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Sitting in front of the fire one night and thinking over the years and what I had done, I decided to put pen to paper and to try and capture some of the highlights of my life.

Not many people can claim that they were born on the 11th day of the 11th month at 11 o'clock in the evening in 1923. But I was and, even more surprisingly, I weighed 11 pounds. My father was a herdsman. He was used to delivering calves. He was absolutely certain just before my arrival that I was going to be a girl. "What's it going to be then,?" asked my mother. "Why, a girl, of course. They always choose to arrive at the most awkward times. If you look out of the window you'll see that it is both foggy and frosty. and it's late in the evening."

We lived at the place of my birth, Lees Farm, in South Marston until I was about five. Then came the move to Upper Upham. One of my most vivid memories was when we had been there only a short time, maybe a few months. It was about 6 o'clock in the morning and my brother Ron and I were just waking up. suddenly, my father rushed in to our room, threw us out of bed and hurtled us on to the landing and towards the stairs. No sooner had he removed us from our bed when the ceiling fell down and fire started to consume first the bed and then the whole room. I reckon that we had a lucky escape.

Dad had been milking in the cowshed when he heard a neighbour calling him. The ominous words "your house is alight" together with the acrid smell of burning made him race towards the row of four thatched cottages where the roof was blazing. He said later he had never moved so fast in his life.

We lost everything we had in that fire. We literally had only the clothes we stood up in. The farmer put us in with another family in another cottage on his farm. It could not have been easy either for any of us. Just imagine two families sharing one small cottage. There were Mr and Mrs Lee with their three grown up sons and then our family at that time consisted of us four boys and a sister. We were a bit tight in there.

In that little cottage there were 12 of us altogether and I know our mother had a hard time in making sure we were on our best behaviour. For example, soon after we had moved in there - it was under Sugar Hill, near Aldbourne but there aren't any houses there today - my mother pointed to an upstairs room and said very sternly " you don't go and look in there". Of course, we were only lads and that whetted our interest. Soon after, my brother Ron who was a year or two older than me dared us to have a look soon after we got up one morning. I can see it now. Old Mr Lee was lying in bed with his nightcap on. The tassell was hanging down just like in a picture from a bygone age. "Get out", he bellowed. We were doubled up with laughter, it was hilarious. Mother , too, found it very amusing in spite of what she said to us that morning.

Not long after that my brother Ron and I met a shepherd from Ramsbury bringing about 500 sheep to Fox Hill. We stood in open gateways to stop them going in to gardens. While the shepherd brought up the rear we kept getting in front of the sheep,

leading the way , so to speak. When he was in sight of his destination he gave us 2p each to go away. It was really to thank us for helping him out on such a hot day. To us in those days, it must have been about 1928, 2p was a lot of money. We started to walk back home but on our way back we got lost. Fog suddenly came down and we lost our bearings completely. Neither of us was very old and we started to cry. suddenly Ron said : "Listen" and later in life I've often thought that mothers are wonderful, they seem to have a sixth sense, for we could hear Mother calling out down in the valley. The dog was with her and when he heard our responding voices he jumped, pulled the lead from out of Mother's hand and headed in our direction. Were we pleased to see this lovely Collie dog. Although he had found us. it was now that Mother was lost in the fog. Eventually we all got back together. mother just said "Let's go home" and the dog led us home for he knew the way. Mother of course had been very anxious about us and sent us off to bed without any tea. However, when we got upstairs we saw that our bread and jam was on the bed. Later, mother came up and washed us.

About a week later, an Army friend of my Dad, Harry Smart from Chiseldon, came over with his wife to see us. He had heard of our troubles and that we had lost everything we had in that fire. He said " I'll take Ron and Tony back to Chiseldon with me for a month or so". My mother and father were very grateful. The Army friend and his wife already had a family of three sons and a daughter. We stayed there for 12 months and were very happy. When Dad went to settle up with him and pay for all the food we had had, he would not take a penny piece. What a friend he was to our family. Eventually, we got a new home in South Marston. This was prior's Farley Farm. it was a dairy farm and concentrated on cows and a few poultry.

