

The wartime memoirs
of Jeff Jeffrey

**LIR Cadet,
RUR Rifleman
& LIR Piper
(1940-1946)**



Jeff Jeffrey 1941

I was born in the early 1920s; a time when the echoes of the First World War still lingered. Men in bright blue suits, with a white shirt, a red tie, and a military cap were a common sight. Les pauvres blesses, as the French used to call them. Men whose health was ruined in some way by their service, many with missing limbs and walking about on crutches or driving past in motorised wheelchairs; others whose coughing would never go away. All still officially in the army, but no longer soldiers and not yet civilians, living in military hospitals and allowed out during the day. It was rumoured that there were those who were permanently confined and in such a terrible condition that they were pitiful to see. These men were treated kindly. People bought them drinks and made sure they got the best places in crowds at football matches. Indeed, no football crowd was complete without a row of wheel-chairs along the touch line. At theatres and music halls the "gentlemen in blue" were often invited to enter without charge.

Those who been discharged as fit were cast adrift to find jobs. Many didn't and made a living the best way they could. Men with a row of medals could be seen standing on the kerb with a tray of matches or sprigs of lavender for sale. When the great depression came the numbers were swelled considerably. Some set up as entertainers - singing, spoon-bashing, grinding a barrel-organ, performing acrobatics. As children we would run to stand and enjoy these treats - too young to pay - and too young to realise how sad it all was and what a marvelous generation they were, who had gone through bad times and now got on with their lives without complaint.

My favourite street entertainers were "the Scotties". That's what we called them, although some of them had probably never seen the skies over Scotland. Using what they had learned in the Army, they dressed up in kilts - a piper or two and a drummer, and someone to take the hat round. The sounds they made filled me with an excitement that I couldn't explain. My father's family were Londoners and staunchly Anglo-Saxon, but my mother's people were originally from Ireland. Perhaps there was a Celtic trace in my make-up that

caused the magic. Whatever it was, I had to go running towards the sound of the pipes whenever I heard them.

Years later, when I was fifteen and about to leave school, the Second World War broke out. I joined the ranks of those who never left school - school left them. When I returned from summer holidays, the school was covered in sandbags and full of auxiliary fire engines towed by London taxis. There were no pupils and no staff, and the firemen didn't know where they had gone. So I went out and found a job.

At this time, the 2nd Battalion L.I.R. took up billets along the north side of Putney Heath and the caubeen was a familiar sight in Putney High Street. Sunday was my day off and I used to go up onto the Heath to hear the pipers practising. I would stand, at a respectful distance, listening and return home to the Yorkshire pudding and roast potatoes feeling well satisfied.

It was too good to last. There came a day when the L.I.R. disappeared and were replaced by a battalion of the Norfolk Regiment. Where had they gone? I had no idea, and nor did anyone else. I had had some vague notion that, if they weren't too far away, I could catch a bus or train to where they were and still enjoy my Sunday concert, but, like my school, they were gone beyond recall. By now, I had got into the habit of going up to the Heath on Sundays and continued to do so.

After a couple of weeks, I was astonished to hear the pipes again. Sure enough, there were three pipers, kilted and caubeened, playing by a clump of birch trees. I couldn't work out why they should still be there if the battalion had gone. Moving closer than I usually did, I was even more astonished when one of them saw me and said, "Hallo Jeff". It was Colin Stanton who had been a friend when we were in primary school together. By now, we were both sixteen and I asked him how he had managed to get into the army. "I'm not in the army," he said, and went on to explain that he was a cadet at the Duke of York's and during the day he worked for Albert Starck, the bagpipe maker. On Sunday mornings he and some of the band practised on the

Heath, because it wasn't the sort of thing you could practise at home. I got a mental picture of my neighbours and agreed.

"Why don't you join?" he asked and seeing my hesitation, said, "I could get you in the band." That did it. I arranged to meet him at the Duke of York's during the week.

