

# Bathgate Remembers



# THANK YOU



TO ALL WHO HAVE SERVED AND ARE SERVING  
IN HER MAJESTY'S

# ROYAL NAVY

IN DEFENCE OF THESE ISLES, PAST,  
PRESENT AND FUTURE

# Introduction

This brochure was written primarily in response to a request made to Community and Parish Councils throughout the country to commemorate the official declaration of peace in Europe on the 8th of May in 1945. (The War in the Far East against the Empire of Japan was to continue for several more weeks which would come to a dreadful climax with the detonation of two atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the 6th and 9th of August 1945 respectively. These dates which traditionally mark the beginning of the so-called 'Atomic Age' also heralded the official end of the Second War on the 2nd of September, 1945).

Since this request was only made to Community Councils in Scotland, a small group from Bathgate Community Council accordingly met up at the Partnership Centre to discuss the nature of such a commemoration/celebration. One of the early decisions we took was that we should try and stir up some outside support. The initial response was very positive – we had representatives from the local branch of the British Legion, Enterprising Bathgate, the Ancre Somme Association Scotland Charity as well as interest and support from Bathgate High

Church, West Lothian Council and all of the town's councillors. Our first meeting was held in September/October last year and became fortnightly after Christmas. Various suggestions were made and discussed until by the end of February, our preparations were making good progress. In short there was to be a whole series of events that were to take place over that weekend beginning the 8th of May. Then Covid-19 struck . . . as a result of which and the ensuing restrictions on movement of people ensured that none of the events that we had spent months talking about and arranging – with the exception of this booklet which you now hold in your hands – could now take place.

With its principal emphasis on the town of Bathgate this booklet cannot begin to consider WWII in any more meaningful way than briefly to bring to light some of the events and stories of the War as evidenced by the people of Bathgate – a story which I believe deserves to be better known since this small town of ours with a wartime population of only some 11,000 people contributed more than its fair share in the nation's fight against the horror of Nazism. Emphasising the nature of what became known later as the

'People's War' we have looked at how this view was captured by using a few of the newspaper reports of some of the men and women who fought in the War both overseas and on the Home Front.

Since the emphasis is on the everyday I have concentrated my focus on the local press as the primary source thereby allowing the soldiers, sailors, POWs and civilians to speak for themselves. For Bathgate this has meant looking through back issues of the *West Lothian Courier* as well as several local history publications such as those published by the West Lothian History and Amenity Society and the then Council's own local historian, Sybil Cavanagh. In short these are the actual words and comments of the men and women themselves and portray their feelings and emotions at a certain period in time. I have only added some background material to provide some sort of context. In short, I hope that this small booklet will be of some value and use in restoring a sense of pride in Bathgate and of the many ordinary decent men and women from our town who came up to the mark at one of our nation's darkest hours.

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# Bathgate Bairn – Sir George Steven Harvie-Watt

*It was peace at last. It came as something of an anticlimax. Pandemonium and disorder broke out at No.10. It was like a bear garden, not that I've ever seen one but it was what I imagine one would look like.*

*On 8th May the PM made his historic broadcast from the Cabinet Room. All the staff crowded in the nearby rooms and on the stairs and lobbies. I'd never seen such excitement. Victory celebrations were now the order of the day. There were amazing crowds in the streets of London.*

*With an escort of mounted police I then drove with the Prime Minister in an open car to the House of Commons through enthusiastic cheering masses. The only open car available was a 14hp Wolseley as used by the police. Two of the detectives in the entourage stood on the running boards, one on either side. Everybody wanted to touch the PM, and at different places en route a few people tried to jump in the car to pat his back. Naturally we had to keep them off. Nearing Palace Yard a man tried to jump in the car and he landed on my hand and broke a finger. I felt no pain at the time. There was too much excitement. But for the mounted police, we would never have got through into Palace Yard and the Members' Entrance to the House of Commons. The exhilaration was terrific . . ."*  
(*'Most of my life'* by G.S. Harvie-Watt, p.193)

This excerpt is taken from the book by George Steven Harvie-Watt who is the 'I' referred to in this extract taken from his autobiography, *'Most of my life . . .'*, sitting in the car next to Winston Churchill himself as they drive towards the House of Commons to receive the plaudits of fellow MPs now that the War in Europe has officially come to an end. So, who was George Harvie-Watt and what had earned him this place in one of the most significant

moments in our nation's history?

George Steven Harvie-Watt was born in Bathgate on the 19th of December 1903. His father being one of the co-founders of the 'Atlas Steel Foundry' in Armadale. At the age of five, he was sent off to be educated at the Bathgate Academy in Marjoribanks Street where he remained until 1916. He then attended school in Edinburgh at George Watson's College which he left in July 1920. It was whilst at Watson's that he indulged his 'hobby' of soldiering, a hobby which was to see him, eventually, be made a brigadier (in the Territorial Army in 1941). After Watson's, he then spent a couple of years working at various jobs in his father's Foundry in Armadale which he found 'boring'. However, in spite of this boredom, in 1922, he went to study engineering at the Royal Technical College (now, Strathclyde University) and then Glasgow University. Unfortunately, however, he found his studies there even more boring than his 'apprenticeship' in the steel mill so in 1924 he opted to do an Arts degree instead without telling either of his parents! For he had by then decided to go into law so having spent a 'bridging' year at Edinburgh University where English law was taught he then enrolled at the Inner Temple to read for the English Bar and, in 1930, he became a barrister and opted to practise in Yorkshire.

His political interests which had been nurtured whilst at University in Glasgow coupled with his family background which was staunchly Unionist should not cause us any surprise to learn that when the opportunity presented itself, George Harvie-Watt presented himself as the Conservative and Unionist candidate for the Keighley seat in

Yorkshire in 1931. He actually won this seat in 1931 with a majority of nearly 6,000 but as a result of Government fiscal policy which resulted in another General Election being called, he lost it in 1935. However, he was soon adopted as the Conservative candidate for Richmond in Surrey which he won in 1937 and retained until 1959 when he left politics for good.

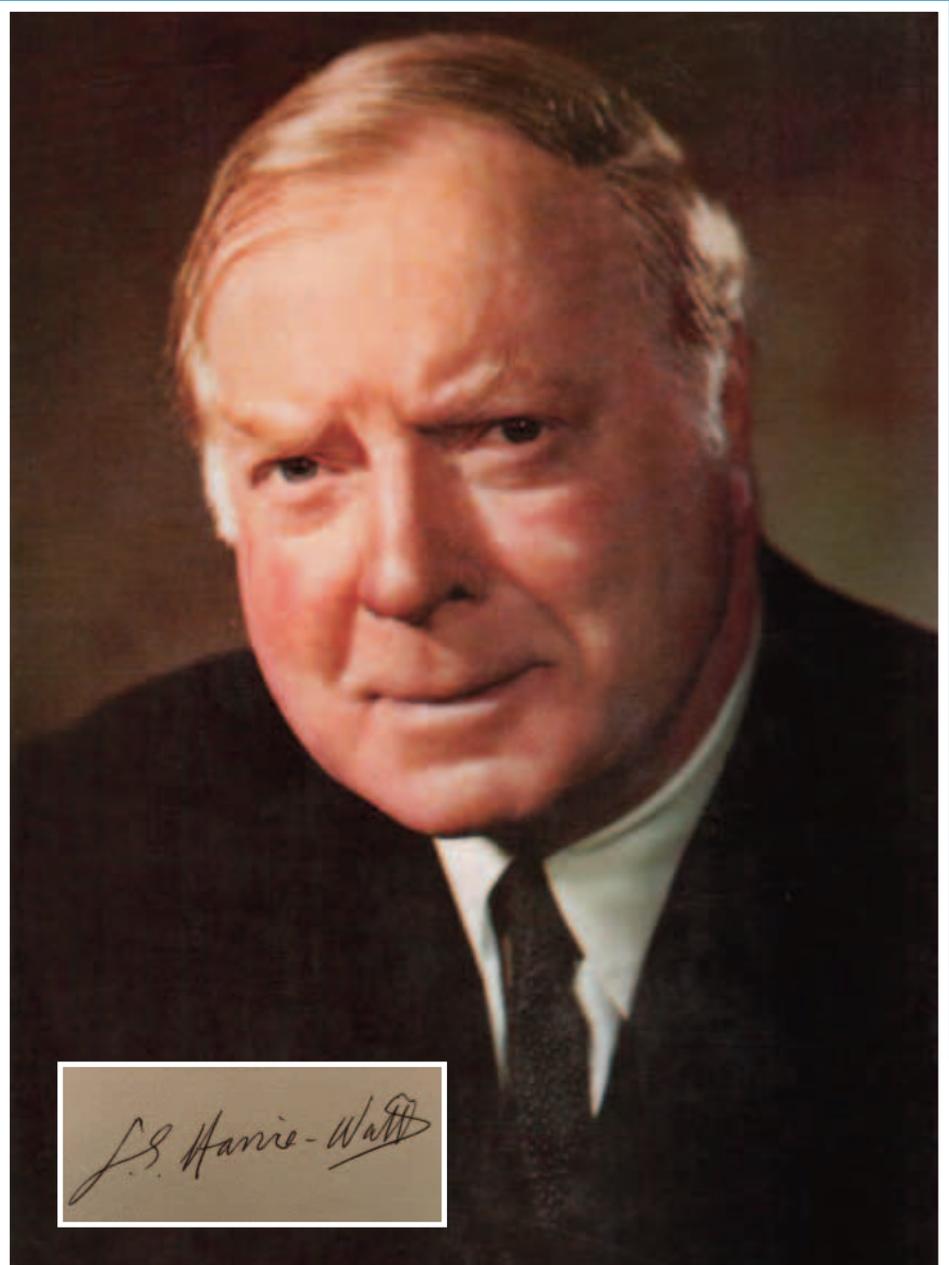
It is whilst he is MP for Richmond that he attracts the attention of Winston Churchill since between 1938-1940, Mr. Watt had acted as a Government Whip and as a PPS at the Board of Trade. The story of how Churchill came to appoint Harvie-Watt as his PPS can be found in the relevant chapter of his autobiography, (*'Most of my life'*) suffice to say here that there was an interview of sorts and on the morning of the 22nd July, 1941, Harvie-Watt walked into the House of Commons with Winston Churchill.

He was Churchill's PPS from 1941-1945 and ensured that Churchill was kept fully briefed on all Parliamentary business during the years of the then Coalition Government during the War and, on occasion, even acted as his personal confidant whilst continuing to discharge his duties as the MP for Richmond. During the War years, he had meetings with the likes of Eisenhower, de Gaulle, Pilsudski, King Alexander of Yugoslavia as well as the Premiers of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, to name but a very few, in addition with his day-to-day dealings with the major UK politicians of that era, such as Anthony Eden, Neville Chamberlain, Stanley Baldwin, for instance. Nor was Winston Churchill himself an easy character to deal with as Harvie-Watt makes

clear on occasions in his book! All the while, Harvie-Watt's advice was sought on a whole range of matters and personalities. Thus, he could not understand, for instance, why several high ranking American officers were so concerned with some of their negro troops fraternising with British women nor that anything was being done by the British to stop this. He could not understand why this was an issue in the first nor that anything could be done to prevent it as such. Again, Churchill wanted to take some retaliatory action against German POWs after it was discovered that some British troops who had been taken prisoner were being manacled. Harvie-Watt said that no reprisals should be taken against them since that would only make things worse for our troops - reluctantly, Churchill agreed. Finally, as the War was drawing to a close, the question was raised as to what should be done with Hitler after the War - one comment that was made was that he should be exiled to an island off the coast of Alaska with no means of outside communication!

As a result of his services to the PM during WWII, he was granted the baronetcy of Bathgate in August of 1945. As such, the baronetcy passed on to his elder son, Sir James Harvie-Watt, on the death of his father on 19th of December 1989.

