

Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier

Adapting and developing the radio ballad for live performance

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. in Creative Writing

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Abstract

Sid: the Ballad of a Soldier: adapting and developing the radio ballad for live performance is a PhD Creative Writing thesis consisting of a creative work and a critical study. The creative work, *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*, is an intermedial performance piece, approximately two hours in length, combining live music, spoken word, recorded speech and music, set against a changing backdrop of images including photographs, maps and excerpts from the letters of Sidney Verrier, my uncle, written while he was a soldier during the Second World War. The critical study both contextualises the creative work and reflects upon the various processes leading to it. Conceptually, the creative piece originated as a collection of songs linked together with spoken introductory and background material, deriving from the radio ballad form evolved by Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker and Peggy Seeger between 1957 and 1963, and subsequently by Jon Leonard and others, and from the performance practice of folk singers. Radio ballads, however, rely heavily on the oral testimony of those who participated in the events recounted; Sid's story is that of one soldier amongst millions, whose direct experience of five years of war service is evidenced only by his own handwritten letters, necessitating a new approach to the radio ballad form. The critical study thus examines the evolution of the radio ballad genre, the use of spoken word by folk song performers and a common feature of both: an underlying theme of authenticity. The critical commentary offers the first proper definition of the term 'radio ballad' and explains how, in order to present Sid's story to a live audience, it was necessary to incorporate a visual element alongside the musical and spoken word components, giving rise to a new evolution of the radio ballad concept.

Impact of COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on this PhD creative research project in three respects, two of which were integral to the project from the very outset; the third area did not become apparent until much later. The first was obtaining access to Sidney Verrier's letters at the Imperial War Museum; the second involved face-to-face discussions with my brother and three cousins, now the only remaining family members with memories, direct and/or inherited, of Sid. The third area was the sharing of draft material, which I have always found to be very productive.

At the time of my enrolment, in October 2020, the Imperial War Museum's Research Room facility was closed due to Covid-19. When the Research Room eventually reopened it did so on a very limited basis – the facility was only available on certain days of the week and there were restrictions on the number of people using the room, so it was immediately booked up for months in advance. I finally gained access to the letters for one day in June 2021 and was not able to visit again until November 2021. This had a clear impact on the timelines for the project – whilst I was able to proceed with academic research, I was not able to make a real start on the creative output until the letters had been read and transcribed, a process did not start until July 2021 and was not complete until well over a year after first registration. I was encouraged to make a start on the critical commentary and attempted so to do, but found it difficult to write a critical commentary on a creative piece that did not yet exist. Once the letters were available and transcribed, the nature of the creative piece began to change. The creative piece did not take its final form until early 2023.

The interviewing stage of the project required an application for ethical approval, and this was made during the first few months; at that time, the Covid-related guidelines on face-to-face interviewing were so stringent that I decided to proceed on the basis of questionnaires. Questionnaires were only sent to people who had indicated that they would respond to them, but in the event some did not. It was never my intention to be ‘pushy’ or confrontational and so I tried some gentle reminders but received very little response. The result is that only two of the relatives concerned responded and, by the time I was able to obtain Ethical Approval for face-to-face contact, early in the 2022-23 academic year, the creative work was so far progressed that I decided to continue with what I had. I believe that the people concerned would have been more likely to offer responses to face-to-face contact, had that been possible earlier in the project and that the inclusion of material gathered from them would have added variety and further authenticity to the creative piece.

Finally, it has always been my practice to share draft creative material within both performance and workshop settings, something which was greatly restricted during most of the first two years of my PhD programme because of Covid-19 restrictions. Even after the restrictions were lifted, opportunities to share work and obtain feedback within the University have been limited. As a result, the rehearsal process which began (externally to the University) in the autumn of 2022 involved more workshop-type activities which, whilst invaluable helping me to shape the eventual creative piece, were very time consuming and, as a consequence, the performance outcome was less polished than hoped.

In summary, whilst I consider the creative piece to be a complete and, for me, satisfying outcome, I do believe that, without the impact of Covid-19, it would have been accomplished

considerably earlier, with significantly greater authenticity and a wider variety of family voices. I also believe that the earlier completion of the creative piece would have greatly facilitated the formulation of the critical commentary.

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Preface

This thesis embodies both the creative output and the results of research carried out for my PhD research project. The creative output is represented by the script for the creative piece, *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*. The critical commentary which follows the creative piece addresses the artistic relevance of the work, demonstrating evidence of originality and an understanding of the relationship of the overall thesis to the wider field of knowledge.

Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier has been performed twice, on 18th March and 27th April 2023. The first performance took place at the Electric Palace cinema in Harwich. The second performance, in the Lakeside Theatre at the University of Essex, was recorded and is available to watch here: <https://essexuniversity.box.com/s/kc60hjlw3bi4owwv151xrpz2z9jowwmxe>

The video is unedited and continuous, beginning some ten minutes before the performance and including the interval; it is thus a warts-and-all artefact of the second performance. Extensive revisions had been made between the two performances, and more took place based on feedback after the second performance. The script which appears as part of this submission should be treated as the definitive version of the work for assessment purposes. For the avoidance of doubt, ‘Sid’ always refers to my uncle, the person; ‘*Sid*’ will always refer to the creative piece.

The list of people to whom I must express gratitude is lengthy, and any words I write here could never adequately convey my thanks. In particular, at the University of Essex, my amazing PhD supervisor, Dr Mary Mazzilli, and the other members of my supervisory panel,

Dr Nora Williams, Dr Elizabeth Bennett and Professor Elizabeth Kuti: all have been unstinting in their willingness to read, listen, observe and offer constructive advice and criticism. Neither *SID* nor the accompanying critical work would be the same without them. Dr Adrian May emerged from happy retirement to attend one of the performances and then met to offer the most apposite feedback and advice. Professor Jonathan Lichtenstein provided much needed guidance when it was most needed, and I am grateful also for encouragement from Matthew de Abaitua, Dr Holly Pester and others within the Department of Literature, Film and Theatre Studies. I wish to express my profound thanks to my Examiners, Professor Richard Hand and Professor Philip Terry, for taking the time to read and – very thoroughly – understand my work.

My long-time Choral Tradition collaborators once more agreed to take on the task of learning and performing my work – their names appear in the cast list of the creative piece, but I must especially acknowledge the instrumentalists whose input at the rehearsal stage was invaluable: Debbie Jones, Zoe Munson, Jerry Jones, (Professor) David Sanders and Penny Verrier (my wife). My good friend Gary Lewis spent hours coaching me through the intricacies of Microsoft PowerPoint and became, eventually, the ‘PowerPoint Jockey’ – PJ for short – in the performances. In connection with the performances, I am grateful to Michael Offord and the team at the Electric Palace, and Kanyinsola, Harry and their teams at the Lakeside Theatre. My whole family have been overwhelmingly supportive over the past four years, but I must especially thank my cousin Richard Verrier – without his unwavering support and input (despite ill-health) this project simply could not have been accomplished. My brother, James, gave freely of his time and memories, aided by his daughter, Maderine, who played a crucial role in collecting his actuality. I have mentioned my wife, Penny, and her daughter Zoe: in addition to their musical participation they have lived with *Sid* for over three years and showed unending patience and interest. For my daughter, Emily, I can only say that at every stage,

whatever her own (extensive) commitments, her willingness to find time and energy to support me has been unbelievable: *Sid* had to have a second voice, as both narrator and ballad-singer and Emily, born a year after Sid's death, fulfilled both roles admirably. I must also acknowledge the assistance of the staff of the Research Room at the Imperial War Museum, Mark Hickman at the website Pegasusarchive.org, the Army Records Office, the National Archives and, of course, the Albert Sloman Library at the University of Essex. My thanks are also due for the assistance, albeit some twenty-five years ago, of Fiona Tait, then of the Charles Parker Archive in Birmingham.

As previously mentioned, I distributed questionnaires to folk song performers designed to elicit commentary upon their approach to the use of spoken word. Only two substantive responses were received but they were particularly thoughtful and helpful, and deserve mention: Jonny Dyer, and my late and much-missed friend Richard Spong; sadly, Richard and I were unable to have the longer, face-to-face discussions to which we both looked forward following his enthusiastic response to the original questionnaire. Whilst acknowledging the involvement of all those mentioned, and the many others who have expressed interest in my project and their own thoughts and insights, mistakes, both creative and academic, are mine, and mine alone.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this project to Sid, my uncle, and the people who cared for him most throughout his long ordeal: Daisy and Will (my grandparents), Claude, Violet, Len (my father) and the rest of Sid's Big Happy Family.

Creative Piece – *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*

Sid

The Ballad of a Soldier

Cast for Electric Palace 18/3/23 & Lakeside Theatre 27/4/23

Live Performers:

Mick Verrier

(Ballad Singer; Octave Mandolin; Guitar)

Emily Verrier

(Ballad Singer)

Simon Todd

(The War Diary/The Psychiatrist)

The Chorus: Debbie Jones (English Concertina), David Sanders (Cello),
Jerry Jones (Violin), Zoe Munson (Flute), Penelope Verrier (Recorders)
Ann Donaldson, Cathy Offord, Jill Ritchie, Pam Fitzgerald, Roger Hamer, Leonard Smith

Recorded Voices (actors names in brackets where relevant):

Richard Verrier, James Verrier, Herbert Holewa (IWM recording) Denis Edwards (Christian Fairhall-Smith), Harry Clark (Leonard Smith), Basil Dean (Roger Hamer), Prof. Alon Kadish (Luke Hollway), Richard Smith and 'Tod' Sweeney (Ian Fairhall-Smith), Dare Wilson and Richard Norman (Gerald Donaldson), Ruth Silcock (Cathy Offord), David Craggs (David Sanders), Claybury Patient 1 (Jerry Jones), Claybury Patient 2 (Susan Fairhall-Smith), Claybury Patient 3 (Jill Ritchie), Long Grove Patient (Ann Donaldson)

Script Directions:

Song lyrics appear in **bold type**

Live spoken word passages appear in standard type

Recorded spoken word passages are *italicised*

Musical and other directions appear in [square brackets]

Slide and Visuality columns refer to the PowerPoint presentations used with the performance

List of songs, in order of first instance (melodies original except where indicated):

Narrative Ballad (melody: traditional song, 'Arthur McBride')

Sidney's Garden

Claybury/Palestine

Quiet Nights

Laughing Willie

Race to the Sea (melody: traditional song, 'The Galway Races')

Wish Me Luck (adapted from 'Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye')

Dig In




Roll On

Soldier Soldier (translated from medieval French song, 'L'homme armé')

Airborne Folding Bike (adapted from 'Little Stick of Blackpool Rock')

Whatever Happened

ACT I

Cue		Slide	Visuality
LIVE MUSIC:	<i>Sid's Slow March</i>	1	 <p>Created using Microsoft PowerPoint</p>
MICK:	<p>[Narrative Ballad]</p> <p>Come all you good people, attend to me well</p> <p>It's of a young soldier, his story I'll tell</p> <p>How serving his country, misfortune befell</p> <p>And brought his proud family great sadness</p> <p>Through France and Belgium and through</p> <p>Germany</p> <p>From Normandy's fields to the cold Baltic Sea</p> <p>And afterwards Palestine brought him to grief</p> <p>And the rest of his life spent in madness</p>	2	 <p>Verrier Family Collection</p>
EMILY:	<p>When I was eight or nine, we went to France.</p> <p>Somewhere in Normandy, my Dad insisted</p> <p>On taking us to Pegasus Bridge, near Caen,</p> <p>To where his Uncle Sid had been, on D-Day.</p>	3	 <p>https://www.tripadvisor.com/AttractionProductHighlight-g187181-d17772024-Private_guided_British_D_Day_Tour_from_Bayeux-Bayeux_Calvados_Basse_Normandie_N.html</p>
LIVE MUSIC:	[English Concertina slowly playing the first line of <i>Sidney's Garden</i>]		

EMILY: Before then, I knew nothing much of Sid

LIVE MUSIC: [Guitar intro to *Sidney's Garden* begins here]

MICK: My earliest memories of Uncle Sid? 4
 Nineteen-sixty-seven, sixty-eight,
 Standing in the garden: Prince George Road,
 Stoke Newington. Grandma and Grandad's house.



Verrier Family
Collection

EMILY: [Sidney's Garden] 5
**Grandad's at the table, Grandma's making tea,
 Sidney's in his garden, that's where he likes to
 be.**



Verrier Family
Collection

**All the world is in its place, or so it seems to be,
 But Sidney's thoughts are far from Sidney's
 garden.**

LIVE MUSIC: [Guitar continues, into English Concertina playing
 the last line of *Sidney's Garden*, rallentando.]

CHORUS: I spent a lot of time in grandma's lounge 6
 A room which no-one ever seemed to use
 Sliding off the shiny leather seat
 Of a sofa bed upon which no-one slept
 Admiring the piano no-one played 7
 The instrument that now has pride of place
 In my own home.



Author's photo



Author's photo

8

And Grandma V, she never seemed to rest,
Her ulcerated legs both tightly bandaged
Her sense of humour wicked, always laughing:



*Verrier Family
Collection*

CHORUS: [Chanting]
(WOMEN ONLY) You poor old soul,
You do look bad.
You really make me feel so sad.

ACTUALITY 1: JAMES: I think my earliest memory is sitting on Sid's knee, in the morning room of our parents' house. He was sitting by the door and, er, had basically been told to sit down, and I clambered on his knee.

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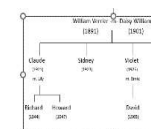


*Verrier Family
Collection*

MICK: My Uncle Sid was born Sidney Robert Verrier
In January 1923.
He had a brother, two years older: Claude
And a sister, Violet, who was younger.

ACTUALITY 1: RICHARD: My father, Claude, and my Aunt Vi
Continues declared that Sid was 'strange' as a child. He had

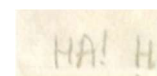
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*Image created using
Microsoft Word*

a propensity for physical fitness. He had remarkable physical strength and gymnastic ability and he was a practical joker. He also displayed strange traits and occasionally, when he was displeased, he would urinate over the bottom of my father's bed.

CHORUS HA! HA! 11
(MEN):



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159*

LIVE MUSIC: [English Concertina slowly plays first line of Sidney's Garden]

MICK: My father Len, he was the afterthought, 12
The baby, born in 1931.
And Sidney was his idol: full of tricks
A gifted athlete, comedian, musician...
...before the war.



*Verrier Family
Collection*

ACTUALITY 1: RICHARD: Sid's war service was never 13
Continues discussed by any of my grandparents possibly
because of his ongoing mental state. As a child I
was brought up knowing his situation and
accepted it without question. He was my
Godfather and I adored him as kid because he



*Verrier Family
Collection*

made me laugh and entertained me with conjuring tricks, especially with lit cigarettes.

MICK: When I knew him, Sid was but a shell. 14
A shadow of the man that once he'd been.



*Verrier Family
Collection*

ACTUALITY 1: JAMES: From memory, he was dishevelled; he
Continues had incredibly bushy eyebrows, which has stuck
with me for history. His fingernails were long; he
had nicotine-stained fingers because he smoked
too much. He was a very quiet man, he could get
agitated and fidgety but he didn't seem to be too
wild with that.

LIVE MUSIC: [Violin slowly playing the first line of
Claybury/Palestine]

MICK: A man of very strange routines and habits
Whose very speech, to my ears, made no sense.

LIVE MUSIC: [Violin slowly playing the second line of
Claybury/Palestine]

ACTUALITY 2: JAMES: He was often around, and that seemed to 14b
cause my mother a lot of stress and made my

father very sad. Although he liked picking him up,
he seemed to be sad about how his health was.

LIVE MUSIC: [Violin playing the third line of
Claybury/Palestine]

MICK: We saw Sid once a fortnight – home for lunch
Sometimes we'd visit him in hospital
Though never on the ward, for I was young
And it was... Claybury.

LIVE MUSIC: [Guitar accompaniment enters at 'screen']

EMILY: [Claybury/Palestine]
**Behind the screen of forest green, stands
Claybury**

ACTUALITY 3: RUTH SILCOCK: Claybury Hospital. There were 15
the gates, huge grounds, drives;



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/robmcrore/10142755406>

EMILY: **Sterile, clean, labyrinthine, a sanctuary**

ACTUALITY 3: RUTH SILCOCK: The hospital was red brick and 16
Continues enormous, covering several acres;



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claybury_Hospital

EMILY: **Tranquility, stability**
 Fragility... futility
 And all of life's broad tapestry
 Behind the screen

ACTUALITY 3: RUTH SILCOCK: Long corridors stretched out of
 Continues sight, with patients stuck to such particular familiar
 sections as a radiator, a window, the entrance-hall,
 benches near the canteen.

MICK: All I ever saw of Claybury was the grounds,
 The cricket pitch, where sometimes there was play.

ACTUALITY 3: CLAYBURY PATIENT 1: I hated Claybury.
 Continues

LIVE MUSIC: [Violin playing the last line of Claybury/Palestine]

EMILY: ...Five years of active service
 Returning home in 1946
 To Claybury within a year or so
 And then to Long Grove, far away, in Surrey.

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*Image created using
 Apple Maps*

PSYCHIATRIST: The closer a patient's relations live to the mental hospital the more likely is the patient to be discharged.

EMILY: Far from home: each visit took all day. 18
A train... the tube... another train... a bus.



<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17445647.2015.1061302>

Two hours or more, and then the journey home,
Time and again, for twenty years or more. 19

The famous Epsom Cluster – five asylums.
A site so huge it had its own railway.



<https://eehe.org.uk/?p=29063>

PSYCHIATRIST: Yes... the closer a patient's relations live to the mental hospital... the more likely is the patient to be discharged.

[PAUSE]

MICK: A lifetime spent in 'mental institutions' 20
And all, my father said, because of war.
Sid was a hero, I was told, and that is true
But not, perhaps, the hero I believed



Verrier Family Collection

LIVE MUSIC: [English Concertina slowly playing Quiet Nights
melody] 21



*Verrier Family
Collection*

MICK: We'd heard tell of Major Howard's D-Day exploits 22
Before the great invasion could begin
Six gliders landing silently, in darkness



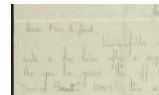
www.pegasusarchive.org

To seize and hold the bridges east of Caen 23
And we thought Sid did that... but he came later
When the Airborne forces landed, wave on wave
Ten thousand troops by parachute and glider
To shield the bridgehead zone, to hold the flanks:
Soldiers, lightly armed, opposing tanks.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pegasus_Bridge

EMILY: Sid's last letter to his parents prior to combat, 24
Was written on the afternoon of D Day.
The fragile wooden gliders were all loaded
And fragile anxious men awaited nightfall.



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159*

MICK: [Quiet Nights]
Dear Mum and Dad, well at last I can write
We've been very busy preparing to fight
It's no Billy Beano; this time it's for real
Tell Dad, very soon I will know how it feels
We are off to the Second Front, into the field:
Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.

LIVE MUSIC: [English Concertina playing *Quiet Nights*
turnaround]

EMILY: September 1939, young Sid 25
A sixteen-year old clerk to an accountant.
His father, an old soldier, forty-eight
Tough as old boots...



'The 1939 Register',
accessed via
ancestry.co.uk

LIVE MUSIC: [Cello playing opening phrase of Laughing Willie
leading into Guitar accompaniment]

MICK: ...Laughing Will. 26
A 'Regular' before the First World War
Who served his time . . .



Verrier Family
Collection

EMILY: [Laughing Willie]
Laughing Willie, why do you never smile
Must you always be so bloody stern?
Is it all the things you saw
When you were fighting in the war?
Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?

Was it five years marching mile on bloody mile?
Five long years and never once at home?

**Was it Ypres or Salonika,
The winter snow in Georgia?
Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?**

MICK: June 1941, Sid joins the army. 27
And after basic training, volunteers
For gliders, with the famous Ox & Bucks



*Verrier Family
Collection*

And joins them in May, 1942. 28



*Service record,
L/Cpl SR Verrier,
(Ministry of
Defence)*

EMILY: And so, for two long years, while others fought
At sea, by air, in desert and in jungle
While bombs rained down on families at home 29
The airborne forces trained, learnt, trained again...



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159*

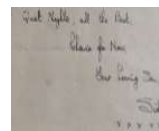
MICK: [Quiet Nights] 30

**Dear Mum and Dad, well I just had to write
Today we went up for our very first flight**



Paradata.org.uk

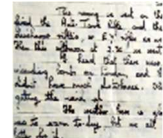
We've been on range trying all different guns 31



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159*

**The weather is glorious, plenty of sun
But now I must close, for the day's nearly done
Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.**

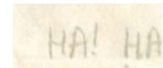
- WAR DIARY: 1st July 1942. Intensive training continues, and many courses have been run in the regiment, including motor cycling, Blitz-buggy driving and wireless. The Divisional Commander gave a lecture to all officers who had not previously heard his talk on the Airborne Division. 32
- CHORUS HA! HA! 34
- (MEN):
- WAR DIARY: The whole Regiment attended a film-show in the Garrison Theatre and saw two films, the training films 'Gas' and 'Next of Kin'. The first is the best of its kind and most instructive. Everyone very much enjoyed the security film, 'Next of Kin'. It was a most impressive show and did make clear to all ranks the necessity of guarding vital information. 35
- CHORUS: [Race to the Sea] 36
- We're the 2nd Ox and Bucks and we're off to see the sea!**
- MICK: **In August Nineteen-Forty-Two, to seek for recreation**
- (Recitative) **The regiment left Bulford bound for Ilfracombe in Devon**



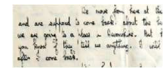
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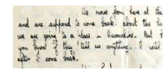
Paradata.org.uk



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SR Verrier, IWM
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Private Papers of
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Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159

WAR DIARY: 6th August 1942. The regiment left Bulford in two parties. The road party set off at 0700 hours and the train party at 0945 hours.

MICK: **With half the men in army trucks,**
 (Recitative) **The others on the railway**
And when we got to Barnstaple
We found ourselves competing

37



*Created from a
1940s road map of
England*

WAR DIARY: The road party made very good time and were running level with the train party between Barnstaple and Ilfracombe where the road and rail tracks run side by side.

CHORUS: **We're the 2nd Ox & Bucks and we're racing to
the sea!**

WAR DIARY: The situation developed into a small competition, which was eventually won by the road party by a very short head.

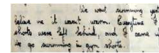
CHORUS: **We're the 2nd Ox & Bucks and we're racing to
the sea!**

WAR DIARY: Our stay in Ilfracombe is intended as a holiday. 38
 Our quarters are good, we are billeted in hotels,
 food and appetites are well up to standard.



www.cinematreasur.es.org

MICK: [Quiet Nights] 39
Dear Mum and Dad, how I wish you were here
Its lovely in Devon at this time of year



Private Papers of
 SR Verrier, IWM
 Documents 13159

WAR DIARY: Companies run and bathe before breakfast and the
 troops find much to amuse them amongst the
 holiday makers.

MICK: **We swim every morning, and train by the sea**
Climbing and shooting and lots of P.T.

WAR DIARY: We have a somewhat meagre band which plays on 40
 the promenade and which employs a crooner to
 distract the Orderly room staff. A change is as
 good as a feast.



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MICK: **And tonight, with two girls, at the ballet I'll be!**

WAR DIARY:

Our Engineers gave an excellent demonstration of 'flame throwing', Bangalore torpedoes and Anti-tank mine laying to all companies.

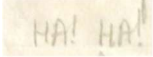
MICK: **Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights**

WAR DIARY: 27th August to 1st September 1942. The regiment 41 marched back from Ilfracombe to Bulford, a distance of 134 miles. Average distance covered per marching hour three and one-eighth miles. During our stay in Ilfracombe the weather was mostly cool and rainy, but on the 27th a heat wave broke and the temperature rose to nearly 90 degrees in the shade.



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CHORUS HA! HA! 42
(MEN):



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WAR DIARY: The distance covered on the first day was only 22 miles. The ground was extremely hilly all the way and we twice had to climb 350 feet in half a mile. Undoubtedly everyone was very glad to reach the rest area alongside a small river by the village of Millslade. A few men did fall out on the march owing to the excessive heat, but after 'stand

down', Companies were allowed to bathe in the
river and those who did found it delightfully
refreshing.

EMILY: November '42, for Sid, a setback
A glider crash, an injury, hospital

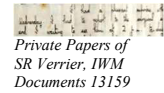
43



*Verrier Family
Collection*

MICK: [Quiet Nights]
Dear Mum and Dad, what a pleasant surprise
The surgeon says I must go under the knife

44



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CHORUS You poor old soul
(WOMEN):

MICK: **I've been out all night, standing guard in the
rain**
I didn't get wet, but I'm tired all the same

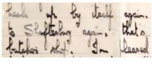
CHORUS You do sound bad
(WOMEN):

MICK: **So I'm off for a tea and to keep out the way**
Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights

CHORUS You really make me feel so sad

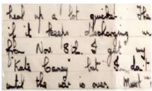
(WOMEN):

EMILY: And so to Shaftesbury Military Hospital, Dorset. 45
 And then long months of pain and great frustration;
 The operation wound refused to heal.

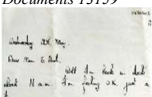


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MICK: [Quiet Nights] 46
 Dear Mum and Dad, here I am, back in ‘dock’,
 I’m feeling fed up and I’ve had to take stock
 Saw the doctor this morning, he says it will heal
 If not I’ll be in for a different ordeal
 No use to the army and out on me ear
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights

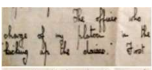


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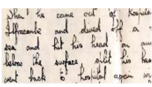
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EMILY: And, back at Bulford, training carried on 47
 And news from the battalion filtered through



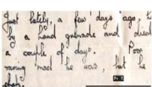
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WAR DIARY: 15th May 1943. H Company held a very 48
 successful dance in the Wing Gymnasium.



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Lieutenant Hinnan was killed on a field firing 49
 practice as the result of the premature explosion



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of a No. 68 grenade. Private Josey of S Company was seriously injured.

The Regiment was defeated at cricket by 30 runs, by the RASC team.

[Pause]

EMILY: March 1944, and off once more to Devon, Sid, back with his unit, fighting fit.

WAR DIARY: Exercise PRANG. This field firing exercise took place on Exmoor Field Firing Ranges. 6 Airlanding Brigade is billeted in area Minehead-Dunster.

MICK: [Quiet Nights] 50

Dear Mum and Dad, I can't get home today

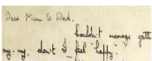
My mate and I got in a bit of a scrape

We headed to town on a bit of a spree

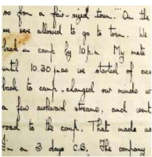
We were late back to camp and got three days

C.B.

Three hours cutting cabbages isn't for me!



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CHORUS You poor old soul!

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(WOMEN):

CHORUS HA! HA!

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(MEN):

MICK: **Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights**

EMILY: Time marches on, the Second Front is looming,
The Ox and Bucks are marked for special work
And move from place to place, endlessly training

53

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WAR DIARY: The whole regiment, less D Company, is accommodated in Woodhall Spa which is a rather old-fashioned watering place, popular in the Victorian era but which has since lost a great deal of the attraction.

MICK: [Quiet Nights]

Dear Mum and Dad, well as you can see

Everything's changed and we're in

Lincolnshire!

WAR DIARY: Troops spent the day preparing their billets and making themselves as comfortable as possible.

They all seemed to enjoy the change from barrack
life to being accommodated in private billets...

MICK: **It's not very bad, but it's not very good** 54
We sleep on the floor of a hut made of wood



*The village just to back
and not very good. I can't say
at the moment the in
along time in near as I will have
left. Only around a little while
well hope to take the
you to meet and I hope you
very best of health. Sincerely,
SR Verrier, IWM
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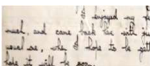
CHORUS You poor old soul
(WOMEN):

WAR DIARY: ...and after cleaning up the billets, which were
not left as clean as the regiment might like, they
began to explore the local countryside.

MICK: **Now I'm off to the WVS for some food**
Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.

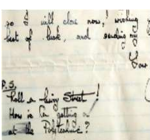
EMILY: And now, with D Day closer, ever closer
The troops are given leave to visit home

MICK: [Quiet Nights] 55
Dear Mum and Dad, I enjoyed my few hours
Being home with this big happy family of ours
It isn't so bad getting back to the camp
Two hours on the train then a bit of a tramp 56



*I enjoyed my
meal and some fresh air and
your love, only I don't see the
time it will be soon.*

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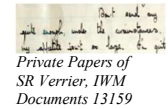
*So I will close now, wishing you
best of luck, and sending you
love.
P.S. Tell your sister!
How is the getting on
with the potatoes?*

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**Through dark country lanes where there are no
streetlamps**

Your ‘Old’ Loving Son, Steak & Kid.

LIVE MUSIC: English Concertina playing ‘Quiet Nights’ 57
turnaround



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EMILY: The end of May, 1944.
The end of training; now it’s off to war.

MICK: [Narrative Ballad] 58

**In June ‘forty-four our young soldiers did fly
As the sun it did set on a pale English sky
To battle they went in a box made of ply
To land in the Normandy moonlight
The gliders set down by the cold river Orne
The soldiers dug in round the Chateau St Come
For two months they stood, did the brave 6th
Airborne
Midst the mud and the blood and the cordite**



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ACTUALITY 4: RECORDED MUSIC: “Wish Me Luck As You 59
Wave Me Goodbye”, fading after one line

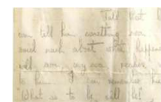


www.iwm.org

- WAR DIARY: 1st June 1944. Keevil. General briefing commenced by companies and lasted from 0800 to 2100 hours, during which the troops were given an introduction to the operation. The amount of information available was such that the troops could not be expected to absorb it all in one session.
- ACTUALITY 4: RECORDED MUSIC: “Wish Me Luck As You Continues Wave Me Goodbye” continues with second line
- WAR DIARY: Major General Gale visited the men on the airfield and gave them further details of the operation. The troops appeared to be well pleased with their role and were obviously gratified with the efforts the higher commands and RAF had made in order to ensure that the operation was a success. 60
- ACTUALITY 4: RECORDED MUSIC: “Wish Me Luck As You Continues Wave Me Goodbye” continues to the end of the verse 61
- WAR DIARY: Brigadier Kindersley visited the camp during the afternoon and wished the troops the best of luck. 62



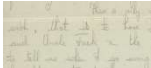

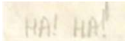
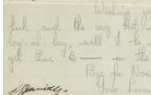
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www.paradata.org

- LIVE MUSIC: “Wish Me Luck”, two lines, instruments only 63 
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- WAR DIARY: Members of the RAF tug crews visited the officers mess during the evening and all enjoyed a rather convivial evening.
- LIVE MUSIC: “Wish Me Luck” continues to end
- WAR DIARY: Lieutenant General Browning visited the camp and gave all the men an inspiring talk emphasising our great superiority in all branches of war. 64 
www.paradata.org
- CHORUS HA! HA! 65 
Private Papers of SR Verrier, IWM Documents 13159, Letter 32.
- (MEN):
- MICK: [Wish Me Luck] 66 
Private Papers of SR Verrier, IWM Documents 13159
- (Recitative) **Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye**
- WAR DIARY: The Regiment, less Bridge Assault Party of Letter D Company and two platoons of B Company, took off from Harwell and Keevil Airfields at 1840 hrs and 1910 hrs respectively. The trip was

very bumpy over land but all became very calm
over the sea.

MICK: **Cheerio, here I go, on my way**
(Recitative)

67



WAR DIARY: At approximately 2055 hrs we approached the
French coast and could see a large fleet of ships
standing offshore and occasional bursts of firing
coming from their guns. It was very easy to pick
out the river and canal below and ahead of us and
we knew there had been no mistake in navigation.

MICK: **As our glider descends from the sky**
(Recitative)

ACTUALITY 5: DENIS EDWARDS: I landed with Major Howard 67b
and the bridge assault party just before midnight,
and we proceeded to capture and hold the two
bridges, as planned. In the big second lift,
codenamed 'Mallard', the remainder of our
battalion, with the Royal Ulster Rifles and some
of the Devons, took off from England at about
1900 hours. At 2100 hours, the whole sky to our
North was filled with countless tug planes and

gliders, supported by circling fighter planes for protection against the Luftwaffe.

MICK: **Link your arms; raise your legs; let us pray.**

(Recitative)

ACTUALITY 5: DENIS EDWARDS: The ground forces and flak guns were very busy, and once the landings took place the snipers turned their attention from us in our trenches to the new arrivals who made better targets. Gliders need open ground in which to land, and in many cases the newly arrived men had to sprint for considerable distances before they could find reasonable cover.

68



MICK: **All I can hear**

(Recitative) **Is the silence of fear,**

‘Til we crash into the fray.

WAR DIARY: All gliders except four landed on or somewhere near the landing zone, although in most cases crash landings occurred and many collisions took place. A certain amount of flak as gliders ran in added to the many difficulties of the glider pilots who did magnificently. At 2215 the regiment began to move forward to the pre-arranged

concentration area. A few people had been hurt in crash landings, including the commanding officer, who managed to carry on, and the loading officer who had to be evacuated.

MICK: **All I know is I'll live... or I'll die:**
 (Recitative) **Wish me luck, as you wave me... goodbye**

WAR DIARY: Despite the darkness of the night, the regiment moved quickly into the concentration area and a temporary HQ was set up. The commanding officer met the Brigadier on the bridge at Benouville and received orders to move forward to Ranville with the intention of occupying Herouvillette as soon as possible and then to move on to occupy Escoville.

MICK [Dig In]
 & CHORUS: **We landed on the sixth of June**
Just eastward of the River Orne,
And when we got to Escoville,
The Colonel cried, "Dig in!"
So we dug
 CHORUS: **Yes we dug**
 MICK: **And we dug**

69



*Image created using
 Apple Maps*

CHORUS: **Yes we dug**
 MICK: **And we dug**
 CHORUS: **And dug and dug and dug...**
Digging for Victory!

The Germans weren't defeated yet
We fell back to Herouvillette,
We picked a shady spot to rest...
The Major said, "Dig in!"
So we dug

CHORUS: **Yes we dug**
 MICK: **And we dug**
 CHORUS: **Yes we dug**
 MICK: **And we dug**
 CHORUS: **And dug and dug and dug...**
Digging for Victory!

WAR DIARY: 10th June 1944. An infantry company began to
 attack from the Breville area and very heavy
 casualties were inflicted on them as they moved
 across open country. The enemy began moving at
 0700 hrs and eventually withdrew at 1300 hrs.

LIVE MUSIC: English Concertina playing "Sidney's Garden"
 theme, slowly

EMILY: [Sidney's Garden]

**Sidney's in the garden, cigarette in hand,
Digging holes for bedding plants to make the
garden grand.
But in his mind he's digging in some far off
foreign land,
Sidney's digging trenches in the garden.**

WAR DIARY: A report that a large number of tanks were moving towards our location caused great activity in the strengthening of our positions. Slight shelling added to the general state of expectancy during the afternoon, but the threat did not materialise.

MICK [Dig In]

**On June the thirteenth we moved on
Up to the Chateau of St Come
And just beside the crossroads there,
The Captain said, "Dig in!"
So we dug**

CHORUS: **Yes we dug**

MICK: **And we dug**

CHORUS: **Yes we dug**

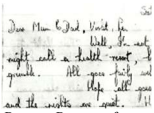
70



www.pagasusarchive.org

MICK: **And we dug**
 CHORUS: **And dug and dug and dug...**
Digging for Victory!

WAR DIARY: Summary of casualties to date... 71
 6th June: three killed, twenty wounded, fifty-three missing;
 7th June: two killed, fifty wounded, twenty-seven missing;
 8th June: one wounded;
 9th June: one killed, thirty wounded, nine missing;
 10th June: two killed, ten wounded.



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MICK: [Quiet Nights]
Dear Mum and Dad I must keep this one short,
This place we are in - it's not a health resort
The mail isn't good, I don't want you to fret
But I really could do with some more cigarettes
And could you please send me some Hackney
gazettes
Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights

ACTUALITY 6: DENIS EDWARDS: Cigarettes were running 72
 low. We were not allowed to smoke during the
 hours of darkness, for fear of giving our positions

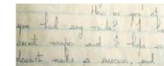


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away. During the day we tended to smoke heavily. A small supply of fags came up with the ration packs irrespective of whether we smoked or not. With supplies running low we began checking with the known non-smokers only to find that most of them, like us, were now smoking like factory chimneys!

EMILY: Trench warfare; days turn into weeks, then months. 73

The troops now battle-hardened, dirty, tired



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MICK: [Quiet Nights] 74

Dear Mum and Dad, I am doing my best

To write a few lines when we get a short rest

My chum has been wounded, quite badly I fear

But I want to pass over what's happening here 75

I'll be pleased to get home to a nice glass of beer

Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights



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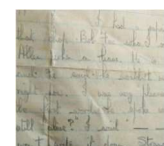


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LIVE MUSIC: English Concertina playing *Quiet Nights*
turnaround

ACTUALITY 7: DENIS EDWARDS: On the 11th August, D + 66, 76

four of us were detailed to dig a new sanitary



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trench. It was far too close to the danger for my liking.

MICK [Dig In]

So we dug

CHORUS: **Yes we dug**

ACTUALITY 7: DENIS EDWARDS: We were working in pairs, 77
Continues two digging in the open field while the others took shelter in a nearby ditch. There were no trenches nearby since the contents of the latrine trench drained into the soil, so it could not be too close to our defensive positions.



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MICK **And we dug**

CHORUS: **Yes we dug**

ACTUALITY 7: DENIS EDWARDS: The first few feet were 78
Continues always the most dangerous because there was nowhere to dive for cover. Lifting out the turf and topsoil was always the hardest part of any dig. We dug fast and needed frequent rest. Sometimes all four of us were taking cover in the ditch.



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MICK **And we dug**

CHORUS: **And dug, and dug and dug...**

ACTUALITY 7: DENIS EDWARDS: We decided to dig the trench 79
 Continues deeper than usual and hoped it would last
 throughout our stay. No-one wanted another
 dodgy dig like that.



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CHORUS: **Digging for Victory!**

ACTUALITY 7: DENIS EDWARDS: The day ended pleasantly 80
 Continues with a completely unexpected treat, when George
 and Beryl Formby suddenly arrived just behind
 our front line.



<https://www.shutterstock.com/editorial/image-editorial/comedian-george-formby-who-died-631961-seen-1220795a>

RECORDED MUSIC: George Formby: “Little 81
 Stick of Blackpool Rock” introduction only



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BASIL DEAN: The Formbys were performing to 82
 troops in the beachhead area when they were
 invited to lunch with Field Marshal Montgomery.



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Monty spoke to George about the 6th Airborne 83
 glider troops who had been holding a vital bridge
 for fifty-six days without relief. He felt they
 would much appreciate a show. George told the



<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205087515>

audience the next day that that he didn't know whether it had been an invitation or an order.

RECORDED MUSIC: George Formby: "Little Stick of Blackpool Rock" first three lines

BASIL DEAN: Early the next morning I found George waiting by my car, with his wife. I tried to dissuade Beryl, but she would not be denied, and so became the first woman of the invasion forces to cross the River Orne. We discovered the first lot of troops in an orchard, hiding in foxholes. The Germans were about 120 yards away.

RECORDED MUSIC: George Formby: "Little Stick of Blackpool Rock", continues

BASIL DEAN: Beryl sat under a tree and George stood with his back to a wall of sandbags, ready to jump into a slit trench. They said to George, "If anything comes over, duck. Don't be embarrassed, because if you don't, you'll be the only one standing. We don't think anything will happen because the Germans will be able to hear you."

RECORDED MUSIC: George Formby: “Little Stick of Blackpool Rock”, continues

BASIL DEAN: Between 12 noon and 3pm, George gave six shows to the men of the Airborne Division, none of them more than 300 yards from the German lines. He sang song after song, screwing his face up into comical expressions of fright whenever shells exploded in the near distance. On the long drive back, whenever sufficient men were gathered to warrant a performance, out would come the uke. By the end of that day, Beryl and George had given nine shows.

LIVE MUSIC: English Concertina playing “Sidney’s Garden” theme, slowly

MICK: But what of Sid, in all these fun and games?
Nothing – for it seems Sid wasn’t there...
His letter on that day a different story:

84



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EMILY: [Sidney’s Garden]

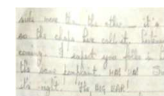
**Sidney's walking in the park, far from all the
guns**

Admiring all the flowers, soaking up the sun

**He knows there'll be mud and blood before the
day is done**

But just for now he's happy in the gardens

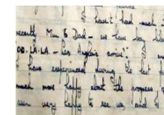
MICK: Ten weeks of static warfare takes its toll 85
The troops are weary, dirty, bored, fed up,
And then...



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WAR DIARY: 17th August 1944.

CHORUS: [Race to the Sea] 86
**We're the Second Ox and Bucks and we're
racing to the Seine**



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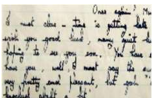
WAR DIARY: During the night 'B' Company patrols reported
that the enemy had withdrawn from STICKIES
CORNER which they accordingly occupied. At
0500 hrs 'A' Company sent a fighting patrol to
TRIANGLE WOOD which was found to be clear
of the enemy. The patrol then continued in
accordance with orders to the road junction at
BENEAUVILLE.

MICK: **So we moved out through Normandy**
 (Recitative) **And started on our journey**
 On the seventeenth of August to seek the
 German Army

WAR DIARY: 'A' and 'D' Companies reached their objective
 without opposition by 1730 hrs. The Regiment
 then consolidated with 'C' & 'D' Companies at
 GONNEVILLE and 'A' & 'B' Companies at
 DESCANVILLE.

MICK: **From St Richer to Heuland,**
 (Recitative) **Le Pt Castel to Tourgeville**
 We crossed the River Touques
 And we marched right on to Foulbec

87

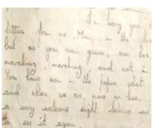


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CHORUS: **We're the 2nd Ox & Bucks and we're racing to**
 the Seine!

WAR DIARY: 27th August 1944, Foulbec
 A quiet day. Lt Scott and Capt Thompson swam
 across the RIVER RISLE and collected 7 Prisoners
 of War.


88



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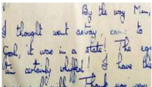
EMILY: In nine days the Ox and Bucks marched forty miles
Fighting all the way to reach the River Seine

ACTUALITY 8: *DENIS EDWARDS*: On Friday 1st September, we 89
were roused very early and ordered to get ready to
move out. No-one was complaining this time.
Loaded down with all our usual gear, we boarded
the trucks that were to take us all the way back to
the D-Day beaches. It was an uncomfortable ride,
bouncing about on the hard seats of the truck, but
it was also a very strange sensation to pass
through that quiet Normandy countryside which
only a few days earlier had been the scene of
bloody battles and horrifying events.



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MICK: ... and just like that, the 6th Airborne went home 90
To rest, recuperate and resupply
While 1st Airborne Division took their turn
Pitching parachutes and gliders against tanks



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EMILY: 1st Airborne met their match at Arnhem bridge
Where only one in five would make it home
Yet German generals knew the war was lost
Their army in retreat on every front
But, just as Sidney planned his Christmas leave 91

Adolf Hitler planned one final gamble...

MICK: [Quiet Nights]

**Dear Mum and Dad, this was not meant to be
I should have been home, but I'm back overseas**

CHORUS You poor old soul

(WOMEN):

EMILY: December 16th, 1944,


The German army strikes through the Ardennes.

MICK: **I wanted to visit my wounded friend Bert
See young Richard christened and go watch the
Spurs
Instead we are having a cheap foreign tour
Cheerio, best of luck, Quiet Nights**

92

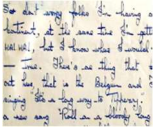
EMILY: Complete surprise achieved, the Allies reel
In shock: they need to reinforce the line
6th Airborne, still in England, back in training
Preparing for the crossing of the Rhine
Are sent, in trucks, to Belgium...

MICK [Roll On]



On Wednesday evening Nov 20 - going
to Reading to see going to London
which that is now part of the song.
Reading night and watching a film
Friday evening. On the Saturday after
to the Show a friend to see the
wants my song to help show for the
of interest in the song and see if
the note was not what it was.

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So did my father to having a
letter, at the same time the night
was not, but it shows what I wanted
to see. There's one thing that I
not see that in the Belgium and I
wings the song along to the
a new song that is a comedy song

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& CHORUS: Roll on a bloody long time
Roll on a bloody long time
For too bloody long we've sung this bloody song
Roll on a bloody long time

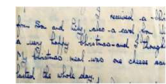
MICK: Roll on a bloody long time
Roll on a bloody long time
The Germans advance so now we're back in
France
Roll on a bloody long time

LEN & ROGER: Roll on a bloody long time 93
And roll on a sunnier clime
I just want to go where there's no bloody snow
Roll on a bloody long time



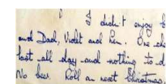
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CHORUS: Roll on a bloody long time 94
Roll on a bloody long time
For too bloody long we've sung this bloody song
Roll on a bloody long time



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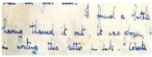
LEN & ROGER: Roll on a bloody long time 95
Roll on some turkey and wine
And a Christmas lunch plan which is not a
cheese sandwich



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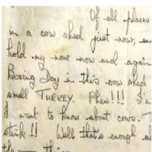
Roll on a bloody long time

LEN/ROGER: **Roll on a bloody long time** 96
I just want to write a few lines
But that's just supposing the ink wasn't frozen
Roll on a bloody long time



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CHORUS: **Roll on a bloody long time** 97
Roll on a bloody long time
For too bloody long we've sung this bloody song
Roll on a bloody long time



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LEN/ROGER: **Roll on a bloody long time** 98
We're fed up with living in grime
I'll take a nice camp bed instead of this cowshed
Roll on a bloody long time



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MICK: **Roll on a bloody long time**
And get us home out of the line
Just now its unwelcome to see France and
Belgium
Roll on a bloody long time

CHORUS: **Roll on a bloody long time**
Roll on a bloody long time

For too bloody long we've sung this bloody song

Roll on a bloody long time

EMILY: And then, just as quick as they arrived 99

6th Airborne were back home again in England

Soon to be an air-borne force once more

With Operation Varsity in store...



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MICK: [Narrative Ballad]

So after our soldiers' baptism of fire

Those months in the trenches, behind the barbed

wire

And Belgium's cold forests, they all did aspire

To rest and find peace in old England

But barely a month from their joyful return




Instead of the peace they'd so painfully earned

They found themselves faced with much greater

concerns

A landing by day in the Rhineland

ACT II

Cue	Music/Text	Slide	Image
LIVE MUSIC:	“L’Homme Armé”	1	 <p>Created using Microsoft PowerPoint</p>
CHORUS:	<p>[Soldier Soldier]</p> <p>Soldier! Soldier! Beware, beware.</p> <p>Soldier, soldier, beware.</p>		
MICK:	<p>[Narrative Ballad]</p> <p>In March '45, our young soldier once more</p> <p>Embarked in a Horsa and flew off to war</p> <p>The day went so badly that all of them swore</p> <p>They’d never more travel by glider</p> <p>Flying to Germany, crossing the Rhine</p> <p>Coming in hard by the railway line</p> <p>Many’s the glider a funeral pyre</p> <p>For the many men dying inside her</p>	2	 <p>Private Papers of SR Verrier, IWM Documents 13159</p>
ACTUALITY 9:	<p>DENIS EDWARDS: Operation Varsity – crossing the Rhine – began on 24th March 1945.</p> <p>Regrettably, the Germans knew only too well that</p>	3	 <p>www.pegasusarchiv.e.org</p>

we were on our way and they were ready and waiting.

EMILY: And so, once more, on March the 23rd, 4

Before they flew, they wrote their letters home

No optimism now, no cheerful words

This time they knew they might not make it back



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MICK: [Quiet Nights- extended verse] 5

Dear Mum and Dad – what a terrible war

I’ve just heard the news about Charlie next door

Its upset me a lot – I hope you are all safe

By the time you get this we’ll be off...

...but have faith

And farewell to the Big happy family

Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie and all

Hopefully soon I’ll be back at the door

All my love, your loving son Sid



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Its upset me a lot – I hope you are all safe 6

By the time you get this we’ll be off...

...but have faith

And farewell to the Big happy family

Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie and all

Hopefully soon I’ll be back at the door

All my love, your loving son Sid



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LIVE MUSIC: English Concertina playing “Quiet Nights” 7

turnaround



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ACTUALITY 10: DENIS EDWARDS: The target for our battalion 8

was the railway station at Hamminkeln, the



www.pegasusarchiv.e.org

Ringenberg road bridge over the River Issel, the railway bridge slightly to the north of the road bridge, and the road running westwards from Hamminkeln and Ringenberg.

MICK: [Wish Me Luck]

[Recitative] **Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye**

LIVE MUSIC: Violin playing second line only of “Wish Me Luck”

ACTUALITY 10: HARRY CLARK: I was seated in the tail-end of continued our glider when the wingtip and its aileron were shot away while we were still up at around 1000 feet.

9



www.paradata.org

LIVE MUSIC: Violin playing third line only of “Wish Me Luck”

MICK: **Will we make it this time, who can say?**

[Recitative]

ACTUALITY 10: HARRY CLARK: The tail section was also shot continued away, just as we came in to land.

LIVE MUSIC: Violin playing fifth and sixth lines of “Wish Me Luck”

ACTUALITY 10: HARRY CLARK: We finally slid to a halt, the landing field was covered in a smoke screen. We continued rapidly got out of the glider, pulled the handcart out with all the extra gear and ammunition in, and just as we got out a German tank tore by, followed by a German motorcyclist – we don't know who was the most scared, him or us – and then we watched the appalling carnage that ensued: two more gliders appeared out of the cloud and within a few seconds there came a fearful noise as they crashed. One of them hit the railway station and disintegrated. There were no survivors.

10



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/koremano/741810730/lightbox/>

DENIS EDWARDS: I recall a glider coming in just above us. It was aflame from end to end and men, without parachutes and with their clothing alight, were jumping. Although they were individually not recognisable, we knew they were our mates, men we knew well. It was a truly terrible sight

LIVE MUSIC: Seventh line only of “Wish Me Luck”

MICK: **Wish me luck as you wave me... goodbye**

[Recitative]

ACTUALITY 10: HARRY CLARK: Our radios were damaged in
continued the rough landing, so I was handed a written
message from our company commander and
instructed to deliver it to Lt. Col. Darrell-Brown
at Battalion HQ.



www.fiddlersgreen.net
et

MICK: **Wish me luck as you wave me...**

[Recitative]

ACTUALITY 10: HARRY CLARK: With enemy snipers and tanks
continued around, I dodged from one wrecked Horsa to
another. The many dead and seriously wounded
were a horrific sight. At the front of one burning
glider was its pilot, still wearing his headphones,
arms outstretched and forming a crucifix. All
these years later that sight still haunts me.

MICK: **Goodbye.**

[Recitative]

ACTUALITY 10: HARRY CLARK: Arriving at the railway station
continued I had no difficulty in locating our Battalion
Commander. He was riding towards me on one of
our small and flimsy Airborne Folding pedal
cycles.



B.S.A.
Airborne Bicycle
<https://onlinebicycle-museum.co.uk/1942-ww2-bsa-airborne-bicycle-1st-pattern-r4152/>

DENIS EDWARDS: The Colonel was a big and hefty man by any standards. He must have appeared a strange sight on that very small cycle.



<https://averagejoecyclist.com/bikes-military-history/british-soldier-on-a-bsa-folding-bike/>

HARRY CLARK: I asked the Colonel what the casualty situation was within our battalion; I believe we landed with about 730 men, and on the landing and the fighting on the 24th we had suffered in excess of four hundred casualties of which a hundred and four were killed. The Colonel told me to hurry and rejoin my company, wished me luck and then, to my complete surprise, shook my hand!

WAR DIARY: 26th March 1945, 0600. The regiment assembled West of Hamminkeln. At 1100 we moved off through Hamminkeln behind the Devons and the RUR, and took up the reserve position at Bramberghof.

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MICK: [Quiet Nights]

Dear Mum and Dad, you'll be pleased I'm ok

Despite all the horrors of last Saturday

Much worse than D-Day – we knew it would be

But now I can say that I've seen Germany



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We treat our hosts fairly, but do as we please

Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.

WAR DIARY: 27th March 1945. All day at Bramberghof. 16

Strength of companies, several more glider loads

having turned up in addition to the transport

parties, is as follows:

A Company, four officers and seventy-six men;

B Company, two and sixty-two;

C Company, three and sixty-seven,

D Company, three and seventy-six;

S Company, six and ninety-six.

The day gave an opportunity for a bit of rest and 17

maintenance. We had to remain at an hour's

notice to move but, owing to the crowding of the

roads, the move was repeatedly postponed.

MICK: [Race to the Sea] 18

[Recitative]

We hit the ground in Hamminkeln

And slogged our way to Rhade

From Greven to Ladbergen

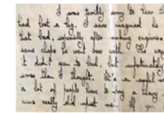
And through Stockhausen to Frille

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ACTUALITY 11: TOD SWEENEY: We marched all the way 19
through Germany to the Baltic. We literally
marched the entire way and I suppose we had a
little battle about every ten miles when we were in
the lead.



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MICK: **We stopped a while in Heitlingen . . .**
[Recitative]

WAR DIARY: 14th April 1945: Heitlingen 20

After some waiting about and several changes in
timing the Regiment left Heitlingen and spent the
night in the woods a few miles north of Celle.



www.bergenbelsen.co.uk

ACTUALITY 12: RICHARD SMITH: The first thing I saw was a 21
whole collection of German guards, stripped to
the waist, barefooted, with no belts, carrying
corpses from the pit where they'd been flung to
the newly-formed burial ground on the other side
of the road.



www.collections.ushmm.org

MICK: [Roll On] 22
(Recitative – **Roll on a bloody long time**
minor key) **Today we discovered war crime**



www.gettyimages.co.uk

**I thought I was tough, but now I've seen
enough**

Roll on a bloody long time

ACTUALITY 12: RICHARD SMITH: The Germans were being 23
continued beaten by the British guards with their rifle butts.

I went into the headquarters and the major who was there said, quite honestly, "I have no control over my troops." The thing that everybody asked was how on earth could a massive camp of that type be fed and watered without the population nearby knowing? It's almost unbelievable. But

when you asked any German they said they didn't 24
know what was going on.

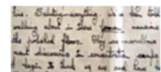
HERBERT HOLEWA: People even today say, oh we did know: we did not. I remember there were three chappies - I don't know what they had done – one was a tailor in any case and he went into a concentration camp and when he came back, I said well was it alright? He said, "Oh we went up in the morning, we had morning sport, then we had our breakfast, then we had schooling, you know this that and the other, then we went – worked – then we came back and we had our



www.iwm.org.uk



andhavathebookthief.weebly.com/maps.html



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lunch, then a rest”. You see he was afraid to say if he would have said something that was true then he would have been back in again and never come out. Everyone is afraid of his own life. I only knew of Oranienberg, of Dachau and Bergen-Belsen. Now you see I even was in Bergen, was an army camp, ’41, ’42, we trained there and I didn’t see any camp... and when the war was over, and we did see the map of Germany where they all were, believe you me we were all flabbergasted we thought that is an impossibility... but it was true.

MICK: **Roll on a bloody long time** 26

[Recitative]

ACTUALITY 13: TOD SWEENEY: Then we received instructions 27
to get up to the Baltic as quickly as possible to cut off the Russians heading for Denmark.

MICK: [Race to the Sea]

[Recitative] **And when we reached the Elbe**

We were under starters orders



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CHORUS: **We're the 2nd Ox & Bucks** 28
And we're racing to the sea!



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Collection*

ACTUALITY 13: TOD SWEENEY: So for the last day of our war,
 continued instead of fighting our way along we
 commandeered any vehicle we could get hold of.

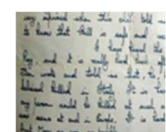
MICK: [Airborne Folding Bike]
**The Colonel cried, "Come on my lads,
 We're off on a spree,
 We've got to beat the Russians
 It's a race to the sea!"**
**And I was right behind him
 Just as quick as could be...
 On my little airborne folding bike!**

ACTUALITY 13: TOD SWEENEY: The forty miles from just 29
 continued beyond the Elbe to Wismar and Lake Schwerin
 we covered in that one day. Within twenty-four
 hours of our arrival, the Russians showed up.



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DENIS EDWARDS: Now we were camped on
 the western bank of the river, looking across at 30
 our Russian comrades camped on the other side.
 They crossed over a wide bridge in considerable



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numbers and invited us to drink vodka with them. Whatever else may have been in short supply, they seemed to have an almost unlimited supply of vodka.

TOD SWEENEY: By the end of two or three hours we were all well gone. All the soldiers, Russian and British, had their hands on one another's shoulders and were singing.

MICK: [Airborne Folding Bike]

**A Russian gave me vodka,
“Za Zdarovye!” he cried,
I knocked it back like water
And went blind in both eyes
And when I got my sight back
He was off for a ride
On my little airborne folding bike**

ACTUALITY 13: TOD SWEENEY: One or two of our men became 31
continued a bit difficult and wanted to kiss the Russian
women, so I thought we'd better get away before
they got their heads chopped off.



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DENIS EDWARDS: They obviously used their visit to have a good look round our camp, for when darkness fell a large band of them paid us another visit, this time uninvited. At gunpoint, they tied up the quartermaster and his staff and made off with most of our rations. The morning after, one of the quartermaster's lads thought he recognised one of the Russians from the raiding party. A group of us crossed the bridge and were met by a Russian officer. As best we could, by sign language, we pointed out the man who we believed had stolen our food. The officer seemed to understand what we meant. He strode across to the suspect and we assumed he was going to question him. Instead, he drew his revolver, put the barrel against the man's mouth and fired. We were horrified.

EMILY: And so, once more to England and a rest 32
 But not for long – all eyes turn to the East
 Japan fights on, the war is not yet won
 The Ox and Bucks still have their part to play
 Refit and train in India – that's the plan
 And then once more in gliders – to Japan. 33

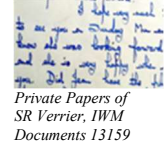
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MICK: And suddenly, romance blossoms – someone new
Begins to feature in Sid’s letters home:

Jean.

34



LIVE MUSIC: “Whatever Happened” – first two lines

EMILY: Where did they meet?

MICK: The Allen Arms, we think

35



EMILY: A Verrier, in a pub? Well, how unusual!

LIVE MUSIC: “Whatever Happened” – next two lines

MICK: Sid mentions Jean in 1943

36

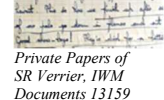


It seems that she was writing to him then

Every other day, or so he said.

And two years on he asked to be remembered

37

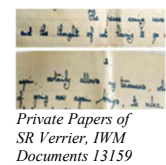
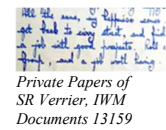


To Julie and to Hilda, and to Jean,

But in July of 1945, she’s mentioned twice

And five times in one August letter

- LIVE MUSIC: “Whatever Happened” – next two lines
- EMILY: More than ever, Sid was looking forward 38
To coming home, to Mum and Dad... and Jean.
- LIVE MUSIC: “Whatever Happened” – last two lines
- MICK: But first, more war... to India, then Japan... 39
- EMILY: ...or not. Two huge explosions end the war
No need for an invasion after all
- MICK: [Quiet Nights] 40
Dear Mum and Dad, I’m so happy today
Your parcel arrived and I’ve eaten the cake
This marvellous news of the coming of peace
I’m already feeling my tenseness decrease
It’ll be some time yet ‘til I get my release
Bye for now, your loving son, Sid.
- ACTUALITY 14: DARE WILSON: The employment of the two 41
British airborne divisions was replanned. One had
to be disbanded; 6th Airborne was the younger
division, but after relative strengths and age-group
composition had been taken into account, it was

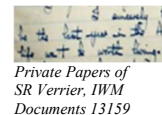


decided that 1st Airborne would be disbanded and the 6th retained. Thus 6th Airborne stepped into 1st Airborne's role as part of the Imperial Strategic Reserve, in Palestine.

ALON KADISH: During the Second World War, Palestine became one of the British Army's main depots in the Middle East. One hundred and thirteen army camps of various sizes were built, mainly in southern Palestine and the northern coast of Sinai, alongside the railroad west to the Canal Zone.

EMILY: Sid briefly contemplates his future prospects
 To seek promotion, or to be demobbed?
 Decides his future isn't in the Army
 Back to the accountant – that's the hope.
 But first... the Middle East, and back to training
 It all seemed so exciting... and at peace

42



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ACTUALITY 15: ALON KADISH: One of the main attractions of 42b
 serving in Palestine were the opportunities for
 sightseeing including, but by no means
 exclusively, the holy places associated with the
 life of Jesus. Whenever feasible, training was

combined with sightseeing in Palestine and Transjordan so as to include as many troops as possible. Jerusalem was especially fascinating: the proximity and sight of Jerusalem excited biblical and romantic associations which had nothing to do with the current desperate struggle between Jews and Arabs.

MICK: [Quiet Nights] 43

Dear Mum and Dad, we are now on the ship

We're all looking forward to making the trip

We're sailing tomorrow, from dear old 44

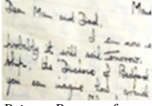
England

The Duchess of Bedford – she seems very

grand

So now I am off for some time in the sand

Cheerio, your loving son, Sid.



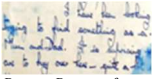
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https://www.norwayheritage.com/p_ship.asp?sh=ducbe

ACTUALITY 16: ALON KADISH: There was also shopping. With 45

the population of Britain still struggling with the economic consequences of the war, including severe shortages in consumer goods, soldiers spent their pay on things to send home, orange-juice, locally made beer and liquers, on



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razorblades that would not cut, on matches that
would not strike, on soap that would not lather.

MICK: [Quiet Nights] 46

Dear Mum and Dad, had a parcel today

Tinned salmon and biscuits and whisky and

cake

Everything intact, the cake's really fine

But I can buy whisky here, ten bob a pint

Your need is probably greater than mine

Your old loving son, Steak and Kid



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EMILY: But Palestine is far from being peaceful:
Old wounds, long festered, brutally re-open,
Bursting into violent confrontation.

CHORUS: [Soldier Soldier] 47

Soldier! Soldier! Beware, beware.

Soldier, soldier, beware.



Verrier Family
Collection

EMILY: In between the Arabs and the Jews? 48

6th Airborne: battle-weary, home-sick troops

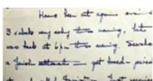
Highly strung, but trained for war, not peace.



Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159

ACTUALITY 17: DARE WILSON: The Second World War had 49

overshadowed the Palestine Question and the vast



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majority of Jews and Arabs had temporarily buried the hatchet. With the end of the war in 1945, Palestine with its thorny problems once more came to the fore.

LIVE MUSIC: Violin playing first line of “Claybury/Palestine”

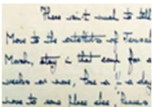
EMILY: The Palestine deployment drags on and on 50
The letters show Sid’s growing discontent
Friends and relatives alike are home
But the Airborne troops are still, it seems, at war



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LIVE MUSIC: Violin playing second line of
“Claybury/Palestine”

ACTUALITY 18: RICHARD NORMAN: The great difficulty which 51
always confronted the British soldier was that he
could seldom recognise his enemy. The person
who was about to murder him might appear in the
guise of an Arab, a bearded rabbi, a brother in
arms or a pretty girl. Furthermore, Hebrew is very
difficult, and the number of soldiers who
understood more than two words of it was
infinitesimal.