I went home walking on air and told my parents. My Mother, like all mothers, wasn't too keen on the idea. My Father, who had been in the Royal Engineers in Mesopotamia (Iraq), thought it would do me good. So I went and joined the Cadet Company of the London Irish Rifles and promptly started to learn the pipes.



My first attempt at the 'pipes aged 16.

THE CADETS AT THE DUKE OF YORKS (1941)

The Cadet Company occupied a long wooden hut in a row of huts backing onto the railings along Cheltenham Terrace. The hut was partitioned into an office, the domain of Major "Dick" Richards, the O.C.: the stores presided over by CQMS "Dusty" Miller, a World War I veteran; and a lecture room-cum-general meeting place. The other officers were Captain May and Lt. Clements. Captain May was a tall, quiet man. I don't remember much about him, except that I liked him.

Lt. Clements, on the other hand, was short - so short that he was scarcely taller than the boys. He, too, was a veteran of the Great



The 1941 LIR Cadet Company

Of the four pipers in the front row; from right to left, Piper Jacoby, Jeff Jeffrey, unknown base drummer, and Colin Stanton (pipe sergeant and bagpiper maker at Albert Starck's. The green caubeens at the back are extreme left CQMS 'Dusty' Miller. The other three from the left are Capt May, Major (later Colonel) Dick Richards and Lt. Clements.



The Pipes & Drums of the London Rifles at the BBC (circa 1940)
The Young Soldiers' Bn, the Cadet Company and some old stagers from the Great War rehearse for a BBC programme.
Unusually for the London Irish the pipers are wearing blanchoed spats.

War and was an enthusiastic shutter-bug. Never without his camera, he would pop out from all sorts of cover at events and parades, clicking furiously like a paparazzo. Within a week the results would be pinned up on the wall of the hut, all neatly numbered so that the boys could order copies. It is largely due to Lt. Clements that there are so many photographs of that time still in existence.

The boys ranged from "the little kids", aged around eleven or twelve, and the older teenagers. We were all issued with khaki uniforms, including greatcoats, and caubeens, badges and hackles. The tunics were of the WW1 variety - with the army being issued with the new battledores, there were plenty of older uniforms available. Pipers and drummers were issued with the large silver badges and blue hackles; buglers wore the small badges and green hackles.. The pipers were issued with the saffron kilt, cutaway tunics and spats. Originally blanchoed, during my time the spats were merely kept clean by scrubbing. They were made of stiff canvas and had to be done up with a button hook. Later, these were dispensed with and we adopted short puttees.

The arms with which we drilled were carbines from the South African War. They were single shot; the cartridge being inserted in a depression in the top rear of the barrel which appeared when the extended trigger guard was forced down. This cocked the weapon at the same time. These were the same rifles as those used in the film "Zulu". They came in two sizes; long for infantry and short for cavalry. This suited the company very well, as the cavalry carbines were used by the shorter boys and the long carbines by the older lads. They were never fired, but used only for drill. We were drilled on the hard standing just inside the railings that fronted on to King's Road and usually attracted a small group of onlookers.

Despite the sprinkling of Celtic names in the Company, the Cadets were as fine a bunch of Cockneys as you could find. In those days, many people in London bore nicknames by which they were usually known. Consequently, one didn't always know their real names. Cadet Drummer "Popeye" was a case in point. He was called Popeye because he looked like the cartoon character Popeye the Sailor.

Also stationed at "The Duke's" was a bomb-disposal unit of the Royal Engineers. When the London bombing began in earnest they were called out frequently to defuse bombs which either failed to go off, or were fitted with a delay mechanism. Dangerous work - many were killed, and all deserved decorations. After the bombs had been rendered harmless, they were brought back to Chelsea and dumped on the parade ground. In addition, there was debris from damage to the Duke of York's buildings - the whole parade ground was a sight that would bring tears to the eyes of any self-respecting drill sergeant, but for Lt. Clements it was a photo opportunity. He photographed me standing beside a bomb, sitting on a bomb and stooping to listen to the ticking of the missing detonator. We found a couple of rapiers in the store and he photographed us pretending to pretend to fight a duel.

