in Florence. I was despatch riding again and I had to go from Rimini, via Forli, over the mountain pass to Florence, which is the loveliest of Italian cities.

Whilst I was at Rimini I received a letter from my sister, Olive, saying that her husband, Doug, was stationed at Naples in a tyre-repair workshop; he was a corporal in the stores. I got to know that some of our lads were going on a course in Naples, so I asked if I could drive them there, and, with luck, I spent the week-end in Naples with Doug.

I also drove around Mount Vesuvius, which had recently erupted; there was just enough room to drive down the road; the ash from the volcano was piled high to the bedroom windows of the houses.

Then back to Rimini. I was still doing the run on the bike to Florence when I was taken ill with a gangrenous appendix. I collapsed and had to be rushed into hospital for an operation. The lad who took over from me on the bike was ambushed in the mountains and left dying in the road. It must have been some Germans, hiding in the mountains; they also pinched his motorbike.

When I had recovered, we went over the River Po and built one of the longest pontoon bridges to cross over. Then we carried on, right up to Trieste, where we were given the job of ferrying ammunition from ships to a dump on the land; I got held up by some Yugoslavian troops and I had difficulty in speaking to them; they let me go after a while but it was a bit scary.

We then found ourselves in the mountains, trying to take Bologna; the weather was very bad and we were doing infantry work, supporting the 4th Indian Brigade. We were in dug-outs for ages; two of my footballing mates got killed in their slit-trench when a shell landed on them. I was soon doing troop-runner, from the trenches to Battery Headquarters, just behind the lines. I was given a month's leave and I sailed home from Naples and it took twelve days to get home. I had a month at home, then had to sail back, which took ten days, and I found myself back in the same dug-out in the mountains that I had left a month before, still trying to take Bologna.

My mother had died whilst I was in the south of Italy but I could not have got home at that time. When I got home eventually, it seemed strange being at home with only Olive in the house. I travelled down to Swindon, to see Frank Sims' mother, and to tell her he was still OK. I also went to see Geoff Clarke's mother to tell her the same thing. It was very depressing to have to go all the way back to Italy, but I was luckier than most to get leave as this was 1944. I remember going to see the Rovers play whilst I was at home on leave, and everyone kept looking at me because I was so brown from the sun in Italy.

We eventually ended up in Monza, just a few kilometers from Milan. I had returned from the convalescence camp on the coast after my operation and the first thing the Sergeant Major said to me when I re-joined the unit was "Would you like to go on a horse-riding course on the race-track at Monza?" This was just down the road from our billets. Of course, I said I would and six of us went, including two officers - Major Bagley and a Lieutenant, and four of us lads. We were there a month and they gave me one of the biggest horses to ride; it was seventeen hands. I had to look after it and water, feed, groom and exercise it, but I loved it. At the end of the month they gave us a certificate to say what class we had passed, then the Major got two horses from the course and made a stable in the billet yards. They used to ride them when they could but I didn't get many rides as he wanted me for his driver. The officers went into Milan nearly every night, to the Officers' Club and Frank and I went to the ordinary ranks club until late at night. Some of the lads got leave to go to Lake Como, which wasn't too far away.

In the billets we turned one of the rooms into a bar and one of the lads painted imitation oak beams on the ceiling and various figures on the wall. They went up into Austria to buy some wines and all sorts of liqueurs like cherry brandy and apricot brandy. Just down the road there was an ATS transit camp and when we knew that some were coming in, we invited them to a dance. Most of them had just come from Blighty and a good time was had by all.

About a mile down the road was King Emmanuel's palace but I never got the chance to go in.

The D-Day landings had started some time ago and were doing well, though we never got back over there. I think they thought we had had enough but we were on an aerodrome when they brought in all the gliders, towed by Dakota aeroplanes, that were due to land in the South of France. A lot of them crashed into the sea with loads of troops on them. I was pleased that we didn't have to go in them.

Well, that's about all of my army experiences. I was in group 25 for demob, one of the first from our unit, but that was because I had been in from the first. We travelled by train through the Simplon Tunnel, right through Switzerland and France, and finishing up at Aldershot to get our demob papers. I went to Woking to get my demob suit, trilby, shoes and raincoat, and then home by train to Doncaster and back to number three Queen Street where I was born.

Olive was still there and Doug was demobbed some time after me. I got about 104 days' leave, with pay, but I started back at work after about a month, but the pay wasn't very good and Mr Hopkinson had not lived up to his promise to make me a partner in the shop, and after army life it wasn't very exciting. I got demobbed in June 1946. I had met Irene about March time. One of the lads who had come out of the army came to the shop to see me and said he was going to a dance at the swimming baths so I said I would go along as well. When I eventually got there after a few rounds of drinks at various pubs with some of the lads, I was introduced to Irene. Harry Ward had taken her to the dance; she used to play piano with his band before the war. He was just visiting Doncaster. When I went dancing again at the Baths, I met Irene again and, of course, we danced together and I

walked her home afterwards. She only lived about five minutes from Queen Street, in Albany Road. We fell for one another straightaway. We got engaged and we had so much in common; we both liked sport and dancing and I'm sure that the man up above saved us for one another.

