

14827765

Pte.

WARREN C. R.

CYRIL

REGINALD

WARREN'S

WAR

MEMOIRS

(Written in 2003)

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Personal history

Family

Father: Reginald William Warren. Born 24th October 1895, Lavenham, Suffolk.
Died 1958.

Mother: Eunice Blanche Pretoria Weston. Born 22nd March 1900, Harpenden, Hants.
Died 1970.

Married: Watford, 10th September 1923. Both worked at Watford Co-op.

I was born in Watford on 3rd March 1926. I had two sisters; Gladys and Brenda, both now deceased.

I married Rachael Millicent Mosley of Lea Green on 10th March 1952. We had three children; Andrew, Keith and Helen. Rachael died in 2000.

Brief summary to 1939

My family moved from Watford, 18 months after sister Gladys was born, to Matlock. Father and Mother had spent honeymoon in Matlock and immediately loved Derbyshire. There was a job vacancy in Matlock Co-op for a draper (Father's trade), published on a list in all Co-ops at the time. Father managed to get the job and we moved up to Lynholmes Road, Matlock. I started school at the county school above Lynholmes Road and eventually so did sister Gladys. When I was 7 years old we moved to Youlgrave. Sister Brenda born in Youlgrave 5-6 years later. Parents decided to start their own business – General Stores – in a rented shop. We lived in a flat above the shop on Church Street. Father eventually got a Morris 8 car and travelled round local villages selling various items from cases, knitting wool etc., so became known locally. (Rowsley one day, Winster, Birchover, Stanton-in-Peak etc.) Older people still remember Warren's Shop. Later my parents moved to Warren Carr and had a lock up, rented shop next to Youlgrave church, to which they travelled by car, via Stanton-in-Peak.

Wartime years 1939-1942

This was a rough time for my parents as eventually rationing started (including petrol). You had to have coupons to buy most things (including sweets). I started work at Long Rake Spar Mine as an office boy at 7s 6d a week. I was 14 years old; this was 1940, the year of Dunkirk.

Things got grimmer, we now had blackout to contend with. Black curtains everywhere, especially over the shop door. You had a job to find your way up the main street in Pommy (the local nickname for Youlgrave, no-one is sure where it comes from) during

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

the winter nights! We had two Wellington bomber crashes (training flights) one on Lathkill Dale near Conksbury Bridge and one at Middleton, on Bradford Dale. On the first one the crew baled out; the second one all the crew were killed they were New Zealanders. There is a plaque at Middleton.

We had German bombers over most nights, looking for Rowsley sidings, Derby and Sheffield. One dropped a bomb near Dales Farm on Conksbury and a load of incendiary bombs on the village. Two houses were hit, but there was not a lot of damage. People said at the time that the bomber saw a flashing light as a car came up the hill from Conksbury Bridge. Car lights were masked, but it was a job to let you see enough to drive by. We were finding burnt out bomb cases all round the village. My Saturdays at this time were spent with my school friend Frank Wilson, who was working at Mawstone Farm, helping out and was given a meal in payment. The evening was spent at the pictures, Pommy sometimes, but mostly Bakewell, walking there and back Conksbury way to save money.

During 1938/39/40 my sister Gladys and I were sent down to Grandma Weston in Watford for 2-3 weeks, during the school summer holidays. The shop tied down Father and Mother. We were taken by Father to Matlock Station where we were put in the charge of the guard, who seated us, then during the journey checked we were OK. As we reached London, he warned us to gather our things together and on arrival at St. Pancras station, helped us off the train and watched us make our way to the big clock at the end of the platform, where Grandma was waiting. We then went by Underground to Watford. We heard our first air-raid sirens during the last visit and our parents decided that was the very last visit.

I was in the Boy Scouts by this time and we used to go out collecting waste paper from the village, store it in the Scout hut, bale it in a baler, from where it was collected, for the War Effort! We used the Trek cart to collect the paper and even got to Middleton once or twice.

Official Army Record of Service

RAF Reserve Service	11/3/44 – 17/8/44	
Bury St. Edmunds GSC	18/8/44 – 27/9/44	
Royal Sussex	28/9/44 – 13/4/45	
Dorsets 43 rd . Division	14/4/45 – 29/7/45	
Devons Austria	30/7/45 – 19/1/47	(Occupation Force)
Hants. Austria	20/1/47 – 19/2/48	(Occupation Force)

(20/1/47 – (28/11/47 to 23/1/48: release leave)

Balance includes Army Reserve for 6 months. There was a chance that I could have been called up for the Korean War, but I was married by then and this occurred a lot later.

List of abbreviations and army slang, with solutions, out of diaries

Pte - Private; **L/Cpl** – Lance Corporal; **Cpl** – Corporal; **Sgt** – Sergeant; **CSM** – Company Sergeant Major; **RSM** – Regimental Sergeant Major.

BD – battle dress; **AA** - anti aircraft; **TCV** – troop carrying vehicle (usually Bedford QL); **POW** – prisoner of war; **Battn** – Battalion (about 1000 men); **Coy** – Company (about 100 men); **Pltn** – Platoon (about 30 men); **Sect** - Section (10 men); **Regt** – Regiment (tied to Counties, or specialists eg tanks); **P.T.** physical training; **Ammo** – ammunition; **Pukka** – done properly; **Stag** guard duty; **SP's** – self propelled guns (field gun on tank chassis); **LMG** – light machine gun (Bren gun); **A/Tk** – anti tank gun; **25 pounder** – standard British field gun (mobile); **VIP** – very important person; **MM** – Military Medal; **CO** – Commanding Officer; **Div** – Division made up of infantry regiments plus tank and artillery regiments, a lot of men and equipment; **RHU** – reinforcement holding unit; **HQ** – Head Quarters; **Demob** – demobilisation, end of Army service.

NOTE: guard duty (unless on front line) was usually from 6pm to 6am and the system was 2hrs. on guard, 4hrs. in guardroom, trying to sleep. In other words you did 4hrs. in total on guard during that duty. You stayed fully dressed, of course.

Equipment for soldiers

Apart from the all important rifle, bayonet and helmet, we were issued with a webbing adjustable belt (I still have this in my gun cabinet, converted to take shotgun cartridges). Then all the webbing equipment to attach, ie two straps to go over the shoulders and crossed on the back, attached to the belt, front and back. Two pouches to hold ammunition etc. Water bottle. Small pack on side (used as a backpack, when in action. Large pack on back holding change of clothes, spare socks etc. Bayonet attached to belt. Gas cape, very useful, could be used as ground sheet to lie on. One woollen blanket, the ground sheet/gas cape was wrapped around this to keep it dry and wrapped around the large pack. One khaki battle dress (called best uniform). Trousers with various pockets, including a very small one at front to hold first aid bandage (a medical pad – yellow – attached to a long length of brown bandage). Blouse type top with pockets and flaps and buttons on end of sleeves (your Regt. badges and Divn. badges were sown on the top of the sleeves). Leather boots with 9 studs in each. Web anklets to wear over top of boots. One khaki beret with Regt. cap badge on. Three pairs cellular cotton drawers – pants. Two pairs cellular cotton singlets. Two pairs woollen vests (I never wore these, too itchy!) One khaki greatcoat (lucky me with plastic buttons, normally brass, which had to be polished.) One khaki jersey pullover. One pair denim overalls. Two rough wear khaki shirts (no collar at first, collars, with tie, later.) One pair gym shoes. Three pairs khaki wool socks. All the wearing apparel had

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

to be marked with indelible ink with your last four Army numbers – **7765**. The point being that if you lost something you had to pay for the replacement. The common thing to happen was anything anybody lost was promptly “nicked” (pinched) from someone else. Hence marking everything as soon as you got it. We also had a kit bag to put everything in we did not need to carry. This was kept in the stores or on a backing up lorry, when on the move.

A small canvas pouch, called a “housewife” containing darning needle, small needle, small hank darning wool, small tube thread. In my diaries I mention sewing on badges and buttons and darning socks. We were allowed a certain time for wear and tear, but it was a bit extended!

For food, two aluminium dishes, one fitted inside the other, for storage in small pack, also a knife, fork and spoon.