Sir George Steven Harvie-Watt's time serving Churchill barks large in his memoirs and although he went on to have a very successful career in business - eventually rising to become President of Consolidated Gold Fields) and continued to fulfil several important public offices such as aide-de-camp to King George VI and on his death to the Queen (until 1958) as well as



Deputy Lieutenant of Greater London - I get the feeling that it was his time serving as Churchill's PPS that he did most for this country of ours. Accordingly he is a great credit to this town of ours and deserves to be far better known!

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# Bathgate War Hero



**B**athgate war hero is awarded France's highest honour for his bravery during World War II.

Malcolm McCuaig, 95, was awarded the Legion D'honneur by the French government for his part in overcoming Hitler's army in the country during WWII.

Having volunteered to join the army as part of a bet in 1941, Malcolm went on to serve at home, in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and in the far east.

**Story Credit:** Daily Record



*Malcolm with Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant Ms Moira Niven MBE and members of Ancre Somme Association Scotland.*





## 1316 and 1942

**W**hat links the years 1316 and 1942 in the story of Bathgate? Bathgate in 1316 would have looked quite different from the Bathgate of 1942. In 1316 there would have been a motte and bailey castle at the far end of the town's original golf course in what would have then been very boggy ground. A small stone church opposite Kirkton Public Park which was already a hundred years old by 1316 built and occupied by a small band of monks who may have earned their keep by tending sheep in the surrounding fields and not very much else. All trace of the castle has long since gone although its outline can still be made out if one uses a drone. The church at Kirkton is still standing but in a sadly neglected state. Bathgate in 1316 then would have been little more than a hamlet of small buildings nestling at the foot of the Bathgate Hills. By 1942, however, this rural hamlet would have been almost unrecognisable to its early mediaeval inhabitants. The town had not one but several churches, numerous planned streets, shops, thoroughfares, roads and had largely abandoned its agricultural beginnings in favour of coal mining, forging iron and steel, and other types of manufacturing. Another major difference – the town was engaged in a world war. For Bathgate was engaged like all other towns and cities in the country as well as in Europe and in states which had been unknown to the mediaeval mind in a war which engulfed the entire world directly or indirectly. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland had been reluctantly drawn into war with Germany and its allies in

September 1939 as a result of the German invasion of Poland and their failure to withdraw their troops as demanded by Britain and France. By 1942, although both the USSR and the USA had joined the United Kingdom in the struggle against a German dominated Europe, the demands being made on the public finances were heavy. 'Savings Weeks' had been adopted by the then Government led by Winston Churchill as a means to encourage people to invest in specific war related initiatives. Thus, in April, 1941, there had been launched a savings campaign entitled 'War Weapons Week' whose aim was to encourage people to invest money into weapons manufactories to ensure a continuous supply of arms to the Forces. The idea proved a popular one with the Government and its citizens and was to be a feature of the War in Britain for the entire period of WWII.

In 1942 there were to be two 'Savings Weeks'. One was the 'Warship Savings Week' and the other was known as 'Tanks for Attack'. In West Lothian, the former was launched in May, 1942; the latter in October of that year. West Lothian was assigned a 'Destroyer' class warship named 'H.M.S. Wallace' and requested to raise the sum of £210,000 over the week beginning the 23rd of May, 1942. In other words, the people of West Lothian were being asked to find this additional money to sponsor the ship and it had to be raised within one week – no mean feat. But it had been done before, Midlothian County that previous week had raised over £560,000 for 'their' warship.

So, to get the campaign there were two ceremonies held in the county. One was held at Linlithgow, the other was held on the grounds of the Old Academy in Marjoribanks Street in Bathgate. Various civic dignitaries attended both ceremonies including Winston Churchill's PPS, George Harvie-Watt who attended that held in Bathgate. The guest speaker at the Bathgate event was Lord Elgin who in his remarks mentioned the fact that as Robert the Bruce in 1316 had given Bathgate Castle and the lands of Bathgate to his daughter Marjory on her wedding to Walter, Lord High Steward, as part of her 'tocher' ('dowry') so he, Lord Elgin, would now give to the people of Bathgate via the town provost, Mr. D Fisher, a coin from the time of Robert the Bruce as his 'tocher' to the people of Bathgate to be redeemed by them at the end of the campaign.

Accordingly, the coin was handed over to the provost and during that week was put on display in the shop window at 'DR Gordon's' in Hopetoun and visitors were charged 3d or 6d to view it. It proved so popular that the sum of £265 10s was raised for the 'Wallace's' sick bay. At the end of that week, the County had raised over £547,000 for the 'Wallace' of which Bathgate alone had raised 100,000 of the total amount. Its expected quota had only been slightly over £35,000.

Accordingly the coin was gifted to the Town Council to be kept in the town 'in perpetuity'.

What happened to the 'Bruce coin' after its week on display? Therein lies a mystery since no one on the Council seems to know where it is. For my part I do hope that it will



turn up since it would be dreadful to think that a coin from such a significant period in Scotland's story and one which was carefully guarded by Lord Elgin's family for hundreds of years got lost after only a few days/weeks/months/years in the care of our Town Council! When, or indeed, if, it is ever found, it would be an invaluable addition to Bathgate's story.

As for 'HMS Wallace' (amongst whose officers was a very young Duke of Edinburgh) her fate is not a mystery. Mainly confined to escort duties for most of the War off the East Coast of Britain where she performed a vital service in ensuring that conveyed carrying vital supplies of food and fuel reached these shores in spite of the efforts of U-boats and enemy aircraft alike, she did see service further afield when she was one of the lead ships involved in the invasion of Sicily in July-August 1943. However, she was to meet an ignominious fate when she was involved in a collision with another Navy ship on the 16th of March, 1945, off the Humber. Deemed not worth repairing she was sold off to a breakers' yard where she was broken up for scrap at the end of that month – just five weeks before VE Day.

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In a previous piece I wrote about the experience of George Harvie-Watt born and educated in Bathgate as he rode in the car beside Winston Churchill to announce to the House of Commons that the War in Europe had ended on VE Day. A few miles away at Buckingham Palace another Bathgate man was being rewarded for his service to his country. This man was Warrant Officer, James Rough, son of a Mr. and Mrs. John Rough, Balbardie Avenue, Bathgate.

Sergeant Rough received the 'Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM)' as a result of his bravery at Bizerte in Tunisia during the North Africa campaign which was waged by the Allies and the Axis between November 1942-May 1943. His duties at that time were those of wireless operator and air gunner. It was in his later role that he was awarded the DFM by his Majesty King George VI on Tuesday the 8th of May. The official citation reads as follows:

*"This airman has taken part in a large number of sorties during which he has successfully attacked enemy transport from a low level. On one occasion when attacking the dock at Bizerte, his aircraft was illuminated by searchlights and subjected to antiaircraft fire. Sgt. Rough put out the searchlight and silenced the enemy position."*

A couple of points I wish to make about this particular decoration. Firstly it was only awarded to those in the RAF and similar Commonwealth forces 'for exceptional valour, courage or devotion to duty whilst flying in active operations against the enemy'. Secondly, only some 6,000 of these medals were awarded to British and Commonwealth pilots during the entire period of WWII. The medal was discontinued after 1993.

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*The background picture is of the Red Ensign or "Red Duster". It is the flag flown by British merchant or passenger ships since 1707.*

# Witness recalls Nazi Rudolf Hess landing in Scotland

**O**n 10 May 1941, Adolf Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess, parachuted into Scotland, landing in a field near Eaglesham.

The prominent Nazi had flown solo for nearly 1,000 miles from Bavaria in a Messerschmitt Bf 110, apparently on a peace mission in the days leading up to Germany's invasion of Russia.

He was promptly arrested by a pitchfork-wielding local farmer who took Hess to his farmhouse before alerting the authorities.

Another account tells of the war criminal being pulled from his wrecked plane and surrendering his luger pistol to members of the Corporal Royal Signals, based at Eaglesham House.

George McKenzie, from Rothesay, said his father Jack helped the airman out of the plane.

The 67-year-old explained: "He had surrendered his pistol to my father and torch to another member of the guard. It was a very exciting time for everyone – we were famous for a couple of days. The prisoner was handed over to the Home Guard and the officer in charge of that unit was given the pistol."



*Jack McKenzie was said to have pulled Hess from the plane*

Mr McKenzie added: "To date the Royal Signals involvement in this matter has been unrecognised possibly because they had no weapons, the guard had pickaxe handles and rubber truncheons, and they were responsible for alerting the anti aircraft defences of Glasgow, so their location would be classified information at the time."

And a few eyewitnesses to Hess' arrival are still alive. John McVicar, 80, has memories of the day when the Nazi leader parachuted into Scotland. He was 10 years old and living in Busby at the time, near to where Hess' plane went down. Mr McVicar recalled the approach of Hess' plane shortly before it crashed.

He told BBC Scotland: "It was a Saturday. It was a very pleasant day – sun and cloud – and as I recall it my father and I were at the back of the house under a great big chestnut tree, kicking a football about, when we heard the unsynchronised engines of a German plane.

"Now that was unusual during daylight and it flew over the chestnut tree. My father said: 'Look at him, look at him' but I missed him just as he went past. And then, strangely – I have never known the reason – we heard cannon fire. My father shouted: 'It is the RAF, they are after the bastard – they are after him'. But there was no RAF plane there.

"So my only explanation is that the plane was armed in some way and Hess was getting rid of the ammunition because obviously he was running out of fuel."

The reason Mr McVicar is able to recall seeing the plane in daylight, although it was late in the evening, is that the clocks were put forward by an extra hour during the war. This meant that it got dark later than normal.

On the night Hess flew over, the sun set in the west of Scotland at about a 22:15 Double Summer Time and the blackout came into force at about 23:00.

Mr McVicar estimates Hess's plane was flying low – at between 1,000ft and 1,500ft – which seemed strange to him at the time because Hess bailed out.

"It was very, very unusual. We could see it wasn't a bomber and we recognised it as an ME 110 – it was recognisable to all of us in these days. So it seemed strange, but we didn't think about it. We just thought [the German pilot] had got lost."

Mr McVicar said less than an hour later, people started to gather at the Busby HQ of the Home Guard – now Busby Masonic Lodge – because they had heard Hess was being brought there.

He continued: "I and all the children gathered up there, waiting for him to be brought in. I got a bit fed up and went back to the park with my football to practice shooting in.

## **Press coverage**

"In the interval, he was brought in, but my sister and brother were there and saw him being brought in. It is said that he had broken his ankle. That also seemed strange since I was told he walked in. About 20 minutes after that – I was going back and forward from the park – the press arrived.

"We expected a couple of reporters but there were more than that, so we thought: why is that? Perhaps it was just unusual that a plane came down in the middle of the day."

Mr McVicar said he walked back and forth in the two hours in which Hess was at Busby HQ, waiting for the German to emerge.

He said: "What I did see was the army arriving from Maryhill

barracks. What struck me as strange was that it wasn't just a truck with a few soldiers. There were several officers, a couple of staff cars, which meant to me 'this is important'.

"I didn't understand what was going on but I knew there was something strange about it."

Mr McVicar said it was 'quite civilised' when the Home Guard took charge of Hess.

"He was wearing his pilot's gear when he was taken there and he certainly was able to walk. If he had a broken ankle, it was well disguised."

Mr McVicar said villagers were 'absolutely stunned' when the identity of the pilot emerged, although no-one could figure out why he had come to Scotland.

"The locals thought this was wonderful, what had happened to the village. It was a very exciting time for everyone - we were famous for a couple of days."