As I said, I was about five years old at this time and my brother Ron was eighteen months younger. He and I were very close to each other both in age in temperament and remained so until his death a few years ago. My brother Wally and I used to go to Roves Farm to clean out four fowl houses for one shilling. This meant that we got sixpence each for four hours work. The fowl houses were huge and today we would talk about intensive farming. We were pleased with our earnings even though we had to hand it all over to our Dad.

Priors Farley farm was very isolated, near South Marston, and being a dairy farm specialised in a herd of shorthorn cows as well as strawberry roans. They were good milkers. Remember, this was about five years after the introduction of the Friesian cow to farms in Britain. My father was a herdsman and as such was far more than a man who milked the cows. To him was given the responsibility of caring for them from birth to death nurturing them with the foodstuffs that helped promote the best supply of milk, getting them serviced by the bull, taking care of the calves, and also determining when it was time for them to be slaughtered. He was responsible for taking the stock to market and for selling the stock. The boss did all the buying. The quality of the milk was important as well as the quantity. In addition to this animal husbandry the farm also had a little poultry section for there were about 50 Rhode Island Reds but my father's main work was involved with the cows.

As we children were now growing up and had to go to school my parents decided that we ought to move to be nearer the village. Our nearest school was at South Marston. We lived about one mile off the main road. Ron who was then twelve years old and I was ten and a half used to walk to the South Marston school every day. This was a

walk of about one mile each way. Shrivenham was a bigger village and so came about another change in our lives. In 1933 we moved to what is known today as Rhymes Cottage. In those days there were two cottages there. They were good houses and each had three bedrooms. My father used to work at Stallpits Farm, which now belongs to Robert Gay's estate. He worked there for Captain and Mrs Colledge for 18 years. Captain Colledge was best described as a gentleman farmer. My father was very well treated for in addition to his wages he received one ton of the coal for the cottage free, all his milk free and all his potatoes free provided that he dug them up. Furthermore, for every animal he took to be sold Captain Colledge would give him one shilling for every guinea he made. I think it is a measure of how good a herdsman he was when Stallpits farm was sold he had several offers of a job elsewhere. Strangely enough, by that time he felt that he had had enough of farming and went to work at Plesseys in Swindon.

The reason for our move to Shrivenham was that the school was much closer. At that time the head teacher was a man called Dickie Dance. His wife also taught at the school. The other teachers that I remember were Dolly Golter, Selina Wheeler, (she was sister to Mr Jones who was the Parish Clerk in Shrivenham for many years.) and Miss Gregory who later became Mrs Pound. Women teachers who married in the days before the last war had to relinquish their positions on marriage. It is good that things have changed for Miss Gregory was a good teacher and it was a shame that the school lost her when she got married. Mr Dance was a wonderful ornithologist, there was very little that he did not know about birds. We had ample opportunity to see and learn about the very many birds that were in the rural backwater that was Shrivenham in the 1930's. However, Mr Dance had a terrible temper or as we say these days: he had a short fuse. We boys got a regular caning when we did anything to displease him. He was a wonderful bloke, really, and would take us to football matches in Swindon. Sometimes we would watch him walk away from us in the classroom when he got steamed up. He would walk round the garden until he had cooled down. My best friends were Dennis Stratton, Les Judd and Bill Benford. I felt so sad when Bill later died by the College Gates in a tragic accident. He was talking to Harold Claridge on sentry duty when one of the sentries' guns went off accidentally and hit Bill. He was only at the time.

In the 1930's we boys left school when we reached the age of 14 years. Incidentally, we stayed at Shrivenham School until that date. We did not have to go to Faringdon as the children do today. When my older brother, Ron, left school he became the Bull man at Stallpits farm. Ron saw to the servicing of the cows by the prize-winning bull. He loved his job and his bull who would bellow for Ron whenever he saw him. I think you could say they had a rapport. You could always see the bull's eye looking through a hole in the shed boards. When he saw Ron he went roaring. We always knew where Ron was when we heard the bull. Later on, the Colledges went to live near one of the artificial insemination centres in Devon. They clearly cared about the quality of their stock. Ron also went down there to look after the animals until they had settled in.