The smaller bowl was used as a “seconds” dish and for drinks, so you had your seconds then cleaned it out with tea – whatever. We also had a clasp knife with one blade plus a tin opener, this was on a lanyard and I brought this home and used the knife for years.

For summer months in Austria we were issued with shorts KD (khaki drill) and you were nobody until you got brown knees!!

We had to buy a shoe brush and polish with a duster for polishing boots, but a toothbrush was issued, we mostly managed without toothpaste.

What you wanted you carried around, unless you were in accommodation somewhere.

One item I forgot was a towel, this was a hand towel and was used for all your ablutions, including a bath. It was a job at times to get it dry!

As regards the uniform, wearing the the full kit made you look like a pack mule!

When we moved anywhere, if you had your kit bag, you carried it across your backpack. While actually on front line duty the large pack and kit bag with most of your kit in were put on a lorry that followed us around and during any break in action (could be anything from a week onwards) we were able to change into clean underwear. The mobile shower lorry was on the same system, but not as often as it took some while to set it up.

We carried the small pack on our back and this had our meal tins and implements, towel, razor and soap dish, toothbrush, waterproof cape and, with me, writing materials. The rest of the equipment carried was ammunition, 2 Bren gun magazines, a bandolier

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

of rifle ammunition, 1 mills grenade (with pin firmly attached!), 1 plastic smoke or blast grenade. Me as no. 2 on the Bren gun had 2 extra pouches with 6 more Bren gun magazines. Most of the lads had a digging in tool fastened on to the back of the belt, I had a small shovel stuck on my back down the back of the small pack. This was a good tool for digging a slit trench, but every time we had to flatten it knocked my tin hat off!! Ah well! You can't have everything! As a matter of interest, the one and only blanket was our total bed linen. This was only used at permanent billets. To keep warm we had the greatcoat, of course and this was used as an extra blanket when needed and it was – a lot!

I almost forgot one important item in this list, which was the identity disc given to all service men and women, particularly for the wartime period. This was a hard compressed disc, about 1" round and flat with a small hole through which a lanyard was threaded and was worn round the neck at all times. Your service number was stamped on this and it was fireproof. The reason for this is pretty obvious as if you were a casualty and unrecognisable in any way during action, this probably would be the only means of identification to pass on your details to the next of kin. Lovely thought, but very practical. Like most of us I wore mine throughout my service but lost it when I was demobbed. The Americans called theirs "Dog Tags".

CHAPTER TWO: LEADING UP TO ACTIVE SERVICE

Wartime years 1942 – my contribution (early years).

I joined the Home Guard at 16. I was issued with battle dress and a Canadian Ross rifle with an 18” bayonet, which I kept at home in my wardrobe! No live ammunition, though this was to be issued if needed! When I stood to attention on parade with bayonet fixed the point was above my head and was it heavy!! I was too young really and Father had to give permission (see Home Guard envelope). I was accepted as a “runner” for the Officers to take messages to wherever. I was eventually given a 38 wireless carried on my back and became a radio operator. I was taken to Derby one night a week for training.

We used to go out on war exercises at weekends and also to the firing range near Friden and one night a week for Drill and lectures in the Chapel at the top of the village. I learned to fire a Lewis light machine gun, my own rifle, which had a horrible kick, a Northover Projector, which fired grenades with a 7 second fuse, also a Blacker Bombard spigot mortar which fired a mortar bomb shaped like a tadpole, also threw one or two hand grenades. These weapons are all mentioned in the Home Guard manuals. We did an attack on Ashbourne one Sunday to test their Home Guards using small bags of flour used as hand grenades, but these were discontinued as rationing became worse.

Our transport was from the RASC training place at Whitworth Institute. The lorries were parked under the trees in the park. We had some hairy rides at times as they were learning to drive! Some nights we were on watch at the top of Moor Lane, in a small corrugated iron-sandbag post, but I did not do this as I was too young. I used to go up for a walk some times, to have a chat and one week we watched the Blitz on Sheffield. It was terrible, we could see searchlights, the bomb flashes, and fires; it was like an inferno. Later on we went to Sheffield with Dad to get some supplies for the shop and saw the destruction, it was appalling. These things you never forget.

I was 18 years old by March 1944 and duly received my “call up” notice (conscription). Thinking about it now, when the war started we had no idea that most of us would eventually be involved. Men would be “called up” for the Forces and as time progressed my older schoolmates started to go, then it became your turn. It was a strange time and worrying. My first appointment was a medical test at Derby Assembly Rooms. This was a real shock for someone who hardly moved out of the village apart from the Watford visits. There were about 50 of us and the first thing was to completely undress, put our clothes in a locker and move from separate booths in the big hall to be examined by various medics in full view of everyone! It took about an hour before it was complete. This certainly brought me into the real world.

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

I was passed grade A1 which meant I could join the RAF for flying duties. When you received your “call up” notification you were asked which service you wanted and I plumped for the RAF but it would have been as an air gunner as I had not gone through Grammar School (Lady Manners). As a matter of interest the average life expectancy of an air gunner later on in the war was 48 hours! After my medical I left the Home Guard and joined the ATC (Air Training Corps), which was held at Lady Manners School one night a week. This was after work, of course and I walked over from Pommy via Conksbury Lane and back after 2 hours instruction. I had great difficulty in finding the road back because of the blackout, but managed. We did spend one weekend at the RAF airfield at Ashbourne to give us some idea of service life. It was a training camp, which had Whitley bombers. These were used to tow a windsock on a long line and the trainee air gunners in the bombers were given training on using the guns in the air. It was an interesting time. I was put on reserve service in the RAF as aircrew were not needed at this time, 1944. I was given my first days pay 4/= and told to keep working until I was needed. My RAF number was 2223819 AC2 Warren, this rank was the training rank until qualification. RAF slang for AC was “Plonk”.

In June 1944 the D-Day landings were made in Normandy and airmen were not the priority. Soldiers were required to replace the heavy casualties at that time. During early August I was asked to go to Cosford, an RAF place near Wolverhampton for re-assessment. This was a farce as all of us, apart from real academics, were failed, me with eyesight! At that time I had perfect eyesight. Soldiers were needed. (See envelope marked RAF). I was now transferred to the Army and in due course I was sent a rail ticket warrant and told to report to Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk, August 17th 1944, – the worst day of my life at that time. The only thing that I was grateful for, and I was very lucky here, was that I would have been involved in the fighting through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany at an early stage. Luck was definitely on my side, this I realised at a later stage.

CHAPTER 3: TRAINING COMPLETED, THEN ACTIVE SERVICE IN GERMANY

I was that soldier 1944- 14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - (Reluctant Conscript)

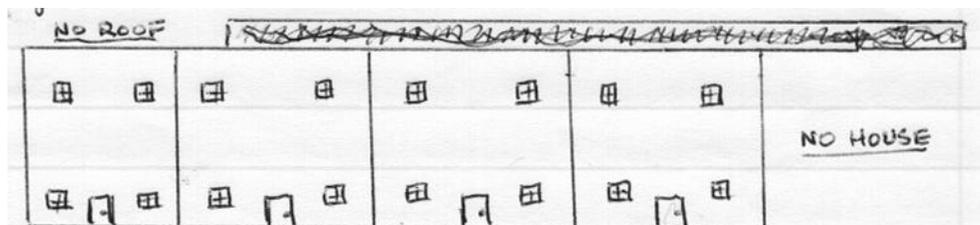
17th August 1944. I was at Bury St. Edmunds for 6 weeks, doing basic training and we were not allowed out of camp at all. It was very intensive. We arrived in civvy clothes and first thing we were issued with all our Army kit, including rifle (according to the Sergeant, our best friend?). We were given some brown paper and string and after changing into uniform, wrapped up our civvies and took them to the camp post office for posting home. I was now in the Army – boy was I lost!! We were billeted in Army huts of about 30 men, in bunk beds with a coke stove in the centre for warmth. Reveille was at 6am and we did not finish until 6pm. We had dinner at mid-day about 1 hour and we were marched to and from. The evenings were spent cleaning equipment and the hut ready for inspection the following morning after breakfast. There was a Corporal in charge of the hut and he had a small room to himself. We were active all day mostly drilling and marching to start with, the physical exercises and marches to toughen us up. This came really hard to me being an ex office-boy, but all the walking I used to do at home proved an asset as I could do the marches with no problem, the city lads really suffered. Towards the end of the six weeks we were really fit and started on the real soldiering. There again being in the Home Guard was helpful for using a rifle and bayonet practice etc.