*Adolf Hitler and Rudolf Hess*

#### **Negotiate peace**

One engine from Hess' Messerschmitt Bf 110 is now on display in the National Museum of Flight in East Fortune, East Lothian. Hess' reasons for flying to Scotland have never been fully explained,

sparking countless conspiracy theories over the years. But it seems he was attempting to reach the Duke of Hamilton, who he believed had sufficient political clout to help him negotiate peace with the United Kingdom.

As it turned out, Hess was arrested and later sentenced at the Nuremberg trials to life imprisonment. He died at Spandau prison in 1987.

Mr McVicar said at the time of Hess's landing in Scotland, local people came up with their own conclusions as to why Hess was there.

"When Russia was invaded [by Germany] in June 1941, we thought this must be the reason - Hess didn't want a war on two fronts. That was the conclusion we reached. We didn't think he was mad - we thought he was there with a purpose. That was how the civilians felt about it."

Mr McVicar doubts the whole truth about Hess's visit will ever emerge.

"It is one of those mysteries in history - I wish we did know," he added.



*Former Nazi military and political leaders Hermann Goering (1893-1946, left), Rudolf Hess (1894-1987, centre) and Joachim von Ribbentrop (1893-1946, right) in court during their trials at the International War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg, Germany, 4th December 1945*

ANCRE SOMME ASSOCIATION

LONDON 75

# VE-DAY

VICTORY IN EUROPE DAY

1945 - 2020



WHEN THE GUNS FELL SILENT AND EUROPE  
WAS ONCE AGAIN AT PEACE

ANCRE  
SOMME  
ASSOCIATION



1945  
VE Day  
2020

75 YEARS AGO BRITAIN AND HER ALLIES DEFEATED A WORLD EVIL, FOR SIX YEARS THE WORLD WAS AT WAR WITH GERMANY. ALL THROUGH EUROPE CITIES FELL, PEOPLE DIED, BUT WE NEVER GAVE UP HOPE. IN 1944 THE ROAD TO VICTORY WAS BUILT, FROM NORMANDY TO BERLIN WE AND OUR ALLIES RECLAIMED EUROPE. ON THE 8th MAY 1945 GERMANY SURRENDERED AND EUROPE WAS FREE.

[www.ancresommeassociation.co.uk](http://www.ancresommeassociation.co.uk)

# Fight Over The Forth

During the Battle of Britain the first German Luftwaffe plane to be shot down on British soil, landed in the small village of Humbie, East Lothian, on the 26th October 1939.

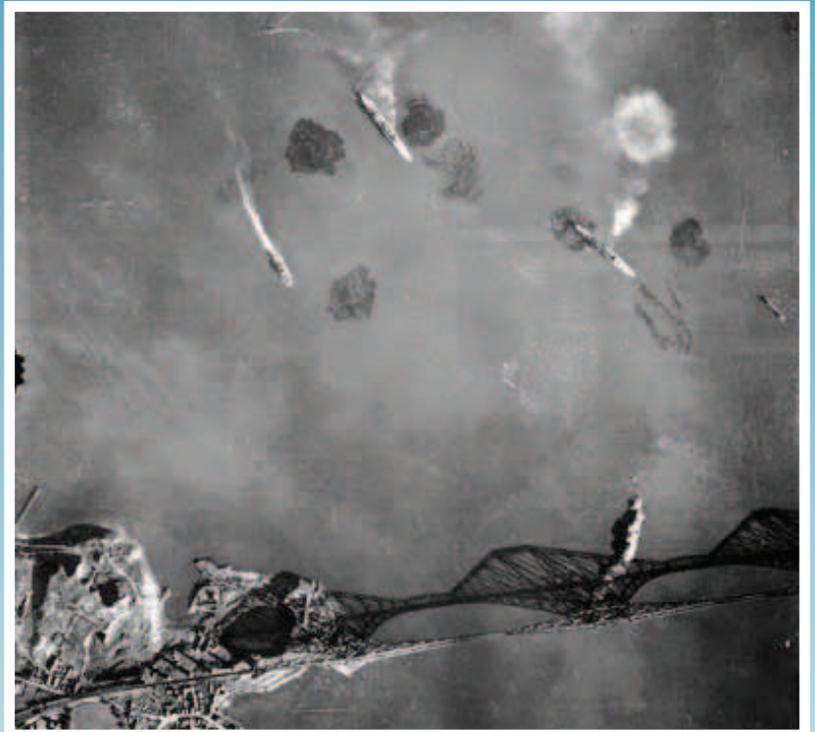
The airmen of 602 Squadron fought an air battle with the Luftwaffe over the Firth Of Forth. Spitfires from 603 Squadron soon joined the Battle in the skies.

Two of the German's air crew were killed in the air, the pilot who was injured and the navigator were arrested by a policeman who was first at the scene, they later became prisoners of war.

Flt Lt Archie McKellar, a plasterer from Paisley, was an Auxiliary Pilot with 602 (City of Glasgow) Squadron. Having successfully attacked the Heinkel bomber he went on to become one of the highest scoring pilots of the Battle of Britain and was awarded a DSO.

Archie was later dubbed as 'the Forgotten Air Ace', sadly Archie died November 1940 just 2 months after the Battle Of Britain ended.

On 31 October 1940, which marked the official end of the Battle of Britain, Air Marshal Dowding mentioned Archie in Dispatches.



*A photograph taken by a German aircraft during the attack on the Forth Rail Bridge. In the early days of the war Hitler had decreed that only naval ships that were underway could be attacked.*



# Courageous Paratrooper

Smiling broadly, weighed down by the bulk of his equipment and with adrenalin coursing through his veins, the brave young man shares a nervous joke with his comrades as they prepare to fight for their country and their lives.

Young, strong and without a hint of fear of what lay ahead, Edinburgh-born Lieutenant Alistair Duncan Clarkson was just days away from making the ultimate sacrifice in the name of freedom.

These grainy images from seven plus decades ago, sold for pennies at a car boot sale, reveal in heart-tugging detail a brief episode in a young life that would come to a bloody end on a muddy battlefield in a foreign country.

They show a proud young man barely into his twenties in his beret and Parachute Regiment uniform, his badges shining with a boyish half-smile creeping across his face.

Another sees him awkwardly sprawled with his brothers in arms on the grass of what is thought to be Barkston Heath Airfield. Behind them is a Dakota aircraft, perhaps the very plane which would fly them to the battlefields of Arnhem from which many would not return.

But the most poignant image of all is the one depicting the simple white cross above the young soldier's final resting place, his rank, surname and initials accompanied by his regiment and his service number.

Once, they would have been treasured by a loving relative, someone whose life was perhaps ripped apart by the devastating news that 22-year-old Lieutenant Alistair Clarkson of the 1st Parachute Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, serial number 251970, had perished alongside



**GLORY DAYS:** A group photograph shows Clarkson with his comrades during training.

1,484 other men as they battled the Nazis on the fields of Arnhem.

Now, on the 75th anniversary of the bloody battle and as Arnhem veterans gather to pay their respects to their fallen colleagues, the pictures are a stark reminder of the sacrifice of one young man whose brief life has now become just a faded memory.

For little is known of who Lt. Clarkson was, what path took him to serve among the fighting elite that formed the 1st Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, and exactly how he met his end, fighting for control of the bridge across the Rhine at Arnhem.

He was born in 1922 in Whitburn and was educated at Bathgate Academy before moving to Edinburgh and according to the War Graves Commission, he died on Friday, September 22, 1944, his body interred at the Oosterbeek War Cemetery in Arnhem. The Commission details reveal his Edinburgh roots; his father is named as Hugh K Clarkson MBE, MA and his mother Margaret T Clarkson.

For his parents, his death was a second tragic blow. They had already buried Alistair's brother Bertrand, an RAF pilot with 224

Squadron, in Piershill Cemetery. He had died, aged only 19, on August 23, 1940.

Just why the photograph of Lt. Clarkson should now emerge at a boot sale in the English Midlands is unclear. But what is certain is that the young Edinburgh soldier was among the bravest of the brave.

"When the British First Airborne Division recruited its men, it recruited some of the finest and most committed soldiers. They were among the best," says Arnhem specialist at the Imperial War Museum in London Laurie Milner. "And if you were prepared to jump out of an aeroplane into enemy territory, then you had to be committed to the cause.





**TO WAR:** *The 1st Parachute Battalion on their way to Arnhem in 1944, Clarkson, circled, and fellow soldiers nervously share a joke.*

PHOTO: IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

“What happened at Arnhem meant we lost one of the best divisions the Army has produced.”

The British Airborne Forces were first conceived in mid-1940 when Prime Minister Winston Churchill called for a corps of at least 5,000 parachute troops to be rapidly trained and then used as ‘shock’ troops in home defence.

Operation Market Garden should have been their finest hour. Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery had persuaded General Dwight Eisenhower, supreme commander of the Allies in the west of his plans for a single thrust into Germany, a push that, had it been successful, could well have ended the war in 1944.

The hastily arranged plan meant the Allied Airborne Army, including two American and one British division would seize vital Rhine river crossings, including those in Holland – and Arnhem.

“Thirsty corps would then advance across all the bridges across the Rhine in Holland.” explains Milner, “with the aim of striking at the German industrial heartland, the Ruhr, and

bringing the war to an end.

“Unfortunately this was an operation that would require an enormous amount of luck. And it was the Germans who had that.”

Lt. Clarkson was among 11,290 allied paratroopers dropped from planes on September 17, 1944, with the job of getting to the main bridge at Arnhem. Their feet touched Dutch

soil at 2pm. By 6pm they were fighting for their lives, their progress dramatically halted by battle-hardened German SS Panzer troops.

“The Allies had been a bit complacent,” says Milner. “They underestimated the Germans. They thought they would not resist. Not only did they resist, but they did everything absolutely right.

“The Germans were in a headlong retreat after the Battle of Normandy when the Allies had chased them across Belgium in less than a week. The perception was that Germany was a spent force and, although they knew Germans were in the Arnhem area, the perception was that they were not a force to be reckoned with.”

But they were. Within hours the German SS troops had swooped to block the 1st battalion and their comrades from the 3rd battalion as they approached Arnhem with the objective of seizing the road and rail bridges across the Rhine. There followed bloody and desperate fighting.

“The Germans drove them into a thumb-shaped perimeter, known now as the Cauldron.

“They were surrounded on three sides in a suburb of Arnhem called Oosterbeek, where they remained until September 26 when Montgomery took the decision to extract them. The Royal Engineers managed to get 3,190 men to safety.

“Lieutenant Clarkson would almost certainly have been contained with that Cauldron.”

The poignant photographs depicting what may well have been the final days before Lieutenant Clarkson’s departure for Arnhem, were bought by Derby teenager Matthew Moore as he trawled through a car boot sale bric-a-brac.

# Mrs Kaye – Bathgate Royal British Legion Member

**A**t the outbreak of War, Mrs Kaye (Margaret Gartshore) was living with her family in Muir Road, Bathgate, and was aged 16. She was still doing classes at the 'Big Public' in Torphichen Street (now Balbardie Primary School), though at the outbreak of War, most of the male teachers were called up and went away. She was a keen athlete, and did running, long jump, high jump and hurdles, as a member of the West Lothian county schools' team. She used to train outdoors in summer, and at the Bathgate Baths in winter.

She heard the news that the war had started on the radiogram in her house. She does not remember any immediate changes in Bathgate: there were still cinemas and dancing to go to. Everybody helped each other. Everybody clubbed together. There was the black-out, and she remembers bumping into a lamp post in the dark street, and using a torch and having to hold it downwards, because of Air Raid Precautions. There were no shelters in the area that she can remember – there were plenty hills that you could go to for shelter!

There was at least one bombing raid on Bathgate, when two bombs were dropped where there are two ponds going towards Blackburn. They dropped into the quagmire without exploding. One of the bombs was found not so long ago when drainage work was going on, and was still live. The other has not been found.

