

CHAPTER VI

Thompson McKay & Co – City of London Volunteers – Territorial's - The Kensington Regiment – WWI – Colour Sergeant – Ypres - The Somme – Gommecourt – London Rifle Brigade – Combles - Hero's Return – Back to Normal – GCR – Freemasons – Grand Rank - The Old Contemptibles – Marriage and Home.

In 1906, at the age of seventeen, my father left the Boy's Brigade as a Sergeant and enrolled in the 4th Middlesex Rifle Volunteer Corps at the Drill Hall in: Adam and Eve Mews, Iverna Gardens, off High Street Kensington. Previously, the Corps was known as the West London Rifles but altered in 1905 to, The Kensington Rifles, when the Borough adopted the regiment. Three years later, when the Territorial Force was raised, there was an amalgamation of two Corps to form the 13th Battalion. It was this force that became known as the Kensington's having their Colours presented by King Edward VII at Windsor on the 19th June 1909 - which my father attended. Four years after the colours consecrated Princess Louise gave her name to the regiment - now becoming the 13th Princess Louise Kensington Battalion, the London Regiment.

When my father joined in 1906 his knowledge of drill, gained in The Boy's Brigade, stood him in good stead for he quickly became a Lance Corporal in charge of a squad of men. This was the start to a permanent connection with the regiment – he stayed close to its organization for the rest of his life. That promotion, to Lance Corporal, began a series of promotions over the next eight years until the start of The First World War. By that time, he was a senior Sergeant in the regiment. To an extent, the Kensington's were a 'pals' regiment, although not strictly so. The term was not used until much later in the war when recruiting began to be difficult. The Regiment was made up of men drawn from the local area, mostly from boys clubs, Scouts, Boy's Brigade and Church Lads as well as a sprinkling of unattached youths. They knew each other and where they lived - were friends, brothers, cousins and schoolmates. Father was twenty-five when war was declared, one of the oldest non commissioned officers. He lived for the regiment - its company and its men. He did not intend to be made an officer, when asked opted to stay with the men he grew up with. By the time the Battalion was put on standby – to take part in the British Expeditionary Force, he had been in the regiment for nearly ten years. He was by then the most senior non-commissioned officer in the regiment.

On Tuesday, 4th August 1914, Britain was at war with Germany. The stated aim was to secure Belgium's neutrality but the underlying motive was to reduce Germany's growing power. Initially it was a war of manoeuvre – 'to outflank' and 'cut off', but ended in 'stalemate' and 'static line'. The major battle that first year for the British was first Ypres in October, fought by the BEF. In the last days of December 1914, twenty-two Territorial battalions marched to join that British Force in France and within two further months, another twenty-six followed them. Amongst these men, my father paraded his men and marched them out of Kensington Barracks keen to get to grips with the Germans. Together, these Territorial made up the New Army. By September 1915, the British Army had fought four more important battles, 2nd Ypres, Aubers Ridge, Neuve Chapelle and Loos. They were the prelude to the Somme Front...

There was not a National plan for Britain's Defence. Not for sixty years had the British fought a war in Europe. It was questioned in Parliament what should be done to avert another shambles such as that experienced in South Africa. The war in France was fast becoming a similar fate. On Saturday 1st July 1916, at 7.30, that fine morning, the Battle of the Somme commenced. This was going to be biggest battle so far - conceived to take the strain off the French who were beginning to buckle at Verdun.

This region of France formed part of the old province of Picardy; an old Roman road linked its cathedral city Amiens and two smaller towns of Albert and Bapaume. The region was crossed by

two rivers the Somme and the smaller Ancre. The Germans were defending their gains. The Allies intent upon pushing them back. The former, constructed deep secure trenches and dugouts whilst developing small villages into miniature forts. The latter, believed such tactics opposed to aggressive behaviour laid scant regard on such wasted effort - their policy was, mobility and attack. What was typical, the Germans held the high ground... not only could they observe what was going on but knew that any attack had to be made uphill!

Our main concern is the northern end of the front line between the British Third and Fourth Armies, opposite the salient village of Gommecourt, its chateau and Park, the wood and famous tree, the Kaiser Oak, and cross-roads. In parts of the front line, the German trenches were only fifty feet away. The attack on Gommecourt was to be a diversionary attack made by two encircling flank-divisions; both made up of Territorial's, the 46th North Midland, to the north and the 56th London to the south. Within the London division were three Brigades each comprising of four Battalions... the 1/13th London [Kensington's], being one of the four. There were no reserves for this part of the battle...

