

## The 1940s

At the start of 1940 I was still below call-up age, but Beecher Stow, who had joined the Officers Emergency Reserve, was posted to Aberystwyth. So it was work on as usual for me. But Dad was now working at Watford Electrical Manufacturing Co. (WEMCO) as a store man, because Silver Studios had closed the weekend that war was declared, and although they opened again quite soon Dad would not return. This happened because Dad received a letter from the studio on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1939 saying that if war was declared that weekend he should not return. War was declared on the Sunday and Dad was working at WEMCO on the Monday.

In April 1940 Germany invaded Denmark and Norway, and we were at war with Japan as well as Germany and Italy. In May the German army invaded Belgium, Holland and France. We thought the British army was lost but it was evacuated from Dunkirk in France by a fleet of little boats. By June France had surrendered and the German army was in Paris.



*Dad and myself in Home Guard uniform in 1940.*

Dad and I joined the Local Defence Volunteers, which very soon became the Home Guard (HG). The Headquarters of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion HG was a building at the junction of St Albans Road and Langley Road in Watford. We were in B Company. Old newsreels show the HG marching in civilian clothes 'armed' with broom handles, but from the very start we were given 'fatigue' uniforms, a rifle and ammunition. The rifle I had was a Canadian Ross .300 which in my opinion was superior to any other rifle I had later. These rifles had been issued to the Canadian troops in WW1 but had been found unsuitable for trench warfare because mud would cause them to jam. The War Office then had them and then made them available to the Home Guard after their packing grease was removed. The .300 ammunition was outside the Geneva Convention because the bullets were cased in phosphor bronze and this metal contains poisonous phosphorous.

Some of our live firing was at Bisley rifle range. On one occasion we had a competition there with the regular army.

Dad and a sergeant of the King's Own Scottish Borderers were brilliant. The final decision between them was made when they repeatedly fired one round at a time, and scored bull after bull until Dad scored an inner and was eliminated.

As time went on the Home Guard received more arms. With Lend-Lease from the USA came Thompson submachine guns and Browning .300 automatic rifles. Our HG company also had two Lewis light machine guns, one of which, with a full drum magazine, was kept in a wardrobe in our house at 74 Bushey Mill Crescent.

In preparation for an invasion of England the Luftwaffe began bombing airfields but suffered casualties. This was later called The Battle of Britain. The Luftwaffe then switched to bombing London during September 1940. Watford did not get much bombing but we had many bad nights when we had to sleep in the Anderson shelter. Some nights Dennis, who was now ten years old, would be taken from his bed to the shelter, and then back again after the 'all clear', and not remember anything in the morning. If Dad and I were on Home Guard duty he would wake me if there was an incident and say "Come on, you'll want to be in on this!". I remember that after one air raid Dad said that it had left "a strong smell of broken glass!"



*My Home Guard portrait, 1940.*

I was still working in London, and Imperial Buildings in Ludgate Circus was badly damaged by blast and it was very cold trying to work after all the windows had been blown out. Then one night it was set on fire by incendiary bombs. The next morning the fire-fighters let me into the building and I salvaged all I could and took it, on a borrowed handcart, to Streets Advertising in Gracechurch Street. They were clients and I was given space in a room which overlooked Leadenhall Market.

In the spring of 1941 I was ordered to undergo an army medical in St Albans. I passed A1, subject to an eye test which resulted in being prescribed spectacles for the first time. I hated having to wear them

but they improved my long range vision wonderfully, and I've worn glasses ever since.

Beecher Stow had asked me to postpone my call-up because he did not want the studio to close while he was away. I was granted one deferment, and this was extended after I had attended a tribunal. I was not happy with this delay and I did not apply for further extensions. To my surprise my call-up papers did not arrive and in July 1941 I had a visit from the civilian police to tell me I was an army deserter! This error by the authorities resulted in a discrepancy of 25 days in my service record.

I was enlisted "for the duration" at Yeovil on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1941. I was given a bed and told that I was free until the next day because it was August Bank Holiday Monday and there was no-one on duty to receive me. I was given the number 1831353 and I began eight weeks basic training, which did not present any problem for me. When this was over I became a Gunner in D Troop 181 Anti-Aircraft Battery Royal Artillery. On our shoulders we wore the 'Witch on a Broomstick' symbol.

After a brief training stop at Buxton, Derbyshire, we moved to Nottingham. We became 181 AAZ Regiment, which meant we would be equipped with launchers and 3inch UPs (unrotating projectiles). These ground-to-air missiles were about seven feet long and were propelled by nine pounds of cordite. The warhead contained four pounds of TNT. The launchers were called 'Projectors' and two rockets were loaded onto guide rails. Each projector had a crew of two, so that one could lay onto the bearing while the other was responsible for the elevation and for firing. Ignition was from a small dry-battery.



*A 'troop' of five projectors with the middle one firing. None of our projectors were positioned this close together, but in eight rows of eight projectors spread over a large area.*

We did a test firing at the rocket range at Aberporth which overlooks Cardigan Bay in Wales. I fired two rockets which meant standing on the base of the projector and being bathed in flame and smoke when the button was pushed. I was far from happy because a rocket, prior to mine, exploded on its guide rails and severely damaged its projector, but fortunately caused no casualties.

On returning to Nottingham we began to build a site in fields off Ruddington Lane, Wilford. The land belonged to Harry Wheatcroft the rose grower. It was a cold, wet, miserable time and it was impossible to dry clothing in huts where the walls ran with condensation. They were Nissen huts which we had built. The steel frames were on concrete foundations, and the corrugated steel cladding was held in position by wire cables tightened with a ratchet. Four command bunkers and 64 ammunition stores were built from concrete blocks. All the blocks were manhandled over ground which had become soft and slippery mud. Finally 64 projectors had to be positioned.

Our Regimental Headquarters was established at Wilford House on Clifton Lane in Wilford. D Troop was moved there to provide RHQ guard and fire piquet duties. There we had dry wooden huts, so we considered ourselves luckier than the other three troops who remained on the Ruddington Lane site.

I was on guard duty just before Christmas 1941 when a Mr. Briggs, who lived only a few minutes walk from Wilford House, invited the sentry on duty to bring a comrade and spend some time on Christmas Day with him and his family. Of those on guard, three of us, Charles Jones, Fred Gibson and I, visited 'Wave-crest' in Roland Avenue, Wilford, and I met Una for the first time.

In early 1942, 181 Battery became operational, but we did not have GL (Gun Laying which meant radar, a name which for security reasons was never used). We got all our operational information from a nearby HAA Gun site (Heavy Anti-Aircraft) and sometimes I went there to listen to their bearings and elevations. I would convert those on a circular slide rule to compensate for the different locations and phone the results to our battery.

D Troop was still based in Wilford and when air raids were likely we were rushed to the battery site in civilian type enclosed vans which we got from American Lend-Lease. One night an exercise was held to check the efficiency of the battery and so no prior warning was given. In spite of our two mile handicap, I was in my command bunker in time to set fuses, load, elevate and begin to give a creeping bearing, but not early enough to get the initial briefing that it was not for real. Through my headphones I

heard an agitated voice say "Dog Troop, this is Dummy Dummy Dummy!" My next command would have been "Fire!" and with fingers ready on buttons it was lucky that whatever word I said then was not misunderstood. I thought I would be in trouble but instead the next voice I heard was the CO congratulating me! I never fired a rocket in action, but that time I almost caused sixteen to be fired in error.

In the summer of 1942 I was transferred to Regimental Headquarters (RHQ) in Wilford House where I was on the establishment as a clerk, but I was really there because I could do technical drawings of equipment and plans of buildings and sites. I had started to produce reference books on aircraft recognition as a hobby, and my interest in the subject resulted in a number of trips to attend study courses. While I was having this 'cushy' time our Batteries waited for the raids that didn't come, and battles were being fought in North Africa.