Her father was an Air Raid Warden and wore a brown uniform – like a military uniform, and a helmet and carried a gas mask. Everybody had to carry their gas mask at all times. Her father had been a soldier in the First World War, but was not in the Home Guard as his old war wounds

meant that the Home Guard's activities would have been too strenuous for him. However he used to go out with his rifle to guard whatever needed guarding. The ARP used to practice at the back of the Legion hut (further down from the present Legion site – where the Model used to be). Her father was in charge as he had been a staff sergeant in the First World War.

There were fire watching parties in Bathgate – units whose duties were to look out for incendiary bombs falling on buildings and to put out fires. They tended to be older men who were not fit enough for ARP or the Home Guard.

Rationing of food was introduced. Everybody had to have a ration book. Mrs Kaye was the only person in Muir Road with a bicycle. Many of their neighbours were elderly, so she would find out what they wanted, take a pile of ration books to the shops, and get their shopping in for them. When she was home on leave from the forces and in uniform, many shop-keepers used to wave aside her ration book, and give her rationed goods without taking the coupons.

She remembers that there were no sweets, and fewer cigarettes. Bacon was rationed and meat was not very plentiful. There was plenty of fruit and vegetables and they were not rationed. Her mother used to bake her own bread.

Mrs Kaye registered in June 1941, aged 17½, and went for a medical. Out of all the girls being examined that day, she was the only one to pass A1+. She was very fit.

She had wanted to join the army or the navy but they would not take you until you were 21, but the RAF would take you at 17. So she joined the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air

Force). The uniform was blue – as in the photographs. When on active duty, they wore battledress – trousers and an army-type battledress top.

She was sent first to Gloucester for 6 weeks of basic training – square bashing and so on. Then she was sent to Blackpool for a short while – doing nothing much, but waiting for a posting. She was then posted to London, and was afraid to tell her mother, as she knew she would be alarmed for her safety.

In London, her work was to go out with the 'blood wagon' – the ambulance, accompanying the ambulance driver. It was during the Blitz, and they were sent out to pick up the casualties – first the living, then the dead. Then they had to search the air raid shelters to see if there were any survivors. She was based in flats right across the road from London Zoo. They would have so many hours on duty, and so many off. She does not recall being frightened – she didn't have time to think about it. She wore battledress and a tin helmet. On several occasions, her shoes were burnt off (working on burning or smouldering rubble). On these occasions, she would borrow a pair of boots from a casualty. On one occasion she was injured by shrapnel and received cuts and burns to her legs. They healed quickly at the time because she was young, but have given her trouble as she grows older.

Next she was posted to Coventry, where she did the same sort of work as in London, and was there for about four months.

Next she was briefly in Folkestone. She suspects the WAAF did not always know who or where she was, as the WAAF records office had

been bombed during the Blitz and many service records lost.

Next she was posted to Ringway (now Manchester Airport). She was always willing to learn new things and go to new places, to learn how others live. Ringway was a wartime Paratroopers air base, and Mrs Kaye had to do a parachute jump as part of her training. In fact, she thought about transferring to the Paras, but was happy as she was in the WAAF, so decided against it.

Next she was posted to Silloth, where they had not expected her, but she was found a bed. Silloth was a base for photographic reconnaissance, and was mainly Australians, then Canadians, then South African and British. It was a dangerous area for quicksands.

Next she was posted to Crosby in Eden, on the other side of Carlisle. She went there to open up a camp. Everything was soaking: she caught bronchitis, and several others got pneumonia. She was hospitalised in Carlisle Hospital for 6-8 months. She left the camp and organised accommodation in a nearby pub. However, they did get the camp opened up, and she was there for a short time. She was then summoned to HQ and told she was being posted to Ireland.

In Ireland, (1942-43) she was based at Nutts Corner, Belfast, a big airfield with big V29 bombers, flying daylight bombing raids. She was employed as a liaison officer to teach 3,000 Yanks about English money, because 'they were being done right, left and centre'. The Yanks were 'all right' and used to call her the 'Iron Lady'. She had to go about with a revolver, as the IRA were active locally and hated the presence of British troops. They didn't go out alone or mix with the

local community because of the danger. There were quite a few incidents of IRA bombs and shootings, and alarms would sound in the camp. The IRA tried to get into the camp but did not succeed.

Half her wages were paid in sterling, and half in dollars which they could spend at the American canteen where they could get things they couldn't get in the shops. Her wages by then were £3 a week, and she was a Leading Aircraft Woman (LAC). At the start of the war she had got 10s a fortnight. By the end of the War she was a Corporal, and an acting sergeant. She sat the course to go on and do officer training, but decided against it.

After Ireland, she was posted to Upper Hayford near Oxford. Again she was opening up a camp which was used by the Yankees then the RAF. The camp opened and she was there for about two years.

In 1944, she was posted to Melton Mowbray. It was a 'hush-hush' camp, an MOD camp. She does not know what sort of work was being done there, as it was top secret. She arrived there by train, and there seemed to be nothing there, no camp. But the local people were very helpful, and helped her get to the aerodrome which was away in a forest for protection. Once again she was involved in opening up the camp, and by this time was in charge of a team of six - three men (chef, wireless operator and mechanic) and three women. She was happy and very busy, and didn't have time to worry about the responsibility. Because it was hush-hush, they were not allowed into the villages, and were out of touch with the world. In fact, the war had been over for six months before they were told.

She also spent brief periods on the South coast of England, on stand-by for the Dunkirk evacuations - and was also on standby at D-Day to bring back wounded and prisoners.

All leave was cancelled at the time of Pearl Harbor. She had been due to go on leave, but by the time she got to HQ, her leave pass had been cancelled. She served for six months before she got her first leave. Otherwise, they got leave as they could get it - two weeks if you were lucky - otherwise one week.

She believes she was the first woman in Bathgate in uniform.

At the end of the war, she came home to Bathgate and took a job in a factory in Broxburn, but couldn't stand being shut in and having civilians round about her. She only lasted a fortnight, then left and joined up again for four years with the WRAF (Women's Royal Air Force). She was stationed with the Queen's Flight and also Bombing Command at Benson in Oxfordshire where she met her husband and married. They later returned to Bathgate and set up a business. Both have been stalwarts of the Bathgate British Legion. Mrs Kaye was on the Legion Committee for 20 years and was given a solid gold badge to mark her long service.

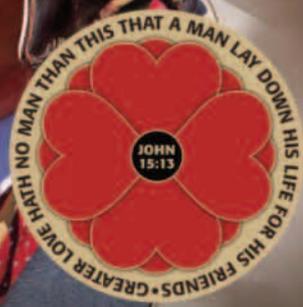
Memories of the War are still vivid - 'it never leaves you'. She particularly remembers counting the planes going out on a bombing raid from the air bases - maybe twelve would go out and only four come back in. 'Where's the rest? In the drink.'

Service in the forces gave her the notion for travel and it was good experience for any youngster. She would do the same again.

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# BATTLE *of* NORMANDY

D-DAY 6th JUNE 1944



THE ROYAL AIR FORCE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE DAYS BEFORE D-DAY AND ON D-DAY ITSELF. SQUADRONS OF TYPHOONS CLEARED THE WAY TO ENABLE TROOPS TO LAND, BOMBER COMMAND DROPPED THOUSANDS OF TONS OF HIGH EXPLOSIVES ON THE ATLANTIC WALL DEFENCES, AND SQUADRONS OF SPITFIRES AND HURRICANES HARRIED GERMAN ARTILLERY, INFANTRY AND TRANSPORTATION. WITHOUT THEM CLEARING THE WAY OPERATION OVERLORD WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED.

ANCRE  
SOMME  
ASSOCIATION



1944  
2020  
D-Day

# Piper Bill Millin – Lord Lovat’s Piper!

Originally from Regina, Saskatchewan of Scottish descent, Bill Millin moved to Scotland just prior to WW2 and joined the pipe band of the 7th Battalion, HLI. He subsequently transferred to the Cameron Highlanders – then volunteered for the Lovat Scouts.

During his commando training, he was approached by Lord Lovat and accepted a post as his personal piper. At the time, Lovat’s father was the President of the Piobaireachd Society.

Despite a ban on ‘War Pipers’ (an easy target for the enemy), Brigadier General Lovat defied the rule – and 21 year old Millin turned out to be the only piper on Sword Beach for the D-Day landing on Normandy.

While still on the landing craft, Millin played *Road to the Isles*. The skirl of his pipes were amplified



through a loud hailer – over the din of gunfire and explosions. Wearing his fathers’ WW1 Cameron kilt, Millin was ordered by Lovat to play *Highland Laddie* as he disembarked and began to play on the the beach – armed only with his pipes and a

sgian-dubh in his hose-top. He later remarked “Wounded men were shocked to see me. They had been expecting to see a medic. Instead, they saw me in my kilt and playing the pipes. It was horrifying, as I felt so helpless”.

The movie **The Longest Day** features Leslie de Laspee (piper to the Queen Mother) as Millin piping at the Pegasus Bridge crossing.

Following the war, Bill Millin worked on Lord Lovat’s estate for several years, travelled and did D-Day lectures in the USA. He was there to play *Lord Lovat’s Lament* at Lovat’s funeral in 1995. His pipes were donated to the National War Museum in Edinburgh on the 60th Anniversary of D-Day.

The D-Day pipes are located at the Dawlish Museum in England, along with his beret and a kilt in their permanent Bill Millin display.

In 2003, Bill suffered a stroke and passed in 2010 at the age of 88. Both his son Bill and grandson Jacob have registered and will be playing at 3pm (GMT) on 8 May 2020 – please make sure you register as well!



# Liberation

If you were to note down all the letters and reports about the experiences of Prisoners of War (POWs) which have been recorded in the *West Lothian Courier* alone then you could easily fill this commemorative booklet three or four times over – especially if you decided to explain some of the references to people and places that although familiar to a readership in 1945 would now require the services of a ‘proper’ historian or repeated searches on *Wikipedia* or other online sources. However, we do not have the space for such detail, so, with this caveat, what I would now like to do is select a story of one Bathgate man – Pte. John Pringle – who survived almost five years as a POW in several camps in Poland

and Germany before eventually being liberated by the Americans on the 11th April, almost a month before Winston Churchill officially declared the War in Europe to be at an end.

The full account of his experiences as well as that of two other Bathgate POWs can be found in the issue of the *West Lothian Courier* dated the 27th of April 1945, roughly two weeks before Churchill made his historic broadcast on the 8th of May. The article begins by setting the scene. These three guys arrived home from various camps in Europe at different times back in the week beginning the 20th of May 1945. All belonged to the Regiment of the Royal Scots and had seen active service before they had been taken

prisoner. All had been POWs for substantial periods of time – indeed the guy whose story I shall focus on had been captured by the Germans on the 21st of May 1940 so had been a POW for almost the entire length of the War!

As I mentioned before, there are certain themes which crop up in the accounts of POWs regardless of location or captors. One such recurring theme is food, either the lack of it or its quality. One comment from Pte. Pringle was that “had it not been for the Red Cross parcels . . . I do not think that 50% of us would have been home today”.

Another is the forced marches that soldiers had to go on in order to escape the advancing Allied armies. Again, Pte. Pringle mentions that

EVACUATION OF  
**DUNKIRK**  
26TH MAY - 4TH JUNE 1940

338,226 SOLDIERS OF THE BEF WERE EVACUATED FROM THE BEACHES OF DUNKIRK. 68,000 WERE KILLED IN ACTION, INJURED OR TAKEN PRISONER OF WAR. THE RAF LOST 145 AIRCRAFT, OF WHICH 43 WERE DESPERATELY NEEDED SPITFIRES.

