

Appendix 3

The experiences of earlier generations

Wartime brings out the best and worst in people. My grandparent's generation was to know first hand as men marched off between 1914 and 1918 to fight the 'war to end all wars.' Before The Great War—also known as the First World War or WW I—there had been other major conflicts, such as the Boer War, and territorial skirmishes within the British Empire. The First World War, however, changed the nature of warfare as new, horrific weapons—machine guns, poison gas, aeroplanes, tanks and submarines among them—exacted both military and civilian casualties in record numbers.

My family experienced both major theatres of war—foreign battlefield and the home front. Granddad Sleet spent much of his adolescence and early adulthood in the British Army. His decision to enlist was largely due to being brought up in an abusive household. Often left to his own devices, he was known to steal apples from market stalls in order to stave off hunger. At least a life in the Army guaranteed him shelter, clothing and food in return to fulfilling his duty to King and Country.

Before the First World War, he was posted to India at the zenith of the British Raj and based in the garrison towns and commercial centres of Poona, Meerut and Rawalpindi. The military presence in India brought Granddad face to face with warring factions such as the legendary Thuggees and the warrior hill tribes of the North West Frontier. Soon, however, came the call to duty on the European Western Front where the languor of trench warfare halted any means of advancement for both opponents.

The First World War

According to Granddad Sleet's medal card, he was enlisted in the 1st Northamptonshire Regiment: Private with the regimental number of 3/11171 and had been issued with the Mons Star (with clasp and roses) on November 12th, 1914. He was subsequently issued with the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Before he met my grandmother, he was a mounted soldier and kept a magnificent war-horse called 'Bob.' Apparently he appeared every inch the professional soldier and cut a remarkable figure on horseback, complete with a military bearing and fine mustachioed facial features. He and Grandma married on January 21st, 1917, at St. Peter's Church, Devonia Road, Islington. He was 26 and she was 19 years old.

Just like any young married couple caught up in the grip of war, there was the inescapable fear that the soldier groom might never return from the front. Only too often Grandma would see the telegram boy cycling along the neighbourhood streets delivering the bad news to unfortunate households. As part of her war effort duties, Grandma worked in the parcel post department of the GPO, and handled, in part, the pathetic packages addressed to German prisoners of war at such internment camps as Alexandra Palace.

Action in the First World War wasn't restricted to the fighting fronts. Now, with the technological advancements in aeronautical science, death and destruction was delivered right to England's front door, as her cities became prime targets for aerial bombardment from long-range bombers and Zeppelin airships. Significant damage was inflicted despite the countermeasures afforded by improved searchlights, anti-aircraft ordnance and fighter aircraft. However, some successes were made, and Grandma often told the story when she watched the Zeppelin that was shot down over the village of Cuffley near Potters Bar, Hertfordshire. The sight of the plunging, burning airship brought cheering masses out into the streets.

It was far from cheerful in the trenches, and although Granddad didn't talk a great deal of the horrors he saw, from time to time he did relate some of those experiences, as well as his adventures in India. Tales of extreme hardship brought upon by such unimaginable conditions as 'trench foot', living alongside heaps of corpses that were being preyed upon by rats the size of small dogs, and, of course, the ever present fear of bursting shells and enemy attack. "Over the top!" orders were obeyed slavishly by the flower of youth, who advanced across the short distance of devastated, pockmarked 'No Man's Land', only to be faced with barbed wire entanglements and the withering fire of German machine guns. If the attack succeeded, largely due to the sheer weight of numbers, vicious hand-to-hand fighting was inevitable in the maze of trenches and dugouts, where the confined quarters meant the full use of cold steel and hand grenades. Such was the fury where no quarter was given, any dugout containing the enemy was ruthlessly eliminated with grenades. Despite frantic cries of "Kamerad! ... Kamerad!", the British Tommy replied, "Here, share this amongst yourselves!"—promptly pulling the pin of his Mills bomb and lobbing the grenade into the interior of the shelter. Even outside the trenches, it was the law of the 'quick and the dead', as Granddad experienced when confronted by a German soldier after cornering him near a haystack, and his single bayonet thrust decided the German's fate. Granddad would laconically say, "It was either him or me." Later during the 'Big Push' of the Somme, Granddad received a bullet wound to his hand that meant being invalided home.

