

WALLY'S WAR

**A SIGNALMAN'S STORY - 1939 to 1945:
(As it is recalled over 50 years later)**

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Wally Jamieson, as TMO, (Technical Maintenance Officer) in 1945.

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THE RECRUIT

In the late days of Aug 1939 all young men of military age had to be concerned as the storm clouds of war gathered over Europe. At Christmas time 1938/39, I returned from Los Angeles as a qualified Morse code operator and a Radio & Electronics Technician from National Schools. I qualified via the Dept of Transport and obtained my Canadian "General Radio Operators License # 31. My desire was to start my own business and to this end I had acquired the necessary test instruments to set up a radio repair business. It was very difficult to raise or save enough money to set up shop. I had been interviewed by numerous radio stations, police forces, etc. There were no jobs in my line of work so I worked at various summer jobs around Sylvan Lake. I applied for a radio job with a taxi company in Edmonton and wound up driving taxi for a while. It was hard to make a living, let alone save money.

My father and I had discussed the possibility of a war in Europe but neither of us knew anything about the military. A group of young men around the resort decided that after Labour Day we would go to Calgary to see what was going on with the army. In due course we found our way to the Mewata Armouries and talked to the recruiting officer for the Calgary Highlanders. Most of the boys decided to enlist with the Calgary Highlanders. During my interview I asked about communications and was told that infantry only used telephones and flags, hardly my cup of tea. They suggested that I go to the Signal's Office. My Father had suggested that I should talk to Colonel Jull. I found out that he was the C.O. (Commanding Officer) of the Calgary Tanks Militia unit. His Office was in the south east corner of the building. He was a brother in-law of a cousin of Fathers and a World War I veteran. I knew nothing of military rank or organisation. I went into the office of the Calgary Tanks and asked where I would find Col. Jull. The response from the clerk was:

"You mean the Commanding Officer?" My response was:

"I guess so."

"You can't see him."

"Tell him that my name is Jamieson, from Sylvan Lake", I replied.

I learned later he was the Regimental Sergeant Major. He left, to reappeared in a few minutes. He led me to an office. The Colonel recognised me and came around the desk with a welcome hand. He curtly dismissed the RSM. He then asked how my father and mother were and said he had been at Dave Jamieson's (father's cousin) for dinner the night before. He asked why I was in Calgary and I told him. He asked about my qualifications and I told him of my training. He suggested that I should have a talk with Bert Lake of Signals and picked up the phone and talked to him. We walked out to the drill floor and he pointed out an office on the balcony of the second level. I thanked him and went across and up the stairs. Again I was greeted by a clerk and I told him I was there to see Bert Lake.

“Do you mean the C.O.?”

“Maybe.” was my reply.

“You can't just do that.” was his reply.

“Just tell him my name is Jamieson”.

Once again a Warrant Officer (Keith Watt) came to escort me to his office. Major Lake was a very gruff type (The Chief Engineer for the City of Calgary). He interviewed me, but when he learned of my qualifications his attitude changed at once. He explained the function of the Signal Corps in providing Communications for all army formations and liaison with the Navy and Air Force.

“You are the type of person we need. I will arrange for your attestation right away.”

He called in another Officer, a Captain Rod McLeod, who was the technical recruiting officer. The necessary paper work was completed. I become a Signaller on the 6th of September, 1939. In the following days, I began my basic military training and army education. There were no complete uniforms so we were issued World War I gear. First we received breeches and putties, a shirt, a cardigan sweater. The next day we got boots and socks. As time went on every few days we got some more kit. I was in the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals!

LEARNING THE BASICS

We were instructed in the use of gas masks and went through the tear gas hut. We learned what nasty stuff mustard gas was and went through the drills. Each day we went on a route march, longer each day. There was lots of drill on the parade square. We occupied the new Mewata huts as the doors were hung. We also learned that the C.O. was a near GOD and could only be

approached via numerous layers of command. We learned military law, "THE KING'S RULES AND REGULATIONS" and the power of command under military law.

This Anti-Aircraft Battery Signals Unit would not be needed until an Army was in the field. September and most of October went by and not a word was uttered about anything technical. We did have one day on the Indian reserve laying field cable for telephones. When asked if anyone could ride a horse, I said that I had ridden. I was handed a piece of equipment and a reel of cable and pointed towards an Indian paint pony wearing an English saddle. We figured out that the cable went on the bar. One end of the bar was attached just behind the saddle and the opposite end was supported with a bar to the stirrup, a handle was provided which you held with your right hand while controlling the horse with the reins in the left hand. We walked the horse around to ensure that the cable would reel off. The problem then was how to mount the horse and get your leg in front of the equipment and into the stirrup. Finally I got up and seated in the saddle. As we started to move the horse suddenly became aware of this contraption and the screech it made as the cable unwound. From a slow walk we were suddenly at the full gallop and the faster the horse ran the louder the squeal. Finally we came to the end of the roll of wire and I could get the horse under control. I rode back to the people observing this wild west show. The Officer in charge of laying the line came over to a very shaken rider and horse. He complimented me, saying it was the best demonstration he had ever seen of high speed cable laying.... I had no idea that cable was supposed to be laid at the gallop.

Later we learned how to communicate with flags by Semaphore and Morse Code. This was a very useful communicating skill and saved miles of walking in operations, just using arms without flags. Then we were given a weekend leave. When we returned, we had numerous parades to the stores for additional kit. Then we had a muster parade and were informed that we would be boarding a troop train in 48 hours. Our destination was unknown but there was all kinds of speculation!

The First A. Brigade Signal Section and the First Line Construction Section boarded a troop train of old colonist cars with a commissary cook car. It was 25 Oct. 1939, my twenty first birthday. We were the first troops to be moved in Canada. Once the train was in motion, we were told that we were enroute to the Signals Training Centre at Vimy Barracks near Kingston. Our coaches were shunted from one train to the next as we made our way across the country. We finally arrived on a siding near Fort Henry, (Between Kingston and Vimy Barracks). We were loaded with all we owned, a back pack, kit bag, blanket, haversack, and rifle. We marched up hill to our quarters in Vimy Barracks. The barrack blocks were beautiful three story

white stucco buildings, with hardwood floors. We would learn what efforts were necessary to keep the floors shining. The dining room (Mess hall) was on the ground floor.

We did a review of Basic Training and then were given Trades Tests. First was a Morse Code test where about 25 men met in the Code Training Room. Each student position had a headset and a morse key all wired in a loop. The Test team watched as all this group listened and copied each message at increased speed. When you could not keep up and copy accurately you dropped out. This group was taken to another room for more detailed tests. Five of us were still copying until the Instructor dropped out. Three of us began chatting on our own at a speed too fast to write. One was a signals operator who had just re-enlisted, the other was a press line operator from Ottawa (Mitch) and myself. The instructor then taught us Army Message Procedure. Thus I qualified as an Operator Wireless & Line, Group 1. Another day they gave us a Trade test for Electrician Signals. Again I qualified Group 1 and was passed on to a test for Instrument Mechanics, (Signal Radio Repair & Installations) and again I qualified Group 1. The results of the tests were posted, my mark for theory was 100%. At a much later date I discovered that these were the permanent force trade tests. This placed me in a special group of permanent force N.C.O.'s (Non-Commissioned Officers) slated to be assistant instructors.

We spent Christmas in Vimy Barracks Kingston. In the traditional manner dinner was served to us by the Officers. It seemed a bit odd at this stage of our training. We had just learned to obey their commands with no question. Ah, but this was only for those few short hours.

TEACHING TRADES

One morning a few days later I was told to report to Major Varco. It turned out that he was a militia reserve officer from Northern Electric Co. in Montreal. We sat and talked about electronics for almost an hour. He gave me a Signals Text Book and told me to meet him in the morning with a lecture prepared on "Electron Theory". The next morning we went across the road to Barriemfield Lines to a Hut full of Militia N.C.O.'s from First Corps. I was instructed that I would be required to ask permission of the senior rank present each time before I could start my lecture, but I was the teacher, they were students. It did not make sense at the time, but as my knowledge of things military increased, it made sense. When we returned to Vimy Lines he suggested we prepare a Block training syllabus for a class of Electrician Signals, & Instrument Mechanic Signals. The whole class would take Phase 1. The two trades would be split, top students would go on to Phase 2 to train

as Instrument Mechanics and the rest would go on to be trained as Electrician Signals. In short order I was teaching four different classes every day. With the aid of some Permanent Force Instructors we established wartime standards for these trades. The required examinations for these trades were at three grades, 1, 2, & 3. Those who qualified as grade 1 provided additional assistant instructors for more classes and practical shop instruction. I was transferred to home war establishment (Vimy) as an Assistant Instructor.

HOW NICE TO HAVE RELATIVES

Aunt Annie, W. G. Samisen's wife had a cousin in Kingston. He was a Doctor (Bruce) who was a head of the geology department at Queens University. Aunt Annie arranged that I would go to their beautiful home for Sunday lunch. These people were very good to me while I was in Kingston. They would phone me to see if it was convenient for me to drive them on a Sunday outing or to various other activities. One week-end they asked if I had a friend who would like to go to Niagara Falls. It was a long week-end and I arranged for a friend to join me. When we arrived at the Bruce Home at the appointed hour Dr. Bruce just said

“There is the car enjoy your week-end.”

“Are you not coming ?.”

“No, this is your fun week-end.”

We needed no further urging and away we went. At Toronto we phoned the Stipe cousins in Hamilton. We were invited to stay with them. Susan Stipe (our age) volunteered to act as our guide to Niagara falls and the peninsula. Her father was not too pleased and instructed us to be back before dark. We did the whole bit, The Maid of The Mist, the walk behind the falls, etc.

DON'T CROSS HIGHER RANK (COL. TYNER)

In November I was told I would be in charge of setting up a shop in a lean-to building and with some of my students would repair old World War One field telephones, fuller phones, and No 1 and No 11 radio transceivers. The equipment was for a Unit known as "Z" Brigade. We were really scrapping the bottom of the barrel for equipment, parts came from other units beyond repair. We were under a lot of pressure to get this equipment ready. Two people came into the shop which was "OFF LIMITS". I did not even look up but shouted:

“GET OUT!!”

Then I looked up to see The Camp Commandant (A full Colonel), and his Adjutant looking very annoyed. I saluted and called the shop to attention. Col. Tyner was a reserve army (Bank Manager) and really felt his rank. I was placed on charge for insubordination. Fortunately I was still on strength at Vimy, on loan as an assistant instructor to 1st Corps. This created quite a problem as to who should deal with the case. Finally Col. Ford at Vimy overruled everyone and had me parade to his office. The usual procedure was followed. The charge was read by RSM (Regimental Sergeant Major) T. J. Wallace. I was asked to plead guilty or not guilty. I pleaded not guilty. When I was asked why. My story was that the building and the shop had signs posting them as OFF LIMITS. With my limited knowledge of the military I had been instructed to put the boots to anyone who came into the shop without prior authorization in writing. I know I was wrong in not calling the shop to attention but I did so as soon as I saw the red tabs. I was marched out and cooled my heels for what seemed a long time. I was marched in again. The Col. announced that the charges had been dismissed. I was marched out. T. J. Wallace then told me to be very careful not to cross Col. Tyner again because he was very upset at Col. Ford's ruling.

LEARNING LEADERSHIP (A ROLE MODEL)

One day while on a route march a Captain dropped back to march beside me. He asked if I was Jamieson, and I said "Yes sir". As we marched along he quizzed me about my training and experience, then left. A few days later I was told to report to the Adjutant at 1st Corps Signals after classes. I went to the Orderly room and was paraded to the Adjutant. It was the same Capt. S. F. Clarke who had questioned me on the route march. He told me that he would like me to join 1st Corps, number two company, as a wireless section head. The hitch was that in order to get me posted from the instructors cadre at Vimy I would have to be promoted. I would have to take an N.C.O.'s course but that would take too long. He called in the RSM and asked him if he would run a late afternoon and evening class of one to qualify me as an N.C.O. Thus every day for 2 weeks after teaching all day I reported to the RSM, a Mr. Portsmouth, for study sessions on military law, organization, leadership and drill. I wrote the exams and passed the practical and was good enough that I was not given a Lance Corporal's stripe but was made a full Acting Corporal and thus was moved to the 1st Corps lines, number two company, in charge of a wireless section (one radio station). I was still teaching the same trades classes.

About this time, Captain S. F. Clarke was promoted to Major as C.O. of # 2 Company. One day I was called into the company office. Clarke

explained to me that he had no establishment left to give me trades pay and asked if I would take a Fitters (Mechanical) Trade test. I was coached for a couple of days, took the test and qualified for 1st Class Fitters' Trades pay, largely because of the time spent with my father in the shop at Sylvan Lake.

Another day I was told to report to a special room to meet Major Varco. In the room were a number of special wooden boxes marked with military numbers and descriptions indicating they contained what appeared to be a complete 2.5 Kw high power radio station. We removed several box lids before we found the manuals and assembly plans & instructions. Varco said,

“Get some help and see if you can put this unit together and make it operate”.

The next day we unpacked the power plant and the three 19"x72" metal equipment racks. We studied the manuals and schematic drawings as we assembled a 2500 watt transmitter. One equipment rack was for the audio amplifiers and power supply. One rack was for the transmitter driver unit. The third rack was for the transmitter power output and antenna coupler. We discovered that it was set up so that it could be used with various antennas. But none were provided. I went to my various books and designed a simple long wire system and suitable coupler. The transmitter loaded into the antenna beautifully. I was instructed that we could not go on air with this kind of power without special permission. So we went back to the drawing board and I worked out a design for a dummy antenna using a whole bank of light bulbs. Major Varco came in to see how we were getting on and I was able to show him the operating unit ready to use as a practical teaching unit. The only really tricky operation in tuning and setting up the unit was neutralizing the high power final amplifier. This was done with a three foot neon tube placed in the tuning coil and as the adjustments were made, you had to cut off the high voltage by making an adjustment and then restoring the high voltage and check. I was using the access gate safety switch which disconnected the high voltage whenever anyone opened the gate to the rack. The major vetoed my procedure for this as too dangerous and insisted that we teach a very much slower procedure of turning off the high power supply. He said;

“This is fine for you, since you know the dangers of radio frequency energy of this power, but many students using this will not be aware of how painful and dangerous a burn from this kind of radio frequency energy can be.”

I had to agree. It was apparent following this exercise that Varco had a lot more respect not only for my ability to teach theory but also my practical hands-on ability. Major Clarke also came around to question me about the

unit and specifically about my design of the long line antenna, and the dummy load unit.