We were now moved to Colchester in Essex, 28/9/44, which was a big garrison town full of camps and soldiers. Again we were in huts. We really started Army training here. There was a big training area out on the Essex marshes and we got to know this very well (Fingringhoe). We were marched everywhere in battle kit. We dug trenches and slept out in them. We used every infantry weapon the Army had, mostly rifle, of course, but also: grenades, 2” mortars, Sten guns, revolvers, Bren light machine guns, Piat anti-tank; you name it, we used it. We were always too tired to go into town, but I nearly always ended up in the NAAFI as I was always hungry. The kit inspections continued of course so before we could go out we had to do our cleaning up. As it was so muddy on the training area this took a lot of time. We were issued with denim battle dress for training, these were washable so we were issued with clean kit – mostly every day.

We were in Colchester at the time the flying bombs (Doodle Bugs) were coming over. We watched Spitfires trying to bring them down while out training. They were not too keen on shooting them down as they had to get very close and they did go off with a big explosion, which could have damaged the plane, as they had to fly through it. What they did do was fly at the side to get their wing under the short wing of the bomb and tip it up and back to sea!! One or two did land on Colchester. One evening we were in town when we heard one coming (I can still remember the noise) and the engine cut out so we knew it was on its way down. We got down in the gutter with our hands behind our heads, that is everybody who was out in the street. There was an almighty

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

bang and silence. We found out where it had landed the next day, on a large open playing field in the centre of an estate. There wasn't a window left in all the surrounding houses and one set of 4 houses the concrete flat roof had moved over, it was spectacular but very frightening. See below:



There were quite a few casualties mostly with flying glass but we were not told about deaths, these were never published for morale reasons – propaganda. We did see one flying bomb shot down, luckily it landed in open country, but they do make a big bang and leave a big hole.

The only sensible thing I did when joining up I put my religion down as Wesleyan (see pay book). At Colchester every Sunday morning there was a church parade. Men were dressed in best battle dress and marched to church (another excuse for a parade and inspection). I with one or two others was excused, but we had to keep out of sight or you were given duties. This is where I first learned the art of “skiving off” (to dodge doing anything!). We were quite a while in Colchester but we were more like soldiers at the end of it.

Dec. 4th – 15th 11 days leave. Home at long last! I was given a rail warrant for travelling to and from. The return journey was not Colchester. I was to report to Mundesley in Norfolk, 16/12/44. It took me a whole day to get home. The journey back was appalling I had to travel down to London, cross over to the LNER (London North East Railway) station, from there to Norwich to North Walsham to Mundesley on a single track railway, then by Army lorry to the billet. This was the ex Grand Hotel on the outskirts of the village on a cliff overlooking the sea. The beach was out of bounds as it was mined and barb wired in case of invasion. Most of the windows on the stairs were broken and in some of the rooms as well. The wind howled through these and of course there was no heating, we were a bit exposed! This was wintertime of course so we got some snow as well. What a wonderful hotel. We were stationed with the Ox and Bucks light infantry who trotted everywhere. Imagine getting up at 6am in PE kit and exercising on the tennis courts in a Force 9 gale, this really toughened us up! Believe it or not I never got a cold there, we did not have time anyway!

We spent a lot more time on exercises (War Games). One particular effort took all week. We marched in full battle order from Mundesley to Great Yarmouth doing about 20 miles a day and sleeping out in slit trenches at night. We had to dig our own trench each night and fill it up again in the morning. We mostly slept in a few inches of water as this was the Norfolk Broads and it was bitterly cold. At Yarmouth, which had been heavily bombed a few times we slept in the ruins and during our day there we trained in house to house fighting with live ammunition and hand grenades. We finished on the

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

second day and made our way back the same way (sleeping out). We were very tired and filthy as we could only shave and wash all exposed areas, so the first thing we did on getting back was shower. The water was a bit thick as it had a job to get down the drain! The only good things about Mundesley were the local people and the WVS, particularly. They ran a small centre where we could get marmalade/jam toast sandwiches for a small payment. These were wonderful!! I spent most of my free time down there.

We were now considered to be fully trained infantry so the next thing was a posting to a front line regiment, after a week on leave, this was called embarkation leave. February 3rd - 16th 1945, I had the same long journey, which took 2 days and reported back to Mundesley at the end. The war was now nearing the end as our troops were in Germany itself. British in the North West, Americans in the South.

I was that fully trained infantry soldier, 1945-

We were not supposed to keep a diary but I did and the information was scribbled down, in pencil some times, I have recopied the days spent front line but memory is involved as well.

After finishing training at Mundesley we were sent down to Dover by troop train from Norwich. I spent my 19th birthday there. We were in barracks in Dover Castle. The following morning down to the docks by lorry with all our kit and on to an LST a large tank landing craft for the Channel crossing. As we approached Calais we were crammed down below decks as we were not allowed to see the defences. This was appalling and everybody went very quiet as we would not have stood a chance had the ship hit a mine. From there we were taken by Army lorry to a small French town, Corbier near Amien. (N.B. Calais was extremely battered, it was more or less totally ruined, but we were not given much chance to see it.) We were billeted in a large granary warehouse next to a canal in two tier bunks, no heating of course. We were allowed into town but we were not made too welcome by the inhabitants, so I only went in once. This was the first of our stops up to the front, these were called RHUs. We were here about 4 weeks. We had to wash and shave in water from the canal, after breaking the ice to get it! It was very primitive? The mobile bath unit came once a week so we could get a shower, but we were given 20 minutes each session that included undressing and dressing, I got good at this.

From Corbier we were moved by lorry to Goch in Germany via Holland. We were in tents in the Reichswald Forest. This was a vicious battle area early on as it was a big area and heavily defended. We could see this and physically understood because if there was any wind at all trees and branches would start falling damaged by shellfire. Goch itself was a mile or two away, but was severely battered and we were warned away from visiting. There was a lot of abandoned weaponry about so we were warned not to stray too far from camp because of these and the chance of mines. We found a German rifle and some ammunition and a range was set up to enable us to try it. We set up a German helmet and took turns to fire at this – good experience! But a bit

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

worrying as at about 50 yards the bullets went through the helmet, so much for tin hats! We also found a German anti-tank rocket launcher, which was fired from resting on the shoulder, but we left this alone. One or two of us found a field gun emplacement with a stock of cordite bags used to fire the shells. We did an experiment with these, we put a bag of cordite in the trench then laid a trail of cordite (like long sticks of spaghetti) some way off. We got down behind a mound and lit the trail with a match. The cordite ignited and flashed away like a rocket to the bag, which went up with an enormous sheet of flame, very spectacular. Of course we then had to have a go with 3 bags of cordite in the trench. This was even more spectacular as it went off with a whoomp! Unfortunately this was too much as it drew attention to the Officers who dispatched a Sergeant to sort us out. We were given a severe lecture and later the whole camp received a warning about the dangers of messing about with discarded ammunition.

It was a terrible camp, very primitive and cold. We were here from 1st April to the 5th. On the 4th April we were up at 4.30am as we were to guard a train taking about 500 German POWs to Oostende port in Belgium for shipment to prison camps in England. We were all in freight trucks, ours were spread out along the train between the prisoners. They were crowded in but we could get our heads down (i.e. sleep) while the train was moving. The trouble was it stopped a lot because of damage to the rails and when it did we had to get out quickly each side in case any of the prisoners tried to escape so we did not get much sleep. It took just over a day to get to Oostende. Meanwhile on the way through Belgium in towns or villages the locals would turn out and start stoning the trucks with prisoners in so we had to try to keep them off, very dodgy.

