

It is very gratifying to find that Len Tutt's 'Portrait of a Young Officer', which I extracted from his wartime, memoirs entitled 'Gentlemen Soldiers' and which our Editor, Major Swann, considered worthy of inclusion in The 2003 Journal, was so well received. I have had many messages of appreciation of this example of his writings, not only from Association members but also from friends of the Regiment and other interested parties whom I do not, or did not know. I must admit to being more than a little surprised that our Journal is still held in such esteem and is so widely read - a tribute of course to all those who have contributed, edited and produced it over the years.

Although not so apparent in this rather moving excerpt, Len, who passed away in November 2002, had an excellent memory, a keen sense of humour, as well as an eye for the ridiculous of which there was no shortage in the wartime services. This later stood him in good stead when writing articles for the BBC, The Imperial War Museum, and for various publications: A number of authors have, with or without his permission, used some of his accounts in their own work.

With his wife Jackie's approval, I have taken a few more extracts from Len's 'Gentlemen Soldiers' in the hope that they will give readers an amusing insight into the days of unpreparedness of 1939:

**Upon Recruitment:** (He was conscripted early in September 1939)

'The Medical, when it came, was quite a traumatic experience but I prefer not to dwell upon the indignities of which my body was subjected. I will content myself with saying that I emerged with an A1 grading and an endorsement, which read 'Puny but Alert'.

The next stage of the proceedings was much more to my taste. I was invited by a very civil sort of chap to take a seat and to have a cigarette. I gathered that it was his job, nay his pleasure, to get me happily placed in whichever branch of the services caught my fancy. He was obviously an officer as he smoked quite openly instead of enclosing his cigarette within cupped hands and taking sly drags, as I noticed other lesser beings were doing. He observed me with both warmth and interest. We were sympatico. "Now let's see, old chap. Higher Schools with credits in Maths, French, History, Chemistry and Physics. Just the sort of man that we want! Any family connections with the services?"

I modestly admitted to the fact that my grandfather, my father and two uncles had all been navy men and he was visibly impressed. "No doubt at all my lad. You are everything that the navy is looking for. I will mark your papers to this effect and you can take it as read that it's a life on the ocean waves for you!"

I was both moved and gratified by his sincerity and kindness and could hardly refrain from embracing him. Instead, I shook his hand warmly and walked away with a nautical roll, humming 'Rule Britannia'.

Three days later I received a rather terse letter telling me to report to the Royal Artillery Training Depot at Oswestry. They didn't mind when I arrived as long as it was between 3.30 and 4pm on Monday 4th September'.

**Basic Training:** (He spent two months at the Training Regiment, most of which was on 'square bashing' and in exercises with imaginary equipment)

'..... but the parade ground was rock solid under our stiff ammunition boots and we marched and countermarched, saluted to the right and to the left and in fact performed every drill movement in the manual. We did them to numbers and then in silence and then sometimes woke up doing them in our sleep. And all the while Sergeant Wall was at our heels. He insisted, persisted, coaxed and cajoled, often displeased with us but always incisive and restrained. Whilst other squad instructors were purple faced and rupturing their larynxes he gave his orders quietly and clearly and we learned to pick out his voice above the general cacophony of shouted commands. His 'About Turn' would bring us back from the far side of the square like homing pigeons.

To me the warm communal life of a barrack room was both novel and enjoyable. I made friendships that exist to this day and we all developed a strange understanding which enabled us to communicate by thought rather than speech, to share a joke by implication rather than words. The hut was a good place in which to be after a hard day's pounding away on the square in the drizzling rain. To take a hot shower and enjoy the ease of plimsolls on tired feet. Tea was the only meal that we did not have to march to and because some of the chaps skipped it in order to visit Oswestry there was always plenty to eat. Then back to the hut, the stove almost red hot with extra coal stolen from the dump, and a session of button burnishing and boot

boning. On Friday nights a few of the 'bloods' would be off to the pubs but most of us were too weary to wander further than the canteen. We lived in quiet communion, gradually losing our rough edges and acquiring a corporate identity, the squad being more important than the individual. We were becoming aware of our strengths and weaknesses.