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS

ANCRE SOMME ASSOCIATION

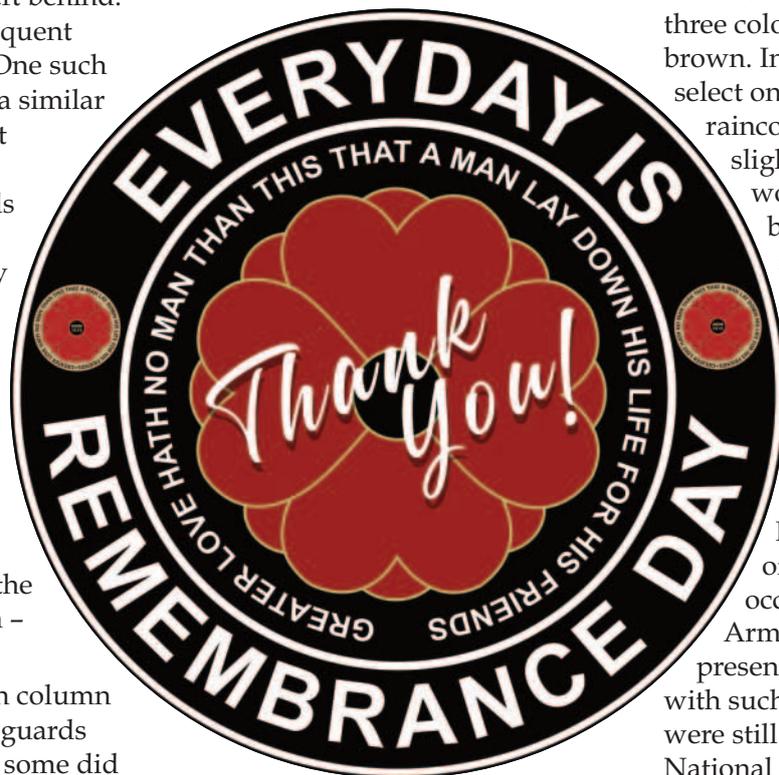
www.ancresommeassociation.co.uk

when the Russians were only two miles away from his camp, the POWs were forced to march 1,500 kilometres through Germany until they came to a small village near Hanover. He further states that some of the men weakened by hunger, disease and sheer exhaustion were simply left behind. Casual cruelty is also a frequent feature in their accounts. One such account mentions that on a similar forced march through East Germany, some of the villagers had left out bowls of water for the POWs which were then promptly overturned by the guards. As you would expect, the day of their liberation and their return home is always mentioned. Whereas in his account, Pte. Pringle is short on dates during his imprisonment, he knows the exact date of his liberation – 11th of April, 1945.

They ran into an American column and although some of the guards surrendered immediately, some did not and were promptly shot dead. Pte. Pringle himself arrived back home in Bathgate within a week of his being freed where he was greeted with gifts and even a piper to welcome him back home!

### FREEDOM

It is recorded in the pages of the *West Lothian Courier* for the 22nd of July and several other newspapers that the first soldier to be 'demobbed' in Scotland was a Bathgate-born chap, a Lieutenant-Colonel THM Murray of the King's



Own Scottish Borderers at Redford Barracks in Edinburgh on June 18th, 1945. Not only had he been born in Bathgate but his father, Mr. E.A. Murray had been an agent at the Bathgate branch of the National Bank of Scotland.

However, his sole claim on our attention today is this fact. Indeed, according to one account he turned up at the 'Disposal Centre' (as it was called) at 8.45 am and was out by 9.40! The criteria used on this first day of demobilisation were age and length of service. Those men (and women) over 48 were amongst the first to be 'demobbed'.

From other accounts we get a fairly good idea of how 'demobilisation' was carried out at the Redford Barracks. Thus each of the men were ushered into a large room and allowed to pick a suit from over 12,000 that were on display. Tailors from Edinburgh and Leith were on hand to advise. The suits came in three colours only – blue, grey and brown. In addition they could also select one pair of shoes and a raincoat. Women were treated slightly differently in that each woman was presented with a bankers' draft to the tune of £12 10s as well as 56 clothing coupons (NB: rationing would still be in force until 1954 in the UK). This was slightly unfair on the women since the men's suits alone were valued at £17! In this building stood rows of desks numbered 1-10 occupied by clerks – both Army and civilian who presented the men and women with such items as ID cards (which were still required), ration books, National Health Insurance Cards, train warrants, eight weeks ration coupons for cigarettes 'at the special rate' as well as a fortnight's ration of sweets all deemed necessary for the return to civvy street'. In addition to the clothes and paper work, Lieut.-Colonel would have received a pay advance which in his case could have amounted to as much as £10. Thus at 9.40 on Monday the 18th of June, 1945, only five weeks after peace was declared in Europe, Lieut.-Colonel Murray drove out of Redford Barracks back to his home in Newton Stewart in Galloway, once more a civilian.

# County Territorials Home

## Enthusiastic Midnight Receptions

**E**nthusiastic scenes were witnessed in various towns and villages in West Lothian late on Friday night and into the early hours of Saturday morning, when men of the 14th (West Lothian) LAA Regiment Royal Artillery, returned home after four and a half years campaigning in the Egyptian, Libyan and Italian theatres of war. During its long period of service overseas the Regiment took part in the victorious operations in North Africa distinguishing itself particularly in the long siege and successful defence of Tobruk and latterly was engaged in the Italian campaign which led to the defeat and surrender of the German armies in that theatre.

The men to the number of 175, belonging to the 40th Bathgate Battery, 39th Linlithgow battery and the 57th South Queensferry battery arrived by train in Edinburgh about 11pm on Friday and were conveyed by special SMT buses to their respective destinations the numbers being made up as follows: – Bathgate 30, Linlithgow 23, South Queensferry 22, Broxburn and Uphall 20, Winchburgh and Niddry 19, Whitburn 15, Kirkliston, 12, Bo'ness 11, Armadale 5, Newbridge 6, Fauldhouse 5, Torphichen, Blackburn, Stoneyburn 5, and Livingston Station 2. The men who looked bronzed and fit stated that they were on a month's leave. They said they had been given an official assurance that they would not be sent to Burma.

Former members of the Regiment and others travelled to Edinburgh and after greeting the men on their arrival directed them to the waiting buses but for these arrangements made locally the men would have been compelled to spend the night

in Edinburgh and as can be readily understood they were deeply appreciative of the facilities provided to enable them to reach home without delay.

**Bathgate's Rousing Welcome –** Although the first expectations were that the Bathgate men were likely to arrive home about 7pm, it became known in the forenoon that the train bringing them from England was not due in Edinburgh until 11pm.



This to some extent upset the preparations for their reception which were being made by Provost J Chapman and Councillor Hugh Ross, matters however were speedily adjusted and steps were taken to acquaint the public that the 40th Battery would probably reach Bathgate by midnight.

On their arrival in Edinburgh, the Bathgate and district men were met by former members of the 40th Battery in Major T Wolfe, Major A K Fleming and C/Lt A Davidson, who informed them of the arrangements made for their transport home, At Bathgate people began to collect in the vicinity of George Place by eleven o'clock and an hour later the crowd must have numbered in the region of 5,000. Both sides of the

street from the foot of Academy Street to George Place itself presented an animated scene. Seldom, if ever, has a larger assembly of people been seen at this focal point. Due to the enterprise of Councillor Ross, George Place was brilliantly illuminated from specially erected lamps at the top of his garage and this coupled with the loud speaker apparatus provided by Greig Bros., through which wireless programmes were heard, helped the crowd to while away the period of waiting. After midnight, Bailie Glen opened an impromptu programme by singing "Hail Caledonia" and then leading the crowd in community singing. Other members of the gathering also made their contributions to keep the assemblage in happy mood.

Among the official party who had collected to give the men a civic welcome were Provost Chapman, Bailies Aitken and Glen, Ex Bailie Jeffrey, Councillors Wheelan and Ross, Major T Wolfe, Provost Drysdale, Whitburn and Capt L Brown, Fauldhouse.

Leaving the buses on their arrival at the foot of Academy Street at 12:40 am, the men, after many of them had been warmly greeted by their wives and other relatives, formed up, and headed by Torphichen Pipe Band under Pipe Major Forrest, marched along King Street to George Place, coming to a half in front of the Post Office. The scene was now one of exuberant enthusiasm and the returned warriors had difficulty in making their way through the dense crowd who rent the air with resounding cheers. It was indeed an unforgettable spectacle and one that must have thrilled the men who, amid rather moving scenes, left their native town just before the outbreak of war in September 1939.

There was a stroke of genius in the choice of tune to which the pipers played in the returning warriors. It was Hyslop's grand old song *Scotland the Brave* with its singularly appropriate beginning - "Let Italy boast of her bloom shaded waters."

When the men halted at George Place, they were addressed by Provost Chapman. After intimating the arrangements made for conveying the men to the outlying district the provost said he thought they could have no doubt of the warmth of their reception when they looked at the crowd who had stood there for the last hour.

The fame of the regiment and their deeds had proceeded them but as they had travelled a long way and were more concerned about getting

home to their loved ones than to listen to anything he might say, he would defer what he had to say to some future occasion. All he wished to do that night was to give them a very hearty welcome indeed to Bathgate and to say that they were exceedingly proud of them.

The Provost thereupon called for three hearty cheers, which were given in a rousing manner.

The men afterwards joined their relatives, although so dense was the crowd that contact in some cases was only made after directions had been broadcast through the loudspeaker.

The crowd, whose behaviour had been exemplary throughout thereafter quietly dispersed.

*West Lothian Courier 18th May 1945*

### **Welcome Home**

To the 14th L.A.A. Regt R.A.  
(to the West Lothian Royal Scots)  
(BY A M BISSET)

After the surge of battle,  
The crash and roar of the guns  
Welcome! a thousand welcomes  
West Lothian's valiant sons  
Our hearts were always with you  
they followed you everywhere  
And that God safe home would  
bring you  
Was the burden of many a prayer.

But 'mid our cheers and rejoicing,  
Our hearts are flooded o'er  
As we mourn with proud-souled  
sorrow,  
Our lads who'll return no more.

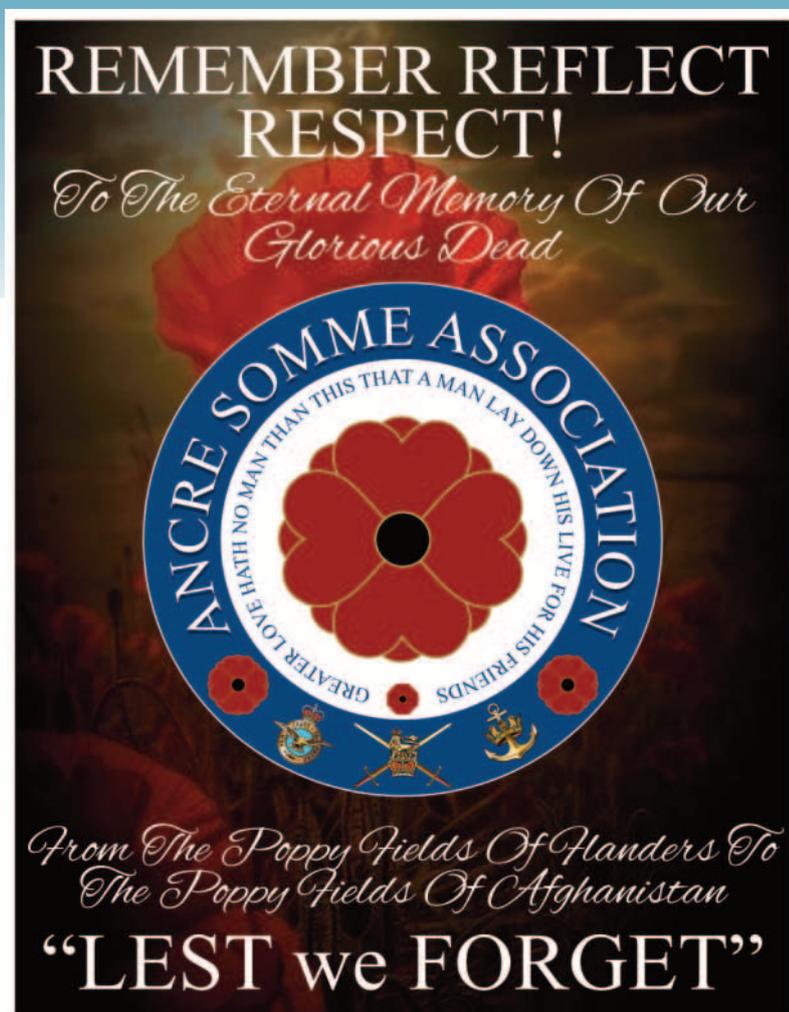
In the flush and the pride of  
manhood,  
They gave all they had to give  
That we and all they held dearest  
In freedom and peace might live.

