

FROM THE COTSWOLDS TO ARNHEM

(A SOLDIER'S STORY)

I was born in a small town in Gloucestershire called Morton in Marsh but subsequently my family moved to the village of Broadwell. It was there in 1940, at the age of 16 years, that I joined the Home Guard. The unit was formed by combining the villages of Broad well and Donnington and consisted of about 20 members. We were issued with armbands and three rifles but no ammunition and we had to take turns in using the rifles for rifle drill. Eventually we were issued with uniforms and we continued various forms of training some of which was quite bizarre in an amusing sort of way.

One of our major exercises, with other units, was to defend Stow-on-the-Wold from an attack by a Canadian Regiment which had just arrived in the U.K. I think they were the first contingent of troops to arrive from Canada. We were given the task of setting up roadblocks on the road which ran from Morton in Marsh to Stow-on-the-Wold. By this time our unit had 6 rifles but only NCOs could use them on exercises. We were in fact issued with 'hand grenades' but only pretend ones for they were in fact potatoes and small bags of flour to throw at the enemy. The potatoes were rolled in the flour and thrown and if any of the opposing troops were marked with flour it counted as a hit. God knows what the Canadian troops must have thought of this. It would have made a superb comedy film except this was serious training in order that we would be capable of defending the country against an expected German invasion.

In April 1942 at the age of 18 years I enlisted in the army, signing on for a period of seven years. I volunteered because I wanted to serve in a tank regiment like my brother. He was in the 17/21st Lancers (The Death or Glory Boys), a cavalry regiment which was part of the Royal Armoured Corps.

Initially I was posted to the Shropshire Light Infantry Regiment at Shrewsbury for assessment and basic training which lasted for six weeks. I was then posted to a Royal Armoured Corps Regiment at Farnborough to undertake tank training. I cannot remember the name of the regiment but I believe it was one of the cavalry regiments, and I subsequently qualified as a Driver/Gunner. (All tank crew members were trained in dual roles).

After completing this training I was posted to the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry, a tank regiment which was based at Uckfield in Sussex and was equipped with Covenanter and Crusader tanks. This being a Scottish regiment made for a very interesting posting.

We spent a large amount of our time on manoeuvres in various parts of the country such as York, Kings Lynn, Uckfield, etc. We were always kept well away from the towns because of the damage that our tanks might cause to the roads etc. However, at one of the locations near a village the local residents were organising a fete to raise money toward the cost of a Spitfire aeroplane and our C.O. was approached by the fete committee to see if he would be prepared to loan the regimental pipe band for the parade. Now it was unfortunate but most of the band

members had just gone on seven days leave, but nevertheless, not wishing to disappoint the locals, the C.O. agreed. He decided that the remaining bandsmen would have their numbers bolstered by pressganging men who would not be on any duties on the day in question to march with the band. I happened to be in the wrong place and was duly requisitioned together with five others. We were each given a bagpipe which had been stuffed so that it could not be played, and also a kilt to wear. On the day of the parade we were positioned in the centre square of the band and then we marched through the village with our arms pumping but not a sound emanating from the six of us to disrupt the rhythmic screech of the rest of the band. The locals were delighted and we received undeserved rapturous applause and praise as band members.

It was sometime in late 1943 when I was in our Orderly Room that I saw a notice asking for volunteers for the Parachute Regiment. At this time I was feeling somewhat frustrated for we were just running about to various parts of the country playing war games when what we all really wanted was to be involved in the real action. After thinking about it I put my name down and in due course my posting came through and I was instructed to report to the Initial Parachute Training Centre at Clay Cross in Derbyshire.

I arrived there in December 1943 and I soon discovered that things were run very differently from what I had been used to for this was a tough regime. To begin with everything had to be done at the double and if anyone was caught walking they would be put on a charge. Anyone on a charge would have to go before the C.O. and he would give the offender a choice of either accepting whatever sentence he decided, or to fight three rounds with him in the boxing ring. Now this C.O. was a Major, he was an ex-member of the Black Watch Regiment who still wore his kilt and also a Scottish middleweight boxing champion, and he was known as 'Mad Jock'. Not many chose the latter option. The whole purpose of this tough training regime was to get us supremely fit and to develop an aggressive nature, and under the guidance of some very tough physical training instructors (P.T.I.s) this was achieved. They were hard task masters.