Men, who were classified as the 'walking wounded', appeared in the streets dressed in *Hospital Blues* as characterised by the blue colour of the garments. Some of the luckier patients were amputees, but there were also cases of multiple amputations, total blindness and acute psychiatric trauma (now known as post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD); many of which were incurable and could only lead to death under distressing circumstances. Among the nurses that tended these patients were several ladies from India. They occupied a fairly high caste and were known as Ayahs. Grandma was always taken with them and their colourful silk saris; referring to them as "handsome women."

Grandma's brother, Richard—always known as 'Uncle Dick'—also enlisted into the British Army and fought on the Western Front. However, his tour of duty was cut short when he was caught up in a poison gas attack. The extent of his injuries absolved him from further involvement on active service, and later in life he was often struck down by seizures that had terrifying results.

At first, the young married couple shared rooms in Grandma's father's house at No. 20 William Street (now Allingham Street) near Essex Road in Islington. This wasn't unusual, as most married sons or daughters lived with parents until they could afford to rent or buy a place of their own. It was a terraced house and quite big enough for the whole family. The basement had a large dining room and

1917. Marriage solemnized at *St Peter's Church* in the Parish of *Uxington* in the County of *Middlesex*

Column	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
463	Jan. 21 st 1917	George William Sleet	26	Bachelor	Soldier	Essex Road	Alfred Henry Sleet	Pensioner
		Winifred Victoria Harrington	19	Spinster	—	William Street	Richard Harrington	Composer

Married in the *Church of St. Peter* according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the *Established Church* or after *Canon* by me,
 This Marriage was solemnized between us, *George William Sleet* in the Presence of us, *Richard Harrington* *Julia Louisa Harrington* *William T. Phillips* *W. J. King* *Emily*

George W. Sleet and Winifred V. Harrington Marriage Certificate, January 21, 1917.

Name	Corps	Rank	Regt. No.
SLEET, George W.	4 Northn. R.	Pte.	3/11171
Medal	Roll	Page	Remarks
VICTORY	K/1101B/4	3116	
BRITISH	do		
14 STAR	K/11/4	41	delay 3396.
Clasp erased. V. 1688, 5 of 23.1.20.			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein 12. 11. 14			

K 1200.

Granddad George W. Sleet, Medal Card.



Granddad and Grandma Sleet in Later Years.



Grandma Sleet (Lower Right), Aunt Win (Upper Right) and other Sleet Family Members – Pre-1939.



Bottom Avenue, Liverpool Buildings, pre-1939.



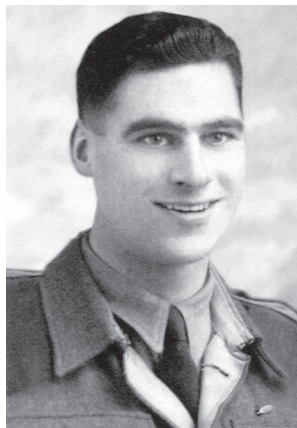
Liverpool Buildings, George VI Coronation, 1937.



Uncle George in Naval Uniform on the Roof of Liverpool Buildings when on Leave from Duty in the Second World War.