I also worked at Stallpits farm. I was a general dogsbody there. For example, my tasks included lighting the boiler, cleaning the shoes, cleaning out the fowls, plucking pheasants. I remember saying one day that I had plucked a pheasant which on closer look was all maggots. I said to the cook that I would not have eaten that if you had

paid me £5. The Captain said "He's not eating that, we are". Captain College was a generous man but he expected his jobs to be done thoroughly. "Boy! Boy!", he would roar and demand that the shoes were re-cleaned if they were not done to his satisfaction.

In the house itself and in addition to having my services there were three young ladies from Ireland, Lil, Kath and Nora who were employed as domestics. They were three of the loveliest girls I have ever met. Always, when we went into the house from doing the chores around the farm, there was a cup of tea and something to eat for us hungry growing boys.

During the war years before I actually joined up I became part of the Uffington Company Home Guard from 1941 – 1943. It was our job to guard the country around White Horse Hill and also Acorn Bridge. Our base on White Horse Hill operated from a caravan and it was our duty to ensure that no enemy landed anywhere in the vicinity. We worked from dawn to dusk on a basis of "2 hours on duty, 4 hours off duty. I reckon that I did more shooting there than I did later in the regular Army.

I also worked for Captain College from 1937, when I left school, to 1943 when I joined up. My employer had told me that my job was actually a reserved occupation and that I could stay on the farm for the duration of the war. I told him: "I want to serve my country and not be in a reserved occupation". My brother Wally and I joined up together up. Wally went into the Coldstream Guards and I went to the Welsh Guards, the reason being that it was not the policy to keep brothers together in a war situation. However, we were together during our initial training some of which took place at Imber Court. This was the headquarters of the Metropolitan Police. Apart from the training, one incident particularly stands out in my memory. I was a runner and enjoyed athletics. One day there was a sports meeting at Imber Court. This was early in the war and the Germans had got into the habit of sending doodle bugs over London. I had seen one and had been told that they usually came down at an angle. However on the day of the Sports Meeting, just after I had won the 3-mile race, a doodle bug came over and dropped vertically into the centre of the watching crowd. The carnage was awful. It blew the back out of the nearby stables and set them alight. The frightened neighing of the horses was terrible to hear. I was really alarmed for the safety of my brother Wally. I searched the crowds – it was a hive of activity with the medical boys moving from one person to another, covering the corpses with sheets and trying to assist the injured in their varying degrees to further help. To my great relief I caught sight of my brother after about half an hour. We embraced each other. I can honestly say that it was the only time we have ever embraced – we were that relieved to see each other. Incidentally, I never did get the medal for winning the 3-mile race that day. I remember feeling really frightened by the bombs and experienced a feeling of release when I heard that we had been posted to Italy. I spent all of my war service years in Italy. Strangely enough, I felt happier on the front line. The Regiment was up in the Appenine Mountains near Bologna.

It was an attractive place and in peacetime it must have been lovely. I well remember one day when we had been told to reconnoitre a certain area and in particular four houses which and suffered bomb damage. The first one was totally smashed in and there was nothing there. At the second one a man with a hurricane lamp stood at the door of his less badly damaged house. We asked our usual question: "is there anyone