TO ENGLAND

In September we were placed on stand-to to proceed overseas and boarded a troop train for Halifax. Here we boarded the Cynthia, a Cunard passenger ship. She had made a passenger run into Halifax and was being converted into a troop ship. Some people were detailed to build sand bag gun positions on the open deck for defence against air attack. My group were sent up to the Old Citadel Fort to get machine guns with anti aircraft mounts. We discovered that all they had were World War One Lewis Guns packed in grease and wrapped in oiled paper. Frankly we did not know the difference. We returned and boiled and steamed the grease out of them before mounting them on tripods with swivels in the sand bag positions on the top deck. At the rear was a Hotchkiss mortar. Little did we know how poorly we were armed to face an Atlantic crossing in September 1940.

A group of Signals operators who could read and send flag signals were sent to the bridge and set up in watches to provide control of the convoy while under radio silence. This was most of the time. Flags were our means of convoy control. This had it's rewards. We were give cabin accommodation rather than troop deck hammocks. My duty was one watch. We were not required to attend the various classes set up to keep troops busy.

We arrived in Gourock, Scotland on a foggy morning on the 5th of October. We marched down the gang plank and boarded this dinky toy like train. It had separate doors for each compartment all along the sides of the coaches. The train whistle was a loud high pitched "Toot" not our steam "HOOOOT" of trains in Canada. Mid morning we stopped at a station and ladies swarmed onto the platform with tea and crumpets. We were on our way again in short order. Our next stop was Aldershot. Trucks took our duffel bag and large pack and we marched into Mons Barracks, showing the Canadian Flag.

We were assigned to our various barrack buildings or huts. The only heat in this damp world was one fireplace in each barrack room. To boot, there was very little fuel. (See bed assignment for # 2 Barrack Block, Room 19). 1st Corps Signals was in the U. K. We would spend several weeks here getting organized before moving to the famous Epson Downs race track with its thirty acre barns.

One day we were sent in a truck to Ordnance to draw vehicles and radio equipment for our section. We returned with numerous vehicles and boxes and boxes of radio equipment. Lt. Cahill, our section officer asked:

“Could I supervise the installation of the radios in the trucks?” I replied:
“I would need additional tools and test equipment”.

He suggested this could be arranged. So we went to work reading the various manuals. We had the radios mounted in 15 cwt (100 weight) trucks and ready for testing in a couple of days. It took the next week to teach the operators how to operate the sets and additional time to show them how to use the various antennas, etc.

Two English Norton motorcycles were part of this equipment. One was assigned to Sergeant Turner who was an experienced rider. I asked who the second one was for he said,

"For now, you will ride it".

After servicing the machine with oil and gas as per the instruction manual I tinkered with the various controls to see what they did, then got on and rode away. My first experience with a motor bike. Needless to say I rode with a lot of care and caution.

AT ALDERSHOT IN NOVEMBER 1941



Due to radio silence, no “on air” transmissions were allowed, so much of our training had to be done with stations close enough together that we could use dummy antennae. Our section was set up on the Ashstead Golf Course where we could hide our vehicles with the aid of camouflage nets, trees and bushes. We were training for a role in the defence of the south coast, if the Germans invaded. We lived in tents beside our vehicles. Cpl. Pynn & Cpl. Kitching were the fellows I chummed around with and we soon ventured out to the pubs in the local area. For our landing leave, four of us decided to go to Scotland and stay at the Overseas club in Glasgow. One day the club arranged a trip for us to visit the ship yards. We were travelling by tram (street car) and we had to change to a different line. It was just at 11 AM (opening time for the pubs). We went into the local. As we came up to the bar 4 drinks were set up. The bar keeper explained that the gentleman at the table would like to buy us a "Gentle as a Lamb" whisky. We turned to our host and drank his health. His companion then told the bar tender to set up the drinks again. We struck up a conversation with these two men and it turned out that they were the sales representatives for "Old Angus Whisky", and the motto on the bottles was "Gentle as a Lamb" and around the neck of each bottle was attached a tiny plastic lamb. One man was the sales representative for England the other for Scotland. Being CANADIANS, it was suggested that we should join them for a tour of the distillery and lunch. We were taken to the distillery's International Sample Room. It was very Posh with beautiful furniture, high ceilings and black velvet drapes between

huge wooden pillars. The drapes concealed every type, form and kind of beverage you could imagine. A tall gentleman with a military bearing and a slight limp (a wooden leg) came along and was introduced as Colonel Jamieson, the General Manager. He had heard that some Canadians were in the sample room and came for a visit. He had been the Commanding Officer of the Canadian Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry Regiment in World War One. He had married and stayed in Scotland. They had one son but he had been killed in the RAF. On learning that my name was Jamieson and from Calgary, home base of the PPCLI, I became an adopted son. Despite rationing he arranged for us to go for a hike in the highlands and fells and visit Lake Katharine.

When we returned to Glasgow, the Colonel had arranged for us to play golf on the old course at Saint Andrew. He had arranged lockers & clubs for us to play the next day. The Links were grazed by sheep to keep the grass trimmed on the fairways, a mobile and unpredictable hazard. As we came to putt on the ninth green, we were met by the Colonel, the Publisher of the Glasgow Times and various other business men of note. It turned out it was their clubs and lockers we were using. We joined them for rather a long lunch. These men were all very interested in finding out about Canada. We played our afternoon round in a rather happy mood. The Colonel had friends in high places in the Canadian Army because he knew where I was whenever he wished to contact me. More of him later.

Shortly after our return I was called and paraded to the company office. Major Clarke, Lt. Rolfe, 9 Warrant Officers and NCO's were present. We were briefed on a new assignment. The Canadian Army was going to raise some tank units in Canada. The eleven of us were to spend time with the first and only British Armoured Divisional Signals. We would each be assigned a different area of responsibility. We would be required to put down on paper all the details about organization, equipment and tactics to be sent back to Canada for use in the formation and training of the Canadian Signals Tank units. My responsibility was technical equipment. They had no G1098, (the official tables of equipment and man power) and no operations manuals. It was necessary for us to sit down with the various people and discuss what equipment they had and how they had used it. We also talked to them about what they felt they needed to operate in the Blitzkrieg mode. These people had been in France and returned via Dunkirk, destroying and leaving all of their equipment behind. We moved around all over Surrey & Sussex spending a day or two with each troop and then moving along to the next unit. Every so often we would meet Major Clarke and Lt. Rolfe to check our progress, be reassigned and get our pay. Shortly after we started Cpl. Barkey, Holaway & I were promoted to Acting Lance Sergeants without

pay, just so our whole group would all be in the Sergeant's Mess to work more efficiently.

We toured all over southern England, quite often in the black out, by bus. No matter where we were, on the week-end we would try to get to the country Hotel and Pub on the Hogs Back. There we could get a lovely lean steak without ration coupons. It was a bit course in texture. We learned later the steaks were horse meat but on our diet, any steak was a treat. Often as we made our way from a pub back to camp, bombs would be falling. The big railway anti-aircraft guns would be pumping all kinds of scrap metal into the sky. This would come raining back down like hail bouncing on the tarmac, cutting through the leaves and hedges. You would pull your tin hat down till your ears stuck through. If you heard a whistle you hit the ditch or dived for cover because that meant that a bomb was close overhead and you could be caught in the shrapnel or the blast. We spent October, November and December on this assignment. Often the location of delayed action bombs or duds required that we detour to get to or from our lines.

In November 1941, we were posted to Bovington Armoured Vehicle School where we were first introduced to the eight hundred weight wireless trucks equipped with the new # 19 wireless sets. Our instructor was a *Very, Very British* Cavalry Officer who had made a study of the use of mobile radio by the Germans. We spent 3 weeks doing wireless drills and exercises all over the South Downs. He knew his stuff and had really studied the German Blitz Tactics. He was also very upper crust you know. One day we were driving along in convoy, suddenly he stopped the convoy, jumped out of his truck with muffler (scarf) flying and went running across the downs yelling "TALLY HOO!! TALLY HOO!!", as the hounds and the hunt went galloping by.

PYE RADIO PLANT

Between Major Varco and Clarke it was arranged that I would visit the Pye Radio Plant near Cambridge and work with the Quality Control Team and at the same time document the Mark II modifications (improvements over the Mark I set). This information was to be sent back to Northern Electric who were setting up to manufacture these sets in Canada. This turned out to be quite an experience. There were 750 women on a tree type production line. The production supervisor estimated that each time a soldier walked down the production line it resulted in at least ten mistakes. This would result in more sets, that would have to be repaired. Our quality control team were moved to work in a separate area. We introduced a shake table to imitate the tank operating situation. This resulted in a major increase in failures at Q. C. which meant we were spending more and more time on the

production line to introduce corrective measures. Many of these women would make very aggressive advances and suggestions.

Signs were posted that read "MAKE SURE THE COMPONENT IS MECHANICALLY SECURE AND THEN SOLDER IT ". This procedure also eliminated many mechanical defects. The internal structure of some of the tubes designed for domestic service (known as valves) were not adequate mechanically and had to be redesigned. It was several months before we saw the redesigned tubes. November was an eventful month. I was promoted to Acting Sergeant with pay. Next we were told to finalize our reports, by now almost a book. We would be have embarkation leave, then be posted back to Canada as instructors for the formation of the Armoured Signals units. For security reasons, under no circumstances were we to tell anyone anything about our departure.

CONVOY TO CANADA IN 1940

After our leave, the nine WO's and NCO's reported to Gourrock near Glasgow to board a troopship. The two officers were to sail from Liverpool and join the same convoy. We would see them in Halifax. The convoy of some 600 ships assembled off the west coast of Scotland, throughout the night of the 17th and early morning of the 18 Dec 1940. Our destination was Canada. Our escort of destroyers, corvettes and E-boats shepherded this flotilla, circling, take point, moving off in ever changing patterns, but always maintaining a defensive picket.

Two of our number had been in France, and returned. We had witnessed the Blackout, the Battle of Britain and the start of the Blitz with it's H.E.'s (high explosives), D.A.'s,(delayed action) and Incendiary Fire Bombs. Having been exposed to these conditions and more, one becomes a fatalist, with the attitude that the one with my name on it has not been made yet.

Our ship was the LEOPOLDVILLE. She was a survivor, a diesel freighter that pre-war had plied between Belgium and the Congo, with a passenger complement of 400. As a troop ship she was converted to carry 4000 souls across the Atlantic. The cargo holds were converted to mess decks. These were tables and benches which seated eight for meals. At night eight hammocks were slung diagonally over this area and the associated walk way. The promenade and open decks had been enclosed with plywood to provide more mess decks. On board ship we were responsible for and had documents for a draft of some 150 physically unfit troops, mostly re-enlisted World War One veterans returning to Canada for medical reasons. One was a young insane lad we were escorting to an asylum in Quebec. This meant that

any time he was out of his cell, for air or exercise, one of us as his guard was hand-cuffed to him. The rest of the passengers were Royal Air Force troops, enroute to the Commonwealth Training Program in Western Canada.

It was the evening of the third day a sea. It was my turn to be hand cuffed to our prisoner. We are standing in the shelter of a life boat, looking over a dull grey and angry sea. Ships of all types and sizes littered the ocean in every direction. They moved in the organized confusion of the ZIG-ZAG convoy patterns. This was done to make it difficult for a submarine to sight and fire a torpedo, before the ship changes direction again. Suddenly the sirens wailed, the hooters barked and our escort ships became a hive of activity. They literally jumped in response to full throttles. They laid down boiling wakes followed by the THUMP...WARRUMP!! and spouting geyser of the depth charges being laid down by our escort ships. We were under attack by the dreaded submarine wolf pack. Then "LIFEBOAT STATIONS" was sounded. This drill had been well rehearsed. It was done in four waves, wave one got the lifeboats, wave two got life rafts, wave three got inflatables, wave four were instructed to hold down hard with both hands on the front of your life jacket so they wouldn't break their necks when they JUMPED OVERBOARD and hit the water!

It was my turn to be in the fourth wave and my turn to be escort, thus I was hand cuffed to our insane prisoner. Survival was measured in minutes in those frigid waters. The loss of lives and material to the U boats was at it's peak. You think deeply at times like this. You could cut the strain with a knife. Were we to be survivors? Then our ship shuddered, and jumped to life and we surged away at 17 knots, soon to be enclosed in the comforting womb of darkness. "STAND DOWN" came with relief and jubilation. We proceeded to our mess decks for a late supper. What happened to all the other ships and crews? We will never know! Due to security, none of the events like this were ever published. But we were survivors! And this is my opportunity to salute all those many souls who rest in Davie Jone's locker.

The following morning came and it remained dark. We were in the North Atlantic near the Arctic Circle and it remained dark for two days. The day before Christmas was cold and foggy but the horizon grew light for a few hours. We had watched as turkeys were moved from storage to the galley and looked forward to a proper Christmas dinner after being on short rations in England. The dinner hour arrived and we picked up our Christmas dinner in a mess tin. The turkey had been chopped and spiced and stuffed into casings and sliced like baloney. This plus sloppy vegetables. What a disappointment.

The next morning we were doing boat drill again. As we watched, a ship appeared on the horizon and suddenly began to make smoke as it surged toward us at full speed. We knew that a German battle ship was operating on the Atlantic masquerading as a merchant ship. It stopped about a mile away and turned her guns on us. All troops deck were tense, the strain was electric. The lucas lamp began to blink out a Morse Message, "Identify yourself at once, or we fire". Our ship sent identification, the response, "Where have you been?. We had been looking for you for days. We are the Battle Ship Rex to escort you into Halifax". We were a very thankful draft to arrive in Halifax on the evening of December 28.

NO PAPERS

Our two Officers with all of our papers had not arrived. Their ship had been bombed in Liverpool and they had not sailed. We were in Halifax with papers for our draft but no proper authorization for ourselves. We convinced the port authority to phone the School of Signals in Kingston. They had received a message from England and we were allowed to board the Troop Train for Ontario. We arrived in the early morning hours at Vimy barracks. The duty Warrant Officer, was Bull Yelland (A personal friend of King Clay's). He greeted us and escorted us to the Warrant Officers Mess for food and drink then off to bed. We were taken on strength at Depot "C" Kingston and were given a pay advance and leave while they sorted out the paper work. We all headed for Toronto. Red Waddell and I boarded the first Train West. We could not afford berths. We sat in our coach seats listening to the clackity-clack of the rails all the way there. We had time to reflect on the reality of what we had left behind in England. The fire bombs and fires, the bombing of London and other major cities, the rationing. Could or would Britain hold out or would our return to the U.K. be via landing craft? We did buy some booze and were partly soused all the way west on the train. We had not been able to advise our families for security reasons that we were coming back to Canada. Things had happened so fast that we kept putting off wiring or phoning. We decided that we would phone at the next major stop. Between Medicine Hat and Calgary we took time out to clean up and put on fresh shirts & shorts. On arrival in Calgary we had to hurry to catch the North bound bus or wait several hours. At Red Deer the west bound bus was waiting for us. Red went on to Edmonton while I grabbed my duffel bags and boarded the bus for Sylvan Lake, arriving at the hotel about 5 o'clock on a Sunday. What a surprise this will be for the family, I thought. As I walked up a deserted main street our dog came bounding down the road on the dead run, hit my thigh and jumped onto my shoulder. What a welcome! I came around to the back door to see the whole family gathered for dinner. What a shock, when they saw me, the faces all looked blank for a moment. (They had heard

rumours that I had been shot). Then all hell broke loose in welcome. It was too much for mother and her heart. She was ill for a couple of days.