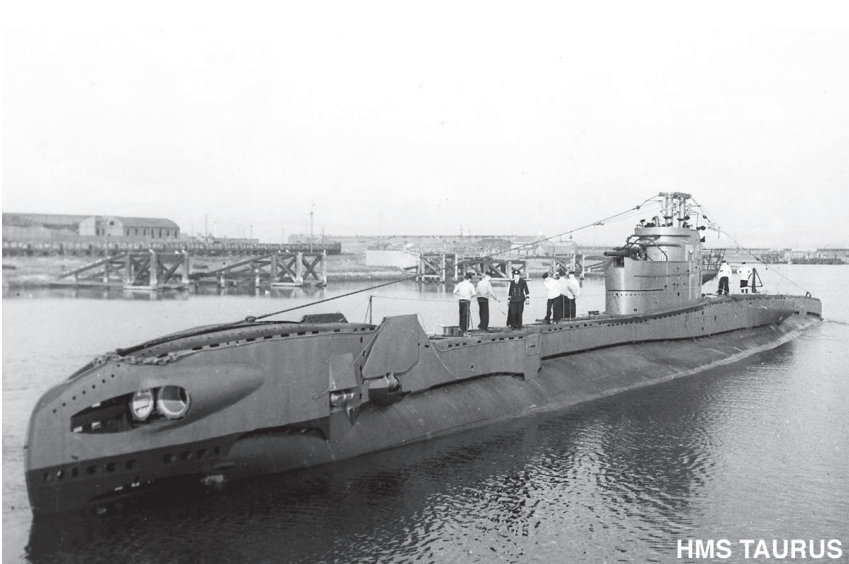
Mum Dressed in the Uniform of the Women's Land Army during the Second World War.



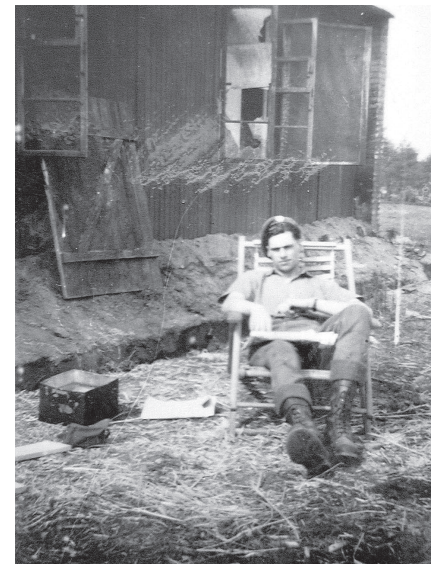
Dad Dressed in the Uniform of the R.A.F. Regiment and Showing his oak leaf MID Insignia.



Uncle Keith Dressed in the Uniform of the Parachute Regiment before the Battle of Arnhem.



H.M.S. Taurus, Uncle George's Submarine, 1943.



Dad at Nijmegen, Holland, 1944.

a small bedroom where Uncle Dick slept, and a kitchen and scullery. My grandparents had the three ground floor rooms and my great-grandparents had the first floor, which had the large parlour, one bedroom and a study.

Around 1927, my grandparents and their three children decided to move into different accommodation, as the house was becoming crowded. They eventually rented a top floor flat in Liverpool Buildings, Highbury Station Road. The buildings were substantially built and quite nice. The ground floor flats had iron railings—later to be removed to supply the war effort in WW II—and bushes, and each block opened out onto a flat roof. There were two large avenues with London plane trees around which were wooden seats. A caretaker swept the roofs and avenues, and locked the main gates after dark. It was said that the flats were rented primarily to tenants with a guaranteed income. Since Granddad was working for the General Post Office he may have been given preferential treatment.

The Second World War

The Second World War (WW II) had far more reaching effects on my family. It was during the war that my parents met, courted and married. It is at this point that I can also document stories applicable on both sides of my ancestry.

With the ominous signs of war on the horizon, London, in common with other major centres, was mobilised with what was to be known as Civil Defence, and the Air Raid Precaution (ARP) was organised to provide protection for the general population. Rationing came into being, the evacuation of schoolchildren started and air raid shelters were constructed. It was realised early that aerial bombardment on civilian centres would be significant. Examples, such as the air raids on the town of Guernica by the German Luftwaffe during the Spanish Civil War, indicated the degree of devastation. Of prime concern was fighting fires, and the London Fire Brigade (LFB) was augmented with another organisation, the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS). The London ‘Blitz’ air raids were to test the fire fighting system to its stretching point.