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LIVE MUSIC: Violin playing third and fourth lines of “Claybury/Palestine” 52



*Private Papers of
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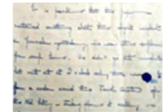
MICK: [Claybury/Palestine] 53





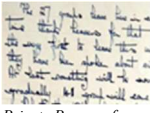
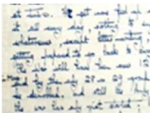
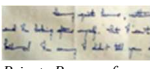

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**In Palestine, the battle lines are never clear
We stand between the Levantines; we live in
fear
And all the folk we go among,
They speak in unfamiliar tongues.
We never know what is to come,
In Palestine.**

ACTUALITY 19: ALON KADISH: Understandably, discipline was strained following a fatal attack on British soldiers. In the absence of intelligence on the identity of the attackers, the British resorted to a road curfew, closing places of entertainment including restaurants and cafes, neighbourhood house-to-house searches, and rounding up local residents for questioning. This collective punishment, according to Major-General Cassels, was chosen because he ‘held the community to blame’.



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- MICK: [Quiet Nights] 55 
<http://britishpalestinepolice.org.uk>
- [minor key **Dear Mum and Dad I am sure you've heard**
 version] **tell**
- Of the incident at the King David Hotel** 56 
<http://www.britishforcesinpalestine.org>
- Ninety-one dead and dozens more harmed**
- One day after we were told not to bear arms**
- And now we're enduring the old city's charms**
- Cheerio, your loving son Sid**
- EMILY: The Demobilisation process is complex: 57 
Private Papers of SR Verrier, IWM Documents 13159
- Five million men and women: fifty groups
- And Sid, far down the list: Group 41
- MICK: [Quiet Nights] 58 
Private Papers of SR Verrier, IWM Documents 13159
- [minor key **Dear Mum and Dad, had four letters today**
 version, with **The war has been finished a year come this**
 increasing **May** 59 
 intensity] *Private Papers of SR Verrier, IWM Documents 13159*
- I've done my fair share – this is no longer** 60 
funny *Private Papers of SR Verrier, IWM Documents 13159*
- Stuck in this land of so-called milk and honey**
- So all I can do is keep saving my money**
- Good Health, your loving son Sid**

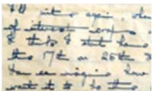
EMILY: But at last, August 1946
Sid's turn comes round...

MICK: [Quiet Nights]

61

[Revert to major
key melody]

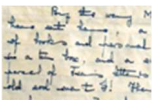
**Dear Mum and Dad, you'll be so pleased to
know**



*Private Papers of
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**In three or four weeks I should be heading
home**

62

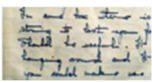


*Private Papers of
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I've already sent you some books in a tin

63

**A few things of mine, and some letters from
Jean**



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159*

**Two pounds of tea and some spare balls of
string**

Cheerio, your loving son, Sid.

EMILY: Sid's last letter home: he speaks of Jean,
Their plans for marriage, furniture, a flat.
A young man in his prime, just twenty-three.

[PAUSE]

MICK: [Narrative Ballad] 64

**And when after all our young soldier returned
To his home in north London his family found
His mind was unbalanced and no longer sound
And all was distress and confusion
The Claybury doctors confirmed their worst
fears
In spite of their efforts, in spite of their tears,
He never recovered in fifty long years
A life wasted in institutions.**



*Verrier Family
Collection*

EMILY: So now, Sid's hopes and plans: all come to 65
naught:
No career, no cosy home, no wife.
What became of Jean?



*Verrier Family
Collection*

MICK: Nobody knows.
I never heard Jean mentioned, even once
As though she never was.

EMILY: Now Mum and Dad, Claude, Violet and Len 66
And all of Sid's 'Big Happy Family'
Watch helplessly as he begins to sink
Into madness.



*Verrier Family
Collection*

MICK: [Whatever Happened]

Home from the Army, driving Mum barmy

Another big nuisance to feed.

Like a fly on a kettle, I can't seem to settle,

I'm restless and zestless – I miss the routine...

And whatever happened? Whatever

happened?

Whatever happened to Jean?

67



*Verrier Family
Collection*

CHORUS: **Whatever happened? Whatever happened?**

Whatever happened to Jean?

MICK: **Now I need to find work, but I'm going**

berserk,

For nothing is quite as it seems.

I wake in the night and I'm back in the fight,

Silent or violent I'm locked in my dreams...

And whatever happened? Whatever

happened?

Whatever happened to Jean?

CHORUS: **Whatever happened? Whatever happened?**

Whatever happened to Jean?

LIVE MUSIC: English Concertina playing Sidney's Garden
theme, slowly

MICK: Within a year or so of Sid's return
His mental health's a cause of much concern

EMILY: [Sidney's Garden]
**Sidney's putting pellets down, to keep the slugs
at bay**
**To save the lives of little flowers or so he likes
to say**
**But in his mind its aniseed to draw the dogs
away**
Sidney's on the front line in the garden

MICK: And so to Claybury...
Overlooking London, on a hill
Ancient woodland, ornamental ponds,
Parkland and gardens, Repton's grand design
Re-purposed by the great George Thomas Hine

68



www.thetimechamber.co.uk

EMILY: [Claybury/Palestine]
**Behind the screen of forest green, stands
Claybury**
Sterile, clean, labyrinthine, a sanctuary

69



Created from a 25in
Ordnance Survey
map obtained from
the National Library
of Scotland website.

Tranquility, stability

Fragility... futility

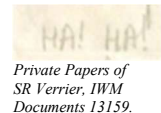
And all of life's broad tapestry

Behind the screen

ACTUALITY 20: RICHARD: When my father took Sid to Claybury 70
for the first time... he often joked about this... he
was asked by Reception who the patient was.



CHORUS HA! HA! 71
(MEN):



ACTUALITY 20: RUTH SILCOCK: Claybury Hospital. There were
continues the gates, huge grounds, drives; the hospital was
red brick and enormous, long corridors stretched
out of sight...

PSYCHIATRIST: Designed by George Thomas Hine, Claybury was, 72
in many ways, the prototype for the vast mental
hospitals that sprang up all around the country
and, upon opening in 1893, named the Claybury
Lunatic Asylum. The word 'lunatic', of course,
gave rise to the slang term 'loony', and the large
psychiatric hospitals soon became known as
'loony-bins'.



ACTUALITY 21: RUTH SILCOCK (poem):

73

What is a loony-bin?

It's what they put you in

To let your family

Dispose of misery



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/robmcrorie/10142567484>

PSYCHIATRIST: The ward group is the principle integrating agency of the unit. From it emerges the insights that shape community life. Ward groups are held each morning for forty-five minutes and are attended by all patients and staff.

74



<https://historic-hospitals.com/2015/06/21/repton-park-formerly-claybury-hospital/>

ACTUALITY 21: PATIENT 3: I remember one small group continues meeting when a rather turbulent young man suddenly took off his shoe and belaboured the consultant psychiatrist around the head. There were a few seconds of silence as the group stared, aghast... then all of us went to her rescue.

PSYCHIATRIST: The group sits in a circle, patients and staff choosing their own places. The pattern of grouping offers valuable information about changes in individuals and sub-groups. The therapeutic task of the group is the examination of the tensions and the solutions to these which affect the community.

ACTUALITY 21: PATIENT 3: What amazed us was that the
continues psychiatrist stayed motionless and serene
throughout the attack.

PSYCHIATRIST: A special anxiety arises from the presence of
disturbed patients in the ward meeting. It was our
policy that all patients had the right of entry into
groups however disturbed they might be. An
excited manic or schizophrenic patient invariably
mobilises anxiety and aggression in all members.
The passivity of staff directly confronts the group
with the problem of dealing with normally
repressed, frightening, unconscious impulses.

ACTUALITY 21: PATIENT 3: We discussed this during the
continues ensuing group (which the assailant was invited to
sit down and join) and she assured us that she did
not feel angry with the patient as his behaviour
was due to his illness.

PATIENT 2: I was transported from the general
hospital to Claybury and walked the long
corridors to the admissions ward. Here was the

75



www.londonpicturearchive.org.uk

malaise of the world written on these blank and uncomprehending faces.

PATIENT 3: I was terrified of Terry at first as he was always prone to sudden violent action. I knew I had overcome my fear when I found myself telling him, in no uncertain terms, of my extreme annoyance at his habit of breaking outside windows in winter and making the room cold.

“Why,” I said, “Don’t you break the inner glass partition instead?”

PATIENT 2: Eventually, when I walked the same corridors, what did I see? The faces were no longer dark and terrifying. The patients who spent their lives at Claybury were so much happier than the outside world ever dreamt of.

76



<https://www.thetimechamber.co.uk/beta/sites/asylums/london-county-asylum-claybury/claybury-hospital-archive-photos/#p-carousel-19636>

JAMES: He was more comfortable in hospital than he ever was at our house... you’d go to hospital and he was more relaxed.

PATIENT 1: I hated Claybury.

LIVE MUSIC: Cello playing opening phrase of Laughing Willie

MICK: Claybury, for Sid, is not enough 77
To Long Grove next, and different ways



www.countyasylums.co.uk

ACTUALITY 22: RUTH SILCOCK (poem): 77b

You can't be sick, there's nothing wrong.
You may be stupid, you may be sad,
You may be lonely, you may be bad,
There's nobody here to help you.
Wait in another corridor,
Stare at somebody else's door,
Spend your life as you please.
We can only endeavour to cure
A recognised disease.

EMILY: [Laughing Willie] 78

**Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?
Did two world wars extinguish all your joy?
Or was it that you knew there was nothing you
could do?
Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?**



Verrier Family
Collection

ACTUALITY 22: RICHARD: As a young teenager I was told that
continues Sid could become violent. This warning was
reiterated when he was allowed occasional
weekend visits home from Long Grove Hospital.
He was banned from these visits a number of
times.

EMILY: [Laughing Willie] 79

**Was it trudging down to Epsom on the train
To see the living son you knew you'd lost?
Every weekend, without fail, in sun or rain or
gale;
Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?**

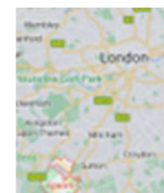


Image created using
Apple Maps

LIVE MUSIC: Cello playing Laughing Willie turnaround

PSYCHIATRIST: According to Dr Sakel, Insulin Coma Treatment 80
offers the greatest likelihood of relief and cure for
some patients whose illness is of a deep-seated
nature.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manfred_Sakel

ACTUALITY 23: LONG GROVE PATIENT: I used to have insulin 81
in my arm. It wasn't very nice to have. I knew
some patients to go right into a coma. It would
burn up all the sugar in their body and drop their



<https://www.semanticscholar.org>

blood sugar level very low and they would go into coma. That was supposed to be beneficial.

MICK: [Wish Me Luck]
 [Recitative] **Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye**
Cheerio, as I go . . . who knows where
Who knows what they're doing, or why?
Who knows whether they really care?

PSYCHIATRIST: The mind has the chance to be completely relaxed, and the functions of the brain have the opportunity of, as it were, setting out on a new path when consciousness returns ...

... if consciousness returns.

ACTUALITY 24: LONG GROVE PATIENT: It made me bad. It gave me a fit. They said we can't give you any more insulin because its affecting you. Forty-four people died from it. 81b

PSYCHIATRIST: Developed by Dr Cerletti, Electro-Convulsive Therapy is sometimes repeatedly given to patients. It quietens them down, but often confuses them for several hours and has a very 82



limited place in long term treatment. The more you have used electro-convulsive therapy, the less you will use it.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ugo_Cerletti

ACTUALITY 25: LONG GROVE PATIENT: They put the wires on your head and then they switch it on and you go into a fit – an epileptic fit. 83



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p02hz9q4>

PSYCHIATRIST: A member of staff would lean heavily on the knees, another one at the ankles and one at each side holding the shoulders down, and the consultant applied an electrical charge through the brain. The patient, of course, jerked very violently – that's why we were holding them.

MICK: **Needle or pin, EST, Insulin**
[Recitative] **Will it cure my deep despair?**

PSYCHIATRIST: Following the theories of Dr Moniz, some psychiatrists believe that by removing sections of the brain, certain serious mental disorders can be treated. They make a hole in the skull over which the so-called probe goes into the brain, and waggle it a bit and that's it. 84



<https://journals.sagepub.com>

ACTUALITY 26: LONG GROVE PATIENT: That was GBH what they did on my brain... and I'll never forgive them for it.



<https://www.wonder-sandmarvels.com>

PSYCHIATRIST: I have recommended, in all, sixteen lobotomies: sixteen patients who had the operation and it was of no benefit whatsoever to any one of them, and some of them had the tragedy of personality change. It was a disaster.

MICK: **Here I go, sane or mad, live or die...**

[Recitative] **Wish me luck, as you wave me . . . goodbye.**

PSYCHIATRIST: Sedatives produce apathy. It is not surprising that patients forced to go to bed by 7pm after an idle day require sedatives to sleep, nor that they wake after eight hours at 3 or 4am and require more sedatives. If, as sometimes happens, this be given at 4am the patient may be very difficult to wake at 6am and not in a very fit state to have their bed made, complete their toilet and help with breakfast. The effect of the sedative may not wear off for four to twelve hours.



Verrier Family Collection, edited by Maderine Verrier using Adobe Photoshop

MICK: **Wish me luck, as you wave me . . . goodbye**

[Recitative]

EMILY: We do not know the treatments used on Sid
In twenty years at Long Grove Hospital.

ACTUALITY 27: RICHARD My grandmother advocated that Sid was “not well” and was adamant that he would “get better one day and come home”. Her view was never queried in order to placate her. Early on, a clearly defined arrangement for his care was established. Grandmother sent daily parcels to Sid containing a letter, cigarettes, chocolates, a daily newspaper & other goodies.

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*Verrier Family
Collection*

EMILY: [Laughing Willie]
**Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do,
Do you really think poor Sid will be ok?
When you're packing up the bag,
With the chocolate and the fags,
Daisy, Daisy, do you believe it's true?**

ACTUALITY 27: RICHARD: On Thursdays my grandmother continues would visit Sid carrying “The Bag” containing the daily parcel contents in larger quantities, the surplus being for other ward patients and nursing

staff. On Sundays remaining family members took over this duty. The impact on my grandparents was enormous. This tradition continued after their death.

EMILY: [Laughing Willie]
Every Thursday when you set out on the train
Are you hoping this will be the day?
When suddenly it seems
Like all these years were just a dream
Daisy, Daisy, how do you bear the pain?

MICK: The parcels... ah yes, long after the war
 Long after Normandy and Palestine
 On Saturdays I'd walk down to the shop
 To buy the chocolate and the cigarettes
 Then watch my father wrap them in brown paper
 And, neatly packaged, lovingly addressed,
 He'd post another parcel

88



*Composite image
 created with images
 from:
<http://cigarettecollector.net>
<https://www.flickr.com>
<https://www.business-live.co.uk>
<https://www.gettyimages.co.uk>*

ACTUALITY 27: RICHARD: My father treated Sid's care as a
 continues matter of duty as did the other siblings. My
 grandmother first took me to Long Grove
 Hospital to visit him in 1958 – she was apparently
 training me for continuity of his care.

Subsequently I visited Sid on numerous occasions both there, Claybury and the care home in Clapton where he was finally settled.

MICK: Sid was, eventually, transferred back to Claybury 89
And there, it seemed, he was content to stay.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claybury_Hospital

ACTUALITY 27: JAMES: My father and I had gone to see him,
continues shortly, well, during the breakup of our parents.
Dad had moved to somewhere in Stratford and we went to see Sid, and Dad was discussing moving Sid to Severalls Mental Asylum in Colchester, and Sid became extremely agitated at this discussion and was taken away by two nurses to a side room, shortly after which we left and Dad was quite upset about it, and that was the last time I actually saw Sid.

MICK: Then Care in the Community arrived
And Sid went out, to Clapton: Living Space
Where he was happy, and did very well,
For an old man who'd known no independence
Since his teens.

EMILY: Sadly, Will and Daisy passed away

Long before Sid's move to Living Space.

And so they never saw what came to be

ACTUALITY 27: RICHARD: It was noticeable that his mental state 90
continues improved immensely when he was transferred to
the Clapton care home. On the occasions I visited
him with my father he appeared to be
substantially better and enjoying life.



*Verrier Family
Collection*

EMILY: Sidney died in 1997 91



*Death Certificate,
SR Verrier, General
Register Office*

MICK: Two weeks before my father, I recall.
And we buried Sid beside his dear old Mum

EMILY: Claybury Hospital closed in that same year 92
Sid's hospital records, apparently, were lost.



*www.countyasylums
.co.uk*

ACTUALITY 28: JAMES: I did, at some stage, stumble across some 92b
medical records that had been put up online about
some of his treatment which is quite horrific.

MICK: When Claybury closed and builders took it over
The records – anecdotally – were left ...

... in a skip.

Now? a very different place,
 “Repton Park”. Behind the same great gates
 The same great buildings, now apartment blocks,
 With newer builds around them, gated all.
 As though the old asylum won’t let go.
 So, we only know the story of his life
 Of five years in the Army, fifty more
 In institutions of one sort, or another.

EMILY: Of the impact on his parents, brothers, sister
 But why?

CHORUS: [Soldier Soldier]
Soldier! Soldier!

ACTUALITY 28: JAMES: I have confused memories and differing
 continues stories that I’ve been told what had caused his
 illness, whether it was caused by his wartime
 experiences, whether it was prior to his wartime
 experiences... it could be one or the other.

CHORUS: **Beware.**

EMILY: Or Palestine?

ACTUALITY 28: JAMES: I was told that Sid had served in
continues Palestine and that the experience had affected him
badly, but I was never told the details...

CHORUS: **Soldier, soldier, beware.**

EMILY: Officially, Sid had Chronic Schizophrenia;
It's listed as a secondary cause of death.

93



*Verrier Family
Collection*

PSYCHIATRIST: Global studies suggest that a diagnosis of
schizophrenia can reduce a person's lifespan by
some fifteen years.

ACTUALITY 28: PATIENT 1: I was put down as a schizophrenic. I
continues don't know why. I'm sure I haven't got a split
mind.

PSYCHIATRIST: 'Schizophrenia' is an unobservable, abstract
concept inferred from overt behaviour or from
reports of behaviour and experience.
Schizophrenia does not cause someone to be

94



*Image created from
book cover*

violent, and people with schizophrenia do not have a split personality.

MICK: For my father, there was never any doubt. Sid's problems stemmed from nothing but the War. And Palestine...

PSYCHIATRIST: Post-traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events. Research suggests that trauma can be a contributing factor to developing schizophrenia.

95



Image created from book cover

EMILY: Perhaps the stress of breaking up with Jean...
...if that's what happened?

ACTUALITY 29: RICHARD: It was apparent to me that my father and Vi had diametrically opposed views about Sid's illness to Len's. My grandmother blamed Sid's condition on his girlfriend leaving him. I tend to share my father's view that he was ill from infancy, that he chose to withdraw from society as a result of his illness. When I visited Claybury with my father to inform Sid that his mother had

95b

died... he changed the subject, and enquired about my mother, Lily, and my wife Jan's wellbeing.

MICK: [Whatever Happened]
Now I can't carry on as if nothing is wrong
I can't face the world as I am.
Find me somewhere to stay, and then lock me
away,
Leave me to rot, 'cause I don't give a damn
And whatever happened? Whatever
happened?
Whatever happened to Jean?

CHORUS: **Whatever happened? Whatever happened?**
Whatever happened to Jean?

EMILY: Maybe it was all those things, and then
 The accumulated time in institutions.

PSYCHIATRIST: The phenomenology of chronicity has been fully 96
 described among others by Martin and Russell
 Barton. the former calls it Institutionalism, the
 latter . . . Institutional Neurosis.



*Image created from
 book cover*

ACTUALITY 30: DAVID CRAGGS: When I came to Claybury I 96b
 was assigned the care of long-stay men who
 would remain in hospital for many years and
 whose discharge was not anticipated in many
 cases. The enormity of their problem was soon
 apparent. Walking from ward to ward, I noticed
 the drab, institutionalised clothing, the lack of
 contact.

PSYCHIATRIST: Institutional Neurosis occurs in institutions,
 whether mental hospitals or otherwise.

LIVE MUSIC: Claybury/Palestine theme 97



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 SR Verrier, IWM
 Documents 13159*

EMILY: We have the letters [98]



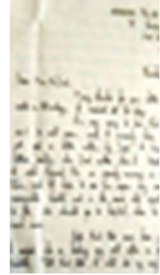
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LIVE MUSIC: English Concertina playing Sidney's Garden [99]
 theme, slowly



*Private Papers of
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 Documents 13159*

MICK: The letters, yes, some photos, and the memories [100]



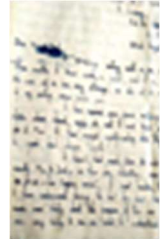
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LIVE MUSIC: [Flute plays 'Sidney's Garden', slowly, with
guitar accompaniment] [101]



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159*

[102]



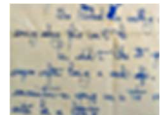
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[103]



*Private Papers of
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Documents 13159*

[104]



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
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ACTUALITY 31: RICHARD: My key memory of Sid is sitting on 104b
his knee at the dining table when I was four or

five years old being enthralled by his conjuring tricks. Occasionally I talk about him within my close family when his name or his past circumstances arise. In general conversation I may discuss Sid's situation when the subject of war or mental health arises only if it is pertinent. I rarely initiate a discussion about him.

MICK: [Laughing Willie] [105]

**Uncle Sidney, how I wish that I'd done more
To show you had my love and my respect
Did you think I didn't care
Because I wasn't there?
Uncle Sidney, how I wish that I'd done more**



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159*

ACTUALITY 31: JAMES: I've always been proud of Sid as a [106]
continues family member and of his service that he gave to

this country, but I do wish we'd been able to speak with him about his experiences, rather than having to try and gain them from censored letters.



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159*

MICK: [Laughing Willie] [107]

**I could have sent you parcels now and then
I could have come to visit Living Space
If I'd known then what I know now**



*Private Papers of
SR Verrier, IWM
Documents 13159*

- Maybe I'd have known just how** [108]
Uncle Sidney, I could have been your friend
- EMILY: [Sidney's Garden] [109]
 (slowly, not quite recitative) **Grandad at the table, Grandma making tea,**
Sidney staring into space or so he seems to be,
In a world all of his own, who knows what he
sees...
Let's hope he's seeing flowers in the garden. 110
- MICK: My last, and happiest, memory of Sid?
 My father driving, me sitting in the back
 Sid spoke, the only time I understood:
 "How did Spurs get on yesterday?" 111
- ALL: [Roll On] 112
Roll on a bloody long time
The match is approaching full-time



Private Papers of
 SR Verrier, IWM
 Documents 13159



Private Papers of
 SR Verrier, IWM
 Documents 13159



Verrier Family
 Collection



Verrier Family
 Collection,
 including badges
 which were kept
 with the letters.

**What I wouldn't give up to watch Spurs win
the cup,**

Roll on a bloody long time

Roll on a bloody long time

Roll on a bloody long time

**For too bloody long we've sung this bloody
song**

EMILY: **Roll on a bloody long time**

ONE MORE TIME!

Roll on a bloody long time

Roll on a bloody long time

**For too bloody long we've sung this bloody
song**

Roll on a bloody long time

MICK: [Narrative Ballad]

Come all you good people, attend to me well

Of soldiers and sailors and aircrew I'll tell

They fight for their countries, enduring the hell

Of the blood and the death and the madness

From the dawning of time and throughout

history

**In every land and the oceans between
 Our young men and women have sacrificed
 been
 And their loved ones are left in great sadness.**

LIVE MUSIC: **The Narrative Ballad/‘Arthur McBride’** 113
melody takes over from the song, played in
 ‘session’ style, twice around, during which time
 the performers and crew take their bows.



Critical Commentary: Developing the radio ballad for live performance

Introduction

This critical commentary seeks to contextualise, justify and evaluate my creative piece, *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*, having regard to the underlying story and the creative influences and processes which make it what it is. The creative piece ('*Sid*') is the culmination of a wider, interdisciplinary project involving oral and written history, archival research, creative writing and musical composition; at its core, however, *Sid* is a collection of songs. Twelve predominantly original songs are linked together by passages of spoken word (including over two hundred lines of narrative verse) in a scripted live performance, a concept which derives in part from the performance practice of folk singers but mostly from the 'radio ballad' format created by playwright and folk singer Ewan MacColl (1915-1989) with radio producer Charles Parker (1919-1980). The inspiration (and primary source material) for the creative piece is a collection of one hundred and fifty-three letters written by my uncle, Sidney Verrier ('*Sid*'). *Sid*'s story is told more fully in Chapter 6, but may be summarised as follows: born in 1923, *Sid* joined the British Army in 1941 and became a member of the airborne forces in 1942. He took part in the large-scale glider landings in Normandy (1944) and Germany (1945) and was then posted with his unit to Palestine, from which he returned in 1946. Within a year or so, *Sid* was admitted to a mental hospital and spent most of the rest of his life in institutions of one sort or another, dying at the age of 74, in 1997. The letters – all but one of them handwritten – are held in the Imperial War Museum (IWM) archive. It was necessary for me to make three visits to the IWM to photograph the letters, which I then transcribed over a two-month period in 2021 (See Appendix A). The challenge I set myself was to tell *Sid*'s story, primarily through the medium of song, whilst being authentic to his voice and experiences as they emerge from

his letters and from the memories of those who knew him – my cousins, brother and, obviously, myself. The question of authenticity is, therefore, central to this project, in terms of both content and artistic form; Ewan MacColl’s radio ballad methodology forms the bedrock upon which my interpretation and application of authenticity is founded.

The creative piece was originally conceived as a ‘live radio ballad’; I adopted this term to describe a previous work of mine – *August 1914* – and have used it since to describe pieces such as *Eleventh Hour* and *The Harwich Ship*¹. Those earlier works, like the present creative piece, used conventions and techniques derived from the radio ballad programmes made by MacColl and Parker between 1957 and 1963, but were, from the outset, intended for live performance, hence ‘live radio ballad’. *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*, as a live-performance piece featuring songs and spoken word, follows in the footsteps of the earlier pieces but is set against a changing backdrop of images which plays an important role in the storytelling. The format emulates both the performance practice of folk singers and the stylistic conventions of radio ballads, but represents a significant development in both genres, particularly when the visual elements are taken into account: the ‘visuality’, as I call it, underpins and links the other creative elements. This critical commentary therefore demonstrates the originality of the creative piece and puts the case for it to be seen as a significant contribution to the genres from which it emanates. In addition, my project is the first to comprehensively investigate the radio ballad genre from its first example – *The Ballad of John Axon* (1957) – to the most recent, *The*

¹ *August 1914* and *Eleventh Hour* portray, respectively, the beginning and ending of the First World War and were performed on the 100th anniversaries of the British declaration of war in 1914 and the Armistice in 1918. *The Harwich Ship*, the creative element of my MA Creative Writing dissertation, was concerned with the story of Christopher Jones and the 1620 voyage of the Mayflower.

Ballad of the Stolwijk Rescue (2020), and provides the first true definition of the radio ballad, acknowledging its inherent and unbreakable connection with folk song.

The term ‘radio ballad’ is used in a variety of contexts in this critical commentary (and elsewhere) and requires explanation. I have identified twenty-nine radio and television programmes made between 1957 and 2020 for national radio and television channels, which are described by their producers as ‘radio ballads’, or have been described as such by other commentators. In addition, two radio ballads were made for the regional BBC Radio Midland. Thirty of these thirty-one programmes were produced for and broadcast by the BBC; the first eight, made between 1957 and 1963, were written by MacColl and produced by Parker: these are generally referred to as ‘the Radio Ballads’ although, as I will show in Chapters 3 and 4, they were not conceived or produced as a series. The capitalised term ‘Radio Ballads’ therefore refers to the eight Parker-MacColl programmes, as follows:

The Ballad of John Axon: a radio-ballad about the railwaymen of England (1957)

Song of a Road: a radio-ballad about the building of the M1 motorway (1958)

Singing the Fishing: a radio-ballad about Britain's herring fishing communities (1959)

The Big Hewer: a radio-ballad about Britain's coal miners (1960)

The Body Blow: a radio-ballad about the psychology of pain (1961)

On The Edge: a radio-ballad about teenagers in England and Scotland (1962)

The Fight Game: a radio-ballad about boxers (1963)

The Travelling People: a radio-ballad about Britain's nomadic peoples (1964)

The uncapitalised ‘radio ballad’ refers to the genre in a general sense. It will be noticed that the words are sometimes hyphenated as ‘radio-ballad’ and sometimes not, but this does not imply a change in meaning, and unless it appears in quotations I have endeavoured to confine myself to the unhyphenated version.

In Chapter 3 of this commentary, I define the term ‘radio ballad’ because I have been unable to discover a definition, although there are plenty of descriptions. For example Peggy Seeger², who was closely involved in all eight of the Parker-MacColl programmes, describes them as “tapestries of speech, sound and song”:

...each one-hour radio ballad consisted of recorded actuality from members of the public, a script and songs made by Ewan MacColl, musical arrangements and direction by Peggy Seeger, production and editing by Charles Parker, musical participation by singers and instrumentalists and ingenious procedures innovated by BBC technicians.³

Seeger introduces the word ‘actuality’ and this, too, requires explanation. As will be seen in Chapter 3, the inception of the radio ballad form was due in no small part to new technology: the EMI midget tape recorder, developed through a partnership between the BBC and EMI⁴. This new device enabled MacColl, Seeger and Parker to interview people in their homes and places of work and they referred to the resulting material as ‘actuality’, a term which, according to Ben Harker, “derived from ... filmmaker John Grierson...”⁵. In the context of the Radio Ballads, MacColl and Parker used ‘actuality’ to refer to the actual recordings of their

² Peggy Seeger (b. 1935) was MacColl’s long-time collaborator and life partner, eventually marrying him in 1977. See Cox, *Set Into Song*, Ch 4 (pp27-35) and Chapter 22 (pp247-258)

³ <https://www.peggyseeger.com/discography/ballads>

⁴ <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org/objects/co35460/emi-midget-tape-recorder-c-1950-tape-recorders>

⁵ Harker, *Class Act*, p299, fn107, referring to Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins, eds, *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary*. London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1996, p93.

eyewitnesses, such as Gladys Axon, widow of John. As will be seen in Chapter 3, it was Parker's original intention to have MacColl write a script based on the actuality, so that actors could perform the various parts, including Gladys Axon, but the eventual programme used the actuality rather than the actors. This use of actuality is a very significant factor in the inception and development of the radio ballads, but not the only one. For example, Seeger's description (above) does not refer to MacColl's extensive use of the operatic device of *recitative*: "A form of speech-like solo singing, free in rhythm and lacking in structured melodies." Recitative will be discussed further in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, and in Chapter 9 where I discuss my own use of the device in *Sid*. In Chapter 5 it will be seen that MacColl's use of recitative was not continued when the radio ballad genre was revived in 2006, highlighting the differences between MacColl's approach to writing radio ballads and those of other writers.

Two programmes were produced by Parker without MacColl's involvement, for one of the BBC's regional radio stations, BBC Radio Midlands; these have been referred to as 'the Birmingham Radio Ballads'. As will be seen in Chapter 4, the Birmingham programmes are quite different from those written by MacColl, but they were described by Parker as radio ballads and therefore merit inclusion in any attempt to define a 'canon'. The Birmingham Radio Ballads are:

The Jewellery (1961)

Cry from the Cut: a tribute to the Narrow Boats on the canals of Britain (1962)

TV producer Philip Donnellan, working with MacColl, turned three of the Radio Ballads into television programmes in the 1970s; I shall refer to these as 'the TV Radio Ballads'. These used mostly the same actuality and song material as their radio counterparts, but these become

a soundtrack to Donnellan's films, rather than the focal point. These programmes will be discussed further, in Chapter 5. The three TV Radio Ballads are:

Shoals of Herring (1972, based on 1959's *Singing the Fishing*)

The Fight Game (1973, based on the 1963 radio ballad of the same name)

The Big Hewer (1973, based on the 1960 radio ballad of the same name)

According to Peter Cox, "For another thirty years after Donnellan's films no more was heard of the radio ballads..."⁶, but they were not forgotten. It is my contention that the survival of the radio ballad is due in no small part to the success of some of MacColl's songs. 'The Shoals of Herring', from *Singing the Fishing*, three songs from *The Travelling People* and a few others became popular with folk singers and their audiences largely because of, I argue, their apparent authenticity as folk songs. It was those songs, in particular, that led to my own interest in Ewan MacColl and, through him, the Radio Ballads.

The radio ballad genre was revived in 2005 by a production team led by John Leonard; six programmes were made, all of which were broadcast in 2006; these will be referred to as 'the 2006 Radio Ballads:

The Ballad of the Big Ships: stories from the shipbuilders of the Tyne and the Clyde

The Enemy That Lives Within: stories of people living with HIV/AIDS

The Horn of the Hunter: the end of hunting with hounds

The Song of Steel: stories of the men and women who worked in the steel industry in the Don Valley

⁶ Peter Cox, *Set Into Song*, p267.

Swings and Roundabouts: stories of the showmen and women who run Britain's fairgrounds

Thirty Years of Conflict: stories from three decades of sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland

As will be seen in Chapter 5, whilst the original Radio Ballads were primarily the work of three people, the 2006 programmes were made by a much larger team and a different methodology, with noticeably different results. The programmes were successful, however, and John Leonard's team went on to make *The Ballad of the Miner's Strike* (2010), followed by six programmes under the banner *The Ballads of the Games*, broadcast to coincide with the London Olympics in 2012. *The Ballads of the Games* mark the first attempt at a planned series of radio ballads. The first programme, *Olympia*, attempts to cover the history of the Olympics from ancient Greece to London in 1948. The next two, *Berlin* and *Munich*, recount the stories of the two German-hosted events, in 1936 and 1972. The three remaining programmes, *Going for Gold*, *Controversies* and *The Marathon*, focus on particular aspects of the Olympic Games and their history.⁷ Leonard and his team then turned their attention to the centenary of the First World War and produced a second series, *The Ballads of the Great War*, five programmes which were broadcast annually from 2014 to 2018. Each programme is simply titled by the year – *1914* and so on – and focuses on the events of that year of the War.⁸

At the time of writing, the last example of a radio ballad is *The Ballad of the Stolwijk Rescue: A modern Radio Ballad by Brian Mac Gloinn*, which was made for Ireland's RTE in 2020.⁹ Mac Gloinn specifically references the Radio Ballads of MacColl, Parker and Seeger in

⁷ See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01kgbxg>

⁸ See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04n2d2s/episodes/guide>

⁹ See <https://www.rte.ie/radio/podcasts/22025252-the-ballad-of-the-stolwijk-rescue>

his narration for *Stolwijk*, but there are significant differences in his work. For example, a shortage of live witnesses (and, therefore, actuality) drives Mac Gloinn to use commentary, which was a noticeable feature of both the *Games* and *Great War* series. Another example, arising from Mac Gloinn's personal perspective on the Stolwijk story as a descendent of one of the participants, is his use of narration. Narration is not seen in the original Radio Ballads or, indeed, in any of those produced by John Leonard, but it is a feature of the present creative work and arises from the same circumstances: a personal connection with the story. When I began my own experiments with MacColl's radio ballad techniques, 2014, I did so having heard all of the original eight Radio Ballads and some of the 2006 programmes. I had not heard *The Ballad of the Miner's Strike* or any of the *Ballads of the Games* series. I knew that *The Ballad of the Great War: 1914* was in production, but I did not listen to that or any of the other *Ballads of the Great War* until after the performance of my own *Eleventh Hour*, in 2018. Developments such as the use of narration, therefore, were my own and arose as creative responses during my own writing processes, as will be seen in Chapter 5. When I came to the writing of *Sid*, I drew upon MacColl's stylistic conventions in terms of songwriting and the use of actuality, but included my own personal narrative, alien to the radio ballad form until Mac Gloinn's *Stolwijk Rescue* (to which I listened in 2021) but commonplace, I suggest, in the performance practice of folk singers.

The tendency of folk singers to talk, often at length, to their audiences is discussed in Chapter 2. I suggest that folk singers deliberately incorporate spoken word into their performance: I refer to this as 'the folk introduction phenomenon'. In Chapter 2, I explore the folk introduction phenomenon and attempt to explain why it occurs. Essentially, I suggest that folk singers use spoken word to authenticate not only the songs they perform but their own performance of those songs. My own performance practice certainly reflects this interpretation.

It is my contention that most folk singers improvise their spoken word introductions, at least to begin with, but the spoken word passages in *Sid* are scripted, a practice I have developed through the influence of performers such as Tommy Makem (1932-2007) and Liam Clancy (1935-2009), Irish folk singers who were popular in Ireland, Britain and North America from the 1950s onwards. Another significant influence on my work is that of English musician Dave Townsend, a friend and occasional colleague whose scripted performances with The Mellstock Band include the use of prose and poetry readings. I explore these influences in some detail in Chapter 2 of this commentary, before moving on to the radio ballads in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 (though the developments noted in Chapter 5 parallel rather than influence some of those seen in my own work). Both strands of influence can be seen in my 'live radio ballad' pieces and in *Sid*, but I suggest that they are already linked, by an underlying theme of authenticity which I attribute, in part at least, to Ewan MacColl.

The term 'authenticity' appears in the opening paragraph of this critical commentary and requires explanation. I do not use the term in the same senses as, for example, Allen Moore. In his broad-ranging 2002 article, 'Authenticity as Authentication'¹⁰, Moore uses 'authenticity' as an umbrella term for a range of value judgements used to refer, primarily, to musical performance; he specifically refers, more than once, to 'sonic design' and instrumentation. The authenticity to which I refer is, rather, a textual matter, concerned not so much with the musical qualities of a performance but, instead, with the substance of what is said, either by the words of a particular song or the spoken word material which takes place around that song. One aspect of authenticity, therefore, is the relationship between the text of a song and the source material

¹⁰ Allen Moore, 'Authenticity as Authentication' in *Popular Music*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (May 2002). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp 209-223.

which inspired and informed the text. As will be seen in Chapter 4, Ewan MacColl's radio ballad songs were written in response to, and as representatives of, actuality that was collected from living actuality-givers. MacColl would listen to and transcribe the actuality recordings. During this process, MacColl would select passages of actuality for inclusion in whichever programme was being compiled but, independently, he would use the actuality to inspire and inform song lyrics. The resulting songs would then be sung to the people whose actuality had inspired them, seeking their approval. For example, actuality collected from a Traveller resulted in the first verse of 'Moving-On Song', in *The Travelling People*; this is how the actuality and song appear in the script:

I was expecting one of my children, you know, one of my babies, and my husband he's sent for the midwife and in the time he's gone after the midwife the policeman came along. 'Come on', he says, 'Get a move on. Shift on' . . . The horse was in harness and we were travelling along the road and the policeman was following behind, drumming us off and the child was born, born on the cross roads.

**Born in the middle of the afternoon
In a horse-drawn wagon on the old A5
The big twelve-wheeler shook me bed
You can't stop here the policeman said
You'd better get born in some place else, so
Move along, get along, move along, get along,
Go! Move! Shift!**

The song goes on to describe a variety of situations in which travellers are 'moved on', eventually alluding to the Gospel of Matthew – "The wise men came, so stern and strict / And brought the order to evict," – thus moving the song away from the actuality, but the passage used at the beginning of the song acts to authenticate it. This effect is heightened by the fact that the song is not sung as a discrete whole: the verses are interspersed throughout the script of *The Travelling People*, so other segments of actuality further authenticate it as the piece proceeds.

There are other ways in which folk song performers can be seen to authenticate their work to an audience, more in line with Moore's interpretation. For example, if the song to be performed is an old song, collected from an oral tradition, the singer will often tell the audience when, where and from whom that song was collected, confirming that the song is a 'genuine' example of a folk song. They might also attempt to place the song in historical or cultural context, to affirm the 'genuineness' of its story, or certain details that feature in the text. If the song is a new composition, the singer may explain some or all of the story behind it, or the reasons for writing it, possibly demonstrating its 'accuracy' to the original story. Furthermore, in either case, the singer may also authenticate their own involvement, on the grounds of their origins or other qualifications. For example, a folk singer descended, as I am, from a family of shoemakers, might well refer to this fact when introducing a song about a cobbler. I argue that this latter aspect of authenticity stems from a practice introduced into folk clubs in the mid-1950s, by Ewan MacColl. This practice, known as 'the Policy', will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2: it proved divisive for folk song performers, and created problems with the whole concept of authenticity, as Moore notes in his article¹¹. In particular, MacColl was seen by many as using the question of authenticity to dictate how folk songs should be performed. I draw a clear distinction between these aspects of authenticity, which refer to elements of the actual performance. For the avoidance of doubt, the 'authenticity' to which I refer in this commentary applies to the creation of new material, and its relevance to the present project lies in the fact that I tried to be as authentic as possible to the source material when writing the songs and narrative spoken word passages. Of course, unlike MacColl, I could not (in most cases) seek the approval of the originators of the material.

¹¹ Moore, 'Authenticity as Authentication', p211-212

Sid, then, is a live musical performance, deriving significantly from the techniques used to create the Radio Ballads; where it differs radically from the radio ballads, and from my own previous works, is in the inclusion of a visual element. The use of images in *Sid* is driven by the fact that the letters, all but one of them handwritten, have visual impact over and above their content, most notably because of the significant changes in Sid's handwriting in the period during which they were written, and it became clear to me that the audience should experience them visually. Having decided to include images of the letters, it was natural to extend the principle and use other images, such as photographs (of people, places and objects) and maps. The final version of the creative piece includes well over two hundred images conveyed by means of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation, adding a new element to the mix of conventions and techniques employed. Whilst working on the original radio ballad – *The Ballad of John Axon* – in 1957, MacColl and Parker adopted the term 'actuality' to refer to the recorded material that was included as an integral part of their programme. In this critical commentary I use the term 'visuality' to refer to images which perform similar functions to actuality and other spoken word elements, lending authenticity to and enhancing the audience's experience and understanding of the song material. I further propose that the creative piece provides a useful model for future live performance works, including a tried and tested script format.

This critical commentary is presented in two parts with an overall conclusion that links the findings of each paragraph to the creative piece and the project in general. Part I comprises five chapters which seek to contextualise the creative piece. Chapter 1 introduces the work of Ewan MacColl, including brief accounts of his theatrical career and his contribution to what is now termed the Second Folk Revival¹² of the 1950s, before moving on to discuss his legacy

¹² See Harker, *Class Act*, pp 125, 135, 153-7.

which, I contend, is frequently underestimated and generally misunderstood, overshadowed by his political reputation. MacColl was a life-long communist and saw his work, both in the theatre and with the folk revival, as a form of political activism. I argue that MacColl's legacy, apart from a fine body of songs and other writing, lies in the dedication to authenticity mentioned above, developed (I suggest) during his period in the theatre and refined in his songwriting approach for the Radio Ballads.

Chapter 2 discusses the extensive use of spoken word by performers in the English-speaking folk song traditions as an integral part of their performance practice, investigating the functions and conventions of what I call the 'folk introduction phenomenon', a topic upon which little has been written. I survey a range of performers and situations, addressing the oft-heard complaint that 'folk singers talk too much' and, drawing upon the work of Richard Watts and Franz Andres Morrissey², analysing why that is the case. It is my contention that these often lengthy, spoken introductions are not merely introductory but an integral part of the performance that may originate with 'the Policy' introduced by Ewan MacColl at the Ballads and Blues Club in the 1950s. The Policy, which was adopted and followed by many other clubs around the country, required participants to confine themselves to performing songs from their own cultures, in languages in which they were fluent. As Watts and Morrissey point out in their work, folk singers often introduce their work with historical and cultural material and it is my contention in Chapter 2 that this is their response to a perceived necessity to authenticate their performance.

Chapter 3 discusses the origins and creation of *The Ballad of John Axon* and, by extension, the radio ballad form. I define the term 'radio ballad', offer a clear explanation as to

its origins, and demonstrate why I consider Ewan MacColl to be the principal architect of the form. Chapter 4 then discusses the development of the radio ballad form through the seven subsequent programmes written by MacColl and produced by Parker, demonstrating how the form evolved both stylistically and technically. The last two programmes produced by the MacColl-Parker collaboration, *The Fight Game* and *The Travelling People*, represent the culmination of the radio ballad methodology – MacColl favoured *The Fight Game* and considered this to be the best example – and MacColl’s songwriting method. *The Travelling People* is the most influential piece in terms of my own work, and produced three songs which have proved to be very successful in their own right. The most successful Radio Ballad song, however, is ‘The Shoals of Herring’, from *Singing The Fishing*. Chapter 4 includes a brief section on the songwriting method which resulted in ‘The Shoals of Herring’.

Chapter 5 explores the further development of the radio ballad through the revival of the genre by producer John Leonard and his team in 2006 (‘the 2006 Radio Ballads’), 2010’s *The Ballad of the Miners’ Strike*, the thematic series of 2012 (*The Ballads of the Games*) and 2014-2018 (*The Ballads of the Great War*) and RTE’s *The Ballad of the Stolwijk Rescue* in 2020. Chapter 5 also looks briefly at the three ‘TV radio ballads’ produced by Phillip Donellan in the 1970 which, obviously, include the use of images and therefore bear comparison to my creative piece. I argue, however, that there are significant differences, both in the use of images and in the reasoning behind their use. In Donellan’s programmes, the songs and actuality become a soundtrack to the moving image: in my work, visuality and actuality combine to lend authenticity to the songs and spoken word which tell the story. Chapter 5 notes a shift in the currency of the subject matter, from the present or recent past, as seen in the 1957-63 and 2006 Radio Ballads, to the historical in the later BBC programmes and *The Ballad of the Stolwijk Rescue*, alongside a change in focus from individuals to communities and then events. *Stolwijk*

Rescue, unlike any of its predecessors, includes a personal narrative on the part of the writer. These developments in style, form and content are paralleled in my own work leading up to the present creative piece but I do not count them as influences in the same way as the original Radio Ballads.

The four chapters of Part II detail the research and creative processes which gave rise to *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*. Chapter 6 lays the foundation for the creative piece by outlining Sid's story, the research undertaken in connection with the project, and the process of digitising, transcribing and sequencing the letters. The project's primary creativity takes the form of songwriting, but the script also features narrative verse, actuality (as defined in Chapter 3), poetry and passages of 'synthetic actuality' (see Chapter 5). Chapter 7 explains my songwriting methodology and examines in turn each of the twelve songs written for the piece. Chapter 7 also discusses the narrative passages and my decision to rewrite the extensive passages of narrative prose into iambic pentameters, demonstrating how this results in greater economy of language.

Chapter 8 considers my use of actuality and introduces the concept of 'visuality'. The primary source material for Sid was written, rather than recorded. There was little potential for actuality of the type found in the Radio Ballads. Only a small number of people had direct memories of Sid or my grandparents and much of the additional material was found in books such as Elisabeth Shoenberg's *A Hospital looks at itself: Essays from Claybury*.¹³ I set out to record actuality from five family members, including myself, but COVID-19 restrictions

¹³ Shoenberg, Elisabeth (ed.), *A Hospital looks at itself: Essays from Claybury*, Plymouth: Bruno Cassirer (Publishers) Ltd, 1972

prevented this from being carried out in a face-to-face interview situation until the process was quite advanced. Two family members eventually provided actuality, and I chose, for reasons explained in Chapter 7, to present my own actuality in the form of narrative verse. The remaining eyewitness material, mostly derived from books, was to be recorded by actors, delivered in the style of actuality. I call this ‘synthetic actuality’, and pay particular attention to the process of selecting and editing material to be used in this way. As previously mentioned, the visual impact of Sid’s letters led me to include them as a backdrop to the performance. Following upon that decision, I included other images including maps and photographs. The images were chosen using similar criteria to those employed in the selection of actuality: Chapter 8 explains the process of selecting, editing and, on occasion, creating those images.

Chapter 9 explains how the technical aspects of the performance evolved alongside the rehearsal process which took *Sid* from the page to the stage, and how that overall production phase, including the two performances and the feedback obtained from them, contributed to the final version of the script. The eventual combination of songs and spoken word, live and recorded sound and images required a new script format which evolved during the rehearsal process. Chapter 9 also discusses, briefly, the musical processes – composition and arrangement – that were required for the production, before offering an evaluation of the creative outcome of the project, set against the original objective and, finally, demonstrates how the methodology evolved during the project has already impacted upon other work.

When I embarked upon this project, the envisaged creative piece was something similar to my earlier *Eleventh Hour*, using Sid’s letters, read by an actor, as synthetic actuality (see Chapter 8). As such, Sid would have drawn extensively upon the techniques and conventions

seen in radio ballads such as *The Travelling People*, allied with some use of poetry and narration in the style of Tommy Makem and Liam Clancy. The outcome is a piece of work which is clearly linked to those influences and to my own earlier work but also makes creative use of the visual qualities of the letters. The innovation of visuality, alongside the use of actuality (Chapter 8) and recitative (see Chapters 3, 4 and 9), lends both authenticity and originality to the creative piece, and represents a significant contribution to both genres, alongside the academic contributions mentioned earlier. Key to both elements of this thesis is the work and influence of Ewan MacColl, which can be seen at work in both genres. For that reason, the commentary begins with a more detailed look at MacColl's life and work.

Part I: Creative Context

Chapter 1: Ewan MacColl

This chapter provides a brief account of the life and career of Ewan MacColl (1915-1989), the most significant influence upon my own work, identifying key points in his career leading up to his work on the Radio Ballads, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. MacColl was a major figure in the Second Folk Revival, but his career was marred at times (as his reputation continues to be) by his dogmatic, left-wing political activism and domineering personality: in the words of author J P Bean he was, “A great talent, but a difficult man.”¹⁴ MacColl’s work prior to the early 1950s was in political theatre, most notably in what became known as ‘Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop’. This earlier work provides examples of a dedication to authenticity which would eventually manifest itself fully in his songwriting for the radio ballads, and which has had a great impact upon my own work. MacColl’s work in the folk revival, I suggest, led to a separate and distinct requirement for authentication in performance which would also have an influence upon my performance practice.

Why does MacColl’s work exert such an influence over my own? My earliest folk song influences were live performances, and recordings of live performances, by acts such as The Clancy Brothers & Tommy Makem, The Spinners, The Corries and the Dubliners. Some of their songs sounded traditional but transpired to be the work of living writers; one which especially caught my attention was ‘The Travelling People’, introduced by Liam Clancy as

¹⁴ J.P. Bean, *Singing from the Floor*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 2014, p98.

having been written by ‘a friend of ours’ who turned out to be Ewan MacColl. For me, MacColl’s songs combined convincingly authentic language with authentically ‘folky’ melodies in a way that few songwriters seemed to be able to match. MacColl’s career is well documented in Ben Harker’s *Class Act* and, in terms of his involvement with the Radio Ballads, in Peter Cox ‘s *Set Into Song*.

This biographical account is mainly derived from two key sources: MacColl’s autobiography, *Journeyman*¹⁵, and Ben Harker’s biography, *Class Act*¹⁶. Ewan MacColl was born James Miller in 1915, in an expatriate Scots community in Salford, Lancashire. Jimmie, as he was known until 1945, was politicised at an early age, through the influence of his father, an iron-moulder who was frequently black-listed (and consequentially unemployed) for his own political activities. By 1930, Jimmie had become a member of the Communist Party and was involved in political street theatre with a group called The Red Megaphones; he met and married Joan Littlewood – a marriage of convenience so that they could travel abroad together – and together they embarked upon various theatrical ventures culminating with Theatre Union, which disbanded with the coming of the Second World War and Jimmie’s conscription into the army. Towards the end of the War, Miller, Littlewood and their Theatre Union colleagues arranged to meet in Manchester, and it was at this point that Jimmie Miller changed his name to Ewan MacColl and Theatre Union became Theatre Workshop. The change of name was ostensibly for artistic reasons, but Harker’s research indicates that, whilst it might have been

¹⁵ Ewan MacColl, *Journeyman: an autobiography*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1990. 2nd Edition, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009.

¹⁶ Ben Harker, *Class Act: The Cultural and Political Life of Ewan MacColl*. London/Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2007.

artistically or ideologically logical for Miller to adopt a Scots name with literary credentials¹⁷, the primary impetus was the fact that Miller, having deserted from the army, had spent most of the war in hiding and was wanted by the Military Police.¹⁸

The outcome of the 1945 reunion was Theatre Workshop¹⁹. MacColl authored several Theatre Workshop plays, including *Uranium-235* and *Landscape With Chimneys* (which spawned the song ‘Dirty Old Town’), but by the early 1950s he was increasingly preoccupied with folk song, as a collector and performer. His growing involvement in folk song, working alongside the American folklorist Alan Lomax, came at around the same as Theatre Workshop located itself permanently at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, a decision which MacColl did not approve. Littlewood says, “One day, Ewan MacColl, James H. Miller, Jimmie, call him what you will, prime mover, inspiration, Daddy o’t, walked out, quit, buggered off – and, not to put too fine a point on it, resigned.” She goes on to say, “His going saddened some of us, others were relieved, having recovered from the first flush of his influence.”²⁰ Already working as an occasional radio actor, MacColl’s folk song interest resulted in a radio series with Lomax, entitled *Ballads and Blues* which, in turn, inspired them to start one of the first folk clubs, The Ballads and Blues Club²¹.

¹⁷ Miller may have taken and adapted the name of Evan MacColl (1808-1898), known variously as ‘The Bard of Loch Fyne’, ‘Clarsair-nam-beann’ (‘The Mountain Minstrel’) and ‘the Gaelic Bard of Canada’.

¹⁸ In 1998, ten years before the publication of *Class Act*, I sought the co-operation of Peggy Seeger in obtaining MacColl’s military record, because it was clear to me that there was a gap in the narrative, and Joan Littlewood’s 1994 autobiography (see fn19) made it quite clear that MacColl had been arrested for desertion. Seeger’s response (which was on a cassette tape of comments and feedback on a piece of work I had sent her) was “I will obtain Ewan’s army record.” I heard nothing more on the subject. Harker provides a full explanation of MacColl’s desertion and arrest in *Class Act*, pp79 et seq.

¹⁹ See Joan Littlewood, *Joan’s Book: Joan Littlewood’s Peculiar History As She Tells It*. London: Methuen, 1994 for a full account of the formation of Theatre Workshop.

²⁰ Joan Littlewood, *Joan’s Book: Joan Littlewood’s Peculiar History As She Tells It*. London: Methuen, 1994, pp434-5.

²¹ Harker, *Class Act*, pp126-128.

MacColl's involvement with BBC Radio brought him into contact with Charles Parker who, in 1957, commissioned MacColl to write the script for a new programme, *The Ballad of John Axon*, which became the first 'radio ballad'. Following that first production MacColl and Parker and Peggy Seeger, made seven further programmes but, in 1964, the BBC discontinued their production, ostensibly on the grounds of cost. MacColl and Seeger went on to other projects, such as The Critics Group, which began as a workshop for young singers, focusing on improving their performance of folk song, but morphed into a theatre group until, in the early 1970s, it dissolved in acrimony²²: perhaps, like their Theatre Workshop predecessors, the Critics Group had 'recovered from the first flush of his influence'. MacColl then found himself, unexpectedly and quite suddenly, wealthy, owing to the success of a song composed years earlier: 'The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face'. This good fortune enabled him to pick and choose projects and, whilst he continued performing as a folk singer until shortly before his illness and death in 1989, he also made valuable contributions to folksong scholarship and a significant body of recordings. In his final years MacColl returned to the theatre, with a play drawn on material gathered for a 'television radio ballad' which never materialised; the play, *Shore Saints and Sea Devils*, ran at the Library Theatre, Manchester, for two weeks in 1983.²³

MacColl's active career in performance art spanned nearly sixty years and his legacy is diverse, extensive and lies mostly outside the scope of the present study. When that legacy is discussed, it is often overshadowed by MacColl's political views. MacColl made no secret of his politicism: Ben Harker highlights his practice of publishing manifesto-style leaflets,

²² Harker *Class Act*, pp184-191.

²³ Harker, *Class Act*, pp239-240

proclaiming political objectives in connection with his various theatre groups and folk clubs and mentions MI5's surveillance of MacColl and his associates. Folk song academic Giovanni Vacca interviewed MacColl at length in 1987 and asked him about the role of political song. MacColl's response was uncompromising: "Its role is to attack the government and to attack it in ways that can produce bodies of songs which can be used in every critical situation;"²⁴ he references an extensive output of songs in support of strikes and protests, in which there is no sense of political balance. Veteran folk singer Martin Carthy told J.P. Bean, "I didn't really know Ewan. I always stayed away. I didn't want to get involved in the politics."²⁵ Another matter frequently raised is what Peggy Seeger refers to as 'the Policy', developed at the Ballads and Blues Club and later instituted as a rule at the new Singers' Club, in 1961: singers should not sing anything but the songs of their own native tradition.²⁶ MacColl describes the reasoning behind the Policy in *Journeyman*:

...we found that we tired of singing songs in a language we didn't speak fluently or, sometimes, didn't understand at all; or, if the songs were from an alien culture or lifestyle, they began to lose their conviction. [...] Peggy found it difficult to keep a straight face when she heard cockneys and Liverpoolians singing Leadbelly and Guthrie songs... She felt that the songs didn't ring true and then it occurred to us that perhaps our own repertoire of foreign songs might not ring true to the natives of countries whence those songs came. A polemic began.²⁷

The Policy was divisive from the outset. MacColl says it was "the first real dissent in the folk revival" and it had an enduring impact upon his reputation. Nearly seventy years on, in the light of the debate about cultural appropriation, MacColl's Policy might appear prescient, but that is beyond the scope of this commentary.

²⁴ Allan F. Moore and Giovanni Vacca, *Legacies of Ewan MacColl: The Last Interview*. London: Routledge 2020.

²⁵ Bean, *Singing from the Floor*, p100.

²⁶ Harker, *Class Act*, p159.

²⁷ MacColl, *Journeyman*, pp278-9.

In the Introduction to this commentary, I refer to a dedication to authenticity which is evident in the Radio Ballads and, I suggest, in MacColl's earlier theatrical work. In 1945, Theatre Workshop decided to draw attention to the dangers of the atom bomb; MacColl, as the group's resident playwright, was tasked with writing a documentary play. Howard Goorney, in *The Theatre Workshop Story*, comments that "Ewan's enthusiasm for the idea was tempered by his lack of scientific knowledge..."²⁸ Two members of the company offered to tutor MacColl in the history of atomic science:

And they did. They provided me with books, they talked and lectured me by the hour and explained new and difficult concepts. Most of all they fired me with enthusiasm and, when that enthusiasm reached fever pitch, I sat down and wrote *Uranium 235*, a documentary play about the history of atomic science from Democritus to Einstein.²⁹

Goorney's account continues:

The dramatic impact of *Uranium 235* was acknowledged, but was it scientifically accurate? Any doubts we may have had were dispelled when we played to a group of scientists who had worked on an atomic energy project in Britain during the war. They were very excited by it and could fault it in no way.³⁰

This episode – gaining the approval of people 'in the know' – may have had a direct influence on the development of MacColl's radio ballad methodology, which involved him taking songs based on actuality back to the actuality-givers and seeking their approval as he famously did with 'The Shoals of Herring' (see Chapter 4).

²⁸ Howard Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*. London: Eyre Methuen Ltd, 1981, p50

²⁹ MacColl, *Journeyman*, p239.

³⁰ Goorney, *The Theatre Workshop Story*, p52

Joan Littlewood made no secret of her opinion that MacColl had betrayed his own legacy by leaving Theatre Workshop and, in his advancing years, MacColl did return to the theatre; largely, however, his theatrical work is forgotten. His acknowledged legacy lies within the world of folk song, but even that much debated: a *Guardian* article from 2015 (on the anniversary of MacColl's birth), 'Ewan MacColl: the godfather of folk who was adored – and feared'³¹, refers to several interviews, painting both positive and negative pictures of MacColl as an individual and of his impact upon the performance of folk song. There seems to be general agreement about his songwriting, specifically mentioning well-known songs such as 'The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face' and 'Dirty Old Town', neither of which was written for a radio ballad. The article also includes reference, by Martin Carthy, to songs from *The Travelling People*, which will be discussed further in Chapter 4. MacColl's songwriting methods changed during the period of the Radio Ballads and he developed a new attitude to 'tune-making', ensuring that his songs were in a recognizable folk idiom.³² I submit that these changes were both driven by and drivers of the dedication to authenticity described above, and resulted in a body of songs which were very popular (as songs in their own right, outside of their original creative environment) with folk singers and their audiences. These, then, were the songs which first drew me to the work of Ewan MacColl, but they were sung not by MacColl but by other performers, whose work I found similarly influential.

³¹ *The Guardian*, Sunday 25th January 2015, accessed online.

³² Seeger, *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook*, p15.

Chapter 2: The Folk Introduction Phenomenon

This chapter investigates the use of spoken word by folk singers which, I suggest, is not simply introductory, but an integral component of the performance, and which has been particularly influential upon my own performance practice. I raised this issue in the concluding remarks of a paper delivered at the Folk Song: Tradition and Revival conference, in 1998³³: “. . . it brings into academic debate a part of folk performance that is largely ignored: the introduction, or whatever one wishes to call it, that precedes the song.”³⁴ The paper was published with the other proceedings of the conference, as *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival and Re-Creation*, which was reviewed by folk singer and teacher Sandra Kerr. Once a close musical associate of Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, Kerr singled out my contribution:

[Verrier] raises some interesting questions. For instance, what is the role of the ‘introduction’ (or whatever it is that you call that stuff you say before you sing)? It’s a part of folk performance that is often ignored, he says. I agree, and depending on whether it is done well or otherwise it can make or mar that performance.³⁵

I have often heard the complaint that folk singers talk too much. It is my contention that whether the ‘introduction’ makes or mars the performance depends upon what is said and how.

Richard Watts and Franz Andres Morrissey, in *Language, the Singer and the Song: The Sociolinguistics of Folk Performance*,³⁶ discuss what they call ‘folk talk’: “Most folk

³³ Folk Song: Tradition and Revival (University of Sheffield, 1998) marked the centenary of the establishment of The Folk Song Society (now the English Folk Dance and Song Society).

³⁴ Michael Verrier, “Folk Club or Epic Theatre: Brecht’s influence on the performance practice of Ewan MacColl” in *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival and Re-Creation* ed. Ian Russell and David Atkinson. Aberdeen: The Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen, 2004, p113

³⁵ Sandra Kerr, “Review of *Folk Song: Tradition, Revival and Re-Creation*” in *Folk Music Journal*, Vol 9 No 1 (2006), pp 97-99, London: EFDSS, 2006; my underlining

³⁶ Richard J Watts and Franz Andres Morrissey, *Language, the Singer and the Song: The Sociolinguistics of Folk Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019

performers do not regard their craft as purely entertaining, even though entertainment is an important element.” They also confirm that the phenomenon is peculiar to the performance of folk song: “In contrast to many other forms of popular music, there is often an overt component that focusses on educating or informing the audience.”³⁷ ‘Folk talk’ includes personal anecdotes, humour, and social references in songs highlighting their continued relevance.³⁸ Watts and Morrissey also introduce the idea that folk talk provides, “... an opportunity [for the singer] to authenticate him/herself ... by establishing credibility and creditability.”³⁹ It seems, therefore, that folk singers do say more to their audiences than other performers generally, possibly because of a perceived need to justify their choice of song or performance style, and demonstrate its relevance to the audience. I contend that this is attributable to ‘the Policy’, referred to in the preceding chapter, introduced by Ewan MacColl to the Ballads & Blues Club in the 1950s.