Somewhere along the way I had contracted a sore throat and mouth and treated it with Buckley's mixture. I later learned it was trench mouth and really had trouble enjoying all that wonderful joy of mother's cooking. Dad and I spent time together at the curling rink. I enjoyed time with Edith and Ralph (a baby) and many friends. But leave was soon over and I was back on the train again, headed for Kingston. On arrival, I soon learned that my sore mouth was in fact, by now, a severe case of Trench Mouth. The treatment was equally uncomfortable. This was before the use of antibiotics and my gums were burned to clear the infection.

1ST ARMoured DIVISION SIGNALS

When I got back to Kingston, Mayor F. Clarke still had not arrived. Major Arthur Wrinch was assembling elements of the 4th Squadron, 4th Militia Division Signals in Barriefield to become the 1st Armoured Division Signals. We joined this unit and having just come back from the front, so to speak, we were old soldiers and all business. These new recruits looked to us with a respect almost bordering on awe. Basic training was the order of the day. King Clay was the senior Warrant Officer and he set up what was known as the "Bull Ring" in a drill hall built while we were overseas. Here King, assisted by Frank Barkey & I, ran very tough basic training drill classes. Glen Kell and Art Hughes taught military law and administration. Red Waddell and Nick Balk taught gas drills. Even the few officers that had arrived gave us a lot of respect and wanted to know what it was actually like in England.

As soon as Major Clarke arrived, he was promoted to Lt.Col. and our Commanding Officer (C.O.). He told us we had 6 months to whip this unit into shape to go back to Britain. He put it very clearly to us.

"You gentlemen must be an example of perfection in your dress, deportment, conduct, instruction and all aspects of your work."

Each of us was removed from basic training duties and were given a specific area of responsibility. King Clay was to teach all ranks Organization and Administration. Glen Kell had weapons and tactics, Bert Milligan had land line and dispatch riders, Frank Barkey had signal Office and operators, and my job was to teach and supervise all the technical trades including motor mechanics.

The 28th Jan. I was confirmed as Sgt. and promoted to Acting Quartermaster Sergeant (Foreman of Signals). This is the highest Qualified tradesmen in Signals and I felt very honoured to be award this rank without any courses. I paid for it in hard work. Initially we had to prepare block training programs co-ordinated with the others to avoid duplication and omission. Then we had to select suitable people and train them to become Assistant Instructors (A.I.'s). We had Permanent Force people coming out of the north from the N.W.T. Signals System, plus civilian tradesmen and ham radio operators; they were all good potential A.I.'s.

In March King Clay and I took an advance party to Camp Borden, where all elements of the Division were to concentrate. A recent major snow and wind storm had left all the buildings buried in snow drifts, blocking doors, roads, parking areas and drill halls. We had to dig our way into a kitchen and mess hall to bed down for the first night. Spring came early and we worked from daylight to dark and long into the night to be prepared for tomorrow. King Clay & Glenn Kell left us one week and returned a week later as Lieutenant Officers. Nick Balk and Red Waddell were also promoted and posted as Warrant Officers in the Army Tank Brigade Signals.

On week-ends we were often assigned to recruiting duty at a stand in Sunny Side or the Exhibition Grounds. In May I was in Toronto for 3 weeks at Danforth Technical School. It was taken over as an Army Trade school and I spent evenings teaching the instructors about army equipment. I learned how to properly use a metal turning lathe during the days. We had a major trades training programs running at various levels in Borden when I was asked to take 50 of the best qualified instrument mechanics and electrician signals to The Research Establishment under Colonel Taber in Ottawa.

**GOOD FRIENDS, RED WADELL AND NICK BALKE AT
BARRIEFIELD IN THE SPRING OF 1942; PART OF THE GROUP
THAT CAME BACK TO CANADA TO HELP FORM THE FIRST
DIV. SIGNALS**



amieson

SERGEANT'S MESS, CAMP BORDEN, 1942.



TO OTTAWA

We were sent there to set up a production line to manufacture a Very Special High Power Transmitter designed by Don Hings from Consolidated Mining & Smelting of Trail, B. C., to be used in our Armoured Command Vehicles. Once this project was under way, I joined another three man team to go to Montreal. We had two assignments. One was at the CPR Locomotive Shops where they were manufacturing the Canadian RAM Tanks for us to take overseas. 300 were ready except for the wireless suppression specification. When driven down a tarmac or paved road you received loud damped spark interference that made the radio useless. Our job was: "Tell us how to fix it". We were lucky and discovered quickly that the problem was the tank track tread pads were slipping and creating static electric discharges into the roadway. This meant that all the pads had to go back and be re-manufactured, incorporating a bronze spring to provide a continuous circuit to bleed this static charge into the road. Two was at the Ogden Rail Shops where they were building the Valentine Infantry support tanks. One look and I said, "Useless for that role". The problem was the turret traverse control which operated an electric motor that received its power via slip rings in the base of the turret unit. These sparked and created radio interference on a grand scale. After a lot of experiments, we discovered a filter that we thought might do the job but we only had one and we needed two per tank to be sure they would be effective. The problem went to Col. Taber. We were called from Supply Services, in Ottawa, C.D. Howe said;

"My plane is going to Detroit for a meeting, it will pick one of your people up in Montreal".

I was it. While they were busy with other duties, I went and picked up a dozen of the Toby Duetchman Filters. We flew back to Montreal that same evening. These proved to be the answer to the problem.

We had been commuting back to Ottawa on week-ends to keep in touch with my people there and get paid etc. This weekend I read Part II orders to find that I had been posted from the Armoured Divisional Signals to E.R.D. Ottawa. I phoned Camp Borden right away to find that Clarke was away for the weekend, but I did reach Capt. J. B. Clement, the Adjutant. His response is unprintable. I returned to Montreal and mid week a message recalled me to Ottawa to report to Capt. Pound at quarter master stores. He told me that all my tradesmen were to be sent to Toronto to meet a train on track number 7, but my name was not on the movement order. He had been instructed by an old friend to give me a travel warrant to take charge of the draft and take them to Toronto. When we arrived at our meeting point it was

to discover that it was a troop train enroute to Halifax and on to the U.K. I was absent without leave from Ottawa for quite a while before the paper work finally was corrected.

Finn Clarke was the Officer in charge of all the troops boarding the troops ship in Halifax. One of the infantry regiments was refusing to go overseas and at one point Clarke was faced with the fact that if these troops refused to board, he might be forced to shoot the offenders. He and J. B. Clements stood by on tender hooks until all the unit were on board. We sailed 14 November 1941 to disembark in Scotland on the 21 November. We then went by train to Mons Barracks in Aldershot. I had been briefing two more Foreman of Signals from the Permanent Force on the Tank Radios and equipment. They had joined us out of the North Country and we had become good friends. Sid McCally, and Stan Stebbin. Sid was assigned as QMS (Fof S) with M troop. I was confirmed in my rank and assigned as CQMS (FofS) 4 Squadron, and Stan as CQMS (FofS) 3 Squadron. We quickly split up the training facilities, and re-established trades training.

Another good friend was Capt. Frank Riddell. He was a character of the first order and a legend of the NWTerritories Radio Net. He had spent 9 years in the north and could repair anything with whatever he had at hand. Sgt. Riddell and Sgt. Hershey worked with the RCMP in the tracking down of the MAD TRAPPER JOHNSON. It was Frank who actually knocked down Johnson by hitting a cast iron frying pan on his back pack. In an exchange of rifle shots Hershey was shot through the flesh of the forearm and upper arm as he aimed his rifle at Johnson. It was at this point they actually brought the Mad Trapper to bay ending what is still a saga of the north. The story was made into a motion picture although the show took many liberties with actual facts.

Frank loved his home made hard liquor and was a real expert at brewing and distilling his own grain alcohol which he flavoured to make his own versions of scotch, rye, or vodka. More on this particular skill later. The first week of December I had leave and went to Edinbough, Scotland to do my fathers bidding and look up the origins of the Airth & Jamieson families for Davie Barr. I also located the Airth castle just south of Stirling Castle. I found that the Jamieson name came from Son of Jamie and could have come from two different clans. The Viking highlanders, Jamieson Septs, of the Gunns of Kileran, in the Grampion Mountains in the north, or the Stewart's of Bute in the Western Islands. I never could locate a link to Canada. The Stewarts were relatively small people and the Vikings tall red heads. The Jamiesons were tall, red-headed men thus I assume we are from the Viking stock. Family duty was fulfilled and I went by the Airth castle which was occupied by an anti-aircraft battery located in the barn area and all I could do

was have a very brief look, in the company of one of the guards from the gate.

On my return I was posted to Chillwell for CSO2/ARMD GRP Course 3, from the 10th December 1941 to 9th January 1942. I learned about the American Tanks and taught two Russians how to operate the #19 set tank radio sets with controls printed in Russian. In January 1941 I was posted as a Qualified Foreman Of Signals (Fof S) (normally a four year course at the school of Signals), and was posted back to M Troop with Capt. Riddell. More importantly it gave me Grade "A" (Fof S) trades pay.

Two weeks in April I spent at the Pye Radio Works near Cambridge on Quality Control of the # 19 radio set. We were also to design a set of special controls and intercom boxes for the armoured command vehicles. The transmitter power tube had been re-designed in a rugged version to correct the fault mentioned previously. We really shook these up on the shake table.

One morning after returning from Pye, I was instructed to pick up a truck and equipment and go to Gatwick Airport to the RCAF 110 AC Squadron. On arrival I was told that we would work with an Air Force Sgt. radio mechanic. We were assigned a Lysander plane and pilot, a light tank and driver. We were to evaluate the radio equipment to be used for tank to aircraft communication. We put tank radios in aeroplanes and RCAF radios in tanks, with numerous antennas. The weather 7 to 25 October was beautiful as we spent our days flying over the surrounding country doing tests. While using radio we were an easy target for the Germans to locate so we had to keep a very careful eye out as we lumbered along at our top speed of 90 mph. We would have been a sitting duck for German fighter planes. On my return I had the company clerk type up my report and recommendations.

In the spring we moved out of Mons Barracks to a canvas camp at Brookwood for field training. Lt-Col Clarke was posted to Staff and would leave the unit he had led and trained. He visited the Sgt's Mess tent to say farewell. This became on occasion for a "BOAT RACE"; Sergeant's Mess members against the officers. The finalists were Clarke and I as we stood across the table, each with a quart bottle of Beer. The first to turn the empty bottle upside down with no liquid in the neck was the winner, I won as a result of more and better training.

Finn Clarke had a very positive influence on my military career, as well as many others. When he was a Capt. I was a Signaller, when he became Major I became Cpl & Sgt; When he became Lt- Col. I became CQMS(F of S). & QM (F of S) WO II. When he made Col. I was RSM WO I.

He made Brigadier when I was Lt. He was Chief Signal Officer of the First Canadian Corps. He was a terrific role model which was reflected in many of the soldiers around him. In the post war years he became the Chief of the Canadian Army as Lieutenant General before he retired to Victoria. Finn is gone now, but I want to take this opportunity to recognize the difference he made to my life and many others.

I was promoted to Acting Quarter Master Sergeant (Foreman of Signal) A/QMS(FofS) Warrant Officer Class II in June and confirmed in the rank in September. Captain Frank Riddel and I designed and built an instrument mechanic's mobile workshop. General A. G. McNaughton came to see it. It was a large semi-trailer, in which we had built a series of very compact bench positions to repair radios. People could be at work as soon as the vehicle stopped and even when moving in slow convoys. This saved hours of set up and dismantling of work benches at every move. He asked very practical questions typical of a practical engineer. This became a standard for the British and Canadian Armoured Signals.

It was a bright sunny Sunday morning church parade. We had marched up the sunken road, just a touch of colour in the hedges. It was a beautiful old rural church. The RSM George Woodstock collapsed and died. As a W.O. II {Foreman of Signals) I was the senior warrant officer, not by the length of service in the rank but because I was (F.of S). Thus I took over as temporary RSM in addition to my regular duties as Q.M.S. with "M" troop. While I was at Weybridge, Q.M.S. Rush had acted as RSM and I expected he would get the promotion not because I was not capable, but I was more valuable and required in my technical role and with trades pay I got more money. Thus this is how I, by accident, became a Warrant Officer Class I. with a very unhappy group of W.O.II's. As it turned out over the next few months, my experience with King Clay & Glenn Kell gave me the skills necessary to handle Drum Head church parades and the numerous other sticky situations as our training and deployment progressed. I was to learn later, it was Col. Clarke who had recommended the appointment. For several months I did both jobs F of S & acting RSM.

We had many Armoured Command Vehicles (ACV) which were like an Armoured box car mounted on a London double deck bus chassis with a special four wheel drive and transfer case that provided about 17 speeds forward. A special AEC diesel was the power plant. It had a driver compartment forward beside and above the motor. The command compartment had a separate entrance door into a compact office, with a wall to wall desk. Two swivel chairs were attached to the floor. Large map boards covered with talc (clear plastic) to write on were on the walls. In the rear area left side was housed a 110 volt Onan light plant & a 12 volt charger. The

right side provided positions for two radio operators and the radio equipment. The command area had two headsets that were attached to control boxes with two selector switches on each. These controls allowed the staff officers to control and communicate directly on intercom with any one in the vehicle from the driver up. He could also communicate forward via high power radio to the formations under his command. He had another Radio link to the rear to higher command. A very high frequency link allowed him to talk to the other 10 A C V's which made up the Advance Divisional head quarters i.e Artillery, Engineers, Air support, Supplies, and other services as required. We had acquired these vehicles as they became available and during manufacturing various modifications were made, from a place for machine guns, to kit storage as well as mechanical improvements. To update and insure that all vehicles were the same I went to the factory at Addellstone. I lived in the Weybridge hotel while all of these vehicles were brought in and modified to comply with the new standard. My function was to inspect the incoming vehicle, list the necessary modifications and inspect the unit when the work was complete. Since I was living and taking all my meals at the Weybridge Inn, the owner and I became good friends. The pub was the social centre of the area so that was where I spent part of each evening. Following the timely call of "Time Gentlemen Please"; a favourite few were invited to stay for tea. The tea was a pint of "Edward's Special Heavy Ale". We would sit quietly in front of the fire and enjoy stories and ale. Then we would count the number of drinks by the number of suds rings on the mug. It was a very special Night Cap.