By the time war was declared only my grandparents and their two daughters—my mother and her elder sister, Aunt Win—were living in the Liverpool Buildings flat. Before the war, their son, Uncle George, had left school and enlisted in the Royal Navy. It wasn’t long before he saw active service on the high seas with the hunt for the German pocket battleship, *Graf Spee*. Sooner or later, everyone in the family became involved in the war. Even Uncle Dick, despite his poor health, assisted as a member of the ARP, and was stationed at Islington Green. Grandma remarked to me that, “... He saw some terrible sights (of bombed houses and dead civilians).”

Aunt Win’s adventurous spirit came to the fore when serving in the AFS. Among the various duties she performed were: dispatcher and canteen van auxiliary. The AFS consisted of a mixed male and female group, but all were required to face the hazards of firefighting—even under the threat of bombing. However, the skill and dedication of the fire service personnel, particularly during the height of the London ‘Blitz’, won the affections of the general public, who maintained their morale with cheers and waves, even though they appeared dirty and weary after fighting the ferocious and stubborn warehouse fires at the docks.

She was moved around from station to station, and it was at one of the nearest to home, Upper Street, that she was promoted to Leading Firewoman as signified by a red stripe sewn on her uniform's epaulettes. This meant more responsibility; one of which was making out rosters for the firewomen. The uniforms were then changed from high neck tunics and peaked round caps, to open neck serge jackets and forage caps like the airmen wore. The brigade's name was changed and called the NFS—National Fire Service—instead of AFS. Later, when transferred to another station, she took on the role as a Physical Training instructor.

Not all the bombs were falling on the docks, and incendiaries were dropping everywhere. They were cylinders about two foot (0.6 m) long and six inches (15 cm) round. Some fell on the roof of the well known department store, T.R. Roberts, in Upper Street opposite Compton Terrace. Despite the efforts of the firewatchers, the fires took hold, and there were frantic calls for a trailer pump and hose, But every vehicle was out at the docks, and the store had to burn to the ground like so many others.

Everyone in the family was having narrow escapes. The radio newscasts had mentioned that Uncle George's ship, *H.M.S. York*, had been torpedoed and run aground in Suda Bay, Crete, where the crew had scuttled it and got ashore to hide in the caves. Before joining the Mediterranean fleet, his ship and sister ship, *H.M.S. Exeter*, had chased the German pocket battleship *Graf Spee* to the Uruguayan port city of Montevideo. There, at the estuary of the *Río de la Plata* (River Plate), he had seen the *Graf Spee* scuttled by her crew. Now in Crete, they were holed up and waiting to be rescued. The Germans had invaded Crete and were trying to find the source of the radio messages Uncle George was sending to Alexandria. As they were deep in caves, bombing was useless, and eventually the crew was rescued by the destroyer *H.M.S. Hero* and taken to Alexandria where Uncle George was put on the battleship *H.M.S. Queen Elizabeth*. He was Mentioned in Dispatches (MID) for his part in the rescue, so my grandparents were very proud of him.

Later, Uncle George sent a letter from Alexandria to say he was now serving on *H.M.S. Havoc* and protecting the Mediterranean convoys. Then there was word that *H.M.S. Havoc* had been sunk and the survivors had managed to get ashore at Tunisia, where the Arabs had turned them over to the Vichy-French army who sided with the Nazis. Grandma was to get a censored postcard later from a POW camp in Laghouat in Algeria, so the news was confirmed.

As the North Africa campaign wore on, Uncle George was liberated from the POW camp by the invading English and American troops, and made his way home. When he finally arrived, the family was shocked at how thin he was. His shin bones stuck out on his legs, and he had lost a lot of teeth through bad food and lack of it. He said everything was soaked in olive oil and solid food was rare, hence the bad teeth. He also had sand sores where they had to sleep and sit on the desert sand as no chairs or beds were available. The POWs were treated abominably, but he did say that they all felt a lot better after they had gone down to the Arab villages and given the inhabitants a beating up for their part in the treatment they received. Apparently any escape from the camp was doomed, because the Arabs caught the escapees and returned them to the Germans. He was home on leave for sometime, and the family did its best to make it enjoyable for him. He wouldn't go into the shelters at night, though, but the air raids had lessened considerably anyway. Nevertheless, he remarked that the civilian population had no choice but to endure the bombardments, but at sea at least they could retaliate with a few gunshots of their own.