In late 1942 the RHQ moved and occupied a house in Magdala Road, off the Mansfield Way, and another a short distance away in Cyprus Road in Nottingham. I was now further away from Una's home but I was able to meet her in Nottingham city centre and go to a cinema or to the Theatre Royal, and I was very often invited to an evening meal at Wilford.

ATS women were introduced into AA units and our title changed yet again to become 15(M) AAZ Regiment. The ATS were given equal rights with the men and did all the duties except operating the projectors.

In 1943 the American bombers began attacking Germany, the British bombed the Ruhr dams and Allied forces invaded Italy. I can remember very little of what I was doing except that in August 1943 I went to 5 AA Group School, at Oakham in Rutland, for an aircraft recognition instructors course. In order to attend I was 'promoted' to Lance Bombardier while I was there. I was unable to go further after this because the next stage was a War Office course and only senior NCOs could attend.

Early in 1944 I caught the common skin infection impetigo. The spots on my face were treated with gentian violet and I was told to keep out of sight until I was more presentable! I was bored and I decided to help some of the lads who were painting the interior of the house. I was not aware that they had removed the counter-weights in a sash window and it fell trapping my right hand. I was treated at an army first aid station in Ruddington. I returned to the RHQ via Wilford and Una remembers my visit because now I had spots on my face and my arm in a sling! Because I could not work I was given 48 hours leave and I went home to Watford.

Troubles, I am told, come in threes. While at home I became ill with a sore throat and a high temperature. The local army MO was called and he diagnosed diphtheria and sent me to Watford Isolation Hospital on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1944. There were many Canadian soldiers in the hospital who had caught diphtheria while being treated for wounds they had suffered during the battle for Anzio in Italy. It was found that I was actually free of the illness, but in spite of being able to go home each day the army insisted that I must be quarantined for 21 days. After that time I would be returned to duty and be sent to another unit via Colchester. Returning to duty after hospital was called "Y Listing" in Army Regulations. I did not want that so I telephoned and asked RHQ for help. I was pleased that they didn't want to lose me, and Captain Carter the Adjutant issued an order for my return.

The next move, ordered by Brigade, was to 'Leylands' Broadway in Derby. It was a splendid Georgian house with nice gardens. The men slept on the top floor of the stable block which in summer was covered with wisteria, the perfume from which was

almost overpowering. Not far away from Leylands was another of our batteries: 120(M) AAZ Battery. My official job at Leylands was filing clerk, but in addition I had many other tasks, and one of which was drawing plans of the house and gardens for the Nottingham Police who had plans to use the house as their County HQ after the war.

The Colonel's orders were simple and common sense. Life was easy and no one stepped out of line. Nowhere was out of bounds, and the men took it in turns to get up, make a bucket of tea and wake everyone up - I have often said that I had seen more girls in bed than most men! Nor were the men shocked when our dispatch rider, Margaret, would come into our sleeping quarters in the morning while the men were getting dressed, and she would shout to our other dispatch rider "Help me Bill, I can't get the bloody Norton started!".

One night we had an air raid on Derby and 120 Battery opened fire with all 64 rockets. The flame and screech, followed by the bursting of 64 warheads was impressive. The returning to earth of the cases and splinters killed a lot of cattle in the fields. I sorted through some of these metal fragments and found a small piece of an aircraft, but it was not considered enough to claim a 'possible' hit. Raids were getting fewer and daylight raids were very rare, but one morning when rain clouds were at tree-top height a solitary low flying Dornier Do217 broke out of its cloud cover. It flew past our HQ and I heard the twin Lewis guns at 120 Battery open fire. This was, it seemed, the only opposition the aircraft met and it flew on to bomb the Rolls Royce works.

When I had free time I was able to take the Barton bus from Derby to Nottingham to meet Una. Sometimes we would meet and spend time with Eva, Una's sister, and her young sons Roger and Martin at Woolaton. Leonard, Eva's husband, was with an AA gun battery in the south of England and in June 1944 he came home on leave and told us that they had just seen the first V1s, or as they soon became known Doodlebugs.

On 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944 we saw some of the aircraft taking part in the D Day landings. All had been secretly painted with black and white stripes so as to identify friendly aircraft. We had never seen so many aircraft at one time. By early September Paris and Brussels were liberated and I felt sure that reinforcements would be needed to replace the heavy casualties of the three months fighting. That would mean that I would be involved. However, on the day of the airborne landings at Arnhem I was travelling to Leeds University to attend a course on economics!

In November I was sent for by the Adjutant who told me I would be transferred to an infantry establishment for training. He said there was still a vacancy on the establishment at RHQ for a batman, and if I accepted that job I could stay. I thanked him and said I had been lucky, but it had not been because I had avoided any duty, and no matter how much I would prefer to stay I would have to accept the transfer. Orders came and I said a sad goodbye to a lot of old friends. It seems strange looking back to realise that one of the last things I had to do was to attend my last evening class at Derby Art School, where I had been studying industrial design and packaging.

I was given nine days of leave on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1944 and then ordered to report for infantry training at Cuckfield, about three miles west of Haywards Heath in Sussex. It was like joining the army all over again with parades, drills and weapon instruction all the time! In eight weeks I was expected to pass courses on rifle, Bren gun, Sten gun, 2" mortar (two inch), PIAT missile (Projector Infantry Anti-Tank) and grenades. There were field exercises and, as the winter turned wet, those were not a happy experience. We did long marches and I found I could get so tired that I could actually go to sleep on the march!

In December 1944 the German army counter attacked and smashed through the American front deep into the Ardennes. All my hopes of the war ending before I got involved vanished.

I was not as athletic as my comrades but I got a lot of assistance from them, even if it meant throwing me over obstacles. I couldn't climb but I had two assets, I never got sore feet and I had plenty of endurance, so that many of those who helped me were thankful that I could help them by carrying much more than my share of equipment, while they limped along beside me. I quite liked firing the 2" mortar but it was sometimes difficult to lay accurate smoke screens. One day, while an instructor was yelling abuse at me I made sure he got all the smoke he wanted by setting fire to one of the many farm buildings on the South Downs.

January 1945 brought snow. Our training ended with an exercise code named Aspirant, but which everyone called Aspirin. We made mock attacks under a lifting barrage of heavy mortar fire. At night we crawled through the snow probing with our bayonets, no longer sword shaped but more like black 7 inch nails, for mines. I even tried, but failed to sleep in the snow and I guess I must have often wondered why I hadn't opted to be a batman!

We started as men with little or no experience in infantry warfare and after eight weeks we were not much better. To have machine gun bullets and mortar bombs fired over our heads was bad enough but it was nothing compared to what the future was likely to be. To survive we would have to learn fast. I volunteered to go into the Yorks and Lancs Regiment so that all of us who had trained together would stay together, so they posted me to the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, the KOYLIs.

We were all given embarkation leave and I travelled to Watford. Una took the train to Luton and I met her there. We announced our engagement on 17<sup>th</sup> February 1945. We both went to Wilford and stayed until I had to return to Watford a day before my leave ended. Mum and Dad travelled with me to Waterloo Station where I caught the Haywards Heath train. I was very depressed and I did not think I would ever come back. It was the 25<sup>th</sup> February.

Next day we went to Dover and boarded a LCT (tank landing craft). It was raining heavily and the sea in the port was dark grey. Out of the harbour the waves were so high that the LCT ahead of us would disappear every few minutes behind mountains of water. It was exhilarating to stand on the deck wrapped in our waterproof groundsheets, but our joy was short lived. A huge wave hit us and it swept a number of men over the side, however all but one were entangled in the rails and could be pulled back aboard. The LCT was turned and we were ordered below while a search was made. Below decks it was awful where the smell of diesel oil and vomit was overpowering and I was seasick for the only time in my life. We had started out as 13 reinforcements for the KOYLIs but there were now 12 - sadly a case of unlucky 13.