In overall command was General Haig. The Third Army led by General Allenby, its VII Corps by Lieutenant General Snow and the 56th London Division by Major General Hull. Snow stressed that no movement should be made towards Gommecourt until the German defences had been destroyed by the artillery.

Before the battle, Major General Hull was ordered to construct a completely new trench halfway across 'No Man's Land', which was 800 yards wide. The Germans observed this.

The artillery had exposed the German trenches with continuous fire. This provoked return fire. The attack went in at 7.30 after the Kensington's had been very patient. Just before setting out men knelt down and prayed, some started to shake staring at photographs of their loved ones, one went berserk another kept crying crouching down ever lower to the bottom of the trench. The British barrage stopped, whistles blew, and section leaders shouted as long lines of men set off making sure they were in line... they walked through the gaps in their own barbed wire made the night before.

The Germans were on the alert they had been warned by the bombardment and their lookouts had raised the alarm. The machine gun started to hammer out their awful chorus. The long lines were easy targets. The Germans had seen the gaps in the wire and had laid down fixed lines of fire to cover them. Men bunched up to get through but the terrible machine gun fire flattened them.

Things on the left were going badly. The night's rain had turned their trench into a morass some of the men were knee deep in mud all night long. It was difficult to get the men out in time. As they appeared in drips and drabs on the top, they were machine gunned down on top of others trying to get out. There were long rows of dead and dying men. In spite of the terrible fire, the men went on forward trying to keep in line at a steady pace. The German wire was supposed to be cut by the artillery fire but was untouched. Trying to get over the wire the strands were being caught in their equipment or wrapping itself round their legs.

At Gommecourt, the Kensington's had achieved success. Making use of the new trench dug before the battle started a smoke screen had confused the Germans. The whole front-line system had been taken. On the left, the hard-pressed North Midlanders had not reached the German front line. If they did not achieve their goal, the Kensington's would be in trouble and left stranded.

At last, the facts began to be assembled. It was clear that the British High Command had failed even though in places it had achieved its objectives.

The next morning the Kensington's found they had reached part of their objective. The night had been spent in the German trenches taking it in turn to stand guard, which was an eerie sensation with all the cries for help coming from the wounded and the stretcher parties from both sides collecting up the bodies. It was in the original plan to seize the German trench system on the right

hand edge of the salient then link up with the North Midlanders who were coming from the opposite side. It was hoped to cut off the garrison of German defenders in the village. The Kensington's were acknowledge to be part of a London force that was second to none – having the greatest period of training prior to setting off to France, and had been in the fighting force since the war had begun. The London force were mostly well educated pre-war volunteers from the commercial heart of London and many would have been made into officers in any other division. The advance the previous morning got off to a good start. In the first hour and a half the 168th Brigade, attacking from the newly dug trench in the middle of No Man's Land, had reached every one of the German trenches in their objective. A fifth of the attacking Londoners were either dead or wounded. By reaching the final trench, they secured for themselves a safe position. The rolling barrage had moved forward as had been planned and the Kensington's and the other three battalions had moved up with it. The London Rifle Brigade was on the left of the right-hand division, Gommecourt Park with its wooded acres before the village was to their left. The German second Guards Reserve Division pushed back almost out of the salient but still holding Fricourt in the front line. What was left of the brigade entered the German trench, which was the first objective ready to repel any German foolish enough to try to take it back.

After a period of four hours the London Division was still in position, although the Westminster's had returned to the First Objective line - along with the rest of the division - this still held to the original plan. This line was to the rear of the German Trench, which was in British hands. As explained, there were no reserves so to make a concerted effort to link up with the North Midlands more men would have to be found. The worst decision was to do nothing for the Germans were beginning to take stock and recover.

At last, information was beginning to get through to Head Quarters. The corps commanders controlling the diversionary attack at Gommecourt were determined to carry on with the encircling movement. Lieut-General Snow ordered the North Midlanders to repeat their attack that afternoon - to link up with the London Division..., which by then was being, counter-attacked... gradually being forced back to the captured German trench, behind them. Snow must have known that the diversionary objective had been achieved. Someone was turning this into a separate battle!