Uncle George then wrote to say he had been posted to MTBs (motor torpedo boats) at Ramsgate. These small boats were very speedy, and the wireless operator's room was padded all round, as the operator was thrown from side to side at full speed. They were used to torpedo a ship and get away quickly. The Germans had a similar craft called an E-boat; which they also used to harass shipping in the Channel.

He wasn't on them long, because the Germans used long range guns to shell the English South Coast, and one day they hit some MTBs in the harbour; Uncle George's boat among them, although the crews were ashore at the time. The family was relieved, because life expectancy of MTB crews was like the rear gunners in the Air Force—very short. He then applied for submarine work, which the family considered was even worse. His training was in Scotland, and being in winter, he had a rough time all round, both at sea and in lodgings.

He was assigned to a submarine and on his way to the Japanese war in the Pacific. He had trained for Radar operations and was now a Chief Petty Officer. Granddad must have had many thoughts about what might have been had Uncle George not left school and gone into the Royal Navy, but he was certainly doing the family proud. He seemed to sail through exams and tests so easily, probably because it was a career he loved.

News of Uncle George appeared quite unexpectedly—in the centre pages a weekly magazine called the *Picture Post*. The family knew he was on *H.M.S. Tapir* and then on *H.M.S. Taurus*, both part of the 4th Flotilla based in Sydney, Australia. *H.M.S. Tapir* had taken part in a big battle in the Coral Sea where the Japanese lost many of their ships. On 13th November 1943, *H.M.S. Taurus*, under the command of Lt. Cdr. M.R.G. Wingfield, torpedoed and sank the Japanese submarine *I34* on the surface in the Malacca Strait. The *I34* was escorted by a submarine chaser, which at once closed in to attack. The *Taurus*, diving deep, hit the bottom and her bows became stuck in the soft mud. The submarine chaser dropped a pattern of depth charges round her, the explosions of which shook her bows free. After bouncing on the bottom once or twice, the *Taurus* came up to periscope depth for a look at her enemy. Wingfield decided to surface and engage her with his gun as she was too small to be worth a torpedo. He was put down again by a Japanese aircraft, which had been called to the scene, but not before he had severely damaged the submarine chaser.

Grandma was quite used to the war now and didn't mind my mother leaving her alone in the flat. Granddad was home at dawn and although he slept most of the day, he was company for Grandma. At nights she was with my Great-grandmother. Great-Aunt Constance (Connie) Rainbird, who lived with my Great-grandmother, had been evacuated from London with her two children, Roy and Patricia.

Mum had now joined the Women's Land Army. She didn't fancy joining an armed service and preferred farm work. However, she said she was not too happy about her job, as she had been put in the Timber Corps and sent to the wilds of Scotland in the winter. She never could stand the cold. Apparently she had joined the Land Army late, and all the farm jobs had been snapped up.

After some months things were no better. She had been shocked enough to hear she was in the Timber Corps, and after a long gruelling journey to Scotland, found that her billet was a couple of Nissen huts in the

middle of a forest. It was bitterly cold, and the bunks near the centre stove had all been grabbed first by earlier arrivals. Her bunk was near the door, and the snow and wind blew in underneath it.

The officer in charge was a giant of a woman with no sense of humour whatsoever. Mum said she was more like a warder in a prison. On the first day, they were taken through the forest by a male instructor and told how trees for felling were chosen. The more the morning dragged on, the less Mum liked it. At midday they made a log fire and sat round it for lunch that consisted of half a stale pork pie and bread and margarine. The tea, flavoured with smoke, went down well because it was hot.

When they got back to the huts, they were too tired to even talk. They had to cook supper, all the pots and pans had to be washed before bedtime, and the ‘Warder’ turned all the lights out at ten o’clock.