We landed at Calais, more dead than alive, and were loaded onto covered freight wagons on the quayside. The train travelled through the flat countryside and we opened the side of the wagon and sat with our legs over the entrance, and began to recover our senses. We arrived at the village of Corbie which is on the River Somme and about ten miles east of Amiens. There were bunk beds for us in the storehouse of the sugar beet producer's co-operative. The whole area stank with the smell of sugar beet which had been harvested but then left to rot in enormous heaps. We were now in the care of 126 Reinforcement Holding Unit (RHU) which was part of 51 Highland Division in 30 Corps.



*Me in my KOYLI uniform in 1945 wearing the Wild Boar symbol of 30 Corps.*

On my first morning in France I broke the ice on the Somme to get water to wash and shave. The river is more like a canal at this point and it was full of little fishes, as I discovered when I washed my mess tins after breakfast. When I went on parade there was an order to take one step forward if we had ever worked in an orderly room. I hesitated because I thought it may be a trap, but decided that things couldn't get worse and took a chance. I was ordered to report to Sergeant Daley in his office. He asked what experience I had, and I told him I had been in the RHQ of an AA unit which impressed him because he was Royal Artillery trained and he said they were the best run units in the whole army. I was told to get my kit and move to the comfortable billet where the HQ staff lived, and would I like a weekend leave in Paris. I had landed on my feet again!

I spent only a short while in Corbie, but I visited Amiens, Villers-Bretonneux and Villers-Bocage. From Corbie the

Canadian War memorial at Vimy Ridge was clearly visible. The French countryside was already spring like and walking in the fields and the woods made the war seem remote. However, on one occasion I was brought back to reality when, on leaving a wood, I passed a sign which read, for the benefit of people coming the other way, 'Achtung Minen'. I hated the way Corbie villagers treated girls who had been friendly with German soldiers, but we were told in no uncertain manner what would happen to us if we interfered.

I never got to Paris because all leave was stopped and the 126 RHU was ordered to move to Helchteren in Belgium. This was a village on a crossroads about 45 miles northeast of Brussels. War had swept over this village several times and left burnt out tanks and roadside graves. We set up in a damaged but very modern Belgium army barracks. The German army had left some equipment and rifle ammunition with wooden bullets. English newspapers said this use of wood was due to shortages, but it may be that they were used for street fighting where their shorter range would be an advantage.

The Germans had removed their AA gun but had left a wooden flak tower which caused us some concern when it burned down one night. It was within sight of the enemy and might have drawn some attention. That night I was on fire-piquet duty, but asleep because we were allowed to sleep until called. The NCO in charge woke me. He had just been issued with a steel helmet of a new design and which, lit by only the torch he was carrying, looked so much like a German helmet that I thought the war for me was over!

Because the NAAFI was not allowed into forward areas we had no canteen at first. Then the Salvation Army set up one, staffed by local girls. It was said that it gave day jobs for the Helchteren 'ladies of the night', but I can't confirm that.

It was here that I first came under shell fire. It was found to be what is now called 'friendly fire'. The first shell from the Royal Artillery took out our telephone, so I was given a written message to take to a nearby unit. I remembered being told in training that crouching while running won't save you, but speed reduces the time you are exposed to danger. I ran faster than I had ever done before! Luckily we all escaped injury. Perhaps the protection we got from the dense pine forest should take more credit than luck can.

To compensate for being unable to go to Paris, I was given a few days of leave in Brussels. I was 'adopted' as a guest by the Streel family who lived in a house on Avenue Albert. Before the war M. Streel had been the representative in Belgium for Vickers Armstrong. He told me how, just before the Germans entered Brussels in May 1940, he had destroyed all reference to military equipment. This had included technical drawings of the 'Predictor', which was a calculator for AA battery fire control. I was in Brussels city when I saw the sad newspaper headlines "Roosevelt est Mort" on the 12<sup>th</sup> April 1945.



*The Streel family at Avenue Albert, Brussels. 1945.*

By now the Allies were in Germany and our unit's role and title was changed and we became 126 Transit Camp and we moved to Louvain. We were housed in a warehouse of a company which had, before the war, made dress and household fabrics. From my window I could see a tower with a Stella Artois sign. As Allied POWs were released they would come to us for 'processing' which meant supplying food, clothing, medical attention, accommodation, and transport back to the UK or their country of origin.

My time off now often meant a trip to Brussels. It was an easy journey of about ten miles on a number 18 tram which linked with the city tram network, although that was a different gauge track. It was on such a trip that a tram driver entertained me by dancing and singing 'The Lambeth Walk' while he was driving! I asked him where he had learned the words and he said that in 1939 he had a stall in Petticoat Lane Market.

I was in Brussels on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1945 and there were some rather wild celebrations there to greet VE day (Victory in Europe). The war with Germany was over! We had orders



to move, but not before I was able to make a visit to the site of the Battle of Waterloo. I was impressed by Lion Hill which was built shortly after the battle by local women as a memorial to the dead from both sides. The exhibition, with its immense diorama, enabled the visitors to believe they were standing in the middle of the battle.

We loaded everything into trucks and headed east, through the southeast corner of Holland, and entered Germany at Aachen. I saw the autobahns for the first time and I was amazed because we had nothing like them in the UK. All the road signs had an additional inscription of "You are now entering ..... by courtesy of 51<sup>st</sup> HD". The HD was quite large and the two letters shared two uprights. Jokingly we said the sign did not stand for Highland Division, but for Highway Decorators. The road was amazingly good except where bridges had been blown. This meant that there were some interesting detours and we saw the effect of Allied bombing. I had seen the result of raids on British towns and cities, but here there were not just shattered buildings but heaps of smashed bricks where only the roads showed what had been there before. We had been told that the grass verges and embankments on the autobahns were probably mined, but German children who came up to talk to us said that it was safe to walk everywhere, and proved it, to our horror, by running and jumping where we had been scared to tread.

Leaving the autobahn at Langenhagen, where the airport is now, we turned south towards Hannover. Our journey ended at the barracks which are about four miles north of the city centre. On our first evening we were warned that it would be dangerous to leave the barracks because of the risk from 'Werewolf' terrorists. We were ordered to carry a rifle and five rounds of ammunition at all times. I was free that evening and I wanted to see the city, but I could get no one else interested because they said we had all come through the war safely and to take risks now was out of the question. I went alone, which still seems a pretty stupid thing to have done. It was the sort of act that in a short time can undo a whole lifetime of cowardice!

I set off for the main road which ran past a flower nursery with blue hydrangeas in row after row. I would have thought that food, and not flowers, would have been grown in every available space! At the main road, which I think was called Vahrenwalder Strasse, I waited for a tram. The first tram did not stop, but as it slowed the local people ran and boarded it. The next tram I would have to board while it was in motion, but I was handicapped by the rifle slung over my shoulder. I got no more than a toe hold on the step of the tram, when the sling at the butt end of the rifle caught in the brass rail that ran along the side of the doors. I was unable to move, and by now the tram was moving fast, but I was saved by my ex-enemies who leaned out and pulled me aboard. Everyone laughed at my predicament, and the only thing to do then was to laugh with them, shake hands, and thank them. So I'm afraid I had very quickly broken the strict 'non-fraternise' orders, but I'm sure I wasn't the first or the last to discover that they were impossible orders to carry out.