One of the ways of improving our fitness and aggression was an activity known as a 'Rumble'. This consisted of long low wooden seating forms being used to form a rectangle, and then an equal number of men would be lined up along the back of each of the longest sides of the rectangle facing each other. The 'Rumble' would then commence by the first two men facing each other being ordered to step into the rectangle and fight and wrestle each other. When these two finished the next two would step in and fight, and so on until every man had gone through the experience. All this was carried out under watchful eye of a physical training instructor. (P.T.I.).

After the first three weeks of this pretty intensive training regime we were allowed out for a night in Chesterfield. My friend and I had both finished our duties and managed to get away early and get a lift into town. We had been informed that transport had been arranged to pick us up at 11.30 pm to take us back to barracks, but what they did not tell us was that we required a 'pass' to get on the trucks. When we turned up at the location where the trucks were waiting we found that the Regimental Police were checking everyone on and there was no way they would allow us on without a 'pass'. Failure to report at the guardroom before 12 midnight was a major crime leading to a serious charge so I decided to have a look around to see how I could solve this problem. It was then that I noticed that one of the trucks was not carrying the usual spare wheel

in the carrier under the chassis so I went to have a closer look thinking this might be the answer to my problem. I wedged my head and shoulders into the carrier and I found that I could put my feet over the rear axle so I knew I was well clear of the ground and I felt pretty safe so I decided to stay put and let the truck take me back to barracks. It was not the most comfortable of rides but it went without mishap and it saved me from being put on a charge. Dangerous? Maybe but there was no way I was going to step into a boxing ring with 'Mad Jock'.

Of equal importance to paratroopers was the ground training which was to ensure that we were able to land properly when hitting the ground. This included getting used to the force of the impact, bending the knees slightly, using the balls of our feet and doing a sideways roll. The training area for this activity was in an old stone quarry near Clay Cross. A platform had been erected on the top edge of the quarry and extended out beyond the edge over a drop of approximately some 30 feet. Above the platform was a large fan but without any power supply. A rope was securely wound around the spindle of the fan and the other end then attached to the harness worn by the parachutist as he stood on the edge of the platform ready to jump. As he stepped off the platform the rope would start to unwind from the fan and this would spontaneously rotate the fan blades which in turn would meet resistance from the air, thereby acting as a brake and slowing down the unwinding of the rope and consequently slowing down the descent of the parachutist. Sounds very complicated and a Heath Robinson contraption but it was simple and effective.

After six weeks of toughening up and ground training at Clay Cross we were posted to Hardwick Hall near Manchester for parachute training at Ringway Airport. We were familiarised with the equipment and made aware we had to complete a total of eight jumps to qualify. We were also aware that a number of fatalities and serious injuries had occurred at Ringway during parachute training. Our first two jumps were from static balloons and it was not a very inspiring sight to see a large basket suspended from a barrage balloon. There was a bar across the top of the basket to which our static lines were connected and in the middle of the floor was chute hole (like a short funnel) which was the exit for us to make our jump. The basket was just big enough to accommodate 3 parachutists and the dispatcher. Well, up we went in a rather eerie silence except for the occasional sound of the wind whistling through the rigging lines connecting us to the balloon. After reaching the jump height of 500 feet the order was given for each of us in turn to put our feet in the hole and push ourselves off and away we went floating back to earth. I cannot say that I felt any particular emotion during these jumps for it was all a matter of concentrating and making sure we were doing everything right, but it was a nice feeling when I felt a sudden jerk on my body when my parachute opened.

These two jumps from a balloon were followed by five jumps from an aircraft which was in fact a converted Whitley bomber with a hole cut out halfway along the floor of the fuselage and which was our exit. The full stick of 20 men had to be split with 10 men being forward of the hole and 10 men to the rear. The Whitley bomber had a very narrow body so we all had to sit in a staggered position on alternate sides of the fuselage with our knees almost under our chins and when the green light came on we all had to inch our way to the hole and exit the aircraft in turn. It was not easy exiting the Whitley for if you pushed off too hard could smack your face on the opposite side of the chute hole and likewise if you did not clear the bulk of your parachute it would catch the edge of the hole and it would throw you forward with the same result.

After completing these 5 jumps we came to the final one, a night drop from a balloon at 500 feet. This was quite an experience, not a sound except the creaking of the basket, nothing to see, just pitch blackness all around. This got too much for one man on the course and he refused to jump and that was it, straight back to his unit, no second chance.