5th. April moved by rail, carriages, no windows, cold, to Bourg Leopoldville, Belgium in huts. 8th April moved again to Haaksbergen, Holland by American lorries for two days in camp. 10th April moved to Hengeloe in Holland by lorry. This was really different as we were welcomed by the people (who spoke English well). Two scruffy soldiers were billeted in a house with a middle-aged couple who could not speak English but made us so welcome. We had a double bed with sheets and a duvet, it was heaven! We spent our evenings talking in our own way. They did not like Americans as they had come over to bomb the railway sidings and flattened half the town from a great height! They were very short of food so could not offer much but they made up for it with their warmth of welcome.

In Holland, children hung about the camp in Haaksbergen, they were not allowed in the area but the minute any of us went for a walk we were pounced on, we were taken over by a child or two, this happened all the time. We British soldiers gave all our chocolate rations (and cigarettes for their parents) to them. One little lady was about 7-8 years old and had a badly scarred head (from an air raid I gather). The first day there I went for a walk and she showed me around the town. She got my chocolate, of course. The following day I had been on guard overnight and managed to procure (pinch) a tin of bully beef from the canteen and gave that to her for her family. We were not there that long so we all disappeared within 6 days. No doubt she got herself other soldiers as

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

well to give her chocolate and cigarettes, but it was the least we could do for such a friendly country and people.

We were then moved into Germany. We were now not far away from the “front”, this was not static as the Germans were retreating so what fighting there was could be anywhere. We now knew we were joining the 43rd Wessex Division and we were issued with our Battalion insignia which we had to sew on to our uniforms. We were now the 4th Battn the Dorsetshire Regt with the Wyvern dragon sign of Wessex. We were taken by lorry to Coy HQ and were a few miles away from the city of Bremen. The 52nd Lowland Division had taken Bremen and the 43rd were backing up on the outskirts “mopping up”. We were still in open country in barns to start with. We were now down to battle kit (see equipment list). We were not supposed to keep a diary so I had my writing kit. There were about 30 of us from the RHUs and we were sent to “D” Coy spread out on various platoons and sections. We were welcomed (!) by D Coy commander and given a quick idea what was happening, then sent to our various sections. 16th April two shells from a Tiger tank landed close by, our first introduction, no casualties. We were about 30km from Bremen itself.

Diary 1945 (transcribed)

This section records my personal thoughts and events on joining a front line infantry regiment. Older soldiers could tell you more as some of them had come over from the 8th Army – which had gone through the Desert Campaign and Italy, to give their long term experiences of battle to back up the younger new recruits. I know my experiences were not much but to me (as it would have been to the older soldiers in their time) it was something entirely different to normal life.

(?) means I can't read the diary entry any more.

April 16th 1945

Lovely day hot clear, lorries 9am moved 7 miles to Battn then Coy D Doug 2 Cpls and me in 10 platoon spread in sections just behind front 2 shells landed not far 1st fire in barn not bad place report to Officers not bad grub guard 45mins. Doug. (Note: Doug was my mate who I joined up with at Bury St Edmunds – from Brighton, Sussex.)

April 17th 1945

6am on Bren carrier German wireless lorry smashing equipment bringing back some left by Jerry patrol in night cleaning rifles messing about. Lorries after din. (dinner)

April 18th 1945

12 miles back good Barn! not bad place grand wash tea thundery rain eggs ¾ hour guard with Doug 1 hour in morn digging latrine messing about tea every ? after dinner

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

drill starting parades hot dusty saw our planes bombing washing socks etc walk bath in tub

April 19th 1945

Grand day hot $\frac{3}{4}$ guard and 1 in morning moving packing etc in lorries 3 hrs farm in house on floor not bad wash guard ? Clear night good sleep

April 20th 1945

Cold early on turn very hot sun 30k from Bremen reserve to 52nd Div attacking Bremen P.T. searching quite a few scattered houses for ammo ? wash writing raining ?

April 21st 1945

Raining cold and dull rained all the while on guard ABCA by major on attack on Bremen moved ??? behind line saw 4 SPs at work ? Bofors tracer AA had to flatten for Jerry shells 2hr guard on couch in farm.

April 22nd-23rd 1945

2 hour guard artillery going on all night rain all night morn cleaning place up bad mess showery in afternoon reading and very tired quieter writing gossiping Doug. Standing patrol in barn up lane on guard rain hard all night wet and very cold leaky barn 2 hours on back part of ceiling came in with wet floor mucky and wet 2 hours sleep Cpl messing about in morn writing

April 23rd-24th 1945

25 pounders moved in next field (4) 4 further off terrific din Apl 24th about 4 hours sleep guard up 4.30 packed and marched off to first attack drove about 4 miles took village 12 tanks 25 pounders mortars terrific din not fired a shot Jerry SPs mortars landed close not much all ours

April 25th-26th 1945

Guard with A/TK not much sleep up 4.30 in lorries SPs firing when left to pretty big town dug in 5.30 dinner moved again 6m on carriers tanks etc. $\frac{1}{2}$ hour rest on carrier then marched 2m stopped for Dem of road block and bomb lifting. On tanks. Russian slaves 500 cleared house after small night advance. 11pm no scrapping Hants been through 500 Jerries in the ? dug in 2.30am in civvy house on guard 2hrs sleep very tired big town.

April 26th/27th/28th 1945

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6m from Bremen Bofors tracer 25 pounder Vickers opened attack terrific house guard in trench fire on wood 1 deer came but lovely day hot sunny etc. march 4m sweating tired SP over outskirts of Bremen Sth Bremen Old town in house on mattress good sleep cushy guard cleaned Bren bed early.

April 29th 1945

Wet cold miserable all day travelling all day in lorries AA sentry on top freezing in barn straw cold ?? wet not very good day

April 30th 1945

Up 5.30 in TCV wait outside village smoke from long way off attack on open road Jerry Moaning Minnie caught us had to dive twice nasty 3 wounded – mines – 3 Sherman 1 Bren 1 Weasel 1 small tank knocked out

May 1st 1945

Rotten weather rained all day cold very muddy on roads eggs for breakfast in TCV to village messing about waiting 86' hole in road ? up back to old place new billets on sofa grand sleep but crowded.

May 2nd 1945

Showery fine periods messing about 3 more letters writing 8pm moving night attack on wood over marsh

May 3rd 1945

Up all night clearing one or two Jerries rained all day hail and thunder wet miserable hanging about moved in billets guard not much sleep.

May 4th 1945

Lovely morn fine warm after din dull colder clouded over guards parcel and letters writing rain hard in afternoon supper egg bacon fried bread

May 5th 1945

Good nights sleep day to remember Germany surrendered 8am dull and cold showers messing about letter from Sue writing guard good sleep

NOTE: Germany surrendered – announced on radio but fighting continued for a few days because of communication problem so we could not relax.

May 6th 1945

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Dull and showery scrubbed gaiters rifle inspection parade! Drill parade writing letters bed good sleep early guard good hot tub sit down bath grand.

May 7th 1945

Grand day warm clear blue sky drill parade writing bed good night being att. 51st Div in area Beverstedt receiving surrender 15th Panzer checking ammo stores etc. searches

May 8th 1945

Another grand day moving messing about V Day marched 6m battle order very hot TCVs met us ½ hour wait Jerries removing own demo charges from road! In barn on straw not bad packs etc.

May 9th 1945

Pretty good sleep hot clear day barber drill bath hot shower not bad clean clothes letter kit check

May 10th 1945

Guarding after laying out all arms and ammo sec. very hot Forts and Lancs over writing football on patrol through Jerry village 10.30 and 2.30 not much sleep.

May 11th 1945

Another hot day Jerries (POWs) marching through again singing no parades mess up game of football warm good game no stag on 24 hour tomorrow good night.

May 12th 1945

Very hot on stag moved into rooms in houses in tent for night pukka guard sweating writing not much sleep real pukka changing

May 13th 1945

Another hot day writing Mosqu. over reading Cherry Tree book messing about kit bags! walk with Cpl grand and cool good sleep.

NOTE: There is a German road map in the file and I have marked this in green ink some of the events mentioned above. This was kept in my writing kit along with the diary.

The diary from here on is fairly legible so is left for my family to read.