MacColl was certainly an exponent of ‘folk talk’: in this example, reproduced in full, he is about to sing a Scots ballad, ‘MacPherson’s Lament’⁴⁰:

We finish with a ballad about an outlaw. His name was James MacPherson and he was hanged in Banff in Northeast Scotland on the 19th of November 1700. The biographers describe him as a man of extraordinary courage, a man who made fine songs, a great lover of women, a great racer of races and a superb fiddle player. Others describe him as an unmitigated rogue and all the rest of it. The fact is he was very popular among the people of Banffshire and Aberdeenshire, so much so that when he was arrested, the petition was signed by tens of thousands of people and sent to the king, asking that his sentence be reprieved. [*Accompaniment begins in the background*] And, indeed, the king was so impressed by the petition that he did write out a reprieve which was duly given into the hand of the messenger who then proceeded post haste on horseback to ride to Banff with the reprieve. But... the wily town council

³⁷ Watts and Morrissey, *Language, the Singer and the Song* p233

³⁸ Watts and Morrissey, *Language, the Singer and the Song* p233

³⁹ Watts & Morrissey, *Language, the Singer and the Song*, p286

⁴⁰ *Great Lives: Peggy Seeger on her husband Ewan MacColl*, BBC Bristol, 7th September 2021, at 25m 04s.

didn't want this bloke reprieved and they got notice that a messenger was on the way, so they resorted to the simple expedient of putting the clock forward by a quarter of an hour and hanged him. And legend has it that that is why the clocks in Banff are still a quarter of an hour late [sic]. My own feeling is that the town council's too mean to get a new clock. *[Accompaniment becomes more assertive, and MacColl begins singing]*

MacColl's 'introduction' lasts approximately ninety seconds, and effectively tells the whole story. There is little left for the song to say, and for that reason I suggest that it is too long, and probably detracts from the overall performance. The passage before the beginning of the accompaniment is quite picturesque, with MacColl using the language of a storyteller: ". . . a man who made fine songs, a great lover of women, a great racer of races...". That information is not contained in the song and, had the introduction ended there, or after the sentence mentioning the petition, it would have allowed the song to complete the story, creating a sense of wholeness between the song and the spoken word. The last two sentences refer (albeit inaccurately) to a real legend,⁴¹ with the last line intended to provoke laughter. MacColl sets out to entertain, inform and educate in line with the findings of Watts and Morrissey but, in this instance, he does talk too much.

I raised the folk introduction phenomenon again in the critical commentary component of a dissertation submitted for the degree of MA in Creative Writing in 2020, before I became aware of the work of Watts and Morrissey:

Whatever the origins of the practice of introducing and linking songs it is, quite clearly, an important element of the performance for many folk singers and for their audiences, and many singers use the same, or very similar,

⁴¹ Paul Kelbie, "Story behind the song... Macpherson's Lament" at https://issuu.com/scotlandcorrespondent/docs/scotland_correspondent_issue_41/s/1054349

introductions over and over, to the point that they are scripted. Undoubtedly, some singers actually write down their introductions and rehearse them.⁴²

That assertion (especially the last line) was an opinion based upon experience and undocumented conversations and so, for the purposes of this study, I sought confirmation, through the use of questionnaires sent to folk song performers⁴³. Jonny Dyer, who performs as a duo with Vicki Swann, was able to provide concrete information on their use of spoken word:

From rehearsals, we can say with confidence that a performance is 75% ‘music’ and 25% talking. Some of this (20% of talking or 5% of the concert) is ‘masking’ tuning and performance changes, but most of it is communication that is part of the performance. A wise person once said if you’re going to talk to an audience, either be funny or informative. We do spend time talking about the more unusual instruments that we play and also the history, context and developments of the songs that we are singing. We also develop a rapport with our audience based on shared humour and we welcome constructive heckling.⁴⁴

The late Richard Spong, half of another duo (Charlotte & Spong) offered a similar perspective:

Where the content of the performance incorporates song, either or both of us will talk to the audience. This will usually be to expand on the song’s content or to explain its content. The purpose will mainly be to entertain, but also to provoke thought.⁴⁵

One question asked whether practitioners usually prepared scripts for their ‘introductions’:

Richard Spong: For song, sometimes, but very briefly and informally – perhaps as one or two keywords.

Jonny Dyer: Formally? No. Informally, a bit. In that you introduce a song with ‘some sentences’. It’s natural to repeat the informative sentences that were efficient/effective and to change the ones that weren’t – and to repeat the jokes that worked and not the ones that didn’t – hence there is an informal honing of spoken material over time that eventually can become nearly-a-script.

⁴² Michael Verrier, MA Dissertation: *The Harwich Ship: A Ballad of Christopher Jones and the Mayflower*, 2020, pp28-29

⁴³ The questionnaires – see Appendix C – were distributed via email following a FaceBook post seeking volunteers, during the period in which the live music industry was brought to a standstill. A considerable number of musicians and singers indicated their participation but did not ultimately respond to the questionnaire.

⁴⁴ Jonny Dyer, response to Practitioner questionnaire, received via FaceBook Messenger, 17th February 2022.

⁴⁵ Richard Spong, response to Practitioner questionnaire, received by email, 1st October 2022.

What Dyer describes is an example of what Grayson Cooke describes as ‘comprovisation’: “...the intricate weaving of the composed with the improvised.”⁴⁶ This is, I suggest, representative of the way that most folk singers work: the spoken word components of their performances, rather than being scripted, evolve from improvised material. A good example of comprovisation in practice is provided by Vin Garbutt⁴⁷, who came to the Electric Palace in Harwich in 2015, for a screening of a film about him, *Vin Garbutt: teeside troubadour*. After the film, Garbutt took to the stage for a short performance and found himself telling anecdotes, as introductions to songs, that had already been seen in the film. Garbutt’s reaction, when he realised what was happening, was very revealing: “ I never realised – I say the same things every time – I thought I just made that stuff up as I went along.”⁴⁸ When asked if they had ever prepared scripts, there was a little more divergence: in Richard Spong’s case, the answer was “Yes, but almost never in full. This might be as annotations on the text of a song we do not know well.”⁴⁹ Jonny Dyer started with something similar, but the expansion is illuminating:

Very rarely. A couple of times in planned sequential shows, (the live equivalent of a concept album I guess) we have tracks that very nearly segue – and if there is spoken word it needs to be very pithy and predictable. When Vicki ‘storytells’, her introductions are more scripted just to make sure that it doesn’t conflict with the story.⁵⁰

The conclusion to be drawn here, I suggest, is that there is a spectrum of performance practice relating to the use of spoken word, extending from the purely improvised to the completely scripted, and that the majority of singers work, generally, somewhere between the two.

⁴⁶ Grayson Cooke, ‘Liveness and the machine: Improvisation in live audio-visual performance’, *Screen Sound*, 2, p96, quoted in Joanne Scott, *Intermedial Praxis and Practice as Research: ‘Doing-Thinking’ in Practice*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p4.

⁴⁷ Vin Garbutt (1947-2017) was a folk singer and songwriter born in Middlesbrough to an English father and an Irish mother, and famed for his use of ‘patter’. For further information see www.vingarbutt.com

⁴⁸ I was present at this event as co-organiser and sound engineer. I remember Vin’s comment in particular, because I was interested in the use of spoken word and the comprovisation process.

⁴⁹ Richard Spong, response to Practitioner Questionnaire.

⁵⁰ Jonny Dyer, response to Practitioner Questionnaire.

My own performance practice has been especially influenced by two groups of performers: The Clancy Brothers & Tommy Makem, and The Mellstock Band. The Clancy Brothers & Tommy Makem (CBTM)⁵¹ frequently used poetry and play excerpts in their performances. An example, featuring on a recording made in 1963 at Carnegie Hall, New York, is the use of poetry to introduce the song ‘Eileen Aroon’. The song is a setting of an English poem, attributed to Gerald Griffin, inspired by an Irish song, ‘Eibhlín a Rúin’, by Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh⁵². There are three elements to the introduction, beginning with W.B. Yeats’ ‘The Host of the Air’, recited by Tom Clancy; this is followed immediately by ‘The King of the Fairies’, a traditional dance tune, performed by Tommy Makem on tin-whistle; Paddy Clancy then recites the first verse of Griffin’s ‘Eileen Aroon’. Liam Clancy then sings four verses of ‘Eileen Aroon’, with harmonies from Tommy Makem. The continuity between the various elements may not be immediately apparent, but there is a clear link between ‘The Host of the Air’ and ‘The King of the Fairies’, Yeats’ poem was first published in the November 1893 edition of *The Bookman*, as ‘The Stolen Bride’ with an explanatory note by Yeats which reads just like a piece of ‘folk talk’:

I heard the story on which this ballad is founded from an old woman in Balesodare, Sligo. She repeated me a Gaelic poem on the subject, and then translated it to me. I have always regretted not having taken down her words, and as some amends for not having done so, have made this ballad. Any one who tastes fairy food or drink is glamourised and stolen by the fairies. This is

⁵¹ Tommy Makem (1932-2007) and Liam Clancy (1935-2009) enjoyed an on-off musical partnership spanning some fifty years following their first meeting in Northern Ireland in the early 1950s. Their first collaboration took place in America when, with Liam’s older brothers Paddy (1922-1998) and Tom (1924-1990) they formed The Clancy Brothers & Tommy Makem. See Liam Clancy’s autobiography, *Liam Clancy: Memoirs of an Irish Troubadour*. London: Virgin Books Ltd., 2002

⁵² See James E. Doan, ‘The Folksong Tradition of Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh’ in *Folklore*, Vol 96, No. 1 (1985) pp 67-86.

why Bridget sets O’Driscoll to play cards. “The folk of the air” is a Gaelic name for the fairies.⁵³

There is another clear link, between ‘Eileen Aroon’ and ‘The Host of the Air’: according to Doan, Ó Dálaigh composed the original Irish song to sing to the love of his life who was about to marry another man – another ‘stolen bride’ story. No mention is made of either link in front of the audience, but the overall effect is a piece which has dramatic unity and continuity, operating at a more sophisticated level than the ‘folk talk’ described by Watts and Morrissey. This is not to say that all CBTM performances were scripted; all four performers made use of ad lib spoken word, often in the form of banter between them, or by adding brief comments. For example, on the 1977 recording *The Makem & Clancy Concert*⁵⁴ Makem recites a short poem – ‘Brewer’s Man’ by Leonard Alfred George Strong (1896-1958) – as an introduction to a traditional Irish song, ‘The Cobbler’. Between the poem and the song, Makem adds a line – “And I didn’t blame her” – possibly to counter the misogyny inherent in both the song and the poem. Interjections such as this maintain a sense of spontaneity in live performance and I endeavour, even in fully scripted material, to incorporate an element of apparently spontaneous dialogue between performers (see Chapter 7).

The Mellstock Band⁵⁵ perform in period costume, “representing rural Sunday-best of the 1840s”, using poetry and prose readings to frame a musical programme; there is little, if any,

⁵³ *The Bookman*, 1893, No.11 (Vol 5 Iss 26) archived at https://archive.org/details/sim_bookman_1893-11_5_26/page/42/mode/2up?view=theater; see also W.B. Yeats; A. Norman Jeffares, ed., *Yeats’s Poems*, Basingstoke: McMillan, 1989/1996

⁵⁴ Tommy Makem & Liam Clancy, *The Makem & Clancy Concert*, CBS Records (Dublin), 1977.

⁵⁵ According to the Dave Townsend’s website: “Mellstock was the fictional name the novelist and poet Thomas Hardy gave to his native village of Higher Bockhampton in Dorset. His family were leading local musicians, who led the church band and played for dances. Hardy’s vivid descriptions, the players’ own manuscript books, and music from the local tradition were the initial inspiration for the formation of the Mellstock Band in 1986.” Their

improvised or comprovised material. Performances are scripted, and commercial recordings are made using the same performance scripts: their 1999 CD, *The Dance at the Phoenix: Village band music from Hardy's Wessex and beyond* is thus an accurate representation of one of the corresponding live performance. It comprises twenty-four tracks, listed here with spoken word elements shown in italics:

1. Major Malley's Reel
2. Dribbles of Brandy
3. *In the Nuptial Chamber* (Thomas Hardy)
4. Haste to the Wedding
5. The Foggy Dew
6. Bold Nelson's Praise
7. The Copenhagen Waltz and The Hungarian Waltz
8. Otford
9. *The Christmas Invitation* (William Barnes)
10. Enrico
11. *Keepen Up O'Christmas* (William Barnes)
12. Here's a Health to All Good Lasses
13. The Ploughboy
14. Old Lango Lee, The Mallard and The Grenadiers
15. *The Ruined Maid* (Thomas Hardy)
16. Rosline Castle
17. *The Choirmasters Burial* (Thomas Hardy) / Winterbourne Tune
18. Harvest Home and Wait for the Waggon
19. The Sheep-Stealer
20. Peggy Band
21. *The Dance at the Phoenix* – 1 (Thomas Hardy)
22. The Soldier's Joy and The Fairy Dance
23. *The Dance at the Phoenix* – 2 (Thomas Hardy)
24. The Girl I Left Behind Me

Hardy's poem, *The Dance at the Pheonix*, provides more than just the title of the performance: on closer examination the poem inspired the concept of an evening of dancing and entertainment, including some of the musical choices: 'Major Malley's Reel', 'The Soldier's

current shows, as listed on their website, include such titles as *The Shepherd's Calendar: Merrymaking and Courtship through the Country Year*, *Music and Tales of the English Countryside* and *Christmas in Mellstock*. See <https://www.davetownsendmusic.com/the-mellstock-band/about-the-mellstock-band>

Joy' and 'The Fairy Dance' are all mentioned in the text. The other spoken-word passages are clearly linked to items alongside them in the programme, e.g. Hardy's poem *In The Nuptial Chamber* leading into the tune 'Haste To The Wedding', and the combination of poem and song which constitutes track 17. As with the CBTM example in the preceding paragraph, the overall piece possesses a dramatic unity and continuity that raises it significantly above the 'folk talk' discussed by Watts and Morrissey. It is this creative use of spoken word as a means of introducing and enhancing the musical elements of a performance that I try to emulate and develop in my own scripted performances.

To conclude, it appears that folk singers do use more spoken word in their performances than is seen in other genres, and their motivation for doing so is grounded in a perceived requirement to demonstrate authenticity. Whilst it appears that actual scriptwriting is unusual, a degree of improvisation is involved, and there are balances to be struck between the amount of time spent talking compared with singing. Some performers, such as Jonny Dyer, clearly take this aspect of their performance practice very seriously. To return to Sandra Kerr's comment – "...depending on whether it is done well or otherwise it can make or mar that performance" – and repeat my agreement. I reiterate my assertion that whether it makes or mars the performance depends on what is said, and how: used well, spoken word can greatly enhance a musical performance, but to be well done it requires thought, preparation and rehearsal. It is against this background that I have developed my own use of spoken word in performance concluding, like Dave Townsend, that a prepared script is the best way to ensure a performance in which the quality of the spoken word matches that of the musical content.

Chapter 3: Inventing the Radio Ballad

In this chapter I examine the origins of the radio ballad, from the inception of *The Ballad of John Axon*, in July 1957, to the broadcast of the programme in July 1958. However, most people seem never to have heard a radio ballad, and it is therefore necessary to explain what is meant by the term. In my experience, when radio ballads are mentioned in conversation, even amongst people who are familiar with songs such as ‘The Bonny Shoals of Herring’ (from *Singing the Fishing*) or ‘The Exile Song’ (from *Song of a Road*), the usual response is a question: what is a radio ballad? Providing a concise answer is not easy; as discussed in the Introduction to this commentary, there are plenty of descriptions, but I have been unable to find a straightforward definition. For example, *The Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* says:

Radio ballads Form or GENRE of musical DOCUMENTARY inspired in the UK by radio producer Charles Parker, and compiled by folk-singers Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, beginning in 1958 with *The Ballad of John Axon*. The introduction of high-quality, portable tape recorders to the BBC enabled Parker and his team to create new patterns of vocal sound, interlaced with sound effects (real, not studio-simulated) which served as an ‘impressionistic’ means of describing the lives and work of ordinary people. John Axon was a train driver, killed in a crash, and the nature of his life was re-created in ballad and recollection. *Singing the Fishing* (1960), taking for its theme the hard life of the North Sea fisherman, won the Italia Press award.⁵⁶

This is a description, rather than a definition and, typically, it ascribes the genre primarily to Charles Parker. Even as a description, it leaves a lot to be desired: ‘new patterns of vocal sound, interlaced with sound effects’ is one way of putting it, but no mention is made of the use of ‘actuality’ – recorded speech – or MacColl’s original songs. In order to properly address the

⁵⁶ James Watson and Anne Hill, *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies*, 8th Edition. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012

question posed above it is necessary to consider both the origins of the term, ‘radio ballad’ and the inception of the first of MacColl and Parker’s programmes: *The Ballad of John Axon*.

The definitive book about the Radio Ballads is *Set Into Song*, by Peter Cox⁵⁷, which describes how MacColl was commissioned by the BBC’s Charles Parker⁵⁸ to write *The Ballad of John Axon*. Parker was Senior Features Producer at BBC Radio Midlands, based in Birmingham; his career is well-documented, in *Set Into Song* and elsewhere. Precisely when Parker and MacColl met is not known; MacColl, in *Journeyman*, says:

I met Charles Parker for the first time in the mid-fifties. I was recording a talk on experimental theatre for the North American Service of the BBC and Charles was the producer. He complained of being overworked and said he was longing to get his teeth into something worthwhile.⁵⁹

‘Something worthwhile’, for both men, would turn out to be *The Ballad of John Axon*, for which Parker commissioned MacColl to write ‘a dramatic treatment’:

I have an idea for a radio ballad which is absolutely up your street . . . a dramatic treatment of the story of John Axon, the Stockport engine-driver recently awarded the George Cross posthumously for staying in the cab of a run-away goods train until it crashed and he was killed.⁶⁰

MacColl’s reply refers to him already having a “somewhat vague notion of writing a ballad-opera on the subject of railways”⁶¹. The catalyst was the advent of the portable tape recorder, enabling Parker and MacColl to record interviews and sound effects over a period of ten days in the Stockport area. Notably, Parker’s letter refers to ‘a radio ballad’: MacColl did not have

⁵⁷ Peter Cox, *Set Into Song: Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker, Peggy Seeger and the Radio Ballads*. Cambridge: Labatie Books, 2008.

⁵⁸ Parker is generally described as a radio producer, with reference being made to his wartime command of a submarine, but he was a History graduate (Queen’s College Cambridge); in the context of the Radio Ballads, Parker’s status as an historian is surely more important than his brief career as a submariner.

⁵⁹ MacColl, *Journeyman*, p301.

⁶⁰ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p1, quoting Parker’s letter to MacColl, dated 12th July 1957.

⁶¹ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p50.

to ask what he meant, so they must have had some shared understanding of the term and, possibly a concept. That said, Parker's phrase, 'a dramatic treatment', indicates something more conventional than the eventual result.⁶²

Tim Crook, in a 2014 article entitled "Norman Corwin's 'The Lonesome Train' (Live Broadcast) CBS 1944", says:

The concept of the 'radio ballad' was being talked about in the context of US radio at least a decade before the BBC's Charles Parker, in the Midland Region based in the City of Birmingham, was developing the genre of 'The Radio Ballad' with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger between 1958-1964 that would gain recognition at the prestigious Prix Italia convention in 1960. (Long 2004, pp131-52) The BBC Radio 4 documentary series *Radio Lives*, produced by Parker's daughter Sarah in 1993, confirmed that Parker had been influenced and inspired to develop the British dimension of radio ballad by listening to a disc of the Norman Corwin-directed *The Lonesome Train* brought over from America.⁶³

Crook's paragraph has been reproduced in full, including the in-text citation, for good reason. The underlying assertion is that the radio ballad concept was in existence well before MacColl and Parker began work on *John Axon*. In making this assertion, Crook relies on Paul Long's article, 'British radio and the politics of culture in post-war Britain: the work of Charles Parker', but Long makes no such assertion. Crook then moves on to Sarah Parker's reference to *The*

⁶² Ben Harker, in *Class Act*, mentions Parker's initial letter but ignores his use of the term 'radio ballad'; in his book, as in this passage from a subsequent article published in *Science & Society*, Harker suggests that the term came to be used later: "MacColl and Parker began to see their task as shaping this contemporary raw material (workers' speech, the sounds of industry) into a modern-day ballad; they began to refer to the program [The Ballad of John Axon] as a radio ballad..." See Ben Harker, "Class Composition: The Ballad of John Axon, Cultural Debate and the Late 1950s British Left" in *Science & Society* (Guildford Press Periodicals), Vol. 73, Issue 3, July 2009. It is evident, however, that Parker and MacColl were using the term 'radio ballad', with at least some shared understanding, prior to starting work on *John Axon*.

⁶³ Tim Crook, "Norman Corwin's 'The Lonesome Train' (Live Broadcast) CBS 1944" in *RadioDoc Review*, Volume 1, Issue 1, March 2014, p3.

Lonesome Train which, alongside the phrase ‘the British dimension of radio ballad’, appears to infer that *The Lonesome Train* was a radio ballad, which it was not, either in name or form.

Unlike *The Ballad of John Axon*, which was conceived as a radio programme and in which the Parker, as producer, was involved from the very beginning, *The Lonesome Train* was a musical composition, described by its creators as a ‘new folk cantata’⁶⁴. It was not intended for radio and Corwin had nothing to do with the inception or composition of the original work, only its eventual broadcast.⁶⁵ Based on the historical journey of the train carrying Abraham Lincoln’s coffin home for burial, *The Lonesome Train* is a musical work with a narrator, and there is no actuality – the recorded accounts of participants and witnesses – as indeed there could not be, given the date of the events recounted. Crook, however, seems to interpret *The Lonesome Train* as a radio ballad, and uses it as evidence that MacColl and Parker had appropriated a pre-existing genre; the paragraph quoted above continues:

...though it has already been explained that the notion of the radio ballad, to be later appropriated and self-proclaimed by the BBC’s Charles Parker, had been recognised as a specific genre in the musical drama of the radio medium.⁶⁶

There is no justification for the assertion that the radio ballad was recognised as a genre before 1957, either in Crook’s own work or in that of Paul Long. I have discovered no evidence that

⁶⁴ Crook, “Norman Corwin’s ‘The Lonesome Train’”, p10. *The Lonesome Train* suffers from accreditation issues. Radio programmes tend to be credited to their producer: *The Lonesome Train* is ascribed by Crook to Norman Corwin, rather than the composing partnership of Earl Robinson (musical score) and M. I. Lampell (libretto). In time, and by a similar process, the eight MacColl/Parker/Seeger programmes would become ‘Charles Parker’s Radio Ballads’, which resulted in a persisting resentment, judging by Peggy Seeger’s 2021 radio appearance: see Miles Warde (producer), *Brief Lives: Peggy Seeger on her husband Ewan MacColl*, BBC Radio 4, 7/9/2021.

⁶⁵ See E Barnouw, *Radio drama in action: 25 plays of a changing world*, New York & Toronto: Farrar & Rinehart Inc., 1945, quoted in Crook, “Norman Corwin’s ‘The Lonesome Train’”: “Lampell and Earl Robinson wrote *The Lonesome Train* in 1942. Warner Brothers bought it and then did nothing with it. The movie contract prevented radio performance until 1944, when Norman Corwin introduced it over the Columbia Broadcasting System.” Originally called *The Lincoln Cantata*, the piece was adapted for radio, re-titled (by Corwin) and broadcast as a live performance, immediately following which the entire production was moved to a recording studio where a second performance was recorded, for release as a gramophone record.

⁶⁶ Crook, “Norman Corwin’s ‘The Lonesome Train’”, p10

the term radio ballad was in use prior to MacColl and Parker's collaboration in 1957. That Parker and MacColl were influenced by *The Lonesome Train* is undoubtedly true, but it was an influence, not a model.

Whilst Long's article does not support the contentions made by Tim Crook, it does question (at least by implication) the definition of the radio ballad as a form of documentary:

[The] Radio Ballads were understood as serious art. In an article drawing attention to the decline in BBC listeners Tom Driberg placed *The Ballad of John Axon* alongside a production of Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* as broadcasts of 'artistic importance' and in need of encouragement (Driberg 1958b: 142) . . .⁶⁷

In terms of radio production, the distinction between documentary and art is rather elusive. Part V of Crook's *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice*⁶⁸ is entitled 'Constructing the radio drama/documentary feature'. The first chapter – 'The phantom distinction' – begins with three quotations appearing to justify the position that, in the radio world, documentary is seen as drama. Crook says: "...the documentary feature in radio is much less like news and current affairs than drama."⁶⁹; the feature, therefore, is a genre of its own, occupying ground between drama and documentary:

The feature documentary as radio drama strives to reconstruct reality or a view of reality. It seeks to offer a better understanding of something or somebody and it searches for the inside view. Its beauty is in its preoccupation with ordinary people and ordinary life⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Paul Long, "British radio and the politics of culture in post-war Britain: the work of Charles Parker" in *The Radio Journal – International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* . Volume 2 Number 3, 2004.

⁶⁸ Crook, *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 1999.

⁶⁹ Crook, *Radio Drama*, p231

⁷⁰ Crook, *Radio Drama*, p231

It will be remembered that Charles Parker's position at the BBC was Senior Features Editor, and Crook's insights explain why Parker wanted 'a dramatic treatment' of John Axon's story. This helps to define the radio ballad – as a kind of artistic radio feature – but it does not address the origin of 'radio ballad' as a term. As previously stated, despite extensive research I have found no evidence that the term 'radio ballad' was used by anyone prior to 1957 and, on that basis, it is my contention that the term originated with MacColl, Parker, or both. MacColl offered this explanation of the term to Giovanni Vacca, in 1987:

They were called Radio Ballads because they used the technique of ballad structure, not merely because they were narrative in form, but because they moved right into the heart of the action immediately, in the way that a ballad does, a traditional ballad; because they used the same metrical form as the ballad does, the certain kind of prosody...⁷¹

This confirms a link between the definitions of 'ballad' and 'radio ballad'. In 1955, not long before the inception of *The Ballad of John Axon*, MacEdward Leach published *The Ballad Book*, a collection of English and Scottish ballad texts, at the beginning of which he posed and answered the question, "What is a Ballad?"

The primary characteristics are as follows: (1) The ballad tells a story; (2) it tells its story in song, in simple melody; (3) it is folk story-song since it has the unmistakable qualities of treatment, of style, and of subject matter that come only from the folk culture.⁷²

It is clear from MacColl's interviews with Vacca, however, that he made a distinction between traditional ballads collected from oral tradition and printed broadside ballads⁷³, and his reference above to the 'traditional ballad' appears to originate, as Vacca suggests⁷⁴, with

⁷¹ Allan F. Moore and Giovanni Vacca, eds, *Legacies of Ewan MacColl: The Last Interview*, p47

⁷² MacEdward Leach, *The Ballad Book*, New York: A.S. Barnes & Co.; London: Thomas Yoseloff Ltd., 1955.

⁷³ For example, see Moore & Vacca, *Legacies of Ewan MacColl*, p89.

⁷⁴ Moore and Vacca, *Legacies of Ewan MacColl*, p179

Gordon Hall Gerould's definition in *The Ballad of Tradition*. Gerould's definition is similar, but adds one important factor, which I have underlined:

“A ballad is a folk-song that tells a story with stress on the crucial situation, tells it by letting the action unfold itself in event and speech, and tells it objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias.”⁷⁵

Based on the two definitions by Leach and Gerould, and the other discussions above, I offer this definition of the term ‘radio ballad’:

A ‘radio ballad’ is radio feature programme which (a) tells a story, without personal bias, (b) moves immediately to the heart of the action and lets the story unfold through songs, ‘actuality’ (the recorded speech of participants in, or witnesses to, the events being recounted) and sound effects, and in which (c) the songs, music and subject matter are characteristic of folk/traditional idioms.

By way of testing this definition, is *The Ballad of John Axon* a radio ballad? The discussions above suggest that *John Axon* is neither a documentary or a drama, but can be placed between the two and identified as a feature. The programme tells John Axon's story, without any personal bias⁷⁶, moving immediately into the action with Seeger's ‘fast solo banjo intro’ and the opening verse of MacColl's ‘Narrative Ballad’:

John Axon was a railwayman
To steam trains born and bred
He was an engine driver
At Edgeley Loco shed;
For forty years he followed
And served the iron way;
He lost his life upon the track

⁷⁵ Gordon Hall Gerould, *The Ballad of Tradition*. New York: Galaxy/Oxford University Press, 1957 (originally published 1932) p11.

⁷⁶ For further analysis on this point, see my “John Axon: Ewan MacColl's Tragic Hero” in *English Dance & Song*.

One February day.⁷⁷

The story is then allowed to unfold through MacColl's songs, actuality gathered from Axon's widow and workmates, and sound effects recorded by MacColl and Parker on the railways around Stockport. The songs and music are characteristic of the folk culture of Britain in the 1950s. Finally, the subject matter – a heroic engine driver sacrificing his life in an attempt to avoid a terrible train crash – offers unmistakable parallels with 'The Ballad of Casey Jones'⁷⁸, an American ballad popular in Britain in the 1950s: Peter Cox notes Parker's particular fascination with railway songs.⁷⁹

When Charles Parker wrote to Ewan MacColl in July 1957, the radio ballad was still a concept, and it appears that the two may have had differing ideas; according to MacColl:

Charles favoured something on the lines of *Lonesome Train*. . . He had heard it while working in the United States for the BBC and it had made a profound impression on him.⁸⁰

The Lonesome Train does not exhibit the combination of elements found in *The Ballad of John Axon*. If, as MacColl suggests, Parker was intending *John Axon* to resemble *The Lonesome Train*, it appears more likely that the eventual format of the programme was MacColl's design, but it is impossible now to know the detail of what was discussed between them before work started. In any event, MacColl soon realised that he was going to do something different:

⁷⁷ Production script, *The Ballad of John Axon*, BBC 1957, p2.

⁷⁸ Aside from the similarities between the Casey Jones and John Axon stories, it is notable that Pete Seeger, half-brother to Peggy, had released a version of 'The Ballad of Casey Jones' in 1956, featuring the 'fast banjo' sound that would begin *The Ballad of John Axon*. Seeger also played the 'fast banjo' in *The Lonesome Train*. Parker apparently insisted on the use of 'fast banjo' in *John Axon*, where it was performed by Peggy Seeger.

⁷⁹ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p26.

⁸⁰ MacColl, *Journeyman*, p302.

The more I listened [to the actuality] the more I became convinced that neither the standard format of the radio feature nor the elegiac framework of *Lonesome Train* could accommodate the wild stuff we had recorded.⁸¹

Peter Cox records that Parker was considering some use of ‘actuality’ at an early stage in the project but notes that he saw this as a relatively minor element.⁸² MacColl was responsible for selecting the actuality to be used (from some forty hours of recordings), a process he describes in *Journeyman*:

The selection of actuality is a task which requires a great deal of patience. You play the tapes over and over again, in the hope that some profound statement which you have overlooked in the first time round will suddenly reveal itself. The typed transcript is a useful guide to subject matter, but it is limited. Your choice must be based on additional factors, such as speed of utterance, rhythm, pitch and timbre of voice and the speaker’s effort pattern.⁸³

This account was written long after the events of 1957 and reflects on the selection process across all eight Radio Ballads, not just *John Axon*, but what follows shows how deeply impressive MacColl found the actuality recordings, the recorded speech of ordinary people talking about their work and lives, as his description continues:

By the tenth time you have listened to a forty-five-second passage of actuality, you begin to feel that the words have originated in your own mind and took form in your mouth with breath taken from your lungs. You have become familiar with every vowel and consonant, with every hesitant pause, every inflection, and – most important of all – you have discovered whether there is anything to be found beyond the words.⁸⁴

Listening to the actuality recordings, I suggest, activated MacColl’s craving for authenticity, noted in Chapter 2: a ‘dramatic treatment’, with actors reading lines, would not do justice to

⁸¹ MacColl, *Journeyman*, p302.

⁸² Cox, *Set Into Song*, pp50-51.

⁸³ MacColl, *Journeyman*, p307.

⁸⁴ MacColl, *Journeyman*, p307.

the actuality or the actuality-givers. When MacColl delivered his script, according to Peter Cox, Parker was taken by surprise:

He was expecting a normal script of 30-40 pages. What he got was nine pages of foolscap, with cue numbers for the voices and effects rather than the complete actuality. For a while he got cold feet, and no wonder. He had intended to use raw actuality, certainly, but this much? And some of Ewan's extracts were so short he worried whether they'd register on the listener's ear.⁸⁵

This represents the moment at which the concept of the radio ballad took definite form, shaped by Ewan MacColl as a creative response to Charles Parker's commission. In due course, as he acknowledges in *Journeyman*, MacColl realised that he needed help with the musical elements of the programme, and turned to Peggy Seeger, who became the musical arranger (and much more, according to MacColl) for *John Axon* and the seven subsequent programmes.⁸⁶

What makes *The Ballad of John Axon* different from other radio programmes? According to Peter Cox, "...the sense of novelty lies in the use of music and song helping to tell a story, and – when we stop to think about it – the lack of a spoken narration."⁸⁷ Narration in *John Axon* is provided by MacColl in his ballad-singer role. The opening verse (quoted earlier) is followed by a reading from an official letter written by the Inspector who investigated the crash – *John Axon* is the only one of the Radio Ballads to use readings - and an announcement about the programme itself, both read by BBC newsreader John Snagge. Thereafter, the programme proceeds to tell its story through a virtually seamless combination of actuality with songs, music and sound effects, until Snagge concludes it with another reading, this time from the letter confirming Axon's award of the George Cross, and finally the

⁸⁵ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p53.

⁸⁶ MacColl, *Journeyman*, p303.

⁸⁷ Peter Cox, *Set Into Song*, p63.

end credits.⁸⁸ With one brief and notable exception (to be discussed later), Snagge's is the only voice heard in any of the Radio Ballads which is neither actuality nor song. By contrast, Charles Chilton's 1961 *The Long Long Trail* – the programme which inspired Joan Littlewood's *Oh What A Lovely War!* – consists of narration (using two voices), with interjections by actors and interspersed with illustrative songs.⁸⁹ Beginning with *John Axon*, the trend in the Radio Ballads is away from any sort of 'external' voice other than those singing. By the time of *The Travelling People*, both the announcement and end credits have disappeared. Another feature of *John Axon* is an operatic device known as *recitative*, "[a] type of vocal writing, normally for a single voice, with the intent of mimicking dramatic speech in song,"⁹⁰ which MacColl uses for moments of high drama, such as this example, at the climax of the programme, when John Axon is alone on the footplate:

NARRATOR: All alone now
 Ron's gone
 On my own now...
 All the way,
 All the way.
 (Shouts) If I make it!
 How far's all the way?

After this, thirty-six lines of recitative follow Axon's imagined thoughts, as he faces his last few moments of life. Recitative features prominently in each of MacColl's radio ballad scripts but not, as will be seen, in any of the programmes made from 2006 on. Listening to *The Ballad of John Axon* and the other radio ballads for the first time, in the late 1990s, I found MacColl's

⁸⁸ Announcements are used at or near the beginning of the next four Radio Ballads – *Song of a Road*, *Singing the Fishing*, *The Big Hewer* and *The Body Blow* – but not the last three. End credit announcements were maintained for *Song of a Road* and *Singing the Fishing*, but omitted from *The Big Hewer*. A longer end credit announcement appears in *The Body Blow* and there is a brief one at the end of *The Fight Game*. The remaining Radio Ballads have no end credits.

⁸⁹ See *Archive on 4: The Long Long Trail*, available on BBC Sounds.

⁹⁰ Stanley Sadie (Ed.) and John Tyrrell (Exec. Ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Second Edition, Vol 21. London and New York: MacMillan Publishers Limited, 2001, p1.

use of recitative to be very effective and have endeavoured to emulate it in my own work. When revising Sid, between the first and second performances, recitative proved to be a useful way of adapting song material that had not worked, such as ‘Race to the Sea’.

The Ballad of John Axon was broadcast on 2nd July 1958, nearly a year after Parker’s inceptional letter to MacColl. Peter Cox sums up the reaction:

The journalists liked it, so did the railwaymen, so did Gladys Axon. What about the listening public? ...the audience reaction was mixed, with a sharp divide between enthusiasts and loathers, and little middle ground. [...] It’s no oversimplification to conclude that the audience split more or less down social fault lines.⁹¹

Charles Parker immediately started planning to make further programmes – he asked for MacColl to be contracted to write “another five radio ballads” eventually receiving permission for “one or two”⁹², but the radio ballad was off and running.

The Ballad of John Axon was the first radio ballad I heard when, in around 1997, I visited the Charles Parker Archive in Birmingham. On the same day I also listened to the fourth programme, *The Big Hewer*, and the last of the MacColl/Parker/Seeger collaborations, *The Travelling People*. The three programmes share as common features the linked use of songs, actuality and recitative and it is this combination which I seek to emulate in my own work, but there were noticeable developments in the manner of use of those common features, which will be explored in the next Chapter.

⁹¹ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p60.

⁹² Cox, *Set Into Song*, pp73-74.

Chapter 4: Developing the Radio Ballad, 1958-1963

Following the success of *The Ballad of John Axon*, MacColl, Parker and Seeger made a further seven programmes. This chapter examines the way in which those programmes developed the stylistic conventions of the radio ballad as well as a methodology. It is important to correct one misconception from the outset: the eight Radio Ballads are often referred to as though they are a series (for example, by Giovanni Vacca in *Legacies of Ewan MacColl*⁹³), but they were never conceived as such. Vacca claims that the Radio Ballads “are dedicated to the working class of Great Britain” before going on to say, rather confusingly, that,

This series of broadcasts, as a matter of fact, constitute a single block (the first four out of eight produced): in them work is portrayed on the basis of constant ideas that define it in a unified framework.⁹⁴

Whilst there are common themes between the programmes they are, in fact, unrelated to one another and certainly manifest no episodic sequence; as seen in the preceding chapter, when *The Ballad of John Axon* was planned there was no firm commitment to make any further programmes.

John Axon is, in fact, very different from the following programmes. John Axon was a railway engine driver, killed when his locomotive suffered brake failure and crashed into a stationary train at a station. The programme tells the story of Axon’s working life up to the day of the crash, and that of the crash itself; in other words, *John Axon* is based on an incident. By contrast, the last of the Radio Ballads, *The Travelling People*, takes a way of life as its story.

⁹³ Moore & Vacca, *Legacies of Ewan MacColl*, p174 et seq.

⁹⁴ Moore & Vacca, *Legacies of Ewan MacColl*, p180.

In between *John Axon* and *Travelling People*, Parker, MacColl and Seeger produced *Song of a Road*, about the building of the M1 motorway, *Singing the Fishing*, about fishermen and the decline of the herring fishing industry, *The Big Hewer*, about miners, *The Body Blow*, about people stricken with Polio, *On The Edge*, about teenagers, and *The Fight Game*, about boxers.

It is important to note that all the Radio Ballads dealt entirely with people and events that were current, or within recent memory. John Axon had been killed only a few months before work started on the first programme; someone listening to the programme in 2024 will hear it as an historical artefact about how railways were nearly seventy years ago, but in 1957 it described railwaymen and their trade in the present. *Song of a Road* described the building of the M1 motorway, the first road of its kind in Britain and an ongoing project at the time, giving it an immediacy which, again, is not as impactful when listening to the programme today. *Singing the Fishing* described the history of an industry in decline, but the mining industry surely was not when *The Big Hewer* was made. Of the eight original programmes, the ones dealing with teenagers, the M1 roadbuilders and the victims of polio are the least critically acclaimed, and Peter Cox records this observation from Peggy Seeger, specifically referring to *On The Edge*: “There’s no progression in the teenage state, just complaint. The other Radio Ballads had a chronology, or a person, or a profession.” Cox then adds his own comment, “Or ideally some combination of them working together: a community.”⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p137.

Song of a Road is a very different programme from *John Axon*, and one which highlights a philosophical uncertainty, rather than a technical one. According to Peter Cox, the choice of subject matter for the second programme was not straightforward:

Among several topics he [Parker] touted were The English Labourer and Whaling . . . But when he returned from an apparently fruitless tour of the Midlands in October with Ewan looking at the labouring possibility, his next subject was presented to him. Whatever misgivings he might have had were suppressed because the idea came from his boss, Denis Morris.⁹⁶

Cox describes in detail the problems and complexities which beset the *Song of a Road* project, but it is probably summed up best in this short passage, describing what happened when MacColl and Seeger presented their “rough tape-assembly” of actuality and songs:⁹⁷

. . . Charles was unhappy with the balance of the material. He felt that his remit from Morris was to write about the building of the M1 rather than concentrating on the workmen who built it – to Ewan it meant Charles wanted to tilt the balance crucially towards the work process, away from the working human.

The inevitable tension had several results: firstly, in Cox’s words, “Ewan had to write new songs dealing with some pretty mundane stuff.” Secondly, MacColl and Seeger demanded more editorial and creative control over future programmes. Thirdly, Parker, having had another bad experience when it came to editing the final programme, decided that the recording process would have to change. Finally, it was clear that the team had to find a better subject for the next programme. Peter Cox quotes the reviewer from *The Times*:

The idea which the authors are pursuing is fascinating; one hopes that they will next time hit upon a style which gives it the force of integrity⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Cox *Set Into Song*, p75.

⁹⁷ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p78.

⁹⁸ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p85.

It is notable that Parker, the historian, was drawn to subjects that now look decidedly historical, possibly because he realised that they would, in due course, be consigned to history. MacColl, on the other hand, chose in-the-present topics with political overtones – fishing, mining, travellers – but his main focus was on people.⁹⁹

By the time MacColl, Parker and Seeger came to the third radio ballad, *Singing the Fishing*, they had evolved a methodology.¹⁰⁰ MacColl identified each individual piece of actuality and sound effect, and these were assembled by Parker onto tape (for the actuality) and acetate discs (for sound effects). Seeger then gathered the singers and musicians in a recording studio, along with the tape players and record decks and the whole programme was recorded ‘live’ with the recorded elements being cued in just the same as the musicians. The tape operator for *Singing the Fishing*, Alan Ward, said, “I almost became a musician myself.”¹⁰¹ The new recording process was used for all the subsequent MacColl/Parker programmes. *Singing the Fishing* went on to earn, “. . . the best response of any Radio Ballad until matched by *Travelling People*,” and won the 1960 Prix Italia, a prize for documentary programmes.¹⁰² Having had success with the fishing community, MacColl chose the next topic: mining. In line with Peggy Seeger’s observation, mentioned earlier, that there needed to be “a chronology, or a person, or a profession”, MacColl hoped to discover a real person whose career would form the backbone of the story, like John Axon in the first programme, and Norfolk fishermen Sam

⁹⁹ For further and more detailed observations on MacColl’s focus on the human aspects of stories in songs, see Vacca’s discussion in Ch. 8 of *Legacies of Ewan MacColl*.

¹⁰⁰ For *John Axon*, everything – songs, musical interludes, actuality, sound effects – had been recorded and it fell to Charles Parker to ‘assemble’ the programme, quite literally. MacColl himself pays tribute to Parker’s rapidly developing skill as a tape editor and Peter Cox describes the process in some detail. A similar but refined process took place for *Song of a Road* when, at least, all the tape machines operated at the same speed.

¹⁰¹ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p93.

¹⁰² Cox, *Set Into Song*, p106.

Larner and Ronnie Balls in *Singing the Fishing*, but none materialised. Instead, in the various mining communities they visited in England and Wales, they found stories of a mythical miner:

As a boy, four five six year old, I remember my father talking about this legendary figure Temple – Temple, the big hewer. Whether he was real or purely legendary I never knew even to this day.¹⁰³

This legendary figure gave MacColl both the programme's title – *The Big Hewer* – and its narrative ballad, but it also brought him some criticism, given his communist credentials. For Dave Harker, another communist, *The Big Hewer*:

. . . signifies a desire to glorify the worker as a hero when the worker is doing a *shitty job*, and such a standpoint may be based either in soggy middle-class liberalism or in guilty Stalinism, for both bourgeois 'democracy' and Stalinist states need to *keep men down coal pits 'happy'*.¹⁰⁴

On this reading, the 'Big Hewer' as MacColl's version of the Stalinist worker-hero, just as John Axon is MacColl's Aristotelian tragic hero¹⁰⁵, and it is quite possible that MacColl himself saw it that way¹⁰⁶, but the programme remains free from personal bias, in line with Gerould's definition of a ballad (see Chapter 3).

By 1961 the methodology was well-established, but Parker faced a significant problem before more radio ballads could be made: the cost.¹⁰⁷ One solution was to produce smaller-scale, local programmes, for BBC Radio Midlands (where Parker was officially based). In

¹⁰³ Actuality transcribed from the opening of *The Big Hewer*, BBC Radio, 1960.

¹⁰⁴ Dave Harker, 'Marxists and Literature', *International Socialism*, No. 90, July/August 1976, p32 et seq, transcribed for ETOL by Eide O'Callaghan. See also Dave Harker's *Fakesong: The manufacture of British 'folksong', 1700 to the present day*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985.

¹⁰⁵ See Verrier, 'John Axon: Ewan MacColl's Tragic Hero' in *English Dance & Song*, Vol LXI/3. London: EFDSS, 1999.

¹⁰⁶ See Ben Harker, *Class Act*, p123, pp202-3. Harker records that MacColl rejoined the Communist Party in 1952 but became disillusioned with Soviet communism following the repression of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, after which he gravitated towards Maoism.

¹⁰⁷ See Cox, *Set Into Song*, p118. Cox estimates that each Radio Ballad was around three times more expensive to produce than the average for a BBC radio feature, and about ten times the average for BBC radio programmes in general; in addition, they were time-consuming and cutting into Parker's expected production rate.

April 1960. Parker commissioned writer Brian Vaughton to produce a script for a radio ballad on Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. Ian Campbell, a folk singer who also worked as an engraver in the Jewellery Quarter, was engaged to write and sing the songs. The resulting programme, *The Jewellery*, produced at a fraction of the cost of a radio ballad (and in a fraction of the time) is frequently described as one of the 'lost radio ballads', but Cox describes it as, "...more a feature programme with songs, not a Radio Ballad."¹⁰⁸ Parker then commissioned a second programme from Vaughton and Campbell, on the subject of canals. *Cry from the Cut* opens with a first-person narrative by Brian Vaughton, introducing each of the actuality-givers in a way in which none of the MacColl Radio Ballads had done.¹⁰⁹ Vaughton's received-pronunciation narrative in *Cry from the Cut* provides an immediate and striking contrast with the four Radio Ballads then in existence, and it is easy to see why this programme, like its predecessor, is categorized by Peter Cox as a 'radio-feature-with-songs'.

It is something of a surprise that the next MacColl script, *The Body Blow*, begins with a BBC announcer introducing the five polio sufferers upon whose actuality the programme depends, but the programme's real significance is its use of 'montage blocks', made up of several pieces of actuality from different speakers. MacColl describes one such montage block as "...19 passages of speech from four speakers, each passage being a comment or part of a comment on the sensation of returning consciousness. The overall effect was overwhelming...".¹¹⁰ The use of montage became a notable feature in the remaining three programmes, adding a new dimension to the process of selecting actuality: different actuality-

¹⁰⁸ Cox, *Set Into Song*, pp119-120.

¹⁰⁹ Whilst actuality-givers are identified in the scripts, with the exception of *The Body Blow* their names are not mentioned in the broadcasts.

¹¹⁰ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p123.

givers can be placed into what might be described as artificial dialogue. A simple and effective example of artificial dialogue comes from *The Travelling People*, where one actuality-giver complains about travellers – “They can’t read or write” – to which a traveller responds, “I’d love to read and write.”

On the Edge was planned and commissioned before *The Body Blow* but production was postponed and it became the sixth Radio Ballad, broadcast on 13th February 1963. The programme attracted significant criticism, mainly because of the mismatch between its subject matter (teenagers) and the ‘folky’ material which made up the musical element of the programme. MacColl, according to Peter Cox, recognised that there was a problem and, although he does not mention this in *Journeyman*, took action:

Stung by the comparative failure of *On the Edge* with the critics, in early 1963 Ewan MacColl collects a small group of people together to listen to each Radio Ballad again. He then steps back and writes a thorough critique. He concludes that only the first four can be called ‘ballads’ in the strict sense of the word; he decides that *The Body Blow* and *On the Edge* can best be described as documentary radio features with incidental music conceived in the folk idiom. To succeed, he decides a Radio Ballad needs ‘a carefully worked-out musical structure in which the actuality is set like the dialogue in a novel.’ He wants *The Fight Game* to have an almost continuous musical line as in the Fishing and Axon.¹¹¹

The Fight Game was, indeed, a more successful programme, possibly because of MacColl’s process of reflection but equally possibly because there was a boxing community with a shared history or, to use Peggy Seeger’s term, chronology. MacColl was happy with *The Fight Game*: “. . . this for him was a winner. In all the other Radio Ballads there had been something that hadn’t worked as anticipated; here there was nothing.”¹¹² Cox suggests that MacColl wrote

¹¹¹ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p143.

¹¹² Cox, *Set Into Song*, p153.

“some of his very best songs” for the programme but laments that “most are now forgotten, for few could easily be sung away from the boxing setting.”¹¹³ This comment is particularly telling, especially when *The Fight Game* is compared with the next (and last) programme: *The Travelling People*.

The Travelling People marked a return to safer ‘folk culture’ ground, focusing on the lives of people in the Traveller community, but it also led into an overtly political landscape. The programme is enormously powerful and, in many ways, less dated than its predecessors, because so many of the issues remain unchanged, sixty years on, such as the problem of education for Traveller children. The programme has achieved notoriety, not least because of its electrifying last moments. The actuality-giver (unidentified, as usual, in the broadcast) was a Birmingham councillor, Alderman Harry Watton¹¹⁴, recorded, it must be remembered, in 1963:

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Watton: | How far does it come in your mind before you say, “I have done everything I possibly can, and I will help the broad mass of these people. But there are some that I can do nothing with whatever.” Doesn’t the time arise in one’s mind that one has to say, all right, one has to exterminate the impossibles. I know all that leads to in one’s mind, Nazism, who is it next: the gypsies, the tinkers, the Jews, the coloured man. I don’t accept that really on these particular people . . . |
| Interviewer: | I don’t think . . . exterminate’s a terrible word! You can’t really mean that? |
| Watton: | Why not? |

¹¹³ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p153.

¹¹⁴ Watton is erroneously referred to in the script as ‘Watts’; in addition to his position as Alderman, Watton was also a Justice of the Peace. Immediately following the broadcast, a BBC lawyer wrote to Charles Parker, concerned that Watton had been quoted out of context; Parker assured the lawyer that this was not the case, and referred to much more material that was unused. In fact, Parker had three reels of taped interviews with Watton, the last of which is labelled ‘Emperor Watton’.

Peter Cox: “And you realise with a start that this is the only time [in the Radio Ballads] Charles Parker ever allowed his own voice to be heard.” In the production script for *The Travelling People* there is another minute or so of material after Alderman Watton’s “Why not?”, but when broadcast there was nothing: “Silence. No credits.”¹¹⁵ That deafening silence was to mark the end of the Radio Ballads, however. There is little doubt that the decision to stop making radio ballads had a political dimension, though Harker indicates that it was common knowledge before it was completed that *The Travelling People* would be the last programme. Whatever the underlying reason, the sheer cost of making the programme provided an excuse: the era of the MacColl Radio Ballads was over.¹¹⁶

Whilst the radio ballad, as such, was dormant, it was not forgotten, and there was a brief attempt to convert the genre to television. The idea was not new when Philip Donnellan began his version of *Singing the Fishing* in 1973: according to Peter Cox, Parker had considered turning *John Axon* into a film, but did not proceed with it. Donnellan himself attempted a television version of *On The Edge*, in 1963, but it was not well-received.¹¹⁷ Donnellan’s choices for his second attempt were *Singing the Fishing*, *The Big Hewer* and *The Fight Game*., and his starting position appears to have been that the original radio programmes were not political enough.¹¹⁸ In *The Fight Game* Donnellan uses the visual dimension to add a political dimension that is not present in MacColl’s radio programme:

Donnellan intersperses images in subliminal flashes. They include soldiers in Northern Ireland, bullfighting, a machine gun’s cartridge belt, a joust re-enactment, a poised trigger finger, a Northern Ireland crowd pelting the Army.

¹¹⁵ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p164.

¹¹⁶ Harker, *Class Act*, pp176-177; Cox, *Set Into Song*, p163.

¹¹⁷ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p260.

¹¹⁸ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p264.

None lasts for more than a second until the end of the fight, when we see longer cut-aways of wounded soldiers and civilians. The final credits run over a shot of a blazing building and the sound of bullets. Cleverly assembled, powerful and disturbing, the film inflamed many, not least the Ministry of Defence...¹¹⁹

Donnellan's last radio ballad conversion was *The Big Hewer* and its timing was inauspicious. Broadcast had to be delayed until the 1974 miners' strike was over, according to Peter Cox, "...lest it inflame the already inflamed, or allow viewers to judge the miners' case for themselves."¹²⁰ Cox's judgement is that Donnellan's TV radio ballads are successful "in television terms" but he quite correctly notes, "...the distracting effect of the all-powerful visual image..."¹²¹. In due course, when considering how to use visuality in addition to actuality, I found Cox's observations to be very astute.

Once again, it is important to remember that the eight radio ballads produced by Parker from MacColl's scripts were not conceived as a series. There is no underlying thematic philosophy and, I suggest, no overt political dialectic – MacColl saw the programmes as 'ballads' and followed Gerould's definition: no personal bias. In contrast to some of MacColl's earlier (and later) plays and songs, the Radio Ballads present a spectrum of life experience, thought and opinion and, I suggest, allow the listener to form their own opinion, political or otherwise, on what they have heard. Peter Cox says,

Those who criticised the Radio Ballads for their political stance were off-beam: looking back now, and especially in view of some of Ewan's political songs, the programmes are remarkable for how polemical they could have

¹¹⁹ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p265.

¹²⁰ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p265.

¹²¹ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p265-266.

been but weren't. But Ewan, despite his political stance, was wedded to the idea that their subjects' words should tell their own story...¹²²

I agree with Cox's evaluation, and have tried to emulate in my own work the neutral stance that, I suggest, underpins the radio ballad form: let the story speak for itself; let the audience make up its own mind. I argue that MacColl's most significant contribution through his radio ballad work was a persistent focus on authenticity and the experiences of people. *The Travelling People*, particularly, has been overshadowed by a supposed political controversy (see above) but its true significance, I argue, is because it is the programme which sounds (to the modern ear) most 'folky'; indeed, the Radio Ballads demonstrates how the sound of British folk music changed between 1957 and 1963.¹²³ One way to demonstrate this is to compare the instrumentation used in *John Axon* with that employed for *The Travelling People*. In 1958, the ensemble included mandolin and fiddle which, alongside the guitars, harmonica and banjo led to a transatlantic folk sound, but there was also a jazz element, with clarinet, trumpet, trombone and drums. 1961's *The Big Hewer* contains a chorus section which sounds remarkably like the chorus section of 'There is nothing like a Dame' from the 1949 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *South Pacific*. By 1963, the brass instruments and stage musical chorus are gone, and the accompaniment has far more in common with the music that British and Irish folk audiences are used to today, albeit with woodwind – clarinet, alto saxophone and oboe – lending a European, 'gypsy' feel at times.

Another approach is to note the relative success of the songs. Three of the songs from *The Travelling People* have been remarkably successful in the British and Irish folk repertoire: 'Moving-On Song', 'Freeborn Man' and 'Thirty-Foot Trailer'; a fourth song, 'Terror Time'

¹²² Cox, *Set Into Song*, p264.

¹²³ Verrier, 'Folk Club or Epic Theatre', p112.

occasionally surfaces in concerts and sessions. Aside from performances and recordings by MacColl and Seeger themselves, the songs from *The Body Blow*, *On The Edge* and *The Fight Game* have largely gone unnoticed. *Song of a Road* produced one popular addition to the folk repertoire in 'The Exile Song' (also known as 'Kiss the Children for me Mary'), whilst *The Big Hower*'s lasting song is not the eponymous narrative ballad, but a piece called 'Schooldays End'. Even *The Ballad of John Axon* has left little lasting impression on the folk repertoire. 'The Song of the Iron Road' is sometimes heard, but the most popular MacColl piece which is associated with the *John Axon* is 'The Manchester Rambler', which was recycled by MacColl, having originally been written in the 1930s, and cannot really be considered a Radio Ballad song. The same can be said of 'Hot Asphalt', from *Song of a Road*, a version of an already-popular Irish song, though some of MacColl's verses have now been assimilated into the traditional song. Nothing from any of the other six Radio Ballads approaches the success of the three *Travelling People* songs or 'The Shoals of Herring' from *Singing The Fishing*.

'The Shoals of Herring', written in 1960, is probably the most successful radio ballad song: a recent, brief search on the discogs website³⁶ reveals that the song has been recorded by well over fifty artists and groups. Peter Cox describes the song as ". . . one of the songs that went into the bloodstream of the folk repertoire (two years later it turned up in Ireland, wonderfully, as 'Shores of Erin').³⁸ Here is Ben Harker's summary of the process which resulted in 'The Shoals of Herring', a song which drew mostly upon recordings of the recollections of an old Norfolk fisherman, Sam Lerner:

MacColl listened carefully to recordings of the fisherman's speech, concentrating on his breathing, tone and phrasing. He borrowed and adapted a tune from the traditional English ballad, 'The Famous Flower of Serving Men'. He then tried out the carefully simulated authenticity by singing the song to Lerner. The fisherman responded to the uncanny experience of

hearing his own words sung in a familiar tune by claiming to have known the song all his life.³⁷

This summary of MacColl's songwriting method is corroborated by MacColl himself in *Journeyman*¹²⁴ and in his interviews with Giovanni Vacca, and by Peggy Seeger in *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook* which contains a chapter entitled 'Ewan MacColl: Songmaker'. Seeger says, "When we began work on the Radio-Ballads, we developed a new attitude towards songwriting altogether."¹²⁵ As will be seen in the next chapter, it was MacColl's radio ballad songwriting technique which set me on the path to developing my own live-performance pieces using radio ballad conventions.

¹²⁴ Ewan MacColl, *Journeyman*, p313.

¹²⁵ Peggy Seeger, *The Essential Ewan MacColl Songbook*, pp15 and 18.

Chapter 5: Reviving the Radio Ballad 2005-2020

In this chapter I will examine the evolution of the radio ballad genre after 1964. As Peter Cox points out, over forty years elapsed between the broadcast of the last MacColl/Parker programme – *The Travelling People* – and the inception of the 2006 Radio Ballads. The rebirth of the radio ballad, in the early 2000s, was due mainly to the persistence of radio producer (and folk singer) John Leonard. The BBC eventually commissioned eight new radio ballads from Leonard’s production company, Smooth Operations, though only six were actually made.¹²⁶ The 2006 Radio Ballads follow the conventions of the original programmes in many respects, though some clear differences will be identified later in this chapter. Leonard and his team then went on to make a further twelve radio ballads, beginning with *The Ballad of the Miner’s Strike*, in 2010. As with the original programmes, the 2006 Radio Ballads (and *Miner’s Strike*) are individual programmes with common features, involving the same stylistic conventions and methodology, but they should not be seen as a series. Thereafter, however, Leonard produced two thematic series of programmes: *The Ballads of the Games* (six programmes all broadcast in 2012) and *The Ballads of the Great War* (five programmes, broadcast at the rate of one a year from 2014 to 2018). The final example (at the time of writing) is RTE’s *The Ballad of the Stolwijk Rescue* (2020).

Peter Cox’s *Set Into Song* incorporates a chapter on the 2006 programmes, but was published before any of the others were broadcast. When I began my own work in the radio ballad style, I did so having heard all eight of MacColl’s programmes and some of the 2006

¹²⁶ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p269.

Radio Ballads, but none of the subsequent programmes, which show very clear differences from what had gone before. Developments in my own writing parallel some of those seen in the radio ballads from 2010 onwards, and this chapter therefore includes some examples of my work.

As Peter Cox points out, whilst the originals took months to make, with the production team working on one at a time, the much larger 2006 production team under producer John Leonard embarked upon all six at once. Cox includes the following tabulated analysis of the differences in production¹²⁷:

Comparators	1958-64	2004-6
Timescale	8 and 7 years	6 in 12 months
Timing	Sequential	Overlapped
Budget	Open-ended (sort of)	Set in advance
Makers	Inside BBC	Outside BBC
Actuality	Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger (pairs, mostly)	Vince Hunt, Sara Parker (singly)
Hours recorded for each	Average 60-70	Average 25-30
Songwriters	One	Many
Writers did interviews	Almost always	Almost never
Recording medium	15 min reel to reel	70 min DAT/Minidisc
Music arrangement	Peggy Seeger, integral	John Leonard, 'framing'

¹²⁷ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p270

Musicians and singers	Jazz and folk	Entirely folk
Sound mixing	Tape splicing	Computer-based

The topics for the six new programmes were chosen to resonate with, but not replicate, the original programmes; as Cox puts it, "...while there is some mapping onto the original subjects, it's hardly slavish."¹²⁸ According to Cox, there were originally to have been eight programmes, but two were dropped, though he does not record why. In the following table, some correlation between the original eight, and the proposed new eight programmes may be seen:

1957-1964 Radio Ballads	2006 Radio Ballads
Railways: The Ballad of John Axon	Steel: The Song of Steel
Roadbuilding: <i>Song of a Road</i>	Shipbuilding: The Ballad of the Big Ships
Fishing: Singing the Fishing	Foxhunting: The Horn of the Hunter
Mining: The Big Hewer	Northern Ireland: Thirty Years of Conflict
Boxing: The Fight Game	Football: untitled and dropped
Polio: The Body Blow	HIV/AIDS: The Enemy Within
Teenagers: <i>On the Edge</i>	Teenagers: untitled and dropped
Travellers: The Travelling People	Fairgrounds: Swings and Roundabouts

The original Radio Ballads, as discussed in Chapter 3, dealt with events happening in the present; with one exception, that is still the case with the 2006 programmes. The two industrial pieces, *The Song of Steel* and *The Ballad of the Big Ships* deal with industries in

¹²⁸ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p269.

decline, and *The Horn of the Hunter* can be characterised in the same way. *Swings and Roundabouts* and *The Enemy Within* are as in-the-present as their 1960s predecessors. *Thirty Years of Conflict*, however, represents a significant change: it is a thoroughly historical work, featuring songwriters and performers who were present and active during The Troubles in Northern Ireland. *Thirty Years of Conflict* covers a defined period, from the late 1960s until the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998: the recent past, in 2006. Musically, all six programmes are thoroughly grounded in the British (or, in the case of *Thirty Years of Conflict*, Irish) folk song idioms; unlike the original programmes in which MacColl wrote all the songs, a team was assembled under a ‘songwriter-in-chief’, John Tams. The 2006 Radio Ballads are worthy companions to the best of the MacColl programmes, producing some excellent songs (such as Julie Matthews’ ‘Crane Driver’, from *The Song of Steel* and Jez Lowe’s ‘The Miami’, from *Thirty Years of Conflict*) and some powerful testimony, and there is still a sense of political ‘edge’ to the subject matter, despite the programmes maintaining a neutral position. There is no attempt in any of the six programmes to discover or create a worker-hero, real or mythical. Secondly, there is a clear division between song and spoken word: as discussed earlier, MacColl’s programmes all feature an element of *recitative* but, according to Peter Cox,

One early decision Leonard and Tams made was not to try to emulate the musical complexity of the originals. Keep it simple, drop in the actuality between verses.¹²⁹

The six programmes made by Leonard and his team and broadcast in 2006 represent the second stage of development. Other than the shift in perspective in *Thirty Years of Conflict*, no single programme stands out in developmental terms, which is hardly surprising as the methodology

¹²⁹ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p275.

was laid out in advance. Do they represent an improvement on the MacColl Radio Ballads?

Peter Cox summarises some of the arguments:

From the originals' perspective much of the actuality is as spine-chillingly good as the originals. Some of the songs indeed match up to Ewan MacColl's, but to admirers of Ewan's songwriting you have to be a paragon to come close. They point to less variety of pace in the music. They go on to compare unfavourably the formulaic song-speech-song- speech, plus a simple instrumental line taken on behind the voices, with the complex tapestry of musical sound of their predecessors.¹³⁰

Cox himself argues that the 2006 programmes should be looked at 'in their own light' and he is, of course, right but I contend that the 2006 programmes, if anything, represent a backward step when compared with *The Travelling People*. The use of musical interludes and accompaniment is not just simplified in the 2006 programmes, it is less imaginative, as is the absence of recitative, and whilst the actuality is good, the use of it also sometimes lacks imagination: for example, there is little in the way of artificial dialogue as seen, for example, in *The Travelling People*.