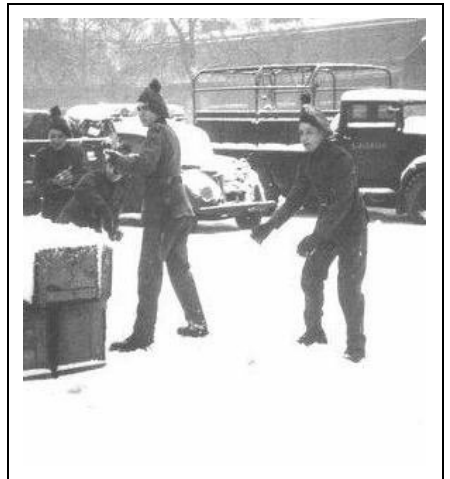


LIR Cadets at the Duke of Yorks

above: a photo-opportunity provided by one of the many defused bombs brought to the Duke of Yorks by the Royal Engineers.

below left: sword fighting.

below right: snowballing.



THE CADET PIPE BAND (1941)

As well as drill, we were taught aircraft recognition, map reading and field craft. The band spent a fair bit of time practising and so missed quite a few of these lectures. None of us could read music and we were taught tunes on the practice chanter by watching the fingers of the teacher and copying, phrase by phrase, until we had got it. Then we would practise it over and over and, eventually, try it on the pipes.

Colin Stanton was the pipe-sergeant and we got quite a few tunes from him, but there were two older men who took over the teaching at different times and were designated pipe-major. What their official standing was, I don't know, but they wore pipe-major's uniform when we were on parade.

The first we called "Old Nicholson" because he had a son who was a piper in the 70th Bn. - who, of course, we called "Young Nicholson". I never knew their first names. "Old Nicholson was a member of the Borough Pipe Band and gave up some of his spare time to teach us. He was a nice man, very even-tempered and patient with us. I remember that each of his fingers was tattooed. Later, he was replaced by a Mr. Burns; a Scotsman and an elderly man. It must be remembered that we thought everybody over 40 was elderly. Despite our opinion of his age, Mr. Burns marched with us on church parades and even went to camp with us

Among the tunes we learned were:- The Minstrel Boy, The Spanish Lady (also called Dolan's Ass), Wearing of the Green, Norah Creana, Garryowen, The Boys of Wexford, Believe Me If All, Oft in the Stilly Night and The Harp that Once.

In addition to the practice at the Duke of York's, some of us often met on Putney Heath and played together. We were all mad on piping and I used to spend my pocket money on 78 rpm records of various bands. They were usually by Scottish regiments, but we were using the same chanter and many of our tunes were the same, except that they had Irish and Scottish names. For instance, we played a march called Clair's Dragoons; the Scots called it "Happy We Been All Together".



The Combined Cadet and 70th LIR Pipe Bands 1940/1

Front rank, left to right - Len Franklin, Colin Stanton, "Young" Nicholson, Dusty Miller, Mo Brown, Cowboy Mackesy, Ray Meade;

Middle rank - Albert Kyne, Tom Jefferies, Pat O'Brien, Sam Sake (?), "Old" Nicholson, Mick Henning;

Rear rank - Jeff Jeffrey (myself), unknown drummer "Bojer" O'Grady. Cadet bass drummer, Mackie, John Fairservice, Clisby, "Popeye".

There was a school of thought that said we should play only Irish music, but a good tune was a good tune and we didn't mind if it wasn't strictly 'kosher'.

