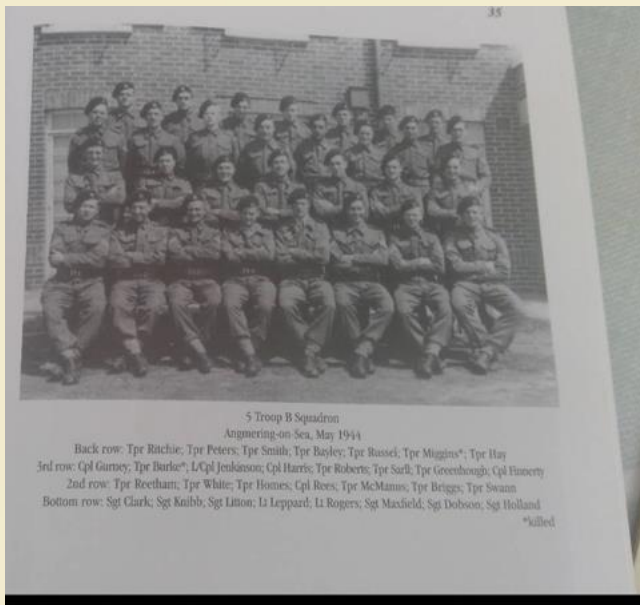


Behind enemy lines

From Charlie Bennett 6H, Annabelle Bennett 4K & Madeleine Bennett 3E Great Grandfather's War stories about Dunkirk and The D -Day Landings

Written by Charlie Bennett 6H



My Great Grandfather, Lieutenant William Rogers, was sent to France with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in the autumn of 1939 after war was declared with Germany. Since he had served as a regular infantry man in the Coldstream Guards in the early 1930's, ending up as a sergeant in command of a machine gun squad, he retained that rank when he joined the BEF, but because in civilian life he was a policeman, he was assigned to a company of military police in France. To show how well equipped and prepared the BEF was, the company of 120 military policemen only had one weapon amongst all of them, the Captain's revolver with only enough ammunition to reload once! Not much use against a Panzer tank! Thus, when the phoney war became a shooting war in May 1940, his main task was trying to direct the fleeing troops and traffic towards the coast in the hope that they would be able to salvage some of the army via the channel ports.

He spoke to my Grandfather of waiting in the dunes at Dunkirk and leaping into a fox hole every time you heard the sound of a Stuka dive bomber as it dove towards a target before releasing its bomb. He said that this was a frightening experience, not knowing if your location was the pilots target. Though my Great Grandfather couldn't swim, he managed with others to wade out to one of the small boats that

ferried him to a destroyer and was fortunate enough to get back to Britain, otherwise, perhaps I wouldn't be here today. I know that he got back to the UK on the night of the 3rd of June and then made his way to London where his fiancée lived and she decided that Dunkirk had been too close a call and promptly got a special licence from the registrar and they were married on the 11th of June 1940, a small personal consolation during a very worrying period for the population of the British Isles.

This is what my Great Grandfather said regarding his war experiences after Dunkirk. At the beginning of 1943, under a reorganisation of the Army in preparation for taking the infantry war back to continental Europe, he was a Lieutenant in the newly formed 15th Scottish Reconnaissance Regiment. The Reconnaissance's task was to scout ahead of the main body of the army, to look and listen and to report back, so that the main body could be forearmed and prepared, by being forewarned.

He finally went back to France during the D day landings at the end of June 1944 and from that point on, the Regiment was involved in the breakout from Normandy and crossing the Seine, through Flanders, Holland and across the Rhine and up through Germany and crossing the Elbe to the Baltic.

He talked about the scout and armoured cars that they were equipped with, along with tracked Bren gun carriers – very useful in the snow and ice and how one type of armoured car could go as fast backwards as forwards, which probably saved his life on one occasion. His troop were scouting ahead down a country lane and as they rounded a bend, they came across a Panzer tank about 100 yards away, sitting on a small crossroads. My Great Grandfather was in the turret of the car and as it reversed back around the bend, the tank fired its main gun and the shell exploded against the non-essential equipment (pots and pans etc) that was strapped to the front of the armoured car. The explosion knocked him out, leaving him deaf for a while and though he didn't suffer any serious injuries, he did suffer from tinnitus (a whistling / ringing in the ear) for the rest of his life, which must have been very irritating. On another occasion the troop had formed a harbour for the night, and he was talking with a trooper from London who was complaining about London policemen, as my father was asking him to guess what his occupation had been before the war, there was a shout of incoming, everybody dived for cover, but after



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the shell had exploded, he got up to find that his colleague had his legs blown off and was dying. He said that whilst his experience of working with American troops was that their outer defences were often penetrated by Wehrmacht patrols and booby trapped, anyone who thought that they couldn't fight should have seen the remnants of the 82nd Airborne Division at the bridge at Nijmegen, when they were relieved by the British armoured divisions he also said that not long after that, when crossing into Germany, they had come across a small concentration camp, it was only when reading the history of the regiment that we realised that this was part of the Belsen concentration camp.