We fixed our wedding for December 7th and went to Blackpool for our honeymoon and stayed in the Albany Hotel, Albany Road. We were the only couple in the hotel and used to have meals with the owners.

Before I got married I had been Frank Sims' Best Man. He came over to Doncaster one week-end to ask me. His bride-to-be was





called Lillian, an ex-Waf. Both Irene and I went there for the week-end and Ann and Doug were there too. Also Frank was my Best Man too in December and, of course, Ann and Doug came too from Uttoxeter. We were married in St. George's Church and had the reception at the Dell cafeteria. There was snow on the ground but the catering was very good. When we left to catch the train to Blackpool a lot of the guests came to the station to see us off, but we caught an earlier train to Wakefield and they missed us at the station.

Irene told me that, in the morning of the wedding, their dog 'Peter' had run off somewhere on the Flats and Irene had gone looking for him, though she managed to get to the church on time. She often said that if she hadn't found Peter the dog, she wouldn't have turned up for the wedding.

We lived for about a year with Irene's Mum & Dad and Sister Mollie, who was four years younger than Irene. I must say, they could not have treated me better; they really made me feel wanted and at home. Irene worked as a punch-card operator at the railway depot and Mollie worked at British Bembergs, producing yarn for silk. I got a job there, working a ring-twist machine. The trouble was, it was night work. Only men worked at nights at that time. It was an easy job and a lot better pay than I had been getting.

I loved football and played for the Thursday team. The first time I played I suffered a cracked collar-bone but, through football, I managed to get transferred off nights and on to the maintenance staff, working with my brother, Stan, who was a foreman bricklayer.

This was so that I could play for the Saturday team. Bill Godfrey, who was Clerk of Works, ran the football team, and was a pal of Stan's. He got me on to his bricklaying gang and we used to mend the brickwork in the boilers and it was very hot and dirty work. If a boiler broke down, we used to have to stop at work until it was mended. Meals were provided and, sometimes, we worked all day and night. We also did all the maintenance in the works and we also built a dock on the riverbank. My job was mixing concrete and we had a little tip-up truck that I used to drive. I really enjoyed the work, out in the open air, and hard work left me in good trim. My brother George got a job at Bembergs too, in 'A' Building. He was on shift work too.

We had some grand Sports Days too. My Brothers' boys, Terence (Stan's) and Leslie and Derek (George's) used to take part and we got through to the five-a-side football finals. We went also to the football and cricket dinners.

After about a year of wedded bliss Irene and I bought a little house on Bridge Terrace, on Hexthorpe Bridge, right opposite Irene's work office. It was an old house but we made it very comfortable. Irene kept working and she used to come to all the football and cricket matches that I played in and we would always go and see the Rovers play when we could.

Then we decided to go in for a family. Our Peter was born on 18th November 1950, on a Saturday morning. We had moved back to Irene's Mum's, near to the confinement, because she was going into Western Hospital, under Miss Peakes. I took Irene into the maternity ward on the Friday night. I had to work on Saturday morning and got a telephone call at work to say we had a fine 8lbs 7oz baby boy, born at 8-o'clock. Both were doing fine and it was one of the best days of my life.

He was a lovely, happy, little lad. Irene's Dad, who was a retired fitter from the Trackless Sheds, used to come down every day, either to take him out for a walk or, if the weather was bad, to play with him. We went on holidays together, also, to a bungalow on the South

Shore at Bridlington. Irene's Mum and Dad would have him anytime if we went to a dinner or dance. Our next-door neighbours in Hexthorpe were a Mr & Mrs Davis, who originally came from London. They were real cockneys but Mrs Davis would help in any way.

When Peter was 15 months old, Irene got a job working on the Tote (Racehorse Betting Control Board), working the adding-machines and supervising at different racecourses. It was various days of the week and nearly all Saturdays and she would travel by bus to different racecourses like Liverpool, Haydock Park, Ripon, Weatherby, York, Market Rasen, Uttoxeter and Redcar. Sometimes she would go as far as Epsom and Newmarket, and even to Scotland. Irene's Mum & Dad loved to have Peter. He used to stay there and was quite at home there. Even when he started school, his Grandad used to fetch him home for dinner. He had a little three-wheel tricycle and used to go all round Balby with his Grandad.