Just one or two special dates:

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

June 16th-17th 1945

My mate Doug from joining up at Bury St Edmunds was taken ill and was taken to hospital. I had no idea where he was taken. He had got a nasty rash from somewhere. He did not come back to the Battn. See holiday week in Brighton for end of Jap War – Diary 28th Aug 1945 – visited Doug who lived at Hove spent all afternoon with him and family. 28th October 1945 letter from Doug. 16th December 1945 I was posted to Austria, did not hear from him again.

June 24th 1945

Sunday VIP lovely church Monty investiture march past on field Fair and Gymkhana good fun. (One of our Sergeants awarded the M. M. (Military medal))

June 27th 1945

Left Dorsets for England and Disembarkation Leave July 10th-24th. After that training for the War in the Far East – Japan.

After the first week on joining D Coy I was made no. 2 on the Bren gun because of my excellent marksmanship in training. No.1 was Dennis, an older soldier. I was not told what happened to his previous no. 2!! I hope it was leave. Being no. 2 on the Bren meant 2 extra pouches with 3 magazines in each. I was the smallest soldier in D Coy with the largest weight to carry. I had a job to get up after lying down with all this weight? The only consolation was that if I had been hit by anything around the heart area I should have survived as I was well covered! I still had my rifle, of course, but was expected to help cleaning the Bren gun and loading the magazine.

Incidents in Germany – not recorded in diary – from memory

April 28th 1945

We billeted in a big house on outskirts of Bremen (Oberneuhäusen – see road map) had no sleep for 24 hours on guard duty, very tired. Searching around the house about midnight with a mate saw a chink of light and decided we had better look. We fixed bayonets and I pulled the curtain back and went into a small cellar closely followed by my mate guns at the ready. The family of the house were hiding in there, two adult males, three women, and three children. As soon as we got in there the men backed off and the women started to scream and the children crying. We were really taken aback. I asked in German if there were any German soldiers (Deutscher Soldaten) the men answered “Nein” and as there was just the one room we could see it was just the family. We looked at each other and without speaking unfixing our bayonets and put

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

them away and put our rifles on our shoulders (upside down). They stopped screaming and we backed out and shut the curtain properly. It was something that stayed with me for weeks later and the two of us never discussed it. Thinking about it later we must have looked really bad, scruffy, dirty, tired eyes and armed, no wonder they were frightened. I would never want to experience anything like that again.

N.B. One thing I was always glad of was that I never fired a shot in anger at a person. If I had killed someone I don't know whether I could have coped with that in later years. I saw dead and wounded people obviously but that I accepted as a part of being a trained soldier.

April 29th 1945

On one of the moves in convoy I was on anti aircraft duty. The Bedford QL troop transport lorry had a round hatch on the roof of the driving cab and the AA guard stood on the seat of the cab with head and shoulders out and with a Bren gun. Imagine if a German fighter plane had decided to attack the convoy we AA guards were supposed to shoot at him? You can guess what would have happened, the driver and passengers would have baled out and the poor sod with his head and shoulders stuck out of the cab would have been stuck! The other problem was going through villages the telephone wire would garrotte you because the drivers never saw these so you had to yell at him to slow down.

April 25th 1945

Travelled to outskirts of Bremen on back of Sherman tank evening time. Sat on engine cover so very warm but dare not sleep as I did not want to fall off! There were about 6 of us on each tank.

May 7th 1945

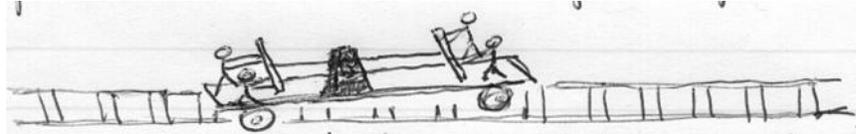
Searching area near Beverstedt (see German road map – nr. Hamburg) attached to 51st Highland Division. Platoons spread out over countryside. Cpl and I on country road. Sat at the side of the road eating Bully Beef sandwich about 15 German soldiers came down the road. Got up and picked up our rifles. They promptly put their hands on their heads. We roughly searched them for weapons and sent them on their way to be picked up by more troops behind us to be taken to a POW camp. Found their weapons later on in a ditch, at the side of the road. We emptied the ammo from these and scattered it up the ditch. Smashed off the butts of the rifles and rammed the barrels of the Luger pistols in the mud to block them up, throwing the magazines away later up the road. Standard procedure.

June 3rd 1945

Moved to a Jerry camp in forest. This was based near to an aerodrome and a factory. In the wood itself were large dumps of bombs with no fins stacked up at the side of a

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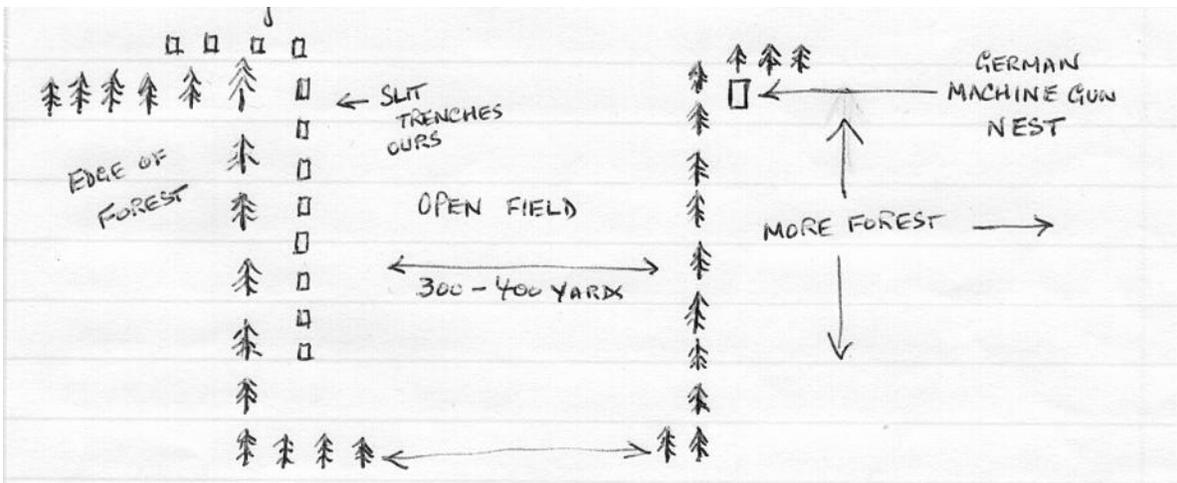
fairly good path. It was rumoured that these bombs contained gas. This was never confirmed but we were warned not to do anything stupid like climb on them. We were told that the factory was in use and the bombs were being emptied (?) by the staff who had made them up in the first place. We had a look around the factory mostly outside as it was securely locked on the Sunday but were warned off when the staff came on again. On the Monday exploring again we found the airfield. There were one or two planes (Heinkel 111 bomber) on this with the tails blown off by the Germans so they could not be flown. We had a good look at them and I sat in the front gunners seat to see what it was like. The guns were still in the plane but no ammo good job! We found another drome later with gliders on for troop carrying. Obviously the factory – bomb stacks – airfield were all linked together, but we could not find out what it all meant. On further exploration of the area we found a railway system with a diesel engine, which of course we tried to start, but it had been put out of action. What we did find was one of the maintenance trolleys on the rails. This was driven by hand by a seesaw type of traction:



Four people pumped the handles up and down to make it move. Of course we had to have a go and reached quite a good speed. This of course eventually led to competition. We marked a course out about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile and had a glorious time pumping back and forth. Eventually we got a bit too competitive and the thing jumped off the rails, luckily no-one was hurt but it put an end to the game as it was too heavy to get back on to the rails. We did some more exploring but in the end the area was put out of bounds and we had to pack up. Apart from the airfield where we were warned off the planes as they could have been booby-trapped. If some of us got bored we always found something to do otherwise we would have gone mad! I always explored the areas we were in by walking, sometimes on my own, but it was better than sitting about, playing cards etc. if the weather was bad I found a book to read.