At Tobruk, unflinching and  
undaunted  
You won undying fame  
And bright on the scroll of glory  
You inscribed West Lothian's name

Surrounded and isolated  
You held the foe at bay  
And turned defeat into triumph  
On that great and glorious day.

North Africa, Salerno,  
Naples Cassino, Rome  
The Gothic Line - you stormed  
them  
And blasted your passage home!

So brave, gallant lads we hail you  
And welcome you home again  
Proud, proud of your fame and  
honour  
West Lothian' valorous men.



*Princess Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, Winston Churchill, King George VI and Princess Margaret on the balcony at Buckingham Palace*





# The Wrong Turn in France

When Winston Churchill made his broadcast to the nation at 3 o'clock on the 8th of May 1945 that the War in Europe was at an end, he may well have been aware of the fact that both Oslo and Copenhagen were about to be freed from Nazi occupation that day as well as Prague in Czechoslovakia. What he would certainly not have known about would have been the 'liberation' of a small village in the north west of France near Calais named Hallivast which has the unique distinction of being the only village throughout the entire period of WWII which was 'liberated' by a 'Bathgate bairn'. A feat which is made all the more remarkable by the twin facts that this was achieved without a single shot being fired and that the village was 'freed' by a member of the 'Royal Army Service Corps' (RASC) – a unit normally concerned with all aspects of military administration and logistics. So, how had this all been achieved? I shall now let the Reuters correspondent, Desmond Tighe, who reported this story take over. His account of events was to be taken up by several of the leading Scottish and English newspapers but has over the passage of time got lost in the 'fog of events'.

*“35-years old driver, Jock Wilson, RASC, who hails from Bathgate, West Lothian, is probably one of the luckiest men in the British Second Army. He has just liberated an entire French village, been put up for the night by the mayor, and served with breakfast in bed. But it was all a mistake.*

*Wilson, who drives a heavy RASC lorry and who has been driving probably 23 hours a day for the last week in northern France broke down, and got left behind by his column somewhere near Bethune. He rectified his trouble and tried to catch up with the convoy, but took a wrong turning – a very easy thing to do when most of the traffic signs are still in German. He found himself bowling through the little village of Hallivast. The inhabitants rushed out and mobbed the truck, for it was the first British vehicle they had seen. He was carried off to the Mayor's house with the villagers shouting and cheering, and they insisted that he should stay the night.*

*After being wined and dined, he was shown upstairs by the Mayor's wife to a spacious bedroom, where he slept in great luxury, the first he had had in a bed for months. At dawn, Driver Wilson was called by the Mayor's wife personally who served him in bed with an enormous breakfast of bacon and eggs and steaming hot coffee.*

*But the story doesn't end there. Wilson eventually tracked down his unit and reported to his Company Commander – along with 2 bottles of champagne, 3 dozen tomatoes and his lorry filled with masses of flowers.*

*“Sorry, sir,” Wilson said apologetically, “but I broke down”.*

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**FOOTNOTE:** By a strange quirk of fate Jock Wilson may have already appeared in the *Courier* several months prior to the events described. Since in a letter published in the *Courier* on the 3rd of September 1943 but originally posted on the 27th of May, the writer of the letter, David Blackadder from Harthill, asks that he and his friend, Jock Wilson from Bathgate, be minded to their friends and relations in their home towns. There is a photograph attached to the letter which shows the two guys reading a copy of the *Courier* somewhere in a desert. If this is the same guy, then he went from the theatre of operations in North Africa to the north-west of France in the interim. After that there is no further trace of Mr Jock Wilson.

# Bathgate ex-P.O.W.'s Experiences in Japanese Hands

**A**mong the recently arrived prisoners of war from the Far East was a Bathgate airman, LAC (Leading Aircraft man) Samuel (Sonny) McBryde, only son of Mrs. Condron, 90 Stuart Terrace. Sonny McBryde, as he is known to his colleagues, is looking fit and well despite the fact that he has had malaria, dysentery and beri-beri during his three and a half year captivity.

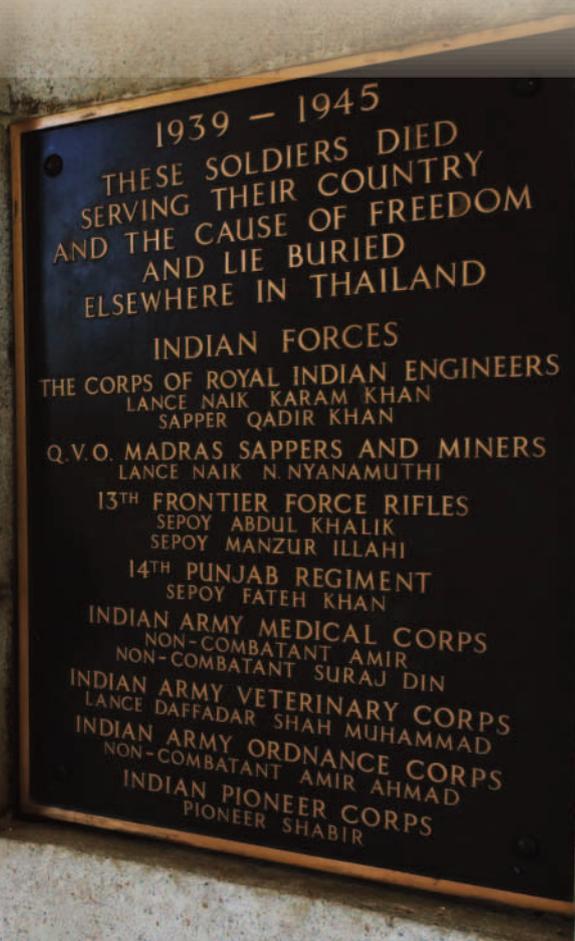
LAC McBryde joined the RAF in February, 1940, and in 1941 was drafted overseas to Singapore. Two or three days before the capture of Singapore, in February, 1942, Sonny was wounded, and for nine months after the fall of that great naval base, he was detained in hospital. Later he was transferred to a 'bamboo hospital' in Siam where he found a few local lads, including Barnard White of Glenmavis Drive, Bathgate. The fun which the lads had, he said, helped to keep up their spirits and morale.

It was about this time that the Japs force-marched many Allied men to the Burma-Thailand railway, and he was among the unfortunate ones. The treatment of prisoners, he added, was atrocious and their staple food was rice. "It was either rice or rice sacks", Sonny said. The Jap method of burial is to cover the corpse with a couple of rice sacks. When asked what he thought of the Japanese, he said, shortly, "not much". The Japs would beat a man even if he stopped to lean on his pick or shovel. Sonny himself bears scars which were caused by beatings from his Japanese captors. Their favourite punishment stick was a bamboo cane which they used often and mercilessly.

A day which LAC McBryde will never forget will be the 15th of August of this year - the day on which he was liberated by Allied soldiers. The Union Jack was unfurled with full pomp and

ceremony and bugles were sounded. He was flown from the camp to Rangoon where the ex-prisoners were lavishly treated and accorded a hearty welcome. From Rangoon they were flown to Calcutta where again cheering crowds greeted them and it was in Calcutta that he received his first Red Cross parcel. All during his long years of captivity Sonny McBryde had never received any parcels or mail of any description. From Calcutta to Bombay the prisoners travelled by train. The next stop was Karachi airfield, where the group boarded a plane bound for Wolverhampton. The aircraft landed at Wolverhampton on Thursday 12th October, and on Monday, 15th October, he was home in Bathgate . . ."

© West Lothian Courier - 26/10/1945



*Kanjanaburi war cemetery in Thailand*

A Spitfire fighter plane is shown in flight against a blue sky with light clouds. The plane is angled downwards from the top left towards the center. Below the plane, a landscape with rolling green hills and a prominent red bridge is visible. The bridge has a lattice-like structure. The overall scene is bright and clear.

# Where Were You When the Spitfires Flew?

**M**r Peace was born and bred in Bathgate, and was 17 at the outbreak of War. He was already working in the office at the North British Steel Foundry in Whitburn Road, Bathgate before the War. After the War he returned there, and remained there until 1972. Then he left and took over the shop at the corner of Livery Street and Main Street, and had it for eight years or so. Then he took a job buying stores for the Wimpey Quarry at Ratho, and was there until he retired about 1987.

He remembers that War was declared on a Sunday. He and his parents lived in the High Street at that time. His father and a neighbour went for a walk in the Bathgate Hills every Sunday morning. They got up as far as the Knock Hill and could see a German attack taking place on the Forth Bridge.

Everyday items soon began to become scarce and his friends began to be called up into the services. He volunteered for the Air Force. He was called for his medical on 25 December 1941, and was called up early in 1942. He was sent for wireless training at Compton Bassett, near Calne in Wiltshire. During this period, preparations were beginning to get underway for the Second Front. Everybody had to learn to drive, and he was sent on a two-week course as far north as Blackpool, to learn to drive.

After passing out from the wireless course, he was asked what he would like to do – but everything he suggested already had its full complement of wireless operators. He asked to be sent as Air Crew, or to serve on the high-speed rescue launches which picked up pilots etc. downed in the sea – but there were no vacancies for radio operators. So

he was sent to Ricall (?) near Doncaster. It was a bomber conversion unit, training the pilots to convert from two to four engines planes. He was a wireless operator there, and then later in the south of England with Fighter Command.

Then he started training for the Second Front, and was sent to a mobile signals unit, which could go wherever it was needed. His unit was sent to 401 ASP (Air Stores Park) – which dealt with air stores and equipment for fighter planes. During the run-up to D-Day, he expected to go into France with the ASP, but then at the last moment his signals unit was transferred to a Mobile Field Hospital. They landed in Normandy a couple of weeks after D-Day. He counts himself fortunate not to have landed with the first wave, but the Germans were still shelling the beachheads when he and his unit landed.

The men and women in the Services were protected from the worst shortages of rationing – the Forces fed them and provided their uniforms, so clothes and food shortages did not really affect them. If they were short of anything, they could generally get it from the Canadian troops. There was good co-operation with the Canadians: no ill-feeling, and the awareness that everyone was pulling in the same direction with the same aim of winning the War. Everybody was there for the same purpose.

So they were never short of food, or of clothing items. However, even in the Forces, they were subject to the same black-out restrictions. Vehicle headlights had to be dimmed – covered with adhesive paper, with just a small slit or hole to allow the light through. As long as you could see the vehicle in front, that was all you needed. Direction signs on the

roads had been removed (to avoid giving aid to the Germans in case of invasion), so when travelling you had to use maps. Often you were not told the name of the town or place you were travelling to; all you were given was a map reference.

