



## **ALBERT ARTHUR WILLDAY**



### **Albert at 18**

### **Kings Own Scottish Borderers**

**Acknowledgement to Albert's family and in particular his daughter Dawn, for providing the below summary of Albert's Service History Taken from a book that Albert had written some years ago.**

Born in Moira, Leicestershire on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1923.

Left school at 14 and worked with his Father at the pipe factory, after missing out on a scholarship at the age of 12, due to catching the measles. Dad had been top of his class, so was very disappointed.

12<sup>th</sup> February 1942, at the age of 18 I went to Maryhill Barracks for 5 months of hard training. We did have some time to play soccer and our team which comprised of 4 professional footballers, won every cup.

12<sup>th</sup> July 1942 I was drafted to the Kings Own Scottish Borderers near Newcastle. We helped the farmers with the harvesting. I was stacking up the straw and leaned over the side to reach a sheaf of straw and the side gave way and I hit the ground and ended up with fluid underneath my kneecap.

**AIRBORNE FORCES ASSOCIATION WEST AUSTRALIA**



October 1942, we sailed on the SS Amsterdam and were at the mouth of the Firth and almost in the North Sea when we felt a shudder when we were rammed by a cargo ship, which sank almost immediately. There was a huge hole in our ship, so we were towed and arrived in Sunborough, Shetland Islands. We had to patrol the beaches as Berger in Norway was occupied by the Germans and is only 80 miles from Scotland. It was reported that landing barges were being prepared for the invasion. The only darkness was from 2am until 3am and the heavens were mostly lit up with the glorious Northern Lights.

3<sup>rd</sup> July 1943 we sailed to Orkney Isles to Kirkwall.

15<sup>th</sup> October 1943 we went to South Ronaldsay which is a small island. The Brigadier recommended that our Battalion joined the First Airborne Division, so we sailed to Kirkwall

2<sup>nd</sup> December 1943 we went to Lincolnshire which was to be our base. We endured many months of intensive training. We marched with a full kit, plus a wireless kit and other equipment. This took 2 hours to march the 10 miles and this continued for the next weeks.

July 1944, we went to Oxfordshire for our special Airborne Glider Training. During our first trip, while being towed by a Stirling, our tow rope broke when we were 100ft. off the ground. The plane flew on, undamaged but the glider went into a building and the pilot and co-pilot were killed. I was at the rear of the glider and escaped injury, but some of my pals had fractures and bruises. We were ordered to fly the next morning, and did five more trips that day, so as not to lose our nerve. There was one mishap when we had a forced landing in a ploughed field. I made many more flights but didn't enjoy one of them. We got the entire slip stream from the plane and were tossed and turned all over the place.

I had Christmas leave at home and I persuaded Gladys (my wife to be) to allow me to walk her home and from that day I thought of her a great deal.

On my return to base in Bulford we resumed our signal course. We enjoyed our sport and I won the Battalion High Jump Competition and I played in the cricket team. My friend Bobby McMillan and I both played for the Battalion Football team. We were both very fit and got our places in the Divisional sports and cross country teams. We won and received 3 extra days of leave.

We had visits from Field Marshall Montgomery (then General), The Prime Minister (Mr. Churchill) and His Majesty, The King. At the parade I never felt prouder than that day when the pipes and drums for our Battalion were playing our march pass and we marched past and saluted base. The air was filled with the haunting tune by Sir Walter Scott "Blue Bonnets over the Border".

Just before 'D' Day we were taken to the airfields. I was shaken up upon hearing that our 3 Platoon was wiped out. I would have been on that exercise, but luckily, I was still on the signalling course. 3 Platoon a glider and the Stirling tow plane crashed into a hill. It was a big blow for A Company to see 38 of your best mates plus 4 or 5 of the Stirling crew just killed in training. We had 4 days leave.

16<sup>th</sup> September 1944 we were briefed for the plan for the Arnhem Operation and even to the last minute, we were expecting the Op to be cancelled. We were taken to Blake Hill Farm aerodrome near Swindon and slept the night. Then at 10am Sunday morning 17<sup>th</sup> September 1944 we took off, towed by the C49 Douglas Dakota and were the first off in the KOSB's. We flew over the channel while listening to our piper playing "Blue Bonnets over the Border". We sang along to many songs.

We were over Holland and at 1pm we were cast off. A shell went through our glider door, so our glider pilot didn't want to give the AA any chance of another shot so nosedived and landed in a field of clover. We were the second glider down and I was the 29<sup>th</sup> to set foot on the Arnhem soil and soon took up defensive positions and took 40 prisoners from the AA defences. The Dutch underground told us there were lots of German tanks close by. The Dutch people were pouring out and giving us the V sign. We then went into position to defend the Drop Zone for the 4<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion. There were a lot of casualties. After half an hour we headed for the rendezvous and found the HQ. We were given further instructions.