In 2010, Leonard, Tams and their team made *The Ballad of the Miners' Strike* which, like *Thirty Years of Conflict*, deals with a specific historical period, in this case the 1984 miners' strike. *Miners' Strike* is the most political of all the radio ballads, and a clear departure from the established radio ballad format. The programme features the use of archival material – sound clips of prominent figures such as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and National Union of Miners leader Arthur Scargill – alongside actuality, which moves the piece closer to being a conventional radio documentary, albeit with songs. In the same vein, the team's next production, a series of programmes, *The Ballads of the Games*, are historical works, timed to

¹³⁰ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p283.

coincide with the staging of the Olympic Games in London in 2012. The six programmes may be considered as two groups of three. The first group is historical and broadly chronological, dealing with the origins of the Games and antiquity and in the modern era (*Olympia*) and then with the politically momentous events of 1936 (*Berlin*) and 1972 (*Munich*). The second group of three is thematically based: *Going for Gold* deals with the experiences of gold medallists, *Controversies* looks at particular events (as though 1936 and 1972 weren't controversial enough); the title of *The Marathon* speaks for itself. *The Ballads of the Games* demonstrate a significant departure from the radio ballad model; in addition to the use of archival recordings introduced in *The Ballad of the Miners' Strike*, the scripts now include what might be termed 'studio commentary': experts describing events in the past, because there is little or no 'actuality' available.

Following *The Ballads of the Games* John Leonard's production team turned its attention to the forthcoming one-hundredth anniversary of the First World War. Five programmes were made, each dealing with the events of one year during the conflict, to be released annually. The format of these programmes follows that established for the *Games* series, greatly assisted by the existence of the same recordings (held by the IWM Sound Archive) that had inspired Max Arthur's *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* which provided inspiration for my own songwriting. In the *Great War* radio ballads, these archival recordings were available as actuality long after most of those recorded had passed away. The *Great War* programmes are a series in a way in which none of the previous radio ballads, including the *Ballads of the Games*, really are, their unity demonstrated by the fact that each programme begins with a verse of an adaptation, by John Tams, of the song 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home'.

The most recent addition to the radio ballad canon came not from the BBC but from Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), in Ireland: *The Ballad of the Stolwijk Rescue*, written by folk singer Brían Mac Gloinn and broadcast for the first time on 20th December 2020. Both the publicity material and the programme itself directly acknowledge the influence of the Radio Ballads:

Inspired by the work of Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker, and set into song by Jerry Early, John Gallagher and myself, Brían Mac Gloinn, this is a modern radio ballad...¹³¹

The Ballad of the Stolwijk Rescue follows, generally, the format of the MacColl radio ballads. The principal difference is Mac Gloinn's spoken narration throughout the piece, announcing both his own identity and that of some of the participants. This personalized narration, as noted earlier, is not present in any of the BBC radio ballads apart from the two 'Birmingham radio ballads' – *The Jewellery* and *Cry from the Cut* – which are characterized by Peter Cox as feature programmes with songs. The programme relates to an event which took place eighty years earlier – the sole 'eye-witness' actuality-giver gives his age as eighty-seven – and there was no recorded archival material to draw upon, as there was for Leonard's team when they made the *Great War* series. Therefore, some of the participants announce not only themselves but their relationship to people involved in the rescue. Musically, the programme is more in common with the original Radio Ballads than those from 2006 onwards; certainly, it does not follow John Leonard's simplified 'actuality-verse-actuality-verse' formula, identified by Peter Cox. As in *John Axon*, the songs in *Stolwijk* combine to take the story forward. Some of the songs have a recitative-like quality, but 'The Ballad of the Stolwijk' – the equivalent of the 'Narrative

¹³¹ Brían Mac Gloinn and Eoin O'Kelly (producers), *The Lyric Feature: The Ballad of the Stolwijk Rescue* (full transcript). Dublin: RTÉ Lyric FM, 2020, pp1-2.

Ballad' which begins *John Axon* – does not appear until just over seven minutes into a forty-four-minute programme. *Stolwijk* is a worthy companion to the other radio ballads, but it has a character of its own.

I have attempted, in this and the preceding two chapters, to chart the development of the radio ballad from its inception, through the thirty-one examples of the genre, to illustrate the way in which it influences my own work. There may be other, more local examples of work in the style of radio ballads but they have not impacted directly upon my work and so fall outside the scope of this study. My own works prior to the present creative piece are, however relevant, especially as they show parallel development, and themselves influence my present work.¹³² In the early 2000s I was given a copy of Max Arthur's *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* and found myself fascinated by two accounts – those of Private S. C. Lang and Gunner Frederick Brown – which involved under-age recruits and the use of white feathers to shame them into joining the army⁷³. In due course I set about writing a song based on the two stories, and asked myself how Ewan MacColl would have approached it. I wrote a first verse closely

¹³² There are, of course, other developmental lines extending from the Radio Ballads and their originators. Derek Paget, writing about Verbatim Theatre, acknowledges Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker and Philip Donnellan as influences alongside Theatre Workshop and Joan Littlewood, and makes the following statement: "...it is clear that the importance of such forms as the 'radio ballads' of the 1950s . . . have been underestimated in past accounts of documentary theatre in the UK." See Derek Paget, "'Verbatim Theatre': Oral History and Documentary Techniques" in *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol 3, Iss 12 (November 1987), pp 317-336. Significantly, Paget continues by referring to the work not of Ewan MacColl the playwright, but of Charles Parker the producer, so it appears that the crucial component is the ability to record and emulate actuality, rather than the dramatic use of it – a legacy of the Radio Ballads, perhaps, but not of Ewan MacColl. *London Road* – Alecky Blythe (Book and Lyrics) and Adam Cork (Music and Lyrics) – a musical extension of the verbatim theatre concept, is, it might be argued, a cousin of the radio ballads. Alecky Blythe's description of Anna Deveare Smith's Verbatim Theatre technique (which, it must be stressed, was not used in *London Road*) contrasts quite starkly with the use of actuality in the radio ballads: "The technique involves going into a community of some sort and recording conversations with people, which are then edited to become the script of the play. However, the actors do not see the text. The edited recordings are played live to the actors through earphones during the rehearsal process, and onstage in performance. The actors listen to the audio and repeat what they hear. They copy not just the words but exactly the way in which they were first spoken. Every cough, every stutter and every hesitation is reproduced." See Blythe, Introduction to *London Road*, London: Nick Herne Books, 2011, p v-vi. This is precisely the opposite of MacColl's radio ballad concept, in which the actuality recordings feature instead of actors.

based on the opening of Private Lang's story, and then chose a traditional melody which appeared to fit the lyrics and experimented with variations until it seemed satisfactory. I then went back to the two accounts and wrote more verses to complete the story. Unlike MacColl, I was not able to go back to the actuality-givers to seek approval, but the song, 'White Feathers', was well-received by audiences.

In 2014, anticipating the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, I wanted to create a larger-scale work. It seemed logical to approach this larger work in a radio ballad style, the addition of spoken word lending additional detail and authenticity to the musical material. It was at this point that I conceived the idea of what I now call 'synthetic actuality'. Actuality, as discussed in Chapter 3, refers to the recorded speech of eyewitnesses to the events being recounted; MacColl listened to many hours of actuality for each of the Radio Ballads, selecting passages for inclusion and then editing them into a dramatically-structured script. Using my interpretation of MacColl's methods, I selected eye-witness passages from *Forgotten Voices* and the other sources, editing them (whilst striving to maintain their integrity and authenticity) to produce passages to be read in the style of actuality, by actors: synthetic actuality. The result of this work was a one-hour performance entitled *August 1914*⁷⁵, combining synthetic actuality (read by live rather than recorded actors) with traditional tunes, contemporary and original songs, selected poetry of the time and brief musical interludes based mostly on the melodies of the original songs. In 2018 I was asked to write a follow-up to *August 1914*, as a commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the end of the First World War. I used *August 1914* as the first act, focussing on the first few weeks of the war, and wrote a new second act encompassing its last few months. Following the example of Tommy Makem and Liam Clancy (see Chapter 2), I used poetry to add an extra dimension at key moments: *Eleventh Hour* begins with an excerpt from John McCrae's 'In Flanders Fields'⁸¹

and uses extracts from three other poems, together with Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum est'⁸², which is used in full, though interspersed with other spoken word. Poetry, as previously observed, is not a feature of radio ballads.

Eleventh Hour is an extension of *August 1914* and does not show much evolution from it. By contrast, *The Harwich Ship*, the creative element of my submission for my MA Creative Writing dissertation⁸³, represents more significant evolution. The piece tells the story of Christopher Jones and the 1620 'Pilgrim Fathers' voyage of the *Mayflower*; its development is detailed in the critical commentary which formed part of the submission. For the purposes of this study, the principal departure from my earlier works was the decision to replace actuality with a dialogue script involving three 'eyewitnesses', alongside original songs and some contemporary musical material. Where an event or story is within living memory, or actuality recordings exist, it is possible to use those recordings, or the recorded words. When dealing with earlier events, this becomes impossible, and other solutions must be found. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, MacColl simply did not have to confront this problem – all the original Radio Ballads were contemporary. In the absence of any actuality, I wrote narrative passages which were found, despite considerable editorial efforts, to be long and unengaging. My solution to this problem was to use three characters who had been part of the *Mayflower* story: Josian Jones (the wife of Christopher Jones, Master of the vessel), Robert Coppin (a member of the crew) and William Bradford (one of the 'pilgrims') and give them fictional dialogue, based upon what is known of Jones and the *Mayflower* and, importantly, upon Bradford's written account. This fictional dialogue functions in a similar way to my concept of synthetic actuality, but there is obviously a degree of artistic licence. I describe in Chapter 8 the process of selecting an eyewitness account and editing it to produce synthetic actuality. In the case of William Bradford's eyewitness account, I followed a similar process, selecting passages and

re-writing them as dialogue. The dialogue for Josian and Robert, however, whilst containing known facts, also contains a significant element of fiction.¹³³

When Ewan MacColl embarked upon *The Ballad of John Axon* in 1957, he had no clear idea of what the final programme would look like. In the six years following the production of *John Axon*, the radio ballad format took shape, culminating in *The Travelling People* but, more importantly, developing an approach to songwriting and the use of spoken word driven, I suggest, by the same quest for authenticity seen in *Uranium-235* (see Chapter 1) and MacColl's approach to folk song (see Chapter 2). The 2006 Radio Ballads simplified MacColl's format but retained his dedication to authenticity. The requirement to produce six programmes in a year, however, led to a formulaic approach. Moreover, from *Thirty Years of Conflict* onwards, the radio ballad became historically focused, leading to consequential changes such as the use of archival material, studio commentary and, with *Stolwijk Rescue* and its more localised, family heritage, a personal narrative element. These later changes were mirrored in my own work between 2014 and 2020. When I embarked upon *August 1914*, during the early months of 2014, my intention was to take MacColl's radio ballad methods and to create a 'live radio ballad', which I intended as what might be described as an immersive listening experience. After *August 1914*, each new project presented new challenges which necessitated evolution. The last link in the chain – *The Harwich Ship* – is a combination of music and spoken word but the spoken word is fictional dialogue, albeit based in fact, from start to finish, and therefore a very different piece to *August 1914*. The performed version of *The Harwich Ship* was certainly not an immersive listening experience in the way that *August 1914* was meant to be, but it is

¹³³ For example, they refer to a character of my own invention: Josephine the Carpenter's Mate.

still recognisable as an adaptation of the radio ballad form. Each of these pieces, like the Radio Ballads before them, constitutes an important influence on the creative processes which resulted in *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*, as will be seen in the four chapters of Part II.

Part II: Creative Processes

Chapter 6: The Life and Letters of Sidney Robert Verrier

At the outset of this project, my intention was to use my uncle's letters, held by the Imperial War Museum in London, as the source material for a creative piece telling his story. The starting point for an account of the creative process, therefore, is an understanding of the story. My Uncle Sid was born in 1923 to William and Daisy Verrier, who lived in Stoke Newington, a district in the north of London; they already had one son, Claude (born 1921) and went on to have two further children: Violet (1925) and my father, Leonard (1931). I was born in 1963, and for the first few years of my life visits to Stoke Newington took place about every two weeks. Sid was occasionally present, and I understood from a very early age that he was 'not well' and lived in a hospital a long way away. As I grew older, I learned that Sid's illness was 'because of the war' and that the hospital was at Epsom in Surrey, to the south of London. I also learned something of Sid's war service: he had served with the glider troops of the 6th Airborne Division, landing in Normandy in June 1944 and again in Germany in March 1945. I was told that Sid had been in an army unit which, in June 1944, under the command of Major John Howard, seized bridges to the east of the Normandy invasion area, and that my grandmother had a letter from Major Howard confirming this. My father and his siblings told me that, before the war, Sid had been a gifted athlete obsessed with physical fitness (unlike his elder brother who was severely asthmatic) and that he had been a keen practical joker. As a child in the 1960s, however, I found him odd and intimidating.

As a young teenager I was encouraged to read a collection of letters which Sid had written during his active service, which arrived in our house after the deaths of my grandparents. The letters were kept in a tin box along with his medals and some other memorabilia. I did look at the letters, but I did not really read them: the handwriting was not always easy to decipher, and the contents were for the most part quite mundane. I returned to them now and again, hoping to discover something 'exciting', but in 1980, following an advertisement in *The Daily Telegraph*, the letters were lent to the journalist and author Max Hastings, who was researching for his book, *Overlord*. I did not see the letters after that: when Hastings returned them, they were passed to my uncle Claude, who used them as evidence in an application to secure compensation for Sid's war-related disability, and then lodged them with the Imperial War Museum. In the meantime, Sid had been moved to a more local hospital, Claybury, and his visits home became more frequent, as did our visits to him. In 1983 my father had a serious health breakdown and my parents divorced. Working full-time at the age of nineteen, I went to live with my maternal grandparents and did not see my father at all for some three or four years. I did not see Sid again, though my father and other relations continued to visit him until his death in 1997, two weeks before the death of my father. Thereafter, Sid became an occasional topic of conversation within the family and snippets of new information emerged. For example, Claude discovered that Sid had not taken part in Major Howard's bridge assault but had been in the much larger second wave which arrived just after sunset on 6th June. For the most part, however, the story I knew at the outset of the project was that handed down as oral history.

At the outset of this project, Covid-19 restrictions meant that I could not visit the Imperial War Museum to see the letters, so I began by attempting to verify the family oral history. In addition to background reading, I was able to obtain the battalion war diaries for

Sid's unit, the 2nd Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, and (after a lengthy wait) Sid's army records. *The Devil's Own Luck* by Denis Edwards, a member of the same unit as Sid and someone who shared many of the same experiences, became an invaluable source of information. Other avenues proved to be less fruitful: despite considerable effort, I was unable to discover any medical or mental health records and so had to rely on the family oral history and what little could be gleaned elsewhere. Similarly, I was able to find no record of the compensation application which Claude made on Sid's behalf in the 1980s, even though I knew it had resulted in a hearing and been partially successful. Family research, mostly conducted via ancestry.co.uk, also yielded some useful information, especially when the letters were available and I was attempting to identify the people mentioned in them. The story gradually became more rounded. Some elements of the oral history were found to be incorrect; others could be neither proved nor disproved.

In September 1939, at the outbreak of the Second World War, Sid was sixteen and apparently working for an accountant, as a clerk¹. When the Local Defence Volunteers (later renamed The Home Guard) were raised in 1940, Sid volunteered alongside his father, a physically fit and active war veteran of forty-nine². Upon reaching eighteen years of age, in 1941, Sid 'attested' into the army, serving initially with the Young Soldiers battalion of the Suffolk Regiment, but he volunteered to join the newly formed airborne forces and was transferred to the 2nd Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, known as the 'Ox & Bucks', in April 1942. The airborne units spent the next two years training for their various roles which became increasingly specialised: the Ox & Bucks became a glider unit, delivering highly trained and skilled infantry to the battlefield in flimsy wooden gliders with an impressive array of specially designed equipment. In late 1942, Sid was injured in a

glider accident, suffering a hernia which required at least two surgical procedures and months of rehabilitation.

Having recovered from his injury, Sid rejoined the Ox & Bucks and went into action with them and the rest of 6th Airborne Division on D-Day, 6th June 1944. After the initial glider landing in Normandy and a few days of movement back and forth, 6th Airborne spent some ten weeks engaged in trench warfare reminiscent of the First World War. On 17th August, Sid and his comrades-in-arms began a ten-day fighting advance across Normandy, eventually reaching the banks of the River Seine, from where they were promptly returned home. 6th Airborne was then re-equipped ready to support the next phase of airborne operations in Holland, but the defeat of 1st Airborne at the battle of Arnhem meant that they were held in reserve. Just before Christmas 1944, the German army broke through the Allied lines in their final great offensive: the so-called Battle of the Bulge. 6th Airborne, called out of reserve, went by sea and road to fight in freezing conditions in Belgium, to be returned home just in time to re-equip yet again for a further airborne operation: *Varsity*, in March 1945.

In Normandy, the airborne forces started with a successful landing and then fought a long and difficult campaign. Operation *Varsity* – crossing the Rhine into the heart of Germany – was the complete opposite. Once they were on the ground and away from the landing zones, Sid and his colleagues had a relatively easy campaign, culminating in another dash to the coast (this time to meet an advancing Russian army), but the landing itself was very difficult. There were many casualties, which became a source of resentment for Sid and others over the ensuing months. Once again, following their successful advance to the coast, 6th Airborne were returned to their bases to re-equip. Their next expected mission was an airborne invasion of Japan but,

following the Japanese surrender, 6th Airborne went instead to Palestine for training, where they became embroiled in an unexpected and difficult police action, attempting to keep the peace between the Arabs and the Jews. Sid spent a year in Palestine, eventually returning home in September 1946, planning to return to a settled civilian life. It soon became evident that he had significant mental health issues and, instead of accountancy, marriage and a family, Sid became a long-term patient at Claybury Hospital, one of the old mental asylums, in Essex. Sid was transferred to Long Grove Hospital in Surrey for a considerable period before returning to Claybury, eventually entering a community care facility in the late 1980s: five years in the army – fifty in mental institutions. Sid's story is not unique, nor even uncommon - what sets him apart is the survival of his wartime letters, one hundred and fifty-three of them, covering the period from around April 1942, when he joined the Ox & Bucks, to September 1946, when he returned from Palestine³.

It is clear from those of Sid's letters which survive that there must have been many more. All those that remain are addressed to his parents, but in them he refers to correspondence with Claude, Lily (Claude's wife), Uncle Jack (Lily's father) and several others. There are lengthy gaps between some of the letters, implying that some were not kept or went missing. There is a deep-rooted family suspicion that when the letters were submitted to the Ministry of Defence as evidence that Sid had suffered mental injury during his war service, some of them 'disappeared'. Nevertheless, one hundred and fifty-three of them were preserved. The letters are, mostly, quite mundane in terms of their content: they were, after all, censored (usually by Sid's company commander, Major Rahm, or one of his immediate subordinates). They speak of routines, frustrations, of a deep and overwhelming concern for the safety of the family: Sid

was, for most of the war, in relatively safe locations while his family, in London, were subjected to nightly air raids, and nearly one-third of the letters include the words ‘Quiet Nights’ at some point, usually at the end. There are humorous episodes (often punctuated with a ‘HA! HA!’), tragedies (such as the death of an officer in an accident with a hand grenade) and, latterly, growing dissatisfaction with both the army and the government, but mostly the letters testify to an obsession with food (especially home-made cake), pen-nibs, family and, above all during those ten weeks in the trenches, cigarettes. The letters also show how the family responded with a seemingly endless supply of parcels including everything Sid needed, and especially cigarettes.

Sid was still a patient at Long Grove when his father, William, died in 1974. Daisy, Sid’s mother, died the following year, and the letters, still in their tin box, passed to my father. Sid lived on until 1997, still receiving regular parcels from his siblings, as though the war never ended: for him, and possibly even for them, perhaps it never did. My father died two weeks after Sid, to be followed by Claude in 2000. Violet died in 2012. The five remaining close relatives – Sid’s nephews, born between 1944 and 1971 – remember him to varying degrees, and Sid’s story is an occasional topic of conversation between us and our immediate families. Following one such conversation in 2019, I decided make Sid’s letters the focus of my forthcoming creative PhD research project.

Sid’s letters are presently owned by me, on behalf of the Verrier family, but held on a permanent basis by the Imperial War Museum (IWM). I was able to visit the IWM Research Room for the first time in June 2021, to photograph the letters, which are mounted on sheets of cartridge paper and bound into two large volumes: it is not possible to separate them for the

purposes of photography and the binding means that most of them do not naturally lie flat. The IWM Research Room does not permit the use of camera stands: the resulting images were not good, but they were sufficient for me to begin work. I did not originally intend to transcribe the letters – my idea was to read and record them, then use dictation software to transcribe them automatically, but it soon became apparent that transcription would be quicker and easier. I began transcribing the letters in July 2021. The process took two months, but by the end I had re-written every word of every letter and knew them very well. I made two further visits to the IWM to photograph pages which were illegible or had been missed, and to attempt to make sense of the dates and the order in which the letters appear in their bindings. Eventually, I was able to sequence the letters into the order in which I believe they were written, and prepared a concordance (to be found at the end of Appendix A). The sequencing process occasioned yet more research. Some of the letters are undated, a few others are misdated. In both cases it was necessary to look for evidence within the letters themselves that could be cross-referenced elsewhere. One example of this is Letter 22, which appears as the fifth letter in the first volume at the IWM, having been identified as being written in 1942. The letter is undated, indicating only “Tuesday, 8pm”, but it contains the following: “Did Dad and Junie see the ‘Salute The Soldier’ procession. Sorry to hear that Len couldn’t see it because of the crowds and I expect it upset him a bit. Still he will see it at the pictures.” On investigation, ‘Salute the Soldier’ was found to be a national fund-raising campaign which took place in March 1944.¹³⁴ The second piece of evidence is the line, “Many happy returns of the day, Len.” My father’s birthday was 30th March, which was a Thursday in 1944. On that basis, I have provisionally dated the letter to 28th March 1944.

¹³⁴ For further information, see <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1944-02-08/debates/3af33b18-d69e-4a8c-b504-a4f99c6787ff/SaluteTheSoldierCampaign>

In addition to the letters, the other contemporaneous source for the project was the ‘battalion war diary’. During both world wars it was a requirement for all British Army units to keep a ‘war diary’ recording significant events, movements, orders and operations. These documents, sometimes handwritten but mostly, during the Second World War, typed, are now held at the National Archives, in Kew. Sid’s unit, the 2nd Battalion, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, as a regular army formation, began its war diary within a few days of the outbreak of war. During the research phase of the project, I was able to obtain the war diaries for 1942 to 1946, encompassing the whole period of Sid’s war service, except for the period January-March 1945 which were destroyed by fire (in a glider) during Operation Varsity. The war diary enables Sid’s letters to be placed as well as dated: for example, the letters record a period of training at a seaside town during the summer of 1942, but no mention is made of the place name (this was clearly not allowed for security reasons) – the war diary shows that this was Ilfracombe, Devon. Secondly, the war diary corroborates and frequently adds detail to Sid’s accounts, for example, when he refers to the whole battalion marching back from Ilfracombe to their barracks in Bulford, and the aforementioned death of an officer in an accident involving a grenade.

Transcribing the letters was a great benefit: for a start, it brought me into closer contact with Sid’s thoughts and day-to-day life than I would have thought possible; secondly, and invaluable, it resulted in one searchable Word document containing all the letters. Once I had collated the letters with the war diary and the account of Denis Edwards in *The Devil’s Own Luck*, I was able to see clear episodes in Sid’s life, which enabled me to start planning the structure of the creative piece. At the same time, I began to realise that I had a great deal of

information about the five years of Sid's active service, but very little about the ensuing fifty years of his life, which was to prove challenging as the creative piece started to take shape.

Chapter 7: Creative Writing

In this chapter I shall endeavour to explain and justify the two straightforward creative writing elements of *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier* – the songs and the narrative spoken word and demonstrate how they advance the story. In total, I wrote twelve songs for *Sid*; each will be examined in more detail in this chapter, but they are listed here in the order in which they appear in the final script; the numbers in brackets indicate the number of verses written:

‘The Narrative Ballad’ (8): original lyrics set to a traditional ballad melody, ‘Arthur McBride’.

‘Sidney’s Garden’ (5): original lyrics set to an original melody.

‘Claybury/Palestine’ (2): original lyrics set to an original melody.

‘Quiet Nights’ (19): original lyrics set to an original melody.

‘Laughing Willie’ (8): original lyrics set to an original melody.

‘Race to the Sea’ (3): original lyrics set to a traditional song melody, ‘The Galway Races’.

‘Wish Me Luck’ (3): an adaptation of ‘Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye’¹³⁵.

‘Dig In’ (3): original lyrics set to an original melody.

‘Roll On’ (8): original lyrics set to an original melody.

‘The Soldier’ (1): my translation of the medieval French song ‘L’homme armé’¹³⁶.

‘Airborne Folding Bike’ (2): an adaptation of ‘My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock’¹³⁷.

¹³⁵Harry Clifford and Fred E. Cliffe, “With My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock”, 1937.

¹³⁶ Stanley Sadie (Ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 14, London: Macmillan, 2001, pp627-628.

¹³⁷ Phil Park and Harry Parr-Davies, ‘Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye’, 1939.

‘Whatever Happened’ (3): original lyrics set to an original melody.

The lyrics of these songs, with the exception of ‘Soldier Soldier’ (which is just a brief translation of the first two lines), appear at Appendix B.

Following the radio ballad conventions established in *The Ballad of John Axon* (discussed in Chapter 3 and, in more detail, in my 1999 article for *English Dance & Song*¹³⁸), the twelve songs are woven into the actuality and narration; none is performed in its entirety at any point. The songs fall broadly into two categories. Firstly, there are narrative songs which advance the story from different perspectives. The Narrative Ballad tells the story in the most straightforward way from the point of view of a third-person narrator. ‘Quiet Nights’ draws upon the content of Sid’s letters and gives the story from his point of view. ‘Sidney’s Garden’ expresses the narrative in a different order, linking my own memories with events in Sid’s past. ‘Laughing Willie’ expresses the story through a series of questions which are intended to represent the point of view of younger members of the family, aware of a problem but not fully comprehending the reasons for it. Finally, ‘Whatever Happened’ is the story of Sid’s mental decline, told from his imagined point of view. These five songs, then, are the ballads – meeting the definition advanced by MacEdward Leach (see Chapter 3) – weaving in and out of the performance, in the same way that four songs scaffold *The Ballad of John Axon*. The Narrative Ballad does this in a very structured way, appearing as it does at the beginning, mid-point and end of each of the two Acts. The others appear on a less regular basis: ‘Quiet Nights’ follows the chronology of the letters, whilst the other three ballads appear when they correlate with and advance the narrative. The remaining seven songs are incidental to the narrative, rather than

¹³⁸ Mick Verrier, “John Axon: Ewan MacColl’s Tragic Hero” in *English Dance & Song*. London: EFDSS, 1999

contributing to it. For example, ‘Race to the Sea’ appears three times in the performance, referencing three specific episodes drawn upon the War Diary.

The songs can also be considered by another criterion: some of them are suitable for performance in their own right – standalone songs, as I call them – in the same way that some of MacColl’s radio ballad songs (see Chapter 3), have been. ‘Quiet Nights’, ‘Sidney’s Garden’, ‘Laughing Willie’, ‘Dig In’, ‘Roll On (A Bloody Long Time)’, ‘Whatever Happened’ and the Narrative Ballad all lend themselves to standalone performance, whereas ‘Claybury/Palestine’, ‘Wish Me Luck’, ‘Race to the Sea’, ‘Airborne Folding Bike’ and ‘The Soldier’ do not.

The Narrative Ballad summarises the overall story and provides a regular framework for the script appearing, in the final version, at the beginning, middle and end of each act. Following MacColl’s method (see Chapter 3), I chose as a model the tradition song ‘Arthur McBride’¹³⁹, an Irish ballad which has a strong and interesting melody and contains a warning against the dangers of being recruited into the army:

But had we been such fools as to take your advance
It’s right bloody slender would be our poor chance,
For the queen wouldn’t scruple for to send us to France
Where we would be shot without warning.

The first line of the Narrative Ballad, “Come all ye good people, attend to me well,” emulates the first lines of many broadside ballads, such as “Good people pray attend, unto these lines I’ve penn’d” from ‘The Tragical Ballad’¹⁴⁰; there follows an overall summary of the story. The

¹³⁹ ROUD 2355

¹⁴⁰ ROUD V2183

last verse provides the ‘moral’ of the story, with the intervening verses advancing the narrative, chronologically. Originally there was to be a verse introducing each of the episodes which I had identified as giving an overall structure to the story (see the end of the preceding chapter), with a final ‘epilogue’ verse, resulting in seven verses as follows: Introduction; Normandy; Ardennes; Operation *Varsity*; Palestine; Aftermath (mental health); Epilogue. The Ardennes verse (3.1, see Appendix B) was omitted from both performances, and the Palestine verse (5) from the second performance. The final performance version incorporated a new third verse (3.2) and therefore comprises six verses, but there are in total eight which, if sung as a standalone piece, accurately and coherently tell Sid’s story; Appendix B shows the song in full.

‘Quiet Nights’, the longest song in the performance, begins every verse with “Dear Mum and Dad,” which is how Sid begins almost all the one hundred and fifty-three surviving letters; the title and repetitive last line derive from his habitual ‘signing-off’ phrase: “Cheerio, Best of Luck. Quiet Nights.”, a reference to the fact that he was in relative safety (in barracks in rural Wiltshire) for much of the war, whilst his family were in London, under the constant threat of air raids. ‘Quiet Nights’ is a clear example of how I tried to be as faithful as possible to the content of Sid’s letters and to replicate his use of language. For example, verse 7 is based on Letters 23 and 24 (see Appendix A), written on 1st and 2nd April 1944 respectively, when the battalion had just moved to a base at Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire. The letters include the following sentences:

. . . as you can see by the above [the address], everything has changed.
 This village isn’t to [sic] bad – not very bad and not very good
 I’m in the WVS canteen at the moment . . . a hotel converted into a canteen
 Our billets are empty houses and huts in the gardens.
 P.S. Get that bed “softer”. I’m sleeping on the floor tonight.

Verse 7 clearly shows how I attempted to include the contents of the letter, preserving the original language as much as possible whilst adhering to the metre and rhyme scheme of the song:

Dear Mum and Dad, well as you can see
 Everything's changed – now we're in Lincolnshire!
 It's not very bad, but it's not very good
 We sleep on the floor of a hut made of wood
 Now I'm off to the WVS for some food
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.

Whilst the letters are referenced in other songs, most obviously 'Roll On' (see below), 'Quiet Nights' is the song which most closely follows the structure and tone of the letters and voices Sid's own perspective and language. Appendix B sets out all nineteen verses in the order in which they appear in the final (post-performance) version of the script, cross-referencing them to the letters from which they take their material. Adherence to the letters is further evidenced by the fact that, with one exception, the song's verses follow the same chronological order: the exception is verse 1, based on letter 32, which appears very near the beginning of the performance¹⁴¹. Only one verse involves a significant degree of artistic license: Letter 81 describes Sid's plans for home leave in December 1944 and, judging by Letter 82 he was able to do all the things he planned, but I considered that it was necessary to convey the suddenness of the deployment to counter the Ardennes offensive in Belgium. Verse 11, therefore, makes it appear that Sid's Letter 81 plans were disrupted.

¹⁴¹ In the performed version there was a chronological discrepancy during the Palestine segment, but this was corrected for the final version of the script.

While ‘Quiet Nights’ closely reflects Sid’s voice and point of view, ‘Sidney’s Garden’ and ‘Laughing Willie’ represent different perspectives. ‘Sidney’s Garden’ was inspired by my own memories of Sid and my grandparents – “Grandad’s at the table, Grandma’s making tea / Sidney’s in his garden, that’s where he likes to be” – and of accounts from my late father about Sid’s life, such as finding him crawling around the house in the middle of the night, planting aniseed balls to distract enemy dog patrols (verse 4). Thus, based on my memories, the song portrays the post-war Sid in a family environment, acknowledging his mental illness, and verse 1 appears very early in the script, giving the piece its conceived epic structure not by beginning with D-Day, the publicly known part of the story, but with my own earliest, private memory.

One question which presented itself, very early in the project, was how to represent the mental health aspects of the story; as mentioned elsewhere, there was a paucity of concrete information on Sid’s mental health and treatment. I therefore had to rely on the actuality (from my brother and cousin) and on memories of past conversations. ‘Laughing Willie’ was based initially on the memories of my older cousins (who, obviously, had earlier recollections) and their ironic nickname for our grandfather. Demonstrating my technique of using questions as starting point, the song asks the question from their point of view (and mine): “Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?” It then proceeds as a series of rhetorical questions, mostly based on our later interpretation of events. The first pair of verses reference my grandfather’s experiences in the First World War; the second pair extends that theme to the Second World War and the post-war aftermath. Following the first performance, several people expressed the view that I had not sufficiently included my grandmother, Sid’s mother Daisy, into the story, and so I added a third pair of verses, beginning with the first line of ‘A Bicycle Made for Two’: “Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do.” These verses go on to reference my grandmother’s eternal optimism that Sid would one day recover. My friend, teacher and fellow folk singer Dr

Adrian May attended the second performance and suggested afterwards that a speech (towards the end of Act II) expressing my personal sense of guilt over my failure to ‘connect’ with Sid, would have been better expressed in song. As a result, I returned to ‘Laughing Willie’ and added two more verses, making a total of eight.

A fifth ballad, ‘Whatever Happened’, was the last to be written, meeting a need for additional song material in the second half of the piece, focusing again on the mental health aspects. The song was initially difficult to write because of a lack of information, in the absence of mental health records or any information about Sid’s fiancée, Jean. Lacking a verified narrative, I decided to exploit the absence of information and rely on memories of family conversations about Sid’s situation, and the various theories put forward by different relatives as to the cause of his mental health issues. The verses attempt to imagine the turmoil in Sid’s mind in the immediate post-war period when his relationship failed and his mental health deteriorated, whilst the last line of each verse, repeated as a refrain by the Chorus, asks, over and over: “Whatever happened to Jean?” Whilst there is clearly an element of fiction in “Whatever Happened”, the song demonstrates my dedication to authenticity wherever possible: the song’s first two lines, “Home from the Army, driving Mum barmy / Another big nuisance to feed” directly reference Sid’s own words in Letter 32:

Now then Mum, if you don’t worry, I won’t be worrying, so keep your chin up and get the house ready for another “big nuisance”. I may be home again soon, when this war is over.

The five ballads collectively tell Sid’s story from different perspectives whilst individually functioning as songs in their own right. The songs are by no means verbatim in their use of Sid’s letters or, indeed, the actuality gathered from my brother and cousin: they employ differing degrees of creative license, whilst displaying similarly different levels of my own

subjectivity. The Narrative Ballad is the most objective, chronological account of Sid's life, whilst 'Quiet Nights' conveys Sid's own account, as seen in the letters, with only a small degree of artistic license. 'Laughing Willie' conveys the subjective points of view of a younger generation looking on, with 'Sidney's Garden' perhaps the most personal and subjective song in the piece.

In Chapter 3, drawing upon my *English Dance & Song* article, I demonstrate how some of the songs in *The Ballad of John Axon* were inspired by events or situations mentioned in the actuality, such as 'The West Indian Fireman Calypso'. I describe these as 'incidental songs' not because they refer to specific events but because they are incidental to the actual narrative. The reference to the West Indian fireman does not advance John Axon's story at all, and certainly has no relevance to the narrative of the accident, but MacColl saw it as an opportunity to add a different musical aspect to his overall creative work. In the same way, I took inspiration from specific references in the source material to generate incidental songs. 'Dig In' was inspired by the descriptions of trench-digging by Denis Edwards in *The Devil's Own Luck*,¹⁴² and referencing the wartime poster exhortation to 'Dig for Victory'¹⁴³. The three verses were based on the War Diary records of the battalion's movements immediately after D-Day and employ a device common to army songs: repetitive lines referencing the chain of command, such as 'Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire'¹⁴⁴, working down through the Colonel, the Major and the Captain.

¹⁴² Denis Edwards, *The Devil's Own Luck*, p85 et seq.

¹⁴³ See [The Home Front in WW2, Growing and Cooking Rationed Food | Dig For Victory \(dig-for-victory.org.uk\)](http://dig-for-victory.org.uk)

¹⁴⁴ Roy Palmer, *Soldier's Songs of the Great War*, [Place: Publisher: Date] p

‘Claybury/Palestine’ consists of two verses which are unrelated to one another apart from the fact that they share a melody. The first verse introduces Claybury Hospital, the mental institution to which Sid was first admitted shortly after returning from Palestine. I wanted the verse to reflect the range of opinion about Claybury, found in the source material, whilst attempting to convey something of the hospital’s atmosphere. This verse was deliberately written in a very different style to the ballads, demonstrating my awareness that the overall performance needed variety. Whilst the Palestine verse relates to a completely different aspect of Sid’s story, the same melody was used to invoke the same sense of ambiguity, once again drawing upon the various source material.

‘Roll On’ developed from Letter 84, written during the Ardennes deployment:

There’s one thing that makes me laugh out here, that is the Belgian and French children singing “It’s a long way to Tipperary.” We’ve made up a new song, “Roll on a bloody long time”. Explains everything.

My research found no song including the words “Roll on a bloody long time”, so I took that line as the start of a chorus, using Sid’s Ardennes letters (83-103) as source material for the verses. The song appears in full at Appendix B, cross-referenced to the relevant letters.

‘Race to the Sea’ takes the battalion’s three race-to-the-sea episodes (1942, 1944 and 1945), as recounted both in Sid’s letters and the War Diary and sets them to the tune of an Irish song, ‘The Galway Races’: the idea for using this particular song as a model came from the date upon which Sid and his unit finally began to move in Normandy: 17th August – Galway Races Day – which is referenced in the original lyrics:

As I roved out through Galway Town, to seek for recreation
On the 17th of August...

The first verse of ‘Race to the Sea’ was based on a lengthy War Diary entry from August 1942, but the other verses are primarily made up of French and German placenames which proved to be quite difficult to sing. As a result, I considered dropping the song altogether, but eventually retained it to use in a recitative style, to break up what would otherwise have been lengthy passages of spoken word.

‘Wish Me Luck’ and ‘Airborne Folding Bike’ are adapted from contemporary popular songs. “Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye”, by Phil Park (lyrics) and Harry Parr-Davis (music) appeared in the 1939 film *Shipyard Sally*¹⁴⁵ and became very popular¹⁴⁶. Extracts of the original song, sung by Gracie Fields, are used during the D-Day sequence of the script, to set the scene for the adaptation, which appears in a minor key. Ideas for the first verse of the adaptation were drawn from the Pegasus Bridge segment of the 1960 film *The Longest Day*,¹⁴⁷ in which the glider troops are seen raising their legs (because it wasn’t uncommon for the floor of the glider to be ripped out on landing) and Sid’s letter of 6th June 1944 in which he quotes his father’s wartime philosophy: “What is to be will be.” The second verse of ‘Wish Me Luck’ heralds Operation *Varsity*, a mission which the airborne troops expected, rightly, to be very hazardous. The third verse appears during the mental health sequence, referring to the various treatments that Sid may have undergone. ‘Airborne Folding Bike’ is based on George Formby’s 1937 song ‘With My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock’¹⁴⁸: the idea came to me originally because

¹⁴⁵ Monty Banks (Director) and Robert Kane (Producer), *Shipyard Sally*, Twentieth Century Fox, 1939.

¹⁴⁶ Stephen C Shafer, *British Popular Films 1929-1939: The cinema of reassurance*. London: Routledge, 2014, p186

¹⁴⁷ Darryl F. Zanuck (Producer), *The Longest Day*. Twentieth Century Fox, 1962

¹⁴⁸ “With My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock” written by Harry Clifford (1877-1960) and Fred E. Cliffe (1886-1957)

the words ‘little airborne folding bike’ were a perfect fit for ‘little stick of Blackpool rock’ and the song was from the right period. It soon became apparent, however, that Formby had played his own part in the 6th Airborne’s campaign in Normandy¹⁴⁹ and so a sequence of actuality was added, including some extracts from the original song. Once again, I started with the original lyrics and wrote a paraphrase which, in this case, was to be sung to Formby’s musical arrangement but, as the script progressed, I decided that the song no longer made sense and most of it was omitted from the live performances. The texts of both adaptations are included at Appendix B alongside the original lyrics.

The translation of ‘L’Homme armé’ (‘The Armed Man’) came about because I wanted something musical to start the Act II, without repeating ‘Sid’s Slow March’, the piece which introduces Act I. ‘L’Homme armé’ is a medieval French song (possibly with English origins) which has been the inspiration for many works between the 15th and 21st centuries¹⁵⁰, and I decided, initially, to exploit the melody. I then began to consider whether the words could be adapted, because I also wanted to make more use of the Chorus in the second Act. In the original French, the words begin, “L’homme armé doibt on doubter” which translates literally to, “The armed man is to be feared”. I began by attempting to translate the whole verse into my own version but decided, from a creative point of view, that only a brief translation was required, to be interjected, occasionally, by the Chorus. I re-interpreted the first line so that it reads as a warning to rather than about soldiers: “Soldier! Soldier beware!”

¹⁴⁹ Sue Smart and Richard Bothway Howard, *Its Turned Out Nice Again! The George Formby Biography*. Ely: Melrose Books, 2011

¹⁵⁰ Stanley Sadie (Ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 14, London: Macmillan, 2001, pp627-628

Having explained the rationale behind each individual song, it is important to note how, in the context of the overall work, they interact with one another and with the spoken word elements. As in the radio ballads (see Chapters 1 and 2) and in my own previous works (Chapter 5), the songs in *Sid* are fragmented: only 'Roll On' appears as anything like a complete song and in most cases the others appear one verse at a time. There are also instances of verses being broken up into individual lines. Taking the first page of Act I as an example, 'Sid's Slow March' leads into the first verse of the Narrative Ballad, which is followed by four lines of narrative verse, a line of instrumental music, five more lines of narrative verse and then the first verse of 'Sidney's Garden'. This song fragmentation particularly characterizes *Sid* as a performance in the style of a radio ballad: a ballad opera or song cycle, such as *The Transports* (see Chapter 3) would present as a series of complete songs.

Whether performed in their fragmented state as part of the creative work, or on their own as complete pieces, the songs are powerful storytelling tools, but each one can only convey limited aspects of what is, unquestionably, a long and complex story. In MacColl's radio ballads (as seen in Chapters 1 and 2) there is no requirement for a narrator: the whole narrative is advanced by the songs and the actuality. For the present project, a considerable amount of information could not easily be delivered through the songs and simply was not available as actuality so, from the outset, I intended to have a Narrator. As mentioned above, during the writing process I decided to include my own input as narration, and this meant that two people could alternate between singing and narrating. However, as with *The Harwich Ship* (see Chapter 5), many of the early draft narrative passages were long and unengaging and I spent a considerable amount of time attempting to edit them. One day, listening to Dr Nora Williams lecturing on *Richard II*, I was reminded of Shakespeare's use of iambic pentameters, and I began to consider whether

this would result in a better economy of language. I then tried re-writing the narrative passages into verse; for example:

Prose Narration (May 2022)

EMILY: When I was about eight or nine, we went on holiday to France, somewhere in Normandy. My Dad insisted on taking us to a place called Pegasus Bridge, near Caen, because his Uncle Sid had apparently been involved in a famous battle there, on D-Day, in 1944.

Narrative Verse (March 2023):

EMILY: When I was eight or nine, we went to France,
Somewhere in Normandy. My Dad insisted
On taking us to Pegasus Bridge, near Caen
To where his Uncle Sid had been, on D-Day.

Prose Narration (May 2022):

MICK: My Dad completely idolised Sid, describing him as an athlete, a practical joker and very much the comedian of the family, but that was the teenaged Sid, before the war.

Narrative Verse (March 2023):

MICK: And Sidney was his idol: full of tricks
A gifted athlete, comedian, musician...
...before the war.

The iambic pentameter versions of these passages are more succinct than the prose passages, but still sound naturalistic¹⁵¹: the lines can be read without sounding like doggerel. By the time

¹⁵¹ For a more detailed discussion of the naturalistic qualities of iambic pentameters, I refer to Adam Neikerk's as-yet unpublished doctoral thesis *Your Very Own Ecstasy: A Life in Verse of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. University of Essex, 2022, Chapter 6.

of the first performance, all the narrative sections of the script had been re-written as iambic pentameters. The narration was divided between myself and my daughter, endeavouring to avoid either of us having to read and sing adjacent passages; my own personal recollections are included in my narrative passages, whilst Emily's narration tends to concentrate on the historical elements of the story. There are over two hundred lines of narrative verse in the final version of the script and these, I suggest, are far more economical in terms of time and space than the equivalent prose would have been. The narrative verse, however, is only a part of the spoken word component. In the next chapter, the other spoken word strands will be discussed, along with the new development: *visuality*.

Chapter 8: Actuality and Visuality

The use of spoken word in *Sid* builds upon the various influences discussed in Chapters 1-3 and upon conventions established in my own previous works (as outlined in Chapter 5). At the start of the writing process, I envisaged six distinct categories (or ‘strands’ as I now call them) of spoken word, fulfilling four functions within the script. One of these was the use of narrative prose which, as already discussed in the preceding chapter, subsequently became narrative verse. I identify and characterise the five strands as follows:

Sid’s letters – recorded extracts of an actor reading selected passages

Actuality – selected extracts from recordings of family members

Synthetic actuality – recordings of actors reading from selected, edited source material

The War Diary – selected, edited extracts from the battalion war diary, read by a live actor

Poetry – recordings of actors reading from selected, edited extracts from poems with relevance

These five strands collectively and severally perform four clear functions. Firstly, they add narrative detail to the songs, by introducing additional material that would otherwise be left out. For example, on the second page of Act I, my brother’s actuality introduces a description of Sid which I had found very difficult to convey in song. Secondly, the spoken word supports and authenticates the song material by providing corroborative evidence of events, feelings and, in the case of the letters, the use of language. In one of the ‘Quiet Nights’ examples quoted earlier, extracts from Letters 23 and 24 corroborate both the facts (such as sleeping on the floor in huts) and the language (“not very bad and not very good”). Thirdly, spoken word (hopefully) provides moments of humour to lighten the mood in what is, after all, a sombre tale. Finally, the use of spoken word enables an element of commentary, over and above the narrative, for

emphasis or where the audience is invited to draw inferences. I shall now consider each of the five strands in turn with reference to creative processes and decisions, beginning with the most important strand, and the overall inspiration for the whole project: Sid's letters.

At the beginning of this project, I had not seen Sid's letters for some forty years. I gained access to them in June 2021 and set about the process of transcription, which is described in Chapter 5. The process of selecting extracts to use began alongside transcription and continued throughout the writing, rehearsal and performance processes. As stated above, the various extracts were to have been recorded by an actor, and early versions of the script included those passages; this example is from a January 2022 draft, showing the anticipated use of extracts from Letter 32:

BALLAD-SINGER 1: Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye
 Cheerio, here I go, on my way

SID: Now then Mum, if you don't worry, I won't be
 worrying, so keep your chin up and get the house
 ready for another "big nuisance". I may be home
 again soon, when this war is over.

 All this business is very fascinating, marvellous
 organisations etc.

BALLAD-SINGER 1: As our glider descends from the sky . . .

Whilst I continued the process of selecting passages for inclusion, I had concluded that the letters would not be recorded. I also became convinced that some of the power of the letters resulted from their visual impact. For example, if the letters were heard, rather than seen, it would then become necessary to describe the changes in Sid's handwriting over the four years which they encompass and, potentially, to infer a reason for the change. However, if the letters were seen, the change would be apparent to the audience who could draw their own

conclusions. The letters thus passed from ‘actuality’ to ‘visuality’, which will be discussed later in this chapter, and this strand of spoken word was removed from the script (although the letters continued to be the primary inspiration).

Actuality, as seen in Part I, means the actual words of eye-witnesses - people with direct knowledge and recollection of the events forming the subject of the piece. I planned to include my own actuality contributions and hoped to obtain actuality from Sid’s other surviving nephews: my cousins Richard, Howard and David, and my brother James. In due course, information sheets, consent forms and questionnaires were distributed. James had his daughter interview him (using the questionnaire) and record his responses on her phone, whilst Richard initially wrote his responses; the others, having initially indicated that they would take part, did not respond. The questionnaire meant that the amount of actuality collected was small and required little selection and editing. There were quality issues with the recordings of James and I spent some time enhancing them. I selected various passages from Richard’s written responses and asked him to record them – the ensuing recordings were better than my brother’s, but still required some editing in order to remove numerous long pauses in the text¹⁵²; additionally, when recording, Richard re-worded some of his responses, so transcription was required. The recordings of Richard and James were then used to begin creating the soundtracks for use in the performance. In the absence of any actuality from Howard and David I decided that I would use my own input as narration (see below).

¹⁵² Richard, born in 1944, now suffers respiratory problems.

As has been noted earlier (see Chapter 5), the availability of recorded actuality is dependent upon the passage of time: if no eyewitnesses survive, then actuality in the sense that Parker and MacColl understood it is not possible. With this project, I knew from the outset that some actuality would have to be synthesized from written accounts, a process with which I was already both familiar and comfortable, following my work on *August 1914* and *Eleventh Hour*. I did consider, however, whether to use recordings that were available, because the material contained in Max Arthur's *Forgotten Voices of the Second World War* is derived from recorded interviews available in the Sound Archive of the IWM¹⁵³. Recordings exist of Denis Edwards, who served with D Company of the 2nd Ox and Bucks (Sid was in A Company), but Edwards says much more in his book *The Devil's Own Luck* and I was keen to use certain episodes that are in the book but not the IWM recording. Similarly, another soldier, Harry Clarke, was recorded by the IWM, but had provided a written account for Edwards which is, again published in *The Devil's Own Luck*. The recollections that would feature the mental health segments of the creative piece were mostly found in the book *A Hospital looks at itself: Essays from Claybury*,¹⁵⁴ for which source recordings are not available. I therefore made a series of creative decisions which dictated an overall policy on synthetic actuality. The first decision was that I would use the more extensive written accounts of Denis Edwards and Harry Clark and not their recordings: their actuality, therefore, would all be synthesized and read by actors. On that basis, all the non-family witness accounts would be introduced in the form of synthetic actuality and voiced by actors. The second decision was that, since neither Richard nor James would be appearing live in the performance, all the actuality, synthetic or otherwise, would be recorded¹⁵⁵. One benefit of this second decision was that the voice actors would be able to

¹⁵³ For further information, see [Sound Archive | Imperial War Museums \(iwm.org.uk\)](https://www.iwm.org.uk/sound-archive)

¹⁵⁴ Elisabeth Shoenberg (ed.) *A Hospital looks at itself: Essays from Claybury*. Plymouth: Bruno Cassirer (Publishers) Ltd, 1972.

¹⁵⁵ In *August 1914* and my other pieces, all synthetic actuality was read live by actors.

rehearse and record individually; this saved a great deal of rehearsal time but, as will be seen in Chapter 6, had implications in terms of technical processes. The process of creating synthetic actuality from written sources involves selecting material – essentially the rationale is the same as in the selection of recorded actuality, discussed in earlier chapters – and transcribing it into the script, but there is a need to edit for reasons of economy and audience engagement. For example, one passage selected from *The Devil's Own Luck* consisted of 317 words. One entire paragraph – sixty-one words – was omitted altogether; the last paragraph was edited as follows:

As best we could, by sign language, we pointed out the man who we believed had been a member of the gang who had stolen our food. The [officer] ~~Russian~~ seemed to understand what he [we] meant; he ~~nodded, then turned and~~ strode across to the suspect ~~that we had indicated~~ [and] [we] assumed that he was going to question him, ~~or bring him over to us for positive identification.~~ Instead, he drew a [his] revolver [,] ~~from its holster,~~ put the barrel against the man's mouth and fired, ~~blowing off half his head.~~ We were horrified [,] ~~as he returned to us, grinning from ear to ear, and indicating that, while the man may have stolen our food, he would certainly not be eating any more of it!~~¹⁵⁶

The final version of this segment, as performed at the Lakeside Theatre, consists of 139 words and the recorded extract lasts around 45 seconds. Actuality for the Palestine segment of Act II was synthesised from two main sources – Professor Alon Kadish's *The British Army in Palestine*,¹⁵⁷ and Major General Dare Wilson's *With 6th Airborne Division in Palestine*.¹⁵⁸

The decision to have extracts from the War Diary read live during the performance arose from a perceived need to vary the listening and viewing experience for the audience. The

¹⁵⁶ Denis Edwards, *The Devil's Own Luck*, pp227-229, edited and presented as *Sid*, Lakeside Theatre script, Actuality 13, extract 7.

¹⁵⁷ Alon Kadish, *The British Army in Palestine and the 1948 War: Containment, Withdrawal and Evacuation*. London: Routledge, 2019.

¹⁵⁸ Dare Wilson, *With 6th Airborne Division in Palestine 1945-1948*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 1949, 1984, 2008.

War Diary extracts formed some of the longest spoken word elements and, in some cases, required further editing between the first and second performances, and yet more editing between the second performance and the final version of the script submitted with this thesis. One difficulty with having the War Diary as a live voice was that its contribution basically ended with Sid's active service. Whilst I was considering how, creatively, to deal with this issue, I was also searching for a way to present information about the mental health treatments which were in use during Sid's time in hospital. I gathered information from a range of sources, including Elizabeth Shoenberg's *A Hospital looks at itself*, Mary Boyle's *Schizophrenia: a scientific delusion*,¹⁵⁹ Russell Barker's *Institutional Neurosis*,¹⁶⁰ Adam Jessel's documentary, *Mental: A History of the Madhouse*,¹⁶¹ and considered using them to synthesize more actuality. Shoenberg's book had already yielded five synthetic actuality-givers: Ruth Silcock, David Craggs and the un-named Claybury Patients 1, 2 and 3, whilst *Mental* provided the composite Long Grove Patient, and I wanted the audience to hear about the treatments from a more authoritative point of view. The answer, once again, presented itself during a lecture, this time on Greek theatre, delivered by Dr Patricia Gillies, which shaped my concept of the stage presentation of the performance: Sid would be performed by three live performers – the two Narrator/Ballad-Singers and a composite War Diary/Psychiatrist – with a Chorus of musicians and singers, with all the actuality being presented as recorded sound clips. The same actor would play both the War Diary and 'The Psychiatrist', wearing different hats (instead of masks) so that the audience would know the difference: as The Psychiatrist, this actor would present the amalgamated mental health 'evidence'. All the passages selected and written for the War Diary/Psychiatrist meet at least one of the four requirements set out above, dovetailing with

¹⁵⁹ Mary Boyle, *Schizophrenia: a scientific delusion?* New York: Routledge, 1990.

¹⁶⁰ Russell Barker, *Institutional Neurosis*, 2nd Edition. Bristol: John Wright & Sons, 1966.

¹⁶¹ Jessel, Adam (producer), *Mental: A History of the Madhouse*, BBC Four, 2010, accessed via <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oswUssXzFIY>

the songs and actuality. This example introduces the audience to ICT – Insulin Coma Treatment – with which most people are not familiar:

PSYCHIATRIST: According to Dr Sakel, Insulin Coma Treatment offers the greatest likelihood of relief and cure for some patients whose illness is of a deep-seated nature.

ACTUALITY 23: LONG GROVE PATIENT: I used to have insulin in my arm. It wasn't very nice to have. I knew some patients to go right into a coma. It would burn up all the sugar in their body and drop their blood sugar level and they would go into a coma. That was supposed to be beneficial.

MICK: Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye
Cheerio as I go . . . who knows where
Who knows what they're doing, or why?
Who knows whether they really care?

PSYCHATRIST: In this condition, the mind has the chance to be completely relaxed, and the functions of the brain have the opportunity of, as it were, setting out on a new path when consciousness returns.

If consciousness returns

ACTUALITY 24: LONG GROVE PATIENT: It made me bad. It gave me a fit. They said we can't give you any more insulin because it's affecting you. Forty-four people died from it.

The line “If consciousness returns” was interjected by Susan Fairhall-Smith, one of the actuality actors, during the read-through (see Chapter 9) and kept.

The final spoken word element in the piece is the use of poetry, deriving principally from the influences of Makem, Clancy and the Mellstock Band, discussed in Chapter 2. I found little in the way of poetry that would enhance the war service segments of the creative piece, but *A Hospital Looks at Itself* included several poems by psychiatric social worker, Ruth Silcock, whose description of Claybury Hospital (in the same book) I had already decided to use. From the outset, presenting the mental health aspect of the story had been a challenge;

Silcock's poetry seemed to provide a different perspective and insight, and I selected two poems which were recorded by the same actor (herself a poet) who voiced Silcock's actuality.

The poems were then situated in the script to dovetail with the other spoken word; for example:

PSYCHIATRIST: [...] The word 'lunatic', of course, gave rise to the slang term 'loony', and the large psychiatric hospitals soon became known as 'loony-bins'.

ACTUALITY 21: RUTH SILCOCK:
What is a loony-bin?
[poem continues]

The use of poetry fulfils, I suggest, an important function within the script, offering a change in tone and perspective on an aspect of the story that is difficult to depict.

The examples given above demonstrate how I used each of the spoken word strands to enhance the overall performance, but it is important to consider them in conjunction with one another and with the musical elements. We have already seen (in Chapter 5) how the songs and actuality dovetail together. On occasion, the various spoken word items dovetail with each other to create fictitious conversations, as seen in radio ballads such as *The Travelling People* (see Chapter 3). An example of this is seen in Act II (Actuality 13) in which Denis Edwards and Tod Sweeney 'discuss' their first encounter with Russian soldiers. That exchange is itself dovetailed with the two verses of 'Airborne Folding Bike' and ends with narrative verse that advances the story into the next phase, demonstrating the overall creative concept in microcosm.

Analogous to the use of actuality, *Sid* presents over two hundred images as a backdrop to the performance of songs and spoken word; the decision to use a visual element was the

most significant departure from the original concept. The use of images goes beyond mere illustration: as mentioned earlier, the letters possess visual qualities that go beyond their contents; for example, there is a striking contrast between Sid's handwriting in the earliest letters from 1942 and that appearing in those written in Palestine in 1946, which can clearly be seen during the performance (indeed, audience members commented upon the change). If the letters had been recorded and used as spoken word, as I originally intended, the object would have been to accomplish three of the functions identified earlier: to add narrative detail to the songs by introducing additional material that might otherwise be left out, to support and authenticate the song material by providing corroborative evidence and to make an emotional impact. These objectives are met, instead, by the images; for example, the first appearance of 'Quiet Nights' is based upon Letter 32, introduced with four lines of narrative verse:

EMILY: Sid's last letter to his parents prior to combat,
Was written on the afternoon of D Day.
The fragile wooden gliders were all loaded
And fragile anxious men awaited nightfall.

MICK: ['Quiet Nights']
Dear Mum and Dad, well at last I can write
We've been very busy preparing to fight
It's no Billy Beano; this time it's for real
Tell Dad, very soon I will know how it feels
We are off to the Second Front, into the field:
Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.

This sequence is performed with an image of an excerpt from Letter 32 in the background, confirming the date and authenticating the language of the song: "It's a real do. No Billy Beano." This use of imagery is an innovation designed to address an issue specific to the source material, but it constitutes an original contribution to a genre which fundamentally responds to actuality, enabling it to respond to other stimuli.

Once the decision had been made to use images of the letters, it made sense to use other images; for example, photographs of Sid at various stages of his life would highlight his physical and mental decline. Similarly, photographs of people and places would lend authenticity to references in the songs and spoken word. The discovery and selection of photographs became an extensive and time-consuming task: aside from the letters, sources of visuality included the family photograph collection and various websites, but in some cases I created visuality in the form of maps and a family tree. As changes were made to the script, consequential alterations had to be made in the sequencing of the images, so that the visual element became a significant component of the performance, rather than just a backdrop of images. In the same way that MacColl and Parker coined the term ‘actuality’ for the eye-witness testimony that formed the spoken word component of their radio ballads, I now propose the term ‘visuality’ for the carefully selected images which are integral to *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*.

Chapter 9: Rehearsal, Performance and Evaluation

This chapter explains how the draft script for *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*, consisting of songs, spoken word and an assortment of images – photographs, maps and cropped portions of letters for which I had not determined a method of presentation – became a live performance. I begin with the technical processes, which began with some experiments towards the end of 2022 but did not take proper shape until the rehearsals were underway, alongside an account of the rehearsal process which began in January 2023¹⁶² leading up to the first performance, in March 2023. I then discuss the changes which took place following the first performance, leading up to the second performance at the Lakeside Theatre (April 2023), the performance itself and the changes made in response to feedback following it. I briefly outline the musical compositions and arrangements which were, mostly, written during the rehearsal process, when the composition of the instrumental group (‘the Sid Band’) was known. This chapter also discusses the development of a script format which clearly incorporated the visuality and technical processes and, finally, describes how that script format facilitated a subsequent piece of work named *58 Ships*, demonstrating that my interpretation of Ewan MacColl’s radio ballad work provides a viable and reliable methodology for selecting and writing material for live performance.

By the end of 2022, it was clear that there would be two technical requirements for the performances: firstly, various recorded extracts, consisting mostly of spoken word, would need to be played; secondly, there would have to be some sort of visual presentation. My intention

¹⁶² I created a WhatsApp group, including all the people I expected to be involved in the production and performance processes, on 23rd January 2023.

with the recorded extracts was to have them organised into a numbered playlist and to activate them manually from a laptop, CD or minidisc player¹⁶³. Whilst I had a plan for the recordings, therefore, I was not sure how the visual aspect might be accomplished. Early ideas had included the use of a printed programme for the audience, including examples of the letters, or putting up static displays around the stage to be seen before, after and possibly during the performance. However, the decision to use images as a component of the actual performance (discussed in the previous chapter) meant that I began to consider methods of projecting images. Amongst various presentation options I began to consider Microsoft PowerPoint, mainly because I am familiar with it and its capabilities. In particular, I was hopeful that PowerPoint would deliver both the visual component and the recordings.

When the rehearsal process began, I convened the cast for a read-through which, in the event, took place over two evenings because of availability. A rough and incomplete draft script served to enable participants to become familiar with the production and to enable casting decisions to be made. The cast included singers, musicians and actors, some of whom would take part in the live performance, whilst others would record their contributions; some of the live performers also recorded as voice actors. Most of those taking part were over the age of fifty, with several in their seventies, and it was immediately apparent that, especially among the older participants, people felt personally connected with the story, because of relatives or acquaintances who had returned, damaged, from war. For example, one actor insistently claimed the role of the Long Grove Patient saying, “It reminds me so much of my dad.” I was able to evaluate during the read-through process whether particular lines were having their

¹⁶³ Minidisc is considered to be ‘old’ technology but offers several useful facilities, including portability and an easy way to reorder tracks.

intended effect; one or two edits were suggested: for example, in the mental health treatments segment of Act II Sue Fairhall-Smith, one of the voice actors, interjected the ‘If consciousness returns’ line mentioned in the previous chapter. The voice actors were asked to rehearse and record their contributions at home which, for simplicity’s sake, was mostly accomplished using the voice message function in WhatsApp. Thereafter, only those taking part in the live performances were required to rehearse collectively and these rehearsals were mostly focused on the musical items. Aside from the two Narrator/Ballad Singer roles and the War Diary/Psychiatrist, the performance group consisted of the band (recorder, flute, concertina, violin and cello) and a Chorus of six singers. Some rehearsals involved the whole group whilst others involved the musicians only.

