



Veteran's Story: World War One

By Patricia Putt

(Adult Category)

Five old soldiers were lined up in a queue, at Wimborne in Dorset, with the intention of joining up for the British Army.

They had been in the First World War on the front line, but luckily they had escaped with few injuries. Unfortunately, they were scarred for life; the men had seen a lot of action at the front line. They witnessed horrific sights; comrades blown to bits; having to shoot the poor horses, because they were drowning in mud; men buried alive in the trenches when the enemy shelled them. Sights no one should ever see.

This wonderful group of men were eager to join up for the Second World War to do their bit. They waited and waited for what seemed like hours, with the young men being rushed by them. The gentlemen were all very sprightly and very proud of their military backgrounds and very eager to do their bit in World War Two. The five had met on the battlefield, and came from the same regiment, in the same part of the country. Nick was a captain in the army in charge of military operations. Jack looked after the horses, watering them and feeding them, and trying to make them more comfortable. George was in dispatch, running between enemy lines and risking his life. Arthur was a lookout for enemies, which was rather dangerous as you could get your head blown off at any time, what a brave man. Michael looked after the rations and was responsible for making sure all the men had something to eat, handing out bully beef in tins and occasionally baked beans. He had to get the supplies from headquarters. Also, he would make flasks of hot drinks, trying to bring comfort to the men. He even managed to get them chocolate from time to time.

Just ordinary men doing what the country expected of them.

They truly were heroes.

World War One Diaries

July 16th 1916

In the trenches between 2pm and 4.30pm our artillery bombarded the hostile trenches. The effect of our bombardment could not be observed owing to the craters in front of our own lines that obscured the view. The enemy replied vigorously with shells of different calibre; *minenwerfer* and rifle grenades doing considerable damage to our front, support and communication trenches, knocking in several dugouts. Two men were killed, and five others wounded.

July 17th 1916

In the trenches from 12 noon until 10pm. The enemy were unusually quiet, only firing a few rifle grenades at trenches, doing very little damage. At 10.45pm the enemy shelled our trenches and attacked two of our saps. Both these attacks were stopped by our fire and the enemy driven off, the enemy suffered some casualties. At 11.15pm the enemy made another attack on one of our saps, this was also unsuccessful.

Those would have been some typical days in the First World War for our brave soldiers.

They were all looking forward to joining World War Two.

“Looks like we are getting to the end of the queue,” they mumbled between themselves.

Out of the office the sergeant came strolling over; the men jumped to attention. The sergeant gave them a salute, showing them respect. He passed around the forms to be filled in. Giving details of their ranks, ages, regiment and service numbers.

They finished filling in the forms and the sergeant collected them and said, “Please take a seat. I will check them and be back when I have finished.”

The men were getting excited, joking around, telling jokes. They felt wanted again, a wonderful feeling. They sat with silly grins on their faces.

The sergeant came back into the room and said, “Gentlemen, please sit down. I have checked your papers. I am afraid you are all over-age to rejoin the military. I am very sorry.”

The men shouted with disappointment. "There's a lot more life in us yet! Don't put us on the rubbish heap!"

The sergeant held his hands up and said, "Gentlemen, listen to me. Have you considered joining the Home Guard? We need brave men such as you. The Home Guard needs military men, you have the experience. How about it?"

They looked at each other and said, "Yes."

The sergeant took their forms over to the Home Guards' office, and these old soldiers were more than happy to be part of the Wimborne Home Guards protecting Great Britain.

All that was thirsty work and they all ended up in the pub. Those men lived on a military pension, roughly two shillings and six pence per week. This had to pay the rent, and feed and clothe the family.

They pooled their spare money together and worked out what they could afford - which was two and a half pints, so they lined up five empty pint glasses and put half a pint in each glass without spilling a drop.

They toasted each other, looking forward to getting kitted out with their uniforms. First, they had to get home to tell their families the good news.

The New Home Guard practiced marching around Wimborne Square singing, "It's a long way to Tipperary." No one was sure if they were singing the right words, perhaps the children should have covered their ears!

The Home Guards rescued hundreds of people during the war and gave comfort to the people at this stressful time. These men played a valuable part in the war, came from all walks of life. They became known as Dads Army.

We could not have done without them.

Comrades to the end.