April 26th 1945

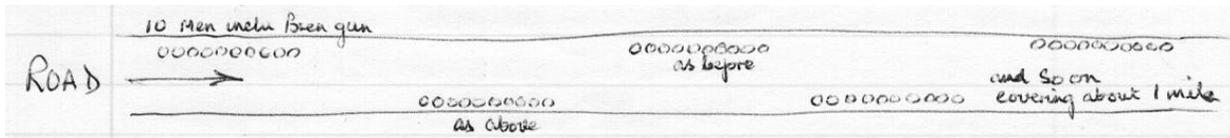
After a night attack through a forest following a creeping barrage of 25 pounder guns we reached the edge of the forest and were told to dig in at the edge of the trees. It was getting light so we all dug our own slit trenches and waited in them for further orders. Later in the morning a patrol was sent out to the bit of forest opposite (see sketch), they returned to tell us there was a German machine gun nest right opposite, but luckily for us one of the shells from the barrage had made a direct hit and killed the 3 soldiers. We would not have stood a chance had they lived. They would have got our entire platoon of 30 men as they could not have missed us!



Slit trenches were dug deep enough for you to kneel or sit in as they were not permanent. We learned later that one of our lads had been killed by one of our own shells that was faulty and dropped short. This was one of the slit trenches at the top of the sketch. We heard this one as it made a strange wuffling noise as it came over and we all flattened.

April 30th 1945

This day we really needed a bit of luck, we were advancing on an open country road the usual way we had been trained to do e.g. Sections:



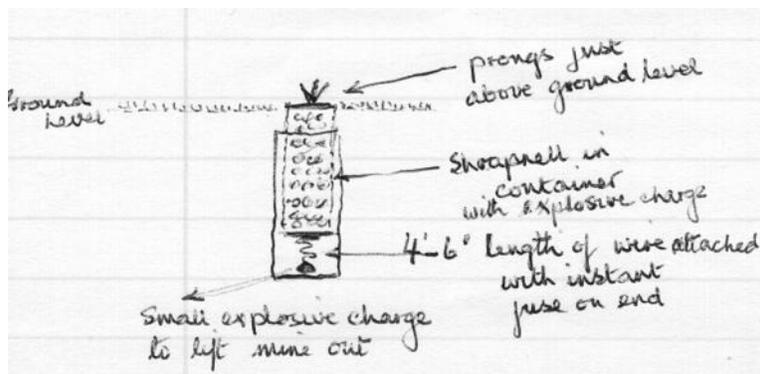
About a mile away in a small wood in a valley a German rocket mortar (called a Moaning Minnie because it was fitted with a device that made the mortar shells moan as they came through the air). We saw a series of flashes as it fired then heard the mortars coming - 10 of them – we all dived for cover on the side of the road. I watched the first ones explode in front of us then got my head down as they straddled the road. The noise was terrific and the shrapnel was whistling about. We lay a short while expecting another salvo but saw the German soldiers running off, luckily they had decided to retreat. 3 of our lads were wounded. One lad was in the section in front of us. He was hit in the backside. The stretcher-bearers picked him up, face up, and lay him on the stretcher but they had to turn him over as he screamed with pain. The other two were further on so I did not see them. It really shook us up and it was chaos for a few minutes. The next lucky escape follows directly on from this.

April 30th 1945

After the escape we continued advancing on the open road and within 1 mile came across 3 Sherman tanks, 1 Bren carrier and 1 Weasel (smaller Bren gun carrier used

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

for taking out casualties and for officers as a command post) all with tracks blown off and abandoned. It suddenly hit us the roadsides had been mined, we were walking through a minefield and had dived for cover on the grass at the roadside, where the mines were laid. Luckily they were anti-tank mines and the weight of a man would not set them off, but it did make us think and we were very careful to keep to the road. Normally the Germans would lay "S" mines in between (anti-personnel) but they had not bothered or else we would have been in real trouble, as these are really vicious and are difficult to see.



You tread on the prongs, which set off the small charge, which throws up the actual mine. As soon as it reaches the end of the wire this detonates the mine and you can imagine what happens at that height off ground level. We were taught how to deal with these but you have to find it first! To prevent the mine going off involves putting a pin/nail in a hole at the base of the prongs to prevent them being pushed down. Of course every soldier carried a nail with them!!??

Further lucky escapes – in training at Colchester

(If you work with weapons you must expect a fatal accident some time)

We were training firing a 2" mortar. A drainpipe with a trigger handle at the base. The "pipe" was fastened to a heavy metal base with a threaded handle used to adjust trajectory and secure the mortar. This was a two-man job and we all took turns loading and firing. I was firing and unfortunately had the team "thickie" as loader. We were firing smoke bombs and high explosive in succession. The mortar bomb was 9" long, the rear had fins, the front lethal end had a metal screw on cap, which when unscrewed revealed a thin foil cover as a safety measure as the striker was very sensitive and any small pressure would set it off. The trainer was a Sergeant who stood behind us, we were on our stomachs, and the others were back at a safe distance. The loader put in the smoke bomb and I fired this off then we had to wait for it to land to see if I had got the distance right. The loader then put the high explosive in and we waited. Unfortunately the loader did not realise I had not fired this off and started to drop the next smoke bomb in. I quickly tipped the mortar to one side, luckily the loader did not drop the smoke bomb when I did this and held on to it. I don't know who was the most shocked, the Sergeant went deathly pale and so did I! The loader had no idea what he

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

had done. The Sergeant grabbed him and after a lot of verbal abuse pushed him to the lads at the back and I got a different loader. We then got a lecture on what would have happened if the smoke bomb had dropped on to the high explosive. They would not have found much of the three of us next to the mortar and one or two at the back could have been hit by flying metal from the mortar itself. You don't forget these incidents (I never told my parents until I left the Army) but it could have ended my career very early!

CHAPTER FOUR: AFTER GERMANY

Back in training

We were brought back to train for the campaign in the Far East – Japan. After disembarkation leave (24th July 1945) I was back at Maresfield Camp in Sussex joining the 4th Battn Devonshire Regt. Unfortunately I was 1 day late reporting back. Was put on CO's orders and given 7 days confined to barracks, cookhouse duties, cleaning and polishing gym floors etc. etc., whitewashing anything that did not move!! (Old Army expression "If it moves, salute it, if it doesn't move, whitewash it".) We were now in training for the war in Japan. We were issued with jungle kit, including a shorter rifle with a rubber butt and flash eliminator, for jungle fighting, also a knife bayonet rather than the old pig sticker. (I brought my pig sticker bayonet back with me, it lives in my garden shed!) It was intensive training and an area of Sussex near the camp was converted to simulate jungle. As those of us who had come back from Germany had been involved in front line action we were considered to be fully trained fighting soldiers?1 so we were to be the backbone of the Battn? The insignia for the Division was a red diamond on a blue background – this was the 70 Div and was classed as a high Division. The eventual plan was to drop us into Japan in gliders (lovely thought). Luckily on August 15th the atom bomb was dropped and were we relieved! By then we were considered to be fully trained and ready to be moved. We were now back on normal training – drilling, firing weapons, more marches and exercises, lectures etc. etc.

(December 16th 1945

Moved by train to Southampton to join Shaw Saville liner "Dominion Monarch", which was taking New Zealanders home after serving over here also their wives and girl friends. The ship was calling in Naples, Italy to drop us off, then on to the Suez Canal picking up more troops there for the New Zealand destination. We were put in the storage hold down in the bottom of the ship where we were in hammocks. We had to take these down every morning and the place made tidy for inspection then up every night – if you had to go to the toilet during the night you had a hell of a job to find your hammock as it was a sea of hammocks. The idea was to pick a point on the ship then count the number of hammocks to yours. If someone had come late and put another one up that was a problem, you then had to punch the bottom of the hammock and if someone swore at you, you tried the next one!! They were wonderful to sleep in though, as they stayed level whatever the ship did. We went through the Bay of Biscay, which was very rough. I was violently seasick the first full day and ate nothing, but the next day I ate all my meals plus any going spare. One or two badly affected lads had to be carried off the ship in Naples on stretchers! We did have some duties to perform as usual, one was to guard doors to the upper decks to prevent us ordinary scruffs from appearing on deck with the Officers and their ladies. We had to wear gym shoes all the while on the ship. I was on duty when we went past Gibraltar, it was night but saw the lights on the Rock. The other thing I remember was seeing some dolphins swimming in front of the bow of the ship, just under the surface. They were wonderful.