During February 2023, with rehearsals taking place, recordings began to be received from the voice actors and re-recorded into Audacity, a digital audio editor and recording application¹⁶⁴. Most of the recordings had been read by the actors from script excerpts and it was not, therefore, necessary to edit them other than for sound quality. My brother had recorded his answers to my written questions, and it was necessary to transcribe and edit them in the manner described by Ewan MacColl (see Chapter 3). Richard Verrier sent his answers by email, so I prepared edited extracts for him to record; he then recorded the extracts differently and I had to transcribe and edit his contribution. A German friend who had agreed to read synthetic actuality extracts based on Herbert Holewa’s account in *Forgotten Voices of the Second World War* was taken ill and could not participate, so I had to access Holewa’s original

¹⁶⁴ For further information, go to <https://www.audacityteam.org>

recordings¹⁶⁵ at the IWM and edit extracts from them¹⁶⁶. The actuality was then organised into sequences alongside recorded music clips from ‘Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye’ and ‘My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock’ (see Chapters 6 and 7), gradually evolving into a soundtrack, with built-in silences to allow for the live elements of the performance. The vision was that a fully automated presentation would move seamlessly through slide after slide, coordinating individual letters with the elements of live performance which referred to them, playing the audio clips in perfect synchronicity with the live performers. This proved to be very difficult to achieve: the first attempts to achieve a synchronised performance were unsuccessful. A disproportionate amount of time was spent attempting to co-ordinate the soundtrack with the PowerPoint presentation, taking into account the expected timings of the live elements of the performance. It became apparent during rehearsals that full automation would not work, and I abandoned the idea of combining the actuality and visuality in the PowerPoint presentation. At the first performance, my friend Gary Lewis, an IT specialist and teacher, monitored a partially automated PowerPoint presentation which conveyed only the visuality.

Prior to the start of rehearsals, I composed a short piece of music – ‘Sid’s Slow March’ – to act as an overture. This is a simple, binary-form melody with three harmony parts, intended to lead straight into the opening verse of the Narrative Ballad. Musical arrangements were made of some of the songs, including ‘Quiet Nights’, ‘Claybury/Palestine’, Laughing Willie and ‘Whatever Happened’. Examples of these musical arrangements appear at Appendix C.

¹⁶⁵ IWM 12340: Holewa, Herbert Franz Richard (Oral history)

¹⁶⁶ It was at this point that I discovered that Max Arthur had already edited Holewa’s story: the *Forgotten Voices* account did not, in places, correspond precisely with Holewa’s actual recordings. It was, therefore, necessary to transcribe and edit the actual recordings.

Brief musical interludes were developed from these melodies and arrangements, a collaborative process with considerable input from the individual musicians. Sometimes, for example, a line of a song would be used simply to herald the appearance (or re-appearance) of that song, but at other times the music is in dialogue with the spoken word; in this example, the music performs both functions:

ACTUALITY 1: [JAMES] From memory, [...] but he didn't seem to be too wild with that.

LIVE MUSIC: [Violin slowly playing the first line of 'Claybury/Palestine']

MICK: A man of very strange routines and habits
Whose very speech, to my ears, made no sense.

LIVE MUSIC: [Violin slowly playing the second line of 'Claybury/Palestine']

ACTUALITY 2: [JAMES] He was often around [...] he seemed to be sad about how his health was.

LIVE MUSIC: [Violin playing the third line of 'Claybury/Palestine']

MICK: We saw Sid once a fortnight – home for lunch
Sometimes we'd visit him in hospital
Though never on the ward, for I was young
And it was... Claybury

LIVE MUSIC: [Claybury/Palestine, verse 1, Guitar accompaniment enters at 'screen']

EMILY: [*singing*] Behind the screen of forest green, stands
Claybury

The interaction of music and spoken word in this extract derives from MacColl's use of Peggy Seeger's musical arrangements in *The Travelling People*, the last of the 'original' radio ballads, which is in complete contrast to the 'keep it simple' doctrine adopted by John Leonard and John Tams for the 2006 and subsequent programmes, in which the musical underlay heard

during and between spoken word sections is based predominantly on the idea of an ongoing accompaniment rather than melodic fragments (see Chapter 5). These musical interludes formed part of my creative vision but were not predetermined: they developed in a workshop context during the rehearsal process. In a similar way, the use of the Chorus for interjections such as “HA! HA!” (which was taken directly from one of Sid’s habitual interjections in the letters) and “You poor old soul” (from something my grandmother Daisy used to say in an ironic tone when anyone was ill or injured) was developed during rehearsals. For example, Chorus members would occasionally ask, “Should we have a HA! HA! there”; if I agreed I would revise the script. Rehearsals were very positive and made clear contributions to the overall creative process but, with hindsight, they were hindered by technical issues, and I accept that some of the issues in the two performances (which will be discussed in due course) were a direct result of a lack of rehearsal time. The cast members were all familiar with the style and format of my work, having been involved in earlier productions, but the technical dimension was new and under-developed.

The first performance took place on Saturday 18th March 2023 at The Electric Palace cinema in Harwich. This venue was chosen partly due to its atmospheric qualities but also because it is only one hundred yards from my home, and I have a longstanding collaborative relationship with the management there. In order not to disrupt the film programme it was necessary that the performance did not exceed a maximum of two hours from the beginning to the point where the auditorium was clear and ready for the first film. With that in mind, the script was organised into five acts to be performed consecutively without an interval. Working from the same script as the live performers, Gary Lewis, now known as the ‘PowerPoint Jockey’, or PJ, was seated behind the band, in view of the audience. As with *Singing the*

Fishing's Alan Ward¹⁶⁷ (see Chapter 3), Gary found himself effectively performing as a member of the band. During this process, a tabular script format was adopted, showing PowerPoint slide numbers as cues; as follows:

EMILY:	Grandad's at the table, Grandma's making tea, Sidney's in his garden, that's where he likes to be. All the world is in its place, or so it seems to be, But Sidney's thoughts are far from Sidney's garden.	5
MICK:	I spent a lot of time in Grandma's lounge A room which no-one ever seemed to use Sliding off the shiny leather seat Of a sofa bed upon which no-one slept Admiring the piano no-one played	6 7

Each PowerPoint slide number represented a click of the mouse for the PJ, and I spent considerable time attending to slide transition times, animations and so on, attempting to ensure that the slides appeared to change smoothly. The soundtrack, containing actuality and other sound extracts, again partially automated, was activated by me, using a laptop. The performance took place in front of an audience of around thirty. The songs and musical material generally worked well, but there were notable issues with the technical processes. Feedback following the show, from the audience, cast members and the Electric Palace staff, was that it was entertaining and had impact, but the technical issues were mentioned. Synchronization was a particular issue with both actuality and visuality and it was determined that an improved method was required. Feedback also indicated that the final act needed more musical material.

Between the first and second performances, I returned to the idea of combining the technical processes using PowerPoint. I devised a method which involved splitting the

¹⁶⁷ Cox, *Set Into Song*, p93.

soundtracks into clips designated ‘ACTUALITY 1’ and so on; each clip was then attached to an individual PowerPoint slide and set to play across slides where further image transitions were required. This meant that minor changes to the script frequently required quite major editing within the PowerPoint presentations, of which there had been five (one for each of the acts into which the performance was divided). For the second performance, the script was divided into two Acts, incorporating a fifteen-minute interval. Act I comprised the first two acts of the Electric Palace show, with the other three becoming the new Act II. The second performance took place on the evening of Thursday 27th April 2023, at the Lakeside Theatre, University of Essex. Technical matters were greatly improved and there were very few errors. Gary Lewis again performed the PJ role, this time from the Lakeside Theatre control room. Act I, which was very much unchanged from the original script, went very smoothly and ran to just under the expected time of forty-five minutes. The second Act, however, included some new material which was under-rehearsed and there was general agreement at the end of the show that Act II was still too long, by about ten minutes. Audience feedback, however, was overwhelmingly positive. This performance was recorded in three separate formats, including a video.

Brief surveys were carried out at both performances using a questionnaire (see Appendix D). In all, eighteen completed responses were collected. The first question asked audience members to reflect upon their experience of the performance and give 1-5 ratings (where 1 = poor and 5 = excellent) for seven different criteria, enabling some basic numerical evaluation. Across the seven criteria, the highest average value was 4.8 and the lowest 3.9; the mean average value was 4.5 out of 5. A fuller account of the feedback appears at Appendix D. Taken as a whole, feedback on the two performances was overwhelmingly positive, and enabled some real evaluation to take place. As a result, I revisited the script and made

significant changes, mostly in Act II. Any future performances of the creative piece will use this revised script.

In 2022 I became involved in an ongoing public research project, *58 Ships*¹⁶⁸, launched during the Harwich International Shanty Festival (HISF) in October of that year. In 2023 I was asked to produce a presentation for the 2023 HISF, showcasing some of the results of the research up to that point; following some discussion, it was agreed that this would take the form of a performance. The concept for this production was based upon the model evolved for *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*: one central narrative ballad and live musical interludes framed recorded voices and, at two points in the 40-minute performance, live presentations by researchers. *58 Ships: The Ballad of the Kings Yard*, took place against a backdrop of images, delivered (along with the recorded voices) via a PowerPoint presentation, and the script, from the outset, followed the format evolved for *Sid*. The five musicians who joined me for the performance had all been involved in *Sid* and were familiar with the format, but Gary Lewis was unavailable. Michael Offord, operations manager at the Electric Palace, performed the PJ role described earlier, commenting later that the script format made the task very straightforward. This short production illustrates how the script format evolved for *Sid* serves as a model for future live performances. Taken together, *Sid* and *58 Ships* demonstrate the validity of my interpretation and use of Ewan MacColl's radio ballad methodologies, and the potential of this new live, audio-visual ballad format as a basis for future projects.

¹⁶⁸ See www.58Ships.org for further information.

Conclusion

This critical commentary accompanies the script for *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*, which embodies the results of the creative output arising from this project. The script also embodies the results of research – that pertaining to the wartime training and operations of 6th Airborne Division, for example – undertaken in order to verify what was known about Sid’s story and to fill in gaps in the knowledge. The object of the critical commentary is to address the originality and artistic relevance of the creative output but, in so doing, it also embodies the results of research. I offer the first real definition of the term ‘radio ballad’, and the first review of the radio ballad ‘canon’, encompassing thirty-one programmes beginning with *The Ballad of John Axon* and ending with *The Ballad of the Stolwijk Rescue*. I investigate the folk song introduction phenomenon and present the argument that it derives from a perceived need on the part of folk singers to demonstrate the validity of their performances. I further suggest that this perception derives, in part at least, from practices introduced in folk clubs in the 1950s which are now, rightly or wrongly, attributed to Ewan MacColl. MacColl, therefore, looms large as the primary influence over my work.

In Part I of this critical commentary I place the creative piece in context, demonstrating how my work has been influenced by the performance practice of folk singers in general, and the work of Liam Clancy, Tommy Makem and Dave Townsend in particular (Chapter 2). I also show how my work derives from the stylistic conventions of the radio ballads (Chapters 3, 4 and 5). I explain how these two influences are connected through the involvement of Ewan MacColl (Chapter 1), and how a dedication to authenticity in his writing and songwriting – exhibited in the Radio Ballads but visible in his earlier Theatre Workshop output – has been so

influential upon my own methods. In Part II, I demonstrate how those influences are seen in my own creative writing (Chapter 7), my use of actuality, my development of synthetic actuality, and the innovation of visuality (Chapter 8) to achieve the fundamental aim of the project: bringing Sid's story, outlined in Chapter 6, into the light. Chapter 9 demonstrates how the creative piece was taken from the page to the stage, eliciting immediate and ongoing responses from its audiences. Chapter 9 also shows how my own working methodology grew and developed during the developmental process. Where Part I contextualises my work within the genres of folk song performance and the radio ballad, and within my own creative output, Part II demonstrates its undeniable originality, as an interpretation of the source material, as a collection of songs and creative writing and as a working methodology.

What significant contribution have I made to the genres across which I work? At the outset of this project my intention was to use my uncle's wartime letters in a creative way to bring to light the story of his war service, his subsequent struggles with mental illness and the consequent impact upon his parents and immediate family. I saw Sid's story as an opportunity to develop my work, whilst bringing the story to wider attention. The outcome, *Sid: The Ballad of a Soldier*, is a live-performance piece featuring songs, spoken word and visuality in a format designed to emulate both the performance practice of folk singers and the stylistic conventions of Ewan MacColl's Radio Ballads. As such, it represents a significant development in both genres. As a live iteration of the radio ballad form, *Sid* introduces a carefully curated visual element – visuality – as an additional layer of authentication alongside actuality, principally to emphasise the fact that the primary source material is the written word rather than the recorded voice. In terms of performance, *Sid* takes the informative spoken word of the folk singer to a new level, employing a crafted – as opposed to improvised or comprovised – narrative which

is intended to complement the songs and add to the overall storytelling, and making use of the operatic device of recitative.

What significant contribution have I made to the field of knowledge? On an academic level, my work contributes to a re-evaluation of the reputation and legacy of Ewan MacColl which will, I hope, continue and grow. As discussed in Chapter 1, MacColl's abilities have tended to be overshadowed by his politics and his personality, and some of his achievements have become obscured. The Radio Ballads – frequently seen as “Charles Parker’s Radio Ballads” – are a case in point, but so is “Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop”. My contribution in this respect draws upon the work of others: Ben Harker, Peter Cox, Peggy Seeger and others have all written authoritatively on aspects of MacColl’s work – songwriting, in particular – which demonstrate his dedication to authenticity in its various guises, but each of them tends to concentrate on the work then at hand. I argue that it should be seen as a process which can be traced back to the early Theatre Workshop days and *Uranium-235*, with MacColl’s determination to learn about atomic science and translate that to the stage (see Chapter 1) then being translated into a drive to ensure that railway workers, fishermen and miners would accept his sung versions of their working lives and trade terminology as ‘authentic’. I suggest that mine is a significant contribution to the debate and that it merits further exploration. My contribution in the field of the performance practice of folk singers, and specifically the ‘folk introduction phenomenon’, is greater. I raised this issue for the first time in 1998 and, whilst it was acknowledged (by Sandra Kerr – see Chapter 2) as a valid discussion, there has been no real follow-up. Watts and Morrissey discuss the phenomenon from a very technical, socio-linguistic point of view, but they do not pay much attention to why it occurs or, importantly, how it can be improved and developed. I hope that my work will spark more debate on the folk introduction phenomenon and the use of spoken word in folk

song performance. I agree with Sandra Kerr when she says that “whether it is done well or otherwise it can make or mar a performance”: it is my belief that closer attention to the use of spoken word would be beneficial both to performers and their audiences.

There are, clearly, things that I would do differently, were I able to start over. Most obviously, I would have benefitted from having all the source material before beginning the creative writing (see the Covid-19 statement at the beginning of this thesis). I have learnt to consider the physical properties of the source material as well as the content: had I appreciated at an earlier stage the importance of the visual qualities of the letters, a significant amount of time and effort might have been saved, and more of that time and effort could have been spent improving the visual aesthetics. From a technical point of view, there is definite room for improvement in terms of synchronisation and timing. As I make clear in Chapter 9, the piece was under-rehearsed even at the time of the second performance, and I do intend to perform it again, probably with a smaller group, at some point in the future. The rehearsal process for that new production would include time in a recording studio, honing and recording the material for future publication. Turning to the creative writing processes, as mentioned in Chapter 6, when I look now at the lyrics of ‘Quiet Nights’ and reflect upon Ewan MacColl’s songwriting techniques, I feel that I should have striven harder to preserve actual phrases from Sid’s letters, rather than seeking to paraphrase them. Similarly, if starting the project anew I would look far more carefully than I did at the actuality and written sources, seeking more than just words. From a musical standpoint, I think there are too many periods of musical silence in the production, and more work to be done on interludes and a general musical underlay. In general, however, I consider my project to have been successful: I feel more ‘connected’ to Sid now than at any time in my life, and his remembrance is now assured, not only among three generations of his extended family but on a wider scale, as demonstrated by an albeit brief

reference to his story in ITV's *D-Day 80*, recorded at the Royal Albert Hall on 6th June 2024¹⁶⁹. Even more recently, my daughter Emily has begun using Sid's letters as a resource in the teaching of A-Level History (with reference to the Holocaust, and Sid's interaction with German people in the immediate aftermath of the war). Sid's story has begun to emerge into the light.

Critical Commentary wordcount: 36,963

¹⁶⁹ I was contacted by author and presenter Jonathan Mayo, who had quoted Sid's D-Day letter (Letter 32) in his book, *D-Day: Minute by Minute* (2014). Mayo was writing the script for ITV's show and wanted some family input. He had been led to me by a web reference to the Lakeside Theatre performance of *Sid*, and wanted to know more, eventually suggesting that I might be interviewed during the ITV performance at the RAH. In the event, Sid's story proved to be rather more than ITV could stomach, but an extract from Letter 32 did appear, with a brief comment about him never being the same again.

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Appendix A: The Letters of Private Sidney Verrier, 1942-1946

An Anthology

transcribed by Michael Verrier

Training: June 1942 - November, 1942

1: 3rd June 1942

No. 5836503 Rank Pte Name S. R. Verrier

Address "A" Company 9A Platoon, 2nd Bn. Oxs. & Bucks. Light Infantry, c/o. A.P.O Nottingham Date 3rd June, '42

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a few lines to let you know that I received your letter with stamped envelope enclosed. I expect you have received the one with the postcard and soap coupons. I hope you are all keeping in the best of health. I'm fit as I never felt for a long time.

To-day we went up in a Bristol Bombay Troop Carrier, and – bhoy – do those engines roar. We went for about 100 miles journey which took about 3 quarters of an hour, and it is quite easy going. I was surprised at the smoothness. 30 of us went in the plane. You ought to come up sometime Ma, join the W.A.A.F's with Aunt Beat and go as bomb-droppers. Its cushy.

This morning we went on the range and fired the Anti-Tank Rifle, and the grenade discharger rifles, or E.Y. rifles as we call them. Then this afternoon at 2.30 we went up.

I heard that there were a few incendiary bombs on London, and I hope you didn't have much disturbance. Old Jerry is getting the wind up.

The weather here is glorious and it was to warm today, but we all look a lot better for it.

We have an all-day scheme tomorrow until about 5 p.m., and on Sunday we go on the field firing range. Still it is interesting, but the trouble here is that I can't save what I used to, up to now, as I have been looking around the place. But I must make a start next week as I hope to get 48 hours leave in just about 2 weeks time, so get them old civvies ready again, and put them behind the door so I can jump into them before I get into the kitchen. We only have to fetch rifle, gas and bayonet, belt and 50 rounds S.A.R. with us on leave. It is pretty easy to get to

home. I can get a bus from here to either Salisbury or Andover, and a train straight through to home sweet home. Roll on.

Well, I will close now, as time is getting on, so for a day or so,

Cheerio, Quiet Nights

All the Very Best of Luck

Sid.

Hoping that Son, all at 2 Pyland [?] and Uncle Ray, Sid and Bob are O.K. also any of the boys home on leave. See you soon.

Cheerio for now.

2: 15th July 1942

5836503 Pte. S. R. Verrier

“A” Company, 13 Platoon

2nd Bn Oxs. & Bucks Light Infy.

c/o G.P.O. Nottingham.

Wednesday 15th July, 9.30 p.m.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Just a few lines in reply to the letter you wrote on Sunday. I received it this morning. Thank you for the 2 – 2½d stamps. I hope you have had my letter by this time. I posted it Monday evening at Company Office. I hope you are all well at home, and that Len and Violet are getting along O.K.

I hope to be home next Monday for 48 hrs, as we can have it anytime between our 7 days leave.

Son hasn't moved very far then, only about 8 miles from Felixtowe, but I bet he prefers Felixtowe to Orwell Park. The park is surrounded with barbed wire, but it is only four miles from Ipswich.

I expect Henry Hattrell is fed up after 2 years in the desert, and chap would be. I hope he is O.K.

Do you know where Uncle Bob is going from Hull. I wrote to him but haven't had a reply yet.

I wrote to Alf Hooper last night and he should have received the letter by now.

We move from here at the beginning of August and are expected to come back about the beginning of September, and we are going to a place in Devonshire. But keep it dark. I'll let you know if they tell us anything. I will be due for leave soon after I come back.

We've had a cushy day today, just weapons training, and red tape on the square.

If Son has been regraded to "B" category, I expect he will go to the Young Soldiers Bn or the 30th Home Defence Bn. They usually do.

We went swimming yesterday in the river, and believe me it wasn't warm. Everytime I dived in, my gym shorts were left behind, and I came up like a merman. We go swimming in gym shorts.

I hope Jim Smith managed to get home last week-end, and if you see him wish him all the best for me, and tell him I hope to see him one fine day.

If you really want to know why I didn't take that job, its because, your in the first glider to cross the "watery stretch" then you're the men to look for the enemy, although we won't have far to look, I'm sure. Its interesting this side of the channel, and cushy, but it will be worse the other side.

Talking about being bottom of the ladder, but this time next week, perhaps we will be about 3000 or 4000 feet up in the sky and I'm higher than many soldiers then. No, I'm not worrying about climbing ladders, as my face just don't fit where promotion in the Army is concerned. As for getting stripes here just yet, well I don't stand a chance, seeing that 50% of this Company have done about 7 years already in the Army, and for some reason volunteers aren't appreciated at all in this Battalion. But it isn't worrying me in the least, I feel a bit independent after seeing how they treat chaps in the Army when there is war on. They say a chap under 21 years can't be relied upon, but they expect you to be able to do as much as a chap of 25 to 30 years of age can do, and perhaps expect you to save their lives one day. But still I'm happy and satisfied to be in England, and able to get home once in six weeks. Some people moan about being about 80 miles from home.

I hope Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil, Junie and Uncle Wal are all in the best of health. Also, all other relations.

Pleased to know that Dad starts his holidays this Tuesday, and I hope to get on 48, Monday, so it will be just in time.

The Paymaster here is stopping me 5/9d a week so I must have a few bob to credit, but I still draw 10/- a week. We expect to get a 1/- a day extra soon, but keep it quiet until it appears the newspaper.

They tell us to keep things dark, about Gliders, weapons, and a few weeks after they show them on the film and in newspapers. Makes you wonder whether it is worth keeping it dark. All our secrets have almost been shown in the News.

Well, I suppose I must close now as I'm going to get inside by bed or roses for the night so,

Cheerio, for a day or so,

All the Best of luck.

Quiet Nights

Sid

3: 18th August 1942

Tuesday. 6.30 p.m.

SAME AS USUAL

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a few lines to let you know that I received the 4 Hackney Gazettes and letter. Thank you for the 3 – 2½d stamps in the other letter. I hope you are all O.K. at home, and that Len likes Central School. I expect he can wear that 7¼ old school cap. I'm O.K. and am feeling pretty fit.

I went to a dance given by the Medical Corp, last night, and I enjoyed it very much, although I can't dance. Plenty of noise. To-night I'm off to see the Russian Ballet at the Pavilion here, and the 2 girls I am going with, said that they didn't mind if I go to sleep halfway through the Ballet, so I'll be pretty comfortable.

We had a scheme to-day and marched out at 5 a.m. to a place about 5 miles from here, then we had to climb down a 100 ft cliff and get out to a motor launch about 50 yards from the shore. Luckily enough we arrived to late to do the swimming and had to climb up the cliff and march back to billets. So we didn't get all our clothes wet. Yesterday we had to lay a minefield for practise.

My mate who came to see you, is on 14 days C.B. for sleeping on guard, on a scheme.

We are marching back to the old barracks, and the distance is just 134 miles which we are expected to march in 5 days. Still we've got our band which has got bigger now. One tin whistle, a mouthorgan and a raspberry blower, and a laddie from Lancashire who's got no teeth. The raspberry blower is only used when the serjeant gets annoying.

Well we only have another week here and my girl friends go back on Saturday, so I will be looking forward to getting nearer home, once again. Then I hope to get my 7 days, if all goes well.

I hope Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil, Junie, and Uncle Wal, Uncle Ray, Aunt Hilda and the children are all keeping well. Also Aunt Beat, Uncle Ernie, and George, John, Aunt Daisy and Fred. Finished at last.

I expect to write to Uncle Bob to-morrow night, and Arthur, as I have a couple of hours to spare.

Well I suppose I must close again now, as I am off to the Ballet, you cads, so for a day or so,

Cheerio, for now,

Wishing you all the Very Best,

Hoping all has been quiet.

Sid.

Have you heard from Son or any of the boys.

Please excuse bad writing for a couple of days.

Cheerio for now.

The date of this letter is open to question and requires closer attention. Aunt Hilda died in January 1943 and this letter would appear to predate that event, making it a 1942 letter, written during the battalion's time in Ilfracombe. The reference to Russian Ballet may eventually provide a clue, and the fact that it took place "at the Pavilion here."

4: 17th September 1942

2.30 p.m. Thursday, 17th Sept.

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a line hoping you are all O.K. and to let you know all is well here.

Night-flying went off very well and we only had a ten minute trip, then a good supper and to bed. To-day we have half day off, and now I'm sitting in the N.A.A.F.I writing this letter. The night trip went off nicely, a good take off, and a smooth landing. To-day we had two – one hour trips, and passed over Swindon again, and right over Oxford, and believe me, Oxford is a grand city, with all the universities and churches. I was thinking of going to Oxford to-day, but its a long way off and the fare is 3/1, so its hardly worth it.

I haven't heard any more about the 2" mortar course, at N. Wales yet, and I will let you know as soon as possible.

I still haven't had a chance of going up in my friend's glider yet, as we are detailed to go in certain gliders, and cannot please ourselves.

Have you seen Bill Thomas or Jack Shepherd at all, if so, I hope they are having a good time.

I saw a W.A.A.F here today and I'm pretty sure she comes from Stoke Newington, or around that way. I will ask her if I see her again. There's so many W.A.A.F's here, you don't know which one to take out first. We've all got friendly with those in charge of the kitchens, so we get a decent supper.

Well, I hope, Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil, Junie, Uncle Wal, Uncle Ray, Aunt Hilda, and the children, Uncle Bob, Aunt Nell and the children, Uncle Sid, Aunt Dais and Fred are well.

So once again wishing you all the best of luck and hoping nights are quiet, I will close for to-day,

Cheerio for now,

Sid.

See you soon.

5: 18th September 1942

Friday 18th September, '42

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a few lines to let you know that all goes well. I hope you at home are all in the best of health. I have received the Hackney Gazette, letter and 2 – 2½d stamps and thank you very much for them.

I'm not going on the 2" mortar course, so I might be lucky enough to get a day pass in a few days time. Next Sunday the 27th Sept if possible.

Sorry to know that I just missed Bill Thomas, perhaps I will be lucky next time, and see him. I haven't seen him for some time now. You've certainly had a few visitors on Monday, and I hope Aunt Beat and Edie, and Uncle Ern, were O.K. when they came on Thursday. I expect Uncle Wal is enjoying his two weeks holiday. Pleased to know you heard from Uncle Bob and I hope he is enjoying himself, and if you send his address along, I will write to him. I've mislaid his last letter.

We've had a decent day for gliding, although I've only had 3. half hour trips. Two this morning and one this afternoon. The final trip we went up to 5,100 feet, and believe me you feel funny right up there. The glider was above the clouds, by 2,000 ft, and we could just see a white blanket of cloud. The other two trips were very steady, and on the second trip, some American soldiers volunteered to go up with us, and a couple of them looked pretty strange after half an hour. Still first time up is very strange. One glider went hedge hopping and did the cows start to run when they went low over one field. One old lady got down on the pavement, when they went over a small village. One pilot here is really crackers.

Well, I will close now, for a day, and hoping all is quiet, I'll say,

Cheerio,

Quiet Nights,

All the Best,

Sid

See you soon.

Send Arthur's address.

6: 6th November 1942

Friday 6th Nov. [1942]

Still here, alive and kicking

Dear Mum and Dad,

Just a line hoping all goes well at home and that you are all in the best of health. I'm O.K.

I had a pleasant surprise when I got back here on Wednesday. I had to report to the surgical specialist about the hernia, and I waiting to see him at 2 p.m. today.

I had a letter from Son as you know and tell him to visit the Allen, and have one on me but he can pay for it. I hope he has a good 4 days leave and that the weather keeps fine, for his trip to Gloucester.

I have written to George Chetman and he will get the letter when he returns on Monday morning. I expect he will need a bit of cheering up.

I was on guard last night and came off at Reveille this morning. It rained until about 2 a.m. this morning, but I didn't get wet. I'm settled down once again and everything is square and tidy, and I'm looking forward to getting home again. Cowper Road is the place for me.

I see old Rommel is on the run with a few shells and bombs tearing his pants to pieces. I like to get my teeth a bit deeper in his pants, and tear of a bit of Boche rump steak.

I having a cushy time so far this morning and it can stay like this for a couple of months. The weather is very fine.

I will write to Alf Hooper over the week-end, also to Uncle Bob, and Uncle Ray.

Well, I will have to close as I'm off for a cup of tea round the Café, and that's the only place where N.C.O's can't find you, so for an hour or so I'm just going to vanish from their "hard work coming looks" so,

Cheerio for Now

Quiet Nights

Best of Luck

Love from

Sid

Hospital: February - July 1943

7: 25th February or March 1943

Thursday 25th

Dear Mum & Dad,

Everything is going fine, as I had the operation yesterday at 12 a.m. I was only under the anesthetic for an hour and I came to as they wheeled me into the ward and they told me I was sitting up as I came to, and I don't remember saying "What-ho boys" as I came through the ward. But I came round properly as they put me in bed. It hasn't affected me at all and I'm happy, so don't worry Mother. 3 weeks time and I'll be fine. Leave in 5 weeks time. Roll on.

Hope you are all well at home, and that Uncle Ray and children are fine and well.

I received your H. Gazette yesterday, and thanks very much for the soap and thank Violet very much for the tooth paste. I'm O.K. for soap and tooth paste for a few weeks now. Thank you very much for selling the weights Dad, but as I mentioned Alf Hooper has gone to Birmingham for 18 months, but I can go round the club on leave as I know the chap who's keeping it going, so I'll see him.

Well Mum & Dad

I will close now as I've a few letters to clear up, so for now everyone

Cheerio for today

Best of Luck

Love Sid

Hope all relations and Aunt Daisy are well.

[This letter has been dated (presumably by IWM) as November 1942 but I wonder whether the reference to, "Uncle Ray and children" indicates a later date: As previously noted, Uncle Ray's wife (Hilda) died in January 1943. The letter clearly is not written any later than April, and the 25th of the month fell on a Thursday in both February and March 1943, hence the provisional date given.]

8: 19th April 1943

Same as usual

19.4.43

Dear Mum & Dad,

Had an interview with the Matron this morning and she told me I was going to Salisbury Hospital about Wednesday for another operation then come back to this place in the ambulance about Thursday and stop in bed for another 3 to 4 weeks until it heals up by itself again. I'm not going to Shaftesbury again, that's nothing but a butchers shop. I'm pleased as it will heal up a lot quicker. The Matron said if it keeps discharging until after 9 months from Nov 8th. I get my ticket from the "Kate Carney" but I don't want that until the war is over. Must come out A1.

Hope you are all O.K. at home and I'm looking forward to my next leave to get back there again.

Well folks I'm for now and I'm going down to have a photo taken with a couple of pals as I told you yesterday in that letter.

So, you'll be hearing from me soon.

Cheerio for Now, Folks,

Best of Luck.

Love. Sid.

9: 20th April 1943

20.4.43

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a line hoping you are all in the best of wealth, and that the air-raid didn't disturb you too much. I'm fine and to-day the sun was very warm and my face is burning.

My pals and I didn't get our photos taken on Monday as it rained all day and we couldn't go out, but we are going to-morrow morning. In the afternoon the doctor comes and my pal and I may go back to Salisbury, a hospital there and be operated on there on Thursday, and come back in the ambulance.

Everything is fine here and we have a little Scotsman from the 5th Scottish Parachute Battalion and he's a proper chap to keep you laughing.

The Oxs and Jocks are going to Ilfracombe again and this time for six weeks and they march there and back this time. I wouldn't mind that at all. They aren't going away just yet. I saw one of my pals in Salisbury on Sunday evening and he told me all about what was happening.

Hope Son managed to get home on Monday and I wrote to him last night and expect he will get the letter to-morrow, Thursday. Also wrote to Alf Hooper, Dan Thomas.

Well folks, hope all goes well and that all relations are well. I'll have to close and I'll let you know how I get on with the doctor.

Cheerio for Now.

Best of Luck,

Love,

Sid

10: 7th May 1943

7th May 43

Dear Mum & Dad,

Well, I hope everything goes well at home and that you are all in the best of health. I've received the letter you wrote on Tuesday.

I have some good news this morning, as the Matron when she looked at "trouble" this morning, managed to pull out a piece of catgut, this time about an inch long. It may heal up although some sepsis came out as well. I'll have to go to Shaftesbury just the same, but the specialist will look at it first. I'm going on Monday. When the operation is over I'm coming back here. The Matron asked for my pal and I to come back here. Two nice quiet gentlemanly boys. HA! HA! HA!

Sorry to hear that Billy Verrier has been wounded in N. Africa, and I hope it isn't serious, and I wish him all the very best. Would you send Arthur's new address when you get it please. I wrote a couple of weeks ago to the old address but it will probably be sent on to him.

Pleased to know that all is quiet in 'Smoky Town' and I hope it stays so.

Well folks at home, the old P.T. Serjeant is on my tail so I'm must make a dash to the "throne", so

Cheerio for Now,

Best of Luck.

Love

Sid

P.S. Don't worry Ma, I'm having a good time!

I'm not worried at all.

The going out to tea was a nice break.

11: 12th May 1943

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

Mil. Hospital.

Shaftesbury.

DORSET.

Wednesday 12th May.

Dear Mum & Dad,

Well I'm back in "dock" again and arrived here about 11 a.m. I'm feeling O.K. just a bit fed up about it.

Hope you are all in the best of health and that all goes well at home.

I saw the doctor this morning and he said I won't be here very long. He mentioned that I'll be here until the trouble does heal up, but all the same it shouldn't be long.

Excuse the writing but I'm using a different pen-nib and I can't write very good with it. Please don't forget those relief nibs from Mrs Millmans.

My pal came back with me and you should see his face, chin on the floor and head touching the ceiling. Not very long.

I'll have plenty of writing to do when I get them pen-nibs as I can't write letters with this pen-nib.

Still by the time this job is finished I'll be coming home again and I'll try for 14 days this time, but I doubt it will come off.

Well folks I'll close now as they have a dance in the Officers Mess tonight and I've got to give a speech as my pal the Colonel can't turn up. He's got a date with a Land girl.

So Cheerio for Now

Quiet Nights

All the Best

Love

Sid

Hope all relations are well.

12: 14th May 1943

14th May 1942 [?] 4.30 pm.

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just received your parcel and letter and when the postman brought it in I had just come to after the “dope” they gave me for the operation. I came to just as the postman came in and as I was still a bit swimmy I wondered if I was dreaming. I’ve been round about 2 hours now and I’ve had a very good dinner. Roast spuds. Very tasty, very sweet.

I went down to the operating theatre about 12.15 a.m. and was put out for the count at 2 pm. As I was going I said to the Brigadier the surgeon, “I’m going now, I’m going to Tipperary.” I think they laughed as I don’t quite remember.

Thank you very much for the parcel it’s lovely and I feel a lot happier now with that sugar and pot of jam.

I also feel more settled down now and happy now the operation is over. I was fed up before, but I’m O.K. now. I’ve got plenty of pen-nibs now thank you, and [damaged] got something to do.

[damaged] you [?] got on on Saturday, well I [damaged] and posted it as soon as I came round.

The weather has been grand to-day. I heard the football cup match yesterday between Arsenal and Blackpool. Surprise for the Arsenal.

Well folks I’ll close now for a day or so, and hoping all has been quiet just lately, I’ll say

Cheerio for Now,

Best of Luck,

Love

Sid

Thank you for the 4 & 2½ stamps, and razor blades.

13: 20th May 1943

Thursday 20th May '43

Dear Mum & Dad,

Thank you very much for your letter posted on Wednesday. Hope you are in the best of health at home and pleased to hear that the air-raids haven't bothered you to much. I expect you have received my letters by now saying that I received my letters by now saying that I received your parcel, I wrote the letter as soon as I got the parcel, so either the post is bloody bad or it is lost. I received the H.Gs and pen-nibs. I'll be pleased to get the soap as the stuff they issue here is awful. I had a bath with some strong soap and my skin on my legs started getting sore as blazes. Still I got some ointment from the sister and it isn't sore now. I must be getting soft, with this hospital life.

The officer who used to be in charge of my platoon in the Airborne is now 'kicking up the daisies.' First accident he had was he baled out of a plane and the parachute didn't open fully and he had a few weeks in hospital with concussion. When he came out of hospital he went to Ilfracombe and dived off a rock into the sea and hit his head on another rock just below the surface, split his head open, and went back to hospital with concussion. Just lately, a few days ago, he was blown up by a hand grenade and died in this hospital a couple of days. Poor chap! Stark raving mad he was, but he was a decent chap.

Hope Don and Bill and Charlie Hart had good leaves and I'll be pleased to hear from Charlie Hart. I'm not sure whether he got my last letter.

Everything is the same here, just laying in bed, and waiting to get up and back in the convalescent home when where I can go for some nice country walks. I'm not leaving here until the wound is healed up so I may be here sometime. If it doesn't heal up this time I'll be getting my ticket from the 'Kate Carney'. After 9 months in hospital anyone automatically gets their tickets. But I wouldn't go into civvy street with this trouble. I'd sooner get it healed up and stop in the Army. Still it is healing up fine now, and the sepsis and stuff that has come out of it; no wonder I felt rotten with all that muck in the wound.

Well folks, I'm down for '40 winks' before dinner, so hoping all relations are in the very best of health, and that all goes well at home, I'll conclude.

Cheerio for Now,

All the Best.

Love Sid

14: 20th May 1943 (Second Letter)

Thursday 20th May . [1943]

Dear Mum & Dad,

Well I've just had a shock, having been regraded "C" for 3 months. Just what I didn't want. Still by the time that 3 months is up I shall be fit again and regraded A1 just as it is time to go back to the Army. I'll probably be here for a couple of weeks, then convalescent for three or four weeks, then P.T. for six weeks. That will be 3 months, then I will be up graded when I leave Taunton depot the P.T. place.

It has upset me a bit still I can't tell the Colonel what I think. But I'm not worried though as I'm sure I will get A1 when I've finished the P.T. Course and toughening up training. I've just had some good news – the doctor has said I can get up to-morrow. The sister took the Vaseline gauze packing out to-day, out of the open wound so I'll be getting up to-morrow. Of course I'll not be dashing about, but just lying in the sunshine getting some colour.

Well Mum & Dad, I'm off again, hoping no bombs have dropped near, and wishing you all the very best of luck and quiet nights I'll conclude,

Cheerio for Now,

All the Best,

Sid.

I haven't heard from Son for a few weeks!

15: 22nd May 1943

Saturday 22nd May

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a few lines hoping all goes well at home and you are all in the best of health.

I'm up on my feet again, thank heavens and the wound must be getting a lot better as the discharge is a lot less now, and I feel better in myself than I did before the operation. I'm grade "C" for 3 months but that doesn't mean I'll get chucked out of the "Airborne". I couldn't stand the ordinary infantry its to boring, in this country.

The weather isn't so good to-day, but yesterday I was out in the sunshine and it was lovely, I managed to get some colour back. I feel O.K.

I had a letter from Lily this morning and she sounds very cheerful and happy as usual. I haven't heard from Son but he is probably busy.

Hope you haven't been disturbed by the air-raids just recently, and that all relations are well. How are Aunt Daisy and the baby now? I hope they are in the best of health.

Well folks I'm closing now for a day, so wishing you all the very best of luck and quiet nights;

Cheerio for Now,

Love,

Sid.

16: 23rd May 1943

Sunday 23rd May '43

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a few lines hoping all has been quiet in London. I heard that you didn't get a raid on Saturday night so I'm pleased to know that you had a night's sleep for a change. Did you get up in these last few raids and stop up. Still I don't suppose they last long. I expect Jerry got upset about those two dams going bust. Still, they've asked for it, I suppose.

Hope you're all in the best of health and that all relatives are well.

Everything is the same here. The weather yesterday, Saturday, wasn't too good and the rain didn't stop until about 7 p.m., almost time to go to "Uncle Bed." It was "taters in the mould" too. I heard that the weather in Smoky Town was lovely yesterday. According to a picture of a nice young wench, bathing in the Serpentine it must have been nice, the weather I mean.

Still to-day is looking O.K. so far, a bit cloudy, but I think it will clear over, and then out on the grass with a couple of good old "Kate Carney" blankets and a pillow for a snooze.

We had nine eggs last week, 3 on Wednesday, all hard boiled but that didn't worry me. I think a lot of chaps put in a big complaint about the grub in this 'butcher's shop'.

Well folks, I'm feeling fine and the wound hasn't far to go now before it is healed up. I don't feel Grade "C" but still it's only a precaution on the hospital part, so I can take it easy for a bit. Still, I always take it easy so it won't make much difference.

So folks I'll close now, so for a day or so,

Cheerio for Now.

Best of Luck.

Quiet Nights/

Love. Sid

17: 26th May 1943

26th May '43

Dear Ma & Pa,

Just received your letter with 6 – 2½d stamps also got the H.G. and bar of soap, and I thank you very much for them.

Pleased to hear that Jerry hasn't been bothering you too much and hope all stays quiet in "Smoky Town".

Had a letter from Uncle Jack this morning & telling me that he has had that weeks course at Denbies [?]. He said the Colonel treated him to a pint. Makes me feel thirsty. Glad to see that Son managed a bit of leave, I bet he enjoyed it too. Also had a letter from Eileen [?]. I get one from Jean every other day, so I've plenty of writing to do. I had letter from Wal Smith and he said Jim is O.K. He's on anti-aircraft guns. George Chapman is a Serjeant Air Gunner now so he's doing O.K.

I feel fine now and have got a job in the Kitchen so I can pass the time away. Yesterday was Colonel's inspection, Red Tape parade as usual. Still he dropped me 5/- for a clean kitchen and invited me to a dinner in the Officer's Mess. Decent old Bhoys! What! The old b -----
--.

When you get 'Nunc' Bobs new address, send it along and I will drop him a line. I almost forgot him not having seen him for a long time.

My wound is almost healed up, just about ½ inch to go now. Not much septic coming out so it should be O.K. If it doesn't heal up this time, no more operations, and I'll get my ticket. I'm fed up with this Butchers Shop. I'm refusing if they want to open it up again, if it doesn't heal up.

Well folks I will close now as I've to draw the days rations for the ward and I have to dish out the grub to the blokes or they'll start bawling and shouting for it.

So, Cheerio for Now.

All the Best,

Quiet Nights

Love, Sid

P.S. Don't worry about the parcel, I may be going to convalescence again soon. And we get plenty of grub on this job.

18: Uncertain Date 30th May/ 1st June 1943

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier

Convalescent Home,

Shepwick.

NR. BRIDGEWATER

SOMERSET.

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a line letting you know where I am once again. I left the hospital on Saturday and I'm pleased to say that there isn't any more discharge and it has healed up. Just the job. I don't know how long I will be here. I hope you are all in the best of health.

It is much better here, now that it is summer time. Plenty of leaves and green, and all the floods have gone and it seems a different place. All the staff were pleased to see me I think, and surprised after all this time. I don't know whether they remembered lavatory window which I thought was a door. They have a different Matron now and I won't be able to court this one as she is too young, only 49, the other one was least 55. I haven't seen [Jane?] yet and I don't want to. HA! HA! I've come for a quiet cushy time.

I had a letter from Son on Friday and I must reply soon. He told me that Lenny had had the mumps but not too bad. I hope he is well again now.

Well I'm closing now, sorry the letter is so short but I'll try and write more next time, so for now,

Cheerio folks

All the Best of luck, Quiet Nights

Love. Sid.

About 200 4 engined bombers went over yesterday. It was a lovely sight.

[This letter is undated but the content indicates that it sequentially follows the May 1943 hospital letters and especially that of 26th May, bearing in mind its postscript. 26th May was a Wednesday so, on that basis, Son's letter arrived on Friday 28th and Sid left the hospital on Saturday 29th. The next dated letter is 3rd June 1943 and therefore this letter almost certainly emanates from Sunday 30th- Tuesday 1st June 1943.]

19: 3rd June 1943

3rd June 1943 Thursday

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just received your letter, Hackney Gazette and 5/- for which I thank you very much. Hope you are all in the best of health and I'm pleased to hear that Len is almost O.K. again.

There isn't much to tell you, as I haven't been far since I came here. Just for a couple of 3 to 4 miles walks, to knock some shape and life into me. The wound is healed up at last. I've been doing some P.T. and I certainly feel a lot better.

The weather hasn't been so good these last four days, all wind and rain, and only a bit of sunshine now and then.

I hope all relations are well and that Uncle Sid is O.K. if you have seen him lately.

All I've been doing lately is, reading books, and I'm beginning to think that by the time I leave here I will have read every book in the library. I haven't been out to-day so far, but I expect I will go for a stroll after supper. I don't know how long I will be here, but all the same I will be pleased to get to Taunton to get used to the "Kate Carney" again. It's been a long rest in these places, although the time has gone quick, so I should soon settle down again. My leave will probably be in about 8 or 9 weeks time, when I leave Taunton P.T. Depot. As long as I can get leave for Son and Lily's wedding I don't mind waiting until then. September is only another 3 months and that'll soon pass by. Still I'll see how I stand when I leave here for leave.

Well folks, I hope all has been quiet in London, and so once again, I'll close wishing you all the best, thank you again for sending the 5/- along.

Cheerio for Now,

Love Sid

20: 4th July 1943

Sunday 4th July '43

Dear Mum & Dad,

Many thanks for your letter received on Saturday with the H.Gs and papers.

Well, the Matron has changed her mind again and I'm not going to Taunton to-day, Monday, but next Monday the 12th. It has surprised me after the Colonel said I could go, and I was looking forward to going. Still I suppose the Matron has the Colonel where she wants him, and her word goes. My pal couldn't go to Taunton this Monday so probably the Matron is letting us both go together next Monday. He isn't quite right yet.

Glad to hear that Uncle Bob is getting some leave, and I bet he is looking forward to it. I must drop him a line soon. I had a letter from him a few days ago.

Where is Son stationed now? Is he still at Dorking?

I hope ^^ Taylor was well and happy in the [Army] and I bet he was telling some tall tales. Did he say where he is? So Aunt Lou came round, strikes me I'll have to go down and see them on my next leave.

I was very pleased to hear that Arthur has come out of action, safe and sound. I suppose he had a go at the Japs, in Burma. I must send another Airgraph, as he didn't answer my last one unless it got lost or delayed. I suppose his address is the same.

I received the airgraph you sent the other day, it was from Len Roles, and I'll put it in the letter for you to read. That's another one I have to reply to.

Everything is as usual here, quiet enough to drive you crackers. We had a picture show on Friday and it was pretty good.

Well Mum & Dad, I hope you are all “in the pink”, and that all relatives are well. I’m fine and Roll On Taunton, and then the Army.

Cheerio for Now, All the Best, Love, Sid

Training: March 1944 - May 1944

21: Undated, probably 18th March 1944

Saturday, 8 p.m.

Dear Mum & Dad,

Couldn't manage getting home today and my-oh-my, don't I feel 'happy'.

We went to Devonshire, field firing, and were in a camp on the coast, about a mile or so from a fair-sized town. On the Thursday night we were allowed to go to town. We were told to be back in camp by 10 p.m. My mate and I weren't back until 10.30 p.m. as we started off across the fields coming back to camp, changed our minds when we came upon a few awkward streams, and went back on to the road to camp. That made us late and now I'm on 3 days C.B. The company commander said he believed our story but the 'terrible' crime couldn't go unpunished. What a frivolous Army – drives me balmy.

Still it doesn't get the better of me. Sorry I couldn't get home. I was looking forward to seeing you all, today, and now I will have to wait. I'll be home soon, though!

Other than this all goes well. The weather in Devon was marvellous – my face was sore with the sun on Friday.

I expect Son and Lily are enjoying their first day of the eight days leave now. I hope they have a lovely time – fine weather – and quiet nights. Tell them I'm sorry I will not be able to see them, this time, but I'll be home again on April 11th, as far as I know. Maybe before!

Remember me to all the folks at home – Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil, Junie, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet and Violet and Jackie and all the other folks. I wish them all the very best.

What have the raids been like just lately Mum – not too heavy or close I hope. I haven't seen a paper since Friday and it is now Saturday evening. Still, we know that there have been raids on London, by the wireless, and they don't seem so bad as they were.

Sorry I haven't been writing so often as I should do, but last five days we have been busy, except for one evening out.

Could you send along 10/- Mum? I bought a railway ticket on Wednesday – to London which cost 12/8. I haven't used it and I let one of the chaps have it and he will pay me on Monday. If he can manage to pay I will be O.K. for the week, but if he can't pay until Friday well I'll be a bit short. I'll send the 10/- back on Friday. I'll be very pleased if you can Mum!

Well once again folks, I must close, wishing the best of luck to you all, and remember me to everyone.

Quiet Nights, all the Best,

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x

Saturday night and I've been cutting cabbages from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. Can't help laughing when I think of it.

22: Undated, probably 28th March 1944

Tuesday 8pm

Dear Mum & Dad,

Many thanks for the H. Gazette and soap and your letter.

Believe me, the food in the parcel came in very handy. We lived like hobos, for 3 days, but it wasn't bad at all. Plenty of sunshine, and my face is sore. I didn't mind it at all.

I will be coming home about the middle of next week for 10 or 11 days, and I'm certainly looking forward to getting civvies on. The very first day I'm home I'll get in civvies.

I had a letter from Aunt Ede this morning. I'll try and reply before leave, but we will be very busy.

What made you send the 'Weekly Telegraph, Mum? Not that little story in the book was it?

Many happy returns of the day, Len. I'll see you O.K. when I get home.

Did Dad and Junie see the 'Salute The Soldier' procession. Sorry to hear that Len couldn't see it because of the crowds and I expect it upset him a bit. Still he will see it at the pictures.

All goes well here – marvellous weather, grub is O.K. and I'm O.K., so I've nothing to grumble about.

Well folks, hope 'Jerry' has kept away, and all will be quiet in future. Don't forget I'll be home next week, thank heavens, peace and quietness, please myself.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x

PS Hope you are all well.

[This is one of two 'adjacent' letters which appear in the IWM collection between one dated 'Wednesday 15th July' and another dated '2 p.m. Thursday 17th September'. The first indication that this letter is incorrectly sequenced is "Many happy returns of the day, Len." Len Verrier (my father) was born on 30th March 1931 and this letter, therefore, must date from late March. Initially, therefore, I thought that this was written in March 1942 and treated it as the earliest surviving letter. However, there is also a reference to the 'Salute the Soldier' event which did not take place (in London) until March 1944, and it is on this basis that this and the following letter have been provisionally dated. It is not entirely certain that the letters are adjacent, and this interpretation may change as further letters are closely examined.]

23: 1st April 1944.

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Coy. 13, Pln.

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I>

Woodhall Spa,

LINCS.

Saturday,

Dear Mum and Dad,

Many apologies for not writing sooner than this, but as you can see by the above, everything has changed.

By the way, about 12.30 p.m. to-day I was in a train, and it stopped for about 40 minutes underneath the railway arch by Aunt Ede’s house. I couldn’t do much about it although I was only five minutes from home.

I hope to be home about Wednesday for ten days. I’m certainly looking forward to this leave.

This village isn’t to bad – not very bad and not very good. I can’t say much more about it. At the moment I’m in a Y.M.C.A. and closing time is near so I will have to shorten this letter. Only arrived a little while ago.

Well folks, I hope Jerry hasn’t disturbed you to much, and I hope you are all in the very best of health. I’m O.K.

Good Luck, see you mid-week, and remember me to all the folks at home.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x

24: 2nd April 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Coy. 13, Pln.
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
Woodhall Spa,
LINCS.

Sunday,

Dear Mum and Dad,

As I mentioned in the letter I send Saturday, yesterday, I would write a longer letter as soon as I got the chance.

No doubt you were suprised to know that I'm here, but I couldn't tell you before. These moves happen now-a-days. I don't know how long I will stop here, but I hope it isn't for so long. What a place – high class – not very sociable from what we hear from other chaps here. Buses – none at all. Railway only – with two trains a day.

Still, I'm in England that is the best part of everything.

On Wednesday I don't know what time I will be home. Maybe at 12 midnight – maybe at 12 noon. The journey takes about six hours.

I'm in the W.V.S. canteen at the moment, which is the only place for troops in the town, other than a N.A.A.F.I. The W.V.S. is a hotel converted into a canteen. A very nice place but naturally not big enough. Queues a mile long.

Our billets are empty houses and huts in the gardens. On either side of the hut I'm in, are civvy houses, and when I'm on P.T. at 7 a.m. I can just imagine the people still in bed. Very nice – roll on Wednesday.

There's one thing about all this, my pal and myself are settled down and so far all has gone well. We felt rather fed up at the first sight of the place, but didn't grumble. I will settle down for the while I'm here, and I expect all will be O.K.

If you get a letter from Lily, for me, hand on to it until I get on leave Mum. I told Lily to write to 68, but I didn't give the reason.

I hope you are all enjoying good health. How are Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie, Mum? All going well and not too much noise from Jerry? I haven't seen a paper to-day and I haven't had the chance of getting one.

Has Son been home just lately? Hope he is well and Lily is enjoying the best of health.

Well folks, I will write again if I get time to-morrow, and roll on Wednesday, peace and quietness. I've just heard the football results. Spurs 0-3. That just puts the "top" on everything. But we keep smiling and singing, and we have a few clowns here.

So once again, I'll say, cheerio for now, and I wish you all, the best of luck, quiet nights.

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x x

P.S.

Get that soft bed "softer". I'm sleeping on the floor tonight. Boy-oh Boy. Plenty of sleep on leave.

Remember me to all the folks!

25: Undated Thursday, April 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier.

“A” Company, 13 Platoon

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

c/o A.P.O.

England

Thursday

Dear Mum & Dad,

Many thanks for your letter which I received on Tuesday.

I hope you are enjoying good health and all goes well at home.

I expect you have received the letter card by now giving the new address. Don't get worried about it – it's nothing much.

I was pleased to hear that Son managed to get home on Monday. How is he now? Still having the blood transfusions? I will be very glad to know that he will soon be rid of all his troubles.

Remember me to Lily, and Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet and Violet and Jackie, and convey my best wishes. I hope Lily is keeping well.

I had a letter from Charlie and Phyllis yesterday, and I must say I received a ragging from Phyllis. I took a good telling off. I'll tell you later!

All goes well here, folks, but as usual, now and again, I get fed up with everything, then sometimes that fed up feeling wears off. Roll on peace and quietness, in “civvy” street.

Remember me to all at home, Mum, best wishes to all. By the way, wish Lenny the best of luck for me, seeing that he goes to the "Poly" next week, and I hope he does his best there.

Well folks, I have written in pencil, as I'm out on training now, cannot carry ink around, so please excuse me. Excuse the writing.

So once again, I will close, and I will write more over the week-end, if I get the chance. Best of luck, and quiet nights.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

P.S.

I will try and write to Aunt Ede before the weekend!

26: 28th April 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier,
A Company, 13, Platoon
2nd Bn., O.B.L.I.
c/o. A.P.O.
ENGLAND.

28th April '44

Dear Mum & Dad,

Many thanks for your letter which I received on Thursday. It was written by you on Tuesday.

All goes well here, everything fine, job is going well.

I was very sorry to hear that "Grandad" isn't too good, and I hope he is soon well again.

So Len took a fancy to Dad's dinner. I can imagine Dad's face when he saw his dinner. Still, I expect Dad had a laugh about it. I certainly did.

I wrote to Aunt Ede yesterday, and the letter will probably reach her about Saturday.

I haven't seen Len yet. I didn't fancy going down there yesterday, but I'll try and see him during the week-end.

I was very surprised to hear that Son has to wear eye-glasses now. Poor old chap. HMM! When you see him again tell him to write a few lines when he gets time.

By the way, Mum, on 8th May you will be able to draw another 7/- (allotment) from the Post Office. That will be 21/- a week you will be drawing. Don't forget. Put it in the Post Office account, after you have cleared up what I owe you from leave. I'm drawing 2/- a day but I can manage. I never go out. Just a smoke, and a little letter writing, and a quiet read. This new increase of pay doesn't affect me just yet, as I haven't three years service yet. I haven't troubled to read about it in the papers, not fully but I don't think I get any more yet.

Well Mum, I have just been across to the canteen and on the way I met Len who was looking for me. I may be going to town – a village nearby, on Sunday and I will meet him there. I promise you, no beer. I seldom drink a “pint” in camp as you know. Sweat to much. HMM!
YES!

Once again folks it is time for bed – the finest pastime in the Army, and I will now close. Wishing you the very best of luck and quiet nights, and Remember me to all relations and convey my best wishes.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x x

27: 16th May 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier
“A” Company, 13, Platoon,
2nd. O.B.L.I.
A.P.O.
ENGLAND.

Tuesday, 16th May.

Dear Mum & Dad,

First of all I must mention how much I enjoyed being at home for a few hours, last weekend. I'm looking forward to seeing you again soon, although I'm not sure when that will be. Maybe this week or next.

I was back before dark, Mum, and I had no trouble getting here. I couldn't have waited longer on Sunday, and probably could have seen Son.

I had a letter from Lily on the Monday morning and I was very pleased. I was sorry I didn't have time to go to Edmonton, and I will go on my next leave to make up for it. Remember me to everyone, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet, Lily and Jackie. Hope all are enjoying good health.

How was Son when he did get home? Fit and well I hope.

All's well here, no unusual happenings.

I saw Len on Monday evening. He was home last week-end and enjoyed himself. If he gets home again he is going to see you and the folks along the road.

I heard from Alf Hooper to-day. He is home next week-end, from Birmingham.

Well folks, remember me to all at home, and I hope to see everyone soon. Sorry the letter is so short but you understand.

Here's wishing you all the very best of luck and quiet nights.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x

28: 21st May 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company. H.Q.

2nd. Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

A.P.O.

ENGLAND.

Sunday 21st May.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

I arrived back safe and sound last night just before midnight. No rush or bother.

A letter came this morning from you, the letter which you posted on Friday.

I enjoyed my few hours at home very much, and came back with just one thought, the usual one, when I hope to be getting home again. I hope it will be soon.

I've had plenty of work to do to-day and my mind has been occupied, wondering what small job I could do next. The jobs may be small but time goes quickly. At last, 5.30 p.m. I have time to write a few lines to you.

The food I brought back with me was fine Mum. I was hungry, some of the lads were hungry, and the food came in handy. I'll finish it tonight. The sandwiches were eaten on the train, and a couple of chaps had the impression they were chicken.

I must settle down again to writing more letters, although I find it hard to keep pace with replies, I can get squared up. First I must write to Son, otherwise he will be wondering what is wrong.

When you write Mum, send Uncle Bob's address, which I have lost and forgotten, then I can surprise the "bright spark". I haven't written for ages.

Well folks, I haven't much to say again, but before I do close, I must say thank you very much for helping me to enjoy my week-end at home and if I caused any dashing about, well Mum, tell Dad to do the work and you have a rest. Tell Dad not to read the last paragraph.

Cheerio for Now,

Best of Luck,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

[Note the change of address from 13 Platoon to A Company HQ; this was presumably the point at which Sid took up his clerk duties]

29: Thursday 25th May

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,

'A' Company. H.Q.

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

A.P.O.

England,

Thursday. 25th May

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Here's hoping you are all in the best of health and all goes well at home.

I haven't received any letters this week, probably the mail has been held up. I expect I will eventually get your letters.

Everything is going well at the moment, but unfortunately I don't get very much time for writing letters. My letters are very short, I know, but you do know that I'm O.K. which is the main thing you want to know. Yes folks, I'm O.K.

Remember me to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil, and Junie. I have some chocolate but I cannot fetch it home. Don't forget to remember me to everyone Mum! I cannot name them – too long a job isn't it? I sincerely hope that everyone are enjoying good health, and making the most of these quiet nights.

I don't know when I will be home again, but I hope very much that the time will be soon.

Well folks here goes, I'm very sorry I cannot manage a few more pages but the time is 11.30 p.m. – up early in the morning – So, wishing you all the very best of luck and quiet nights, I'll conclude,

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x x

30: 28th May 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company. H.Q.

2nd. Bn. O.B.L.I

A.P.O.

ENGLAND.

28th. May. 44.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Sorry I haven't written sooner, but you understand.

I haven't had any letters from you since my last few hours at home, probably held up somewhere. They will arrive one fine day, maybe all together.

I hope all goes well at home, and you are all in the very best of health. Had any visitors lately, Mum?

Everything is fine here, same old pastimes and carryings on. I haven't seen any pictures or theatre shows, just stopping in making the most of a quiet life.

My two jobs, clerk-batman are going along well, although I have plenty to do. It occupies my mind and time.

How are Son and Lily, “in the pink”, I hope very much? Remember me to Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet, Jackie, Lily and Son. If I had time I would write many letters, as I used to, but I'm afraid it is impossible.

How are Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie? Has Aunt Ede come back from Norfolk yet? I can't promise to write, but I will do my best. Here's wishing the very best of luck and good health.

Well folks, I'm stuck for words, so I will close now, wishing you all the very best of luck, and sending my love, from,

Your "Old" Loving Son

(Steak & Kid)

Sid.

x x x x x

P.S.

Roll on Civvy Street!

How is Len getting on at the Polytechnic?

31: 1st June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company.

2nd. Bn. Oxs. & Bucks.

A.P.O.

ENGLAND.

Thursday 1st June ‘44

Dear Mum & Dad,

Many thanks for your letter which you write on Sunday. I received it to-day.

I’m very sorry to hear that “Grand-Pop” isn’t to well again, and I sincerely hope that I will not get a letter written by Dad. I know what letters contain when Dad writes them! Bad news usually. I wish “Grand Pop” a speedy recovery in a very short time, and I hope to see him again very soon, enjoying reasonable health and in the same old spirit as he used to be. He should go to hospital, where he would benefit much more.

Did Aunt Ede come home on Friday? I expect she is looking very well after a few weeks in Norfolk. Tell Aunt Ede, I will do my very best to write a letter to her in the time I have to spare. How are Aunt Lil and Junie?

What has Son been up to, getting appointments at the Town Hall? What is it for Mum? I wrote to Son yesterday, so maybe he will let me know what it is all about in his reply.

Don’t send any parcels Mum! I get quite enough, under the circumstances. With warm weather my appetite isn’t so large. I’m quite satisfied just now and everything is going well.

I was pleased to hear that Uncle Bob is well, and if he asks how I am am, tell him the B——
— fool is O.K.

I had a letter from Les Day, the sailor-boy, a few days ago. He is well and happy enough. He was on leave, ten days, during April when I was home.

How are Len and Violet? Does Len still enjoy going to his new school. Tell Len to write one of these days when he isn't reading a book of some sort, and no "cheeky remarks" if he does write.

How is Violet Mum? Getting on well at the office – making an progress with shorthand.

Well folks, I've done my utmost to write more than usual, and although it isn't much more I expect you will appreciate it. So wishing you all at home, and all relations, very good health, the very best of luck, and quiet nights, I'll conclude.

Bye for a While.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x

["Bye for a While" and "Don't send any parcels Mum" suggests that Sid knew he was off to war.]

Normandy: June 1944 - September 1944**32: 6th June 1944**

6th June 1944

Dear Mum & Dad,

Well folks, at last I can write a few lines after a very busy morning. As you can guess I'm off on the long awaited "Second Front". HMM! It's a real do. No Billy Beano.