Our division, 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne had to play forward Coy for the division and to make our Company Head Quarters in Oosterbeek. I had my entire full group on the wireless set, as I was doing 'control'. The Leader of the Dutch Underground gave us the full plan and offered to



fight along with the Battalion, which he did. He told us that 2 Panzer Divisions of tanks were heading towards Arnhem with, a number of SS Divisions.

6 pm on 17<sup>th</sup> September 4 truckloads of 200 S.S. troops drove up near 3 platoons. When the Germans were 50 yards away they let them have it before the Germans knew what was happening.

Meanwhile we were at Company HQ and were being shelled and mortared and had a few near misses. We were lucky compared to the 4<sup>th</sup> Parachute Battalion who were defending the Bridge N.W. of Arnhem.

I was sitting in a slit trench with Major Buchanan and talking about home and the fact that they would now know about the operation "Market Garden".

In the morning, the Germans opened fire and we returned fire. After casualties on either side, our advance restarted about 3pm along the road and we had to take cover quite often as German snipers had been left behind to slow down our advance. After reaching the borders of the town, we took to the woods after, a number of shells exploded and injured quite a lot of our company. We prepared to dig in for the night. We still had 2 dozen German prisoners with us, including a few Dutch who we believed to be pro-Nazi. We had cigarettes, which were a great help at the time, and I ate a couple of blocks of porridge and a few biscuits.

We were hoping the British Army would turn up, but the 30<sup>th</sup> Corp never reached us. The poor weather conditions in England had delayed flights to Holland.

We were attacked again, and our Mortar team and Anti-tank team were wiped out. There were dead and dying all over the place. We took the wounded to HQ. The "18 set" was out of order, so we couldn't get through to Battalion HQ. The Germans blocked some of the sets by playing music on our frequencies. Our supplies and rations were being dropped to the Germans.

After holding our position for 7 days instead of 2, we had no food or water and were exhausted and could hardly stand up. After leaving HQ we arrived at the main road. We found ourselves surrounded, so we asked Major Buchanan "What should we do?" We had to surrender. A German Officer spoke English and gave us water and we were taken to a barn. Next morning, we travelled in a cattle wagon and couldn't sit as there were 50 of us. We went to Milberg Stalag 4D and stayed for one night as it was for officers only.

We travelled for 3-4 days and passed through Berlin where bombing was taking place by the American Thunderbolts. Luckily, we had our identification – yellow silk triangles on and were able to show them through the door. We were taken to Stalag 12A. Photographs were taken, and my stalag number was 89377 and my work number 355. We were all given a card to write home and were in that camp for 12 days.

7<sup>th</sup> October 1944, 50 of us were put into cattle trucks and travelled 5 days and 5 nights then arrived at Stalag 4B, which was a very nice camp compared to others. We spent 3 days there before being loaded into a cattle truck for 3 days and were on our way to Tuetcherththal near Halle in Central Germany. We arrived on 19<sup>th</sup> October at Stalag 4D and were given some lentil soup. My friend Bobby McMillian was still with me.

We were taken to a salt mine near Leipzig in Eastern Germany – 31 km from Halle, and there were 40 of us. We slept on straw, full of bed bugs and were bitten at night. We worked 10 hour day's in slush and I had sores on my back and legs. My beret had holes in it from liquid dripping down. This liquid was used to make aluminium. Once a day we ate 250g of black bread, 1 pint of broth (carrots boiled in water).

I had a perforated ear drum and had to walk 1 mile to a hospital. Instead of working in the salt mine I was sent to the salt factory where I crawled to get ash out of the furnace flues which were underneath the salt vats.

14<sup>th</sup> April 1945, the Americans came crashing through the camp. Tanks and jeeps were everywhere and, we were given biscuits, chocolates and cigarettes. What a welcome sight, and they said that they got a great kick out of releasing us chaps. They didn't know that it was a POW camp.

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After a couple of days Bobby McMillan and I borrowed a car and drove to the airfield. The Lancaster's came and flew us back to Belgium. We were met by girls with flowers and food. We were taken to Oostende then across the channel back to England. We were wearing American uniforms, so people thought we were Americans. After going to Sussex camp, I caught a train to Moira and was met by my sisters Kathy and Winnie. We arrived home and Dad and my Uncle Arthur were up the garden and they ran to meet me.

I was sent to Southport Hospital for 3 months as I had lost so much weight and my ears needed to be attended to.

I was sent to Castle Bromwich in the West Midlands, where I did Technical Administration and Education Office work.

After being demobbed on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1946, Gladys and I were engaged.

We were married on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1949.