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

December 23rd 1945

Landed in Naples, taken by Army lorries through the dockside and the rough side of the city to 307 transit camp in tents. The lorries were driven fast through this area. We spent Xmas in this camp and had our dinner there. By tradition the Officers served us our meals at the tables. Saw Vesuvius volcano. Smoking. Very impressive.

December 26th 1945

On to train – cattle wagons – en route to Austria. As we went through the South of Italy we passed some large orange groves. Having not seen any oranges during the war you can guess what happened. The train was a very slow one so the oranges were raided and one or two lads brought armfuls back. The only problem was later on there was a mad rush off the train as we all got the “runs”. We were not used to fresh fruit! We passed through Rome station all marble; then Monte Cassino and saw the ruined abbey on the hill. Then up through Udine on the other coast.

December 27th 1945

Arrived in Austria – Villach transit camp in huts.

December 30th 1945

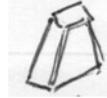
Karawankenhof Hotel in Carinthia, Austria. Beautiful place near mountains, on the border with Italy.

It was a beautiful country but to most of us it was a waste of our lives as we were still soldiering. I did get around and explored as usual but for all that it was not a holiday, the people were not too friendly; after all they welcomed Hitler and he was an Austrian by birth. We had to watch our backs for quite some time and for a while you went about in pairs. Eventually we were accepted and some of the lads took home Austrian wives. Austria was divided up on occupation between British, French, American, and Russian. The Russians had the eastern part, which included Vienna. Vienna being the capital was divided as all the HQ were based there. We had the southern part of Austria, Carinthia and Styria, borders with Italy, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. I had two leaves from here.

We were moved about the British Zone of the country quite a bit in various billets, camps and the occasional Schloss, in Ehrenhausen, (small village) but even here the other ranks i.e. the scruffs were either in the outside buildings or in tents. We were back to normal soldiering, marching, drilling, firing weapons and out on manoeuvres for the odd week or so, no change and trying to avoid doing these! We did get to Vienna as all battns took turns in the duties there mostly guarding. I was put into Intelligence Section (?) which involved patrolling the Austria/Yugoslavia border and gathering information. At the end of the war Tito took over Yugoslavia but there were some

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

elements that wanted the monarchy back. These people operated on the border, they called themselves “White Guards”. We were supposed to keep these people away from the border. There was a 1 mile deep forbidden zone along the border and the inhabitants had special passes a “Wohnsitzbescheinigung”! We were supposed to stop anyone within the area and check this. If any of the White Guard were captured we were supposed – after interrogation – to hand them over to the Yugoslavs at the border post. We found out later after a spell of torture they were shot, so strangely enough we never caught any! The border is marked by 3 foot high concrete posts



every ½ mile.

If any of our lot strayed over by mistake and they got you, you were there for about 3 months, imprisoned in Ljubjana jail. When you were given back to your own lot, without watches, rings or any other valuables, you were promptly tried by court martial for desertion and spent 6 months in an Army detention camp! Not bad eh?

The two duty visits to Vienna were really interesting and I spent my time off duty exploring. Our days there were split up – one day preparing for guard, one day on guard duty and one day or part day free, depending if you were put on camp duties, this was the pattern all the time we were in the city. It was here on one of the weeks that I spent 7 days inside – for being naughty – purely an Army offence (honest Guv!) Vienna like Berlin was in the Russian zone so they had the same system for the Military Police of 4 men in a Jeep patrolling the whole of the city, which was divided up like the rest of the country into zones. The jeep had 1 British MP, 1 French MP, 1 American MP and 1 Russian MP, each dealt with his own men, backed by the others if there was any trouble.

The Prater where the big wheel is was in the Russian zone and I did want to see this but had to go on my own, so it was a quick look from a side alley as the Park was full of Russian soldiers. I did spend about ¼ hour but it was worth it, the wheel obviously was not working, it had been damaged. I got to know my way around but did not use the underground much – mostly by tram. (When Rachael and I went to Vienna I could take her round all the sites of interest, I could remember most areas and we did go on the big wheel.)

Our troops were stationed in Meidling Barracks, where the Austrian royal guards were based. There are some photographs in the album where we are on the roof of the barracks we were in. The HQ of our forces was in the Schonbrunn Palace (Summer Palace), this is where most of our guard duties were, plus some storage warehouses in the city. They did have a ceremonial guard on the main gates of the Palace but I was the one with the plastic buttons on his greatcoat, so I was out!! There is a photo or two of some of us in the Palace grounds including one of our lads on a statue.

The journey to Vienna was fascinating as we had to go by Army lorry and over a mountain range. The Russian border post was on the Semmering Pass, which was on this range, and we had to stop here while they checked us over. On the other side

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

coming down we could see the Danube Valley, a wonderful view, as this does go by Vienna. On the 24th-27th June 1946 the British forces in Vienna held a Military Tattoo over a weekend for the other forces plus civilians which went down very well. Us people in the Devons were mostly on guard duty, but the classier troops – Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders etc. – were in the Show. We were given one evening off to see the show. I spent two periods in Vienna, June 13th to July 16th 1946 and April 17th to May 25th 1947, but one of my leaves coincided with the last visit so I went on leave from there, but came back to another place, not recorded in diary, to join Battn.

We spent 9 months in the village of Leibnitz near the Yugoslav border. We were billeted in the school, a 2 storey building, but there was no water on so we had to wash in a tent in the yard, the toilets were also there. It was the winter period and it was bitterly cold, alright during the day but cold at night. We did our own border patrolling in this area (photo of me sat on the frontier post in album). I was the platoon scrounger as I could always remember where items were if someone wanted anything. I had managed to obtain a small pot-bellied stove from somewhere and managed to persuade the Officers 30cwt truck driver to move it round for us (my cigarette ration). As we knew we were going to be some while in Leibnitz we decided to use it in the school. We managed to smuggle it into our classroom, there were about 10 of us in there. We were at the end of the building so we were on an outside wall. We bashed a hole through in the evenings with an old bayonet and a hammer someone picked up? Someone was based in the yard when it came to knocking through the outside wall, this was for the stovepipe. The pipe was removed during the day and the hole was covered up with a picture. The hole on the outside was so high up it was not noticed during the day. The next problem was fuel, there was a coal store in the yard for the Officers/Sergeants quarters, but this was surrounded by a fence and barbed wire, which we were supposed to guard as well as the school? This problem was soon solved as the people on fire watch guard were given the job of keeping our fuel topped up overnight. We managed to make a hole in the fence near a wall and close to the ground, which could be covered up without creating suspicion. We had a spare large haversack and this was used every night. The other problem was the stove and the haversack on inspection days. This was solved by taking the back off one of the tall cupboards and sticking this in front of the stove with the haversack on top. We then filled it with the brushes and cleaning tools for the room. It worked very well! The trouble was some evenings there could be as many as 30 people getting warmed up in the room, but they did contribute with the fuel supply. What a way to live!!

I was sent on a weeks ski course to a small Austrian ski holiday place in the mountains – Flattnitz. It was a smashing week, we wore just pullovers during the day, but put greatcoats on as soon as the sun went down. I got a small badge to signify I had passed the course, but appear to have lost this. The idea was for patrolling the border during the winter. I never got the chance to do this as I was sent out to the various Coys to check their intelligence systems and collect information, so I did not get a chance to practise – pity! My 21st birthday was spent on one of these, so I had no chance to celebrate with my mates!

Incidents in Austria (personal recollections)

Because I was in the Intelligence Section, anything to do with the border I had to be involved and make a report to the C.O. We had a 30cwt at our disposal and were sent out at odd times, so that the residents could not know we were about (there was a lot of Black Market activity at this time). We had a driver who stayed with the vehicle – a Sergeant who was in charge – and 4 other lads plus me. On this particular time we were lumbered with an objectionable Sergeant who had been in the Merchant Navy for years. He knew it all! We had to park 2 miles from the border as the path ran out. It was hilly country and heavily wooded – fir trees. We reached the border after a long devious walk and found the border mark. The Sergeant took out the map – I had got one as well – looked round and said “Right, we will stay together, follow me”. He started walking to the other side of the post but I said “Hang on, you’re going into Yugoslavia”. He turned round and said, “Who’s in charge?” so I had to say “You” but also said, “You go that way and you’re on your own”. The rest of the lads backed me up and we moved along to the next post. He was a bit cross and shouted us to “Stop” but he was ignored. About ½ mile on we came out of the trees and could see our lorry down in the valley. He shut up then and I had to do the map reading from then on. (The actual conversation was not quite as polite as recorded above, of course!!)