As I got to know Hannover I found it was an interesting city. It had many links with the British royal family. I was able to stroll in the Georgengarten and to see the Guelph Palace which is now the university. Guelph is the name of our Royals before they changed it to Windsor. At the royal theatre, in the Herrenhausen Gardens, I saw a performance of Carmen in German. This was the smallest theatre I have ever visited. The military took over the leisure facilities on the north bank of the Maschsee Lake which was a good place to spend time when we were off duty. It was a very hot summer and my memories all seem to be of drinking and eating ice-creams. The main building there now is a gambling casino.

There was however a lot of work to do. Allied POW's of all nations and races came to us. Some were a problem because of languages. I remember a lot of Chinese who had been taken prisoner when their British registered ships had been torpedoed. We had heard reports about German concentration camps and we were prepared for the worst when we were about to receive a contingent of Palestinian Jews who had been captured in North Africa, but they were all fit and well because they had been treated as British prisoners. Most of our 'clients' were men who were keen to get back to the UK as soon as possible.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> August 1945 an atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and on the 9<sup>th</sup> a second bomb destroyed Nagasaki. The deaths and injuries that were caused was just awful, but resulted in Japan surrendering on the 14<sup>th</sup>. I was relieved because I feared I would be sent to fight the Japanese. My AB64 (Pay Book) carried the ominous words "Far East" but now it looked as if I would be spared.

(1) SOLDIER'S NAME and DESCRIPTION on ATTESTATION.

Army Number 831353

Surname (in capitals) JONES

Christian Names (in full) ROBERT ALBERT LEWIS

Date of Birth 15.7.1921

Place of Birth: Parish [redacted]  
In or near the town of [redacted]  
In the county of [redacted]

Trade on Enlistment Commercial Driver

Nationality of Father at birth [redacted]

Nationality of Mother at birth [redacted]

Religious Denomination B.P.C.

Approved Society Oddfellows

Membership No. [redacted]

Enlisted at [redacted] On 4.8.41

For the: [redacted]

\* Regular Army. \* Supplementary Reserve.  
\* Territorial Army. \* Army Reserve Section D.  
\* Strike out those inapplicable.

For [redacted] years with the Colours and [redacted] years in the Reserve.

Signature of Soldier Bob Jones

Date 5.8.41

DESCRIPTION ON ENLISTMENT.

Height 5 ft 9 1/2 ins. Weight 132 lbs.

Maximum Chest 33 ins. Complexion Pale

Eyes Blue Hair Brown

Distinctive Marks and Minor Defects [redacted]

CONDITION ON TRANSFER TO RESERVE.

Found fit for [redacted]

Defects or History of past illness which should be enquired into if called up for Service [redacted]

Date [redacted] 19[redacted]

Initials of M.O. i/c [redacted]

Pages 2 & 3 of my army pay book - with the ominous words 'Far East'. Details of birth and parents were erased for all soldiers serving overseas.

I had now completed six months duty overseas and I got leave on the 5<sup>th</sup> September and travelled by train from Hannover to The Hook of Holland. We passed through Arnhem and saw bits of aircraft still in tree tops and farms where the fuselages of Horsa gliders had been cut into sections and were now used as chicken coops. I lost one day of my leave because a very severe thunder storm stopped the ferry service from The Hook to Harwich.

Una and I spent time together in Wilford and in Watford. I believe we visited my Aunt Daisy and Uncle Pat at their cottage at Mastin Moor in Derbyshire. We also spent time with Una's sister Eva and her young sons Roger and Martin. At the Theatre Royal in Nottingham we saw the opera La Boheme.

After I had returned from leave the unit's role was again changed. It was becoming obvious that with the large numbers of men in the forces in North Germany that an easier route was needed for leave personnel, and also to cope with demobilization.

Cuxhaven and Hull were chosen as the ports and we moved into the barracks near Cuxhaven which were no longer needed by the Kriegsmarine. There were three main barrack blocks, and from my room I could look over the Seedeich to the estuary of the River Elbe. In the distance I could see the Kügelbake which was a huge wooden structure built as a navigation aid to shipping. By getting onto the Flak tower on the roof I could see the Dühnen beach, the North Sea and on the horizon the island of Neuwerk.

Locals told us how the American army decided to capture the island of Neuwerk and how they had refused the offer of the horse drawn vehicle which crosses the sands at low tide. The Americans said that a Jeep could go anywhere a horse and cart could go. They had to be rescued by the Germans and the Jeep was swept away by the sea! I didn't laugh because I remembered my encounter with the tram in Hannover.

As a tribute to the British forces the Swedish Lloyd Line placed two ships, The Britannia and The Suisse, at the disposal of the War Office. These ships were quite luxurious and we were, quite rightly, not allowed to go aboard with boots on. We were amazed to see white linen table cloths and even bowls of sugar when Britain was severely rationed. It was the only time I can remember when officers and men ate together. Later a newer and bigger ship The Prinz Eugen was also in service.

While they waited for a ship it was necessary to find food, entertainment, accommodation and transport for hundreds of men. This service was then repeated for the men returning from leave until they were put aboard trucks to return to their units.



Me at the Cuxhaven Control Centre board for 21/22-5-46 (21<sup>st</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1946). The board shows at that time we had: 64 navy and 2142 army & RAF in accommodation; no officers, but 209 others in backlog; the SS Empire Rapier was due at 0900 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and would depart at 0830 on the 23<sup>rd</sup>; on the 22<sup>nd</sup> the cinema was showing 'Going My Way' at 1400 and 'Blood On The Sun' at 1830. The main portion of the board shows the train and TCV movements. Behind me are the steps up to the lookout tower.



*Me with Ron and Ken Smith, but I'm not sure which is which! Cuxhaven 1946.*

Ron and Ken Smith, who came from Luton, and I were chosen to man the Control Centre. A small number of Royal Navy personnel were attached to 126 Transit Camp in Cuxhaven, and Leading Seaman 'Gibbie' Gibbs was also with us in the Control Centre. We had no training and learned as we went along. We had a wooden building in the centre of the barracks, which was heated by a single coke stove. A glazed lookout tower, which I designed, was built on the roof from which, with the aid of a public address system, we were able to direct troops. We also had a turntable to play music over the system. One person had to be on duty at all times with another on standby. Ron and Ken were identical twins and it was not always easy to tell who was on duty!

We had a fleet of TCVs (troop carrying vehicles) and a company of ex Wehrmacht drivers all in smart field grey battle dress uniforms. The TCVs travelled between our control centre and the docks. The docks were guarded by German police and they would sometimes stop our empty trucks, so on occasions it was my turn to ride on the leading vehicle to make sure they got through. Each day we said how many trucks we would need at what time and where, and it was the duty of Herr Grabe the leader of the drivers to issue orders. All the drivers called him 'Leutnant' but on one occasion when I inadvertently used this title I was reprimanded by a nosey officer who, I guess, thought I had 'gone native'! The transport unit also had a 15cwt truck which Ron, Ken and I were able to use as our unofficial transport around Cuxhaven.

We had several interpreters but the chief one was Helmut Gebhard who was an ex Focke Wulf Fw190 pilot who was just waiting for the day the Russians attacked us, so that he could join the RAF! He didn't claim he wasn't a former Nazi and said that any German who claimed otherwise was certainly lying. He spoke excellent English, and he could do a very good impression of a very aristocratic British army officer voice so it was not a good idea to let him use the PA system!