In my time with the Cadets there were no notable parades for the Band. We played mainly for church parades, either alone (normally at the Duke of Yorks) or with the 70th (Young Soldiers) Bn. who were stationed at Mill Hill. Our Band lacked a bugle-major, so Dusty Miller (our CQMS who was a veteran of the First War) would don a kilt and march in front carrying a bugle



***The Cadet Band outside The Colville Arms
(opposite The Duke of Yorks, Chelsea)***

*left to right: CQMS Dusty Miller, Colin Stanton, Unknown, Old Nicholson,
Unknown, ex-bugler now Piper Mo Brown (looking down)
someone obscured behind him, Bugler Bojer O'Grady, a 70th Bn. bugler,
Bugler Mackie, Unknown, a 70th Bn. bugler, Jeff Jeffrey (myself)*

The Band usually managed to disappear during the church service itself. One of the favourite places to disappear to was the Colville Tavern, directly opposite the Duke of York's. As long as we were in uniform, the landlord turned a blind eye to our obvious youth and he, or his two young sons were happy to serve us. In any case, we never had enough money to have more than one drink.



CADET CAMPS (1941)

At Whitsun in 1941 the Cadet Company went to camp at Rickmansworth. All the gear was packed onto a civilian lorry and the cadets perched on top of the load. I don't remember the journey across London, but we finished up in what appeared to be an unused farm. It was a walled area with large wooden double gates. Inside were several buildings which looked as if they had contained farm animals, now long gone. On this occasion they contained us, and we set up a guard room in a brick building with bars along one side. This attracted humorous comment and attempts to feed us through the bars. There were other cadet companies at the camp, including London Scottish and King's Royal Rifle Corps, all busy settling in. It wasn't long before a posse of officers appeared, some with red tabs. I suppose that they had something to do with the cadet movement - we never found out, but it gave us somebody to salute.



***London Irish Rifles Cadet Camp
Whitsun 1941***

top left: The Band mount guard;

***top right: Bugler O'Grady feeds the guard ;
centre: preparing for a field exercise: steel
helmets, gas capes and military gas mask
haversacks were not issued. Keen lads
bought these items from military clothing
shops;***

bottom left: Inspection by visiting brass;

***bottom right: Sitting outside the guardroom
with a visitor from the London Scottish.***



Being the tallest lads, the band was chosen to mount guard and was turned out for the inevitable inspection. The brass went through the usual motions and appeared to be satisfied. They then disappeared, presumably for a good lunch and a drive back to Whitehall. We did see them again, though, when the entire camp was drawn up on parade in a nearby field.

The 70th Battalion LIR had come to the party and loaned two of their cooks for the weekend. They fed us well and in the evening asked if they could borrow a couple of kilts to wear off duty. The band obliged - another photo opportunity for Mr. Clements - and the two went off to town to see if they could impress any of the local girls. On their return they reported neither success nor failure, merely thanking us and returning the kilts next day. Perhaps they thought we were too young to discuss the matter.

Also attached to us for the occasion was a Trained Soldier from the Coldstream Guards. He was very tall and well-built and took us for drill, acting as a kind of sergeant-major to the company. As I understood it, a Trained Soldier was ranked somewhere between a private (in this case Guardsman) and a lance-corporal, with limited powers of discipline. A Trained Soldier, for instance, would be in charge of a hut or barrack-room and detail men to do the various cleaning chores. He wore the usual guardsman's cap with its vertical peak, designed so that the wearer had to keep his head up in order to see where he was going.

There were field exercises in which we practised cover from fire, cover from view and marched around the countryside and across fields. The turnout inclined to be varied according to how many personal extra bits and pieces we had managed to acquire. The standard issue uniforms were, in some cases, augmented with steel helmets, gas capes, and gas masks. Fortunately, the inspecting officers were long gone.

On Sunday we were joined by a local Royal Artillery battery for church parade. As we stood on the road waiting for them to arrive, we could see them in the distance, every back straight and every man keeping perfect step - we were very impressed.

The weekend went by very quickly and soon we were back in Chelsea, having played at being soldiers and being away from home. We were now more keen than ever to join up.