Tell that Dad of mine, I can tell him something soon. HA! HA! He hasn't said much about what happened [to] him, but I will soon, very soon, realise what did happen to him. I can remember his motto last time, "What is to be will be!", and I guess that it will be my motto. From father to son, through the ages.

Now then Mum, if you don't worry, I won't be worrying, so keep your chin up and get the house ready for another "big nuisance". I may be home again soon, when this war is over.

All this business is very fascinating, marvellous organisations etc.

There is only one thing I wish, that is to have Dad on one side of me and Uncle Jack on the other side of me, to tell me when I go wrong. You can't beat the old sweats at this game. Still I have plenty of confidence, so all should go well.

Remember me to all relations folks, I love 'em all. So folks, being another quick letter I must now close.

Wishing you tons of good luck and the very best of health, and boy-oh-boy, will I be pleased when we get these B———— on the run.

Bye for now

Your Loving Son, Sid.

33: 10th June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company.

2nd. Bn. Oxs. & Bucks.

A.P.O.

ENGLAND.

Saturday 10th June ‘44

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet, Len

Well, I’m not in what you might call a health resort, but I mustn’t grumble. All goes fairly well.

Hope all goes well at home and the nights are quiet. How is Grand-father now, Mum?

It is fine to get the chance to write to you all – I never feel happy unless I have written, and I sincerely hope this letter reaches you.

Remember me to everyone at home and send my love to all. Tell Uncle Jack that I have a good idea what war is like, noisy and quiet, and believe me next time I will not poke my nose into one. Don’t matter though, all these things happen for the best and when it is over I will appreciate everything in civvy street much more than I ever did, also everyone in this world will be much happier.

How are Violet and Len, Mum? Is Len doing well at school? Tell Violet to drop me a line or two when she gets a chance.

Well folks, I will close now, sorry so short, but when I come home I’ll have more to tell you, and may the day come quickly when I do get home.

All my love to you all, quiet nights and the very best of luck.

'Bye for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x x

P.S.

Keep Smiling Mum.

Don't worry!

34: 12th June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company.
2nd. Bn. Oxf. & Bucks L.I.
A.P.O.
ENGLAND.

Monday 12th June ‘44

Dear Mum & Dad,

All goes well here, food is O.K., and all round I haven’t anything to worry me. Excitement comes now and again.

Since I came to France, I haven’t had any letters or seen a newspaper, but that is very reasonably understood. I’m hoping very much to get a letter soon, and also to read an English newspaper. We hear the news, so we know pretty well everything, but the newspapers describe events so much better.

I think you must be hearing and reading quite a lot about this “ ’ere do” but it isn’t too bad just now folks, so don’t worry to much Mum.

How are you at home folks? Enjoying good health and all going well. Are the nights quiet, or is Jerry still bothering you. Did Dad have to stand to with the Home Guard? I expect Uncle Jack was in his glory.

I don’t know the chances of getting home in the future, whether near or far, but when I see you all, well don’t be surprised if I have a drink will you folks. Then after a celebration, a quiet life for ever. I’ve never appreciated peace and quietness as I have done during the last seven days, when it has been quiet.

Is Billy V. on the Second Front, or don't you know yet? I know that there is the possibility of seeing a couple of old friends out here.

How are Aunt Ede and Aunt Lil and Junie? Keep them laughing Mum, till I get home, and I'm sure I'll make them laugh a bit more. No nothing like Len with the barrow and the policeman, but not far from it. By the way, I haven't seen Len Harvey over here yet. Have you heard much about him lately. I was also wondering if Jim Smith is over here.

There is a shortage of cigarettes over here. I get a free issue now each day but it isn't enough, and I cannot buy them yet. If you do send any Mum, don't send to many in case they go astray or get lost. 20 will be fine amongst a few daily newspapers. Maybe by the time I receive them, I will be able to buy some. Cigarettes will be cheaper here because duty isn't paid on them as in England.

Well folks I'm going to get some sleep whilst I have the chance, so I'll close now, so

Wishing you the very best of luck and quiet nights. Good luck to all relations and good health.

Bye for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x

35: 13th June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company.

2nd. Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

A.P.O.

ENGLAND.

Tuesday 13th June ‘44

Dear Mum & Dad,

I have just received your letter dated 4th June, which I was very pleased to see. I was still in England then, and believe me , I wouldn’t mind if I was still in England now.

It hasn’t been to bad yet, out here you know. Landed O.K., after a few bumps and I welcomed the “terra firma” very much. So far so good, and I’m hoping for a quiet future – only hoping.

Are you all enjoying good health at home, and is everything going well? How is Grand Dad? How are Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet and Jackie? Is Lily O.K. and is Son still busy at his job. My love to all at home, and believe me folks I will be very pleased to see all the big happy family, which I hope will not be to long. Remember me to all relations.

Excuse the dirty paper folks, but I’m not in a very convenient spot just now for letter-writing.

I have seen a newspaper to-day, dated Thursday June 8th, rather behind time but a pleasant sight. Perhaps you can either save them or send them to me. The address is as per usual.

Boy-oh-Boy, what wouldn’t I give for a pint of Brown Ale right now, and to be drinking it in the “Allen Arms”. I’d give more to see you smiling faces, you lucky people.

Well Mum & Dad, Violet and Len, I will close now, wishing you good luck, and quiet nights and here's hoping to be seeing you soon.

Cheerio for Now, Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x x

36: 15th June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,
 "A" Company.
 2nd. Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.
 A.P.O.
 ENGLAND.

Friday June 15th

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Once again I am doing my very best, trying to write a few lines to you.

As always, I hope you are fit and enjoying good health and all goes well at home.

I could write a lot about what has been happening over here, but I want to pass that by. I could never forget it but the less said about it the better. There is only one thing I want to say, that is, my oldest chum Bert, you remember him folks, was wounded in the leg this morning. He will be coming back home I expect, and when I get home I will have to go and see him. I will miss him very much, but I have his home address so I can write to him.

Have you heard from any of the chaps or seen ^^ ^^ ^^ lately Mum? If you do see any, remember me to them, and wish them all the very best of luck for me.

How are Violet and Len, Mum? Gosh, I will be very pleased to see you all and I hope we all have a drink on the next meeting. I could certainly drink a glass of beer. That reminds me, I left a quart bottle of Brown Ale in the cupboard and when I come home I will have it, as soon as I can get home. That's if Dad hasn't drunk it.

Well folks, once again I will close, don't forget to keep smiling Mum. "What is to be, will be," so wishing you the very best of luck and quiet nights, I will conclude,

Cheerio for Now,
Love to Everyone,
Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x x

P.S.

Excuse the dirty paper.

Thank-You -----

It's mud.

37: 17th June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company.
2nd. Bn. Oxf. & Bucks. L.I.
c/o A.P.O.
ENGLAND.

Saturday 17th June.

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a few lines to let you know that I'm O.K. So far.

I haven't received any letters except the one you wrote on Sunday 4th June. Probably your letters are held up in the post somewhere and maybe I will be seeing a couple very soon.

How are you at home folks? Have you had any air raids? I have heard of Jerry's secret weapon and I hope very much that it doesn't make a success, and hasn't much effect.

Has Aunt Beat heard from Arthur recently? If you write to Arthur, will you send my best wishes and tell him that I'm looking forward to that celebration when this is all over.

Have you heard if Jim Smith is out here? I haven't seen Len yet, nor that chap Bob who I usually met in the Allen, whilst on leave. I hope they are safe. I think that Billy Verrier is out here and how I would like to see him. They are all so near yet so far. But I suppose we will all meet again some time and place and I will be very pleased to see them.

I have written a letter each day for the last 3 days and I will do my best to keep doing so. If I can I will try and write to Aunt Ede, and Aunt Lil. I will do my best. I only hope that all my letters are reaching you.

Well, I will close now folks, until tomorrow, so wishing you all the very best of luck and quiet nights, I'll conclude.

Cheerio for a While, Keep Smiling,

Love to Everyone at Home,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

P.S. Best wishes for good health for Grand-Dad.

38: 17th June 1944 (Second Letter)

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
 "A" Company
 2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.
 A.P.O.
 ENGLAND.

17th June '44 Saturday

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Many thanks for your very and most welcome letters, one from Mum and one from Violet. They cheered me up very much, and it was good to hear that you are all well.

Your letter Mum and Violet's, reached me on the 17th, to-day, and you posted them on the 10th and 9th respectively. Not bad under the conditions, but probably they will be quicker in posting, soon. Doesn't matter how long the letters take, it is very nice to hear from you all at home, and while you write regularly I will receive them regularly.

I expect you are more settled now that Grand-Dad is in hospital. Visiting Thursdays and Sundays isn't too bad, but I expect you find the journey there and back very tiring. Remember me to Grand-Dad, and I wish him a speedy recovery in the near future. Yes Violet, I have a date in November and I'm very much hoping that I will be there. Perhaps this senseless carrying on of war will finish completely when this one is over. At least I hope so.

I have read about the new "Jerry" weapon, but I expect it is to try and affect the morale at home. Maybe it will not be so much of a success as our old enemy things. So keep your chins up folks!

I wrote to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie earlier to-day, probably they will be pleased to see my letter, and maybe it will cheer them up.

How are Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet and Jackie, Son and Lily? Is Lily well Mum? Remember me to everyone and convey my best wishes, love and good luck. I might have a pint with Uncle Jack when I come home. Did I say might, perhaps I put the wrong word, I think I should have put, I will have a pint. Ask Uncle Jack! HA! HA!

There is a great thing I don't regret Mum, and that is having a good time on my last few passes. It was worth spending the money, I'm beginning to think.

I put ten francs on the Derby sweepstake, but I didn't win. First time I spent any cash out here.

We certainly could have had better weather last week.

I don't need any soap just yet Mum, and food has been very good up to now, under the conditions. Don't worry about sending food, Mum, as if I have to move it will be more for me to carry, so hold on to it for a while.

Well folks, I will close now, and here's wishing you the very best of luck, and quiet nights.

Cheerio for now, Your Loving Son, Sid

x x x x x

39: 19th June 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
 "A" Company
 2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.
 A.P.O.
 ENGLAND.

Monday 19th June '44

Dear Mum & Dad,

I have just received a letter dated 7th June, from you. Last Sunday, I received two dated 9th and 10th, one of which was written by Violet.

Things aren't too bad out here just now, and I really do hope they will stay this way, until, perhaps one day I will be seeing you all. Plenty of mud, and it is no place for picnics, or sunbathing. Could you send a couple of H. Gazettes.

I haven't seen Len, but I hope to, one day when all is quiet. I'm hoping that he is safe and well, also Bob.

Hope you are all enjoying enjoying good health, all going well. Have you had quiet nights Mum?

How are all the relations, "Bless 'em all", and send my love. Hope to see them soon. Soon may mean months but I'll be seeing them.

Well folks love to you all, best of luck, and quiet nights. Keep Smiling.

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x x

P.S. Glad you have heard from Arthur.

40: 21st June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company. H.Q.

2nd. Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

A.P.O.

ENGLAND.

Wednesday, 21st June

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Received your letter which you wrote on Tuesday, June 13th. By now I hope very much that you have received at least two letters from me. Thank you very much for your letter.

Yesterday I posted a letter to you and one to Uncle Jack & Aunt Violet.

I certainly look forward to getting your letters now I'm here, which of course is the only thing I have to look forward to, except the day I come home, and I am looking forward to that very much.

How are you all at home folks, enjoying good health, and how is Grand-Dad now? I hope Son has recovered from the old complaint once again. Pleased to hear that Lily is well. Remember me to Son and Lily, and tell them that I wrote a letter to them about five days ago. Remember me to Uncle Bob, Aunt Nell and children, and boy-oh-boy I wouldn't mind doing my service where Uncle Bob is, right now. Did you have a nice time at Junie's birthday party? I imagine that all the children enjoyed themselves – good sing-song, and Aunt Ede's favourite – K?????. Hope Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie are in the best of health.

Surprised to hear that Clem was home for a few hours, and with a nice young lady. Another one will soon be walking up the altar I can foresee that. I don't blame him. If you see Clem

again, wish him the very best of luck. If he's bored stiff with his job, I'll tell him he is much better off with a boring job. I've certainly learnt one lesson out here folks.

Have you had any more air-raids just lately Mum? I hope not.

By the way Mum, you've no need to send any money. Just a couple of Hackney Gazettes now and again, and a regular letter is all I ask for.

I have the photograph of Son and Lily's wedding with me and it is good to see your smiling faces in the family photograph. I take a look at them very often.

Hope Violet has enjoyed her week's holiday, and did she go far Mum? Probably she spent her holiday locally, but I expect it made a break. Enjoy yourself, sister? Get drunk? HMM.

Well folks, I will close now, wishing you very good luck, the very best of health, and keep smiling. Love to all relations.

Cheerio for A While,

Your Loving Son, & Brother,

Sid

x x x x x x

41: 23rd June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company. H.Q.

2nd. Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

A.P.O.

ENGLAND.

June 23rd. Friday ‘44

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just received the Hackney Gazette, soap and the letter. I’m very pleased to see a local paper with the local news, and thank you very much for them.

Hope you are all enjoying good health and all is well at home. I’m O.K. so far.

You have mentioned that you haven’t received any letters from me yet. It is strange that Son should get the letter I sent to him before you received any, because I wrote to about three to you before I wrote to Son. Altogether I have sent you probably eight to ten letters . Maybe, folks, the letters have been destroyed or lost, or are delayed through some unforeseen happening. Don’t worry though, I expect you were all pleased when Son received a letter. I have been receiving your letters much more regularly than I thought I would do, and to see them is a real pleasure and very comforting.

I met Bill Verrier’s platoon serjeant, but Billy was transferred elsewhere. I was hoping to meet up with him. I haven’t seen Len, but I expect he is O.K. I hope so very much. Love to ALL.

Well, best of luck, folks, quiet nights, don’t worry and keep smiling,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x

42: 25th June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company.

2nd. Bn. Oxf & Bucks.

B.W.E.F.

Sunday, June 25th.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

I have received the letter written by Dad, and was very pleased to know that you have received at least one letter from me. Probably by now you have received a couple more.

I was glad to know that you are all O.K. – safe and sound – especially having heard that the raids on London have started again. Jerry’s secret weapon must have caused you some disturbances recently. Is Jerry trying to hit military objectives. I don’t suppose he is. Same as usual, anywhere will do.

I have heard from Son, and I am very pleased to know that Son and Lily are both well and cheerful.

I don’t think I want anything sent along Mum. I have four bars of soap and a strong soap. All I need really, are a couple of local papers each week and a couple of picture books, which I can pass on when I have read them. If you send parcels Mum, each time I move I have more to carry. Food isn’t bad at all, basic but tasty. Biscuits seem to get harder after eating them for 3 weeks. No bread since I left “Blighty”. By the way, I could do with some lighter flints.

I mustn’t grumble at all, really, as I think I’m a lot better off than I thought I would be before I came here.

I haven’t seen Len yet but still hoping to before long.

Well I will close now folks, it seems to be getting noisy again, so wishing you all the very best of luck, and quiet nights, and hoping to see you soon.

Cheerio for Now,

Love to Everyone at Home

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x

43: 27th June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company.

2nd. Bn. O.B.L.I

B.W.E.F.

June 27th, Tuesday

Dear Mum & Dad,

I have just received your letter, or rather, Lenny’s letter, and I thank Lenny very much for it. He can write a very nice letter and perhaps you can tell him so. Cheered me up to know that he likes his new school, and I hope he is doing well, and making good progress. I will write at the first opportunity.

I had a surprise to-day, I met that chap Bob Fox who I often met in the Allen when on leave. He is well, safe and sound and he said wouldn’t mind seeing the Allen right now. I was very pleased to see him, and the first words he spoke were “Blimey, are you still alive?” I said “----
- ----- too!” I won’t write it down. Strange, but I almost asked him the same question.

I’m feeling rather dirty after living the way I have done since “D” day, and I will be very glad to have a good bath, change into civvies and go for a nice walk round the parks at home. Better than a walk, would be a couple of days sleep. Still, I’m not grumbling – “life is too sweet” but may the happy day when this war ends come very soon.

How are you all at home, folks. Quiet nights or noisy just lately. I do hope the P Bomb hasn’t been worrying you to much, and the sooner we get the upper hand the better.

Well folks, I must close. I’m just going on sentry so wishing you all the very best of luck, and I send my love to everyone at home.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

44: 30th June 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Coy.

2nd. Bn. Oxfs & Bucks.

B.W.E.F.

Friday 30th June 44

Dear Mum & Dad,

Here's hoping you are all enjoying good health, and you haven't been disturbed too much by “Flying Bombs”. Bloody things! Don't matter the R.A.F. knock hell out of them and the “Jerries”.

It is a strange life out here, one day I feel mad next day I'm full of sympathy. As long as I don't go “shell happy” I don't mind. HA! HA! Still, roll on peace and may it come before the winter.

Have you heard if Billy Verrier is out here? I told you I met his serjeant. Also I met with that chap Bob who I used to meet in the Allen.

We had a rumour go round that an E.N.S.A show was in the bridgehead, called “The Shell Happy Four in Keep ‘em Ducking”. Some bright spark made that good one go round. It wasn't true but it made us laugh.

How are all the folks at home Mum? What is Grand-Dad like now? I hope he is much better than he was and don't forget to convey my best wishes for a quick recovery. All the Best, Granddad. Remember me to everyone, and good luck and good health to everyone. Boy-oh-boy, how I would like to see them all, at one big party. But that is impossible just now and probably for a long time yet. Sooner the better though!

Has Lenny received the letter which I wrote to him, with a letter to you, Mum & Dad.

Well folks, I haven't received a letter from you for a few days. The airgraph was from Len Roles. Probably a few will arrive all together – so come on postman be kind to your old S. & Kidney.

Wishing you the best of luck, and quiet nights, I'll say love to ALL.

Cheerio for Now, Your Loving Son,

Sid. xxxxxxxx

45: 2nd July 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company.

2nd. Bn. Oxfs & Bucks.

B.W.E.F.

July 2nd, Sunday

Dear Mum & Dad,

Thank you very much for the cigarettes, papers and toothpaste. Boy was I pleased to see them. At the same time, I received the letter you wrote, the day before you sent the parcel, and a letter from Uncle Jack, and of course Arthur’s airgraph. So you can understand how much better I felt having received a few letters. Your parcel was dated 23rd June, your letter the 22nd June, and Uncle Jack’s letter was dated 22nd June. I received all three last night, 1st July.

Well Mum & Dad, I hope all goes well for you at home, seeing that this war affects you almost the same as us chaps out here. One day it will all be finished and life will be really worth living. No sound of guns, bombs or bullets, but just memories. ??????? regular every night and no black out. I can’t imagine it after 5 years of war. Still it will come one day, and probably will be the happiest of surprises.

I was very pleased to receive Uncle Jack’s letter, and it made me feel much happier. I was glad to hear that “Ellanby” folks are all in good health and all is going O.K. I will write to day if all stays quiet. Out here, night time is usually noisiest, and sometimes the world goes mad. You should see me performing – dodging the ???? HA! HA! Even you folks at home would have to laugh – I’m sure I do cartwheels and hand-stands ???? to get into my “little ‘ole”. HA! HA! Just like air-raids, afterwards we laughed at everything that happened. It is terribly saddening though. I will be pleased when all of it ceases.

Glad to hear that Grand-Dad is more cheerful now, which shows that he is probably a lot better. Best wishes and good luck Grand-Dad. How is Aunt Lou, Mum?

Arthur's airgraph was quite a surprise. He said he was on the Burma border when he wrote the airgraph. He mentioned the park I went to on my last leave and he said he wouldn't mind going to one himself. Len Roles wished to be remembered to all the folks, also hopes you are all enjoying the best of health. Arthur ??? the same. I would like to see them both, I expect they will have plenty to tell us, about experiences in India.

The cigarettes came at the ??? moment, as I had smoked my last one, so you can imagine how pleased I was to see them, and thankful. 20 every four days will be fine Mum. Don't send too many otherwise if they get lost it would be wasting.

I haven't drawn any pay since before D-Day and have only spent ten francs, on the Derby, since I have been here. By the time I do get home I will probably have a few pounds in credit, which will pay for a few pints and shorts, but I think the majority will be put in the P.O.S.B. More sensible these ??? .

I'm using an indelible pencil and it is spitting with rain.

Well folks, thank you again for your small but very welcome parcel. Now I must close, sending best wishes for good luck, good health and quiet nights.

Cheerio for Now, Your Loving Son. Sid x x x x x x

46: 6th July 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company.

2nd. Bn. Oxfs & Bucks.

B.W.E.F.

6th July, Thursday

Dear Mum & Dad,

I have just received two letters, one from yourselves and the other from Len, dated the 30th and 28th of June. At the same time, I received a letter from Son dated 28th, and a small package containing 40 cigarettes from Son with a letter enclosed from Uncle Jack. How pleased I was to see so many letters all together. The mail had been held up for some unknown reason, and I was expecting to see quite a few letters for me when I was told the mail had arrived.

I'm very glad to hear that you are all in good health and all is going well. Has Grand-Dad recovered completely from the operation by this time, Mum? I very much hope so. In Len's letter he mentioned that he hadn't been to school for one week and I can easily understand why. I think they are getting the secret weapon well in . . . ?

By the way, did Len receive that very small souvenir which I sent a few days ago? Don't tell me that a small piece of cloth like that was censored. Tell Len I will be writing to him as soon as possible. How is sister Violet? I expect she has been going to work as usual. Where do you do your office work now Violet, in the basement? HA! HA! If you can get down O.K. I'm only leg-pulling.

Gosh, Mum you must get tired, going to see Grand-Dad each day. Why don't you have a rest for a change. I know one sad affair has been happening after another in the family lately, but take it easy Mum, otherwise you will be over doing things, not me as you are always worrying about. Keep smiling though, and when the war is over we will all have a long rest. Dashing about will finish.

There is just one small article I need Mum, and that is a shaving brush. I've lost the really good one, over here, and I must have one. A cheap one is all I need whilst I am here. It was silly to have brought the other one out here. Don't go dashing about for one. Probably Son has one at home which he doesn't need any longer. Son won't mind! Thanks Son!

If you see Son after you receive this letter will you thank him very much for the letter and cigarettes. I am sending Son a post card to acknowledge that the cigs. reached me, and I will write as soon as I can.

How are you Dad? I expect the H.G. is more at the alert ??? but I think "Jerry" has his hands full at the moment. I can imagine Uncle Jack "on his toes" waiting for any unlucky Jerry to come his way. I don't think there is much fear of that happening – not now. What I'm waiting to see is (Monty's) "push the B----- into the sea" just to make up for Dunkirk for the 3rd time. Drowned the bloody lot. Still it remains to be seen and I sincerely hope we can finish the job by Xmas, although the going will be tough.

Well good luck, folks, and good health, and keep smiling! Your in this as much as we are, so carry on the good work. Your Loving Son, Sid x x x x x

47: 8th July 1944

Rank Pte *No.* 5836503

Name VERRIER. S.

Address "A" COMPANY 2nd BN. OXF. & BUCKS. B.W.E.F.

Date 8th July. SAT.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Many thanks for your second parcel of papers, cigarettes, and the letter. I also received a letter from you yesterday evening. The separate letter was dated July 3rd, Monday last. Thank you very much for the cigs, Mum. I had another letter from Lily dated July 3rd and one from Aunt Ede. The mail is getting here a couple of days quicker – thank heavens. I hope you are receiving my mail O.K. by now.

By the way, your mail to me isn't censored, or, it hasn't been so far.

I haven't heard from my chum, Bert, from Loughborough, not yet, but I hope to, very soon. It is a job writing to as many folks as possible, believe me, and I always do my best to write at least one a day to you at home. Still I enjoy letter writing, although I usually have to rush about it. Although I'm not ambitious in this Army, there is plenty of work to do.

I do know one thing, the sooner these Germans are blown off the face of the earth, the better. I've got past that, "not their fault" idea. Spoil everything all over the world for everybody. I'm waiting to see the whole B----- lot driven into the sea, or cut to pieces. I think that all they live for is war, well, over here they are beginning to feel the "pinch".

I'm pleased to hear that Grand-Dad is a little better now, although it is only a question of months. Who knows, Mum, whilst he is strong he may pull through. Remember me Mum – good luck and a quick recovery Grand-Dad.

I didn't write yesterday Mum, I was busy, very busy, so that is one of the few days which I have missed writing to you.

How are you Mum? Does your bad leg still worry you – no, I haven't forgotten it. You certainly do to much walking about now, and it would do you good to have a rest, air-raids or no air-raids – take it easy Mum!

Whilst I have been writing this letter, I have been given a letter from Violet (V.) Will you thank Violet very much and tell her that I will write as soon as possible in reply. Thank Violet for the new fountain pen very much, but ask her to keep it at home until I get home. I would rather it be left in a safe place. Pencil is good enough whilst I'm here.

I will be pleased to get into a decent bed folks. In the front line since D-Day and sleep isn't very regular. Usually manage about 4 hrs each 24 hrs. Two or three times since I came, I've been lucky and managed about 6 hrs in a day. Still I'm doing my share, although it isn't much, and that is all that bothered me, and now I'm just hoping to be back in "civvies" in a few months time, knowing that I did my share however small.

I was very pleased to hear from Lily, I'm a lucky "guy" to have a sister-in-law who writes so "cheery" letters. Lily said that Uncle Jack and Violet had written to me but the letters haven't arrived yet, but I'm certainly hoping that they reach me this evening or tomorrow.

I would like to write to all of the relations Mum, but I'm afraid that is impossible yet. Maybe when I get to a rest camp I will do. Usually at rest camps there is more to be done than in the front line, and it is a damn lot noisier. I came here with 200 francs and have only spent 10 francs, which was a gamble on the Derby and naturally I didn't win. Approximately 1/- in 5 wks.

Thank Aunt Ede for the letter, I'll reply as soon as I can. So that is what you call the "Flying Bomb". Windy descent – it must be.

Well folks, I must close, I have another letter to write now. Remember me to every one at home, I will be very pleased to see you again. Good luck and Best wishes to you all at home. Keep Smiling. Cheerio for Now, and Quiet Nights.

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x

48: 9th July 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,
 "A" Company. 2nd. Bn. Oxf & Bucks.
 B.W.E.F.

9th[?] July Sunday

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Just received your letter dated July 4th, and I'm very pleased to know that you are all O.K., within reason. I'm not doing so bad.

Are you receiving my mail fairly regularly. I send letter cards now and then, when I'm in a hurry and want to get the reply away by next post time. I noticed that this letter wasn't posted until the 6th July which is very quick, and I hope the mail continues to arrive so quick.

There are just a couple of small things which I need Mum, one is a packet of envelopes and a writing pad. Just one pack of envelopes, otherwise I will find it a job to put them in my pack.

To-day I have written to Lily in reply to her letter. I have three letters to reply to – Violet's, Len's and Aunt Ede's. I will try and do them to-day and to-morrow. The trouble is that I'm out of envelopes at the moment and haven't any more of these letter cards having used my issue of four to five per week. Maybe one of the chaps will lend me a couple. No stationery shops out here at the moment.

When you send the papers Mum, don't worry about sending the daily papers, just the H. Gazettes will be fine, and a Sunday paper or two. The daily papers are pretty regular out here now, and usually are only a couple of days old. Just a Sunday paper and the Hackney Gazette. Otherwise I'm quite O.K. for anything I need, just now.

My cigarettes position has been very good thanks to you all at home. So far I've had 40 from Son, and 40, two lots of twenty with the papers from you Mum & Dad. For the past week, I

haven't been without a "smoke", but have always had plenty to spare. A few days ago I had 50 from the N.A.A.F.I. which are free, and yesterday another 8, and each day I get [an] issue of 7. At the moment I have about 20, another [to-morrow] and maybe I will receive your third parcel with 20 cigs. That is all I have to do at times – smoke, and I'm pleased I have, and get, plenty to puff away at. Waste of money in some ways, but I enjoy every cigarette. I don't know how Dad did 4 yrs, last time as a teetotaller. Blessed if I know.

I haven't seen Len yet but there is always a chance that I will. Nor Billy Verrier. I made enquiries, but no luck.

Well, here's wishing you all at home the very best of luck, and quiet nights. How are the P. Bombs now?

Cheerio for a While, Your Loving Son, Sid x x x x x

49: 10th July 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company. 2nd. Bn. Oxf & Bucks.

B.W.E.F.

10th July 44

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

I'm not replying to a letter which I received but just writing my usual daily letter. Matter of fact, I haven't had any mail to-day owing to a probable hold up somewhere. Still, I'm lucky to receive the mail that I do, so I'm not grumbling because it is late in arriving. I wrote yesterday, to you Mum and Dad. I haven't received Violet Savage's or Uncle Jack's letters yet, and I'm wondering if they have gone astray, just for a while. I wrote to Violet S. a couple of days ago and to Lily yesterday.

How are you all at home? How are the raids now, getting less or getting more? I very much hope that you haven't been bothered too much about them. Do you still stop in the house Mum & Dad or are you using the Anderson. For heavens sake take care of yourselves, and don't go getting out too much Mum. Is Len still going to school? I know Dad will still be going to work, can't keep an old sweat down. I expect Violet goes to work, not having far to go. How are Aunt Ede and Aunt Lil and Junie? I can imagine how upset they must be and I wish I was at home to keep them laughing. I would like to be there with you all when the raids are on. Still Son is around and I'm very glad about that. I expect he is always in enquiring how you are, and often coming to see you.

I will write to Aunt Ede and Aunt Lil, Uncle Jack, and as many relations as possible. If I don't write to some relations Mum, just send my love, and best wishes, and as soon as I get plenty of envelopes and paper, I will write.

You will notice the mess the envelope is in, The flap on the back of the envelope gets stuck down because of sweat. The stamps aren't much use over here so I might just as well use them as I am doing.

Well folks, I must add that I will be very pleased to get home and see a lot for myself of what has happened. It isn't bad out here, bad enough with living conditions and noise, but perhaps it could have been a lot worse. The first three or four days was tough going, but since then everything is more settled and we know a little more of what is going on. It will be grand to walk along a pavement again and get away from mud and tracks. In the trench at night with black out up and the candle alight, the pin up girls look pretty good. Covers up the clay walls. My chum and I are scared to look at the pin up girls when its noisy. Still we have a laugh between us at times. But I can think of how we will be laughing when we get back to "Blighty". That will be exciting.

I have just sent away Field Services Post Cards to Aunt Ede & Aunt Lil, Aunt Beat, Jim Smith and family. Also to Uncle Jack and Aunt Violet, and one to you Mum & Dad. All are dated 10th July. They aren't much I know but just to let everyone know I am thinking of them. Remember me to Uncle Bill and Aunt Nell, Mum! I will write as soon as I can to Uncle Bob. I have his address but if I send the letter to you, you can send it on. Don't expect the letter just yet though. This evening I was issued with a four letter cards which will help very much.

Well folks once again I hope the P. Plane will not worry you to much in the future. I had the pleasure of watching 2,000 tons of bombs drop on "Jerry" and I hope they're all "Bomb Happy". They deserve all what they get.

Cheerio for Now, Best of Luck to ALL at home.

Your Loving Son, Sid x x x x x

50: 11th July 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,
 "A" Company. 2nd. Bn. Oxf & Bucks.
 B.W.E.F.

11th July. Tuesday

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just received your letter dated 7th July and I'm glad to hear that all is well, in spite of the present day difficulties. Life at home must be rather hectic with the Flying Bomb around all day and night. Keep going strong folks, and let us hope very much that soon "???" take them "down a peg". I expect you have missed a lot of sleep just recently and are using the shelter more. Keep smiling folks, it won't last for ever. Everything has been overcome before now and I'm sure the "back room" boys will do a good job soon, giving it back tenfold.

I am very sorry to hear that Grand Dad's condition is poor, but don't give up home Mum. If it is a question of time, perhaps it would be better now than keep on suffering for months. Don't you think so?

Don't worry about me folks! I get along, no pains in the stomach now from the operations. If the rupture breaks down well it's a just too bad – "A BLIGHTY ONE" – no, I mean that's just too good to hope for. I'm afraid there's nothing wrong with me! HA! HA!

The only things I need are a packet of envelopes and writing pad Mum, which I have mentioned in my previous letter. Don't send food, I don't do to bad. All tinned food, and biscuits. Still no bread after 5 weeks, and when I do get some bread, "?????" I will probably sit and admire it for a few minutes.

So Gladys came to see you. I expect the visit came as a surprise. I wouldn't know Gladys if I passed her at home [?]. I hope she is well and happy and did you ask where she is now? With Dan Thomas's battery perhaps.

How are Mr & Mrs Thomas and Bill and Dan? Remember to let them know that even though I haven't written letters, I certainly haven't forgotten them. It seems a long time since I saw them, and also you folks at home, although I was home a couple of week-ends before the invasion began.

Pleased to hear that Son and Lily came to dinner, it probably cheered you up very much. One of these days I will be coming to dinner and how I will enjoy it.

Love to ALL. Cheerio for Now, Your Loving Son, Sid x x x

51: 13th July 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier

“A” Company, 2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks,

B.W.E.F.

13th July 1944, ~~Friday~~ Thursday

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a few lines to let you know that all goes well. I have replied to your last letter, but I have a moment to spare and I thought I would write. I’m hoping very much to get more mail to-day – your third parcel of cigs and papers, and maybe two or three letters.

How are the air raids now, Mum & Dad? Hope you are all safe and well and haven’t been disturbed too much. Are all relations safe – Uncle Jack and family? Lily and Son, are they O.K? I’m always thinking of you folks at home, wondering what kind of life you are leading now. How is Grand Dad now Mum?

Yesterday I wrote to Violet and Len V. and to Son and Lily.

Don’t forget to send along some writing paper and envelopes Mum. This letter form I’m writing on now is the very last one, for two or three days, until the next issue. I have a few sheets of paper but no envelopes.

I must say I will be very pleased to be in a rest camp somewhere. It has been a long spell out here in the front line, and I will not be sorry to get away from it. I haven’t seen or done much, but it is the living conditions, damp old “dug-outs” etc. I’m not fed up, but a change would do a lot of good. Still, these days I’m beginning to think that we are regarded as “machines” not human beings.

By the way, yesterday I wrote to Aunt Ede and Aunt Lil. I hope my letter cheered them up a little, it was more cheerful than this one.

The mail is going all “haywire” again. A few each day that’s all. Just the time when mail is needed quick, to know how you are in London, it goes “haywire”. Roll on peace and civvy street.

I haven’t seen Billy Verrier yet although he isn’t far from here. I told you I met his platoon serjeant whilst out here, but Bill had been transferred to another regiment in the same division. Has Uncle Walter heard from him yet? I do hope he is safe and well. Remember me to Uncle Walter and Aunt Lou and family. I haven’t seen Len Harvey, still hoping to. I have only seen Bob once, and not since then. But I suppose we will all meet again but Lord knows when.

Well folks, I must close now as I’m going to get a little sleep in, so wishing you all at home, everyone, the best of luck, and quiet days if possible. Keep Smiling although it’s a job.

Cheerio for now.

Your Loving Son,

Sid

52: 14th July 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company. 2nd. Bn. Oxf & Bucks.

B.W.E.F.

14th July, Friday

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

I haven't yet received your third parcel of cigarettes and papers, nor Uncle Jack's letter or Violet's letter – Violet Savage. Yesterday I received a second letter from Violet Savage, and gosh, I was cheered up. I replied yesterday evening. I didn't get a letter from you, neither yesterday and I haven't received one to-day, and I sincerely hope you haven't had any trouble at home. Maybe the mail has been held up.

Well, how is Grand Dad now Mum? Better or worse? I hope very much that he is a little better. Please remember me and wish him the speediest recovery possible Mum! One day soon, perhaps I will be able to go and see him at the hospital.

How are the air raids now Mum? Still the same or have the R.A.F. stopped a lot of them. Violet S. said that they sleep in the house just the same, so I expect you do the same Mum & Dad.

Have Violet and Len received my letter to them yet? Also I wrote to Aunt Ede and Aunt Lil a few days ago. Last night I wrote to Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet and family. I wrote to you yesterday as well Mum and Dad and the letter was posted this morning. I sent a few service post cards, one to Aunt Beat, Aunt Daisy, Uncle Bill and Aunt Nell. I will try to write to Dan Thomas or Bill Thomas. I haven't their addresses but I can send them along to Mr and Mrs Thomas. I must get down to plenty of letter writing as soon as the writing materials come along. There is nothing else I need Mum as I have plenty of soap, toothpaste, and by the way, I've managed to get hold of another tooth-brush, I ??? ????? ???, so if you haven't bought one yet, I shouldn't bother Mum. If you have bought one would you save it for me at home. Sorry if I caused you any bother folks.

Well, once again I must close folks, wishing you all the very best of luck, and take care of yourselves – don't go out to much. So wishing you good health, and may I be home to see you soon.

Cheerio for now, Love to Everyone.

Your Loving Son,

Sid xxxxxx

53: 16th July 1944

P.S. New Address

British Liberation Army. HMM!

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company. 2nd. Bn. Oxf & Bucks. L.I.

B.L.A.

16th July, Sunday.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

I have just received the parcel of papers and 20 cigs, and your letter sent on July 8th, and I thank you very much indeed for them. I managed to read a couple of Hackney Gazettes this afternoon.

I'm pleased to hear that you are all in good health and all safe and sound at home, Mum & Dad. I'm very sorry to hear that Grand Dad isn't as well. He must be very bad for Uncle Bob to get 14 days compassionate leave to go home and see Grand Dad. Does Uncle Ray go to see Grand Dad? [I'd like] to be able to get home to see Grand Dad, but I'm afraid that's impossible, as you can understand.

Yesterday I wrote to Aunt Beat, Violet Savage, and sent a letter ??????. I received a letter from you yesterday, dated the 10th July. The letter got here quicker than the small parcels. The letters come by air, parcels by sea. Letters ????? 4 days to get here.

Well folks I will be very pleased to get home again, away from the front line, and have a rest. Gosh its Sunday, and the guns never stop. ??? doesn't matter over here, I'm afraid. I think our lads have done their [time]. I will certainly enjoy myself on he first evening home. I can just imagine it.

Thank you very much for the 200 cigarettes on the way Mum, and ????. I managed to buy 100 to-day at 4d for ten Players. You can buy them for the same price I imagine. The 200 shouldn't be to long in arriving now.

I've just had a surprise, your letter and Len's letter posted on the 13th July have just reached me. That's quick isn't it. Thank you very much for the flints, envelopes, and letter, and thank you for your letter, and I'm pleased to hear that you received your ??? wanted souvenir. Also, I'm glad to know that you are receiving my mail very much quicker now. Yes folks things are more settled in now. I certainly couldn't expect the mail to be any quicker. That has cheered me up very much.

So Dan Thomas came to see you, I'm glad to hear that he's bound to write now he has the address. Yes he's one of the best. I was surprised to hear that Janet and Dan are not together.

Well folks, I'm jolly pleased to have the local papers, flints, 200 cigarettes on the way, and envelopes, and Len's letter was very cheerful. The P. Bombs don't seem to bother you young man, unless you are "pulling my leg". Still, you keep your chin up, I must say that. How is sister Violet, still working hard on that office chair. That's the idea you stick to the chair – remain seated. I will when I get out.

So, Best of Luck Folks, God Bless You, Your Loving Son, Sid xx

54: 18th July 1944

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company. 2nd. Bn. Oxf & Bucks. Lt. Infy.

B.L.A.

18th July 44 Tuesday

Dear Mum and Dad, Violet and Len,

I haven't received any post to-day, which is due to a hold up over here. I will be getting some to-morrow most probably. I expect there is plenty of post on the way. I still haven't seen Uncle Jack's or Violet's letters yet. Probably take a month to get here now, but better late than never.

Last night I wrote to Uncle Bill and Aunt Nell, this morning I wrote to Uncle Jack and Aunt Violet, also to Violet S. I'll gradually writing letters to each relation as I have plenty of writing material now and writing occupies my mind and time, also I enjoy it very much. Writing a letter seems to take my mind off what's "going on here".

There was a lot doing to-day and probably you will be reading about it before you get this letter. What a sight we saw.

How are you all at home folks? Well and reasonably happy. I sincerely hope so. Has Grand Dad's condition improved at all, Mum? I hope so very much. Please remember me and I wish Grand Dad better as soon as possible. How is Aunt Lou? Are all relations enjoying good health, and all safe and sound? Have ??? Aunt Ede and Aunt Lil and Junie. I send my love to everyone at home, and hope to see you all soon. Roll on the happy day when all the boys come home. Perhaps it will not be long now. I'm still hoping to see Christmas at home, and may it be quiet and peaceful. You will be taken out when I do get home, no ifs and buts. O.K.?

Do the Flying Bombs will worry you Mum & Dad? Five quiet nights must have made a break for you. How are they of a day time.

The post has just arrived and I have received a letter from you dated Wed. July 12th, and a letter from Son dated July 14th and a letter from Wally Smith.

You are still dashing about Mum. First to Aunt Ede and Aunt Lil and then to Grand Dad. I hope you are not running yourself down, Mum. Have a rest now and again – take things steady.

I expect you were surprised to see Bill Smith wasn't you folks. I very much doubt if I would recognise him now. I would like to see him.

Yes you are quite right Mum - every day is one day nearer – thank ?????. Just when the day will be I cannot say but believe me I'll go silly and Slap Happy-????-Nose, that's what you will be calling me.

Glad to hear that you have seen Don and Glen [Clem?] again. Good Luck and best wishes to them. Son tells me that George Dyer is on the L.C.Ts evacuating casualties. Well I must say I never want to see him on his L.C.T.

I'll wait till we get home. Also Son tells me that Violet Savage has volunteered to come over here. She has certainly plenty of courage, and I must write again soon. I doubt if she will come yet a while.

Well, 'Bye for Now Folks. God Bless You All, Keep Smiling. Y.L.S Sid xx

55: 19th July 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company, 2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks. L.I.

B.L.A.

19th July 44. Wed.

Dear Mum & Dad,

I have just received your letter dated 15th July, and am very pleased to know that you are all well and reasonably happy.

The cigarettes 200, haven't arrived yet, owing to the fact that they come by sea. Thank-you also, very much, for the parcel that is on its way. Writing pad, envelopes, and shaving brush. I have received the flints and envelopes in your letter, thanks very much Mum & Dad. You certainly look after me well, and I hope I don't cause you any trouble, folks. Thank you very much for everything you are doing for me.

Glad to hear that you have received my letter July 10th. I expect you are pleased the letters reach home much earlier.

That is a good one – the Bob Hope programme – Bob down and Hope for the best. Where did you hear that one Mum?

Also glad to know that Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie are well, and are taking the raids better now. Are the nights still quiet in London? My love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie – here's hoping to see them soon.

Yes Mum you are right – we have to be thankful, there's no doubt about that, and may the day come soon when this war is all over, and we can start afresh.

In London the people are certainly taking the air-raids with their chins up – going to work just as usual. You go to see Grand-Dad each day with these bombs flying about. Yes you are doing fine Mum.

How is Grand Dad now Mum? I hope very much that he is well, within reason. Remember me to him and I wish him better. I'm thinking of Grand Dad all the time. I sincerely hope to see him well again, and on two feet.

I had a letter from Son yesterday, Wal Smith, and yourselves. I think I told you in yesterday's letter.

I'm not doing so bad, but I would like to see you soon, so let us hope the war will soon be won. The army in Italy are doing well and the Russians are tearing ahead. I don't care who gets to Berlin first if we can get it finished with.

Well Mum & Dad, Violet and Len I must close now, so wishing you the very best of luck I will close. Quiet Nights.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x

P.S.

Do you know anyone at 242 Allen Road by the name of HARRIS.

They are my chum's cousins.

56: 22nd July 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company, 2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks. L.I.

B.L.A.

22nd July 44. Sat.

Dear Mum & Dad,

Sorry I haven't written for two days, but it has been due to bad weather which has made letter writing practically impossible.

Yesterday I received a letter from Uncle Jack, I'm pleased to tell you, and it is dated July 17th. He told me that everything is O.K. at home and all goes well. I'm very sorry to hear that Lily was nearly [hit?] when that Flying Bomb came down and I sincerely hope that Lily wasn't shaken up to much. Uncle Jack said Lily didn't seem to be unnerved when she got home. I hope she is O.K. now!

I didn't get a letter from you yesterday Mum – probably held up somewhere in the post. I'm expecting some letters tonight. The parcel of 200 cigs hasn't arrived yet although I hope to see them soon. Son mentioned that some cigs. are also on the way. Roll on cigs I'm out of a single “smoke” just now, but tonight I can buy some from the N.A.A.F.I. supply that will be coming in if that isn't late. Maybe your 200 cigs. will come along tonight.

How are you all at home folks? I read in the papers that the flying bombs are coming over heavy again. I think Jerry will regret ever using the “flying bomb” by the time this war is over. Indiscriminate as ever he could be. There isn't any accuracy to them I'm sure.

How is Grand-Dad now Mum? I very much hope he is getting better now. Please convey my best wishes for a speedy recovery. How is Aunt Lou, Mum?

What is life in the Home Guard like now Dad? Uncle Jack said it is guarding bombed houses now, but I expect your H.G. is as it usually is.

Life out here the last two days has been B----- wet. About a foot of water in the old dug-out, so now I sleep beside it and jump in when the Bob Hope programme starts. It could be worse!

I'm looking forward to coming home! One chap's wife, has written to him and said that some troops who landed on the beaches first, are coming home. I guess it is just one of those rumours that make life so unbearable out here. By the way, how is the war going on? Does it sound O.K. according to the news. More rumours are going around about trouble in Germany – revolution, and I'm wondering if that is true.

How are Lenny, Violet and Son and Lily, Mum? Len still going to school? I bet he has got tall during the last two months.

I hope all the relations are well and reasonably happy. I can't write them all there are too many. I'm trying to write to each in turn.

Still in the front line Mum & Dad, and it certainly is Brownings Lost Army just now. A nice long sleep after 7 weeks would be just to pleasant.

Well Mum & Dad, the postman has just brought me along the parcel you sent, with the writing pad, envelopes, labels, and shaving brush. You certainly know how to work the gags. Very tasty – very sweet. Thanks ever so much, especially the Players, and thank you very much for all of the parcels. I guess it has cheered me up very much. You could take the money from the cost of everything from the £1- a week, Mum. I know you won't take it, but it is there Mum.

Well Mum & Dad thank you very much once again for the parcel, and perhaps one day I will be able to send you a parcel, souvenir from France, perhaps.

Time is getting on so I must close now, so I will say, cheerio for a day or so, and here's wishing you the very best of luck and may the Flying Bombs stay away.

Bye for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x

KEEP SMILING

57: 23rd July 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company, 2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks. L.I.

B.L.A.

23rd July 44. Sunday.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet & Len,

I have just enjoyed the salmon and tomatoes and they were very tasty. Grade I salmon is a change from Grade 3, which is the usual stuff we get out here. Yes folks, I'm very pleased you sent it along, and I enjoyed it very much.

To-day I received letters from Son and one from Aunt Daisy. Son seemed very cheerful and seems happy enough. Aunt Daisy mentioned that Fred hasn't had any leave for 4 months and is looking forward to seeing him home. I was very glad to hear from Aunt Dais and I replied this evening. Son and Aunt Daisy's letters were both posted on the 19th July. I will reply to Son's letter tomorrow.

How are you all at home folks? Keeping in good health and all going well? Did the “flare-up” of the Flying Bombs upset you much? I hope none came to near.

I was reading the Hackney Gazette you sent along and in the Memories and Deaths column, I noticed that a young lady who I went to school with and was married, has been killed by enemy action, and I'm beginning to think that some bombs have been fairly close to home. I was terribly sorry to read it and it rather disturbed my thoughts – upset me. The girl was named Mary Bland, and it is probably the girl I knew by that name who lived in Barretts Grove. Her married name was Nutland, but I don't remember the name. It is a terrible shame, and I knew her very well.

I haven't received the 200 “fags”, or Uncle Jack's, Violet S's letters yet which were sent a good time ago. There must have been a slight hold-up somewhere. I will get them one day.

The weather is gradually clearing up, after a couple of days of torrential rain which didn't improve matters. But I get along – all dry now. I expect you had the same weather.

The bad weather put my letter writing begin and I have a few to write now.

I had a letter from Uncle Jack yesterday, so I must reply as soon as possible.

How is Grand Dad Mum? Just lately I have been prepared to hear some bad news, although I do not like to write that. Perhaps it would be better now Mum, than having to suffer such terrible pain.

Well folks, I must close now, it is almost really dark, I will write again tomorrow, a longer letter and tell you a few tall stories. No, I won't pull your leg.

So, Cheerio for Now, keep smiling, and keep your chins up, folks. Best of Luck.

Your Loving Son & Brother,

Sid x x x x x

58: 24th July 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company, 2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks. L.I.

B.L.A.

24th July. Monday

Received your letter dated 20th. Dad’s letter.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet & Len,

Just a line, my daily letter to let you know that I’m well and reasonably happy. I sincerely hope you are all well and happy and not having so much trouble with the flying bombs.

I replied to a letter from Aunt Daisy, and also to a letter from Son. I haven’t had a letter from you since the 22nd, that was the parcel, and I think I can guess the reason why. I am expecting to hear some bad news about Grand Dad, Mum. Probably I will receive a letter this evening when the mail comes along.

Everything is O.K. here, and I hope the war news continues to be good. I wonder if anything very serious will come of this stir inside Germany. It may be the beginning of the collapse, and I hope, and would very much like to see the war finish much sooner than the critics estimate. I read so much in the papers, and I’m beginning to think that Jerry is in a tough position, although he still has much occupied countries in his hands. I’m quite content to sit and patiently wait for Jerry to collapse. I don’t think it will be as easy as the newspapers try to make believe. Dead Germans are the best Germans, especially those fanatical Nazis about 18 to 20.

I’m not feeling so bad except for the lack of sleep. Tinned food gets one down a bit, but it is filling and I’m pleased to eat it at meal-times. I will be pleased when our line isn’t the front line, but I think that will be a long time yet. I’m quite prepared to stop in the front line until the armistice is declared. I also think it is time we were given a break considering the Allies so-called overwhelming masses of men. Many rumours go round about being sent to a rest camp,

letters from “Monty” congratulating the division on doing such a fine job, which you have probably read in the papers, all of these are hardly worth taking any notice of as we still sit in the front line, wet dug-outs, dirty clothes, no bath and very little comfort and I’m beginning to wonder if once again we have been forgotten. I suppose one day, certain people will realise that we are human beings and not machines of war. It does me good sometimes to have a moan. It is my own and only privilege, otherwise down comes the iron clamp of B----T and discipline, of the “blinking” Army. Admitted the last couple of weeks have been quiet here, just sitting watching. It may have been very much worse but everything so far has gone well. I will be pleased to get home or get down to a normal life again.

Son mentioned that he has applied to try and get posted to France. Gosh if I had his opportunity now to stop in England, I know what I would do with voluntary applications. He would be crazy to come out here now, with Lily expecting a baby so soon and the flying bomb raids at home, I guess that would keep me in England. Surely Son will not be upgraded to A.1. If he does come I sincerely hope he gets a job with a G.H.Q. well behind the lines. I would not like anything to happen to Son, after all his efforts. It is the last thing I want to see – Son in the front line, and I told him exactly the same. I had no need to be here after 9 months in hospital, but I’m only a non-ambitious “buckshee” private and Son has started something which he could benefit from in the future. I will be quite happy to go back to accountancy when I’m finished with the Army, and perhaps I will have the chance I missed when war broke out.

How are Violet and Len, Mum & Dad? What does Violet do now? Still in the office or has she gone up one step yet? How is Len getting on at school, or hasn’t he been going just lately? Have they received my letter?

Are Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie enjoying good health and is all going well for them? I hope all relations are safe and that they haven’t had too much trouble with flying bombs. Tell them all that I will be only pleased to see them.

By the way Mum & Dad, can you read the address very easily by the time my letters reach you. If not, in future, I will borrow a pen, just for the address. I don’t want Violet to send the pen from home. I will wait until I get home.

Well folks, I must close now, time is getting late, so wishing you all at home, lots of good luck, and good health, I’ll conclude.

Cheerio for the Present, Love to ALL.

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x

P.S. Don't worry!

59: 25th July 1944

P.S. I have just received Violet V. letter. 8 p.m.

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company, 2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A.

25th July. Tuesday

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

I have just received the letter and “People”, envelopes, and letter from Uncle Bob which you put in a large envelope and posted on July 18th. Thank you for everything folks.

I’m terribly sorry to hear that Grand Dad passed away last Sunday week after such long suffering, and although I have been expecting to hear the bad news it still doesn’t seem possible. I remember the last time I saw him, he looked very bad. Perhaps the best thing has happened Mum – don’t you think the same? It must have upset you very much Mum & Dad, even though you knew it was coming sooner or later. Uncle Bob and Gladys were there I suppose. I’m glad to know they managed to get home, again, but the journey couldn’t possibly have been a pleasant one.

Thank Uncle Bob for his letter, next time you write to him Mum. I will write this evening and perhaps you will send it on to Uncle Bob. How are Aunt Nell, Nellie, Bobbie, Ray and Daisy and Lenny? All well, and happy.

It is good to know that you are keeping so cheerful in spite of the raids. I bet you laughed when that Spitfire went over and you thought it was a flying bomb, and I bet you ran to, down to the shelter. I hope this new weapon will be soon be knocked out – Jerry as well.

It is good to read the papers and to see how confident they are, and I would like to see some of the estimates on how long the war will last, come true. Gen. Smuts says a few months others even say November. Gosh how I would like to see it finish so soon.

Pleased to hear that Sid Williams has been home for 24 hrs. Has Aunt Beat received my letter yet Mum? There wasn't much in it, but I did my utmost. How is Arthur now? Safe and sound.

Did Lily come down during the week as you mentioned she might do, in your letter. I hope she is well and happy. I must write soon, perhaps tonight.

So Dad has reverted – gosh, I didn't think he would do that. But of course, he certainly doesn't get enough time to take interest in it. All the H.G. up there is a blessed wangle, don't you think so?

Remember me to all the chaps at the M.W.B. and the H.G. chaps Dad. How are MR Bull and Mr. Reynolds? Get any bombs around there Dad? I wish everyone there the very best of luck, also hope to see them sooner than we think.

I'm very glad to know that Len Harvey has written to Mrs. Smith. I haven't seen him yet and he isn't very far away as you can guess. Near a hell-fire cross roads. I expect I will see him before very long, and gosh how we will be pleased to meet. I still haven't found out any more about Billy Verrier and I was wondering if Aunt Lou had had a letter from him yet. If so I hope he is safe and sound. He must know I am here and maybe he is looking for me. I'd like to meet Len, Billy, Bob Fox, and Charlie Hart's brother-in-law, Tommy Butt, who is also out here. I must try and write to Charlie Hart soon.

I read Sunday's the 23rd News of the World and "The People" yesterday, which arrive by air now. Don't worry about sending the daily papers now Mum just the locals will do very nicely. We get plenty of newspapers now – so just the locals – just the locals. Thank you very much. Salvage the others in the old bin!

The Sunday 23rd papers sounded very confident and it seems that soon the war will be over, considering the way the M.Ps. are discussing coming peace time matters. The Russians are doing marvels and the 8th and 5th Armies, in Italy – the Second Front opened, and trouble in Germany seem to point in our favour, don't they. Well all I'm hoping for is a quick finish and then the finishing off of the chaps to blame. I could do with no mercy whatsoever, using a

“bloody” great chopper. I expect they are getting the “breeze up” now! I suppose Spain will be the next on the list and of these pro Nazi, and Fascists in other countries.

Well folks, I must close now as time is getting on – almost tea-time, then more letter writing, so I will wish you all at home, everyone of the relations, and all the folks I know at home, the very best of luck and may God keep you all safe.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

60: 26th July 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier

'A' Company

2nd Bn Oxf & Bucks L.I.

B.L.A.

26th July. Wed.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Just a very few lines to let you know that all is well. Hope you are all enjoying good health and are safe and sound.

I have replied to your letter dated the 18th and Dad's letter 20th. Have received Violet V. Letter and will reply to Violet's and Uncle Bob's letter as soon as possible. I have just written to Uncle Jack and Aunt Violet.

I'm O.K. and still hoping to get to a rest camp and get to a decent night's sleep, a bath and a change of clothes. Washing is a job, owing to the wet weather.

Well, I will close now folks, sorry so short, but will write again as soon as possible. It is good to try to keep up the daily letter and may help me to find something more to write tomorrow.

Any news of Billy Verrier, or any of the other chaps. Dad told me that Mrs Smith has heard from Len, so apparently he is O.K. Haven't seen anyone else.

So, I will close now Mum & Dad, thank Violet for her letter.

Wishing you good luck, and may the raids soon stop, I'll say,

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x x

PS.

No letter this morning again.

No post came up, but some will

arrive this evening. How have the raids been lately?

61: 28th July 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A.

Friday 28th July 44

Dear Mum & Dad,

Just a few lines in reply to your most welcome letter which reached me yesterday. Very pleased to hear that you are all enjoying good health and all is well.

I'm very glad now you can start again Mum, after a very busy time with Grand Dad, and the funeral.

I've just received Len's letter dated 22nd July, so please thank him very much for it. I wrote to Len only yesterday. I'm pleased to know that Len is still as cheerful as ever. He gave me all the news in his last letter about the attempt to kill Hitler. If only he had been “knocked off”. Perhaps a next time will come and I wish a revolution would start in Germany, it would help very much.

It seems that Hitler has managed to quell this last attempted uprising, doesn't it.

Glad to hear that Albert Goult is still O.K. It is some time ago that he went abroad. He is safe enough now I imagine, if he is still in the same place.

I expect you enjoyed the company of Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie last Sunday evening. You can all have a good joke and laugh, even these serious times. Keep smiling and carry on.

I had a surprise when I heard that the Flying Bombs were being shot down at the rate of one every two minutes into the Channel. There must be a lot going over! Of course, there must be a lot shot down in daylight.

I've been washing this morning – boy, did I look a picture. Up to my eyes in soap suds, and a face as long as a week. Do I like washing? Do I b------. But it is for my benefit.

I haven't received the 200 cigs yet, nor the cigs which Uncle Jack has sent along. Still hoping to get them soon. I bought plenty yesterday from the N.A.A.F.I., so I have plenty to go on with.

How are all of the relatives Mum & Dad? I could name everyone but it would be a long job. I hope all are well, and safe, and I wish everyone the very best of luck for the future. Convey my love and best wishes. Perhaps I will be seeing them soon. I hope so.

Very glad to hear that Son and Lily came to see you and stayed for tea. Are they both well?

I expect you have been getting my mail O.K. I have been writing quite a few just recently, trying to catch up with replying to all the letters, that come in, and at the same time I have written a few letters to more relations. I have written to Uncle Bob, and sent the letter to you to forward on. Wrote to Len and Violet yesterday.

Well folks I will close now, wishing you good luck, good health and as quiet nights as possible.

So, Cheerio for Now, Love to you and all relations.

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x

P.S. Time for you to take it easy now Mum!

62: 30th July 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A.

30th July, 44. Sunday.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I have just received two letters dated 24th and the 26th July, and I thank you very much for them both. Glad to hear that you received two letters from me dated 17th and 18th, also a card.

I did receive an airgraph from Len Roles sometime ago, also your parcel, in the tin.

Thank you very much for putting the £1 a week in the Post Office. I must have a few pounds in credit now. I've only drawn a £1 since I left England.

The flints reached me O.K. and the lighter is going strong once again.

Yesterday I received a letter from Violet S. and that cheered me up a lot. I like to hear from as many folks as possible, and I reply and write to as many as possible.

So Aunt Beat has moved to Kensington along with Edie and Bob. I hope George doesn't get called up to soon. I would like to see the war finished before he passes his flying course – then perhaps he would be O.K. for a nice job with the Airways when peace comes. He seems so interested and keen on flying and will probably make good progress. I wish George the very best of luck. I will be writing to Aunt Beat soon.

See Mr Churchill! What, here! I don't think he was around this way at all. Way back by the seaside on the Cherbourg Peninsular I should think. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I didn't see him.

I quite understand how busy you all were last week, Mum & Dad, so don't worry about my thinking of letters or papers being late. I realise and consider everything like that.

The weather to-day has been marvellous, and the world seems a brighter place when the sun is shining – instead of the mud and the dismal raid.

Thank you for Aunt Beat's new address, it is easy to remember. You will not see her so often now, will you Mum? Still when the war is finished that journey will not be a long one, and no bombs will bother you.

I'm glad in a way that you have written, telling me that Uncle Wal, Grand father and Bertie Verrier are buried very close to each other in Abney Park Cemetery. I must go and see the graves when I go home. Not very pleasant, but I must go.

Remember me to Mrs. Barr, Mrs. and Mr. Burke, and Mrs. Bovington, and please convey my kind regards. How is Doris Bovington now days Mum? Does she get much leave now? I haven't seen her for a very long time now. Remember me and convey my best wishes if you do see Doris. How are Doris Roles and Doug, her husband? Well and happy I hope. Do you see Jim Smith or any of the chaps around ????. Best of luck and best wishes to them all if you see them.

I still haven't seen Len yet, but [I hope] he is O.K. I made a few enquiries from some chaps [I met] going along the road. I may go along and see Bob Fox this evening on the bicycle. I cannot go far being a company runner. Cushy, unimportant job, but doing my share I suppose. I was a batman but the officer was killed. One of the finest chaps there could be, and it is usually the way – the best go first.

I have written to Violet S. to-day, a letter 6 pages long. God knows what I found to write about.

I received a letter from Aunt Lil and Junie to-day, so I must reply as soon as possible.

How are the raids at home? Any close ones? I sincerely hope not. Still, keep smiling, and don't let these fanatical B-----rs, get you down. How are you all – enjoying good health and all going well? I very much hope so.

Well, Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, I must close now, so wishing you good luck and quiet nights and days, I'll say cheerio for the the present.

Your Loving Son,

Sid. x x x

P.S. Cigs haven't arrived yet but I've got plenty.

[This letter makes specific reference to Sid's job as a batman, and to the fact that, "...the officer was killed." The battalion war diary records three officer deaths up to this point: Captain Marriott, Lieutenant James and Major Favell. The last of these was commanding 'B' Company at the time of his death, which points to it having been one of the other two – I am looking into this. The most likely candidate is Capt. James Marriott, who had been awarded the George Medal in March 1941 for some act of non-combatant gallantry. Marriott was killed on 10th June 1944 (which seems to have been a 'busy' day for the battalion.)

63: 31st July 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A.

31.7.44

Dear Mum & Dad,

Everything is O.K. so don't worry to much. Hope all is fine at home and the raids aren't so strong.

I have been very busy to-day ???? ????? now about 9.30 p.m. and I have just enough time to write to you a short letter.

I haven't received any mail today due to a hold up somewhere, but when the mail does come through I will get probably three or four and I will appreciate them more.

I have a small photograph frame here, and Son and Lily's wedding photo is in the frame, alongside a photo of Violet. They fit the frame side by side perfectly. I've tried to find a small frame for the family wedding group, but haven't seen any yet. I expect I will find one. Hang the frames on the wall of the dug-out – cheers the “joint” up quite a bit. Talk about getting all sentimental!

I have read Sunday 30th July “People” and all the critics are very optimistic, and would very much like to see their forecasts proved to be correct. The news itself is very good according to the papers. “Jerry” still seems to think that this V.2. will change the situation. May we get too far inland then he will be unable to use them. The papers published that a new plane is being used to counter attack the flying bomb, and lets us hope it will be very successful.

I have written to “old chum” Bert, not having heard from him yet, which I easily understand.

Well folks, good luck, God Bless, keep smiling and as much as possible, a quiet life.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x

64: 1st August 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A.