else there?" The reply was "Just my brother and his wife". The brother came to the door – he only had half a leg. He had stepped on a mine. I shuddered and felt waves of nausea going through me. The third house was completely wrecked so we turned to the last one. This was a big house and when the old man was asked if anyone else lived there he said "No". But my companion was suspicious and persisted with his questioning. The old man let us in and after searching the place noticed that the door to the cellar was slightly askew. We entered it and found 8 men and women sleeping there. When we asked if they had seen any German patrols they responded that they had about half an hour earlier. The corporal and I were more than a bit alarmed. As this information sank in we heard chains rattling and there was a strange noise at the door. We discovered that the cows had returned for milking and the strange noise was a huge dog. I remember thinking that we really were at war. On the way back in the dark to our unit the corporal suddenly said "Stop". Along the dark and narrow track we were going there was a trip wire under my neck. Another step and I would have been killed. The wire had been tied amateurishly but menacingly to two bushes across the track. Its keyring when pulled would have blown us both to pieces in the detonation. Thank Goodness for his sharp eyes. We felt a little bit trembly at thinking about our narrow escape but soon settled down again at the unit. Our adventures were not over by any means for a few days later the Germans started shelling our camp. One or two of our boys sadly copped it. Somebody said to me "What's that thing on your neck?" I put my hand up to it and found that I was bleeding. I was promptly told to report sick and was taken to the General Hospital in Florence. On examination it was found that there was a small piece of Shrapnel embedded in my neck. Three days later I had blood poisoning and spent the next three months in a convalescent camp at Naples in Southern Italy. We were not far from the notorious volcano Vesuvius – only about 15 miles. The volcano happened to have a blowout during my time there and I've never seen anything like the 3" deep ash that lay everywhere.

Soon after I recovered from my blood poisoning I was sent to Rimini on the Adriatic coast. I had always been interested in athletics and in my Army days I turned my attention to boxing. An almost unbelievable occurrence happened one dark night when we lads were talking in the dark not long before getting ready for a boxing match the following day at Ancona. A voice asked me: "Where do you come from, then?" I replied "Swindon. A little place near Swindon." The voice carried on: "I know it well. If you put the light on then you'll see who I am." It was Bert Mildenhall from Stallpits Road. What an amazing coincidence. Sadly I was beaten at Ancona but I was not too unhappy because I was beaten by the Golden Glove champion of New York. I have to say that he didn't look too pretty after our rounds that night. I had a good write up in the local Regimental pages and when the CO saw me the next day he said: I take my hat off to you Brad".

It was not long after that we knew the war was coming to a close. We were so thankful and were looking forward to returning home. Just before I returned I met an American who told me that another boxing Exhibition was on the following day and invited me to participate. I declined very wisely I think since I knew we were due to leave Italy in the following two days. On returning home from Italy I went to Selkirk in Scotland with the Regiment. The war was now officially over in Europe so it was pointless to do Army duties. Britain had had a very hard time in the 6 years war. Consequently we lads were instructed to help the local farm with the harvest and we

worked alongside the land girls. I remember our Sergeant who was very shy. One day he expressed an interest to me in one of the landgirls. I invited him to join us lads at the local pub one evening and said to one of the girls "Be kind to him, he's very shy and has never had a girl friend. Blow me within 3 months of meeting this first girl he married her.

After our sojourn at Selkirk we were sent to Cologne and saw for ourselves the sheer devastation of that lovely city. It was completely flattened apart from one building. The cathedral stood defiantly amidst the destruction. It was quite a remarkable sight. While we were there the War Crimes Investigations were taking place at Nuremberg. Some of our lads used to go to the public gallery and try to recognise the senior German Army officers in the dock. They saw Ribbontrop who had been the Foreign Secretary and also Field Marshall Keitel. As part of our duties we had to guard the Divisional Bakery near Bonn. About 200 German workers were employed by the British Army – in their totally ruined city there was little or no employment and consequently we saw the stark poverty on the faces of the German civilians and their children. One of our jobs was to count these 200 employees into the Bakery. The Sergeant in charge was a compassionate man and said to us not to be too strict in observing the numbers because for some people the Bakery was the only means in Cologne of obtaining any food at all and keeping them from starvation. Every day they gave away the excess dough to the hungry people who gathered outside the Bakery. I reckon as many as 400 people appeared at this time. While our Sergeant didn't mind about the bread going to the hungry he did get annoyed about other items that disappeared from the Bakery. One day a corporal saw a woman snaffle an egg from the work top. When apprehended about it she denied it – but when examined the egg was found to be in a queer place.