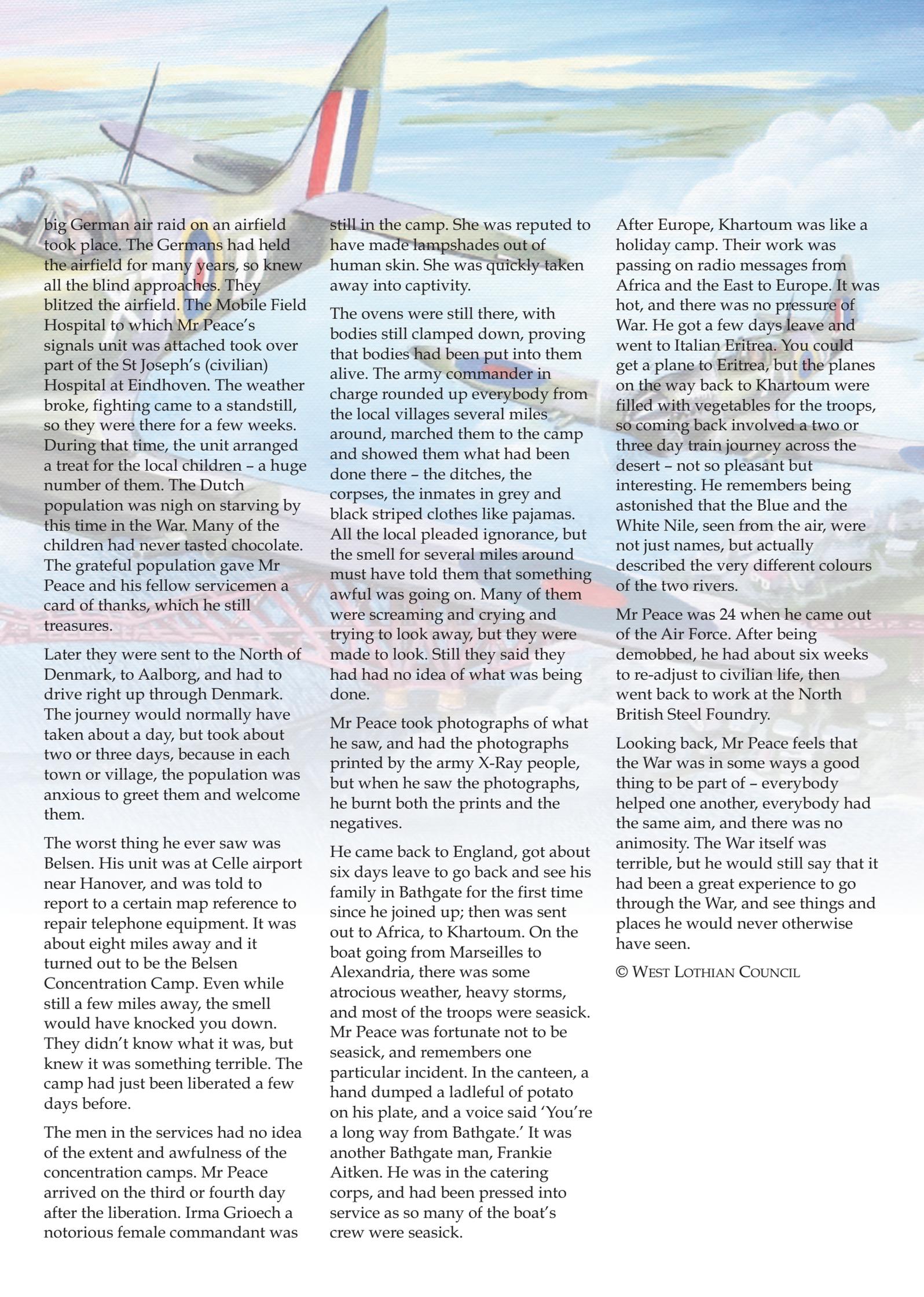
The pay was not very good! You could opt to take it all, or have some of it sent home. As there was nothing to spend his money on, Mr Peace opted to have his money sent home. Especially when he was serving abroad, what mattered was that you got fed. It was all you cared about.

He was fortunate enough to avoid ever being under attack from the air, while posted in the South of England, but they were sometimes aware of the V2 rockets passing overhead, and wondered where they would land, and what would happen when they did. Like civilians, servicemen and women carried gas masks – at least during the earlier years of the War. He had to don his during exercises, but never during a real emergency.

Mr Peace had one period of leave in six years. At the end of the War, he was sent home for about six days, before being posted abroad again.

When he was first assigned to an active unit, his wireless was on for 24 hours a day. There was a day shift and a night shift, so when off duty, your time was pretty much your own. But then when he joined a Mobile Signals Unit, he was on duty pretty much 24 hours a day. When serving abroad with the Mobile Field Hospitals, the wireless operators would go out with them to help out during emergencies. You were as well doing that as sitting about when off duty.

In January 1945, Mr Peace was serving at Eindhoven, when the last

A vintage biplane with a red, white, and blue striped tail is flying over a landscape with a river and hills. The sky is blue with some clouds. The plane is seen from a low angle, showing its wings and propeller.

big German air raid on an airfield took place. The Germans had held the airfield for many years, so knew all the blind approaches. They blitzed the airfield. The Mobile Field Hospital to which Mr Peace's signals unit was attached took over part of the St Joseph's (civilian) Hospital at Eindhoven. The weather broke, fighting came to a standstill, so they were there for a few weeks. During that time, the unit arranged a treat for the local children – a huge number of them. The Dutch population was nigh on starving by this time in the War. Many of the children had never tasted chocolate. The grateful population gave Mr Peace and his fellow servicemen a card of thanks, which he still treasures.

Later they were sent to the North of Denmark, to Aalborg, and had to drive right up through Denmark. The journey would normally have taken about a day, but took about two or three days, because in each town or village, the population was anxious to greet them and welcome them.

The worst thing he ever saw was Belsen. His unit was at Celle airport near Hanover, and was told to report to a certain map reference to repair telephone equipment. It was about eight miles away and it turned out to be the Belsen Concentration Camp. Even while still a few miles away, the smell would have knocked you down. They didn't know what it was, but knew it was something terrible. The camp had just been liberated a few days before.

The men in the services had no idea of the extent and awfulness of the concentration camps. Mr Peace arrived on the third or fourth day after the liberation. Irma Griech a notorious female commandant was

still in the camp. She was reputed to have made lampshades out of human skin. She was quickly taken away into captivity.

The ovens were still there, with bodies still clamped down, proving that bodies had been put into them alive. The army commander in charge rounded up everybody from the local villages several miles around, marched them to the camp and showed them what had been done there – the ditches, the corpses, the inmates in grey and black striped clothes like pajamas. All the local pleaded ignorance, but the smell for several miles around must have told them that something awful was going on. Many of them were screaming and crying and trying to look away, but they were made to look. Still they said they had had no idea of what was being done.

Mr Peace took photographs of what he saw, and had the photographs printed by the army X-Ray people, but when he saw the photographs, he burnt both the prints and the negatives.

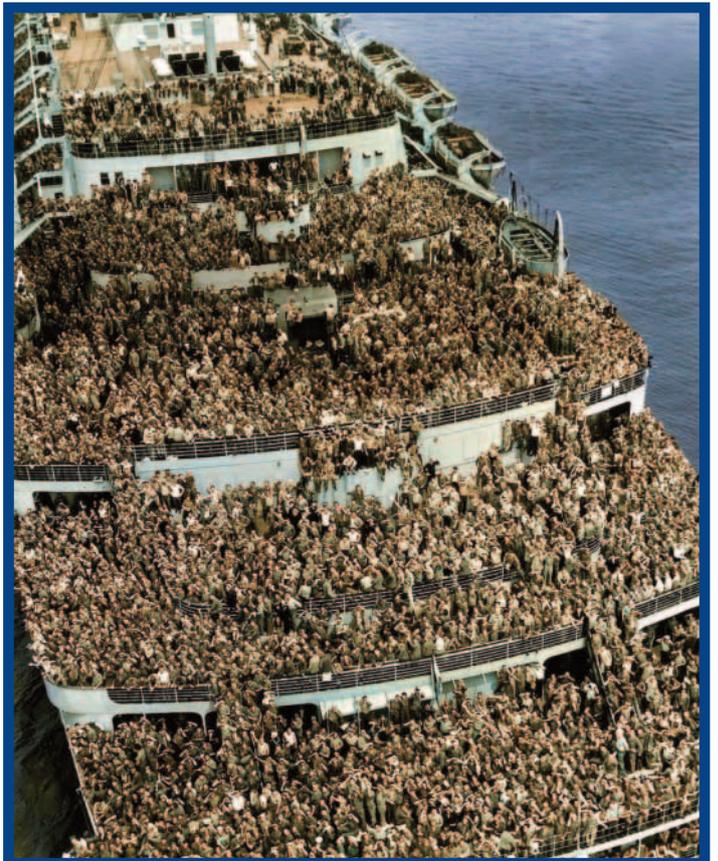
He came back to England, got about six days leave to go back and see his family in Bathgate for the first time since he joined up; then was sent out to Africa, to Khartoum. On the boat going from Marseilles to Alexandria, there was some atrocious weather, heavy storms, and most of the troops were seasick. Mr Peace was fortunate not to be seasick, and remembers one particular incident. In the canteen, a hand dumped a ladleful of potato on his plate, and a voice said 'You're a long way from Bathgate.' It was another Bathgate man, Frankie Aitken. He was in the catering corps, and had been pressed into service as so many of the boat's crew were seasick.

After Europe, Khartoum was like a holiday camp. Their work was passing on radio messages from Africa and the East to Europe. It was hot, and there was no pressure of War. He got a few days leave and went to Italian Eritrea. You could get a plane to Eritrea, but the planes on the way back to Khartoum were filled with vegetables for the troops, so coming back involved a two or three day train journey across the desert – not so pleasant but interesting. He remembers being astonished that the Blue and the White Nile, seen from the air, were not just names, but actually described the very different colours of the two rivers.

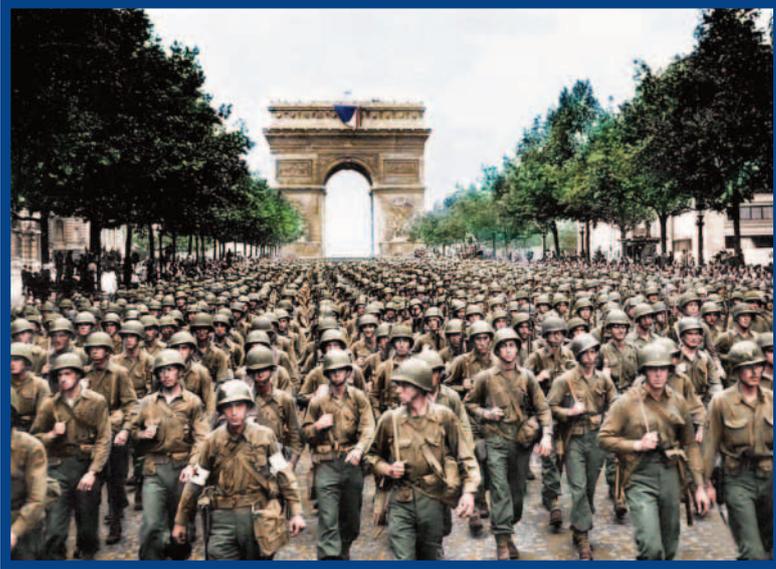
Mr Peace was 24 when he came out of the Air Force. After being demobbed, he had about six weeks to re-adjust to civilian life, then went back to work at the North British Steel Foundry.

Looking back, Mr Peace feels that the War was in some ways a good thing to be part of – everybody helped one another, everybody had the same aim, and there was no animosity. The War itself was terrible, but he would still say that it had been a great experience to go through the War, and see things and places he would never otherwise have seen.

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# VE Day Celebrations



As the world began to realise that an end to hostilities in Europe had finally arrived, both servicemen and civilians alike started to believe that life could return to normality after 6 years of bloodshed.

The pictures opposite capture a fraction of the feelings from around not just the continent, but every corner of the globe.