Tuesday 1st August ‘44

Dear Mum & Dad,

I have just received your parcel, Hackney Gazettes and local papers, for which I thank you very much. Thank Lenny for his letter as usual it was very cheerful.

Stuck in the front line – 8 weeks to-day without a rest, and I’m feel very “browned off” about it. I’m beginning to think that we are the fanatics for stopping here so long. Our job was finished according to Monty a couple of weeks ago – holding the bridges, but we are still here. My opinion of everything that is happening is getting lower and lower. Carry the Yanks perhaps they will relieve us! At least they brought enough men!

Now I’ve had my daily moan perhaps I can settle down to a little more cheerful writing.

I didn’t receive any mail other than your small parcel this morning. There is more mail coming at 7.30 p.m. perhaps I will get a couple more letters.

I will be able to have a read when I find time, now the local papers are here. I have let letter writing slip behind these last two days, owing to the don’t care a s--- feeling, but I must make a good effort during this evening. I have to write to Aunt Lil and Junie, and Violet S, replying to letters from them.

By the way I received 100 cigarettes from Uncle Jack and Aunt Violet, on Sunday evening 30th July. I replied with a letter which was posted on Monday. Your 200 cigs haven’t arrived yet, but I will not give up hope.

The weather for the fourth day has been very good and may it continue to remain to help the Russians and Americans in their advances.

Hope the flying bombs are not coming down in such great numbers now. Have you had much trouble with them just recently?

Glad to know that everyone at home, including all relations are in good health.

Could you tell Len that I will reply to his letter as soon as ever I can Mum? I have a job now to keep the pace. I get very tired after writing two letters and feel like a jolly good sleep.

My stomach is O.K. – never worries me unless I get wet through then the “cramp” sets in. If I could get the chance of getting in the Pioneer Corps I willingly would go. The chap I was in hospital with who had the same complaint is still Grade C, guarding P. of War in England.

Well folks, here I must close, two more letters to write. Sorry I do not sound as happy. I just like to give you my opinion, which means nothing I know, but I think we could do with a rest, away from the front line.

Well Cheerio for Now, Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, keep smiling, and the sooner and home and out of the Army, the happier we all will be.

God Bless.

Best of Luck,

Quiet Nights,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x

65: 4th August 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A.

Friday 4th August 44

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Thank you very much for your letter and Len’s letter which I received yesterday afternoon. Your letter was dated the 28th July same as Len’s.

I’m very glad to hear that you have had a little more rest Mum, and you are all in good health and all goes well.

I received letters from Violet S. yesterday and from Wal Smith, so I had quite a lot of reading to do, which I very much enjoyed.

The weather is good just now, and has been for about six days now. Sunshine, and everyone looks well – getting sunburned. Hope it is the same in London.

I’m glad to know that you are sleeping in the shelter now. I think you are very safe in there, especially against Blast, Mum. I expect Dad sleeps in the house doesn’t he? Can just imagine Dad still pushing his bicycle backwards and forwards to work.

I was very surprised when I read Len’s letter – St Faith’s, Londesborough Road and Balls Pond Road.

I had a hot bath this afternoon Mum! One has been fixed up in a house nearby and it has been used very much. Did I appreciate it – very much. When I have written another letter I must get cleaning some clothes – laundry. That’s a job I don’t like. Scrub, scrub, scrub.

Violet Savage wrote and told me that Violet V. has registered for National Service and asked to go with the W.A.A.Fs. Another one going crazy! Well I hope she changes her mind, especially if she has the chance of being exempted.

I have just received the parcel you sent on the 28th. Salmon, sardines, sugar, sweets and biscuits. It was a marvellous change to eat some soft sweet biscuits. Sugar in my tea – wonderful! Thank you very much for everything Mum, I will enjoy everything you sent. Don’t send too many of your rations, leaving yourselves short. You may need everything before the war is finished. But thank you for them very much.

Tell Len, I will try and write to Len as soon as I have cleared up replying to letters I have here, during the meantime he can read these letters.

I have written to Aunt Lil, Aunt Ede and Junie, and posted the letter last night.

Well folks, just lately I have been rather busier, and I’m sorry I didn’t write yesterday. I have some laundry to do this evening, so I will close now, and I will write again tomorrow. So Cheerio for now, I’m cheerful but a moan now and again does me good. Best of Luck, Quiet Days, Keep Smiling.

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x x

P.S. Just received your long letter 29.7.44

66: 5th August 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A.

5th August 44

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet & Len,

Just a few lines in reply to your letter dated 29th July, Saturday.

Glad to know that you are receiving my mail a lot quicker now. Sometimes I do not sound cheerful in my letters, I know, but we must all have our little grumble now and again. I'm O.K.

By the way, if the Jewish chap's forecast comes true, I'll buy him all the motzas I can buy in S.N. He'll get plenty.

I still haven't any news of Billy Verrier. Doesn't he ever write now Mum? I haven't heard from Charlie, also I haven't written, owing to the fact that I wasn't allowed to fetch addresses with me. He will understand.

I wrote to you last night, same old stuff – a lot about nothing but I don't suppose you worry about that.

Thank you for putting the cash I send home, into the Post Office. Besides the P.O. Book and [Certificate] I have about £100 [?] in credit which I can draw out when I get back and that will go into the Post Office. Since D-Day I have only drawn a £1. Must be O.K. now.

By gosh, Mum you aren't talking cheerful, “Jerry” about, and “up to his larks”.

I hope Lily was well when she came to see you with Son. Time is drawing near, and I very much hope I am home before the christening takes place.

Did you receive a letter which I addressed to Uncle Bob, to 68. I hope he is well.

Pleased to hear that Arthur is well, and he is safe and sound. I'm afraid I will not be able to write to him just yet Mum.

Still hoping to go back and have a rest Mum – they seem to leave us here as though forgotten. I suppose when the “Brass Hats” are satisfied with what we have helped to do they will let us have a few days, living in comfort. I'm cheerful, but that's what I have just written is the usual grievance.

I saw by the newspapers which we received yesterday that the war is going well and I'm hoping to see things happen very quickly now. Russia 100 miles from Silesia on the German border. The quicker that 100 miles is covered the better it will be.

The weather is reasonably good to-day. Rather cloudy but bright.

Well folks, keep the shelter in good condition – don't be surprised if I'm the first b----r down there when I get hom. Make way for an “old sweat”. HA! HA! An “old sweat” from civvy street.

So Cheerio for Now

Keep your Nuts Down

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x

P.S. Wishing you good health and hoping the bombs stay away.

67: 6th August 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

A" Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A.

P.S. Have just received 200 cigs. Apparently they are the ones you sent, through [illegible] Phillips. Thank you very much Mum & Dad. Also 100 from Son and Lily.

Sunday. 6th August. '44

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Hope you have been receiving my mail more regularly just recently. I write every day. Last week I missed one day and another day I sent a card because I was quite busy. As much as possible I write every day.

How are you folks? Well, and safe and reasonably happy. I sincerely hope so.

I have written to W. Smith to-day and this evening I may write to Son and Lily. How is Lily now Mum? I will try and write to Len. Did Uncle Bill and Aunt Nell receive my letter I wrote?

Sunday to-day, and life has been fairly quiet so far to-day. Of course that Sunday atmosphere isn't here – every day seems the same.

Have you had any trouble with the Flying Bombs? I expect it has been noisy now and again, but keep smiling folks it won't last for ever.

How are Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil, Junie? Did they come and see you to-day. I'll be writing again as soon as possible. I'll be pleased to get home and have a few jokes with them. May be it will not be so long now as we think.

I didn't get any mail to-day, but only one lot of mail has arrived so far to-day. I may get a letter this evening. Have you received my letter letting you know that I received your parcel. Biscuits, sugar, salmon etc. I've certainly enjoyed that parcel Mum! Don't send too many Mum – they must cause you a lot of trouble packing them up and finding tin boxes for them. I will try to send the last tin box home, with something in the tin.

Does Len go to school yet Mum, or haven't the holidays finished yet. I expect the flying bombs keep him at home, and I don't blame you Mum. He will soon regain anything he loses from studying.

Well Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, I will close now, wishing you all the very best of luck, nights as quiet as can be expected these days, and here's hoping to see you soon. I will write again tomorrow.

Cheerio for Now, Folks.

Keep Smiling.

Your Loving Son

Sid x x x x x x

P.S. Hope all relations are well, safe and as happy as possible. Love to ALL.

68: 7th August 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks. Light Inf.

B.L.A.

7th August 1944

Dear Mum & Dad,

Many apologies Dad for not wishing you many happy returns sooner. Happy Birthday! I'm sure you will understand how I came to forget it – time goes so quickly and I've hardly noticed which month is which. Being an old-timer you must know how easy it is to forget, under these conditions.

I must thank you very much indeed for the 200 cigs. I received yesterday. You forgot to put in the package who they were from but apparently they are the 200 you ordered some time ago. Thank you very much for them Mum & Dad I appreciate every cig. out here. Also yesterday I received 100 cigs from Son and Lily.

Life isn't so bad out here, gets noisy now and again, Bob Hope programmes. Bob down Hope for the best, the same as you do at home. Still it cannot last for ever. The Americans are doing marvels and the British steady but sure. Maybe the Russians will soon be on German soil. I sincerely hope as much.

Only sea mail arrived to-day, and I haven't received any [illegible] to-day, so far. Perhaps I will get one this evening, if more mail arrives.

Have you had any close bombs at home Mum? I very much hope you haven't. I saw in the papers that you had a 12 hour lull a couple of days ago. Hope all the relations are well and safe and sound. I would very much like to get home to see you all and ??? what life is really like in London. I will be home one day I suppose.

How is Violet getting on at work Mum? Making good progress. Perhaps the firm will not let her go into the Services. Even if not I don't suppose Violet will go for sometime yet.

I wrote to Wal Smith last night, Violet Savage, and I wrote a letter to you Mum and Dad. I must write to Son and Lily this evening, thanking them for the cigarettes. Will I be pleased to see my exciting nephew or niece. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that I will be home in time for the event. How is Lily now Mum? I hope all goes well and Lily is as well as can be expected under the conditions. Once again folks, love to you all at home, here is hoping and wishing the days and nights are quieter than usual.

Best of Luck. Good Health. Your Loving Son, Sid x x x x x

69: 9th August 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A.

9th August 44

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Have received your letters dated 1st August – 2nd August with H. Gazettes, and a letter 2nd August. Also received two letters from Violet V. one typewritten, and another dated August 4th. I have also had letters from Uncle Bill, Son, Lily, Violet S., and of course L. J. Verrier, the young card-sharper. All these letters have arrived within three days so I have plenty of replies to write. By the way the books Violet V. sent along have arrived – this morning.

I saw in the papers yesterday that W.A.A.Fs. have arrived in France and knowing that Violet S. had volunteered I wondered if she has come here. I sincerely hope Violet hasn't come just yet. Still I will soon know if she has. One W.A.A.F. who is in France, comes from Dalston, according to the papers.

How are you all at home folks? I very much hope you are well and happy and the buzz-bombs haven't been so noisy just lately. How are Violet and Len, Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie? I'm certainly looking forward to seeing you all once again but heaven knows when that will be. After the army of occupation in Japan by the way we keep being let down. The opinion is my own! Three cheers for democracy.

I'm glad to know that you get plenty of visitors Mum. It must help whilst this bomb is being used, although you are probably kept busy.

Pleased to know that my mail is coming through quite well – I don't think any letters have gone astray yet. Thank you for the shaving soap.

I still do some office work, very little, but for a good while now I've been a company runner.

I cannot tell you what part of France I'm in. All I can tell you, I'm in the front line still and am likely to be here for the duration. Us chaps aren't allowed to have a break, I'm beginning to think. My opinion – well, I wouldn't write it down. We've had it quiet at times and other times very noise – a good share, believe me. Still the news is good that's the main thing.

I was surprised to hear that Clem [Glen?] is getting married on Nov 4th. Who is the young lady Mum, do you know? Next time you see them please convey my kind regards and I wish him and his wife-to-be very good luck and great happiness.

[Missing page 3 – seems to be missing at IWM]

. . . in reply to their letters. I will be writing to Violet S. again this evening. You understand Mum, the more I write the less worried you will be. I write every day to you, every day to Violet S. – then both 68 and 41 know that I'm O.K. I couldn't write to Uncle Jack or Aunt Violet every day, I wouldn't know what to write about, so I write to Violet S. every day and I can always find something to write about. Very very good friends, but I sincerely hope she doesn't come to France, or Sonny. One is enough out here and I'm not being selfish.

Well folks, I will close now, wishing you all the very best of luck, a life as quiet as possible and I'm always hoping to be seeing you soon.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son, and Bro.

Sid x x x x x

Remember me to all relations. I very much hope all are well, within reason. Best of Luck and Love to all, including Mr and Mrs Thomas, Don and Bill.

70: 11th August 1944

5836503 Pte S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks. L.I.

B.L.A.

11th August. Friday

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

I have received your letters dated August 5th and August 8th and I thank you very much for them. I was very pleased to hear that all goes well on the homefront – all enjoying good health and not too many close; flying bombs.

Yesterday I went to the beaches for a day and I really enjoyed every moment. There wasn't much to do and nothing much to buy or see, but I was very contented sitting in the park of the town nearby. Quiet and peaceful, and the park had been very well kept – flower beds and trees and lawns, they looked wonderful. Just a blended mass of colour and reminded me of the parks near home. Only a day, but I really appreciated every moment.

During the last two days I have received two letters, one from you each day. I haven't heard from Violet S. and I wonder if she has arrived with the W.A.A.Fs. in France. According to the papers the W.A.A.Fs. have arrived in France.

I sincerely hope that all the relations at home are safe and enjoying the best of health, also that there hasn't been any trouble with the raids. I send my love, wishing everyone good luck, good health, and a home front as quiet as possible. I'm always looking forward to the day when we will meet again.

I met an old friend on the beaches yesterday, a chap I was in hospital with, and we were very surprised and pleased to meet again. We didn't expect to be meeting each other in France during the “blue suit” life and never mentioned it in hospital. We were glad to know that both of us were safe, and keeping well.

I have just received the small parcel of stationery and your letter dated the 6th August. Thank you very much Mum, that is just what I need now. This evening the N.A.A.F.I. supplies will probably be here and I will be able to buy a writing pad and envelopes. I'm looking forward to receiving that parcel on the way, with the eggs inside. I will soon find a place to cook them, providing they are not broken when they arrive. I will fry them if they are broken.

You must have been very surprised to see Cyril Roles, after quite a long time too. I imagine that he is getting a big chap now. How does he like a sailor's life, Mum? Is Doris Roles well now Mum?

Very glad to hear that Doris Bovingdon has had 7 days leave. I certainly don't blame Doris and Mrs Bovingdon for going away on holiday, during the 7 days. Remember me to Doris, Mrs Bovingdon, Mrs Barr and Mr and Mrs Burke and I hope they are enjoying good health and I wish them very good luck for the future.

Pleased to know that Albert Goult is well. Haven't these last two years passed by quickly. I know Albert had been out East for some while but it hardly seems almost two years. Remember me to Mr and Mrs Goult wishing them the very best of good luck for the future.

Well Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, I do not get too much time for writing now, and I'm sorry that I missed two days. I didn't write to Violet S. yesterday. By the way, I started this letter yesterday evening but I am finishing it now a day later. Saturday today, and the time is about 8 p.m. so perhaps you will receive this letter on about Wednesday or Thursday, with luck.

Tell Lenny and Violet I will write as soon as possible. Thank Violet very much for the two small photographs – they are very good, and I'm very pleased that Violet sent them along. Photographs are always welcome. I have photos of the families at the wedding – Vs' and Ss' – Son and Lily – Violet S., and I often look at them helping to keep me reasonably cheerful and it helps me to know that I'm not alone in this very noisy part of the world.

So once again, folks, darkness is near which will cause me to end writing this letter, which I very much enjoyed writing. I must conclude now, folks.

Cheerio for a While, and with God's help may there be A Peaceful Home Front.

God Bless You All

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x

P.S.

71: 13th August 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.

B.L.A

Sunday 13th August.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet, and Len,

Have just received three letters from 68. Two from you Mum, one written August Monday and the other written Aug 9th. I have also received Violet’s letter dated Aug 9th. I’m very pleased to know that you were all well up to that time, and I sincerely hope that all goes well now.

I received a letter from Violet S. to-day, which helped to cheer me up very much, as did your letters. They always do – all letters!

Thank you very much for Uncle Ern’s address, I will write as soon as possible. I’m so glad to know that they are all in good health – Uncle Ern, Aunt Ethel, Ivy and John.

If you could send along a couple of pencils Mum, I would be very thankful. The pencil I have is a stub now and very uncomfortable to write with.

Thank Aunt Ede for the jam in this next parcel Mum? The parcel hasn’t arrived yet, but it will do. Also I must thank you very much for a parcel on it’s way.

I certainly don’t blame Son, trying to send Lily away from London for a while. I hope Lily is as well as possible under the circumstances. I must write as soon as possible. I hope Son is O.K.

I'm pleased to know that Mr Eames had a few days leave and I hope very much that he enjoyed himself, although London is a noisy and unwelcome spot these days.

I was glad to hear from Violet V. again to-day. I haven't replied to your last letter yet Violet, but I will do so at the first opportunity.

In a way I'm not sorry that your occupation is reserved Violet. Perhaps Mum will be pleased to keep you at home with her, especially during these raids. Two of us in the Services already, and I'm certain Mum doesn't want that no. to go to three.

Thank you for telling me about the eggs – providing "Jerry" doesn't break them, I know I will not. By the way, sister, thanks for the books you sent along, and please thank the young lady at your office, Miss Lyn, for passing them on to you, for me. The reading is good and sensible, and some articles are very interesting.

Rose Lamb, is that the young lady who often came home with you Violet? Twenty years her senior. Phew! Good Luck!

Well Mum, Dad, Violet and L.J.V. (news expert), I must say "Cheerio" now, but only for a while. So wishing you all the very best of good luck, nights and days as quiet as possible, and with God's help may we all meet again soon.

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x

P.S. How is the H.G. Pop?

72: 14th August 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks L.I.

B.L.A.

14th August – Monday

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

I have just received a parcel from you Mum, and two books from Violet, and I thank you very much indeed Mum. Thank you for the books, Violet.

I have cooked the eggs Mum, and enjoyed them. Thank Aunt Ede for the jam please. Sugar, chocolate, biscuits, tea – yes Mum, I will make the most of everything you have sent along and I'm sure I will enjoy everything. Don't send chocolate along Mum, I get a bar of chocolate each day, and a few sweets.

Glad to hear that Violet will probably have to continue with her job instead of going into the A.T.S.

What did Son dress up as a German for Mum? Some scheme, or just a joke. I will be writing to Lily this evening, perhaps she knows why. I wrote to Violet S. this afternoon.

What have the raids been like Mum? I sincerely hope you have enjoyed some quiet lulls, and I hope also that you will have much quieter nights and days in the future. The news looks good, maybe the end is not too far away. The Russians on German soil, and the Americans are pushing forward, and with God's help may the advance continue with all speed possible, until the Germans realise that they are very foolish to carry on.

How are you all at home, Mum, Dad, Violet and Len? Keeping those chins up, and making the most of everything when there is quietness? I can guess that you are carrying on as usual.

Please convey my love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie, and all the relations at home. I'm always looking forward to seeing you all once again. I will write to Aunt Ede and Aunt Lil soon.

Well folks, I will close now, wishing you all the very best of good luck, nights as quiet as possible, and gosh, how I hope to see Blighty again as soon as possible, away from this "hulla-balloo" as the old sweat (Pop) says.

Bye for Now, folks, God Bless. Your Loving Son, Sid x x x x x x x

73: 16th August 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
 “A” Company,
 2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks.
 B.L.A.

16th August. Wednesday

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

Just the few lines I write daily to you. I haven't received and mail to-day, and I didn't get any mail yesterday. There is another incoming mail to-day, and I'm hoping to receive a letter letting me know that all is well at home. I expect the mail sometimes gets held up, and I'm not surprised when the letters sometimes take longer than usual.

Everything goes well so far Mum and I haven't too much to grumble about. I would enjoy a rest, miles away from the front line, but apparently we can keep on our feet a bit longer, and we aren't completely “bomb happy” yet. Don't be surprised if my head looks rather to one side more than the other – it's the “big ear” complaint, so the chaps here call it. Listening for what is coming. I expect you folks in London are suffering the same complaint. HA! HA! Sounds silly, but it's right. The BIG EAR!

I sincerely hope you are all enjoying the best of health, and as usual, all goes well. Have you had much disturbance locally from the ‘flying bombs’ – Mum and Dad?

Yesterday I wrote to Uncle Ern and Aunt Ethel, I think the address is 86, Canonbury Ave, Islington, London. I mislaid the address you sent along, and I hope my memory has been correct. I know I'm not very wrong and the letter, I'm sure, will find them. Also yesterday, I wrote to Violet S. and to you folks at home. Day previous I wrote to Son and Lily.

This evening I must wrote to Len, and Violet. Do you mind if I send the letters all in the same envelope Mum? I thought not. Thanks very much. HMM! Sorry Mum, this Army life is making

me cheeky. Dad, where's the strap. What! Not across "mon derriere". OO-LA-LA. "Aw gord Blimey" "B.S.A."

O.K. folks I've calmed down now, and I will get on with sensible letter writing.

Good news about the landing in S. France isn't it Mum & Dad? I wasn't surprised really Mum, after the big raids on the ports in S. France. It should help very much, especially in Italy. Gosh, what an event when the three armies meet up, and I hope very much that it will not be long.

Once again folks I've written as much as possible and I think it is time for me to close. So for a while, I will say "Bye for Now" and here's wishing you good luck, good health, and nights and days as quiet as possible.

Cheerio for Now, God Bless!

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x x x

P.S. Love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie. Be writing soon.

74: 18th August 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

Friday. 18th Aug.

Dear Mum & Dad, and Violet

I was so pleased to receive a letter from you to-day. Your letter was posted on Sunday 13th Aug.

The best news was that Len has been evacuated, more or less, through the “Stars & Stripes”. It certainly is very kind of them. I’m sure that Aunt Lil and Junie and Len will find rest and quietness wherever they are now. I expect you have the address now, so please send it along Mum, and I will write at the first opportunity I get.

I posted home a tin box of bars of chocolate, and a few sweets this afternoon. I have been saving them up for a few days instead of eating them. I sent them away quickly to save me from carrying them around. I sincerely hope they reach you and are not masticated by some kind person who reads the contents on the parcel. I’m sure you will receive them.

I hope all has been reasonably quiet on the home front, folks! Are you all enjoying good health and does all go well?

Well Mum & Dad and Violet must say cheerio for now, give my love to all the relations. Love to Aunt Ede, hoping she is enjoying good health.

Cheerio for Now, Good Luck.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x x

75: 19th August 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

Friday 19th August [presumably just a simple error]

Dear Mum, Dad and Violet,

A few hurried lines to let you know that all goes well. I sincerely hope you are all in good health and having fairly quiet days and nights.

I had a very pleasant reunion with Len Hardy to-night about 5 p.m. First meeting since D-Day and I was very pleased to see him. He wished to be remembered to you all at home, and wished you all good luck. You might mention it to Mrs Smith next time you happen to meet. He asks you to convey his kindest regards and best wishes to Mr and Mrs Smith and Wal and Jim. Just the same Len, cracking jokes. He was reading a book when I spotted him, and the look on his face – well – I couldn't describe it, it was more than a look of surprise. One day I will be able to tell you where I spotted Len, but I daren't write it down in this letter. HA! HA! You will laugh!

Please convey my love to all the relations at home Mum! How is Aunt Ede? Have you heard from Aunt Lil, Len, & Junie yet? I hope to get the new address soon, and I must write as soon as I get the address. I can imagine how much Aunt Lil, Len and Junie will benefit by evacuating from London. The healthy country life will be a great change for them.

Well folks I have received the letter dated 15th Aug. with H. Gazette and stationery enclosed for which I thank you very much. Three days the letter took to reach me, and that is the best time so far.

Happy Birthday Dad! I sincerely wished I could be at home now to celebrate with a drink. I very much hope that your next birthday will find all the family together again – no war – just peacefulness and quietness, in the London that we all knew before Sept. '39.

Once again folks I must close, my letters must be short letters for a while, so I hope you will realise why I do not write so much.

Wishing you very good luck, very good health and many quiet lulls from the bombing I will now conclude.

Bye for Now,

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x x

P.S. I sent a parcel of Chocs and Sweets yesterday.

76: 22nd August 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
 “A” Company,
 2nd Bn. Oxf & Bucks.
 B.L.A.

Dear Mum & Dad,

It is strange writing with a pen once again. Three months I have used a pencil, and I am finding the use of a pen very strange, so do not be surprised if my writing seems rather poor.

I have received your parcel containing salmon, butter, cheese, bread, syrup, etc, and I must thank you very much for it, Mum! I have enjoyed myself – eating like “blazes”, having a good feed whenever possible.

I haven't had much time to write to you recently Mum & Dad – we have been liberating. HMM! Plenty of “OO-LA-LA – Les Anglais arriv .” I must mention that what I have experienced during the last few days has made me much more happy about the progress of this war. The French seem very happy to see us, and I understand that very easily. For instance, they are very pleased to see good food, sugar, white bread – not black “Jerry” bread – and everything we can afford to give them.

I have received a letter from you, which was posted on Thursday last. Sorry to hear that Jack S. had an accident and I sincerely wish him better, and fit once again.

I'm very pleased to hear that Billy V. is safe and sound. The times I have thought about him and made enquiries of him, and all this time he has been in “Blighty” in hospital.

I have had a letter from Len V. from Manchester. I'm so glad to know that Aunt Lil, Junie and Len have been evacuated. Safe for a while, I'm sure! Len seems to be making good friends already, which is very good.

Yes Mum and Dad, the A.A. men and girls are certainly doing a fine job. 40 out of 70. Jolly good.

How is Aunt Ede, Mum? Has the bad cold gone now. I sincerely hope so! I send my love, and looking forward to see Aunt Ede once again.

The weather has changed again, slightly raining again, I hope it isn't for long. The sunshine will follow the rain, I'm sure.

How are you Mum, Dad and Violet? All in good health, - I hope very much so! How are Son and Lily, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet and Jackie? When I find time I will write – I'm rather unsettled just now.

Well once again, Mum & Dad and Violet, I must say "Cheerio for Now" – good luck, and keep smiling. I may be seeing you soon, if everything goes well.

Bye for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x

Sorry such a mess! The Rain!

77: 27th August 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
 "A" Company,
 2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
 B.L.A.

27th Aug '44

Dear Mum & Dad, and Violet,

Many thanks for your letters I have received in the last few days. I have letters here dated 20th August and the 12th, I think, with H. Gazettes.

I have also heard from Len, Aunt Daisy, Son, Violet V. (typewritten), and Violet Savage. I will try and reply to each letter to-day.

Yes Mum, I know the girl who Clem [Glen?] is getting married to, soon. I remember Eileen, but cannot remember the surname. I must write to Clem as soon as possible.

Thank you very much for the big parcel Mum & Dad. I enjoyed everything very much. Have you received a parcel of chocolate and sweets from me, which I posted about eight days ago?

How are the raids now Mum? I read in the papers that they have been heavy now and then, and I very much hope that you haven't been disturbed by close falling bombs. Keep those chins up folks – I'm hoping to capture a few sites soon which should make things easier, especially for you folks in London, and the South.

I was very pleased to hear from Len. I am writing to-day. Aunt Lil is probably very busy, and must get very tired, but maybe Mrs Royle will soon be better. Len, Aunt Lil and Junie are very much safer there, that is the main thing.

Son saw Arthur Murray – after all this time. I suppose he was pleased that he managed to scrounge off the Second Front. Bad feet! I'm scared but I couldn't do that. I will see it through.

Son wrote and told me that Lily is going away again soon. I don't blame Son for sending Lily away from London. It is certainly no health resort now – matter of fact, it never will be!

Once again, Mum, Dad and Violet, I must close – time is getting late, so I will now wish you good luck, many quiet lulls, and here's hoping to see you soon. You have an idea where I am, have you, well, I must say the surrounding county is very pretty and pleasant, but gosh "it ain't 'arf getting knocked abaht a bit".

Bye for Now, Folks,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x

P.S. Have seen Len H.

78: 29th August 1944

P.S. Don't send any parcels!

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,

"A" Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

Wednesday 29th August. 44.

Dear Mum, Dad & Violet,

I have just been given three letters from you dated 22, 23, 24th of August, and I thank you very much indeed for them.

I'm sorry you haven't received any letters from me, Mum, in the last seven days or so, but as you can guess, over here, I've been marching, marching, marching, and not in the wrong direction. You have seen in the papers what we have been u to and where we are, more or less. Yes, the river was a very welcome sight, believe me, but I never want to see it again.

Each day in the advance we usually caught "Jerry" up, a shove up his rear quarters and he had cleared off by the morning. As for their prisoners, they honestly "stink". Must be lousy. It has made me feel a lot better, this push forward, which as the papers say became almost a rout in the end. Liberating villages, church bells ringing, flowers from everyone, finding some paratroops hiding from "Jerry" has all helped to make a very exciting seven days. The Maquis have helped very much.

How are you all at home folks? I have once again heard from Len V. He seems happy enough. When I come home, I will go and see him, and Aunt Lil and Junie. I wonder if I could manage the journey in a day, perhaps I will do it. When I come!

I heard on the news at 9 a.m. that you people in the South can hope soon that the flying bombs will cease worrying you. I sincerely hope so. I suggest the Yanks turn the sites in the opposite direction and shake the buggers up a bit. Fancy writing "To Berlin" on a buzz bomb. I may get the chance yet. Signed from "the Folks at Home" "Returned with pleasure and a bloody loud bang". "Finsbury Park Astoria". Was it full up. I hope not.

Well folks, I must close now, time is getting late. Roll on the day when I surprise you all. Love to Aunt Ede, see you soon!

Best of Luck, Good Health, Quiet Days.

Your Loving Son,

Sid x x x x x x

P.T.O

P.S. Thank you for the parcel with cake in it. I have received H.G and writing pad and envelopes. No mail gone astray yet.

Love to Son, Lily, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet and Jackie. How is Lily Mum? I'm still hoping to be home for the christening.

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x x

By the way, we're resting. Taken pity on us at last. HA! HA! I'll write tomorrow.

I have the RUNS – CHRONIC DIORRHEA. Spelt wrong but you can understand.

I'm now making a Dash and Hope for the Best. "JERRY" that is all I can use!

Sid.

England: September 1944 - December 1944***79: Undated Letter, provisionally late September 1944***

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

~~Thursday~~ 7 p.m. Friday

Dear Mum & Dad, and Violet,

I arrived back O.K. on Thursday night, about 12 p.m.

I hope that yourselves, Son and Lily, got back home on Thursday night in good time. Anything happening now Mum – and bangs or crashes? I sincerely hope not.

I will have plenty of work to do in the next few days. Letter writing will take up most of my spare time. Once again I'm settling down to life in camp. But compared to the other side I'm sure this place is heaven.

I enjoyed my leave Mum and Dad very much but I'm hoping one day I will find a steady young lady to stop me drinking so much. Guess I did drink a lot but still it kept the boredom away. Thank you very much for standing a young drunkard like myself for 14 days.

I will write to Son this evening, I haven't a lot to write about but I can find a few stories – tall stories.

By the way Mum, the parcel which I thought went astray, came to light this morning. Gosh, it was in a state! The eggs. Phew! that tin certainly whiffed! I have the cocoa, Oxo, tea, sugar and milk. Thank you very much Mum!

I may be seeing Len H. again soon, sometimes he comes up here to the pictures, then drops in to see me on the way back.

Have you heard from Len or Aunt Lil, Mum? I hope they are well and happy. I will write as soon as possible.

Well Mum, Dad and Violet, I will close now. I will write again over the week-end. Thank you very much for helping me to enjoy my 14 days. Roll on the next time I get home, hoping it will not be long.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son & Brother,

Sid

x x x x x x

80: 25th November 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
A.P.O.
England.

Saturday, 25th Nov. 44.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

A few lines to let you know that I will be home, about Wednesday week, 6th Dec, for nine days. Something interesting at last.

Nothing much has happened here during the past week, and I haven't had very much to write about.

I received your letter this morning and I'm very glad to hear that Len, Aunt Lil and Junie are home again, I daresay that the nearby disturbance must have upset them for a while.

By the way Mum, I don't know if you are going “haywire” just lately, but in the letter I received this morning you have written the address 68 C. Rd. twice, and no S.N.

I was very pleased to know that Son & Lily came on Monday. The baby is looking fine isn't he Mum?

I thought Uncle Bob would be coming from Morecombe to see you all. Sorry to hear that Aunt Nell is unwell and I very much hope she will soon be well again. Last evening I wrote to Len Roles, and Arthur. Could you send their addresses along as soon as possible Mum, then I can send the airgraphs away. I haven't seen Len H. for a week or more, so I couldn't pass the form on to him. I used it myself.

I will not be home next week-end Mum – probably the passes will be stopped, so near to leave.

By the way Mum, please don't write and tell me that Dad has won the football again. HA! HA!

So folks, I will close now, wishing you all quiet days and nights, and good health and good luck.

Cheerio for Now

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x

P.S. I have written to Son and Lily.

81: 3rd December 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
A.P.O.
England.

Sunday 3-12-44.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Thank you for your letter last week I was very pleased to hear that all was going well, and you had no trouble from “Jerry”.

I will be home on Wednesday – what time I’m not sure but I hope it will about mid-day. On Wednesday evening Mum I’m going to Dagenham. On the Thursday I’m going to Loughborough to see Bert, the chap that is now out of the army. I’m stopping there on Thursday night and catching a train back on the Friday morning. On the Saturday afternoon I will be going to the Spurs v Arsenal to see the first half then I must make my way to Lily’s place for the christening of Richard. I expect Dad will be going to the Spurs. After that I’m not sure yet what I will be doing.

I very much hope you haven’t had any trouble lately through the war.

I have written to Lily as you probably know by now, telling her that I will be home for the christening on Saturday, and I’m looking forward to it very much.

How is Len, Mum? I expect he is very glad to be back in London again and in the same school once more.

Please convey my love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie and I will be very pleased to see them again. I hope they are well and safe.

Well folks, I must close now, and if possible I will write again before leave, although it is hardly worth it.

So good bye for now, wishing you the best of luck, and very good health, and quiet days and nights.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

82: 19th December 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
A.P.O.
England.

19th Dec. 44. Tuesday.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

A few lines to let you know I arrived home O.K. on Sunday night.

Nothing much has happened since I came back, and as usual I haven't a lot to write.

I sincerely hope you haven't been disturbed too much in the past few days.

I enjoyed last Sunday night very much but would liked to have said goodbye to George. I will be seeing him again soon I hope, and we will have a drink.

I'm looking forward to January 20th very much and I'm sure I will be there. I will be very disappointed if I cannot get home.

Well folks I enjoyed my leave and am looking forward to seeing you soon. Remember me and please convey my love to all the relatives, and I will be very glad to see everyone again. Thank you very much for the Christmas present and parcel Mum and Dad, and I thank Len and Violet very much for their presents.

So once again folks I will close, sorry so short, but I will write again soon.

Happy Christmas and Best wishes for the New Year.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

Ardennes: December 1944 - February 1945

83: 27th December 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

Wednesday, 27th Dec.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Everything goes well here folks, mustn't grumble yet. Hope all goes well for you all at home, and all has been quiet.

Of all places to be, I'm in a cow shed just now, and talk about hold my nose now and again. I spent Boxing Day in this cow shed and I didn't smell TURKEY. Phew!!! I'm sure I know all I want to know about cows. Two words. They stink!! Well that's enough about my bed mates the ----- things.

This part of France is O.K. – very cold but I have made myself warm. Digging trenches in solid rock keeps me very warm.

I haven't received any letters over here yet, but am hoping for some tomorrow. I sincerely hope Son, Lily and Richard are enjoying good health, and all at 41. Love to everyone, and Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie, and the relatives.

Well Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, it is time for sleep, I've had 4 hrs in the last 48 hrs, so I'm ready to get down to it, so I'll wish good luck and good health.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son.

(Happy as a cow in -----)

Sid.

x x x x x x x x

84: 30th December 1944

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
 "A" Company,
 2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
 B.L.A.

Saturday 30th. Dec.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Once again I have time to write a few lines, and I'm very pleased to let you know that all goes well.

I found a bottle of ink, and having thawed it out, it was frozen, I have much pleasure in writing this letter in ink. Quite a change.

How are you all at home folks? Well and happy and everything as per usual? I very much hope so. Have you been disturbed lately?

I received a Christmas Card to-day, from Son and Lily, also a card from Violet V., wishing me a very happy Christmas – and I thought it very frivolous. My Christmas meal was one cheese sandwich, no tea, which lasted the whole day.

I haven't much to write, except that the weather is very very cold. Can manage on the food although it isn't very much. I was in France, but am now in Belgium, and I prefer the latter country. Jolly fine place and very sociable and kind people in Belgium. The buildings are very fine, although there are the slum areas as in other countries. Rode through a large part of Belgium to France and saw plenty of it.

[Redacted/damaged] . . . the places where Dad was last war. So don't worry folks I'm having a cheap tour of the Continent, at the same time I'm getting paid for it. HA! HA!, but I know where I would rather be. Too ----- true. There's one thing that makes me laugh out here, that

is the Belgian and French children singing "It's a long way to Tipperary." We've made up a new song, "Roll on a bloody long time". Explains everything.

Well folks, please convey my love to all the relatives, tell them I'm getting along as usual and I wish them all the very best of good luck, and good health, also a very happy New Years Hope to see them one fine day.

So once again Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, I must close, it's cold, and the best place is between the blankets, so cheerio for now, best of health to you all and good luck.

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x

85: 31st December 1944

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. Oxf. & Bucks. L.I.
B.L.A

Sunday 31st Dec.

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet and Len,

How are you all at home folks? Enjoying good health and everything going well? I hope so very much. Have you had any nearby “bangs or crashes”?

Nothing much has happened here, all quiet and well, and you have no need to worry. I haven’t been short for cigarettes. Can’t spend much money, except to buy cigarettes, which are cheaper now, and I cannot buy much in the shops which are here. I hear that potatoes are now rationed in England, and I’m sure that was a surprise to you all. Probably owing to a bad harvest. The food here is gradually getting better, and to-day’s was reasonable.

How are Len and Violet? Is Len getting along well at school Mum? I expect Violet is still having a moan about paying Income Tax. HA! HA! I would rather pay I. Tax, in “civvy street”.

I have written to Lily and Son, and to Beattie. I haven’t had much time to write to any relations, unless I send a postcard, although I don’t like writing postcards to anyone.

I have been looking around the shops trying to find something as a present for you Mum and Dad. It is suprising what things there are to buy over here – quite a lot in the bigger towns. We are allowed to send parcel, gifts etc! I’ll do my best!

The stamped envelope is one you sent along before my ten days leave, and I have only this one envelope left until I get my kitbag.

I have just received some cards and letters, about five minutes ago. Christmas cards from Don and Dot, and a letter from you Mum, with 10/- enclosed, and a Xmas Card from you, Mum and Dad. Thank you very much for the Card, 10/- and two letters Mum and Dad. Please thank Don and Dot very much for the Card, and although late, I wish them a very happy new year. Very glad to know that Arthur is well and as usual I'm sure he is just as cheerful. Yesterday I received a Card from Edie and Bob. Also to-day I received a letter from Beattie. Cheered me up very much!

I didn't enjoy Christmas Day, Mum and Dad, Violet and Len. One cheese sandwich to last all day and nothing to drink – no tea! No beer. Roll on next Christmas!

Pleased to hear you had Cards from Len H. and Dave Roberts. By the way Mum, I gave David my case, with civvy shoes enclosed, a pullover and a few odds and ends and asked him if he would post it on to you or go up to London one week-end, and come and see you. I gave him 5/- to post it.

Well folks, it is time I closed, I'm on guard very soon, so wishing you very good luck and very good health & to all the relations, Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie, I'll say cheerio for now and here's hoping I will soon be with you. God Bless!

Your Loving Son.

x x x x x

Sid x x x x x

(Belgium Land Army)

(Always digging trenches)

P.S.

Love to Lily, Son, Richard.

Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet, Jackie, and Aubrey.

P.S. (Extra).

Just had the pleasure of watching a "Jerry" plane and, probably the crew, going to the best place for all "Jerries". 3 Cheers for the Ack-Ack!!!

86: 3rd January 1945

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn, O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

3rd ~~Dec~~ JAN '44

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet & Len,

I have received your letter in reply to my letter, the first of mine addressed B.L.A. Please to know that you know where I am now.

I wrote the first letter on the ship. By now you have probably received more letters from me. Have you had my shows and case yet? Maybe Dave came to see you.

Thank you very much for 200 cigs. which Uncle Jack is ordering for Dad, and yourself, Mum. I will look forward to them very much.

I'm very glad to know that life isn't too noisy in London, so you mention in your letter.

I eat the parcel on the train going to the port. The cake was lovely Mum, and a couple of chaps and myself, enjoyed every piece very much. I often wish now I had some here now. The food here is getting much better but if you could manage a parcel now and again – once a fortnight and I would be very much obliged.

I received the 10/- note with Xmas Card and also a letter.

Life isn't bad over here Mum, although the weather is bad. Frozen roads etc!

Well folks remember me to everyone you happen to see and wish them all the best of luck for me.

Now I must close now it is late, and must get some sleep.

So cheerio for now, good luck, good health and God Bless

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x x

4th Jan. All O.K.

87: 5th January 1945

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A

Friday, 5th Jan. 44.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

A few quick lines to let you know that all goes well. Hope everything is the same at home – all quiet.

I haven't much to tell you folks, except I will be very pleased to see you again. I haven't seen Len Hardy or Bob Fox for some time now.

Please convey my love to Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet, Lily, Son, Richard, Jackie and Aubrey. Also to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie. I sincerely hope all are enjoying the best of health, and all goes well. How are Aunt Beat, Uncle Ern and family? How is George getting along in the Army? Hope he is getting used to it. I have heard from Beattie, and she has received the new address. Rather surprised Beattie, but she will be O.K. I will be writing to her to-day, but am not sure if the letters will be posted to-day.

Well folks, as I said at the beginning of this letter, short and sweet, so from your loving son, who is trying hard to jog along with a smile and waiting patiently for this war to end I wish you jolly good luck, and very good health, and keep your chins up. Love to you all at home, and remember me to the big happy family.

Cheerio for a While.

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x x x x

88: 6th January 1945

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A

6th Jan '45 (Sat.)

Dear Mum & Dad, Violet & Len.

I am very pleased to tell you that I have just received three letters from you. Jolly fine. One letter was with the small parcel – H. Gazettes, CIGS, sweets, biscuits, and books, posted on the 29th Dec. The second letter you wrote on 31st Dec. Sunday, and the third letter was written on the 1st Jan.

Pleased to hear that all goes well at home, and not too noisy.

I have seen Len Hardy only once. I haven't seen Bob Fox yet. You certainly received a few Christmas Cards Mum and Dad.

I will write as much as possible Mum, so don't worry.

I haven't lost any mail yet from you, or Xmas Cards. Everything has been received by me.

Glad to hear that George likes the life so far, and I hope very much that the war is soon over and he won't have to come out here.

If Son and Lily go into the “Allen” again soon, please remember me and convey my best wishes to Julie, and Hilda and Jean, hoping to be home soon.

I will write to David and my old chum at Loughborough as soon as possible Mum. I have some postcards.

Don't worry too much about gloves and comforts Mum, I can keep myself warm, and without carrying too much kit around.

I'm not in the cow shed any more Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, but I wasn't sorry to leave it.

Very glad to know that you received my case from David. Jolly nice of him to post it. I was worried about the case and contents, but now you have them I'm very pleased.

Please thank Mrs Thomas for the books, I must write as soon as possible. Hope very much that everyone at No. 5 are well and safe. Remember me to Mr & Mrs Thomas, Dan, Dot, Bill and everyone.

Well folks, I'm racing against darkness to finish this letter so don't forget, don't worry about me being cold, just a home made cake now and again, and some tea, & sugar, milk from the nearest cow shed.

Good Luck, Best of health and keep singing and dancing "old lady" Keeps you fit! HA! HA!
Mind my bike and teeth, old sweat. HA!

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x x x

Love to all the big happy family.

89: 7th January 1945

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier

“A” Company, 14 Platoon,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet & Len,

I have received another letter to-day which you posted on the 3rd Jan, and I'm very pleased to let you know that no mail has been lost. 10/-, Xmas Cards, H. Gazettes everything have reached so far, and have helped to keep me cheerful.

I have already written to Mrs Thomas, and Aunt Ede, and this letter is the third one to-day. I have been very busy and every letter is a hurried one

The weather isn't quite so cold, but cold enough to make me appreciate many things at home.

You have probably received a few letters from me by now, and are feeling less worried. You haven't much to worry about folks – my trench is deep and strong. Same old routine, daily – a little earth from the bottom on to the top daily. I haven't slept in a trench yet so don't worry whatsoever. I'll be coming home again as last time.

Pleased to hear you have heard from Arthur. Tell him I wish him good luck and hope to see him home soon, or be with him soon. One of the two!

I had a surprise to-day. Met a woman from Covent Garden, and was very surprised. I said “Bonjour Madame” and the reply was “Wotcher Mate.” I nearly collapsed. HA! HA! It is true though and I'll tell you more when I come home. No leg-pulling!!

So once again folks, I must close, but not before wishing you good luck and the very best of health. Don't forget to convey my love to all the relations, and wish them good luck and good health for me.

Bye for Now, quiet days and nights,

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x x x x

x x x x x x x

90: 10th January 1945

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A

10th Jan '45, 5 p.m.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I haven't written for the past three days, owing to being very busy. I couldn't even manage a post card, but now there is a possibility that this letter will be posted.

I very much hope you are enjoying good health and everything as per usual. How are the “bangs” from above?

Your mail to me has been getting here very well, the last letter I have received is dated 3rd Jan. and I'm hoping to get more this evening and I'm hoping there will be a parcel with home-made cake enclosed. This fresh air life and not too much food certainly makes me hungry. I'm certainly looking forward to my first dinner at home, and may that day be sooner than I think.

I have had some letters from Beattie, two last night, and she is fine. Says she went to a few parties between Xmas and New Year's Day and I certainly don't blame her enjoying herself these days.

I haven't seen Len H. since the day we landed, or Bob Fox. As far as I know they are O.K.

Convey my love to all the families Mum, please, I will write to as many as possible, as soon as I can. Very unsettled these days.

Well folks darkness is about here so I will have to close. Sorry so short will write again soon.

Good luck, good health and keep smiling.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son.

x x x x x x x.

P.S. To-day I met a Serjeant Major who was the P.T. Instructor at Shapwick Convalescent Home, and you should have heard what he called me.

Please thank Violet V. for her letter Dated 4th Jan.

91: 14th January 1945

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier

“A” Company, 14 Platoon,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

14th Jan. ‘44

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Today, I received two letters from you, one dated the 7th Jan and the 9th Jan, and I’m very pleased to know that you are all safe and sound. By the way folks, I received the parcel yesterday – jolly fine, and I am hanging on to the tinned milk, tea, salmon, just in case we are short one day. Thank you very much for the parcel Mum, it was a gift from heaven. The food is much better just now and I hope it doesn’t change.

You have no doubt read in the newspaper of us, and you have no need to worry any longer as to where I am. I’m

[Page 2 apparently missing at IWM]

the R’s have been too often, and I sincerely hope you haven’t been upset too much.

Thank Len for cleaning my shoes for me, Mum, and I’m thinking it is time I treated him again, also I must find a souvenir for him. I must write to David thanking him for sending the case along. He’s in England.

It is about time Uncle Bob came down South a little. I’m sure he will never get fit, and I don’t blame him, folks.

I expect Dad is very pleased about the 4 weeks day work, it will be a break and a rest for him, and also when he gets the new job the work will be much easier.

Please convey my love to all the folks at 41, all the relations. Love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie, I'll be giving them a surprise one day.

[Page 4 apparently missing at IWM]

92: 16th January 1945

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier

“A” Company, 14 Platoon,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

16th Jan. 1944

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I have received your letter dated the 11th Jan, and the small parcel with H. Gazettes, and peppermints etc, and I thank you very much for both.

I am pleased to know that you all goes well at home, also that you had two quiet nights.

I'm quite used to this weather now Mum. Quite a change for you people in London to have the snow for some time. It will soon be clearing off now that January is more or less finished – and a jolly good job it will be.

Life is not too bad now – very quiet, and food and sleep are much better and more. To-day I went to a E.N.S.A concert, which wasn't too bad under the conditions. When I was there, I met Bob Fox the chap I often met in the “Allen” when on leave. I haven't seen Len H. since the day I left England.

I remember Fred Graves, Dad, so remember me when you see him again. I will have to try and see him when I'm on leave again.

Convey my love to Son, Lily and Richard and all the folks at 41., and I sincerely hope they are all enjoying good health.

If I get time Mum, I will write to Uncle Bob, but you understand how inconvenient writing can be over here. I haven't forgotten him, so please remember me, and I will be very pleased when we are on leave again and manage a drink or two together. Love to Aunt Nell, Nellie, Bobbie and the children. I imagine that his interests in the Army are the same as mine, as usual.

Please remember me to Mr and Mrs Smith, and Wal, and tell them, that I haven't much chance of seeing Jim at the moment, owing to being in a different part of the country. I would certainly like to meet him – what a reunion we could have – even on coffee.

By the time you receive this letter folks, I expect the wedding will be all over, so I hope very much that you all enjoyed yourselves as much as possible. My only wish at the moment is to be home on Saturday and to be able to be with you all. So if you please Mum and Dad, wish Violet and Aubrey, good luck, and every happiness for the future, for me.

Once again, I will close, with best wishes for the best of luck, and the best of health and a quiet life.

Cheerio for now,

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

All O.K.

18th Jan. '45.

93: 29th January 1945

5836503. Pte. S. Verrier

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

Monday 29th Jan.

Dear Mum, and Dad, Violet and Len,

I received a letter from you last night, Mum and Dad, which you posted to me on Wednesday the 24th.

I've very pleased to know that all is going well.

The parcel you sent along was a great help Mum. The birthday parcel! I enjoyed the cake and also, my chums thought the cooking was jolly fine, and it was. A piece of home made – and you know how much I like it at home, so just imagine how much I enjoyed it out here. I'm saving some of the “tinned stuff” for a time when food may be short. The weight of the parcel was very heavy and I wondered what was in it. So thanks very much indeed Mum, I'm being looked after very well by you, as usual, and I'm very grateful.

Thank you for the write heather Mum, and please thank Violet and Aubrey for it, it was very thoughtful.

I had letters from Violet V., Aunt Ede and Beattie. By the way Mum, Aunt Ede said in her letter that there was 10/- in the Xmas card she sent me. I didn't find it in the Xmas Card, and I really don't know what happened to it.

Well Mum, as per usual I'm very busy tonight, and I cannot write much again. When I go back to rest I will write as much as possible.

So, keep Smiling, "Joe Stalin is going along fine", good health and good luck. I'll be very pleased to walk in the door and give you another suprise.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x x

P.S.

Hope sincerely that all has been quiet at home, and also that all relations are safe and well.

Please thank Violet and Aunt Ede for their letters. I will reply when possible.

How is Richard, Mum? I very much hope he is well by now. Love to all at 41, Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie.

Sid.

xxx

94: 30th January 1945

P.S. Happy Birthday to Arthur.

Good Luck to George, Sid and Aunt Beat and family.

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

30th Jan. 45. Tuesday

Dear Mum and Dad, Violet and Len,

A few lines to keep you from worrying folks, and to let you know I’m O.K.

I hope very much that all goes well at home – nothing near to home or too noisy.

Your mail is coming through fine Mum and Dad, the last letter was dated the 24th, and I’m hoping to receive more this evening. I had letters from Aunt Ede, Violet V. and Beattie, and yourself, yesterday.

Please convey my love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and June, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Jackie, Violet, Aubrey, Lily, Son and Richard. Tell them I’ll be very happy when I’m roaming round to see them in “civvy” clothes, and may that day be very soon.

There isn’t much chance of seeing Jim Smith yet although you know how much I would like to. Haven’t seen Len Hardy lately, nor Bob Fox.

How is Richard Mum? I hope he is well again now. Hope Son and Lily are well and all at 41.

How is Dad getting on at the Water Board. "How is it going 'Pop'" Don't tell me it is too cushy because I will willingly come and help you.

I say Dad, I never thought how cold a chap could possibly be. You know, perhaps more than I do and gosh, how I'm looking forward to coming home. It is impossible to describe the life to any one unless they have been through the experience. I guess I can get along O.K. Pop, but it takes some "sticking". Roll on the spring and warm sunshine.

By the way Mum and Dad, Beattie sent me 160 cigarettes a week or so ago. I almost forgot to tell you. Don't you think that was very good of the young lady, and I wrote and thanked her very much.

Cigarette situation has been pretty grim just lately and I'm waiting to see the duty free cigs come through.

Well, once again folks, I must say cheerio for now, wishing you all the best of luck, good health, and a quiet life. You will never know how happy I will be to be home with you again. This is more than adventure – it is slow torture.

Cheerio, Mum, Dad, Violet and Len.

Your Loving Son and Brother

Sid

x x x x x x x x

P.S. Please take some of my vol. allotment and buy yourself something Mum, Dad, Violet and Len.

95: 31st January 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

31st Jan. ‘45

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Same old letter folks, but I’m sure you don’t mind at all. Words and letter the same each time I write, but really folks there isn’t anything I can tell you which would interest you. I’m just trying to do my share and carry on making the best of everything. At least I’m O.K. folks.

I received a letter from Son last night, to which I replied this morning.

The duty free cigs. haven’t started to arrive yet, but the cigarette situation isn’t to bad to-day. Probably some mail will be here this evening. Mail, in the “line” is like a gift from heaven, and I have had plenty thanks to you, folks at home.

How are you M, D, V & L? All well and happy? Have you been receiving a few letters from me lately, because I have written a few just recently. One to Aunt Ede. By the way Mum, did Mrs Thomas receive a letter from me? I wrote thanking her for the books which arrived here in the first parcel.

Once again, I must be on my way again, so wishing you jolly good health and luck I will close. Keep smiling. Love to all relatives. Cheerio for a While.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

410

x x x x x

P.S. The tea, sugar, and milk is very handy these cold nights – just a mug each night.

By the way, I am allowed to tell you I'm in Holland.

96: 1st February 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company, 14 Platoon,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

1st Feb. '45. Thursday.

Dear Mum and Dad, Violet and Len,

A few lines hoping all goes well on the home front, and you are all enjoying good health.

I have some good news – the thaw has taken place, at last, over here in Holland. Not quite as cold, and the countryside looks more natural now. Makes life slightly easier. At the moment life isn't bad at all, and although “Jerry” isn't at a comfortable distance, he is keeping quiet. Thank heavens.

There is still no sign of the duty free cigarettes, and I'm hoping they will soon be arriving. They are bound to take longer now, more than last time I was here, because of the greater number of troops.

I didn't receive any mail last evening, or the evening before, so roll on postman perhaps he will fetch some this evening. I wrote to you yesterday, and for each day the three previous days.

How is Richard, Mum? I wrote to Son yesterday and addressed the letter to Dorking. I hope everyone at 41, are in the best of health. I will write as soon as time allows. Daylight hours call for sleep here, and rather busy at night.

I haven't seen Len Hardy, or Bob Fox for a couple of weeks, but I'm rather positive they are safe and well.

I cannot send any gift parcels home yet, following a shortage of duty free labels. I have a few small things to send home – nothing expensive, but just a small parcel of useful things.

I will close not Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, keep smiling, and here's to your enjoying good health, good luck and a quiet life. Remember me to all the folks, and love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x x x x x x

P.S.

I have plenty of writing paper Mum, but I am very short of envelopes.

97: 2nd February 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company, 14 Platoon,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

2nd Feb. '45

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

This morning I received the second large parcel, and honestly I cannot thank you enough for everything. They are really wonderful, and gosh I really appreciate the whisky, no matter how small the bottle. Thank you very much indeed folks, I would like to show my gratitude otherwise, but at the moment it must be in writing. Also to-day I received letters from you, Lily, Uncle Bill and June. Your letter is dated Sat. 27th Jan, which is good going with the weather so rough.

According to Lily's letter, Richard is improving and I'm so glad to hear so.

Yes Mum, the food is much better now, and if I were you, I would ease up on the parcels, just in case. Not that I don't want them Mum, but it would be safer, don't you think especially if what you mentioned in your letter about stopping this and that. I haven't heard about the stopping, if the books are sent. HA! HA! What a to-do!

I haven't received any duty free cigarettes yet folks, but some chaps have had them, so I will soon be seeing some, I'm sure. At the moment, I have plenty of cigarettes because the N.A.A.F.I. arrived yesterday and I bought 140 – cheap of course, and I'm fine for a few days.

The wedding cake is really marvellous, Mum, and I must thank Violet and Aubrey, very much, by writing, and as soon as I can. I will try and send a tin back to you, Mum and Dad, as soon as the duty free labels are issued, and then we can send gifts to home.

So Uncle Jack was disappointed, but I'm sure everybody enjoyed themselves, and probably their own fault if they didn't. Now I'm sure Son and Lily's wedding or any other person's wedding couldn't have been more enjoyable, or better. From the money point of view – Crab [?] show. Burn the letter when read.

[Next page missing at IWM]

98: 6th February 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company, 14 Platoon,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

Monday 6th Feb 45

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I have received two letters and two small parcels of H. Gazettes. The two letters are dated Monday 29th and Wednesday 31st of January, and one parcel of papers contained biscuits and the second parcel of papers, Oxo cubes. Thank you very much indeed Mum, they have been very pleasing. Have you been receiving any letters from me recently.

The weather isn't so bad now, and not really cold. I very much hope the snow and cold spells have gone from London by this time.

I was very pleased to hear that Mr Thomas and Bill came along to see you. Bill has certainly been busy and I wish him jolly good luck for the future. He is certainly doing his share, and I'm sure they deserve their leave, every six weeks. Did Mr Thomas receive a letter from me Mum? I posted one about four weeks ago. Please convey my kind regards and I hope to be seeing them again one fine day.

I send my love to Lily, Son, Richard, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Jackie, Violet and Aubrey.

So Dad has passed the first examination – good show “Pop”, and keep it up. Show them what you can do!

It was good of Violet to write to Len H., and I'm sure it will help to cheer him up slightly.

Glad to hear that Aunt Ede has received my letter and card. Yes Mum, usually we get a roof over our heads this weather, and there isn't too much trench life.

It must be a rather serious affair with coal just now, but "thank heavens" you have plenty at home, folks. I was reading that transportation from the mines is the chief setback.

Pleasant surprise to see Clem and Eileen I'm sure, folks, and how I would liked to have been with you all to enjoy the good laugh. We do, surprising I know, have a good laugh out here, but they are nothing like the laughs at home. Don't matter though, they keep us going.

The parcels have all arrived so far. Three in all, including one for the 20th Jan., and don't worry about throwing the cakes, if stale, over to "Jerry". Insulting the cakes too much, stale or not. The cakes haven't been stale on arrival at all.

Give my love to all the relations, folks. Love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie. I wrote to June on the 4th.

Wishing you jolly good luck and very good health, and a quiet few days, I must now say

Cheerio for Now, folks.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x x

From here the Rs can be seen taking off. Seen two!

Roll on!!!!!!

99: 10th February 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

10th Feb. 45. Sat.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I haven't much news to tell you folks, except that all goes well, and I'm O.K.

At the moment I'm having a couple of days rest – a little way behind the line. I get a good nights sleep which is half the battle, for two or three nights.

This evening I wrote to Aunt Beat, asking for Arthur's and George's addresses.

I heard from the lads about the V.2. at D. Junction. I hope it didn't upset you too much, and have had no closer than that.

Glad to know that you enjoyed last Sunday evening with Mr. Mrs. and Bill Thomas. So Dan and Dot have been on long leave – lucky people, and I'm sure they enjoyed every moment.

I daresay Ben Taylor is a long way from us, but if I do get the chance I will try and find him and I can imagine how he would welcome me. A political argument. Good luck to him.

Once again folks, I'm in a hurry so wishing you good luck – good health and quiet days.

Bye for Now,

Your Loving Son, Sid

x x x x x

100: 10th February 1945 (Second Letter)

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

10th Feb. 45. Saturday.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I have just received two letters from you, dated the 1st. and 3rd of Feb., for which I must thank you very much.

Many happenings are taking place again I hear. Jack joining the Army, Len the Navy, and Aubrey going to the “footsloggers”. I sincerely hope they all enjoy it and wish them the best of luck. It will pass the time away for Len that is one good point.

How are you all folks? Any V.2.s. nearby, or V.1s? I sincerely hope not. [DAMAGED] good health? Is Richard back to normal health [DAMAGED]

[The remainder of the page is too damaged to transcribe]

Did you enjoy yourselves when Mr. Mrs. and Bill Thomas, Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie came to tea. I expect you had a good laugh about “old times”, and I don’t blame you. I was wondering if you could get Bill’s address and send it along to us. There’s no hurry Mum – whenever you see Mr. & Mrs. Thomas again.

Please convey my love to Lily, Son, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Jackie, Violet and Aubrey, and Richard – (young one-eye always open). Love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and June.

Still in the frontline – and boy-oh-boy, the R.A.F. have certainly been “up to their tricks”. Total war, and I wonder how “Jerry” likes it, after craving for war of this type. From what he takes I should think life is very unhealthy for him.

Once again folks I must close, I will write again soon, maybe tomorrow if possible [DAMAGED] then I will wish you, good luck, good health

[The remainder of the page is too damaged to transcribe]

101: 12th February 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

12th Feb. '45.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I haven't very much news to tell you, folks, as you understand how much I am allowed to tell you.

My three day rest has finished, which I enjoyed very much, and I am back once more “with the lads”. Leave to Brussels started some days ago, and the 48hrs each man is allowed, is the next relaxation I am looking forward to. Taking a view of our life over here, all round, the good and welcome breaks come fairly often. If and when I go to Brussels, I am wondering if Jim Smith will be there still. I very much doubt it, but nevertheless I will hope for the best.

Len H., I haven't seen for a

[Next page missing at IWM]

There isn't much chance of meeting Leslie, Gladys brother – he is usually a few miles from these places. He is with ordnance, apparently. There is a possibility of meeting Sid Cox – knowing he is with B.L.A., and also his battalion.

I haven't received any mail for two days, but probably to-morrow morning a few letters will cheer me up – or a parcel. I was surprised when you wrote to tell me that you received five letters in one day, most likely due to bad weather.

Once again, I must close folks – keep smiling – wishing you very good health – and very good luck, and a quiet life.

Bye for Now,

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x x x

102: 15th February 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

15th Feb. ‘45.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet, and Len,

I received a parcel on the 13th, and two letters, one letter dated 8th Feb. and one on the 9th. The parcel was the one with the tin of crawfish, etc – books.

I was very pleased to hear from you Mum, that all goes well at home – Richard much better now, Son Lily, and all the folks at 41, enjoying good health.

I must thank you very much for the parcel folks, it was very good – T.S.M., and home-made cake, and thank you very much for the catarrh pastilles. I’m enjoying everything very much. I’m saving the T.S.M. for rough times or when I’m feeling very dry. At the present time I’m getting plenty of food, and drink, which isn’t too badly cooked, and under the conditions, I haven’t any grumbles. I’m not losing weight I’m sure, so there cannot be much wrong.

Glad to know that Dan, Dot and Bill came along to see you – and I’m sure you was pleased to see them. I thank them for their wishes. Yes Mum, Dot is a very nice girl.

By the way folks, I received a packet of 100 cigs, duty free. They arrived the day before yesterday, 13th. I think they must be from Son and Lily, so please thank them very much for me Mum. There is no slip of paper inside to let me know who sent them.