We got the joyful news that we were going to be demobbed in 1946. I returned to Shrivvenham and met up again with Wally. A few weeks later in July 1945 there was a Welcome Party in the Memorial Hall in the village to welcome home officially all those returning from service into civilian life. I was totally taken aback to receive a cheque for £12. Every returning soldier received the same. When we wondered from where this bounty had come we were told that the money had been raised from **dances** held in the Memorial Hall during the war when the Americans were based in Shrivvenham. Someone had anticipated the return of us men at the end of the war and had run the dances on a business footing, putting the profits to one side for the purpose of helping us to settle in again. It was a handsome sum of money in those days when the average weekly take home pay was about £6.

After the war I had several temporary jobs on the buildings either in Shrivenham or in Swindon. In February 1952 I decided to join the Wiltshire Regiment. My father and two of my brothers were in this Regiment so I did the same. To be accepted I had to go to Exeter where I joined the Paras. During this time my mother was ill with liver cancer and I thought that if I could pass the Para Test I would get closer to home at Abingdon. Therefore I did the course at Aldershot and followed that with my Jumping course at Abingdon. I enjoyed it very much but found it quite hard-going. While I was there the news about my mother was not good and we knew that she did not have much longer to live. So I put in for a temporary post at Abingdon. The RSM got to hear of my plight and asked me to report to him after I had done my last qualifying jump. The day following my last jump was the Wings Parade where I was awarded my Para Wings on successfully completing the course. I duly reported to the RSM who said that I was on the permanent staff at Abingdon and asked me what I wanted to do. I wondered if there was a batman job available. He replied: "Be mine.". He went on to say that I should see my mother as much as possible. "You've only got one mother." He was like a father to me and said that as long as his kit was laid out each day on the bed then I was free to visit my mother in Shrivenham. I do remember that on Battle of Britain Day he insisted on sending me home. During this time I was walking out with Rose and falling in love with her. She was the girl for me I thought and I particularly loved the way she would visit my mother and take care of her. I asked Rose to marry me several times but she wanted more time to think about it. After my mother died in October 1952 the RSM told me that he would like me to take over as Barman in the Sergeants' Mess. I was still his batman and did the Barman job as well. A little later I again asked Rose to marry me and to my delight she agreed. I reckon it was the best move I've ever done. Just before the wedding the

RSM called me in to the Big Hall and said that on behalf of everyone on the base he would like to present me with a breakfast, dinner and tea service. It had come over on the Queen Mary's very last journey from America. We were married at Bourton Church in August 1953. We learned that for the Vicar who married us it was his first wedding and he did not charge us any fees. We went off to Guildford for our honeymoon. Rose continued to live with her parents in Bourton while I was still based at Abingdon and I came home whenever I could. It was while I was on an educational course at Didcot but still based at Abingdon that there came a phone call from the Depot wanting me to return immediately. The RSM told me the sad news that my sister had died soon after childbirth. The RSM was very sympathetic. After a little while I got promoted to a full corporal. As there was no vacancy at Abingdon I was posted to P Company (Airborne Forces Training Unit) at Aldershot. While I was there helping to train other lads I happened to say to one of my mates; "This is hard going." Later he drew to my attention that a storeman's job was advertised on Orders. When at the interview I said honestly that I knew nothing about keeping stores records, but was willing to learn, the officer said that I was the man for him and so I got the job. One of my duties was to take the tea and coffee together with the cheese rolls and jam doughnuts to the Assault Courses for their teabreaks. One day I got chatting to the Sergeant there. He asked me where I came from and when I told him Shrivenham he asked me if I had met a WAAF from Shellingford. I replied that I did and that she was a very nice girl. "I'm glad you said that because she's my wife." We've been friends ever since and that must be over 50 years now.

It was while I was at Abingdon that I had an accident which led to me being downgraded medically. We were jumping at Frensham Common near the Hogg's Back and I couldn't get rid of the Bren gun and I fell awkwardly and damaged my leg. The sergeant from Shellingford picked me up and took me back to base. Having