At a later date I drove one of these A C V 's on Salisbury plain to prove to General Crearar that they could follow tanks in cross country fighting. It was quite a test, not only of the equipment but of driving skills, through streams, mud, sharp coulees, through stone fences and hedges. The tanks were of course determined to leave the wheels behind. The General even asked to drive the unit at the end of the test, but would not try the routes I had driven. It was probably early October when the job was finished and I returned to Brookhouse. When I arrived at the gate guard post, I was told that the Adjutant wanted to see me as soon as I arrived. Thus I went directly to his Office and was greeted with almost a tirade.

“Mr. Jamieson, what do you mean coming to my office improperly dressed! What kind of an example are you setting for your troops. It is very obvious that you have not been even reading Part II Orders. This just will not do, we will have to see the C.O.”.

I couldn't understand what the tirade was about. Capt. J. B. Clements was our Adjutant. We had worked together on many projects and at that time we were working closely as Adjutant and RSM Finally the C.O. Lt.Col., A. E.

Wrinch, walked in and he addressed me as "Mr. Jamieson". All very formal. He then suggested that it was time the bar should be opened in the Officers Mess. That we should all go down and have a drink on my promotion. It wasn't until then that the light finally dawned. While I was away I had been promoted to Acting Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM).

As RSM my transport was a big Harley motor bike. On convoy control and on main roads it was a beauty to ride, but for cross country, it was too low and heavy. On convoy control all the dispatch riders worked for me on controlling the convoy and directing the vehicle at every key intersection. They were a very clannish group as they had originally enlisted as a group known as "The Toronto Black Hawk Club" with their Sgt. Bill Hay. The summer in Borden, Bill had run an evening class on bike riding for all the N.C.O.s and Officers who rode. He was a tough task master but his instruction saved many lives in later years. The D troop soon learned that I could handle my machine and looked after me and my bike whenever we were on exercise. If it came to cross country travel a light bike replaced my heavy Harley and it found a place on the truck. When we would pull into harbour at night I would park my bike with the others and go about my numerous other duties and when I returned with my batman to service the bike and bed down, the bike was gassed up and my bed made under a tarp along side the bike. It made a perfect bunk, with the hot motor to keep me warm for most of the night. In the morning when I came back from breakfast, my machine and bed roll were taken care of and we were ready to roll. I felt honoured by how they accepted me as one of them. They were great scroungers and sharing their bartered treats of vegetable and eggs meant you were in! At all times I was still respected as the RSM. Riding a motor bike in the black-out was no job for amateurs or the faint hearted. We all took our bumps on exercises. It was important to know how to lay down your bike and roll away to safety. Some did not make it and died or spent many weeks in hospital. On one occasion I was riding along a narrow twisting lane of southern England. It was a bright and sunny day. I could see another bike coming to meet me, just his head and shoulders above the hedge row, both of us were steering with our body weight and balance as we enjoyed the sun and air. Suddenly as we met on a curve, our crash bars hooked and locked and we spun 180 degrees and both went off in the other direction. We turned and came back more cautiously to discover we both had a damn sore knee and a bent crash bar. We were both amazed and a little dazed that we both must have been at the same speed and weight for this to have happened.

During my tenure as RSM (this is the loneliest job in the world) I meet another RSM, Spud Murphy, of the London Canadian Provost Corps. He had his own suite in Belsize Park. My CO was very understanding and whenever I was not busy, a week-end pass was available. We knew two

young ladies who ran a ticket service at the Canadian Beaver Club and they would hold seats for the 4 of us for shows and other events. So Spud Murphy and I spent many week-ends at his suite and in the Pubs. These two ladies died during the Buzz Bomb raids.

After all the various Spartan exercises and our various larger exercises up in Yorkshire and Norwich we again returned to Brookhouse. We began the research and practical water proofing of all the various vehicles and equipment so they could wade. This started with ramps into and out of swimming pools until we found out what waterproof mastic was required and how much of a charge it took to blow the mastic compounds off the various parts of the vehicles. Captain Riddell and I were to provide the electrical know how to ignite the charges. We provided a lot of input as to how to provide the necessary air input and exhaust output in order that the motor would run underwater and how to cover the spark plugs and ignition to keep the salt water from shorting out the engines. Once out of the water these had to be removed with small charges, in some cases only cordite. The object of this whole idea was to make the vehicles able to run off the ramp of a landing craft and into up to 8 feet of water and wade to shore. Then, at the press of a button, the cordite and powder would blow the plugs out of the main tank guns and machine guns, then blow the mastic off the turret ring to allow the turret to traverse. At the first stop, numerous things had to be done, like putting the fan belt back on, removing the carburetor breathing pipes, remove the mastic on the spark plugs, generator, battery etc., to restore the vehicle to normal operation. All the different types of vehicles required different treatments. Frank Riddell's special skills were priceless. There were lots of fun and games. Then came the proof of the pudding, with actual exercises where we actually drove the units from the various landing craft into various increasing depths of water. If they drowned or quit for whatever reason, they were towed out, the problem solved and then they were sent back for another try. We even tried to water proof a motor bike but with no real success.

TO OFFICER'S TRAINING

By September of 1943 we had completed the major problems of water proofing vehicles. Then, after an exercise on the south coast, I was called back to Brookhouse and informed that I would be going up to the Officer Selection Board at Black Downs. It was a special opportunity for me. (When we had first arrived back in England and while we were in Mons Barracks we spent our evenings doing a review of mathematics and other subjects prior to applying to the selection centre. You needed good math to train as Officers. This was a complete review of math from addition, subtraction to calculus and real and imaginary terms. For me this was an important time for suddenly all this math made sense. I had no interest in going to

the gunners or engineers and Signal Officers with rare exceptions, required a degree in Electrical Engineering. My technology certificate did not qualify me at this time.)

I had to get prepared for the written tests. I was called in to Lt.- Col. Wrinch's office and he said,

" I am sorry that you have been held up for so long before being sent off to Officers Training".

They had to have me train two people, both a foreman of signals and an RSM. He also wanted me to complete my liaison role in insuring that the various Signal detachments posted to operating with all the Armoured regiments and Infantry units were being properly employed and able to do their job. I could not be spared for Officers Training until these various tasks were finished.

I was posted to the holding unit on 20 Sep 43 and over the next month I went to the Pre O C T U selection centre. I was told nothing, but was posted to # 1 Wing Canadian Training School (RSM) CDN OCTU at Camp Borden, England. An Infantry Officers Training Unit.

The selection process was a very demanding time with I. Q. tests, math tests, "M" tests for reasoning and aptitude tests. There were also field tests, like "Here is a bunch of pipe and eight people, make a tower". They would then stand back and see who would figure out how to do it and who would take charge and organize the rest to build the look out tower. You were shown a culvert and told to crawl through it. What they did not say was that it was about a hundred yards long. The crawl would be through wet, slimy mud; dirt sections where you would be held up by sections that collapsed in on you. You had to wiggle and squirm to keep moving, all in the pitch black dark. At the end you had to walk or swim through an area where there was just not quite clearance for your head above the water. When we got out it appeared that several men had not made the total crawl. That was the end for them; many others were failed each day for various reasons. In the end it was my turn to go before "The Interview Board of Officers", which would decide if you were in or out. They badger you, trying to make you lose your temper. They insult you and in the end, if you passed, they compliment you. I passed the test and was sent back to the holding unit at Hove.

ARRIVAL

The following Monday I was sent to the Infantry Officers Training Centre at Camp Borden, England, with several other cadets. On arrival, as we

disembarked from the truck, someone called my name and I looked up to find Sid Finney, who was the RSM. We had shared the same Mess in Mons Barracks in Aldershot as W.O.II's and lived in the same house. His greeting was:

"Wally my boy, am I going to enjoy making your life a living hell for the next weeks".

I still was wearing my badges of rank so I replied:

"When I march off this parade square as an Officer you had better be there and be the first to salute my commission!"

There were two major prods that made me work double hard on this course. One was Finney the other was Kieth Watt who was in the course ahead of me. Keith had been a W.O. III when we left Calgary and he served for several years as RSM of the holding unit at Hove. Each time I had occasion to pass through the unit he would comment on my promotions until I arrived as an RSM. This prompted him to see his C.O. a Colonel Tyner, and request to be sent to the Officers Selection Board.

THE ROLE OF RSM

A REGIMENTAL SERGEANT MAJOR is a unique position. You have been promoted through the various non commissioned and warrant officers ranks to become a Warrant Officer Class 1. You are the top dog of your kind, so to speak. You are in charge of the SGT's Mess and you are the ranking disciplinarian. You are feared by some junior ranks and respected by all ranks, including the officers. You work directly with and are part of the Commanding Officer's Regimental Headquarters Staff. All ranks call you Mister. It is the loneliest job in the world. Wherever you go, everyone expects you to be checking up on everything from proper dress, proper deportment to every period on a message form. Having been Foreman of Signals, they were not surprised when I checked the inflation pressure of truck tires. So you have no really close friends in the unit. Even people you have known for years back off from the rank. But as one looks back over the years it was the best rank in the army. It is a very unique position but it does tend to make one a bit of a snob or at least you might tend to get an inflated ego. You have the authority to demand the respect of all around you. However, with OCTU, all that changed.

It is a real shock to you as a person when you remove the R S M's badge of rank (often referred to as the dog fight) and put up the white shoulder tabs of an Officer Cadet which in effect is one step lower than a private soldier. When you have to jump to the order of a Lance Corporal. Every where you go for the first 2 weeks

you must march at double time. And there were other worries. At the infantry officer O C T U Courses, there was always speculation about which class will we be? Will we be Platoon Leaders on "D" Day, or the first line re-enforcements? We all remembered the stories from Dieppe. We knew that sooner or later we would go back into Europe; the speculation was only on where or when. Even other services like myself had no assurance that if we would return to our corps, or if infantry officers are needed.

INFANTRY TRAINING

The infantry training was very tough and demanding physically, a two mile run as a warm up for our daily 45 min P.T. sessions; all done with tin hat, small pack, rifle and regulation boots. This was followed by a trip or two over the assault course made up of various barriers which required team work to get everyone over walls, across swinging ropes etc. Small Arms training with live ammunition and crawling through under growth with machine guns firing tracers a foot over your head was also part of the drill. We would be asked to observe a plot of ground with normal vegetation and see what we could observe. After 10 minutes when we were commenting of the flowers and bugs, twenty men carefully camouflaged would stand up out of the undergrowth. Then we were dressed and concealed in the same area for the next group to find.

During the first 2 weeks we went everywhere on the double. This was one of the most physically demanding 6 weeks of my life. Every two weeks another class graduated. Kieth Watt was in the class ahead of me and we had to compete to see who would act as RSM for his passing out Parade. It turned out that Keith was awarded the Commandant's cane and I took the parade as RSM. For my class I too was awarded the cane as top cadet. This meant that I took the position as C.O. of the Parade. As we marched off the parade ground, Sid Finney was right there, and he was the first person to salute my new rank. During the last 2 weeks of training we lived in a separate mess (dining room) where we were instructed in the proper mess edict etc. and this is where the graduation party was held. Sid was normally a very reserved person but on this occasion he really unwound as we often had in the Mons Barracks Sgt's Mess. This surprised many of the instructors present, but they had never seen the Sid I knew so well.

In the army there were always rumours which were often referred to as LATRINE-A-GRAMS. One of these was to the effect that 5 DIV was going abroad. I arranged to phone Colonel Varco who was now on the chief signal's officers staff. I reached a clerk who I knew and told him that I wanted to be returned to 5 Div. and asked who I would have to talk to arrange this matter. He said;

“ One moment please.”

The next voice that came on the line was Colonel Clare's clipped voice.

"Jamieson how are you getting along?"

"Fine." I said and I then expressed my desire to return to 5 Div. His response was very firm and clear.

"Jamieson, your next job has already been arranged and you can do the job as a Warrant Officer or as a commissioned officer, but you will not be going back to 5 Div. I would prefer that you carry on with your training. In the long run we will both benefit."

So that was as far as that went.

GRADUATION

Having been an RSM, I graduated as full Lieutenant while most of the class were 2nd Lieutenant's (one pip wonders) that would go to the Infantry Service. Two of our class were Sergeants from the Intelligence Service and spoke several languages and were skilled in unarmed combat. Nine months previously I had taken an instructors short course in Scotland at a Commando School in basic unarmed combat. The three of us were not allowed to practise these skills with the other students, only among ourselves. Thus during our weapon and regular physical training, we often were a group apart. On other occasions we performed demonstrations of these skills for the other students. This whole class was a bunch of very tough and skilled infantry soldiers.

I was the only Canadian in our class. We also had two other non-Brits. They were medical students from Norway who had escaped and travelled via Iceland, Canada, and Spain to reach the UK and the Norwegian Brigade. They were Kanut Astvic, and Kanut Mostu. "The two Kanuts". They had trained as Commandos, Engineers, and were now taking Signals training. They were 6 feet plus, very fit fellows and did everything with a blood lust. They were a class behind me but being the only cadets not from the U.K., we chummed around together. Just before our Christmas leave I received a message to phone Colonel Jamieson in Glasgow (i.e. Old Angus Whisky). When I called he enquired what I was doing for Christmas leave and did I know of two more cadets from overseas? I suggest the two "Kanuts", my Norwegian friends.

"I have just the ticket for you fellows. Can you be at the Darlington station to catch the following train? You will be contacted on the train by a WAAF Officer who will escort you to your digs. You won't be disappointed".

We certainly were not. The destination was Lord Nuffield's Estate (Austin Cars) and we were royally entertained for the week with parties, dances, grouse shooting and billiards. Mention almost any thing and it was arranged. What a week. We lived like the other half lived. Then back to the grind. The soldier training here, while very

demanding was a cake walk after the Canadian Infantry OCTU. The technical training covered all phases of Communications both in theory and in practise. Every third week was a Exercise in which we were # 1 runners and dispatch riders; # 2 operators in the signal office; or # 3 as NCO 's. Thus you worked in various jobs, moving up in rank on each exercise until on the final one you were acting as Brigadier and the various staff officers, effectively running a Division. I was the Brig. You were under observation at all times and the observers set the various situations and you had to react and issue the necessary orders.