On another occasion we called at a farmhouse on the way back from another area to get a drink from the well. The farmer came out and offered us some homemade schnapps (plum brandy). It was a hot day and it tasted really good, they kept the jar in a water butt so it was cold, so we had a glass or two. We said goodbye and made our way to the lorry ½ mile away. We had not gone 200yds when the drink hit us. Two of the lads collapsed, I kept seeing double, the Sergeant was a whisky man but he was not too good, the other two walked very stiffly with glazed looks! We managed to reach the truck but we were in a terrible state, the driver fell about laughing and we had to sit by the lorry for over an hour before we started back to camp, luckily this was an hour away!

The aristocracy were very pro-Hitler as it gave them a higher status in a German State. One or two of them were real ardent Nazis and could have made problems for us. A lot were confined to their Schloss or big house and guarded there. Some were in the process of being taken to a tribunal for trial. They all spoke perfect English. At one point our platoon had the problem of looking after a family of two men and two women – middle aged – who were removed from their home and were on their way to a trial in a local town. They could not be allowed to be taken to a local jail as people in their position could have coerced or bribed their way out because of their position, so it was left to our lot to watch them. They were not allowed any freedom and were watched 24 hours a day. There had to be a Sergeant in charge and an ordinary soldier backing him. The Sergeant had a revolver and the private his rifle, and they were loaded. I don’t know what their crime was. One day the Sergeant had to make a report to an Officer and left me in charge. (He should not have done this.) I sat on a low wall in the courtyard of a house, with my rifle leaning against the wall beside me. The people were standing in the middle of the yard. They were talking between themselves. One

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

of the ladies moved over towards me and about 15ft away stopped and said “We are just going to the village – alright?) I looked at her as the others watched, slowly picked my rifle up, loosely held it, pointed it at her, opened the bolt and flipped a live round out, pushed back the bolt putting another live round in and clicked off the safety catch. Then said “O.K., ready when you are”. She went very pale. If looks could have killed I would have dropped dead! I gather later these people treated the ordinary soldiers like dirt. When the Sergeant came back I was picking up the live round from the ground. He could tell something had happened by the looks on their faces, but did not say anything till later, when I explained. These people were treated less like nobility after this and were made to carry their own luggage!

There are lots of incidents I have not recorded which would need a full size book, like we were on a trip in a 30cwt truck to collect rations, it was late evening, on the way back the driver was in a hurry and we ended up in a ditch. We were out in the country, no radio of course. We ended up getting a local farmer harnessing up his two oxen to pull us out, which they did with ease! Another occasion we were out on patrol in winter in a jeep. This was a favourite vehicle of the Officer. It had been fitted up with a cab and doors by the mechanics. Unfortunately it was very icy and on getting out my side I slipped, grabbed the door and tore it off its hinges! The driver panicked but when we got back I volunteered to say what happened. The Officer went spare; the trouble was I had great trouble in keeping a straight face. I got away with it, but only just! I was the one that damaged the door, of course. As mentioned before Austria was a beautiful country and on the whole I enjoyed my time there but it still came down to the fact we were there to do a job and it was a waste of my life at that time.

The other big problem there were the large numbers of displaced persons used as slave labour. They were put in camps in huts, some had families, but they were hundreds of miles from their real homes. Hungary, Rumania, Yugoslavia but mostly Russian. It was our job to look after them. The locals hated them and if anything went wrong they were always blamed, which meant we had to sort it out. The Austrian police were operational but dare not go near the camp, so had to be escorted. We also had to look after their welfare and were coerced into helping out the medics on de-lousing expeditions. Dousing the whole camp and inhabitants with powder – ugh!! On one occasion the Austrian police wanted to arrest a man for alleged thieving so our small section of 10 men were sent with two policeman to collect the suspect. The Sergeant put me in the accommodation this man was in (two rooms of a large hut) and told me to watch him and keep him there. Unfortunately the rest of the camp got the news and a large crowd gathered. The Sergeant panicked and left me in the room and went off with the rest of the lads to use his radio and get reinforcements. Unfortunately the man’s wife was with him and she was very pregnant and obviously extremely upset. Talk about agony aunts, what with trying to placate her and keeping an eye on him, I had my hands full. I was stuck in that room ½ an hour before the lads plus Sergeant came back with a further 30 men and the job was completed.

One other incident was on the firing range somewhere in Austria. We were using an Officers standard weapon a 6 shooter 38 revolver for practice. There were 6 of us at a

time with a revolver each and you had to stand sideways on, arm fully extended and fire your 6 rounds then turn and face the targets 30 yards away, check your hits then unload the cartridges. The main thing was to check you had fired 6 times. In our group were two lads, very close mates from the same area of Devon, who stood together. The unloading process was dodgy, you had to grip the barrel of the gun with the left hand and operate the lever at the butt end to open the gun. You had to be careful to keep your finger away from the trigger when grasping the pistol with your right hand. Unfortunately the lad on the right hand side of his mate had not counted his shots and inadvertently touched the trigger and the gun fired his missing round. It went through the calf of his mate's right leg and the lad fell screaming with pain. I was on the other side of the lad who let off the shot. The Sergeant ran over and shouted "Anyone got a medical pad?" and believe it or not, I was the only one with a pad in the special pocket of my trousers. I went over and we took his boot off and sock and pulled up his trouser leg. There was blood everywhere. The bullet had made a neat round hole where it went in, but the other side was a jagged mess. I whipped out the medical pad and clapped it on the open wound and held it firmly while the Sergeant wound the bandage tightly round and tied it securely. The other lads had backed off but one had run off to get the lorry to take the lad off to the hospital. He had passed out while we were dealing with him, which made it easier for us. He was sent home to England and discharged from the Army, we heard later as the bullet had damaged the muscles in his leg. This incident emphasises how hard you get when things like this happen, just one of those things!!?

These incidents and lucky escapes illustrate what a different world it was from normal life during the war time years. People now could never realise what war meant to the people involved in that time as at times life was so bizarre, but you can understand why we can remember them so vividly ourselves. It worried me for a long time that in dealing with the above accident I had no feelings towards the lad involved, just that there was a job needed doing, do it, forget it and carry on as normal? The other thought occurring to me reading through this was the statement "normal life". What was normal life during these years? News from war fronts, blackout where there was absolute darkness wherever you went, food rationing which also gave you basic foods, no fruit other than apples and pears. Every item purchased was restricted by ration coupons, this included petrol of course and sweets. The fear of death particularly in towns and cities through bombing and early on the bad news from the war fronts, yet we seemed to have survived somehow, but "normal life", no chance!! In the early years there was fear of invasion on top of everything else.

The other thing I noticed from the diaries was a large number of "fed ups" and other comments like "good grub", "messaging about" and the main item during the time in Germany was "good sleep" as there were not many of these during that spell. I do not know how we managed to keep going but this is one reason I could sleep anywhere on anything even now!? The "messaging about" note refers to finding something to do to offset boredom, which was quite often. There is a lot more information in the diaries I kept but the majority of this journal was memory by association with a short note in the diaries. I hope all this will give some idea of the life and times of those 6 years, but I

14827765 Pte. WARREN C. R. - CYRIL. REGINALD WARREN – WAR MEMOIRS

hope you will realise this is a mostly personal exercise (I think I have mentioned this a time or two!!) I trust it is not too boring – “NOT THE WAR AGAIN”. One thing above all that happened, that kept me going, was a silly sense of humour. I never lost this at all but it got me into trouble at times!!

Motto: NEVER VOLUNTEER FOR ANYTHING

Point to remember: If it was a stupid order to do something - do not say so in a loud voice and inappropriate language – you are very likely to be punished. Stupid boy!!

14827765 Pte WARREN C. R. Infantry soldier (conscript)

19th August 1944 – 20th November 1947