been downgraded the Company Commander asked where I would like to go for my next posting. Rose and I discussed it and then I said I would like to go to Devizes. While at Devizes I used to go to Imber which was a village requisitioned by the Army but which is now deserted. The Army had used it to practise knocking houses and every building in the village with the exception of the church had been knocked down to the ground. We, in peacetime, practised street fighting there. What I do remember there were the thousands of rabbits that had the horrid disease myxomatosis. It had only just been introduced into Britain then. Later, at Devizes, I slipped going down stairs. My friends said I was accident-prone when I ended up in Tidworth Military Hospital. I was there for 3 weeks; this was during the Suez crisis of 1956. I was so pleased to see Rose when she came to visit me. Her employer was very good to her for he offered her the loan of his car and was happy for her brother-in-law to drive her to Tidworth. At the time Rose was still living in Bourton and working in Shrivenham. I was in a plaster cast up to my neck for almost 3 weeks. The company Commander was uncertain as what to do with me. He said that I had too many good courses behind me and put me on extended manoeuvres to see how I got on. I had great difficulty in keeping up with everyone and sadly I had to go back into hospital for a while. So then, my time in the Army was nearly up. I'd signed on for 5 years and had almost done the time. I decided to leave.

I then got a job in Plessey's the electronics firm in Swindon. I worked in the canteen as a general help. My father still worked there and when he retired he asked me I'd like to take over from him looking after the canteen boilers and the other boilers. I agreed to this and I was pleased to say that I got the occasional free meal. At that time it was an attractive proposition. Later in my time at Plessey's I went into the factory in the Assembly Shop and assembled parts. I was at Plessey's for a total of 8 years. During my time in the canteen I used to work with Big Bill Glusing – his real name was Gunther – from Watchfield. He was German and stood about 6'6". I reckon he weighed about 19 or 20 stones. He was a wonderful friend and after I left Plessey's we always kept in touch. He used to take me in his car to the factory as living in Watchfield he passed through Shrivenham on his way. One thing we did regularly was to do a 3-mile walk in our lunch break. I particularly remember one day when we took a short cut by Elgin on the Industrial estate. Partly concealed from our view there was a pit about 8ft deep and just as wide again. As I've mentioned before I'm inclined to be accident prone and I tumbled into it and sank up to my breast pocket which was filling with water. Gunther lay at the edge of this pit and with his massive strength he hauled me out. I was unable to help much and there is no doubt at all, he saved my life. There was no one else about and I shudder to think what would have happened if I'd been on my own.

I seem to attract accidents for I remember that when I was working in the factory doing renovations for a building firm we had to shift the rubbish on to a monorail in a cart. We were not supposed to sit in this cart but some of us did including me. One day in this position someone must have touched the trip switch and this set off the monorail. It promptly tipped us out of the cart and sadly I had to go to the Great Western Hospital at the Railway Village in Swindon. It was built by Brunel for the benefit of his workforce and although small was very good and efficient. It was built long before the Princess Margaret Hospital and the Victoria Hospital. That day I had cut the area between 2 fingers very deeply and needed 3 stitches.

Another long standing friend from Plessey's was Graham Stanley. He was the charge hand. And we are still in touch at the time of writing. He and his wife have been marvellous friends.

In 1965 I applied for and got a job nearer home – this was at RMCS working in the kitchens. I liked this very much. The staff there were mainly women. I stayed there for only a year since there was a cutback in the numbers of men employed. It was last in, first out. I then worked with my younger brother, Wally, in Wroughton. He was a ganger. This means he was in charge of all the labourers and helped the foreman measure out the new buildings at Coventry Farm. When we finished at Wroughton I went to Sandringham Road in Swindon's Old Town. The houses there were all built on rafts as they were so very low lying and close to the brook. We built the rafts.

After that I went back into RMCS into Roberts Hall to do some renovation work for Clarke's of Swindon and this took me to my retirement in 1988. I was happy to retire as I felt I had had enough. Rose and I were lucky to have one of Lady Barrington's houses in the Recreation Ground in Shrivenham soon after I came back from the War. We had lots of garden to look after plus the decorating to do. I felt privileged when Mrs Pam Ilott asked me if I would like to become a Trustee of the oldest Charity in Shrivenham dating back to 1641. I enjoyed my involvement with this and just before I resigned in 2002 the Trust had built another 2 Almshouses. Rose and I now live in one of the new Lady Barrington flats in the centre of the village. It's great.

In 196