We were all glad to complete the course without any mishap and I was pleased with my assessment which was recorded as 'Above average, a very confident parachutist'. We were presented with our red berets, our 'Wings Emblems' and a parachute regimental cap badge and also granted seven days leave after which I had to report to 250 (Airborne) Light Composite Company, Royal Army Service Corps at the Moorlands, Lincoln. This company was part of the 1st.Airborne Division.

When I first applied to join the Parachute Regiment I anticipated that at the conclusion of the course I would be posted to such a regiment. However, because I had not previously undergone any infantry training I was posted to an R.A.S.C. Airborne Unit. I was content with this and I can say my infantry training was carried out very thoroughly at the Longhills at Branston.

On 24th February, after my leave, I arrived at Lincoln railway station. It did not seem like a very satisfactory introduction as there was no one else at the station and I appeared to be the only posting to 250 Company and there was no transport awaiting my arrival. I made enquiries as to the location of the Moorlands and I made my way there on foot to report my arrival. It was then that I was told that although I had arrived at Company Headquarters, (the C.O. was a Major Gifford) I was at the wrong place and I should be at The Longhills at Branston, and worse still there was no transport available for me. I was given directions and told to make my own way there and this I did by walking all the way there in full kit including my kit bag. An R.A.S.C. company with no transport? Ridiculous!

Later that day I arrived at The Longhills and my love story with Lincolnshire began. I was issued with my R.A.S.C. cap badge and shoulder flashes and at first I was billeted in The Longhills Hall. I found there were three parachute platoons at this location, Nos. 1, 2, and 3. and I was posted to No.1 Para Platoon. I should explain here that each platoon consisted of some 30 to 36 men and each platoon had a Platoon Captain in charge, ours being Captain Cranmer-Byng. The defined duties of R.A.S.C. parachutists were to provide logistical support for their formation, both on land and in the air. The Parachute Platoons of 250 Coy had a secondary role as the Defence Platoon of the Brigade to which they would be attached, for which a greater degree of infantry training was required. One of the men also billeted in The Hall was a talented artist named Arthur Sims and he had painted some large murals on two of the walls in the hall which depicted aircraft and paratroopers in action. These paintings remained visible until a few years ago when I understand they were painted over. (Incidentally, after the war Arthur Simms became a commercial artist and his work was featured in a number of magazines).

In the British Army there has always been a degree of friendly rivalry between regiments and in my case, not being a dyed in the wool R.A.S.C. man, I was to begin with, wrongly regarded by some as being somewhat superior to them because I had come from a tank regiment, so I had to earn their respect. I did have a couple of spats with Sergeant Walsh who was No.1 Para Platoon

Sergeant, which resulted in me having to spend a night in the guardroom but we later became good friends and things settled down very well. After a short period in the hall I was moved into the stables to join others located there. All our transport was located at company H.Q. at the Moorlands with just a few vehicles at the Longhills for the use of the officers.

As the days passed there was the normal routine of army life, route marches of several miles which would last for hours and take us through many of the villages. We carried these out by marching for 50 minutes and then resting for 10 minutes. There were other training exercises, physical training, target practice which we carried out at the Longhills and other locations around the country, and we wanted to get to know about the village of Branston and the residents who all made us very welcome. The Salvation Army had turned a house in Silver Street into a little tea room, there were a number of shops, a village hall and a recreation ground. There were also two public houses, The Plough which never seemed very popular, and the Waggon and Horses which seemed rather small with the bar or rather the server being at the end of a passageway and consisted of some planks of wood resting across two beer barrels. The beer was drawn off from barrels situated at the rear of the server and collected in a large metal measuring jug from which it was poured into your glass. There was a piano in a room off on the right and I am sure that in a week it had more beer poured into it than some of the patrons consumed. The dance in the village hall was the highlight of the week. A man named Frank Harrison was member of the band and his party piece was to place his violin on his head and play it. I later learned he was a painter and decorator and he lived in Johnson Villas at Branston.

It was at one of these dances that I first met a lovely lady named Gwen Tindall from the neighbouring village of Potterhanworth. I did not know it at the time but she would eventually become my wife. (And I thank God that it happened).

The normal routine of army life continued and one day we had a visit from Sergeant Major Gibbs from Company Headquarters. He told us that our fitness levels were dropping and so we would be starting early morning training runs commencing at 6 am. Now with him being somewhat obese (some said he was a fat so and so) we insisted that he came with us. He agreed and he said he would be right behind us. And he was, on a pedal cycle.