Although the London Division was being hard pressed it retained coherence, being in the German trench gave the men cover and time to sort themselves out. The Germans, on the other hand, over their initial shock and were getting stronger by the minute. It did not take them long to understand the significance of the British move, not that they understood the battle of Gommecourt was a diversionary one, but that these two divisions were trying to encircle them and join up... They intended to prevent that happening. The German guns were ranging in, joining together to bombard the position. Gradually the British troops began to run out of ammunition. Most of the senior officers who had set out in the morning were now either dead or injured. The afternoon wore on and the fighting continued. By 4 pm there were only four officers and seventy men remaining gathered together holding the German front line trench... it was now touch and go whether there was going to be a total rout. Of the seven battalions to start out seventeen hundred men were dead, two hundred were prisoners and over two thousand wounded. Most of these were lying about on the battlefield. The Germans systematically raked these with machine gun fire to kill them off annoyed that now and again one of the wounded would start firing.

By evening, when the light was poor, stragglers started to drag themselves in. They were tired, hungry and distressed having got so far and not in the end succeeding. The Germans were moving about in No Man's Land not only finding their own wounded but directing their first-aiders and stretcher-bearers to find the English wounded too. This concern for the wounded was reciprocated. There were 4,314 casualties in the London Division alone out of nearly 60,000. It was a seven to one battle, in favour of the Germans.

Back in Britain there was a call for volunteers. It could be seen that the war was not going to end soon – that there were going to be more large battles and many more deaths before the Germans defeated. Quickly men rushed to join the colours. In the first eighteen months, two and a half million men were volunteers. It could be seen that the pick of these men were the finest the nation could produce. The Battalion was withdrawn to re-equip and to train the new intake coming from the call for volunteers.

Equipment and organization even with the best men is a lost cause without proper training and good leaders. In this instance: the foot soldiers were attacking fixed positions without proper orders. They did not know where the enemy was; they did not have suitable covering fire; they did not know what position they were to take and what to do if they did?

Officers did not know who their Commanding Officer was – they were not properly briefed, sergeants were not told of any contingency plan if the first aim not achieved and the men were not trained in field craft. ‘Press on Regardless’ was the order of the day which leads to slaughter.

The London Battalion was ordered to leave Millencourt and march to St. Riquier where it entrained for Corbie, reached by mid-morning. Marching to Daours the troops were finally rerouted to Saily-le-Sec by which time the transports had caught up.

It was now early September; receiving orders to relieve the Irish Fusiliers, the Kensington’s linked up with the Warwickshire Regiment. The Officer Commanding the Kensington’s was ordered to extend his line from the south corner of Leuze Wood and dig-in as close to the German trench as possible. During the night, the Kensington has moved out to attack the German trench. Unknown to them the Germans had reinforced that part of their line. A bombardment was laid down by the Germans on the British troops, as they surged forward. They fell back, to try again that evening.

The battalion had been fully up to strength regarding men but officer were in short supply. They, with the help of a flanking French battalion, were to advance upon Combles as the Germans, it was believed, had left it unoccupied – the General Staff thought the Germans would be in retreat after such a bombardment... this was not the case!

In the morning the regiment advanced towards the trenches in front of Combles, they stumbled, upon uncut barbed wire, which had been hidden by the long grass. Very heavy fire from both machine gun and rifle was directed on them. A third of the regiment fell killed or wounded the rest fell back taking cover where they could. They started to try digging a trench to connect the shell-holes together.

The Kensington tried to take Combles again that night but by then the Germans had reoccupied their trenches and alerted to this possibility. The Kensington’s were again strongly opposed only this time they had the added trial of a German barrage. These shells straddled both the newly dug trench and their original positions...the Kensington’s were caught in the middle, where they huddled in shell holes all night.

After being berated by high command, the Commanding Officer decided to try again the next morning... The following day, on the Sunday, a third try was prepared. The morning dawned clear and sunny... again the troops were ordered forward. There was only about half the regiment left and most of the officers had been either killed or wounded. It was a gallant effort but again it failed...!

The Commanding Officer was ordered to report to the Battalion Head Quarters where he was asked why they had failed to occupy the trench and conduct patrols to strengthen their position. He reported that he had not been ordered to do that in the first place and that his original orders had come from another brigade; he went on to report, that his orders came via another brigade and that he did not know who was in charge of the operation. High Command ordered him to recommence the attack...