In August of the same year we were at camp once again. This gave Lt. Clements more opportunities to photograph the LIR Cadet Company, but nothing however could surpass my memories of my first camp that Whitsun of 1941.



***London Irish Rifles Cadet Camp
(August 1941)***

above: the Cadet Company on the road at Rickmansworth, complete with outrider on a bicycle;

right: more field exercises.



CALL UPOR VOLUNTEER?

With hindsight and looking back over 60 years, it looks as if we were all incredibly naive in our enthusiasm for getting into the action, but teenagers feel that they have to be 'with it'. Being with it in those days had little to do with clothing or pop music. Sooner or later, all the young men were being called up - at that time when they were nineteen. Older schoolmates or older brothers were going away and reappearing in various uniforms. They all had short haircuts, looked fit and had tales of service life which made us envious.

The problem with the call-up was that you could be sent anywhere the authorities decided. If you escaped the Navy or the RAF, you could be sent to the General Service Corps, where you would be given basic training and posted to any regiment in need of reinforcements. I was determined to avoid this by volunteering. The London Irish, disappointingly, seemed to be well up to strength for pipers, but I heard that the Royal Ulster Rifles 70th Young Soldiers Bn. was short of them.

In those days I took everything on trust. I had not learned to treat rumours with suspicion - that came later. So, when I was eighteen, I set off to join up. There was a recruiting office in Wandsworth High Street. I used to pass it every day on my way to school on the tram - but, by this time, I had not been to school for two years and, upon arrival, found that the recruiting office was closed. I couldn't believe it. Who in their right minds would close a peacetime recruiting office when war had broken out? I searched for quite a while and, eventually, found one in Mitcham. Here I was interviewed by an ancient colonel who had never heard of the 70th RUR - but had heard of 70th LIR. It took me quite a while to convince him. He then discovered that they did exist and were in barracks in Plymouth. I had a medical, took the King's shilling, signed the attestation paper and was sent home.

Some weeks passed, and then I was sent a railway warrant and told to report, not to Plymouth, but to the Ulster's Depot in Omagh. So, a couple of days later, I set off from King's Cross on that tedious journey known to many servicemen - Rugby, Preston, Carlisle, and

Dumfries to a cold grey morning on the dock at Stranraer, thence to a choppy crossing in a railway packet to Larne. From Larne the train goes to Belfast, then another train to Omagh.

THE ROYAL ULSTER RIFLES

Omagh life began at the Old Depot where we were taught heavy infantry drill (don't ask). That completed, those of us destined for the Ulster Rifles were sent to the New Depot, about half a mile away where we were taught to forget heavy infantry drill and were taught rifles drill. After three months basic training was complete.

We were marched to C (Specialist) Coy and assessed. I was told to speak into a microphone attached to a No.18 set. The officer listening on another 18 set decided that I should be a signaller. "But, sir," I said, "I joined up to be a piper." He looked at me as if he had discovered a strange new life form. "We can't all have what we want, lad," he said, "There's a war on." Protest was useless and I was beginning to realise that life wasn't going to be easy. Nevertheless, I



*I qualify (middle back row) as a second year signaller for the RUR
The Instructor was Cpl. Keeling of the Royal Irish Fusiliers*

quite liked signaling and, if it hadn't been for the overriding passion for piping, I could have been quite happy.

The pipe band of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers occupied a hut quite near to C Coy RUR and I went to see them, hoping perhaps that there might be an opening. But it was a forlorn hope. They were sympathetic and offered to lend me a chanter for practice, but they played Brian Boru pipes, so that wasn't much use.

At last I qualified for my flags and was ready for posting to a battalion. Another blow fell. The call-up age had been lowered to 18 and Young Soldiers battalions had been disbanded. So 70th RUR (and its Pipe Band) ceased to exist and I was posted to 7th RUR in Lincolnshire. The 7th didn't have a pipe band. I was sent to the signal platoon and began a life of wireless sets and cables. We were billeted over a pub, The Woolpack, in North Somercotes - I believe it is still there.