Work became routine: count them in, stamp their papers, issue coupons for free chocolate and cigarettes, give out cinema tickets and tell them which accommodation

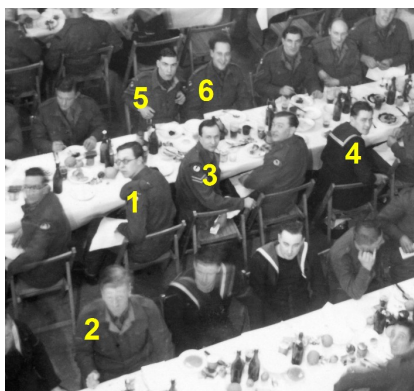


block to go to. One day out of a sea of faces I saw someone I recognised, it was one of the eleven KOYLI reinforcements with whom I had landed in France. It was good to learn that they had all survived and had, by the end of the war, reached Lübeck on the Baltic Sea coast.

Winter 1945 was quite severe. The Elbe froze over but ships were still able to break through the ice to get to the docks. It was a white Christmas. A few days before that Ron Smith, Bill Cooke and I looked into a Cuxhaven church. Bill, who came from Chesterfield, was an organ builder insisted we should go up into the organ loft. He played "White Christmas" and I was quite embarrassed to find we were not alone. Bill stopped playing and said he would play a hymn, but the German vicar said "No, continue because all beautiful music is praise!". I could not help wondering, and hoping, that if a British vicar had found German soldiers in his church he would have acted as graciously.



*NCOs and men of 126 Transit Camp at Christmas dinner in Cuxhaven 1945.*



- 1 me
- 2 Ron, or Ken, Smith
- 3 'Ronnie' Lawther
- 4 'Gibbie' Gibbs
- 5 'Bill' J W Cooke
- 6 R C Dixon



The menu for the Christmas 1945 dinner. On the back of the menu was space for signatures of those present. The menu for the luncheon reads:

	Hors D Oeuvres
	-
	Roast Chicken - Bread Sauce
	Roast Pork - Apple Sauce
	Stuffing
	Gravy
	Roast Potatoes
	Potato Croquettes
	French Beans
	-
	Xmas Pudding
	Brandy Sauce
	-
	Mince Pies
	-
	Bread Rolls Butter Cheese
Chocolate	
Sweets	
Fruit	
Cigarettes	
-	
Tea	
Coffee	
Beer	

Christmas dinner was in the big hall of the docks and it was quite splendid. Afterwards everyone, and that included our German workers, went to the local cinema for a screening of Blythe Spirit. It was quite an enjoyable time and I had further cause to celebrate because I was due for leave on December 28<sup>th</sup>. I sailed from Cuxhaven in one of our new ships the Empire Rapier. This was a 'Liberty' ship built during the war by the US. These ships were mass produced in welded section and supplied to the UK under 'Lend-Lease'.



*Me on the dockside at Cuxhaven,  
with the Empire Rapier behind.  
1946.*

When I got to Hull I went to Wilford. Una and I had planned to spend the twelve days together in Wilford and Watford. Una told me that the Co-operative Bakery office, for which she had worked for four years, had refused to give her time off work. I telephoned them to try to reverse their decision but I failed and I was left in no doubt that Una would lose her job if she did not work (Una left instead). Una and I had planned to get married when I was demobilized but we decided not to wait any longer. Una was under 21 years of age, the age of consent in those days, so it was necessary to get permission from her parents. I spoke to her Dad and Una's sister Eva spoke to her Mum.

I had incorrectly assumed that a marriage by special licence would mean a register office wedding, but the Vicar of Wilford said he would make an immediate appointment for us to see the Bishop of Nottingham. We had tea and cakes with the bishop who was very helpful. We had now to go to Watford to tell my Mum and Dad who were understandingly a little upset that we had given them so little time for their arrangements. We returned to Wilford on New Years Day.

We were married on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 1946 at St Wilfrid's Church in Wilford on a bright clear morning. There was a light dusting of snow. The reception was at Una's home and so much had been done in so short a time. In spite of the rationing of food, which was very severe at that time, there was even a wedding cake! Una and I had a lot to be thankful for. That evening in icy cold weather we travelled to Watford with my Mum, Dad and brother Dennis.



*Una and me leaving Wilford Church. The first picture of us as husband and wife. 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1946.*

We spent the rest of my leave at Watford and then returned to Wilford. We knew that some people had assumed that we had married hastily for 'the usual reason' but we knew they were wrong, and I trust that in later years we would remember that when we were tempted to jump to conclusions!

I returned to Cuxhaven. The ship met ice off the German coast and by the time we entered the Elbe estuary the squeal of the ice against the hull was deafening. Back at the Transit Camp my comrades were full of praise for the way I had kept my marriage plans to myself and refused to believe anything else. I made my claim for Marriage Allowance and of course had my leg pulled about letting them know when I wanted an AFA22, which was the army form for children's allowance.

It still looked like a long wait before demobilization. A system was established by the government by which men were returned to civilian life in

batches. Each batch had a code number based upon age and length of service. Until then I had not realised how old some of the others were, and suddenly I noticed how many had grey and even white hair. So many would be 'demobbed' before me because my number was 39 - only another year in the army if I was lucky!

We had an easy time in the Control Centre. As long as troops moved efficiently no one seemed interested in us at all. There was not much to entertain the staff. Films at the camp cinema were for the troops in transit so they always saw a different film as long as the programme ran for less than three months. I was pleased with simple diversions such as watching the German coastal defences being blown up. I always watched from the barrack block roof when the Americans, who had an enclave at Bremerhaven, fired experimental V2 rockets from Nordholtz (Bremervorde). Many hours were spent just strolling on the sands. Ron, Ken and I were often met by a little German girl, about five years old, with blonde hair plaited at the top of her head. She would walk between us holding our hands so that we could swing her off the ground as we walked along. Every time she landed she would shout "einmal!".

Some of us became 'gun freaks' as there were always a lot of hand guns in circulation. Many men who came through Cuxhaven on leave or demob had souvenir pistols, and when they were told of the penalties imposed on those caught smuggling guns through Hull they panicked. I found and used a Luger which had been hidden behind a lavatory cistern. I had an almost inexhaustible supply of 9mm ammunition and it was fairly safe to fire at targets floated out into the sea.





*Ron Smith, or maybe his brother Ken, with the little German girl who followed us around Cuxhaven. 1946.*



*Me on the wooden bridge over the stream that ran through the barracks at Cuxhaven. The stream was a hazard at night after drinking too many schnapps! 1946.*



*Shooting my Luger. Cuxhaven 1946*



*Me with a German anti-aircraft gun. Cuxhaven 1946.*

Almost everyone dabbled in the black market. We had a free issue of cigarettes but many of us did not smoke. Cigarettes had become a form of currency for the Germans and were traded for watches and cameras. We all clubbed together to raise enough cigarettes to trade for a rather good Blau Punkt radio from the local DPs. Displaced persons were usually civilians who had been forced, or sometimes volunteered, to work for Germany. I was delegated to go with a comrade to the DP camp which proved to be an 'Alladin's Cave'! I was frightened by the whole business but we returned safely and everyone was delighted with our new barrack room radio, until we found it had been stolen a few days earlier from a cafe in the docks! We hid that radio and went back to our old Volksradio which, contrary to British propaganda, was capable of getting all the UK radio stations although it was usually tuned to BFN (British Forces Network).

What was considered much worse than trading in the black market was having British currency in Germany. When one of my friends became very seriously ill his parents were brought over to see him, and he told them he had got a fair amount of Sterling. They asked my help to get it back home and so I took the 'Stolen Moments' perfume they had bought and very carefully undid the seal on the box, inserted the notes around the bottle and sealed it again. I told them they must declare the perfume at the customs in Hull or it would be confiscated or they would loose more than stolen moments if it was opened!