After another tremendous bombardment, the artillery fire lifted to range onto the German second line trenches. The day’s rations eaten before the shelling had stopped washed down with

water. The feeling was that they might as well die with a full stomach rather than have to carry extra weight. It also stopped the men from thinking about the tremendous racket made by the shelling. Many were feeling quite petrified although there was nothing one could do to relieve the tension. Cigarettes were passed round and lit. It was clear that if one talked continuously it made waiting that much easier. The conversation was about nothing in particular just idle chatter. Overhead the Germans had raised balloons to observe the fall of their shot. The Royal Flying Corps were up taking pot shots of the balloons to try to bring them down. Some companies had moved forward into No Mans Land. My father and his company climbed over the parapet and went towards the German lines. There was a great deal of other fellow lying about dead from the day before. By moving rapidly, they reached the German trenches... there was not anyone about? It was not realised by the Allies how complicated and well constructed the German positions were... the Germans were below ground in deep dugouts. Shortly afterwards the German machine guns went into action. They had been hiding in their deep bunkers perfectly safe. As soon as the British shelling had stopped to allow their troops to move forwards up they popped pulling their guns up on ropes. The trenches had been prepared to take the machine guns to give them fixed lines that covered their front. They continuously fired their guns putting down a carpet of fire mowing everyone down. My father found he was the only one standing either everyone else was dead or wounded. He immediately jumped into a shell hole where he found a few others who had survived. There they stayed whilst the machine guns continued to blast away. Eventually the fire lifted and my father found they were up against the German trench parapet. Organising an advance he lead his few men into the German trenches again only this time they knew they had to eliminate the Germans in their deep bunkers which they did with grenades.

This battle continued long after it was realised it was a hopeless cause. Urged to maintain pressure on the Germans to relieve the French at Verdun these battles continued well into November. The ground resembled the imagine landscape of the moon. It was a shocking wilderness of mud, shell holes, flooded trenches and parts of bodies lying amongst discarded equipment. Four and a half months of turmoil had resulted in an advance of five miles. Both sides had lost nearly half a million men each. The Kensington's were drawn back from the front to rest shortly afterwards.

I relate these battles to illustrate how awful life was at the front. This was not an isolated battle where casualties were higher than the gain warranted. Haig never visited the front nor witnessed the carnage wrought. The war had a profound effect on my father whose life afterwards was never the same again. He relived his time in French throughout the rest of his life, as I am sure many more did. Over the next two years, he lost his brothers and his friends that he had grown up with. My father never trusted his officers again and certainly not those taking staff positions. He thought them inefficient and uncaring. His experiences played an important part in shaping his military service in the next war.

There were throughout the war a series of small victories and massive set backs which cost the lives of many troops. My father quickly made up to the regiment's Colour Sergeant. He refused to accept or apply to be an officer. He could not bring himself to join the officer's mess and improve his conditions whilst his friends needed his experience and guidance whilst living in squalid holes scooped out of the mud.

He also fought at Mons and Ypres being awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal [second only to the Victoria Cross]. He received it for taking over the regiment when all the officers had been killed leading an attack on a German position. As he had to show 'the right spirit' he did this directing the attack with a walking stick, his revolver securely kept in its holster. He realised that his demeanour of confidence rubbed off on his men – they had faith in his ability to see them out of the bad times. Later, he receives two mentioned in dispatches. He ended the war a hero but with deep scars that never healed.

In 1918, there was a unity of command between the English and French Armies under the French Commander in Chief, Marshal Foch. The British and French had relied upon, to a major degree, a continuous sustained firepower from the artillery. This depleted the German Army, a fact not recognised until later by the High Command. Had they followed up immediately victory would have come sooner? As it was the eventual counter attacks made by tanks later on led to ultimate victory breaking the moral of the German Army. Ludendorff and The Kaiser both realised that the war could not go on. The Treaty of Versailles settled the fate of Germany and directed the course of events over the next twenty years, which led to The Second World War.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the experiences gained by my father in the First World War made an enormous impression on him. He could not stand poor leadership and sloppy behaviour. These feelings were reinforced losing four brothers. He was an excellent leader of men and knew it. He was respected and liked by his caring behaviour and could be always 'do his stuff'. His general demeanour raised the standards of his men who respected his bearing. Being previously a member of the Territorial - slightly older than the norm - had greater military knowledge, was called upon by the officers, who were often much younger, to advise and assist. It was in the Regiment's interest to keep him looking after the men.

He felt close to ultimate realities, sustained by a profound and unassailable conviction that all would be well – that he would survive come what may. It was a ghastly experience - the mud, the uniform, the equipment, gas mask and rifle, bayonet and ammunition all in preparation for possible extinction. There he stood so often having to show confidence without fear ready to lead his men on the racked battlefield. It is no wonder that these thoughts remained with him for the rest of his life. He could be forgiven for any mistakes he made in later life.