Although the 7th Bn. RUR didn't have a pipe band in my time with them, there was a Rfn. Duffy who had his own pipes and another Rfn. who could play. When the Bn. was at Usselby Hall in Lincolnshire the three of us used to walk the three miles to the Church of Scotland canteen in Market Rasen, taking it in turns to play Duffy's pipes. I don't know what happened to Duffy, but the third member of the trio - whose name I forget - turned up in the 2nd LIR in Italy. I urged him to join the pipe band, but he wouldn't and went to a rifle company - he was killed within a week, poor chap.

VOLUNTEERING AGAIN!

The year turned. It was 1943 and there were victories in North Africa. Life was pleasant enough, but I wanted to see the world. So I volunteered for a draft. I had come a fair way, but still hadn't learned not to volunteer.

Soon I was on a train to Glasgow, then on a ship in a convoy, around the top of Ireland and out into the Atlantic. I was delighted to find that I didn't get seasick - a decided advantage when passing through the Bay of Biscay. One morning early we passed through the Straits of Gibraltar and into the Med. First stop was Algiers and several units disembarked. We went on to Phillipville - it's now called Skikda - and were told to fill our water bottles and walk around. The idea was to acclimatise us to the heat, but it wasn't really that bad.

We had about three weeks of this and were then put aboard an old three funnelled Indian troopship, the SS Takliwa, for the crossing to Sicily. The Takliwa was very ancient and rat-infested. I developed acute stomach pains and spent the three days in the sick bay before we arrived at Catania. Still a bit white-faced, I joined the lads and we were marched to a vineyard on high ground behind the town which was to be our home for several days.

After the shortages in England it felt luxurious to be able to reach out and pick a bunch of grapes when you fancied it. We all ate grapes until we were sick of them. During this time we had an air-raid on the harbour. The warships anchored there put up a terrific barrage which decided the Luftwaffe to make off fairly quickly. One of our draft was hit by falling shell splinters and was taken to hospital.

One morning we were ordered to pack our kit and be ready to move. Nine 3-ton trucks arrived and we got aboard. Soon we were clear of the town and bumping along roads with walls made of dried lava either side. After a while the road began to climb and took us across the shoulder of Mt. Etna and through villages of stone houses, many of them damaged. The sides of the road were littered with the trash of war - rusting tanks and guns spoke of fierce fighting.

The war in Sicily had finished before we arrived, but the evidence of it was everywhere to be seen. We were all a bit thoughtful as we drove through this area. Many of us had been in the London bombing, but this would be different - as well as bombardment there would be small arms fire and an enemy who would not be invisible high up in the sky, but uncomfortably close on the ground.

We began to see signs bearing a battleaxe - the 78th Div - then the shamrock of the 38th Irish Brigade. There was turn off on the road with a sign that said 6th Royal Inniskilling Fus. The first three trucks turned off. The next three trucks went up a track marked 1st R.I.F. At last there was a track which said 2 Bn. LIR I couldn't believe my luck that I had got on to the last truck but one.

At LIR HQ Coy, we were paraded and sorted out. I was asked what I was and said 'signaler'. I was told that they didn't need any of those and I was sent to a rifle company. The next morning we were on parade again, this time to be told something of the history of the company and what platoons we would be sent to join. At the end of the talk a face I knew appeared - Pipe-major Archie Evans. I had seen him at Shepherds Bush when some of us had gone to see the band play there. "Are there any pipers here?" he asked. My hand shot up and I was promptly sent to HQ Coy.

A LONDON IRISH PIPER ONCE AGAIN

I had come full circle. Getting to where I wanted to be - in a London Irish pipe band - had been accomplished in a roundabout way, with no sign that I would ever succeed. And yet I had been heading towards it all the time. I had been incredibly lucky. When in 7th RUR I had been offered a stripe and an instructor's course at Catterick. What if I had taken it? What if I hadn't volunteered for a draft? And what if I had got on to one of the first six trucks in the Sicily convoy?