As part of our physical training we would play a type of football cum rugby, a sort of rough and tumble, while wearing our army boots but this resulted in too many minor injuries, mainly bruises and grazes, so it was decided we should wear gym shoes. The first match caused a broken collar bone. It seems it was a wrong decision by the P.T.I.s or whoever made it.

It was during one of our training marches that I again saw the lovely lady called Gwen whom I had previously met at the dance at Branston. We had just finished our forced march and were carrying out patrol work on the roads through Potterhanworth when I saw her and her family in the garden of their house so I dropped a thunderflash by the hedge as I passed. When it exploded it caused quite a bit of mayhem and I had to go back later and apologise, but afterwards I seemed to spend a lot of time at Potterhanworth, and it was not to visit the Chequers Pub for the couple running it seemed strange miserable people. I think I went there once.

One of the major exercises we were involved in while we were at Branston was to fly to Cirencester in Gloucestershire to take part in defending it against the Guards Armoured Division. In this exercise we were dropped from 1000 feet and I found that it was a marvellous view of the countryside at that height. Normally we dropped from around 500 feet to reduce the time spent in the air when we are most vulnerable to enemy sniper fire. (I would add that the parachutes we used gave a far faster descent than the large rectangular ones used by display teams and civilians in this day and age). On this exercise our Platoon Officer, Captain John Launcelot Cranmer-Byng, to give him his full name, was not all that keen on parachuting and as he was jumping at number one we thought we would give him a bit of a hand. Unfortunately we popped him out some 5 miles from the drop zone and we later learned that he had landed in a tree and some farm workers thought he was a German and refused to let him down until the Home Guard arrived at the scene. He was not a happy man.

As parachutists we were required to do two glider flights in case there was not enough aircraft available for all parachutists, so we went to Barkston Heath to complete them. The glider they were using was a Waco and it was literally a small platform with room for 4 parachutists and the pilot and the rest was just a canvas covered frame. It went up and down like a yo-yo at the end of a tow rope. We all learned the meaning of air sickness.

On 6th June 1944 (D Day) the Normandy landings took place and we were all bitterly disappointed and frustrated that we were not used in that operation. We were supremely fit and highly trained and we wanted the opportunity to engage with the enemy and demonstrate our professional skills. We were obviously being held in reserve in case something went drastically wrong with the landings or elsewhere and a quick response was required.

In August we left Branston and went to Barkston Hall where we were under canvas to get ready for operations, many of which were planned and then for whatever reason they were quickly cancelled. All this only added to the frustration we felt concerning our lack of involvement in any real action. At this time each R.A.S.C. Para Platoon was attached to an individual Parachute Battalion in readiness for deployment.

At this location we were camped next to the lake so we did a bit of fishing with explosives and there was fish on the menu for the next few days. Next we were moved into the stable block at the village pub for a while and then into Nissen huts on the outskirts of the village.

The United States 82nd Airborne Division were billeted on the other side of Grantham and a few interesting meetings took place whenever we met up with them in the town. They did not like being called cissies just because they had reserve parachutes when they jumped, whereas the British did not use them. Fights took place and some people suffered a few bruises etc, but then it escalated to a very serious level when one of the American soldiers went back to his billet, collected a pistol, returned to the town, and shot and wounded a member of the Royal Signals. The outcome was that the authorities allocated different days for us and the Americans to visit Grantham.

During the few weeks we were at Barkston my mate 'Tojo' Spencer and I would sneak out of camp to go and see our girlfriends. He had a girlfriend that lived in Lincoln and my Gwen was at Potterhanworth. We would try to hitch a lift but it was hopeless as there was hardly any traffic so we would walk the whole distance together to Lincoln and I would go on to Potterhanworth. For the return in the late or early hours I would walk back to Lincoln, meet 'Tojo' and then we would both make our way back to camp by alternately running and walking short distances. We did this at least a couple of times a week but on one occasion we suffered for it. We arrived back at about 5.30am, went to bed for a short while, then got up to find that we were going on a route march. Of course we had no option but to comply and go on it. Sometime during the march 'Tojo' and I, Sergeant Walsh, and one or two others were having a discussion, and I happened to mention that my feet were a bit sweaty and sore. Sergeant Walsh then said that I must be going soft, so to let him know that I was not I told him about our walk to Lincoln and back the previous evening. Now shortly after this he must have related to Captain Cranmer-Byng what we had been up to, for he called us into his office but rather than giving 'Tojo' and me a rocket he said to us, "Bloody good show, but next time you do it come and see me and I will excuse you from the route march". This was heartening news but we never put his promise to the test to see if he really would excuse us.