By the end of the war Martha, my grandmother, lost three more sons. □Thomas the eldest died in his first year in 1881 and Elsie in her third in 1894. In all, by 1920, Martha had lost seven of her children. Now there were only four left. Albert, my father was now the eldest, Lillian and Edith, the two girls, and William the youngest. Edward was adopted that year because Martha so pined for another son. Since that time, she always wore black in morning and on Sundays wore their medals in turn as a mark of remembrance. When I knew her, she was never without her bible, which she read every day.

The cry by the post war generation was 'Back to Normal', whatever that was! At the same time, there was an equal desire towards making social conditions conform to 'a land fit for heroes'. Soon after the war my father was demobilized and he went back to work for the Great Central Railway, at Marylebone Station. Whilst he had been away they had taken over T.M.& Co. plus G.C.R. employees, were always going to be associated with their original parent company and my father was always going to feel an outsider especially when applying for upgrading.

Owing to the congested state of the Railways bought on by the surge in industrial production and the movement of people, the Government allocated twenty-four motors to the G.C.R. Company. My father was now running the Goods department and did not have sufficient drivers to service all the transport available. His task was to enrol temporary drivers from a pool of unemployed men and test them to see if they were experienced enough to drive heavy goods vehicles.

During this period, my father an existing Freemason was asked, with others, to form a Masonic Lodge. It was a regimental lodge one of many being set up after the war. This he did and the meeting place was at the regimental headquarters in Kensington. He remained a dedicated Freemason for the rest of his life achieving Grand Rank status. At a number of Lodges, he played the organ for initiation ceremonies and services. Over many years, he had become a leading member of the organization. He was also a founder member of the 'The Old Contemptible Association' - an association of men who had been in the original mobilization of the Territorial Army in 1914. His

hobby, which last until he was married, was photography. He had his own plate glass camera and tripod and did his own developing. During this period, he still lived at home in Amberley Road, Paddington.

The railways were expanding after the restrictions felt during the war. Many of the army wagons were passed to the railways to relieve the build-up of vehicles parked in dumps. My father realised the changes this would make to an organization limited to horse transport. He submitted a plan to the Senior Management - a scheme whereby horse teams would be retrained onto motor wagons by rota – making provision for suitable cover. The plan was accepted and he was placed in charge of running the training.

Gradually, by the introduction of motors, sharing rounds and districts, whole areas could be integrated, eventually leading to an enormous transport system. He personally drove a wagon to check each delivery round... ensuring that the times estimated for each delivery were possible. His methods were adopted, becoming so successful that he was asked to introduce a similar scheme for both Kings Cross and the Bisopsgate Depots.

The Grand Central Railway was a collection of lesser Midland Railway Companies and was, by the time of my father's birth in 1889, an amalgamation of provincial railway lines. Eventually it ran routes to London from Manchester and from Grimsby to Immingham linking up with other Midland cities. The name London & North Eastern Railway, which was the formation of three 'Great' railway companies, became a reality and the name used in 1922. The formation of the L.N.E.R. railway company linked together a vast conglomeration of harbours and docks together with an enormous fleet of ships.

The Railway Act of 1921 amalgamated, by government regulation, the existing one hundred and twenty lesser companies into four massive concerns. This rationalization made enormous economies, standardizing equipment, schedules and fares.

It was in 1926, father was still attending the Territorial Army at Kensington Drill Hall, promoted to the rank of Major - second in command of the regiment. He was still running the cartage department at Marylebone Station. The discontent of the railway workers was still being felt in the industry. Wages were very low and unemployment high. The men were, through their union, threatening to strike to try to force up wages.

There was a Railway strike that year and my father was asked to drive and deliver a load using a motor wagon – to help maintain deliveries and at the same time break the strike. He also helped feed and harness the horses whilst still keeping up his office duties. If there were a motor left at the station by the time the Senior Manager arrived – forty minutes after my father, the matter would have to be explained and accounted for. The following year the Conservatives won a convincing election. What was significant was the Labour Party becoming the second party for the first time.

My father was 37, was regarded as Thompson McKay personnel. This meant that the workers were barred from applying for cartage work on the Great Central Railway – it was a 'closed shop'. This restriction was eventually lifted because the railways complained that there was not freedom of movement and that if Thompson did not remove the 'ban' work would be given to another company – it was with drawn. However, being trained and employed by firms other than those within the railway industry meant that workers were stigmatized when applying for work in any of the railway companies.