One morning, Mum got up and packed her kitbag and belongings. She had asked her parents to send some money earlier, and with this she got transport to the village and railway station. The ‘Warder’ threatened her with punishment at the other end in London, but it didn’t stop her. She reported to the London office, told them of the conditions at the camp, and that she was going to report it to higher authorities. Also that she was resigning from the Women’s Land Army. Mum then went back to her part-time job in Clerkenwell and no more was heard about it.

Late in the Second World War after the Allied invasion of Normandy, England was, once again, subjected to aerial bombardment from the Germans. This time, however, the attacks were not from enemy aircraft, but by the *Vergeltungswaffen*—or revenge weapons—namely the V1 flying bomb, also known as the ‘doodlebug’ or ‘buzzbomb’, and the V2 supersonic ballistic missile.

Several missiles hit my part of the borough, and brought much devastation and loss of life. V1s landed at Highbury Corner, Grosvenor Road and Florence Street. V2s came down at Palmer Place and McKenzie Road. Grandma described the V1 explosion at Highbury Corner on many occasions. She was working in the scullery when the flying bomb struck. The blast shattered all the windows in the block of flats and blew off the bolt on her front door. As she looked out the front room window, people in various states of injury and shock were making their way along Highbury Station Road. One man in particular, who was bleeding profusely from glass shard wounds to his neck, insisted in getting home to see if his family was all right. Others were less fortunate. Len, the local newsagent, comforted a man, who had lost both legs caused by the blast, until the victim succumbed to his injuries. The entire area was ravaged, and following are various reports and statistics.

The flying bomb struck during lunch hour (12:46 p.m.) on June 27th 1944. 26 people lost their lives, 84 were seriously injured and 71 slightly injured.

According to the Civil Defence Air Raid Damage Report, the flying bomb impacted at the apex of the Compton Terrace Gardens, Upper Street and St. Paul’s Road. Damage was listed as: Compton Terrace: Demolished No. 34 & 35. Partly demolished No 33. Badly damaged Nos 32 & 37. Surface shelter FK1 situated in Green opposite No 35, roof collapsed. St. Paul’s Road: Partly demolished even Nos 324, 326 &



Remains of T.R. Roberts Ltd., Upper Street, 1940s.



Remains of the Westminster Bank, Highbury Corner, 1950s.



Extent of VI Blast Damage at Highbury Corner, June 27, 1944.



Commemorative Plaque, 1970s.

328. Seriously damaged even Nos 310-322 inclusive. Holloway Road: Partly demolished Nos 1 & 3. Seriously damaged Highbury Station LMS Railway and Nos 5 & 7. Upper Street: Demolished Nos 253, 255 & 257. Partly demolished Nos 251 & 259. Seriously damaged Nos 243, 245, 247 & 249.

Both Mum and Aunt Win had met servicemen and their relationships were becoming serious. My future father was in the R.A.F. Regiment, and after a while, he heard he was going over to France which the Allied Forces had invaded, so he and Mum got engaged and arranged to be married.

Aunt Win's steady beau, Sergeant Keith Banwell, was going back on duty after recuperating from earlier wounds, so both couples decided to have a double wedding on March 4th, 1944. Keith got a special licence at Westminster, and he and Aunt Win were married in the St. Mary Magdalene Chapel of Ease in Holloway Road, where my father was the best man. Mum and Dad had married in the Registry Office in Liverpool Road beforehand, and Keith was their best man. Grandma had managed to make a cake with practically a month's rations, and friends were invited to an impromptu home reception.

Aunt Win had managed to get a top flat in Liverpool Buildings just two blocks away from my grandparents, and Mum had located some ground floor rooms in a house in Highbury New Park. They were all delighted to start married life in reasonable accommodation.

Uncle Keith seemed to have been born for the military, and at 19, he volunteered for the Coldstream Guards, but soon afterwards moved to the 1st Battalion, the Royal Hampshire Regiment, then facing widespread unrest on the North West Frontier of India. The unit went to Palestine in 1938 and Egypt in 1939, where men from the French Foreign Legion joined it. Always outstandingly fit, Uncle Keith proved more than a match for them as their temporary Physical Training instructor.