THE 2 LIR AND THE IRISH BRIGADE

Apart from the LIR's own book entitled the "The London Irish at War", the 2 LIR's WW2 involvement in the Irish Brigade is also well documented in books such as "Algiers to Austria" by Cyril Ray, "Clear the Way!" both of which contain photographs of the 2 LIR pipe band. But two anecdotes, not surprisingly involving the Band and alcohol, have avoided publication until now!



The Massed Bands of the Irish Brigade

2nd Bn. LIR pipers (easily recognisable by their caubeens pulled over the left eye) are from left to right: Ronnie Briar, Jeff Jeffrey (behind the leading piper Paddy Brennan of the Royal Irish Fusiliers) with Sammy Turner glimpsed behind the two of them.

The Band take tea (and altar wine) at the Vatican

The 2 LIR's visit to the Pope in 1944 is well documented but nothing has been written of the Band's performance..

On arriving we did the usual trick of counter-marching on arrival at any church, so as to be facing the following marchers who then wheeled and marched into the church. The band would then stop playing and look around for a pub or cafe, being sure to be back in time for the end of the service. In this case we surveyed St.Peter's Square, but there was no place of refreshment to be seen, so we stood about smoking.

In a while a priest emerged from the Vatican and said that we should go inside. We told him that we were not of the faithful, but merely the musical accompaniment. "It doesn't matter," he said, "come along in." Not wishing to be rude, we followed him into the audience chamber. It transpired that the Pope (Pius XII) had expressed a wish to hear the pipes, but the heathen pipers were outside. So the priest was sent to fetch us. The Wearing of the Green seemed to be suitable for the occasion, so we played that. His Holiness seemed to enjoy it and we were all given a rosary and a photo of the Pope to take away with us. The photo never survived the vicissitudes of war, but the rosary I gave to a very pretty peasant girl at Tavernelle near Lake Trasimene. It didn't do me any good - her father warned me off.

When we came out into the sunlight, we were accosted by some Irish priests who, being Irish citizens and therefore neutral, had been living in Rome during the German occupation. It seems that they were desperate for a cup of tea. They had not been able to get any and, like drug addicts, were feeling the pangs of withdrawal. A truck was dispatched back to camp and it brought back a chest full of tea. The young priests were loud in their gratitude and invited us to visit their seminary. So we piled into the truck - and squaddies, priests and tea chest set off through the streets of Rome. On arrival, the tea was carried reverently into the kitchen and a brew was soon on the go, with the priests sniffing the aroma like Bisto Kids. It was heartwarming to watch them drink the first cup they'd had in months. "Aaaaah!" they said.

Having satisfied their craving, they showed their gratitude in a practical way. Tea may have been scarce, but communion wine was plentiful, and they produced it in abundance. I remember little of that afternoon, except a haze of alcohol and good company. They talked about the rigours of the occupation and we brought them up to date on the war so far. Eventually, amid many expressions of goodwill on both sides, they went back to God and we went back to camp.

The Band toasts the end of the War in a POW camp.

It's not generally known that the war in Italy ended a day early. The Southern German Armies surrendered 24 hours before the general capitulation. 2 LIR crossed the River Po and, after spending a night at Udine, embussed in TLCs and went up into Austria. At Villach we turned eastwards and headed for a rendezvous with the Russians, whom we eventually met at Wolfsberg.

Streaming westwards was an entire German Army desperate to get away from the Russians. They kept to their side of the road and we to ours. After hours of traveling, we were approaching Wolfsberg when we were overflown by Allied planes. After having passed, they began dropping loaves of bread just ahead of us. Our convoy came to a halt. It looked as if there was a camp of sorts ahead. We were told to get out of the band truck, don our kilts and get ready to march.

And so, with the convoy waiting behind us, we set off further eastwards with pipes and drums playing.