*Me with a large bore 'game' rifle. Because of the gun's recoil we only fired it when it was held down by sandbags. Cuxhaven 1946.*

There was really nowhere to visit outside Cuxhaven, and transport was just not available. I did however make a trip to Hamburg one day. I cannot remember what excuse I used to make the journey but I expect it was for an eye test or to go to the dentist. I saw my first Russian soldiers in a Hamburg Woolworths. On our return trip we stopped at a fruit farm and I gave the farmer a bar of chocolate in exchange for a box of plums. A little fresh fruit was all we wanted but the farmer thought a bar of chocolate was worth so much more than I did and he started to load the truck while I tried to tell him we were satisfied. A military police vehicle followed us from the farm to Cuxhaven and I thought we were in trouble, but maybe he was on a similar mission!

During 1946 I had two more UK leaves. In April Una and I went to Skegness with Eva and Leonard and their young sons Roger and Martin. Leonard had just been demobilized. In July we were in Wilford and Watford making plans for the future because the end of my military service would be only about two months away.

I was always a rather reluctant soldier and I was quite pleased that I had never been promoted. Early in September 1946 I was called into the CO's office. He said that in recognition for my work in the Orderly Room I was being made Lance Corporal. I was

not impressed because he did not even know where I worked. Becoming acting unpaid lance corporal in five years made me tempted to say "Big deal!", but then he said "Paid and backdated for four months", and I was not going to turn money down.

I had now been in Cuxhaven for just over a year and had made many friends, so that while I was happy to be going home I had the sad task of saying goodbye to those I was leaving. I visited the Kamerrer family for the last time. Frau Kamerrer did the laundry for a number of us. Herr Kamerrer had been a U-Boat sailor. They had a son Peter who was about four years old.



*Me, with a comrade on the right, and Frau Kamerrer (centre front) and friends. Cuxhaven 1946.*

I promised Ron and Ken that I would keep in touch and since their home was in Luton that should not be difficult. My last task was to see that my Luger did not get into the wrong hands. I reduced it to all its component parts and took a final walk around Cuxhaven so that I could lose the pieces on waste land, in the sand and into the sea.

I sailed on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1946 to Hull and then went by train to the Military Disembarkation and Dispersal Unit at Guildford. I was given a grey civilian suit which was no too bad, but not memorable. The tie I chose was the most garish I could find being all shades of pink, and I remember that tie vividly! I was on paid leave until 5<sup>th</sup> December and then I would be transferred to Class Z (T) reserve.

I had been in the army for over five years. If you ask me what I had done in the war I could only say with certainty that I had put on weight. When I was enlisted I must have been quite a bean pole because my weight then was only 122lb (about 55kg). I had survived a major war unscathed which I had considered impossible on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 1945 when I set off for France. I had not fired a shot at the enemy and no one had fired an aimed shot at me. I had travelled a little and learned a lot. The most important event in those years was that I had met Una, now she was my wife and we were together. A new phase of our lives had started.

I had kept in touch with those I had worked with before the war and I planned to work freelance now that I was home again. I now think that was a wishful idea. I found that Beecher Stow was back and he was pleased to see me. He offered me employment at a good salary which was an offer I could not refuse (I remember it as £370pa). His studio was at 123 Queen Victoria Street in the City of London. The building, which no longer exists, was opposite to Faraday Building which was one of the main London telephone exchanges. The studio was on the second floor, on the first floor was the

Queen Victoria Building Society and on the ground floor was the Civil Service Store with their restaurant on the mezzanine.

Dad was now back at Silver Studios and seemed happy to be back as a textile designer, although he had enjoyed his time at WEMCO during the war. He was, however, beginning to have heart trouble and said at times his heart "played boogie-woogie". Dennis was now in his late teens, and by 1948 would become a colour retoucher, first for Sun Printers and later at Odhams. Both these companies were in Watford and both produced magazines in full colour.



*Me, Una, Dennis, my Mum and Dad, on the lawn of 74 Bushey Mill Crescent, Watford, 1946.*

Una and I were living with my parents at 74 Bushey Mill Crescent, Watford, which solved our immediate problem of accommodation but we hoped to get a house of our own in spite of the acute shortage of housing. We made an offer for the next door house, number 76, when it was put on sale and that offer was accepted. Foolishly we trusted people who had been neighbours for many years but when someone offered them more money our agreement was broken. Nowadays we would be less surprised at the practise called gazumping.

Early in 1947 Una was pregnant. We were happy, I had a good job and getting a house was just a matter of time. Looking back, and how easy it is to be wise now, we were stupid because Una could have worked and together we could have saved more towards a deposit on a home. In April Una lost the baby. We were both unhappy and I felt devastated. When I was told that "it was probably for the best" it was probably well meant but difficult for me to understand.

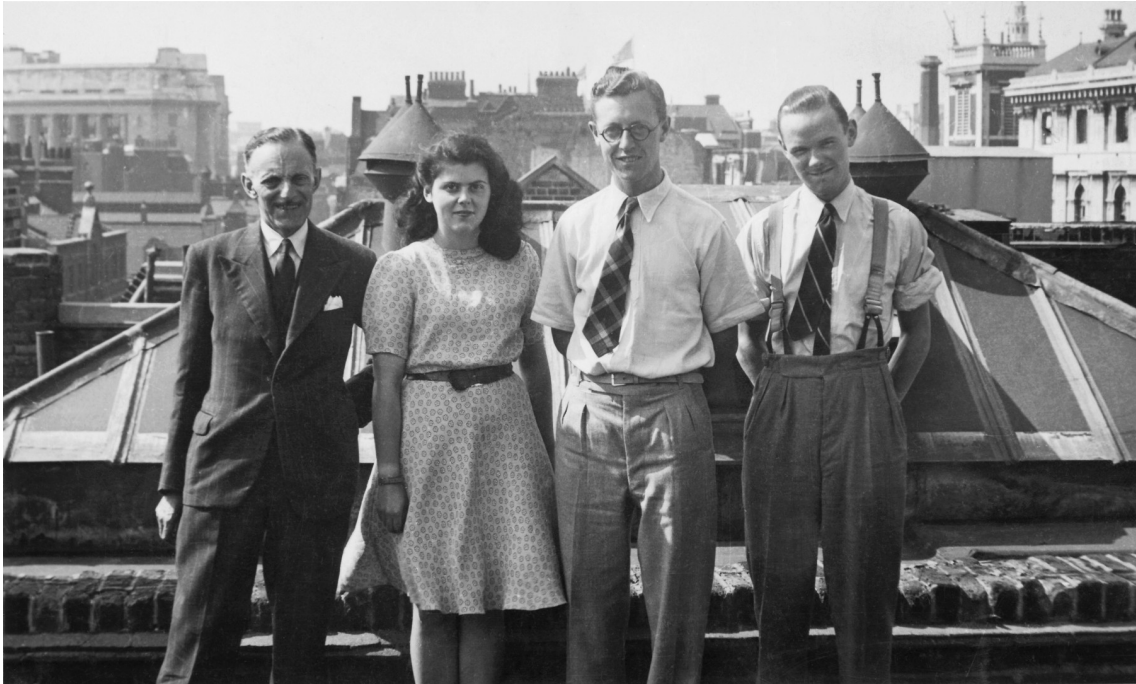
By August Una was fit again and we went on holiday to the Isle of Wight. My brother Dennis went with us and we took our cycles and had an extremely happy time exploring the island. We were able to see some of the remote beaches and countryside which we had not seen before. We stayed with Mabel and Joe Cooper (Joe's brother Fred had married my mother's sister Nellie Carpenter). Their son Harold had a small boat and so we had fun rowing, and catching shrimps, on the River Medina.



*Dennis, Una, aunt Mabel and her son Harold on the Isle of Wight, 1947.*



*Me and my brother Dennis on a beach on the Isle of Wight, 1947.*



*A.J. Beecher Stow, Rowena Bishop, me and Tom Watts on the roof of 123 Queen Victoria Street, London. 1947.*



*Dennis Carter, me, Rowena Bishop and Tom Watts on the roof of 123 Queen Victoria Street, London. In the background is the Faraday Building. 1947.*

By now the studio was prospering and we had been joined by Rowena Bishop, Dennis Carter and Tom Watts. There was plenty of work and the future seemed secure, but Una and I still had no home of our own, and this seemed worse for Una than for me.