He volunteered for special service and joined 52 (Middle East) Commando; but a shortage of facilities for combined operations led him to move on to the highly adventurous Long Range Desert Group, which worked behind enemy lines alongside the SAS. He was captured during a raid on Tobruk in 1942, but stole a German truck with a friend and escaped back to British lines.

He was taken prisoner again near Heraklion during a raid on German-held Crete and was guarded by Max Schmeling, the world heavyweight boxing champion of the early 1930s, who was serving in the German army. Even so, Uncle Keith managed to escape again with friends, this time by boat. The craft ran out of fuel, and drifted ashore in North Africa after nine days.

Exposure and sunstroke put him in hospital for three months. It was at this point that his likeness to general Sir Bernard Montgomery was noticed, and he was summoned to Cairo by Army Intelligence. The likeness was convincing, but only when seated, as he was rather taller than the diminutive future field marshal. He served as the 8th Army commander's double in North Africa to confuse enemy intelligence, but he complained that he found sitting in staff cars boring and was successfully transferred to the Parachute Regiment.

He soon joined the 10th Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, and in September, 1944, took part in the débâcle at Arnhem. Six of the 15 men in his Dakota were killed by anti-aircraft fire before they could jump. Once on the ground he sounded a hunting horn to summon his men. At the end of the battle he was wounded, and captured for a third time. On his way to a POW camp in Germany he managed to leap off the train and offered his services to the Dutch Resistance as a weapons instructor under the codename "Tex". Captured yet again after a raid, he was arrested as having breached the Geneva Conventions by joining the Resistance and not wearing a uniform. He was court-martialled and sentenced to death.

When he refused to betray his Dutch comrades to the Gestapo, he was paraded in front of a firing squad. The next day he was brought out again, only to be subjected to a barrage of blanks. Preserving both his sanity and his silence, he was sent to the notorious Auschwitz concentration camp, confined in a 6-foot square cage and starved to half his normal weight. Uncle Keith hung on until the Red Army liberated the camp and insisted on rejoining the 11th Battalion of the Parachute Regiment as soon as he was fit; returning to the 10th Battalion after it was reconstituted.

My father's military exploits occurred after the D-day invasion, and included duties as a dispatch rider and action as a paratrooper in the Normandy and Low Countries Campaign. Dad excelled in one front line engagement with the enemy that earned him a Mention in Dispatches (MID) citation, and the privilege to include the oak leaf cluster on his medals ribbon. Both local Fareham, Hampshire (where Dad lived before joining up), and Islington, London, newsmedia reported his escapade as follows:

From the local press in Hampshire:

For ten days, men of the R.A.F. Regiment, replacing crack infantrymen, went into action on both sides of the German frontier in a sector of the Second Army front line.

The first squadron dropped five tons of bombs on enemy positions, and two volunteer snipers, Peter John Page, 174, West Street, Fareham, and L. Cartledge, Stoke-on-Trent, wiped out seven of Hitler's front line fighters.

Peter Page has been in the R.A.F. four years and he volunteered for the R.A.F. Regiment when it was formed. He has been "over there" since D-day as a dispatch rider. His wife says he was too modest to mention his escapade, saying only that he had been on a "job". He was a projector operator at the Savoy cinema, Fareham, before he joined up. His sister is Marion Crawford, the young Fareham dancer, now with E.N.S.A.

From the *Journal*, Islington:

A 21-year-old Highbury sniper in the R.A.F. Regiment wiped out seven of Hitler's front-line fighters on a spell of duty with his corporal.

L.A.C. Peter Page of Highbury New Park had been "browned-off" with inactivity around his aerodrome in Belgium. Together with half a dozen of his pals in the R.A.F. Regiment, he volunteered to lend a hand to the Army in the front lines.

Peter and his corporal were put in a position immediately on the German frontier. They and the other R.A.F. boys relieved a very famous infantry regiment in an important sector. They discharged their unfamiliar duties most creditably and were warmly congratulated by the Army officers when they handed over once more to the infantry.

Peter Page has been in the R.A.F. for almost four years. He was originally a cadet for the air crews, but volunteered for the R.A.F. Regiment as soon as it was formed.