Meanwhile, in nearby Stalag 18B, the allied inmates had had an interesting 24 hours. The previous day a British major had landed outside the camp by parachute, marched up to the gate, told everyone that the war was over and put the senior other rank, an Australian WO1, in charge. The German guard melted away.

The major unfolded a collapsible bicycle and pedaled off to the east - now fast becoming a favourite direction for Allied personnel. They never saw him again.

Shortly after, the food drops began. The WO1 organised the collecting of the food and rationing it out. The next day all was quiet.

They had no idea what was happening. More food arrived. They stood about uncertainly, speculating.

Suddenly somebody said, "listen! I heard something."

They all listened, but heard nothing.

After a while, the sound came again, lifting on the breeze and dying away again. It sounded vaguely familiar. Then it came again, stronger this time.

"Bagpipes!", shouted the WO1, "Bloody bagpipes".

They all rushed to gate and threw it open. Marching along the road, getting ever closer, could be seen the pipes and drums of 2 LIR.

"My oath," said the Aussie, "It's just like a film."

And it was. It couldn't have been staged better by Cecil B. Mille. There were cheers and hats flew into the air as the band wheeled into the gate and onto the square.

"Are we glad to see you blokes," said the Aussie after handshakes all round, "come and have a schnapps."

"What's that?" we asked innocently. Throats inured to Italian demon vino, bottle always unlabeled, and caressing the gullet like barbed wire, we felt we could cope with anything. Schnapps was something new. It had belonged to the camp commandant who had left in a hurry. The WO1 had thoughtfully locked it up, until a suitable occasion presented itself - and this was it! Toasts were proposed to the Allies, the Russians, everyone present and even the camp commandant for being kind enough to leave his supply behind.

Schnapps, for those who haven't tried it, is drunk in small glasses and burns a bit at first, but soon becomes smooth and seemingly innocuous. Just as you think you've got it mastered, you suddenly realise that your legs don't belong to you at all and sitting down seems highly desirable. From there to lying down is a fairly easy transition. Did the convoy catch up with us? I don't know, but I think it must have because the last thing I remember was being loaded onto a 15-cwt truck and being carted off to a billet in Wolfsberg and new adventures.

As for the next morning, the least said the better.

DEMOBILISATION & AFTERWARDS

I was with 2nd Bn. LIR for three years until it broke up in Austria in 1946. Those bandsmen who had not been demobbed were posted to 1st Bn. LIR in Trieste. I had been trade tested as a clerk and was sent to the Military Government and made sergeant and chief clerk - lucky again.

I was demobbed in 1947 and it was discovered that I had pulmonary tuberculosis and I spent two years in the British Legion Sanatorium at Preston Hall near Maidstone. I was told that the active service conditions and probably the constant sharing of bagpipes had caused the problem. Going back to piping seemed like a bad idea and I have never played them since, but every time I hear the pipes I have to go and listen.

There was a final twist. Signaling, into which I was so unwillingly pushed, gave me a new interest to replace the piping I had lost. I sat for exams and became a licensed radio amateur, a hobby which I still pursue to this day in Australia where I now live.

I emigrated to Australia in April 1957. I had been working as a civilian technical storeman for an heavy anti-aircraft regiment in south-east London. An interesting job, but dead end. I came here and spent 28 years in broadcasting as an announcer.



Jeff Jeffrey ANZAC Day 2006

The medals on my right chest are the general service medal and the Victory Medal from WW 1. They were my Dad's. It is the custom in Australia to wear a relative's medals on the right breast when marching on ANZAC Day. Small children march with their Dad's and/or their Granddad's medals.

The buttonhole badge is the "For Loyal Service" badge issued to ex-service personnel in receipt of 100% disability pension. It was issued to me in 1947 or 1948 when I was indeed 100% disabled through war service.

Below that is the British Veteran's badge which I received this year. Above both badges is a sprig of Rosemary for remembrance. Volunteers hand out the sprigs to the veterans forming up for the march.