It was during one of these exercises, we were given a very detailed script of how and what we would say on the air from early morning until late afternoon. This was D-day and we were part of a diversion set up to give the Germans false information. We soon realised what was going on and tuned other sets in on the radio networks from the beachhead at Normandy. Our reception was very good as we were located high on the cliffs. For the next two days we again sent out false information at key times. We mostly listened to the Armoured tank brigade nets in support of our infantry.

Two of our class were Warrant Officers and a two NCO's from the 7th British Armd. Div. Signals (The Famous Desert Rats of the Sahara fame, plus a number of Selective Service, university electrical engineering graduates). They were very young and wet behind the ears. They tended to look down on us and stay apart from us "Rankers or Mustangs" as we were called. They soon learned that these Rankers may have trouble in the theory but they really new their way around in a practical world. One of the senior Instructors was a Captain, a wounded desert rat with a lot of tank experience. He made full use of these battle smart veterans.

One evening some of us had gone to Darlington to a show and around to a pub later. As we waited on the station platform I noticed a very cute young WAAF Officer in the tea room. She smiled and asked;

"Are you from the Signals School OCTU Wing in Marlborough?"

"Yes." I replied.

She replied "I am the Ratios Officer for the unit". I said,

"You appear to be alone, can I escort you home?"

She agreed that she would appreciate company in the black-out. However, cadets were not allowed to date staff. A few days later she spoke to me in the mess hall and suggested she was going to a party and needed an escort. We would meet at the bus stop as if by accident. This led to a series of dates that were pleasant breaks in the strenuous routine. At this point in the war one was afraid to become involved in any serious friendship.

We spent 2 weeks in battle camp in the Lake District of England doing infantry exercises. This was the physical make or break. Some days we were doing infantry attacks and covering 25 to 30 miles and then in the evening doing a night reece (reconnaissance) for 2 or 3 hours. This stretched the young cadets to their limits and without the tough old sweats they would never have made it. We were under canvas up in behind Lake Ulswater, near a steep hill known as the Knabb. It was a hill 1800 feet high. We would run up to the top and back before breakfast every day. We had been tipped off that this would be a part of a trained soldiers test. The chief instructor here was a W.W. I major. He walked on most of our exercises. At 67 he was a very physically fit gentleman. One day we were moving up a steep climb near Swilling Edge. I was designated Sergeant and had dropped back to encourage some of the young lads. The Major walking behind saw me and commented:

"What is the trouble Canada, having trouble keeping up?"

I made no comment but picked up the three small packs from the ladders and said;

" Follow me sir."

I started off at a trot and did not stop until I was at the head of the column. The Major did not follow me but the kids did. That evening in camp he came over to see me at supper. He asked that we move off from the others and said,

"Canada, you are very fit & tough fellow and you did not develop that fitness here nor as an RSM."

I explained that I kept a high level of fitness and endurance. That night it was tested. I was assigned to lead a daybreak attack. To be prepared I spent three hours on a night reece. The old Major came to me at lunch the following day and inquired;

"How did you know the lay of that land so well this morning? You made excellent use of the ground and caught the instructors flat footed" I replied:

"George Bernard Shaw said two things Sir. "Ground Bullets Speed" and

"Time Spent on Reconnaissance's is Never Wasted". This is where my Infantry training at OCTU paid off. His reply was:

"Of all classes who have done this project you are the only one that made the effort to be that well prepared. And you only took half the normal time allowed".

We had caught the enemy (i.e. the Instructors) still at breakfast.

Back at school we completed the course again, spending the last two weeks in a separate Officers Mess where we could be more relaxed. When the top Cadet was announced I again had been awarded the Commandant's Cane as top of the class.

This meant that I took the position of the C.O. of the passing off parade and was presented with the cane as top cadet. When I had dismissed the formal parade and stood talking for a few moments with the instructors, I felt someone touch my elbow. As I turned, Jeanne (the Ratios Officer) threw her arms around me and gave me a great big kiss and commented;

“Now it's legal for all to see.”

And then she was gone. We kept in touch for a while after I left OCTU, but then we lost touch. Too bad.

I was paraded to receive the CANE award from the Brigadier. His comment was that very seldom did the award go to anyone who was top in both the technical and combat skills.

On the 1st of August 1944, I was posted as a Lieutenant R.C. Signals. Officially a Gentleman by an act of parliament. I arrived back at the holding unit in Hove on the 3rd of Aug. This was a very proud moment for a kid from the village of Sylvan Lake. During early September I was back and forth to tailors in London to get my tailor made serge uniform, Great coat, etc. I had a bank account in the Bank Of Montreal, Thread Needle St. and discovered some extra money so I went all out and had a custom last made for my boots with 14" high tops. No more putties or gaiters. What Comfort and Class.

INTO EUROPE

New Officers normally spend 3 months at least in the Hove Holding unit so on my arrival, Col. Tyner (I had known him in Barriefield in 1939) told me that as soon as I returned from leave, I would be the Instructor for technical trades and could expect to be very busy. He was pulling strings to keep both Keith Watt and I on permanent staff. However, first things first. I had arranged to meet The Kanuts at the Norwegian Brigade in London for our leave. We met and lived at the Brigade lines for the week. What a time we had! When I arrived back at Hove, the Adjutant wanted to know where I had been since they had been trying to contact me.

“You have been on the draft list for a week to go to Europe.” he said. I asked:

“Who takes over all the training and the equipment I signed for before I went on leave?”

“Who knows? I will put you on the re-enforcement draft for 30 September. You are a priority posting, so things will have to be arranged.”

“I can have my stuff ready to go to kit storage in a couple of hours.” I said.

Then I went to see Col Tyner. He was annoyed.

“They can not post you! Who issued that order?”

He looked at the paper work. It was authorised by the Chief Signal Officer. I caught a quick view and said:

“Finn Clarke.”

“Who do you know?”

“We both probably remember Capt. Finn Clarke from Barriefield.” He looked at me and said:

“You are on your way.”

The following morning a group of 7 of us were picked up at 8 A.M. and met a channel packet at Dock side, at Portsmouth on the south coast. Our channel crossing was in a rain squall, landing at Dieppe about 2 P.M. We were directed to an office. My name was called and the paper work confirmed.

“A driver is here to meet you Lieutenant.”

Signalman Ilsley came forward and introduce himself.

“My Name is Ilsley and I will be your driver. Where is you duffel?”

We collected a bed roll and kit bag and were on our way. Into Europe. My movement orders indicated that I was a reinforcement officer going to 4th CDN. ARMD DIV. SIGS. We took off and the driver handed me a map and pointed to a spot marked on the chanograph and said,

“That is where Rear Div. Headquarters is located. Can you direct me? I just happened to pick up a provost corporal that needed a lift coming down. The up route will be different.”

It was a long day of driving and it was getting dark when we saw the Tac Sign indicating Rear Div. H.Q. It was in the corner of a forest. We drove in and I reported to the Administration Officer Capt. John Rintoul.

“Boy are we glad to see you. You are the new Technical Maintenance Officer.”

“Strange though, I expected a Captain.” he said.

“But, I will take you over to meet Sgt. Ritchy and then we will go to the mess for dinner”. I said:

“Whoa! You see these pips? They aren’t even dry yet. I left OCTU only 3 weeks ago. I will take any Infantry Battalion or Armoured Regiment, or any

Lieutenant's job but I can't be expected to take on the job of TMO. There must be a foul-up some place."

"Your papers say H. W. Jamieson but the C.O. said to expect a Wally Jamieson and he would be the TMO."

I explained that Wally was my nick name.

"Who is the C.O.?" I asked.

"Lt-Col. Bill Sheriff" was the reply. I must have looked startled. Rintoul asked;

"Is that a problem?" My reply was:

"No, he was the second in charge in 5 Armoured Division when I was RSM."

"When can I see him?" I asked.

"At present, Advance Div. is pinned down on the Albert Canal and we have no land line contact and are under wireless silence. For the next while, until we can contact the C.O. I will take you to "M" troop and you can use the TMO's tent."

We went over and met Frank Ritchy and he said;

"I will have the troop fall in at once sir".

My reply was, "It is dinner time, I will be around and meet them all after dinner".

The troop and shops were quartered in an underground ammunition dump. After dinner I met all 37 men of the men in the troop and had a chat with each as we went through their quarters. I sent Ilsley to set up my bed but he told me that he could not find my safari cot. I didn't like to freeze my butt, but there wasn't much choice. I had him roll out my canvas valise on the ground. Sgt Ritchie introduced me to Sgt. Brock the fitter, Sgt. Ignanowitz, the Electrician Sgt. I asked the Sergeants to come to my tent with coffee cups. They arrived a short time later and I asked who would like a drink. They all looked a bit startled but I re-assured them it was good scotch whisky and poured them a belt to break the ice. I learned later that my approach set the right tone. The next day I learned that the whole maintenance group, all through the division, were on the point of mutiny and the former TMO had just been posted out. He was a Doctor in Electrical Engineering but had no field experience. His main passion was collecting souvenirs. He had a Sgt. under close arrest because he refused to go and get a pair of German Jack boots sitting on the edge of a slit trench. When a good sized rock hit the boots they triggered a teller land mine explosion. There were more horror stories. It came out that he had come as a re-enforcement Officer just 4 days before they had landed in France. The Officer who had been the Original TMO had joined the unit when they arrived in England. That was Red Waddell, one of the group who had gone back to Canada to form the 1st Armoured Division. He had been with Capt. Rolff in Army Tank brigade as a Warrant Officer II and when commissioned, had held several postings before coming to 4th Armd. Div. He met with an very unfortunate accident while on leave just before "D" day. He was

visiting the local pub with a lady friend. He went out into the black out and fell, bumping his head and landing with his face in a pool of water. Red had drowned right there. This was a personal blow. He was one of the nine of us who had come over together, he was my drinking buddy.

However, knowing Red so well also made it very easy to re-establish his methods as they were so close to mine. It was four days before I had an opportunity to catch up to Lt-Col. Sheriff, on the banks of the Albert Canal, after the crossing was made by pushing a bailey bridge across. We sat on the edge of the canal and I made my point clear that I felt that a mistake had been made in my posting as TMO. His response was very simple.

“Wally, I had to go to the Chief Signal Officer Brigadier Genet to find where you were. I then convinced him to cut all the red tape. In the end it was your record in OCTU that swung the deal. You remember the problems we had in 5th Div. when we first posted our people to the regiments and brigades? I feel we have the same problem here. You solved it then as the RSM. We are having far too many on air radio failures. Rintoul tells me M troops is back on track already. What did you do there?”

“You know how close Red Waddell and I were. The troops must sense that because I have done nothing different than Red would have done.”

“Mr. Jamieson, you do what has to be done to restore the battalion to the way Waddell operated. If you run into any problems with the regiments tell them to talk to me and you will have my full backing.”

With that kind of support what can one do but get on with the job? So I began a tour of the troops attached to the various Armoured Regiments. As I expected, our people were being used on guard duty, on kitchen fatigues because they were attached for all purposes. They were being seriously misused. I talked to the Sgt at each unit and then the unit RSM. I asked if they were having radio problems and they replied;

“Yes.” My reply was:

“Do you not know why?” Some replied;

“Yes, these signals people are not properly trained”.

Then I would suggest that we talk to the C.O. and when he agreed with his RSM. I explained what the various tradesmen from signals were there to do.

“The 3 Operators were to man the radio listening link to Brigade 24 hours a day. The electrician signals were to provide charged batteries at all times in the tank harbour. This meant that they looked after charging machines in the supply echelon all day and delivered batteries to the tank Harbour at night. The instrument

mechanics did installations, exchanged defective sets in tanks and did first line repairs on radios. Now if we could provide twice as many people they would have some time to do what they are doing now. But we can't. My people will not do anything from now on but provide you with communications. You will find that these people will provide excellent trouble free service to your unit, provided that they are given the time to do their job. If you wish any further discussion on this subject please feel free to call my C.O. at advanced div. H.Q."

I instructed my Sgt's that if they had any problems, to contact me at once. The word soon spread that don't fool with the new Signals Officer, he means business. And the radio failures soon dropped dramatically. We were on the move for a few days and stopped just out of Brugges, a very old Flemish town. A jeep stopped beside our tack sign and inquired were I could be found. It was Stan Stebbin. He suggested that as soon as we were both settled that he would be back and we should get together for a drink. We agreed to meet at a little old hotel near the gate to the church square in Brugges. We both back tracked and met about 5 P.M. We went into the Hotel for what passed as Belgium beer, (mostly water). We were the only ones around and were having trouble attempting to communicate with the owner. The Germans had left during the night. The 4th Armd. Div. Tanks had gone through the town in the morning. The people were still stunned and confused. There had been no fighting and they did not know if they were liberated or not. Two lady school teachers arrived to check on the hotel owner (one was his daughter) and they both spoke fair English. We offered some canned spam, dog biscuits and other goodies from my personal larder in the jeep and ordered another beer. Their eyes lit up like flashlights, but they said,

"We must go home to see mother. You must come with us and we can make tea with your treats".

We closed the hotel and piled into the two jeeps and went to the biggest house in town. Pre-war he had been the "berger meister" or mayor. Even at his age he had to be very careful to avoid the concentration camps. We brought in some more food and the ladies started to spread it out. When the old man stopped every thing and jabbered away to the daughter who asked us to go to the cellar with the father. This was a questionable thing to do in this situation. We were not to sure but what we might be led into some kind of trap. We loosened our side arms and with his lantern and our flashlight we preceded to the cellar. There the old man found an axe and a long handled hammer. We then went around the pillars and rooms to the extreme back of the caverns. The daughter could not understand what was going on any more than we did. Finally the father pointed to the dirt wall and asked us to hammer at what appeared to be a dirt wall. This did not make any sense at all. To humour the old man I took a swing with the hammer. The wall sounded hollow and in the next swing I broke through a wall of willow sticks and mud. We soon had a large enough hole to crawl through. In the beam of the flashlight were rows and rows of wine

racks all covered with dust and cob webs. This had been sealed up before the Germans had found it. He selected his best brandy, wine and other liquor and told his daughter that we could now have a proper liberation party. We did so, far into the night. They enjoyed the food and we enjoyed their booze and company. When we finally returned to our stations, the sky was growing lighter in the east. A very concerned Sgt Ritchy in an almost fatherly manner suggested:

“If you are going to stay out late, then let me know so I won’t worry.... We don't want another TMO.”