Traffic was non-existent on those roads late at night or the early hours but on one occasion when returning from Lincoln we got a lift with a milk lorry to take us part of the way but then one of the tyres punctured so we stopped to help him to change the wheel, then we continued. I cannot remember where he dropped us off but Captain Cranmer-Byng caught us getting back into camp. We knew we had taken a big risk by going out because we were on 'standby'. He told us that everyone was kitted up ready to be taken to the airfields and that we should pray that the operation went ahead for if it did not he would see us in his office. We scrambled around, got kitted up, then joined the others, then it was called off, and we knew we were in real trouble. We feared the worst. We were later marched into his office and stood in front of the Captain for one of the worse crimes a soldier can commit. Then Sergeant Walsh stepped forward and said that he should be standing there with us because he had given us permission to go out. What a good friend, he was a life saver. That was the end of the matter.

We were suddenly briefed on the Arnhem operation (Market Garden) but without much conviction that it would be any different from previous briefings for operations that had quickly been cancelled. We were briefed on our target, namely the town of Arnhem and the bridge over the River Rhine, that we would be on the 1st Lift, and our Nos.1 and 3 Parachute Platoons were scheduled to deliver the ammunition and supplies required at the bridge. Our No.2 Parachute Platoon would be part of the 2nd Lift on 18 September which would include the Company vehicles to equip the Divisional troops of the Parachute Regiment, RE and RAMC. We were also informed that XXX Corps, which included the Guards Armoured Division, would push north to support us, arriving two days after our drop. Our heavy transport would reach us by travelling overland at the rear of XXX Corps. Although his whole operation was behind enemy lines it appeared that everyone was of the opinion that there would be little resistance from the enemy. (Little did they know!)? The drop was to be spread over three days because there was insufficient aircraft to cope with the large numbers of troops and equipment.

Suddenly on 17 September we were on our way, being transported to the airfields where we boarded the C47 Transport planes and took off for Holland. As well as the entire troop carrying C47s; I believe there were 12 Horsa gliders carrying more troops and some light transport. The flight was uneventful except for some anti-aircraft fire, but previous air attacks had put some of the enemy A.A. units out of action. The 21st Independent Parachute Company had preceded us as pathfinders to mark out the drop zones, there being 3 for parachutist (DZs), 3 for gliders (LZs), and 1 for supplies (SDZ). Our drop zone was near Heelsum, and unfortunately like the other zones it was about 8 miles from Arnhem and the bridge. For the Dutch civilians on the ground it must have been like an armada of planes, gliders and parachutists in the air, something they had waited years to see and would lead to their liberation.

Everything appeared to be going to plan and we made our way to the collection point which was a farmhouse on the outskirts of Heelsum adjacent to the drop zone. We later learned that two men from our platoon had been killed on the drop, both having joined our unit only days before we left England, and Sergeant Walsh our platoon sergeant was also missing. (I later found out that he did eventually make it to our unit but later he was killed in action). Our orders were that No1 Platoon and No 2 Platoon would accompany the 2nd Battalion Parachute Regiment to the bridge as they advanced along 'Lion' route, but as our platoon was incomplete our Platoon Officer, Captain Cranmer-Byng, who was the senior captain of the three platoons, ordered No.2 Platoon under Captain Desmond 'Paddy' Kavanagh, to the bridge and kept No.1 platoon at the drop zone to organise supplies. (Captain Kavanagh was later killed while single handedly attacking an enemy machine gun post). We were then engaged on securing the area and patrolling the edges of the drop zone. We did learn that there were areas of soft ground on some of the landing zones for the gliders which caused serious problems on touchdown. The wheels would sink into the ground and bring the gliders to an almighty abrupt halt, causing the rear end to rise up and then crash over and begin to disintegrate. A number of glider troops were killed and injured in this way. There was also one or two collision between some of the gliders. The same thing happened on the second day when light transport and light artillery was being landed, for with the abrupt halt on touchdown the vehicles and guns broke free from their moorings as the rear lifted and they rolled forward at speed crushing some accompanying troops and the pilot.