So serious was The General Strike, two years before, on the well-being of the company that it was agreed in 1928, for all the staff to accept a two and a half percent reduction in fees, salaries and wages. The previous trade boom ended a depression saw markets shrinking. Industry was declining and unemployment figures rising. This situation continued until 1930 and even then, there was an agreement by some trade unions not to seek a wage review until the end of that year.

In 1933 in conjunction with the other three main railway companies the old, established cartage firms of Carter Paterson and the Hay's Wharf Transport Company being part of Pickford, were purchased. The same year saw the unification of London's transport brought into being and the creation of the London Passenger Transport Board. By the time my father left home in 1933, to get married, Paddington, Marylebone and Bayswater were becoming crowded. Many of the houses had been turned into flats and where old houses pulled down blocks of flats were put in their place. There was rising child mortality caused by overcrowding due to lack of provision and bad housing arrangements.

Although my father eventually achieved the title Cartage manager on the Great Central Line every time he applied for a higher position he was reminded that he had insufficient experience of railway matters and turned down. This was an excuse to engage him on a lesser salary.

The First World War broke the pattern of British social life. Rigid class barriers that existed are hereditary and the passing on of land was now falling to those 'in trade' who accumulated money. The comradeship felt from hardship experienced in the trenches was gradually eroded by a class struggle between 'the workers and the management'. Women's work during the war allowed them to experience a freedom from the previously expected role of 'mother'. It was a less ordered society and the demand for 'equality for all' was becoming more strident.

The four railway companies provided their own regular long-distance trains establishing a network of suburban commuter services. Almost all the London suburban lines were electric taking over from buses the bulk of passenger transport.

Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich in 1933 and from that time until 1936 concentrated on the total establishment of his own personal dictatorship. It was during this time that my parents were married at Tatworth Church, South Chard, Somerset, in 1933. My father was 44 and my mother 25. My brother Stan was born 11th June 1934 in Sudbury. I joined the world eleven months later at 31 Cumberland Road, North Harrow, where my parents moved to enjoy a better house and environment.

From 1939 onwards until the privatization of the railways in 1948, the government under the Emergency War Act controlled the railways. In September 1939, the British Army was unprepared for war in manpower, equipment, training and battle hardened experience. It tried to stop in 1940 a German Army better led, with a properly worked out plan plus superior equipment. It was again like the previous war, a shambles perpetrated by inferior general Staff Officers and previous Governments planning for appeasement. Tanks, aircraft and weapons need mass production methods and that favours the aggressor because he has a previously worked out set of plans and knows when they are wanted by. Britain's unpreparedness led to a mass retreat, loss of heavy equipment and to a greater effect, loss of moral.

There was a two month pause before Hitler ordered an air attack and during that lull Britain tried to make up for the lack of material and men. A voluntary force was formed by Winston Churchill called the 'Defence Force Volunteers' – later known as the 'Home Guard'. The vast majority of the men that volunteered were veterans of the First World War, too old to join up for the regular army but able to serve as a defence force. At first, these men were not able to receive a uniform or weapons but had to content themselves with suitable replacements like pick handles and iron bars.

My father was immediately called up to be made second in command of the 17th London Division Home Guard. He was loaned a car for the duration of the war, given a telephone line - and relieved from his post with the railways. His task was to enrol and train a division of men to defend North London based on The Kensington Regiments Drill Hall in London ... the training area Epping Forest... this was during a critical period. He was fully aware of the secret operational bases in and around the area he controlled and it was up to him to supervise the Royal Engineers to

construct such bases in Epping Forest. These bunkers were hidden in such a way that any German attack and occupation would bypass these linked posts allowing surprise attacks to hinder their movements. The men who had been selected to operate these bases were specially chosen for their knowledge of the area and not part of the normal Home Guard detachment.

His man management skills and planning abilities were put to good use. Frankly, I am sure he enjoyed the challenge and could more than cope with the task.

After the war, my father returned to the railways, once again, only to this time into a nationalized railway that came after the Bank of England and the coal mining industry, in 1947. It had been all but nationalized between the wars. After this, there would be only four railway companies left to complete total nationalization of the railways. The railways were then 'British Railways'. The Transport Act, which brought about these changes was passed in that year and came into operation in 1948. It was also to affect road haulage concerns - the 'British Road Services' was the result. He believed that, with the amalgamation of the four railway companies - into British Railways, he would stand a better chance for promotion... He thought his wartime record and his standing with LNER would stand him in good stead, particularly in the reconstruction of the railways - necessary just after the war. Time proved him wrong...