Life in the armoured division was divided into two roles. When we were committed to action, everything moved a breakneck speed. Every detail was urgent and top priority. Then, when we returned to rest or reserve, priorities changed. First we looked after personal life, a rest, bath, clean clothes and proper food. Next came routine maintenance on communication equipment and restoring supplies and personnel to the forward units. Then we went into the repair mode to restore our reserve supplies to operational condition. Then we would again start our keep fit program of morning exercise every day and small arms practise once a week with live ammunition. The quarter master did not like to keep issuing ammunition to us, but the C.O. agreed that since our sections operated with the forward units that we had to be kept sharp.

The Armoured Division operational plan was to exploit any break out. The tanks would go through the line and what you could not run through, you ran around. It was not unusual to run 10, 20, in one case 30 miles in a day with no real support on either flank. Any thing could happen and often did.

In late 1943 our unit was committed to the clearing of the plodder fields and Walcheren Island by the 3rd & 4th Cdn Divisions. My shops were established in a small town of Lier east of Antwerp in a local garage. As the shop vehicle pulled into position around these buildings and camouflage nets went up, Sgt Ritchy came along and commented;

“You sure think like Capt. Waddell, but you are a much tougher soldier, and he was permanent force.”

Kind of a left handed compliment but I knew then that I was accepted by the troops under my command.

The # 4 Squadron C. O., Major Grant, phoned me one morning in a rage. He said:

“My Armoured Command Vehicle would hardly move.” My reply was,

"I told you and your driver mechanic last week when I was at Brigade H.Q. that you could not run that diesel engine at low idle or it would carbon up. Now all you can do is gradually increase the idle speed as much as possible without stalling, and hope you don't get a move for 48 hours. The nearest set of new injectors is in Southall, England. I used my last set this morning and you will not get any performance from your A.C.V. until we get new injectors."

"I will have your ass for this as soon as I talk to Col. Sheriff". My response was,

"Please phone the C.O. ASAP. It will allow him to chew you out, something which my rank won't allow. But, believe me, SIR, the Operating and Maintenance Instructions posted in the cab of your vehicle are properly authorised. And necessary, as you have just discovered."

This meant that I had to get these injectors very quickly. I had the C.O. send a message to AEC Diesel in Southall to order a dozen injectors. They were sent by courier to Dover to be dispatched to Dieppe Supply depot where I would pick them up. This short circuit of all the normal channels was only possible by the fact that I knew the person to contact at AEC from prior association. The following morning my driver and I drove to Dieppe and collected a can of diesel fuel that contained the 12 injectors. This avoided the fouling of the jets or parts of these delicate units. They normally required white room conditions for assembly and handling. I was returning to my Jeep when I heard someone yell,

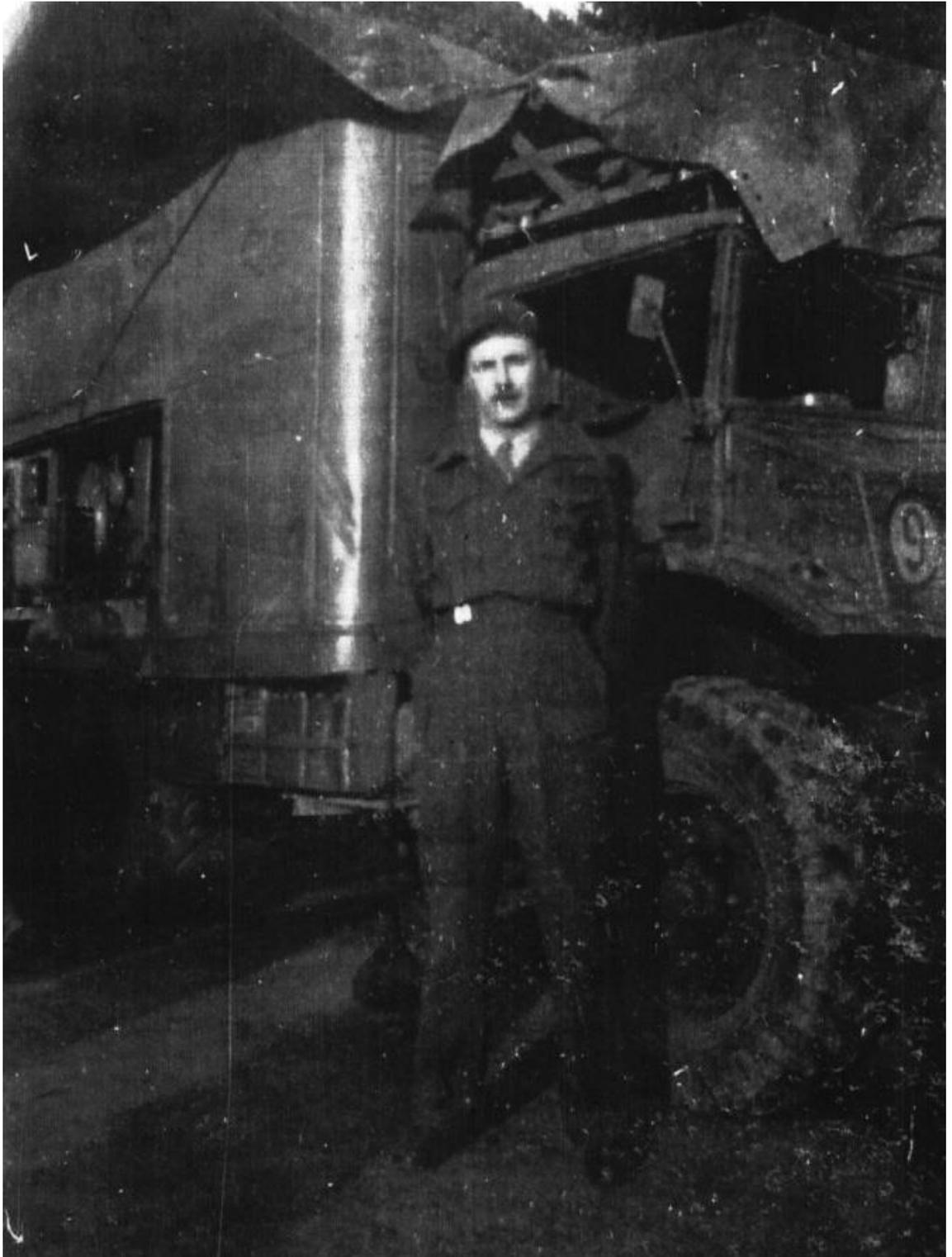
"Who is driving that Jeep with the Green patch?"

I turned to see Moose Findlay, a teacher from Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. We had played hockey against each other back home. He had been wounded and was coming back from England to re-join his Signals unit. He needed a ride back up to 4th Div. We had quite a visit as we drove back the "UP" route into Belgium passing the Vimy Memorial and other sights of WW I. The next morning my Fitter, Sgt. Brock, had the injectors at Brigade H.Q. and supervised the installation. Even a tiny speck of dust could foul these units. Major Grant phoned me to ask where the injectors had come from so quickly and to say how pleased he was that I had got him out of hot water with both the Signals C.O. and his Brigadier. It would appear that as I had predicted that when he complained to Col Sheriff, he had really caught a rocket, a much used expression of the time.

It was only a few weeks later when Moose and I had another meeting. A half track semi-armoured vehicle came into the shop for an urgent installation of the command vehicle radio package. Moose came in to collect this unit and head back to the Support Group H.Q. The following day another of the same type of vehicle

arrived for the same radio package. Moose Findlay arrived to collect this one too. It was the third vehicle shot out from under him in 72 hours. When I saw what bad shape he was in, I delayed the completion of the job while I offered Moose a drink. He poured a mug full of straight scotch whisky and drank it like a glass of water and held the mug out for a refill. I obliged and this was enough to knock him out. He had had no sleep for about 4 days and had lost his favourite driver and a liaison officer friend who had died in the seat beside him in the vehicle. It was a typical case of battle fatigue, to use the mild term for this awful condition. I Phoned Div. H.Q. and spoke to the our Adj. He arranged for a re-enforcement officer to pick up the vehicle and go back to Brigade. H.Q. Several days later I had a visit from a

SOMEWHERE IN EUROPE WITH 4TH DIV. 1943, WITH A MOBILE MECHANICS SHOP VEHICLE.



Brigadier who was the Support Group Brigade Commander. His question was:

“How in the world did you manage to get that mad man into hospital? We could do nothing with him.”

I explained my treatment and knowing the man I saw his problem and used the only treatment at hand. Moose was a big strong man but never was able to return to forward action. But he did survive to return to teaching.

Once the messy job of Walkeren Island was cleared up, we were assigned the job of moving north into the corridor established by the airborne units during operation "Market Garden". If Montgomery had been given the armoured support he needed to take and hold the bridge at Arnheim by Eisenhower, the war would have been over by Christmas of 1944. However, this was not to be and in the fall we were moved up into the airborne salient for which the Airborne had paid such a dear price. We were a part of the force assigned to hold the salient for the winter. We first moved to the area of Breda to consolidate our flanks and then on to the area of the Grave Bridge. My shops were in a grove of trees. I was billeted with a frail old widow lady living in a small cottage, with a shed for a goat. She spoke no English but we got by with sign language. She had been living on goats milk and what little produce she could barter for goats milk with her neighbours. I was eating in the field mess so each evening I would bring her something from my dinner. She would not eat alone. When I came she would heat goats milk for me.

When we moved into the Eindhoven area, we were in a seminary for a few weeks before moving to established shops in the small town of Boxtel. The school yard was used for my workshop vehicles. The churchyard was our parade square, it was basically used for physical training. The troops were all billeted in the homes in the area. My quarters were with a doctor and his wife. His health was very bad. He had been interned on two occasions and badly treated, when his health broke, he was sent home. He recovered and resumed his underground activity, he was again interned until his health again was broken and he was released again. I introduced him to our unit's Medical Officer. A small clinic was set up between them with off duty nurses assisting his wife. This soon required that I move out to provide more space. My new billet was a family of mother, daughter & son. He was a local insurance broker. Their house was across the road from the church. All of these people had almost an in-born fear of anyone in uniform and it took time to win their trust.

As the airborne attack and subsequent operations had moved north, Bergan Op Zoom had been by-passed because the main road had been blocked with a cement road block about six feet high with re-enforced steel, poured across the full width of the road and into the trees on both sides. This was covered by both machine guns and the famous 88 mm anti-tank guns. It had been much easier to by-pass than sacrifice the man power to take it. I was asked to have a look to see if it was possible

to use a remote controlled mini tank robot to push a bangalore pipe bomb into position to blast a hole through the trees or the road block. I had driven as far as seemed prudent and crept forward to where I had a good enough look to confirm that this was not a practical approach and felt a better plan was to blast the area with a missile from our support typhoon aircraft. I had started my returned trip in my jeep. I had a funny awareness of danger, something that is developed during combat and I was driving with a very heavy foot across an exposed section of road when the first round exploded right behind me. I glanced back and I saw mud and water falling back into the crater. I was moving at top speed, but that didn't keep me from trying to press the accelerator through the floor. The next round came across in front of me and ploughed up another crater beyond the road. At this point one acts without thinking. I put the jeep in neutral and bailed out and into a ditch full of water. The third round was much closer. I scrambled along the ditch to the trees and on down the road. It was only then that I discovered that part of the heel and part of the top of my boot were gone, cut away by shrapnel. Some slivers of steel were in the leg of my pants. These were my boots with the 14" leather tops that were hand crafted on my own custom last from a famous cobbler in London. (The cobbler and last were lost to a V2 buzz bomb and I never did get the second pair I had ordered). Short a boot and a very shaken and thankful guy, I returned to my unit. I had a rather hard time explaining to Q.M. why I needed boots and a uniform until I showed him the evidence.

The following day a platoon of infantry went into the area. It turned out that I had been shot at by an anti-aircraft battery. They were very hungry and almost out of ammunition and they surrendered without a fight. The Light Aid Detachment (L A D) brought in my jeep with only a few shrapnel dints and scratches.

It was only a few days later that the Algonquin & Lake Superior Regiment went into Bergen Op Zoom with knives, at night. From the land side they took the whole town and garrison by surprise. They left only a rather bloody mess of dead guards and dead troops. Many died in their barracks. Just north of this area, a troop of tanks moving up the coast road looked down from the cliffs and spotted two E Boats (submarine chasers) in a tiny sheltered harbour below. The tanks moved into a ravine to be able to depress their guns low enough to fire on the boats. The boats guns could not be elevated to effectively return fire. The result was Her Majesty's ship the 4th Armoured Division engaged and sunk 2 ships of the German Navy.

When we had time to collect and look at our inventory. We found we were using a large amount of captured German equipment to replace what we could not get and to increase our flexibility and efficiency. We needed additional telephones, many of those we had were taped up handset parts. We also needed linesman climbing irons (spurs) and linesman Klien pliers. We were using many German power plants from captured enemy stores and needed spare parts. We had found that it was much more efficient to use one emergency airport lighting power plant to

power a whole headquarters unit with 110/220 volts AC. We used 110/12 volt battery chargers instead of the 12 volt chore horse units. We had an ever increasing need for more electric power for more and more liberated conveniences. A large Philips manufacturing plant was located near Eindhoven. When I made inquiries of the local men, many had worked in this plant. They put me in contact with a supervisor who knew the operation of the plant. To make the machine shop operational all he needed was a large 110/220 power plant. I went out to Antwerp to captured enemy stores and located a suitable three phase plant which would fill the bill. We arranged for some of the Dutch technicians to come in and make the parts that we needed. They were pleased to get to work and they showed such ingenuity and variety of skills it was hard to believe. Food was their main need. We managed to provide this, through a lot of direct barter and through the Civil Rehabilitation Program. We fed these men and families until proper arrangements were established. Through the winter we were able to rebuild an inventory of needed parts. These people knew where to locate and obtain parts for our liberated equipment. This machine shop was the first Philips plant to operate after liberation, but with no official sanction, but it was a god send for us.

By talking with the local people we learned their Christmas customs which are quite different than ours. On Dec. 7th Santa Claus as we know him makes the rounds visiting the various families. His companion is "BLACK PETER" who carries the list of good and bad children. He also carries treats for the good children. As I remember, this was the gift giving equivalent to our Christmas. The Dec. 25 occasion was strictly the religious time, for Church.