**Top Left:** In London, Winston Churchill takes centre stage on the balcony at Buckingham Palace, flanked to his left by the Queen Mother and Princess Elizabeth, who would become Queen Elizabeth II only seven years later after the untimely death of her father King George VI, seen here on the right of the Prime Minister with Princess Margaret making up the quintet.

**Middle Left:** The Reichstag was seen as symbolic of, and at the heart of, Nazi Germany. It was arguably the most symbolic target in Berlin. Meliton Kantaria (Georgian) and Mikhail Yegorov (Russian), raise the Soviet flag over the Reichstag.

**Bottom Left:** British prisoners of war wave and cheer as they pose for a picture moments after being freed from their German captors.

**Middle Top:** Military police officers read intently of the victory unfolding under their watch.

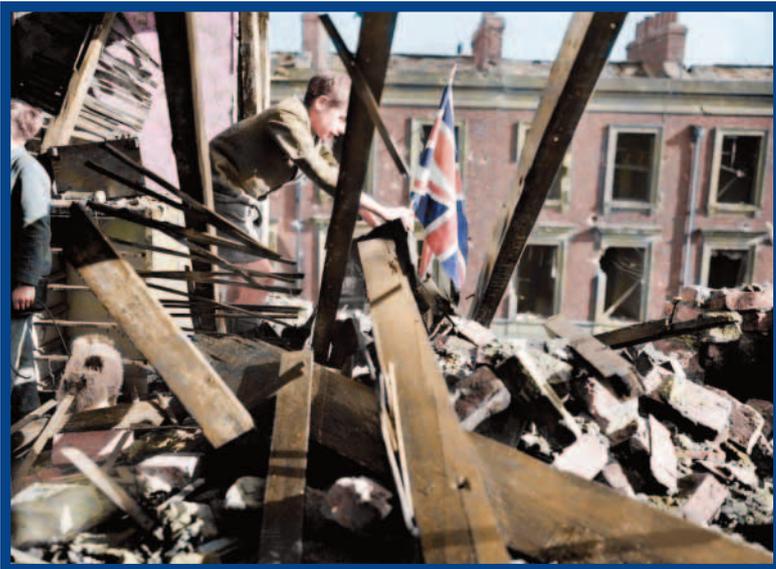
**Middle Centre:** Red Army troops return to Moscow, welcomed by thousands of thankful Russians who had endured extreme hardship under the Nazis.

**Middle Bottom:** American troops cram a passenger liner and are pictured sailing into New York after the hostilities in Europe.

**Top Right:** American soldiers march victoriously through Paris letting the French know the news.

**Middle Right:** A young boy defiantly poses with a Union Jack flag among the London ruins after the Luftwaffe had bombed a few nights previously.

**Bottom Right:** Allied soldiers pose with a seized Nazi flag and a portrait of Adolf Hitler – telling the world that no longer shall we live in fear of this man.



# GENERATION TO GENERATION



RIBBONS *of* P O P P I E S  
SOWING ● THE ● SEEDS ● OF ● REMEMBRANCE

1914-1918



1939-1945

ANCRE SOMME ASSOCIATION

75 YEARS AGO WAR IN EUROPE ENDED, IT BECAME KNOWN AS

# VE-DAY

8th MAY 1945 - 8th MAY 2020



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BRITAIN & THE COMMONWEALTH - AMERICA - CANADA - FRANCE  
REMEMBER REFLECT RESPECT

# Hiroshima



*In this Sept. 8, 1945 photo, an allied correspondent stands in front of a building that once was a movie theatre in Hiroshima, Japan, a month after the first atomic bomb ever used in warfare was dropped by the U.S. on Aug. 6, 1945.*

**W**hen the Japanese surrendered in World War II, the historic news was all but eclipsed by the world-altering event that led up to it: the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, which happened 75 years ago this year.

“The greatest and most terrible of wars ended, this week, in the echoes of an enormous event – an event so much more enormous that, relative to it, the war itself shrank to minor

significance,” read TIME magazine’s first sentence of the first story that ran the first week after. “The knowledge of victory was as charged with sorrow and doubt as with joy and gratitude. More fearful responsibilities, more crucial liabilities rested on the victors even than on the vanquished.”

It was clear to all then that a great force had been unleashed, and those who had survived the awful war would be left to try to harness it. In 1985, on the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the publication looked back at the legacy of the Atomic Age. As part of that special issue, Yoshitaka Kawamoto, the director of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, shared his memories of that day in 1945.



Kawamoto was a 13-year-old student at a middle school only about a half-mile from the site of the explosion. In the moment of impact, most of his classmates were instantly killed. Those left alive cried out, or sang to try to attract the attention of anyone who might help. The horror, however, had only just begun:

But then the singing and the cries grew weaker. My classmates were dying one by one. That made me very frightened. I struggled to free myself from the broken fragments, and looked around. I thought that gas tanks had exploded. Through a hole in the roof I could see clouds swirling in a cone; some were black, some pink. There were fires in the

middle of the clouds. I checked my body. Three upper teeth were chipped off; perhaps a roof tile had hit me. My left arm was pierced by a piece of wood that stuck in my flesh like an arrow. Unable to pull it out, I tied a tourniquet around my upper arm to stanch the flow of blood. I had



*Cenotaph through which the Atomic Dome can be seen at Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima, Japan.*

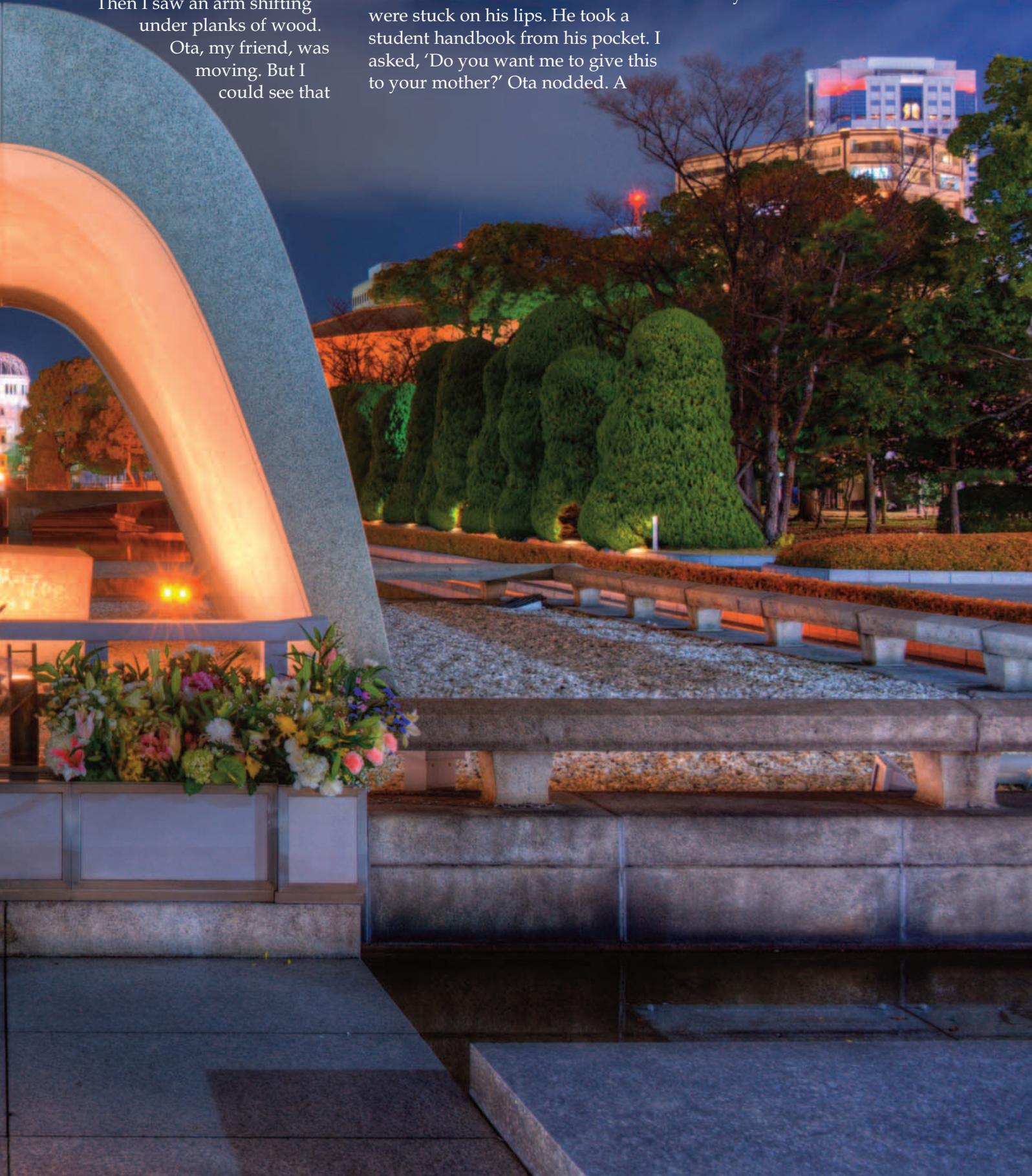
no other injuries, but I did not run away. We were taught that it was cowardly to desert one's classmates. So I crawled about the rubble, calling, 'Is there anyone alive?'

Then I saw an arm shifting under planks of wood.

Ota, my friend, was moving. But I could see that

his back was broken, and I had to pull him up into the clear. Ota was looking at me with his left eye. His right eyeball was hanging from his face. I think he said something, but I could not make it out. Pieces of nails were stuck on his lips. He took a student handbook from his pocket. I asked, 'Do you want me to give this to your mother?' Ota nodded. A

moment later he died. By now the school was engulfed in flames. I started to walk away, and then looked back. Ota was staring at me with his one good eye. I can still see that eye in the dark.



Please remember this was a victory over nazism, Hitler, fascism, racism. rape, torture, genocide, mass murder, death and destruction. Estimation for the total number of casualties in the war vary, because many deaths went unrecorded. Most suggest that some 60 million people died in the war, including about 20 million military personnel and 40 million civilians. Many of the civilians died because of deliberate genocide, massacres, mass bombings, disease, and starvation.

The Soviet Union alone lost around 27 million people during the war, including 8.7 million military and 19 million civilian deaths. A quarter of the people in the Soviet Union were wounded or killed. Germany sustained 5.3 million military losses, mostly on the Eastern Front and during the final battles in Germany.

An estimated 11 to 17 million civilians died as a direct, or as an indirect, result of Nazi racist policies, including mass killings of around 6 million Jews, along with Roma, homosexuals, at least 1.9 million ethnic Poles and millions of other Slavs (including Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians), and other ethnic and minority groups. Between 1941 and 1945, more than 200,000 ethnic Serbs, including gypsies and Jews, were persecuted and murdered by the Axis-aligned Croatian Utase in Yugoslavia. Also, more than 100,000 Poles were massacred by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in the Volhynia Massacres between 1943 and 1945. At the same time about 10,000–15,000 Ukrainians were killed by the Polish Home Army and other Polish units, in reprisal attacks.

Hitler was aiming to take over the world with his regime dictatorship ideology.

This programme gives an insight not only from a local perspective, but is an interesting, informative and explanatory realisation of War created by an evil totalitarian monster. Hopefully the young people of today will learn more of their local and world history.

History should never be allowed to be repeated on this scale. We don't want wars or conflicts which cause hate and division – but who knows what the future holds.

Please visit the Bennie Museum in Bathgate to understand local history where there are fantastic artefacts about some of the people who fought for our freedom.

**The Bennie Museum**  
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**Museum Opening Times**  
**SUMMER – April to September**  
**Mon-Sat – 11.00am-4.00pm**  
**WINTER – October to March**  
**Mon-Sat – 11.00am-3.30pm**  
**CLOSED EVERY SUNDAY**

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