His 19-year-old Islington-born wife told the "Journal" that Peter had been too modest to tell her of his achievements and had simply said that he had been on a "job" for seven days. His last letter home told her that he was well but tired.



The war had now turned in our favour, and the Allied Forces were sweeping across into Germany. It wouldn't be long before Uncle Keith was freed from Auschwitz, and Mum had received a letter from Dad, now in Europe, where his unit was guarding airfields. He said they had come upon one of the Jewish death camps and he was horrified, but couldn't say much in letters, which were heavily censored.

Everyone thought how lucky our family was in wartime. Not one member of the family was lost although all had had narrow escapes. They had all celebrated on V.E. Day, and the victory over Japan marked the end of the Second World War.

After the Second World War – End of a generation

After the Second World War, Liverpool Buildings had completely changed, and not for the better. With the iron railings removed for the war effort, the privet hedges dying a dusty death, and the seats and London plane trees in the avenues long chopped up for firewood because of the coal shortage, everywhere looked down at heel. The outside paint was faded and peeling from six years of neglect. Some families had moved to safer areas, and the empty flats had been taken over by bombed out families from the poor areas of London's East End, which further impoverished the buildings.

Great-Aunt Connie had moved from Cambridge to Watford, and was much happier; and Grandma had managed to get Uncle Dick and Great-grandma a flat nearby. Great-grandma was getting old now and needed help sometimes, so it was a sensible move.

Uncle George wrote to say that after going on sea searches for any Japanese presence on scattered islands, he was back in Sydney and was going to live in Australia when he left the Royal Navy. It was sad news for Grandma, who had hardly seen him since he joined the Navy, but as Mum was now expecting a baby, as also was Aunt Win, she had plenty to look forward to.

Aunt Win and Uncle Keith moved to Potters Bar, Hertfordshire in 1948 where they raised a family of three: cousins Linda Dawn, Avril Eileen (died December 30th , 2007) and Ian Keith (died October 12th, 2011). Later the marriage failed, and Keith moved away leaving Aunt Win to bring up the children. Uncle Keith died on July 25th, 1999, and his ashes were interred at the Oosterbeek Military Cemetery near Arnhem, Holland, his last battleground.

Great-grandma, who had been ill for sometime, died and the family was very sad to lose her. She had lived through two world wars, a depression and a general strike, so life had not been too pleasant for her.

Then Granddad died on August 21st, 1961. He also had had a hard life. The abused childhood, his Army service in India and the four years in the trenches of the First World War, and then years of night work, and carrying his bicycle up and down all those stairs had worn him down. He had looked forward to getting a little place with a garden when he retired, but it wasn't to be; he died aged 72 years.

Uncle Dick continued living alone in his second floor flat, but his health, too, was failing—a combination of previous ailments, malnutrition (even though Grandma visited him every day with food) and a liking for beer. He passed away in 1975 at age around 79 years, and was buried with little ceremony in a pauper's grave.

Mum and Dad moved to Hatfield, Hertfordshire, and a telephone was connected for Grandma so that her daughters could keep in touch everyday. They visited her often, but Grandma wouldn't come to live in Hertfordshire: her London was her life and she was always ready to get back after visiting. In the 1970s when Liverpool Buildings were going to be demolished (they had gone downhill and were shabby and neglected, so it was a good thing), Grandma was given a little flat in Upper Caldly Walk, Canonbury, opposite the New River. The riverside banks were planted with rose bushes and shrubs and there were even goldfish in the river. It had all been given a facelift, and Granddad would have loved it.

Uncle George visited from Australia, but when he went back, Grandma seemed to go downhill in health. Aunt Win was with her on Good Friday, but went back to work on Saturday. During the night of March 26th, 1978, Easter Sunday, Grandma died in the hospital where she had been taken. She was 80 years old, and up to then she had been full of energy; even decorating her own flat. It was a complete shock to the family, and for years they all missed her company as she was quite a character. Thus ended my grandparents generation on Mum's side of the family.