When I had been at British Bembergs for seven years the firm went in to liquidation. They had not modernized their machines and they had to finish. I didn't get finished right away but I started looking for other work. I put in for a PSV test and got an interview at Pilkintons' Glassworks; also at International Harvesters, the tractor firm. But then I got a job at Briggs' Motor Bodies, down Carr Hill, a company that was later bought out by Fords. We then bought a house in Belmont Avenue, which was nearer for me to go to work. The people from whom we bought the house, Mr & Mrs Higgins, were emigrating to Melbourne, Australia but they only stayed for two years; It was too hot for Mrs Higgins. When they came back, they bought a house two doors away.

I was now working in the trim-shop, making car seats. We were working shifts - a fortnight of days then a fortnight of nights. They were a good firm to work for and the money was quite good. Also, they supported any form of sport and I used to play cricket and football for them and even started playing golf. We had a 9-hole course on the sports field. Irene and Peter used to come and see the matches when Irene wasn't working, and she helped make the teas with some of the other lads' wives. With Arthur Wright, Tommy Foran, Dickie Smith and Brian Jones, we used to have some very happy times. We also used to help run the Dinner and Dances at the Danum Hotel and at the Mansion House.

Peter went to King Edward Road Infant and Junior School and used to play in the school football team, then he went to Doncaster Grammar School, passing his 11-Plus, along with John Higgins, Eric Morton and Raymond Goy. John Higgins lived at the top of Belmont Avenue and Eric Morton at the bottom. Raymond Goy came from a few streets away. The main winter sports game was rugby but Peter, being rather tall and slim, took to playing hockey. I used to love going to watch him play on Saturday mornings. Also we belonged to the Friday-night parent and teachers' association, who helped to organise all sorts of activities such as swimming. I used to help run a motor maintenance group. We got a go-cart kit and the lads built it and used to drive it round the playground. We had a driving instructor too and I wanted Peter to pass his test; but no, Peter couldn't keep away from the Rovers' matches, when they played on Friday nights, which they usually did, so as not to clash with the horse racing across the road from Belle Vue. Quite a few kids did pass their test but Peter didn't bother. —

Whilst I worked at Fords we bought a new Ford Popular, one of the best that came out of the factory. It was marked 'employee's car' on the line and everything was done first class. I built the seats myself, using extra springs and double padding, etc. My football pal in the paint shop made sure that everything was done tip-top. I had this car for ten or twelve

years. We also bought a new caravan from Bawtry Caravans and the Popular pulled it all over the country without any trouble. We had holidays in it every year and Irene's Mum and Dad had it on the coast for months at a time.

Before the Ford Popular I had a Triumph Gloria, which was a grand car and the very first car I had was a Jowett, with a twin cylinder engine which did about 60 miles to the gallon and we never broke down with it. We bought it off one of Irene's Tote pals for about £40. The Triumph had cost about £130. If I had kept it, it would have been worth a lot of money now.

I started work in the motor industry in 1953, then in 1964 Fords decided to transfer the factory to Liverpool where the number of people out of work was one of the worst in the country; so they decided to close Doncaster and move to Halewood, near Liverpool. We didn't want to leave Doncaster for quite a few reasons; Irene's Mum and Dad needed us; Peter would have had to leave the Grammar School; also the problem of selling up and buying a new house, so we decided to stay in Doncaster, a town where we were both born and which we liked so much.

I got a job at International Harvesters, in the export stores depot. The wages at that time were a lot less than in the motor building factories, but a lot of people were going to be out of a job, so we decided to take it. I enjoyed the work and the conditions were quite good, with plenty of clerical work and packing the orders to every part of the world, except to the communist countries. Eventually the wages began to creep up to the average; also it was just day-work, 8.00am to 4.30pm. I also got the job of relief driver on the 15 cwt truck that was used for various jobs, like collecting and distributing the daily mail to all parts of the works, fetching tractor parts from the different stores, taking the parcel post to the station, going to the customs and excise office; in fact it was a very interesting job but hard work, lifting heavy parts at times. Len Haller was the regular driver and I used to take over when he went on holiday or was off sick. We also had rota weeks when we were working overtime. I started at Harvesters in 1964 and stayed there until I retired in 1983.

I forgot to mention that I had had a year in the Insurance business. It was a period whilst I was working at Fords. Things got very slack and sometimes we were on short-time, so I applied for a job with the Britannic Insurance Company and I had a round from Balby Bridge to Eglington. I had to adjust because I worked on commission. I enjoyed the clerical work but didn't care for the job of persuading people to take out insurance, and it meant going out at night when people were at home. Mollie's husband, Kenneth, was on the Britannic too and he had been working for them for quite a time. She met him whilst working at Bembergs. They got married and bought a house in Albany Road, just below Irene's and Mollie's mother and father. When Bembergs closed down, Ken got a job at Fords but when they went on to short-time he started in insurance and did very well at it, eventually getting a travelling agents job. I stayed for a year but then got asked to go back to Fords. The money was better for me so I went back, much to the displeasure of the insurance manager.