It was at this time in December that the Germans made their last desperate attempt at an offensive with the break out from the Ardennes Forest on the American army front. It was a desperate try to reach the port of Antwerp. They initiated one of the major assaults of the war in the midst of a snow storm. The American Troops were caught completely off guard and had the Germans not had weather problems and run out of petrol, they might well have reached Antwerp and our supplies. This would have had a major impact on the outcome of the war. It was Christmas morning and our Christmas dinner preparations were well under way when we were amazed to receive a " Two Hour Stand Too". This meant that we must be prepared to move within 2 hours. This was followed by a situation report giving us the most recent information from the battle salient in Belgium. Our task was to move into position at the north end of the forest while Patton moved into the south end. We would both attack along the German Belgium border and meet, cutting the German supply lines into Belgium. It was snowing heavily, almost a sleet, when the move order came. I was asked to report to Advance Div. H.Q. at once. On reporting I was told to send my Foreman of Signals back to M troop to lead the move there. My response was that this was not necessary. Sgt. Ritchy had seen this done back in France and he would handle it with no sweat. Better than a stranger. And the F of S would be needed far more in his own job. My question was;

“Why am I here?”. The response was;
“Capt. Archie Johnston has been sent to hospital and we don't have a re-enforcement so you are "O" troop C.O. His job is to lead the reconnaissance H.Q. group to locate a suitable harbour area in the vicinity marked on the this talc covered map board. It had all the latest information marked up on it. That Damlier Scout Car and driver are yours, we will move in ten minutes.”

I sat down to study the map and sent the driver to find me more clothes. He found a rabbit skin vest. I wore one with the hair next my skin, the second one I wore hair out under a second leather jerkin with sleeves and a big pair of long cuffed mitts. We lead the convoy off down the road in a storm that soon turned to freezing sleet. In order to keep my bearings I had to ride with the adjustable seat set to the high position. This meant that my whole upper body was above the protection of the armour. The map board to which I had to refer quite regularly was covered with a rain cape. We managed to maintain our required fighting speed (25 mile in two hours) despite the weather and limited visibility. As we approached our suggested harbour area I went ahead of the party for a closer look and in my busy survey lost the cape. I was referring to the map almost constantly even though the talc cover of the map was collecting ice. We finally found a suitable location with some shelter and I went to get out of the scout car and could not move my hands or the map board. I was covered with a solid coat of ice. My driver got a trenching tool and shattered the ice to let me out. Cold, wet and very miserable, we welcomed the arrival of the Advanced Div. H.Q., with the Armoured Command vehicles. The best news was that all the cook vehicles from rear echelon had arrived. They had the Christmas dinner under way when the move came. The field kitchen was a series of boiler plate sections approximately one foot wide and two feet long with an oval hole in each. These were supported by end plates which folded out and down to support the tops. These sections were lined up in a row of up to six units. A large gasoline fired heater, a cross between a blow torch and flame thrower, was placed at one end so the heat varied depending on how far along the large aluminium cooking vats are sitting from the end. It was a regular practise for a move that they put everything into what were called hay boxes. These were well insulated boxes into which the large aluminium cooking pots fit snugly so that if heated and filled, the hot food would continue to cook for several hours. These were often used to send a hot meal to the front line tanks with the ammunition and petrol trucks that went in at night. They worked like magic and we were soon served the best tasting Christmas turkey dinner we ever had (even in mess tins). Boy, were we cold and hungry.

That evening after dark I went back to Boxtel for supplies and took a box of Christmas treats and food to the family where I was billeted. The item that thrilled the mother most was a small box of Kraft cheese.

"Fromage! Fromage!" she cried.

The weather beat the Germans and we joined in the mopping up operation in January. In the new year we moved to S'Hertogenbosch where we set up shop in a large garage and billeted the men in local homes. An apartment block, on the round about near the canal crossing as you came into town had been shelled and a whole corner was open. We collected all the tarps and canvas we could locate and covered over the openings and windows and set up a heating stove using diesel fuel. This was around the corner from the house used as a mess. We moved in and in a day the pipes were thawing out and cracks needed welding. The boys had rigged a water tank to supply running water. The next thing I knew Sgt. Ritchy asked if I would like a shower. They had fired up the geyser which normally heated bath and shower water using natural gas. Now it operated on a mix of welding gasses. This was a luxury no one can describe. We were using a lot of diesel fuel keeping the frost out, heating both the shop and our apartment. We would soon be questioned about this.

We had seen a coal barge that had been sunk in the canal about 2 miles down stream. It was in an open area and could be seen from quite a distance from both sides. We did a reece and got onto the barge and brought back some coal. This coal run became a routine chore. It was made in the late afternoon or evening. We could supplement coal for part of our heating requirements. One very foggy day on the coal run, as we approached the barge we could hear Germans voices. They had been taking coal from the opposite side of the barge. Fortunately we had never met. We were very careful on approaching the barge in future. We never met again, but coal was still being taken from the opposite side.

It was during the early spring that we found a Ford Monarch Sports Coupe probably looted and abandoned by the Germans. It was parked in a garage and left. It had been converted to burn wood gas with the stove mounted on the rear bumper and a large gas bag stretched over the roof of the car to store the gas instead of a gas tank. We fired it up and brought it into the shop in S'Herteganbosch and found out that it ran quite well. This would be a fun play thing so we stripped off the wood burning accessories and set it up to again run on petrol. I had myself a real sporty V8 transport with the pre war high rear fins. It turned heads everywhere. As soon as Bobby Houston saw it he felt that this would be a real nice STAFF CAR. That was until the Divisional Commander saw it and figured this would be the ideal prestige car for him and asked that it be painted in army colours with all the proper accessories and markings. Shortly after the vehicle was in service an order was issued that all liberated vehicles in our area be turned in to captured enemy store in Antwerp for the use of civilians. Click-click - click, the General returned the car to our C.O. who in turn handed it back to me. What a shame! (5th Div. had move up into north west Holland to Gronigan and the vehicle turn in did not apply).

I had been looking for an excuse to visit my old friends in 5 Div. Sigs. I suggested to my C.O. that I deliver the vehicle and leave it with Capt. Riddel for the time being. Houston

contacted Riddel. My driver in our jeep and I with the V8 took off across northern Holland in the wee hour of the morning and in due course arrived at "M" Troop 5 Div. Sigs. about lunch time. Frank had gone to the Officers Mess. Big Mack was F.of S. He told us to wait. In a few moments he came back with a Sergeant's Battle Dress blouse. Which I put on and then went for lunch with all my friends in the Sgt's Mess. What a reception I got! Everyone wanted to buy me a drink. The hospitality was such among officers and men that we stayed over night. We got a good start the following morning and as we drove across this flat land we saw a large plant making smoke on the horizon. We came closer and I decided to investigate, to find that it was a distillery salvaging rotten potatoes to make the famous Dutch Gynn. We bartered some cigarettes for several litres of this famous product and proceeded on our way. We later discovered that if one poured a bit into a spoon it would burn. Strong stuff.

There is one final chapter to the story of the ford car. I later learned the our C.O. Robert Houston who would command the Occupational Force, reclaimed the vehicle only to discover that the motor had aluminium heads. These heads had been eaten away by a chemical reaction with the wood gases and the return to petrol. As I was leaving Europe he contacted me to see if I would send him new heads and gaskets so that the vehicle could be returned to active service and in due course I believe it was and it toured many spots in Europe in the post war years. I wonder where it found it's final resting place ?

Shortly thereafter we were advised that a NAFFI show was coming and the Auxiliary Service Officer asked me if we could make the local theatre fit for use. It had been shelled and had a hole in the wall and the Germans had thrashed it before leaving. We took a group of volunteers in to clean the place up. We built another of our diesel oil fired stoves. We modified an artillery tannoy (P.A.system) and set up very temporary lights. A liberated power plant provided the lighting. We were ready for the show. It was only then that we found out the show was Gracie Fields, Vera Lynn and the Kit Bags. A pretty make shift set up for this class of show but it was all we had. The place was packed for the afternoon show with body heat making the temperature bearable. The place was better for the evening show. What a group of troopers that gang were. They came to the Officers Mess for dinner between shows. Our bar stock had just arrived and we had a fair stock. After the evening show they returned to the Mess and had a few night caps. This turned into a party that lasted into the early hours. We had to refill the gas tank on the light plant a second time. Both booze and food ran a bit short for the next while.

In the early planning stage for the spring offensive it was realised that an island in the Needer Rhine was a problem since it provided an observation post for the Germans. It had a tunnel entrance from their side. Operation Horse was mounted to take the island. The night before the attack we had a fresh fall of snow. The infantry unit that was leading the attack had elected to use # 19 sets on wheels that we called baby carriages for that is what they looked like. They needed more range than was available from their normal backpack 18 set. These black sets with a long

waving antenna against a white back ground were a dead give away and the attack failed. The # 19 sets came into the shop laced with machine gun bullet holes. The attack was remounted, only this time we built sleighs from angle iron and mounted 22 sets (higher power) on them, used trailing antenna and we covered the set and operator with white sheets. The communications worked and the operation was a success. Unknown to me I was recommended for a medal as a result. I was called to the C O's office and told that at a future date I would receive a "Commander in Chief's Certificate for Good Service" from 21 Army Group. On that later date I was paraded to Monty. (Field Marshal Montgomery) and received the certificate.

During the late winter a meeting was arranged for me to meet some Dutch telephone people at a Brigade H.Q. up near Arnham. I was to arrive in early evening just before dark. It turned out that these people were Dutch telephone people working for the underground in occupied Holland. They had crossed the Needer Rhine in a small black boat. Their task was to locate suitable telephone cable man holes on the north side of the river while we located man holes across from their locations on the south side so that as soon as possible after the river crossing we could lay a cable across and use available underground lines. We were assured that after the pre-crossing artillery barrage and bombing there would be no useful surface lines left standing. We met on several occasions during the winter to look at various options. The final plan was established and my task was to build two cables. These would be built on a steel messenger cable strong enough to stand the force of the river current, then 4 Quad cables were wrapped around the messenger cable with loading coils as needed. This bundle was wrapped and tarred to be waterproof for a least a month. The entire cable was rolled up on a 14 foot reel mounted on a low-boy trailer. The night before the crossing, these trailers were dispatched by special routes for bridge clearance reasons to two locations. The first was at a point near Arnhem in what had been the local power station. I went to meet the cable troop Officer and give him instructions about the cables and man hole locations. Traffic moved as orderly as could be expected during the night. At dawn tanks were almost track to track, lined up along the river bank. The artillery guns were lined up according to range; Field guns, Medium guns, Heavy guns. The air strike bombing was to start first, followed by the tanks firing across the river. Then the artillery creeping barrage would start to roll across the land. I had to leave and make my way up river to the second crossing where 4th Armd. Div. was to cross and meet our lines officer and the second cable. This cable was to cross at Wesel. Just before first light I was at our crossing point as the bombers came in with thunderous explosions and blinding flashes. At first light the tanks started firing, creating a rolling wave of vivid light and rolling thunder like I hope never to witness again. When the artillery began to fire, the waves of sound following the muzzle flashes tugged at ones clothing.

I crossed later in the day with M Troop and my shops. There was not a patch larger than a house that did not have shell crater of some size. Our task once we broke out was to run for Appeldoorn and on north into Germany. However there

were a few delays. The famous Siegfried line extended from the north sea in Holland along the German French border all the way to the Alps. It was built by the French after WW I to prevent the Germans ever again attacking the Low Countries. This elaborate system never came into play during the German Blitz. The hinge of this line was based in the Hockwold forest. This became a problem to us, since we were very thin on the ground. During the battle to take this area, 4th Armd Div. moved up to replace the British Guards Armd Div. I was instructed to move my "M" troop into an Infantry role and relieve an infantry platoon in the south tip of the Holkwold. The area proved to be very soft and wet and we had to get all of our vehicles up on hard stands in case we would have to move in a hurry. It continued to rain. We had to cover our slit trenches and man them night and day. The Germans had blown the Zyder Zee dike which had flooded all but one of our supply roads. The priority was ammunition, petrol and then food for 7 divisions. We had been instructed to live off the land as much as possible. Just down the hill was a farm which had been abandoned leaving all the pigs, cows and chickens. The Brits, obviously not farmers, had tried to shoot the chickens with a sten gun, with little success. My boys, lead by the carpenter, went down in the evening and picked them off the roosts, put them into sacks and brought them back just as simple as that. Shopping for dinner, the Canadian way.

A railway ran through the forest just north west of our location. An attack was mounted to cross the open, low ground in this clearing by going along the rail grade. The A.V.R.E.'s (A tank with a bull dozer blade in front) pushed across at first light to spit the rails off the ties and over the bank. This was supported by tanks ready to fire at any sign of resistance. All was quiet until the tanks started to cross. Then a battery of German 88's anti-tank guns opened up and stopped the lead tanks cold. Other tanks tried to go around but mired in the soft ground and they too became sitting ducks. We lost 52 tanks that morning. Sgt. Frank Ritchie and I watched with field glasses as this carnage took place. It was a very colourful display as the 88 shells would ricochet off the tank hulls and the tank hulls would glow red hot. Some hits would set off ammunition in the tank. Fini! Some would be set on fire. This while our anti tank guns and machine guns would try to provide covering fire for tank crews to escape. When it was light enough and the weather cleared enough, the Typhoons (Close Air support rocket carrying planes) came in and blew the forest apart. We were here for some days while we tried to obtain new tanks and recover the tanks that were repairable.

Back at camp, one of the boys had been milking the cow and settling the milk to get cream, something we had not seen since we came into Europe. When the chickens ran out someone had spotted a pig at the farm. A group of us went to investigate and found a large sow in the farm yard pond. We drove the pig back to the barn and into the pen which had a small door into the barn. Our butcher, the carpenter, instructed us to get an axe. Sgt. Frank produced the required tool.

“You go into the barn and stand by that little door. When we drive the pig in, hit it between the eyes with a good solid blow to stun the animal. I'll be right behind and will slit its throat. We'll pull it out and string it up with a winch to dress it and then take it back to our lines to cool. Once it is butchered, we will had pork every which way we could think of.”

We even bartered some with other units. A few days later I was going across to the I.M.'s work shop when I saw a jeep coming along the road with mud flying every direction. I commented to my Sgt that if I did not know better I would say that was Frank Riddell T.M.O. of 5th Div. Signals, but they were in Italy. I was no sooner in the shop when I heard;

“If this is "M" troop where in hell is the T.M.O.?”

I stuck my head out and it was Frank. Our greeting was not truly a military one we grabbed each other in a bear hug. 5th Div. had been moved up into N. W. Europe. Our 2nd in command had been the Adj. of 5 Div. and Riddell's side kick. I had been Riddell's Foreman of Signals before I became RSM. Frank's first comment was,

“Now I've found you, where is B. J. Clements?”

“He is our 2 i/c” I replied.

“Lets go find him!” he said.

Off we went to Advanced Div. H.Q. As we bounced along I noticed a large wooden cask between the wheel wells. It was covered with kit and other stuff. We found B. J. in his caravan and he was as surprised as I had been. Frank said:

“Come on and help uncover the hogs head!”