Every evening without fail Sergeant Wall would spend a little time with us. He made no attempt to be 'one of the boys' but he gave quiet words of encouragement here and there and made sure that we had no major problems. We suffered from a particularly inept Gunnery Sergeant who instructed us on the mechanism of gun recoil systems. He had learned his lectures parrot fashion and delivered them at great speed, pointing to highly detailed diagrams which were too small for us to follow. Sergeant Wall would follow these lectures by drawing diagrams in chalk upon the scrubbed table top and patiently go over things step by step until he was sure that we all understood. We progressed so well that one day I was able to point out an error to the Gunnery Sergeant. We got the old bromide, "Just wanted to see if you were awake lad!" But the news of this reached Sergeant Wall who wasn't at all pleased. We soon learned that in the army three stripes always knows more than two striped; two striped always knows more than one stripe; and one stripe always knows more than a mere gunner, who knows B\*\*\*\*\* All!

..... so our time at the camp drew to a close. We were stones lighter and much fitter than we had ever been in our lives. True to Sergeant Wall's early predictions we were chosen as top squad and headed the passing-out parade. A hundred or so of us were told that we were being posted to a Yeomanry Regiment somewhere in the Midlands. I was quite happy as it looked as though our squad were going to keep together. We could hardly wait to ask Sergeant Wall what a Yeomanry Regiment was and it was the first and only time that we were to see him at a loss. "What's a Yeomanry Regiment?" he repeated in a broken voice. "A Yeomanry Regiment is made up of a lot of bloody hayseeds playing with horses. What they know about soldiering you could stuff up a cats' A\*\*\*! To think that all the work I've put in on you lads is wasted", and he walked away dejectedly.

We walked back to the hut to start packing our brand new kit. We were, most of us, the product of an urban environment and Sergeant Wall's talk about hayseeds and horses had left a chill in our hearts. "Never mind", said an optimist, "If they are that bad they will never send them off to war!"

### **We Join the Regiment:**

'..... until at last, in the gathering dusk, we arrived at Newark Station. At Sergeant Wall's entreaty we came stumbling, stiff legged, from the train; fell in, took up our dressing, stood at ease and stood easy. Nothing happened. We waited and waited. Sergeant Wall paced the platform and began to show signs of concern as he checked his movement orders again. We began to take up an air of permanence. There was a half hearted attempt to talk but this was quickly quelled by the punctilious sergeant. And then we heard it! Like the sound of a curlew on a distant moor, the whinnying tones of our first gentleman soldier. A tall, thin, drooped over sort of an officer came tottering along the platform like a distrait sand devil. To our absolute horror and to our sergeant's utter confusion the officer saluted first before we were called to attention. "Frightfully sorry old chap", he said. "Got sort of lorst you know".

It was the first evidence of something which we were to get to know very well in the months ahead. Removed from their native heath the younger officers displayed a distinct penchant for getting themselves lost on every possible occasion. In an excess of enthusiasm someone had removed all the signposts in the area. The theory was that an invading army, perhaps bent on putting Newark to the sword, would be delayed if they couldn't find it clearly signposted. It may or may not have foxed the Germans but it played havoc with our subalterns. Sergeant Wall's faith in the infallibility of the military hierarchy was being reduced to naught. He proceeded to hand over with indecent haste. "One Hundred and twenty other ranks, all present and correct, Sir!"

He handed over a packet containing our documents, got his salute in first, and was away up the platform with Bombardier Cobb at his heels. We felt abandoned and looked after the pair of them like puppies condemned to be left behind. As he reached the exit the sergeant looked back and shook his head in disbelief, but gave us half a wave. The Bombardier contented himself with a rude gesture of farewell.

We looked to our new mentor. He was visibly unhappy. Possibly for the first time he had a large body of military looking men under his command and he was overwhelmed. After a couple of tentative starts he roared, or rather he meant to roar, "Parade will move to the right. Right turn", but all this came out in an agonised high pitched squeak. There was some confusion as we all turned to our right and knocked our kitbags over. "Oh! Come on chaps. Pick up your things and follow me", he said. We straggled along behind him, hoping against hope that Sergeant Wall couldn't see us!

After a great deal of jumping on and off trucks and being recounted because there seemed to be one short, half of us were sent to Southwell (339 Battery) and the other half to Farnsfield (414 Battery) where we were placed in billets for the night. The following morning the Southwell

chaps were transferred to Farnsfield and the Farnsfield half were sent to Southwell after a great deal of list checking.'

**By Jack Nash**

**Extract EYA Journal 2004**