My sister, Olive's husband, Doug Graves, was an insurance agent too. They lived in Mother's house at number 3 Queen Street because, when I came out of the army, my brothers and I decided to let Olive have the house. I lived with them until I got married to Irene when I moved to Irene's Mum and Dad's house. Olive adopted a little boy, called Stephen, then they bought a house in Victoria Road, selling the Queen Street house without letting us know anything about it. Then they adopted another little boy, called

Brain, and a little girl called Linda. The kids all went to King Edward Road school, the same as Peter. Of course, they are all married now with families of their own. Brian was a plumber by trade who went into the trade on his own. Olive and Doug bought a bungalow at Armthorpe but, very sadly, they were only there for a few years before Doug had a heart attack and died, before proper attention could have saved him. Olive missed Doug very much but now she has a busy life. She has a little car and goes out quite often and does a lot of dancing, swimming and yoga. My three brothers have also all passed away. George, who worked in Wheatley, was the first to go. He had to have tablets, just to make it to work but he had a fatal attack whilst in bed and left Dot, his wife, and the two lads Leslie and Derek, who are both married with families of their own. Stan had to finish work early and was in hospital many times before he succumbed, leaving his wife Muriel and their two children Terence and Jean. Fred, my eldest brother, retired from the Railway, then had a job at Carr Hill works. But he's now gone too, leaving his second wife, Elsie, who lives just at the back of Belmont Avenue in Sylvester Avenue. Fred had a large family with his first wife, Maggie, but I'm afraid we have lost touch with most of Fred's family, one of whom emigrated to Canada, working as a prison officer, and a daughter who had a hotel at Bridlington but who died leaving a son and daughter. Her husband emigrated to Australia with their children. Others live around town but we very seldom meet.

Peter, my son, finished his schooling at the Grammar School and was offered a place at University College, London, but he had to wait a year before going. He got a temporary job working for Doncaster Council's Parks and Gardens Department, based in Elmfield Park. In October 1970, we took him down to London, to live in a university hall of residence called Ramsay Hall and to study French.

Irene still worked on the Tote and I used to go at the week-ends and bank holidays. Irene's parents were now getting old and her Dad died first. I remember I had to fetch her home from Beverley, where she was staying overnight. He was in and out of hospital, following an operation. Irene and her sister, Mollie, used to visit them every day, in rotation and to help them do the shopping. After their Dad died, Irene's mother got very difficult to look after and we had her in turns at our own homes, but she didn't settle and wanted to go back to her own house. Eventually, we got her to go to the day centre in Greenfield Lane. She didn't want to go at first, thinking it was like the old workhouse used to be, but once we got her there we couldn't keep her away. A van used to pick her up and bring her back home. Some Sundays I used to take her out in the car and on Saturdays I used to take her with Peter to a cricket match at Warmsworth. She loved going there in the Summer.

Peter was away at University in London and Irene was still going odd-days on the Tote. Sometimes she would billet for two or three days, depending on where the races were, mostly for the Grand National at Aintree or to Ascot or Cheltenham. I was still at Harvesters but didn't have to work nights so it was easy to manage. Irene always got plenty of food in for me and I never had to do any shopping, apart from bread. I know Irene used to like going out to work and traveling but she came home ready for a rest at times. She didn't get back until 7.00pm, or 8.00pm or 9.00pm some nights.

Peter's third year at university was spent in Switzerland with three other lads and they were lucky to find a professor's house to rent. It was a beautiful place and Peter asked us to go for a holiday there. There was plenty of room and a balcony, where you could have breakfast or other meals. The lads worked at different colleges, teaching the students the equivalent of our 'A' Levels. I know they all enjoyed it and got on well with all the other teachers and professors of all nationalities. They had a party for us in their flat, which was



quite interesting. When we went out there we travelled on the old Orient Express train, right through the night to Lucerne, then changed trains to Geneva. We also had a trip by train to Annecy in France - a beautiful place with a large lake. Annecy was called the Venice of France. There was also a big gaming casino there.

Peter completed his year in Switzerland then returned for his final year in London. One of the lads out in Switzerland and one who had been out in Lyon, in France, shared a flat with Peter in Edgware. In the vacations, Peter got a job at Butlins, at Filey on the East coast. Working there, he met Anna, who came from Forest Hill, in South London. In August 1975, they got married

Peter got working for Argos as a relief manager; then they opened a shop in Doncaster and Peter came to manage it. It was the first of the Argos shops to take a million pounds. He bought a new house in Rossington and they had a little girl conceived around the time of their honeymoon. Anna's Mum and Dad were Yugoslavians but Anna was born in England. Stephanie, our little granddaughter was born in May 1976 and she is a lovely little lass.