In October 1947 we went to Nottingham. Una's cousin Eileen married Arthur Dransfield on Saturday the 3<sup>rd</sup>. After the reception Una and I went to the Nottingham Goose Fair but during the evening I became unwell and we returned to Wilford. The next day we travelled back to Watford. After work on the Monday I was so ill that I

could only get from the bus into Euston Station by holding on to walls and railings. I managed to board a train but I can't remember how I got home.

Dr Wood was called and he diagnosed pneumonia and I was kept in bed and given 'M & B tablets'. May and Baker were the makers of a sulpha drug that I had been prescribed. My temperature was very high and I was delirious for part of the time. To this day I can remember a smell like burnt tar in my head and from which I could not escape.

I was admitted to Shrodells Hospital in Watford on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1947. Although penicillin had been used as an antibiotic since 1940 it was still not available in tablet form in 1947, so I was given intramuscular injections every four hours for five days. By the end of that treatment my bottom was like a pincushion, and I was told that the cost of penicillin was at that time quite alarming. I began to recover and the care could not have been better. Sister Dwight was in charge of the ward, and I guess that she thought that being 'ex-service' I should get the best possible attention. This included a daily bottle of brown ale and bringing me her own portable radio!

Unfortunately my temperature continued to yoyo and x-rays showed a patch on the apex of my right lung so there was a suspicion that I might have pulmonary tuberculosis (TB). I was kept in Shrodells Hospital until 10<sup>th</sup> January 1948. I was told I ought to go into a sanatorium, but because all the tests had been negative I said I would not do that. Instead I signed myself out of the hospital, but it was an amicable arrangement and I promised, and kept to it, that I would rest in bed for three months.

Pay from the studio had now stopped at my request because I thought they could not carry a 'passenger' for an indefinite period. The Hertfordshire County Council (HCC), as part of its fight against TB, had a grant available which paid us 39 shillings (£1/19/0) a week which was less than a quarter of my work pay. We also had two shillings and six pence a week from The Oddfellows, which was my medical insurance, and some help from the Red Cross. In July 1948 the National Health Service (NHS) started and we now got 42 shillings (£2/2/0) a week which was the same rate as the retirement pension for a married couple at that time. Now that I had support from the NHS the HCC grant ceased, but at that time I was receiving much more from the HCC than some who lived in other counties.

Dr Wood visited me most Sunday mornings but these were just friendly occasions. In March of 1948 Dr Dommen, who was a TB specialist, paid a call. He was pleased with my progress and said that I no longer had to stay in bed, but I had to rest a great deal. He said it was vital for me to go into Ware Park Sanatorium, but that I would be there for observation only. Because I had not taken the earlier advice I would have to wait three months for a place there.

The British Legion advised me to claim an army pension. The Ministry of Pensions replied with instructions to see their doctor in London. I checked with Dr Dommen and he said "No" emphatically! I then got a visit from the Ministry's doctor on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June. He wrote his report on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July, which I now know confirmed TB, that it was active and that I was waiting for admission to a sanatorium. He wrote "The general results are doubtful", whatever that meant. The Ministry asked for a report from the medical officer in charge of Shrodells who wrote to say that the test for TB were all negative, that there was no evidence of damage to the lung and "we were in fact uncertain whether this was unresolved pneumonia or a tuberculosis infection".

On 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1948 I entered Ware Park Sanatorium near Hertford. I was in good spirits. Before my departure a neighbour had called at the house but said "I don't want to see



him, I want to remember him as he was" but I came out and she was amazed because by then I was not only feeling fit but I was also suntanned from all the days spent in the garden. The ambulance that called for me also stopped to pick up another patient, a teenage girl. All her family were in tears when she left them. She cried bitterly for a while but later she smiled when the attendant told us we would have good luck because a black cat had crossed our path. The cat survived but almost at our expense when the driver braked!

I arrived in time for lunch but afterwards I was terribly sick. This was a bad attack of panic, which was not surprising as I was fearful because I had been told that my Uncle Bert had died at Ware Park and that his mother, my grandmother, had also died of TB. I was given a bed in Cedar Ward and what I saw of the park looked good and I then began to think that perhaps it wouldn't be too bad there. The wards were wooden chalets and were open to the weather. There were even beds under the verandas which were occupied even in the most severe weathers.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August I had notification that my claim for a pension had been rejected. I told the British Legion and they said I should refuse to accept defeat so I appealed in writing on the 4<sup>th</sup> October 1948.

Meanwhile I had settled in and now had many friends who were all about my age and mostly ex-servicemen. After the first couple of days I was free to roam in the park. There were some interesting botanical specimens there including a Tulip Tree and a Strawberry Tree. I built a model sailplane and got a lot of help constructing and flying it. This was my first sailplane, although I had built rubber propelled planes before the war.



*Me with the small blue and white sailplane outside Cedar Ward at Ware Park, 1948.*

The treatment there was quite primitive, and only one antibiotic had proven to be effective against TB at that time. This was streptomycin which, in the available forms, had serious side effects. Only patients who were severely ill, of which there were few at Ware Park, and those who were prepared to say they accepted the risks of brain



damage were given streptomycin. The most common treatment was AP (artificial pneumothorax) which meant collapsing the lung. Women patients had APP (artificial pneumoperitonea). These treatments involved injecting air into the chest cavity surrounding the lungs. For some reason men were injected into their armpit while women were injected below their ribs. My own treatment was only to be kept in bed for the first week and I then had complete freedom to do anything, except strenuous exercise, for the rest of my 'incarceration'.

Once again every test was negative and the doctors decided I could be discharged on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. I asked a doctor what I should do now and he said "Go home home and raise a family, but make sure your children get a BCG inoculation". When patients left Ware Park there was a friendly one-upmanship when it came to transport. Una, Mum and Dad arrived in a big chauffeur driven Packard which Dad arranged from Durrant's Car Hire. Mr Durrant had been with Dad and me in the Home Guard.



*Me after returning home from Ware Park, 1948.*

Lack of exercise for a year had left me somewhat flabby and I spent the next three months getting really fit again. When I went to Dr Wood and said I wanted to return to work he advised me to take at least a month's holiday. When I said that we had little money left he said "Spend all you have!". Una and I went to Torquay and had a wonderful holiday. I remember that, on one of the few wet days in the month we were there, we stood in a shop doorway counting out our money to see if we could afford to buy an umbrella, and we laughed because we felt we no longer had anything to lose.

We were back to square one!



*Dennis Carter's wife, Rowena Bishop, me and Una at the wedding of Arthur Gibson and Eira in 1949.*

I returned to work at Beecher Stow's studio in March 1949. There had been two additions to the staff: Ken Bromfield and Arthur Gibson. Beecher Stow insisted that I returned as Studio Manager but I considered this a little difficult because I was surrounded by very good and experienced designers and I had limited knowledge of what was now needed. However, everything went well.

By now the Ministry of Pensions had rejected my appeal but had said that I could go before a tribunal. On advice from the British Legion I requested this and the date was set for 1st July 1949 with the location of Staffordshire House, Store Street, London WC2. The British Legion arranged that I would have legal representation. I was told that I stood no

chance whatsoever, but that I was helping to keep the pressure on the Ministry of Pension's quota system. I felt happy that I was fighting not for myself but for someone in greater need. The advice was to speak for myself, not to be intimidated and to be as aggressive as I wished. I had an opportunity quite early because my army record was read out and it started "Failed to report, desertion..." to which I replied by literally thumping the table hard and shouting "Not true!". We proceeded after I got an assurance that my reply was noted.