On the second day, our transport having not yet arrived, five of us were sent out on a scouting mission to try to commandeer what transport we could find. We knew that the enemy had moved into the woods around the village but no contact was made. Eventually we found what appeared to be a school bus. There were no passengers in it but the driver was still with it. Fortunately he spoke good English and after we told him why we needed his bus he volunteered to drive it for us saying that we might find it difficult because of the foreign controls and the left hand drive. He also said that if he was captured he would tell the Germans that we had forced him to drive the bus for us. We agreed and returned to the drop zone where we were ordered to load up with ammunition and establish a supply dump at Oosterbeek which was roughly about halfway to the bridge. We created the dump in a clearing in a wood just outside the town.

We completed this without too much interference from the Germans until we were on our way back when we ran into an ambush. Suddenly we found ourselves under fire with bullets slamming into the bus and the driver was killed instantly. Somehow we managed to stop the bus but we were stranded in the middle of a clearing with enemy fire coming from a wooded area on

raised ground to our left and machine gun fire from raised ground in front of us. L/Corporal Plant was killed at this point and we were pinned down in the open area. There was a house about 50 yards from our position and one by one we managed to reach it, take cover, and return fire. Three of us had rifles and one of us a sten gun but we had no radios to call for any assistance. The fire fight lasted for almost two hours before finally our ammunition ran out. When we could no longer return fire the Germans eventually realised we had run out of ammo and they came forward and captured us. At some stage one of them stole my wrist watch and I never saw it again.

The four of us spent the first night in a police cell in the town, then a night in a barn, and next to a transit camp at Lindberg. There I was surprised to see a lot of our 2nd Platoon in captivity. Conditions there were very primitive with water being supplied by three stand pipes which were only turned on between 6.30 and 7.0 am each morning. Roll call was 6.30 to 7.0 am each morning so you can imagine we became very grubby and dishevelled. From there we were moved by train travelling in cattle trucks to a camp near Berlin, Stalag IV B. On the way there we reached Cologne and an air raid was taking place. The train stopped before we reached the station because it was being bombed and they marched us through the streets to the other side of the station. It was then that I saw a sight that has remained with me to this day. All around was devastation but the Cathedral was standing there virtually untouched. The workers who were making safe the nearby damaged buildings did their best to drop loose masonry on us but we escaped with minor injuries.

We reached Stalag IV B near Berlin and found there were a lot of Russians there but we were segregated from them and after a few weeks we were moved to a camp near Dresden, again by train in cattle trucks. There we were put to work in a logging camp up in the mountains returning to the camp at the end of the day. This went on through the winter and was extremely cold work.

Our guards were quite elderly and not very enthusiastic for the German cause, especially as they now realised the war was lost. One of them had a deformed arm and he informed us that the Americans were only about 50 miles away. We told him that the Americans would shoot him and the other guards if they were still holding us prisoner when they arrived. This did the trick for they allowed us to walk away and they disappeared.

We eventually located the Americans and at first they did not know what to do with us. We just marvelled at their rations for they were eating huge prime steaks. We spent about two weeks with them and even accompanied them out on their patrols. I told them about my watch being stolen and a Sergeant lined up a number of German P.O.W.s, made them roll up their sleeves, and divested them of their wrist watches, giving one to me. It was a good watch which I used for about 18 years.

After about two weeks enjoying their hospitality we were airlifted back to the U.K. where I was granted two weeks repatriation leave and I renewed my courtship of Gwen. After my leave I had to report back to a tank unit as my airborne service was classed as a temporary assignment and I was a regular, and so I was sent to a training unit at Newcastle and then to the 8th Royal Tank

Regiment at Barnard Castle, where I became a driving instructor teaching recruits to drive all kinds of military vehicle, including heavy tanks.

Gwen and I were married at Potterhanworth Church on 18th December 1946 and I was demobbed in July 1949. In the 1950s Gwen and I took up residence in the village of Branston. Another ten years and I will qualify to be called a 'Yellow Belly'.

Footnote – Many words have been written and spoken about Operation Market Garden and Montgomery said “In years to come, it will be a great thing for a man to be able to say ‘I fought at Arnhem’.” That is true, but one has to question the planning of the operation and we must draw our own conclusions. Why was the confirmed presence of SS Panzer armoured units in the area ignored? Why was the soft landing ground for gliders not noticed? Why were the Drop Zones so far from Arnhem? Why was there a loss of radio communications? Why was XXX Corps advancing on a narrow road with ditches either side and where they were exposed to ambush and devastating enemy fire? A three day lift gave time for the enemy to strengthen their defences after the first day.