Once we had uncovered it and moved it to an accessible place, he drew off a bottle full of this liquid, almost pure alcohol made from distilled grape wine. I suppose one could call it brandy, but strong? You covered the bottom of your glass and filled it up with water or coffee and it was still a strong drink. We sat in the caravan while we had a visit and something to eat. It was then decided that we would go to Antwerp for the weekend and have a party. What a party that was!! In those days everyone had a jeep key and you could not turn your back or your jeep was gone. Our answer was a very stout length of logging chain and a heavy duty padlock. Plus a high voltage charge wired between the ignition switch and the steering wheel. This was very discouraging to any tentative thief. One had to know how to approach the vehicle in order to disarm this devise. Monday morning found some very hungover guys making our way back to our units.

The wartime “CARAVAN” was kind of the Mobile home or office. The deluxe, rear area versions were rather posh office and quarters built on a large truck

or semi-trailer. The higher the rank the larger and more deluxe the unit. Most of the accessories were liberated, (i.e. Captured booty the Germans had taken from the low countries). My "M" troop had built a trailer unit for the C.O. and by hook and crook it was very well furnished. Major Clements or second in command had a German truck with a kind of house built on the back equipped with a Coleman stove, a single bed, washstand, a food locker & a locked liquor cache. My caravan was a 15 hundred weight with the tarp replacing the former plywood top. It was almost high enough to stand up in. This was equipped with a single bed which folded up against the front wall, a Coleman stove, wash stand and mirror, a grub box and two easy chairs each with a reading light, a # 19 set communication radio and a Phillips radio receiver. My portable locked liquor cabinet moved between the van and jeep as required.

When we came back into the line after our refit and rest we were moved up into the salient again and began clearing the area between the rivers.

INTO GERMANY

We entered Germany at Neuenhaus on the 7th of April. and fought our way north west towards Oldenburg and the North Sea Port at Wilhelmshaven. This was the major port for the submarine fleet in the North Sea and the Atlantic. I had been called on several times by the "T" group who identified captured enemy technical equipment. We liberated a lot of research test gear located on a small lake in this area. The facility was used to develop the one man submarine for remote control but at this stage it was ridden by a suicide rider, a diver. The design was to be directed by a form of early sonar. (This part of the design was not operational). They had the best of everything in test equipment. For my assistance I was given some very useful instruments to take back to our shops. We made good use of the equipment.

RIECHPOST (TELEPHONES)

In Germany the German forces had stopped blowing up telephone terminals and destroying telephone exchanges. They did not want to destroy their post war communication network. Then we found out they were exchanging intelligence information across the lines as we advanced. This meant we had to disable these exchanges as the infantry cleared the towns. The terminal racks were located where the main cables entered the building, usually in the basements. Each pair of wires were a line and were protected from lightning with tiny carbon blocks. When one twisted these carbons, it grounded that wire and disconnected that line. Sgt. Ritchy (he spoke German) and I were assigned to go in with infantry platoons and get to the line racks and ground all the lines. At Neuenhaus we caught the girls switchboard

operators still on the boards so we had them twist all the carbon blocks. At Meppen we crossed a canal and on our return about 9 AM found the ferry in operation. While we were crossing, a very thin skeleton of a man in very ragged clothes and unshaved came over to speak to me and asked if I had trained at Camp Borden. I did a double take and asked why he wanted to know. He responded that he felt that he knew me. He told me that he was with Canadian Intelligence and his name was Ray Whittle. The light turned on and I realised he was one of the Sergeants from our class in Borden. He had spent a very hungry winter in Rotterdam where they actually survived on tulip bulbs and sewer rats. He had lost about 30 lbs. He was making his way back to his unit so he came with me to report in at our Div. H.Q. We then went to the mess where he gulped down a meal only to have it come right back up. So I delivered him to the local medical unit for care and a bath. He came back to see me for lunch, a few days later after his debriefing. I again hardly recognised him. He was all cleaned up and in a smart new uniform. Ray and I kept in touch but our paths did not cross again.

We continued north. At one point we crossed a canal with the infantry platoon and took the exchange area. On my return to the jeep I found Llsley, my driver, gathering money up by the hand fulls and putting it in the jeep. I emptied my stationary box and we filled it with money! A shell had made a direct hit on the vault of the local bank and blew it wide open. There was German, French, Dutch, Belgium, and even some English pounds, all invasion money printed by the Germans. Money of any kind had little value at this time, cigarettes or food were the items of barter. It was only after V.E. Day that anyone going on leave was issued money with their pass.

The function and role of the TMO was a dual role. One, when out of active action, was to see that the preventative maintenance was carried out on all of our equipment, to avoid problems during operations. The second role was that of immediate first line repair or replacement. Innovation was often the necessary solution. One of our major problems was tires. The supply of regular tires for special vehicles ran out but there were lots of a special composition desert sand tires. However these would not stand up to cold weather and cobbled stone roads. The tread and casing would separate and blow out at the most inconvenient times. This meant that another vehicle would have to assume the function of this unit, often a soft vehicle for a hard one (armoured) seldom equipped with the necessary radio equipment, or a vehicle would have to be drawn from a unit in reserve, much to the annoyance of senior staff.

Cable laying vehicles were always a problem as they were 4 wheeled units trying to follow tanks, after the tanks in wet weather had all but destroyed the road. Often we had to mount the cable laying apparatus on a tracked Bren gun carrier. Thus the TMO sometimes became a chief fireman in forward trouble spots. You were moving around among all hard armoured vehicles in a very soft jeep. It was these times when you went days without sleep.

V.E. Day - Victory in Europe

At one point my tent was too close to a stray shell and was burnt up. Not that it mattered much. "M" troop and I were working almost around the clock. I had not had any sleep since we had crossed the canal. Ilesley had set up my bed to share Archie Johnston's tent. I came in about 10 PM and was taking off my boots. I was dead beat on my feet. A runner came with a message and passed it through the tent flap. It read:

“EFFECTIVE 8 AM. MAY 8TH, ALL HOSTILITY WILL CEASE IN N.W. GERMANY.”

I read it and passed it to Archie, who was in bed. Then suddenly I realised, THE WAR IS OVER! I screamed at Archie. He had also read the message still half asleep. His reaction was as slow as mine. I called Sgt. Ritchy and told him to have "M" troop fall in at once with mugs.

"You mean now, at this hour?"

"Yes at once!"

I went to my jeep and liquor box to check the inventory. Two gallon jugs of issue overproof rum, several bottles of champagne and 4 bottles of a liquor called "Advocat" (Very thick Brandy & Egg yolk). When the troop had collected, looking very tired and wondering what I was on about; I read the message. Amidst the turmoil and shouting and cheers, I poured drinks for all. We covered the bottom of each mug with the syrupy army issue rum, then added advocat and watered it down somewhat with champagne. The party moved to the mess tent and needless to say, it went on all night.

I guess I got some sleep. I was awakened by my pillow phone and was told that I was to report to the C.O.'s Caravan at Advanced Div. at once. Frank Ritchy volunteered to drive me. We arrived at Div. H.Q. I went to the Caravan and was invited in. The C.O. Bobby Hosten pulled over a case of scotch and pulled out a bottle and removed the cork. He handed me the bottle and proposed a toast to our survival. Those who joined us were Bruce Clements our 2I/C and Bill Pound our Q.M. Messages kept coming in as we sat drinking and visiting. It was over. Well, almost over.

It appeared that a truce team was being assembled to go into Wilhelmshaven to meet the German Command. Bruce Clement, always the innovator, suggested that we should have a jeep join the tail end of this peace convoy and if possible see the communications set up of the famous North Sea Command bunker. He looked at me and asked where Sgt. Ritchy was. We found him in the Sgt's mess. To horse! With Ritchy as our interpreter, a white flag and too much hutch in our gut, we set out to find this convoy and armoured escort. We were all very drunk but we made it to Wilhelmshaven and Bruce actually bluffed his way into the talks. Frank and I drove around the base. What an gigantic set up. There were submarine pens protected by thirty feet of cement. The communications centre commanded the German army, navy and air force for northwest Germany and the

Atlantic Ocean. Then we found the Signal Office entrance. We went in and demanded to see the Senior Signal Officer on duty. A Fieldweibel appeared and we asked to see the communication set up. He spoke English and quickly obliged by arranging a tour. He then joined us in a drink. We suggested that this set up would be destroyed before it was handed over to us. His reply was:

“Nine! Nine! We will need this to fight the Russians!”

Many Germans figured that they would join the allies and go on to defeat the Russians. History proved his point.

A few days later, in the middle of May, I was called to a meeting at the office of the Chief Signals Officer. There were only 5 of us, all TMO's. We were told that there were to be 6 TMO's in the organization for the continuing war and we were the ones he wanted. One for the Occupational Force, one for the Far East (6th Div.), one for the U.K. and one in the School at Kingston and one in Ottawa.

“Now, rather than freeze appointments, I would rather that you volunteered for the job you would like.”

“I will expect to hear from you before the week-end.”

When I returned to the unit, we found out that several Lt-Cols. had been given the same option. The C.O., Robert Houston was the junior one. He was a career officer and figured he would get the Occupation Force. I was the junior and the only TMO that was not a Captain. We decided to both volunteer for the Occupation Force. A few days later I was called to the orderly room and handed Part Two Orders to find that Brig. A. E. Wrinch was to command the Sixth Div. Signals in the Canadian Far East Force and that Lt. H. W. Jamieson had volunteered and was posted to the Sixth Div. Signals. I had been RSM for Wrinch, and he had first choice of a Technical Officer. So that was that.

However, in the mess the next day, the Medical Officer looked at me and said:

“Come to my office.” When I got there he said:

“Have you looked at yourself lately? Get on the scales.”

They read 135 lbs. (When I entered Europe I weighed 180 lbs.)

“Wally, I will give you a choice. Two weeks leave and rest in the U.K. or the hospital. I have talked to the C.O. and he will arrange leave”.

I was on my way to Torquay the following day with double rations and a reservation in the Torquay Hotel. I was to see a doctor in Exeter every few days. On the train down to Devon I met a Lt.-Col. from the Saskatchewan Light Infantry and booked into the Torquay. We hit it off and had supper together. Later that evening we met a couple of American Army nurses who were looking for someone to play tennis. We hiked along

the sea shore, played tennis and toured Cockington, an old English village. Each following day was even more strenuous. We both put on weight like you would not believe. It was lots of fun but all too soon it was over and we went back into Europe.

At "M" Troop Stan Stebben had taken over as TMO and was setting up an assembly line to re-pack wireless sets in wooden crates with silicon sand to keep them dry. I had missed the plane ride back to Canada with Wrinch but was to leave on the first available draft. We would go by boat. The priority for return home was set up on a point system, dependant on length of service and time in Europe. I had joined Draft # 110 for M.D.13 in Alberta to find that a number of the fellows that had left with A.A. Brigade in 1939 were on this same draft. A large group of nurses were also returning to various military hospitals across Canada to prepare for the returning wounded. This meant that we had a very interesting mess socially. We cuddled under blankets on the sunny but chilly deck, played shuffleboard and various games through the day and even helped to clear the mess hall for dancing in the evening. My girl friend was a nurse from Edmonton. (I later learned that she was engaged). After we arrived in Canada I boarded a troop train for the west. Two days later, the train stopped beside the Mewata Armoury on 9 Ave. in Calgary. We were quickly checked through and out to meet our welcoming families. I was met by my mother and father, Uncle Will and Aunt Ethel McKinnon, a cousin Ted (May) Houghton and an old girl friend, Kay Farries. (Kay later became my wife and life long partner). We went back to the motel with the family and I arranged to meet Kay later that evening. I had a month of leave before having to report to the American Signal Corps H.Q. at Fort Monmouth for briefing before going to the Far East to join an American unit and await the arrival of the Canadian 6th Division. Five officers were slated to go to 6th Div. and no one knew what to do with us. We were posted to Wetaskiwin, a training base for draftees. They were doing basic training to be posted to various prisoner of war camps to replace World War One veterans units who were acting as guards. After a couple of days as training officers, the C.O. found that these battle hardened veterans were being a little too hard on his zombies. He suggested that we should just act as conducting Officers taking drafts to the various POW camps and the rest of our spare time we could use his jeep and do as we wished. Harvest help was very scarce so we volunteered to help with the harvest by stooking for the local farmers. We discovered where ducks and geese were feeding during the evening. I got my father's shot gun from Sylvan Lake and the others obtained guns and we started hunting morning and evening to chase the birds out of the stooked fields. The farmers were soon phoning in to tell us where we could clear their fields. We provided wild game dinners for the mess. It was a lovely warm fall and the game was plentiful.

We took turns taking drafts, to Seebe, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge. Then we went back to hunting and harvesting. It was during one of these trips that I was in Calgary. Kay was working at a Stagette Canteen in downtown Calgary and I had arranged to meet her there. We were to go up to Ted Houghton's for coffee. I was on my way there when the final victory over Japan was announced. Everything went mad. We reached Ted Houghtons' home only after walking all the way from downtown since no buses or

transports were moving. Kay had to walk part way in bare feet. So how to celebrate? Well, in Europe when we all knew that the end was in sight, a message went out to all Signal Officers that as soon as V E Day was in effect we were to open the Signal's Officers Mess and any and all donations of liquor or furniture would be gratefully appreciated. I gathered up a bunch of cigarettes and other barter food and sent a 60 cwt. truck back to Amiens in France to a winery. Sgt. Brock returned with a truck well laden. We split the wine between the Sergeants Mess and the Officers Mess. When the Officers Mess opened after V E Day it was stocked with liberated liquor of every type to the tune of some thousands of bottles. As each of the contributors was posted out there was a fairwell party that included a case of various liquors. My case included 3 bottles of a rare vintage champagne. When I got to Calgary, I had one bottle left. When I attempted to open it, the cork hit all four walls, leaving only a taste for our toast. And thus ended my war.

When I look back, I realise how lucky I was. I was one of the few who beat the law of averages. My training as an infantry officer had prepared me for a role as an infantry soldier. In those years the life expectancy of a officer in the front lines was a matter of minutes while in action. Luck led me in another direction. As I look back now, 60 years later, I remember best the good times. Those are the times I have shared here.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD



21st Army Group

LT HW JAMIESON RC SIGS

FOR GOOD SERVICE

It has been brought to my notice that you have performed outstanding good service, and shown great devotion to duty, during the campaign in North West Europe.

I award you this certificate as a token of my appreciation, and I have given instructions that this shall be noted in your Record of Service.

B. L. Montgomery

*Field Marshal
Commander-in-Chief, 21st Army Group*

Date 21 SEP 45

(#7)

REUNION WITH FINN CLARKE