My claim depended upon whether the tribunal would accept that I had TB when I was demobilized from the army. The army medical had passed me then as A1. Without an x-ray, I maintained, that it was not possible to diagnose TB which has no symptoms, such as a cough or loss of weight, in its early stages. The judgement went against me, which was not surprising because at this date there was a virtual plague of TB and the government would certainly not give pensions to the thousands, mostly ex servicemen, who were being found to have the disease when the mass radiography scheme had begun.

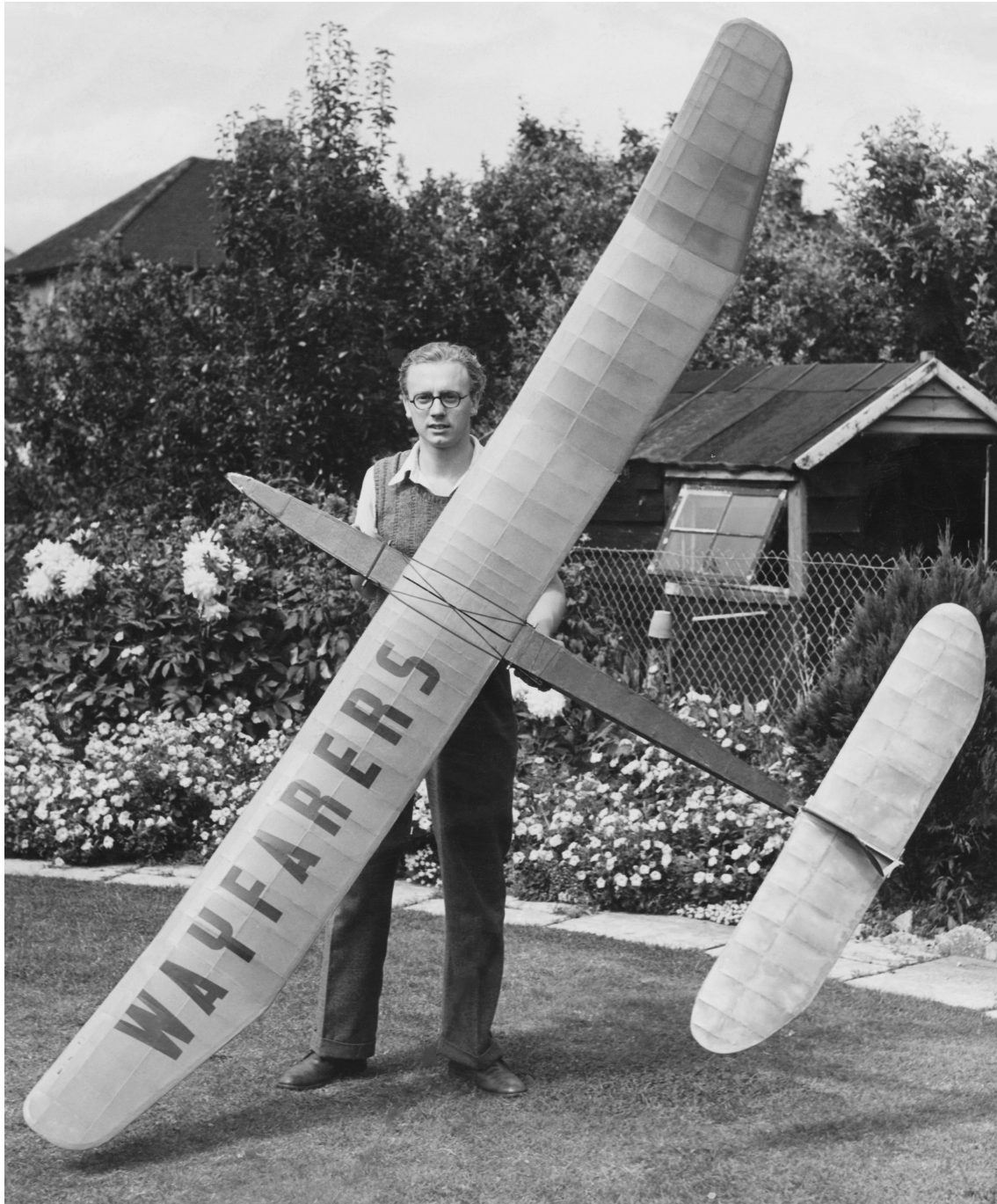
I was surprised that I was not nervous when I faced the board. In later life, when I gave lectures or made speeches, I was reduced to a jelly, but on that day I felt elated and I was proud to have done it alone. My legal advisor had not said a word, but as we came out of the room he shook my hand firmly and said that I had done very well.

In 1948, my brother Dennis had joined with Dave Lawrence, Pat Ward, Tom 'Bonker' Bone and others in the Wayfarers team to fly model aircraft in competitions. While I was at Ware Park I had built and flown a model sailplane, but until now I had not thought of competition flying. We built sailplanes of up to 10 foot wingspan, and now that small engines were for sale at a reasonable price we began building 'power jobs'. Dennis and I both bought Mills 1.3cc diesels for which we mixed our own fuel consisting of equal parts ether, paraffin and castor oil. We test flew models at Abotts Langley, in fields near the sewage farm, and also at West Hyde.

These were the days before radio control and competitions were scored on three flights of under three minutes. So recovery of the model after each flight was vital, and this

was made possible by using a 'dethermoliser' consisting of a parachute, or hinged tailplane, which was triggered by a loop of burning fuse so that the plane was usually brought down within sight. Power models were judged on the ratio of time under power to the glide time, and again three flights were needed.

Since our power models were usually 'under-powered' they were trimmed to gain height by repeatedly doing a half loop with a roll off the top. This looked quite spectacular if it failed to roll off the top of the first loop because the bottom of the loop would be below ground level! Sailplanes were launched on a 300 foot line. A ring on the line was attached to a hook under the sailplane's nose. At height the ring would be pulled off the hook by drag from the line and it would fall away.



*My brother Dennis with his 10 foot wingspan sailplane which came second in an international competition, 1949. (photo Watford Observer)*

All the club's models were red with a black fuselage, and all carried identical lettering of WAYFARERS in black on the upper port wing and under the starboard wing.

Recovery of models was often not easy because they could end up in people's gardens or in trees. I had a model land on the tracks of the underground railway between Fairlop and Hainault in the path of a train. The driver stopped his train just short of the model and handed it over the fence to club members. I thought he might be less than pleased, but instead he asked questions about engine capacity and what fuel it used.

Una came with the team on competition trips and was I think quite interested. Margery, Bill Nichol's wife also came in their motorcycle and sidecar and they brought their little dog. I think that Margery was not happy with Bill spending so much time building and flying models and I believe she told him he had to choose between her and his hobby.

The late 1940s were the prime time for us and by the end of 1950 the Wayfarers were having to spend more time planning future careers, or were about to serve time in National Service. We had flown in competitions at Fairlop, Eaton Bray, Berkhamstead, Radlett, Elstree, Heston and many other places. For me it had been a short period but we had all been quite successful up to the time it ended. There is still a Wayfarers club, based in the Watford area, flying radio controlled models but there is no continuous connection between this and our original club.

We designed, built and flew our models to win competitions and were very successful, In September 1949 the West Herts Post newspaper recorded "two firsts, four seconds and six third places in recent competitions". Because we had so few members they wrote of the club "So it seems that while Watford may not have quantity in regard to its air-mindedness, it certainly has quality!". I am proud to say that with a powered model I gained third place in the SMAE Cup.

Una and I had now survived the 'fearsome forties' and we now looked forward to see what the next decade would bring.

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