I received the megazones O.K. – and the tin inside in the parcel of etcs! Please thank Violet for the ones with the local papers.

Sid Williams in Belgium, I wasn't very surprised Mum, but I wish him all the very best of luck. Perhaps he isn't in the "line" – maybe a little way behind. I can imagine that Bridie will be worrying now. I hope she and Peter are well. George is luckier, Brentwood – I expect he will be home now and again.

You are quite right Mum, I did receive the 10/- before I left England. The very same morning. I must thank Aunt Ede very much indeed. It was such a rush I almost forgot everything.

So everyone here has had a Xmas dinner – well, apparently we should have had ours.

Once again folks, I must close – sleep – Good health, good luck and quiet nights. Thank you very much for the parcel.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x x x

103: 18th February 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

Sunday. 18th Feb. '45.

Dear Mum and Dad, Violet and Len,

I received today a very large parcel, and two letters. Yesterday I received two letters and Hackney Gazettes and soap. Thank you very much for the parcel Mum – by gosh, I have put on weight this time over here, and some of it is due to the contents of your parcels. Carrying those pocket books! Thank you very much folks you will never realise how much I enjoy them.

The letters are dated Feb 10th (two – one with H. Gazettes), Feb., 11th., Feb 13th and 14th. and I must thank you very much for them. Pleased to know my mail reaches you O.K. – even if every Saturday is a regularity.

Very glad to hear that Arthur is safe and well. I bet he enjoyed the fried chicken. I can just imagine the b-----y thing crowing in the middle of the night and I would have walloped it very much harder. Send my very best wishes for good luck and hopes for drinking a cup of tea at 68, very soon. Time Arthur had some leave.

The things I was going to send home, I will now hold on to! One is a steel comb, almost unbendable. I wish I could have bought half a dozen, they are well worth the money. I bought it in the Ardennes. I will hold on to them! I know you want a few [?] which are hard to come by now.

The parcel I received to-day, was the one with a small bottle of whisky enclosed. Two Lilliputs – H.M.C. and other books etc. The paper – blank – in the parcel, isn't necessary. I do that so suddenly it is a question of soapy water – not blank paper. By the way Mum, don't worry about

parcels for a while – have a rest – I have plenty of food stored up now. Tea, sugar and milk is fine. I'm getting along fine – never short of the "old cup of tea".

Thank you very much for the milk chocolate, and please thank Reggie Eames and Mrs. Eames for sending it along. I expect Reg is O.K. safe and well in Iceland.

I knew Len Hardy was a L/Cpl., when I saw him last, but I forgot to tell you in my letter. I will be very pleased to see him again soon – if possible.

I guess you were all suprised to see Aunt Lil and Irene on Thursday 8th Feb. I'm sure Irene is a big girl now – isn't she Mum? Perhaps I will be seeing them one fine day. I send my love.

I don't need any money Mum. I haven't drawn any since I came to Holland. Since I left England, I have drawn only 500 frcs, Belgian francs, and that is app. three pounds. There is nothing I want Mum, I'm quite happy with what kit I have and also quite weighed down, so thank you all the same folks.

The weather hasn't been too bad Mum, as a matter of fact, any weather is better than the weather in the Ardennes. That snow, and, I would sooner have the rain.

I may see Sid Cox, Mum, although it is only an off chance – but I will keep my eyes open whenever I get the chance. I'm sorry to hear that Sid has had trouble with his eyes. I wish him good luck, and good health and a speedy return to "Blighty" when it is all over. I hope very much that all at 66, Cowper and well, and I wish them all good luck and no disturbances. Perhaps soon, the V.2s won't bother you at all, and the "Jerries" who play around with V.2s may find themselves being rocketed all over their rocket sites.

Please to hear that Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie are well, also that you often see them. I send my love and wish my "old pals" good luck, good health, and perhaps a good laugh.

Don't worry about envelopes Mum, I have plenty thank you. About 60, and the last envelope is addressed from Berlin, providing "Joe" doesn't get there first. The cigarettes have started to arrive – a 100 packet two days or so ago – but it doesn't say who from. The others will be here soon, as don't send any seperate parcels of cigs thank you Mum.

I haven't much to tell you folks. Still watching the "squareheaded b-----", but not quite so friendly as the army around St Nazaire are with the "Jerries" there. It's a queer experience is war.

Once again, Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, I will close – my turn for "dog-watch" so wishing you all, the very best of luck, good health and a quiet life, I will conclude. Love to Son, Lily, Richard, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Jackie, Violet and Aubrey, Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie. Also to all relations and friends.

Bye for Now

Your Loving Son and Brother

Sid

x x x x x x x x x

P.S. You will not receive any mail for a few days after this letter, but don't worry at all, because I'm not worried in the least.

Keep Smiling, there is no need for anxiety!

England: March 1945***104: 11th March 1945***

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

A.P.O.

England.

11th March 1945, Sunday.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I arrived back in camp, safe and sound, as per usual, and once again I'm settled down very well. I had a busy day on Sat. and am having a busy day to-day.

I sincerely hope you haven't had too many noisy days and nights, and no close ones. I heard a “Bang”, as the train was moving out, and I wondered where it was.

I enjoyed my leave Mum and Dad, although I finished up in the usual way. It was good to be at home, and near home all the time, and I will be very pleased when I'm home for good.

By the way Mum, I received two letters this morning from you, a letter from Lily with the photo of Violet and Aubrey's wedding, and the parcel with the “good” double whisky enclosed. The cakes are fine – the coconut ones, and please thank Aunt Ede for sending the coconut to make them with. Thank you for everything in the parcel, Mum and Dad.

No news yet of 36 hr. passes, but I cannot grumble even if I can't get home for a while. It is good to be in England, and I have been very lucky. Maybe they will start again.

Please convey my love to Lily, Son, Richard and everyone at 41. Love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie.

There isn't any interesting news to tell you folks nothing much has happened.

Time now is 10.15 p.m. almost Lights Out, and I'm going for a good sleep. I will write again tomorrow night, if possible folks, I might be busy for a change.

So wishing you good luck, and good health, and nights and days as quiet as possible, I will say

Cheerio for Now, Love to all.

Your Loving Son and Brother,

Sid.

x x x x x x x x x x

105: 21st March 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

A.P.O.

England.

Wednesday 21st March '45.

Dear Mum and Dad, Violet and Len,

Yesterday, I received a parcel of one hundred duty free cigs., they were from Lily and Son. I have written a short letter to them thanking them very much.

I sincerely hope all goes well at home, that you are all enjoying the very best of health, and days and nights have been reasonably quiet. How I wish you could all spend a couple of weeks down here, in the country, wherever it may be, to get a rest from the noise. Of course it is almost impossible because of work, but I've always hoped you could have a rest somewhere in the country.

The day before yesterday, I packed a small parcel of chocolate, and I asked one of the chaps, if he would post it for me. Probably you will receive it in a couple of days. By the way Mum, would you please send some to Lily, for Richard – two or three bars.

Many happy returns of the day Len, if I was home we could celebrate it but I'm afraid I will not be able to get home. Many happy returns of the day Mum. I will buy a couple of presents as soon as I get the opportunity to do so, on my next leave.

How is Dad getting on? Still working overtime? Have Dad's new teeth arrived yet Mum? If they have I'm sure he looks much younger again, and feels much better.

By the way, I met another old school friend of mine to-day. A chap in the Glider Pilot Regiment. He has the D.F.C. for the work he did on D-Day. You will remember that I met him in 1942 on an aerodrome, a couple of weeks before I went in hospital. His name is Philip Hobbs and probably you have heard me speak of him. It was a very welcome and very much enjoyed reunion.

Please convey my love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie, and I sincerely hope all are enjoying very good health. I send my love, best wishes for good luck to all the relatives and friends. Hope to see you all again soon.

Once again folks I must wish you all, the very best of good luck, good health and a life so quiet as you could possibly hope for.

Bye for Now.

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x x x x x

106: 23rd March 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier.

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

A.P.O.

England.

Friday, 23rd March 45.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

How do you do folks? I sincerely hope that all goes fine at home, and you are all enjoying good health, and not suffering too many disturbances.

I wrote to you yesterday, and the letter was posted yesterday morning.

Yesterday, I received two letters from you Mum and Dad, one dated the 18th and the other the 20th March. I was very pleased to know that all was well.

Dad has his new teeth, roll on the day when I see him again, which I hope will not be very long.

New false teeth always do “puff the cheeks” out a bit. Mind how you go up the Spurs next time Dad! They cost a lot of money.

I was suprised to hear about Uncle Bob. Lucky for the time being, and I bet he is making the most of every minute – I certainly don’t blame him. When the war is over I suppose he goes.

I have just received your letter telling me that Charlie Cox has been killed in action in Burma. I’m terribly sorry Mum, and I am very upset about it, and it is hard to realise, or impossible to realise how upset all the family are in 66. It is a hard war, and terrible. I will do my very best

to write to Mrs Cox tonight, although I haven't much time. If I do not write Mum, please convey to Mr. and Mrs. Cox, my feelings, and I wish to express my deepest sympathy to Mr. & Mrs. Cox and family. It is a very very sad happening.

Please wish Uncle Bob, and family, the very best of good luck, good health, and "bon voyage". To Uncle Bob, "I wish I was home just now to enjoy a pint of beer in a good old London pub. It is ages since I had a drink with him." All the Best, Uncle Bob, see you soon.

Well Mum and Dad, by the time you receive this letter, I will not be in England, but don't worry – have faith, that is what I keep saying to myself, and keep laughing at the slightest incident which appears to be comical. I laugh at some of the silliest things, but that laugh keeps me going. You will see the papers, and understand.

Keep Smiling – I'm doing my best to do so and I'm sure everything will be O.K. I will be thinking of you as much as you will of me – always. So – chin up, and keep jogging along, and maybe when I come home next time I will be home for all time. The same old motto, with the boys and myself, "Roll on a blinking long time." HA! HA! Describes everything!

Good Luck, Mum, Dad, Violet, Len, good health and God Bless you all and keep you safe. Love, and all good luck, health and happiness to Son, Lily and Richard, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet and Aubrey, and Jackie. Love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil, and Junie, here's hoping I'll be with you all soon, trying to make you laugh. Love to Aunt Beat and family, Uncle Bill and family, Aunt Dais, Fred and the baby, good luck to all. If Son happens to go into the "Allen", will he please convey my kind regards and best wishes for good luck, and good health, and a quiet life. Remember me to all the friends.

All my love to you Mum, Dad, Violet, and Len.

Cheerio for a few days.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x x x x

P.S.

Keep going at school Len, and take the cushy job!

Good luck and good progress I wish you at Smith's, Violet.

O.K. "Pop" you stand it well!

Sleep well Mum, you will be doing me a grand favour.

Germany: March 1945 - May 1945

107: 26th March 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

Monday, 26th March.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

A few lines to let you know I'm O.K., which I'm sure you will be pleased to hear.

I sincerely hope that all goes well at home.

Rather hectic that day – Saturday – still, it was expected, but was I pleased to set foot on earth. Much worse than D-Day.

I saw Len Hardy yesterday – he was O.K. then, was with him all night whilst a battle was going on. I expect he will tell you an old soldier's yarn next time he's home. May that day come soon.

Gosh, I never thought I would see Germany, but here I am. The civvies at first seem to think that we are going to treat them rough, but they soon find their mistake. We do as we please, but prove to them that the German propaganda is not true. We are here to treat them a hell of a lesson, and they are now very timid, as they learn their lessons. I asked one chap what he thought of Hitler and the Nazis – he spat and waved his hands, much as to say they are no “bloody” good. It is strange isn't it folks, but I took that answer half-and half. What a lesson they are learning!

Well folks, I'm in a hurry so I will close now, but not before wishing you jolly good luck, good health, and happy birthdays Mum and Len.

Love to all at 41, and Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie and all the relations.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x x x

Hope no V.2s have been near any of the big families homes. (x x x Richard)

108: 28th March 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

Wednesday 28th March ‘45

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

A few lines to let you know all is well.

I sincerely hope that you are all in good health and everything going along as per usual. Have the V2s ben worrying you much just lately folks? I sincerely hope not.

Again today, I saw Len Hardy, on the march this time. He is O.K. I looked for Bob Fox today, but I couldn’t find him, and after making enquiries I found that he was wounded in the leg. David Roberts, and “Ginger” are safe! A lot of the oldest chums, I will never see again.

There isn’t much to tell you about this country, having seen plenty of the inhabitants of numbers of villages I’ve been through. They are very scared at first, but we don’t say anything to them, just leave them alone, as much as possible. I suppose most people here are pleased in one way to see us, because after we occupy, the villages or towns are really very safe. They certainly are not starving – nor am I!!!

How are all the relations, Mum? I hope they are all well and safe.

By the way Mum, if you could send a newspaper along, I would be very pleased. I’m sure you know much more of what is going on than I do. Our news is more rumour than anything. I don’t know where I am, except the distance from the River, and I just keep foot-slogging east which is the way to “civvy street” and home, although a long way round to it. Perhaps the end is in sight now! I hope it is very much.

Have you received my letter – the one I wrote the night before I left England? Have you received the parcel of chocolate and the old photograph wallet? You should have done so by now. I also wrote to you and Lily on Monday night.

I received a letter from Lily which was posted on the 21st., so when you see Lily again Mum, please thank her very much indeed for it. I haven't received any more mail since then, nor duty free cigs, and that means another 300 hundred or four hundred are still in the post.

Please convey my love to Son, Lily, Richard and all the folks at 41, and also to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie.

Well folks I must get some sleep – we never know happens tomorrow – so wishing you jolly good luck, and health, and quiet nights and days, I will conclude. Cheerio for now,

Keep Smiling! Your Loving Son, Sid.

x x x x x x x x x

109: 31st March 1945

1st April O.K.

Seen Len H.

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

31st Mar. 45. Saturday

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I have received two letters from you, one dated the 24th March, last Saturday, and the 25th March, Sunday. Also I received yesterday, the H. Gazette, soap and nail brush, and I thank you for them very much.

How are you all folks? All going well, and have the nights and days been quiet just lately? I sincerely hope so. Did Len have a bit-of-a-do on the 30th.

I hope to see Len H. again to-day. Gosh we have been “footslogging”, and I’m very pleased to get a few hours sleep. Still we are doing O.K. for food and sleep, so don’t worry to much about parcels Mum.

I haven’t much news to tell you, although much has happened. I see the newspapers are very confident once again, and let us hope that the end is near.

How are Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie. Please convey my love and best wishes for good luck, good health and a quiet life.

Have you received the parcel of chocolate yet Mum?

How is Uncle Bob, Mum? What-oh, what would I give to be “knocking back” a few beers in the local. Roll on a ----- long time.

Please remember me to Bill Thomas, Mr and Mrs Thomas and Don and Dot. I wish them the very best of luck, and health. I expect Bill has been busy Mum, and I wish him the very best of good luck. I will be seeing him one day soon, I’m sure, and I bet he will drink something – maybe a whisky!

How are you Len and Violet? Still doing well at school and work – I hope so. Been to the pictures lately?

Well, folks, I must close now as time is short, so wishing you jolly good luck, good health and a quiet life, I will say

Cheerio for Now, Your Loving Son Sid x x x x x x

110: 6th April 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

Friday 6th April ‘45

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

You can understand why I haven’t written Mum and Dad – gosh it is good to settle down for a day, or even a few hours.

I sincerely hope all goes well at home, and the nights and days have been much quieter.

I haven’t much news for you Mum and Dad, V. and L., but I will say that life has been very hectic just lately. Roll on the end of this war and may it be soon.

I read in the news sheet which we sometimes receive that the V. bombs had not been used for 4 days. I hope they soon stop altogether.

Love to Lily, Son and Richard and all the folks at 41. I will be very pleased to see everyone again. How is Richard, Mum?

Did you receive that parcel of chocolate folks? It was posted the day I left England as far as I know. I have a letter here posted on the 27th March, Sunday.

So the butcher knows Phil Hobbs! Gosh, it rather suprised me. I don’t know how he managed on the landing. I very much hope he is O.K.

Is Uncle Bob still near home Mum? Remember me, and I will be pleased to see him again and have a drink with him. Gosh – what a day!

I have received a letter from Mr and Mrs. Cox in reply to the letter I sent them. Also I have received a letter from you dated the 26th March, Saturday. I hope very much that by now you have received a couple of letters from me. It is two weeks since I arrived and the letters I sent should have reached you.

Well folks, I will close now, sorry so short, but when things slow down a bit I will do my best. So Good Luck to you all, good health and a quiet life, are my wishes for you.

Cheerio for Now, Your Loving Son, Sid x x x x x

111: 9th April 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
 “A” Company,
 2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
 B.L.A.

APRIL

9th ~~March~~ 1945

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I am receiving your mail quite regularly now. The last letter I received is dated Tuesday 3rd April, which you posted on the 4th April, and reached me on the 8th April. Pretty good going. I see that my mail has been reaching you in a reasonable time – usually 4 to 5 days.

I haven't seen Len H. for a few days now but as soon as I get a chance, I will look out for him. I expect he's O.K, also I will be very pleased to see him again. He wishes to be remembered to you, and hopes all is quiet for you at home.

Pleased to know that all the relations are well and safe. How is Arthur, Mum? Uncle Bob should be on his way by now, but the trip should be a quiet one. Love to everyone, and good luck!

So you have been reading about the boys, in the papers. Talk about “Hark the Herald Angels Sing”, I've almost heard them once and more. Yes – it has been quite a do since the 24th March, when we came “tearing through the Blue”, and what a day that was. To chaps of the Phil Hobbs type I owe everything – we all do that took part. They were as cool as ever when the going was toughest.

At the moment, I'm having a rest in a quiet village, somewhere in Germany. A village that hasn't been touched by the destruction of war, and so far folks, life is more or less the same as being billeted in a village in England. The civilians have realised that the propaganda which has been drummed into them for so long is wrong. As soon as British troops arrive in any

occupied village or town, the civvies expect to be shot or have their throats cut, or be treated roughly. Well, we don't like them but we don't treat them badly at all, and I think they are very lucky to get away with their past, as easily as they do. As regards living accommodation we just walk in and let them get on with it. Even then the civilians seldom lose their beds for the night. But putting it plainly, "they don't sod us about". We ???? sod them about.

How are you all at home folks? Son, Lily, Richard, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet, Aubrey, Jackie, and I sincerely hope all at 41 are enjoying good health, and making the most of the quiet days and nights in London.

Daivd and "Ginger" are safe and well, and both wish to convey their good wishes.

Once again Mum, and Dad, it is time to close, so wishing you the very best of health, good luck, and continuous quiet nights and days.

Roll on the day when I hear the voices in the distance chanting the "Volga Boatmen".

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

112: 14th April 1945 (Typewritten)

5836503 Pte. Verrier, S.

“A” Company, H.Q.

2nd Bn Oxf & Bucks Lt Infy.

B.L.A.

Saturday, 14th April 45

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Yesterday, I received a letter from you dated Sunday the 8th April. A parcel arrived yesterday and enclosed was the tinned food, tea and biscuits, and I must add that they have been very much enjoyed during to-day.

I haven't much news for you, but I'm still resting and enjoying every minute of it.

As you say Mum, these Jerries seem to know that the end is in sight and many of them are clearing out of it whilst they have the opportunity. They give themselves up wholesale, especially after they receive the medicine the Royal Artillery dish out. Very often the prisoners can be seen walking back from the fighting without an escort, and I'm sure they are glad to be getting away from it all. Three Jerries were captured as they cycled through our lines, and they told our chaps that they were cycling to home for 36hrs. leave. Their homes were in a village which had been occupied by the British some time beforehand. You can imagine how disorganised they were then, and probably still are.

Are you still enjoying the quiet life in London, Folks? I sincerely hope so. I hope very much that all relatives are enjoying good health, and this new spell of peace and quietness. Please convey my love to everyone and here's hoping that soon I will be with you all.

How are Violet and Len getting on with work and school? By the way how is Dad getting on with his studying? Wearing long trousers yet Pop?

Did you go and see the Spurs, getting beaten by Crystal Palace Dad? Quite a surprise. Or did you manage the Cup Final?

To-day I received a letter from Son, and I was very pleased to hear that he is stationed in the Essex area once again. It is good to know that one of us are nearer home to help matters at worrying times. I will be writing a letter to him to-night.

Once again folks, I will wish you good luck and health until I write again, which I hope will be very soon, probably to-morrow. Remember me to all the near friends. Good luck to Don, Dot and Bill, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

P.S.

Please excuse the typing of this letter, but it is much quicker and at the moment I'm very busy. Found the typewriter in an office way back a few miles now, and I must say that these Jerries can make a good job of work in some respects.

Sid x

113: 15th April 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

15th April, Sunday

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I haven't much news for you folks, nothing much is happening. I'm O.K.

I sincerely hope that you are all enjoying good health and everything quiet. Is it true that you haven't been disturbed for two weeks and more?

Just lately Mum, we have been meeting hundreds of Russians, men and women, Poles French, all types of people, and it has been interesting to see the reception some give the Allies. Russians, I never thought I would see so many, and they are very happy to be rid of the German soldiers. I have asked some of them where they come from in Russia, but I haven't met any from Aunt Violet's home town. I will carry on looking and maybe some one will know the place, or come from there.

How is Len getting on, and how is Violet now Mum? Still working hard.

I haven't received any duty free cigs. yet Mum? The 140 that Uncle Jack ordered, the day before I came home on my last leave, haven't arrived even yet.

I do not want anything urgently Mum, but I could do with some flints, and the pen nibs, otherwise I can manage.

Well Mum, Dad, Violet and Len, I will not make this a long letter, so I will conclude, wishing you good luck, good health, and quietness on the home front.

Bye for Now,

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x x x x

P.T.O.

114: 16th April 1945

16.4.45.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Have received letters from you dated 12th and 13th., one with D. Express, about steamrollers. Also letter and photo from Violet, and letters from Aunt Ede. Thank you very much for them all folks. The photo is jolly good, thanks a lot Violet. Will reply as soon as possible.

Your Loving Son & Brother,

Sid

x x x x x x x

115: 18th April 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
 "A" Company,
 2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
 B.L.A.

WED. 18th April 45

Dear Mum and Dad, Violet and Len,

A few lines to let you know that all goes well.

I had a very pleasant surprise this morning. I saw Len Hardy and I'm very pleased to tell you that he was safe and well. It had been noisy and I was just passing Len's crowd, and who should give a yell but Len. He was digging in and was he "ticking". I didn't get a chance to speak to him as we were moving after our "old friends". The ----- He yelled that he hoped you were all O.K. at home and pleased to hear that all is quiet in London. Please remember him to Mrs. Smith, he sends his love.

By the way, one of Len's sergeants brought in 45 Jerries, with a pistol. Took them all by surprise. Must have caught them napping. That is true! That's the way we want them. But I'm very glad to know that Len is O.K. – as I hadn't seen him for two weeks.

I sincerely hope that you are all well, and enjoying quiet nights and days.

So Bob Fox is back in England. I thought he would be, I knew he was wounded in the leg but I wasn't sure how bad. I hope very much that he is getting much better and I wish him the quickest of recoveries to fitness and good health. I was hoping I could get the hospital address but I don't suppose that is possible.

Please convey my love to all the relations. I very much hope they are well and safe. I hope to write to Aunt Ede soon in reply to the letter she sent to me.

Well folks, I must have a clean up now, wash and shave, as I've been busy. I haven't had much chance yet, because in the house we have just taken over as a billet, there's a young German of 98 yrs old, a fraulein and boy, can she jabber. She's taken a fancy to my mate, and he's getting fed up as he can't understand what the b----- hell she's talking about. Two German women asked me yesterday if I was going to cut their throats – they're really scared and they do all they can to make us comfortable. I don't mind that at all.

Well, let me know the family news when you write again, so for a day, folks, I'll wish you good luck, the best of health and a quiet life at home.

The regimental motto is ----, S---- or Bust, Bash on Macduff, and Roll on a Bloody Long Time. Just one more river to Jordan.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x x x

116: 20th April 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

20th. (Friday). April.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I have just received a letter from you dated the 16th April. The letter with the pen nibs enclosed, for which I thank you very much. You can see that I am making use of them.

I was glad to hear that the weather has been very fine in London. What with the black-out being lifted soon, the quietness at home, I can imagine how much you appreciate what has happened over here.

The weather here isn't too warm, so near to Russia, HA! HA!, but the weather has been good, and I pray that it carries on.

I told you that I saw Len Hardy two days ago. He isn't far away, but owing to duty I cannot get there, but it has been very quiet where he is so I'm positive he is O.K. We are always pleased to see each other, you can imagine that, even if we can only give a cheery yell to each other.

I was glad to hear that you have heard from Uncle Bob, although I suppose he is abroad now. Wish him good luck for me and I hope to see him soon.

When you see Aunt Dais again, please convey my love and good wishes to Aunt Dais, Fred, and Tony.

By the way Mum, we get papers regularly from the N.A.A.F.I. issue, so to save you time, perhaps you would stop sending the daily papers now Mum. We get them when they are a day or two old – good show.

I knew Dad was working at Hornsey. He started there when I was on leave. Your cousin Sid Ball came down for him.

I will look out for the parcels, they should be arriving soon.

David and Ginger thank you for your wishes. They are O.K. and are very pleased to know that all is quiet at home.

Food is fine thank you Mum, so don't worry too much about parcels. Just a cake now and again and that will be fine. Talking about food, the family in this billet, have just sat down to supper. A big ham on the table, the biggest I've seen for ages, and boiled spuds. Not bad eh, but they are farmers.

I have a small present for Len, I think it will be useful to him. It is a really good geometry set, I think, and he may be able to use it at the Polytechnic. It has compasses etc. I bought three linen pillow slips from a chap and I will try and send them home by post, the next time I go in the rest area.

We get bread now, and it is a change from biscuits. These civvies stare when they see our white bread. The German brown bread isn't much good.

Please convey my love to Son, Lily, Richard, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet, Aubrey, & Jackie. I sincerely hope all are in good health. Also Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie.

Once again folks I must be closing now, so wishing you all, the very best of good luck and good health I will conclude.

Cheerio for a While.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x x

117: 25th April 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

25th. April. 45. Wednesday.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I have received a parcel from you, the one with grade one, tea, sugar and milk, oranges, dates etc, and I thank you very much for them. I’m thoroughly enjoying everything. Also to-day I received a package of 200 cigs. from you Mum and Dad, and a small parcel of papers with tea and sugar enclosed. The day before yesterday I received two letters and yesterday another letter. Thank you very much for them all Mum and Dad.

The paper I’m writing on is German, good stuff isn’t it – they aren’t very short by the looks of this paper. I saw it in a library and I didn’t hesitate. We are billeted in a mansion for a while, having a rest again, supposed to be having a rest, but we do more work here than in the front line. Spit and polish, training, as soon as we leave the line. Saluting – everything. We’ve been told not to do too much walking about in these German mansions, in case we damage the polished floors. They are marvellous places, but after the recent discoveries in concentration camps such as BELZEN, I begin to think we are and have been too lenient over here. Yet in the village I’m now stationed in, the people have openly told us that they expected the British sometime or other. They knew we would be here long before the Allies crossed the Rhine. The German soldiers told the civvies here to expect the British. Sometimes it is hard to understand, but nevertheless the Master Race has received a nasty shock. One German fraulein, speaking good English, told me what a terrible mess Hanover was, and seemed very upset about it. I asked her if she knew what a terrible mess Rotterdam was in 1940 when the Germans bombed it, after the armistice had been signed, and killed 30,000 in half an hour. A defenceless and shelter less city. Also London and Coventry. To top everything I told her that when the surrender came, the Allies were clearing out of her town and allowing the Russians to move in. She did get worried then, but when I showed her the photograph of the death pit of Belzen she cried like a two year old, probably because the majority of the bodies in the pit were Russian. By gosh Mum and Dad, these people shake when the Russians are mentioned. They expect us to cut their throats but heaven knows what they think the Russians will do. It is strange also,

that there are many Russians, men and women, who have been taken from Russia, Poland and other countries, and made to work as charwomen, servants and farmworkers, and who have been treated decently and well, and they don't seem in a terrible hurry to go back to their countries. One French slave worker, a soldier captured in the Maginot Line, told me he was stopping in Germany, to re-join the army of occupation when peace comes, and then he is going to do all the backside booting. There was murder in his eyes, and after what he told me I could understand why. When the Jerries come in, prisoners, we leave it to freed Allied prisoners to march them back, and by gosh you should see the Master Race in the hands of a few Poles or Russians or Froggies, when the odds are even. It seems comical, even unbelievable. There is no doubt that the German Army is going to pieces. One good example. We were riding in lorries one day, advancing behind the tanks, and from the woods on either side of the road, in country where a few troops could have held infantry up for days, came two long columns of his Master Race, holding white flag up, which were prominent for miles. They didn't fancy a s---- or bust campaign with the lads.

Taking things all round folks, I think the majority of the Germans wanted and supported this war, and the minority were just pressed down. I even believe that the same thing would have happened in England had Moseley and his party made good progress, but fortunately for us he didn't. I think I can say that I have met some of the very few over here who didn't want or support this war. They were people who were educated for a short time in England and who had suffered through the Nazis rulings and S.S. Yes folks, I wouldn't have missed this experience for a pension, to see the Master Race, washing up our plates after meal times – doing our laundry – anything to oblige, getting us eggs galore, one even killed a pig and cooked it for us, and pork is the same over here as over there, and if it was poisoned it is taking more than two weeks to kill me. Mum and Dad, they are scared now at what they have already done, without committing more atrocities. As for his Redoubt, I guess he will get browned off with acting as “shepherd of the hills”. As for his S.S. and paratroops who've never been in a plane, the best thing punishment for them is “shellshock”, good and strong, and that's the way they come in. 1000 bombers, and 1000 guns to wipe out every pocket. Die for Hitler they will – poor senseless doped sods.

Well folks, my temper may be frayed, probably because an old dear of 98, a few minutes ago asked me for a bar of toilet soap – very scarce in Germany. Just imagine, she wanted to wash her hands – had no soap for days. I said much more than “Go away you dirty old cow”, and by the time I had finished swearing at her, I think she learnt every word in the English language, and knew what I meant. That's all for now, folks, about the Master Race.

I was terribly sorry to hear that Bob Fox had lost a leg. I never imagined he was wounded that bad, especially after making enquiries from the same chaps he went over with. The way they spoke it didn't seem to bad, but unfortunately it is much worse than I thought. It's an awful war folks, and a lot of people have to pay a heavy price, but that news really did upset me. If

you happen to see Bob around home before I come home, please convey my best wishes for a recovery as good and as strong as possible to normal health. I will write to Julie and maybe she will pass the letter on to Bob's wife or family.

I haven't seen Len this last four days but all has been quiet and he's O.K. Before I leave here, I will try and pop down to see him. I won't borrow the old chap's bicycle – I'll just take it, or maybe I'll borrow his pony and trap, and the old Prussian b----- will be driving me there to see my old pal. A buck private goes to see a L/Cpl. in a pony and trap and the chauffeur will be one of the Master Race. Well you can guess how the General travels about – it's a procession.

Once and once more folks, I'll wish you goodnight, good health, and a quiet and peaceful homefront. Love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie, and to all at 41, and all relations and friends. Remember me to Ben. Ask him if she can speak English yet. I couldn't learn Dutch and I'm sure Ben will have a job. So he's changed at last, well politics aren't needed where we go – the experience is better, and I've learnt much more than politics.

So, Cheerio for Now, Folks,

Keep Smiling

Your Loving Son

Sid

X x x x x x x

P.S.

This has been my first chance to write a decent letter, I hope it doesn't bore you.

Have you heard from Uncle Bob?

118: 28th April 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

28th April 45. Saturday

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I have received two letters to-day. One posted on the 24th April, the other was posted on the 23rd April. Both you wrote last Monday week. Thank you very much for flints Mum, I am just using the last flint of the old packet.

Last night I wrote to Son and Lily – I mean the night before that. Last night I wrote to you.

Jim Smith came home, I guess he deserves some leave after being over there so long. Is he home for good Mum, or on leave from N.W. Europe? Wish him jolly good luck and good health, and may we get our tickets on the same day. Remember me to Jim and I'll be jolly glad to see him again. I sincerely hope MR. Mrs. and Wal Smith are in good health, and enjoying the peace and quietness in S. England.

Ben Taylor home as well, it must seem more natural with the lads home for a while. Roll on the day when all the lads, we knew, are home again. What a pleasant thought that is. Good Luck to them all.

I will let Len H. know if I see him soon, unless Jim has written and told him. All is quiet now so Len must be O.K.

By gosh, I was suprised to know where Uncle Bob is. It didn't take long to get him there. I daresay it suprised him. Still all is quiet there and there isn't much to worry about I'm sure. The place where a very tough battle took place. I bet Uncle Bob never thought he would see

that place. Please remember me when you write again, and maybe you will send his address along to me. It is time that I wrote to him. Wish him good luck, and good health please Mum.

Well I must close now, so until I write again, probably tomorrow, I will wish you, good health, and the best of health, and a quiet life in London. Love to everyone.

Cheerio for a While, Your Loving Son, Sid

x x x x x x x x x x

119: 29th April 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. Oxf & Bucks.L.I.
B.L.A.

29th April. 45. Sunday.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

This evening I received two parcels from you, and I thank you very much for them both Mum, and Dad. The cake is wonderful, and wasn't even broken – good show that. I have given some of lads a piece of cake and they think it is jolly good. All the local London lads, Edmonton, F. Park, and Hackney, they are all coming to see you when we're finished out here, just for a piece of cake and a cup of char. I gave Ginger a piece, and he was very pleased. I don't often see David but if I do, I will hand over a piece. The second parcel was the one in the Cream Cracker biscuit tin, half full of biscuits, the Grade 1, Red, T. and M, and the double in a bottle. Thanks very much Mum, it was a grand welcome this evening after marching about 20 miles, eating hard biscuits all the way. Munching and marching, thats all we do.

Also this evening I received 200 cigs. from Edie and Bob, and I must write as soon as possible, and thank them very much. It was a very pleasant surprise, and I will write in reply, perhaps this evening.

Although the war passed this way only a few days ago, the electric light and water are going strong again, and life is reasonably pleasant. These Germans, civilians here, have been treated leniently compared with the atrocities they have stood by and allowed to carry on. We stand for no nonsense, but try to show them that brutality is not our practise. But if “Joe” comes here, these civvies will find a difference. That's why Himmler knows who is best to ask for unconditional surrender. But bash on Macduff, asking two is no good, he must ask the Big Three, and from the Third maybe he'll get a shock. Bremen didn't last long – probably because the lads, on the ground and in the air rolled their sleeves up good and proper. Sod the civvies – bash the place to pieces, send them bomb happy – then get in – bash on!

I bet you were suprised when Himmler asked for unconditional surrender – they must realise it is lights out blowing for the master race. Poor old Musso, and executed by his own people. Yes, all goes well!

I sincerely hope you are all enjoying the best of health and a quiet life. Let's hope that the noisy nights in London are finished, and may the noisy times here soon finish, for the sake of all of the lads here and their folks at home. Wishing you all at home, all the relations and all friends, the very best of luck, good health and no more blacking out, I will conclude. Thanks again for the parcels Mum and Dad, they are a good send, but please don't leave yourselves short.

Cheerio for Now

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x x x

If I see Len I will try to get some cake to him!

P.S.

Ginger, David and the "old soldier" wish to be remembered to you. The old soldier is 41. The old soldier is the chap that Dad spoke to at W Loo when you all came.

120: 30th April 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,

"A" Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

Monday, 30th April, 45.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Just a few lines whilst I have a few spare moments. I wrote a letter last night, telling you that I received the big lovely cake, and the biscuits, grade one, T. and M. , and 200 cigs. from Edie and Bob. They are jolly good biscuits compared with the harder ones we get. Some more mail will be coming up this evening.

Enclosed are a few stamps from the Master Race, for Len, and I daresay they will interest him.

There isn't much news other than I wrote in my last letter so I will not write more than a couple of page.

By the way I haven't told you before, but I'm the company clerk now, not the pay clerk. The company clerk didn't come over by air, as his wife was seriously ill. I went in H.Q. "flying coffin", and lucky for me, the other "coffin" I would have been in crashed. I should have a stripe HA! HA!, but being out here things like that aren't worried about.

Well folks, I will close now, hoping you are all enjoying jolly good health and quiet days and nights.

Good Luck, Good Health,

and here's hoping it won't be long before I am home again with you all.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x x

121: 7th May 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

Monday 7th May. 45.

Dear Mum and Dad,

I had news this morning of Billy Verrier, the chap that never writes home. He's a ----- isn't he.

A chum of mine who has just returned to this company, after healing up his wounds, met Bill in the hospital, and Bill was wounded but only slightly, and by now he is probably back with the 51st. I was very surprised when this chap told me, but very pleased to know that Bill is safe and well now.

I have heard the awful news of cousin Ray, and it is really hard luck after all this time. Son wrote and told me that, he, Ray, is missing believed killed in Italy. It is hard to believe that any person could be killed at such a moment when the war seems at an end in Europe. It is hard. I must write to Aunt Mary as soon as possible.

For me folks, all goes well. As far as I know Len is safe and well. And for you, it is time to stop worrying – no V1 or V.2s, and all quiet over here. Everything is peaceful.

So, for a while folks, I will say cheerio, and here's hoping I'm home again soon for a celebration.

Good Luck and Good Health.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x x x

122: 8th May 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
 "A" Company,
 2nd Bn. Oxf & Bucks.L.I.
 B.L.A.

Tuesday, 8th May '45

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Well to-day is the day of victory, and I hope you have been enjoying yourselves at home. I keep wondering whether you are getting together now, like the good old days. I expect Aunt Lil and Aunt Ede and Junie have been to see you.

I heard Churchill's speech on the wireless, and the broadcasting of the celebrations on the programme after the speech had been read in all Allied languages. Gosh, I would have liked to have been there, very much. If I am lucky enough perhaps I will be on the marches that might take place. At the moment, I would march anywhere in England.

Believe me folks, I've never felt so fed up since I joined the Army. No beer here, no decent grub, worthy of such an occasion, no mail. No fraternization with civvies, absolutely nothing. It is just being drummed into us that the standards of peace time soldiering are required, whilst our chaps from the British Empire are dying out East. Makes my blood boil! I'm still in Germany, also Len Hardy, and roll on the day when I see the coast line of Blighty. There is one thing I am very grateful for, that is the war is over in Europe and there will be no more suffering for you all in England – no black outs, no V. bombs. You are all safe at home, and I am O.K., that means a lot to us all. Yes, the news was grand to-day, although we all knew it was coming, a few days ago. Five and a half years is a long time, but at last it is finished, and may the S.S. and Nazis and all the Germans who supported the Regime, die of frost bite and starvation whilst road building in Siberia. Shooting is too quick for them, to relieving, slow torture and nothing less to teach them a lesson. Just say "Siberia" to a "Jerry" and they shake. After all this shelling and bombing the Germans have had, they still regard the British soldier as a gentleman, because they know that after the bombing the Germans carried out in 1940-41, they deserved all that came back to them. Take for example in a place where the Russians met the Yanks, we were stationed there to guard a prisoner of war camp, we were in very good

billets, houses belonging to higher class Germans. In our billet was a lovely girl, yes a lovely girl, really marvellous, although a German. The second day we were there, her mother said to us, "The British are gentlemen, so you will not interfere with my daughter." She spoke very good English. The answer she received, was "Don't worry we are very particular." Upset the poor old cow, but we don't fraternize. The civvies sweep the streets around our billets, clear up the mess they make after looting and those that came to our lines getting away from the Russians, live in the woods. It is a sight worth seeing.

With us here we have an ex-German soldier, who acts as our interpreter. He is a German, but had many relations with the English before war began. He knows people in Tottenham, Wood Green, Palmers Green and Plumstead. He speaks perfect English. He did not agree with the Nazi Party, told them what would happen, was disgraced because he remained reserved from the Nazi Party, and disgraced by his Professors at college. Instead of being a very high ranking officer in the Party he remained a private in the German Army. What he has told me, and explained to me of what happened to Germany pre-war was terrifically interesting, and I have sat and talked, and ask him questions for hours. He is the type of chap that any average Englishman could talk with for hours. He has written books and I would very much like to get hold of at least one. He can even remember the name of a policeman he used to chat with outside Wood Green station, a policeman by the name of Stone. He is really interesting to listen to. That's how I will spend V. night, chatting with a sensible German.

I can just imagine the local pubs now, and do you know, it wouldn't surprise me if you all went out to the pub for a drink. Miracle if you have, but I expect you have had a drink of some type.

Well folks, I really wish I was home now, but that isn't possible at the moment, and heaven knows when it will be, but I will be seeing you.

Good Luck, good health, and once again I'm jolly glad it is all over, for everyone's sake.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

X x x x x x x x

P.S.

Talk about feeling restless, there's nothing doing now. Roll On!

N.B. A Gentlemans Job in Germany

Two days ago the boys caught the last German sniper, an S.S. trooper. If the German civvies like to see him, he's hanging in the Market Square, riddled with his own ammunition. Poor Sod!!!

123: 10th May 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,
“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
B.L.A.

Thursday, 10th May, '45.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Yesterday I received a parcel from you. Cake, T. and con. milk, butter biscuits. Also, a package of papers, with toothpaste and soap enclosed. Separately also, was a letter. Thank you very much for them all Mum and Dad. Seems to me that everyone you know and I know subscribes to the parcels and believe me folks, I am very grateful for everything.

I haven't much news for you, all is quiet here.

On victory night, at one minute past midnight, everything went up into the air. Every pistol flare, every mortar, and starlit shells, salvoes of guns. And the biggest bonfire you could wish to see. What a commotion. The next night, the Russians did the same. Sounded like a battle going on, but we were all celebrating.

To-day I received 80 cigs. from the Edmonton Conservative Club, so I must write and thank the person who sent them along. I expect Uncle Jack had something to do with sending them along, so please ask him when you see him again Mum or Dad, and thank him very much for them. Nevertheless I will write to the Con. Club.

I sincerely hope you are all enjoying health and all goes well. Glad to hear that Uncle Bob is getting along O.K. Do you think he volunteered for the job Mum? Wouldn't surprise me.

Strange feeling now – no wallops or bangs, crashes or bullets flying about. I bet you folks in London find it hard to realise the war is over in Europe, but jolly good job it is.

Well folks, I will close now please convey my love, to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil, Junie, and all at 41. Hope to see you some day, sooner the better, but most of all we must be thankful it is over in Europe.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

x x x x

124: 13th May 1945

5836503 Pte. S. Verrier,

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

B.L.A.

Sunday 13th May ‘45

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I am allowed now to tell you in which part of Germany I am in. The village is on the edge of a big lake – one of the biggest lakes in Germany, near Wismar, which as you have probably heard, is on the Baltic. The village is named BAD KLEINEN, and in all directions when looking from our billet the countryside is a grand scenery. The billets are fine places, very clean and tidy and the whole village is a very clean place. Of course we are not allowed to fraternize with the civilians unless they are French, Dutch, Belgians or Poles, but most of the slave workers are on their way home, and good luck to them after five years in this country, working like blazes under the square heads.

Enclosed is a photograph of Schwerin Castle which is, as you can see is on the edge of the Lake Schwerin. Wonderful place with 114 rooms, and the Princess who owned the place started grumbling because the Army decided to take over 100 rooms and left the other 14 rooms to her. It was mentioned in the newspapers if you remember.

It is a Sunday, and life is exactly the same as life in England on a summer’s day. The people will go out for a sleep in the fields, and most of our chaps are in bed snoring like blazes – where I should be. On V. Day there wasn’t much doing. No slap up feeds, or beer, but at one minute past twelve on V. night, every pistol flare and mortar flares went up in the air, all together. For an hour everything was lit up, by fires and flares. I didn’t wait to see that – not twelve at night, but was in bed.

The lads told me about it in the morning. I celebrated V. night by having twelve hours sleep, and woke up to find that the war was over. We knew that it was the finish when we made a dash from the bridgehead to the Elbe, up to Wismar. For twenty miles along the road, was a

never ending stream of prisoners, a sight I never expected to see. They were retreating from the British and Russians and suddenly found themselves passing each other. It is said that when the Germans were retreating from the British front, the German columns had armoured spear heads out trying to find where the Russians were. Strange warfare.

I don't know where or when I will coming home, but I hope I will be home to see you again soon. But I will prefer to soldier, civvy attached, for 2 years out here rather than go out East. I think I have done as much as most people could do. But if I have to go – well – I'll be seeing the world a bit more. If I go out there civvy street won't be worth thinking about – might just as well stop in the Army for seven years, as much as I detest the red tape. I like the travelling when there are places of interest to be seen but being tied down by red tape doesn't agree at all. But I take no notice, as much as possible. I'm cushy – company clerk in rest areas, and wireless man in action. Still, I'm hoping that I don't have to go to Japan.

I hope you are all enjoying good health and all goes well at home. I imagine that you can't realise the war is over – seems very quiet and strange. Sometimes I wonder if I am dreaming. It will take time to get that peace time feeling back again.

I suppose Son will be getting demobbed during this year, and good luck to him. I must write when we settle down. There is plenty of work to do over here – unfortunately. Bags of spit and polish, blanco, and charges. 7 days C.B. for not saluting an officer, 7 days C.B. no haircut. This is how we finish up after seeing 50% of our pals go down in flames and out of control. Good show – boys! They've died for a better cause. Some earn VCs in the field, but get 7 days CB for dirt boots, just after the surrender. If that's discipline I would rather be on the dole – unemployed! This world will never be peaceful.

Well folks, remember me to everyone, and I send my love. If you happen to see Henry Hattrill's mother or father, please ask if Henry is back from Czechoslovakia yet. I expect he has been released by the Yanks or Russkis. He may even come to see you, and if he does, wish him good luck, and good health for me, and maybe I will have a drink with him later on. I will be jolly pleased to see him again.

Cheerio for Now, Folks.

See you Someday.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x

England: July 1945 - August 1945*125: 22nd July 1945*

Wing Barracks

BULFORD

WILTS.

Sunday. 22nd July.

Dear Mum and Dad, Violet and Len,

Thank you very much for your letter, which was in the parcel, Mum. The parcel was fine Mum, and I'm very thankful that you sent it along. George is a good chap and is very kind and always willing to help whenever possible.

I hope very much that Jean came to see you on Sunday Mum and Dad – I know she was looking forward to it very much, and she is very happy when she comes to see you. Did Jean have the photographs Mum? I will know to-morrow though – especially if a photo., reaches me by tomorrow.

Have you seen Son and Lily and Richard since I went back last, folks? I sincerely hope they are well, and Jackie, Uncle Jack, Aunt Violet, Violet, Aubrey, Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie are in good health.

I have Uncle Bob's address Mum, so I must be writing to him at the first opportunity. I have tried to write a few letters this week-end, but owing to the other clerk being away, I have been very busy.

According to the newspapers, the demob. scheme will apparently be speeded up, and I hope it makes a big difference to my demob. I doubt if I can wangle this next journey abroad Mum and Dad, but still, I know how lucky I am to be still alive, and when I come back from there, I hope I can come back to a decent living in a country worth living in. Seems in a big turmoil at the moment, and many things need straightening out, and may-be by the time I come back, the

big politicians will get off their backsides and do something for the people who have earned it. Best thing to do is wait and see, but I expect the same old politicians will still be praising those big cemeteries, and our glorious dead across the Channel. It all remains to be seen.

The parcel was lovely Mum, and thank you very much for the tin of crawfish. My mate and I, soon “polished it off”, this evening, and we enjoyed it very much – first my chum had tasted for years, he said, and asked where you managed all the points. I told him you didn’t get any points Mum – just kindness of your part, and he aid, “Well thank your Mum, for me.”

I haven’t heard any news of going away folks, it all seems uncertain of when we actually leave this camp, but until I find myself on the way, I’m very happy to be here. All the same, my happiness comes when I get back to civvy street, and find myself a job with good prospects. Roll on 41, Group, and a job worth having.

All the Best Mum Dad, Violet and Len – good luck, see you on Sat.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son and Bro.

Sid.

126: 7th August 1945

Wing Barracks.

Bulford.

WILTS.

Tuesday, 7th Aug. 45.

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

I am sorry I have not written earlier, folks, but as you can easily understand I haven't very much to write about.

News is very scarce and no person in the camp knows what is really happening I'm sure of that. The latest rumour is that the long leave is on the 2nd or 3rd Sept., but whether that is true or not I am just waiting to see. If I do get my 9 days leave then I hope to be able to go down with Jean, to the Wye Valley, where she I going for her first holiday. The next week-end pass is on the 25th of the month, which is two weeks on Saturday. Having to wait four weeks this time instead of three, and I wouldn't be suprised if this leave starting on the 25th August is the 9 days and not 48 hrs. Even so I will try and get my leave put back a few days, then I can go with Jean for a few days.

Jean wrote and told me that she came round to see you all on Sunday, and I know how pleased you were to have Jean with you for an hour or so. Jean is always happy when she comes to see you I'm sure.

By the way Mum, have you taken the 10/- I borrowed from you the day I went back, from the £1-15-0. I didn't draw any money last Friday, and am only drawing 7/6 this week. 1/- a day is plenty, I never leave camp, no pictures or nothing, and I'm gradually cutting down the smoking, and I think I can finish it by the next time I am home.

Please remember me to all relations and convey my love. I hope, very much, that you are all in good health, and all goes well.

So Cheerio for Now Folks.

Your Loving Son and Bro.

Sid

x x x x

x x

127: 11th August 1945

P.S.

Have a wireless in the
Company Stores now.
Proper News Fans

Wing Barracks.

Bulford.

Wilts.

Saturday 11th Aug. 45

Dear Mum, Dad, Violet and Len,

Thank you very much for the parcel which arrived this morning, Mum, it was made very welcome and I have made good use of the salmon, biscuits and cakes already. So thank again Mum, it is very kind of you to send it along, and I appreciate everything.

I will be home on the 25th August folks, two weeks to-day, for some reason it has been put back for 7 days, probably something to do with the holiday rail travel.

The peace coming news is marvellous and the thought of not having to go into action again, certainly allows my tenseness, which the thought of going over again brings, to relax. When the actual and official news is announced I very much doubt if I will be allowed to come home. The travel limits will come down to within 20 miles of the camp, as it did on VE Day, according to the chaps who were here. But the celebrations don't both me chaps, it is just good news to know we have finished the rough times and maybe we will be demobbed sooner than we thought.

I sincerely hope you are all enjoying good health and all the friends and relations are well. I can imagine how pleased Mr and Mrs Thomas, Bill, and Dot are, to know that Don will have no need to go into action now. Also you Mum and Dad, to know that I will not go to the East

now, but probably only to B.L.A. for occupation purposes. Finished with airborne operations that's jolly good, although we laugh about them and have some excitement when we go, but "bloody" pleased to come back as we went, and sorry about the chaps who don't return.

I had a letter from George Fryer, who is now in Belgium, at Bruges, and he wishes to be remembered to you and hopes you are all well. When I write I will convey your best wishes. His group no. being 26, it will not be very long before he is back again with his family.

My hand is completely healed now, all bandages finished with and I doubt if much of the scar will be seen by the time I'm home again. I wasn't sorry when the stitches were removed, they were a nuisance.

Has Aunt Beat heard any news of Arthur's homecoming? I imagine he is on his way home again by now, and I bet he is in good form with letter writing.

Have you heard from Uncle Bob, Mum? When you write again, please convey my remembrances and you might apologise for my not writing, but since I came back from Germany, there has been plenty of work and administration to carry out, but there is a possibility of hard working times calming down soon. What does he think of Austria, Mum?

I sincerely hope Len is getting along, making good progress at school, and Violet doing well at work, and both in good health.

I suppose Dad is still studying and the way times are passing by, there will be more studying for me to do soon.

I almost applied to go to O.C.T.U. a few days ago folks, but thought better of staying as I am. Financially I wouldn't be able to save as much as I am now, I'm sure. In this office job, I'm quite settled down, and whenever I see the chance of going higher, as a clerk, I will take it. Frankly I'm happy as I am until demob. comes along. I'm never on parade, no marches now, or P.T. absolutely nothing but office work, and the more work I have to do the happier I am to plod through and finish it. Scrounging everything, and never on parade, is real soldiering, any old soldier will tell you that. Is it true Dad – You can't deny it old 'un.

Please convey my love to Son, Lily, and Richard, and all at 41, and love to Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil, and Junie, hoping all are enjoying good health.

I am so pleased to know that Jean is coming to see you again on Sunday, Mum and Dad, and I'm sure you enjoy and appreciate her company – she's a grand girl and if there is anyone in the world that doesn't like or can't get along with Jean, well there must be some mental trouble with them. Believe me when I write that I have never been as happy as I am now, and when I get that so long awaited "Boot from the Kate" whether I'm a Private or a, or a Tin Hat Bloody Field-Nobody, with all the Red Tape and Brass Bands, I mean to get on the path in civvy street and make the best of the early years and look back contentedly in the later years and I'm sure I can manage it. Just waiting now to get started somewhere or other, but whilst I'm moping around here I can't do too much about it. Everything so uncertain until re-settlement.

Well time's come to close down folks, so wishing you jolly good luck, and good health, I must leave you for a day or so. Bye for Now,

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

Palestine: October 1945 - August 1946

128: 1st October 1945

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxfs & Bucks. L.I.

M.E.F.

Monday Night. 1-10-45.

Dear Mum and Dad,

I am now on the ship and probably it will sail tomorrow. It is a big ship, the “Duchess of Bedford”, 27,000 tons, you can imagine how grand it is.

The lounges and decks are big, the lounge is more in comparison with a dance hall. Sleeping conditions are good, food is good and thinking ahead I’m going to enjoy it. New experience, and a wonderful change from life in Bulford. That is what I wanted, to get away from the Plains after 3½ years. By the sounds of the rumours and tales going around it isn’t going to be so bad out there. Barracks will be helpful. Until I get there I have nothing to worry about whatsoever.

I have written to Jean, a few pages that will arrive on Tuesday or Wednesday. This letter should reach you on Wednesday. It will be posted before the ship sails.

I feel excited folks, and I must say I don’t think I will be more excited until the demob. day comes. It is a new experience and it is grand, and I’m sure I will enjoy every moment, and time will fly. Plenty of office work to do on the boat, the days will pass by quickly.

A chap here is entertaining the lads by playing the piano in this Recreation Room. Lively lot of lads – always are in this division. Singing “like blazes”.

I phoned Jean on Sunday night, at 7.30 p.m. and we were very pleased to speak to each other. There is one great happiness in my mind, and in Jean’s, and that is when I can come home

again, perhaps we will not have to see each other again saying goodbye in the sad way have done before. The time will soon go by. Jean is wonderful to me folks, her letters are marvellous and keep me very very happy.

An officer who said goodbye to us last night at Amesbury Station, came up and complimented me on my work, and told me to carry on in the way I have been doing so. First time ever in this Army, any officer and has done that and said something complimentary. He let the “cat out of the bag” I think. Very nice of him though. University schoolboy. Poona Wallah.

How is your leg Mum? I hope it is much better, and making great improvement.

Well folks, I’m off to bed, lost some sleep last night. 15 hrs in the train. Just listen to the piano, think up some happy memories, and then turn in.

Cheerio for a While, don’t worry, I’m O.K – enjoying every minute of this new experience.

Hope you are all in good health, and love to all relations.

x x x Your Loving Son. Sid

x x x x

129: 2nd October 1945

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

Tuesday. 2nd Oct. 45.

Dear Mum and Dad, Violet and Len,

Hallo folks, a letter at long last, and I’m sure you will be very pleased to receive it.

Everybody is very jolly on board tonight, singing like the “devil”. All excited and happy. Playing carols, crown and anchor, piano playing, cinema show, and swimming bath. Life of luxury, can’t whack it. I have written to Jean to-day, but cannot say when they will be posted. If we stop at Gibraltar, they may post them there. All the same, you will receive them in a few days time, and all your worries will be over.

I hope Jean has been to see you folks, when times haven’t been busy for Jean. I know only too well that you make Jean very welcome, and she does enjoy visiting you.

Well I must close now, almost lights out, and time for a tea and cake before I turn in. Will write again tomorrow, enjoying myself very much, first time for a long time, but when I come home next time there will be more enjoyment than I have ever known before.

Hoping you are all enjoying good health, and your leg is healing up, I will close.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x

130: 9th October 1945

“A” Company.

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

9th October 1945

Dear Mum & Dad,

A line to let you know I arrived in Palestine to-day, Wednesday 10th. Actually, to-day is Tuesday, but I am writing this short letter to be able to post it as soon as I am on land. You should receive this letter on Monday, I very much doubt if it will reach you by Saturday, but I am hoping it will, very much.

I have enjoyed the sea trip very much, feeling very fit, no sea sickness. Have seen many interesting sights, but only regarding the war. Crete, Partellaria, Cape Ban, Gib. Malta. Never stopped any place, Palestine – full speed ahead!!! There is nothing to worry about, the heat isn't as bad as I thought it to be. As usual, more exaggeration.

I sincerely hope you are all in good health – and your leg is much better, Mum. Well folks, I can't stop for many minutes, the mail is to be collected, and we are getting ready to go ashore. So for a day or so, I'll say

Cheerio for now. All's Well.

Your Loving Son,

Sid

x x x x x x

131: 13th December 1945

“A” Company.

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

Thursday 13th December 45.

My Dear Mum, Dad, Violet & Len,

A few lines, hoping all goes well at home, that you are all enjoying good health.

The mail situation isn't as good as it might be, owing to bad weather, planes cannot fly, they are grounded according to information given to us. But in time they will reach me folks, and when they do arrive the more I will have to write about. The weather has been rough over here just lately. Windy and very cloudy.

I had my photograph taken with 8 other chaps and an officer to be printed in the Middle East Mail, with an account of the Regiments doings in Europe. Red tape and Brass Band you know. Whatever the Colonel picked your currant bun for I don't know. You, you, and you sort of business, it must have been.

All goes well here, lots of rumours going about, but I will not give you any impressions of them. They always float about when something is “brewing”.

I wrote to Son a few nights ago, the letter must be well on its way by this time.

Well must close now folks, please convey my love to all relations and friends. Here's wishing you good luck and good health.

Your Everloving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

132: 27th December 1945

“A” Company,

2nd Bn. Oxf & Bucks.

M.E.F.

Thursday 27th Dec. 45

Dear Mum and Dad,

A parcel arrived today, with the iced cake, tinned salmon, tinned spam, sweets and biscuits and a drop of whiskey in the bottle. Everything is intact, and the cake is fine Mum. Thank you very much for them all, I will enjoy them very much and I gave the contents a great welcome.

But before you send the whiskey again Mum, I must tell you that it is only ten shillings a pint bottle over here. So far I haven't bothered to buy any at all. I am allowed to send one bottle home, and then it takes very much packing and the Customs are very particular about what they pass, fit for consumption etc. Scotch Whiskey duty free, and Canadian Whiskey. I put some in my tea this evening it ????? ?? very well.

Plenty of your letters have been reaching me, letters dated the 24th Nov., 22nd Nov, a package of papers with cigs. enclosed 20, posted about the 20th Nov, and a letter written on the 13th December with Evening News have just arrived, in the last two days. Gradually coming up to date. Some of the letters in which you have put papers have been brought by sea.

Surprised me to hear that Fred stayed away a week when on demob, leave. Certainly pleases himself.

Please send Uncle Ern's address along next time you write Mum. I must try and write to him. Can he start work yet, of a different nature? I hope his hand isn't so bad as it was when I saw him last. It was a nasty mess.

Sorry to hear the oranges were not too good during last month. Did they get better ones for the Christmas?

Food is very good here, and I hope you will not be offended when I say your parcels are not necessary Mum. There is absolutely everything in this land, including camel meat.

Did you give Jean the 15/- for the money she had to pay Mum? I hope you did, and I hope Jean took the money, otherwise it could never be called a present. Upset, I felt like committing murder. PAY UP MUM!!!! from the allotment.

The parcel of soap and toothpaste hasn't arrived yet, nor the Xmas Pudding parcel. Soap is hard to get in England, Mum + easy to get over here, so please keep it for your use. Toothpaste is also easy to get but costs 2/- a large tube. But when your parcel arrives Mum I will have a good stock and it will be unnecessary to send any more for a couple of months. Thank you very much Mum. Then the Xmas parcel. Look Mum, don't spend anymore than necessary, save the money, I can manage fine and look after myself.

The cake is lovely Mum, I am eating some now, and have given some to the lads. Thank you ever so much.

So Richard is walking now – he is coming along fine isn't he.

Len didn't like to go for his wages after having a week off. Another conscientious young man in the world. I must write Len a letter.

Goodbye for a While Folks, thanks very much for everything, but please don't worry about food at all – I'm doing fine.

Your Loving Son

Sid xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

133: 1st January 1946

'A' Company,
2nd Bn ObLI
MEF

Tuesday 1st Jan., 45

Dear Mum and Dad

A letter arrived to-day, dated the 20th Dec 45, with an Evening News enclosed. Thanks very much folks – it was made very welcome. Four letters came from Jean to-day and yesterday I received the present which Jean sent, it's a box of 50 cigs from [June?]. Jolly fine books Jean has sent and n have been reading them when spare minutes come along.

I think you will receive a photograph whether I enquire or not, the Captain Merrill in command of the affair took the names and addresses of all of us. Don't be suprised if a photo does reach you. It is eagerly awaited by the chaps here, reading the Middle East Mail each day. I let someone else buy it and it costs them 3D, I will cut the photo out. Personally I don't care a hang if it is published in the papers or not, but if it is I will send it to you.

Clem demobbed – that is a suprise, but it will give him a chance to get cracking in civvy street. I bet you was suprised Mum.

I had a Christmas card for Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie, and I thought I had sent it, but when I looked in my pile of kit – it is a mess – I found the card still there. Much to late now for New Years Card. Shame isn't it!!!!

Jean wrote and told me that you gave her the 15/-. Good job too, and I feel much more satisfied now. Very nice of Jean to fetch the Gin and also a bottle of Scotch round to you. Yes folks, Jean's family are very kind and it doesn't take very long to learn that they are.

Thank you of the “snap” of Len, it is very good folks, and he certainly looks a good sailor. Has he thought about joining the Navy – Mum? Ten days bored me silly, although I must say a chap is in nobody’s way when on a ship and miles out at sea. He certainly feels free. Have you seen the Cadet Xmas Card?

All goes well here, but we are being given instructions by Corporals with One years service and seen no action – an hour to fire a rifle and a Bren Gun. Everyone must pass the Tests of Elementary Training. Yes we are enjoying every moment in this land of milk and honey. It is time they educated us in Army Laws for the life we will all return to soon, not to carry on putting blood into our veins which will make war, and not keep the world at peace. No matter what government is in power the Army still carries on making its own instructions. Admitted Palestine will soon be the heart of the British Empire and all that, but we came here to stop this squabbling between the Jews and the Arabs, but it is fast becoming more hatred to the British by the Jews. The Jews won’t interfere with the British Army more than necessary because they know the real reason why we are here, and also from what we have saved them from. So roll on demob., to do something for my benefit, and not to keep money in the pockets of those who have already got to much. Personally I never buy anything British made out here, I realise the amount of profit that goes into the pocket of the “sit back boys”. Principle stinks doesn’t it. It isn’t only the British Empire which will suffer if Palestine, Syria, Persia, Iraq, Egypt goes out of the hands of the British, but oil kings might also feel the pinch. We are told to fight to the last man against Jewish terrorism. HA! HA! I’ve heard those tales before. More complicated and delicate than meets the eye.

So Cheerio for Now folks. I’m happy enough until I get back with Jean, and you all, but the stories we are told rather get my goat.

x x x x x Good Luck, Good Health

x x x x x Your Loving Son, Sid.

x x x x x

134: 7th January 1946

“A” Company,
2nd Bn., O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

Monday, 7th Jan.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Four letters came to-day, two from Jean, and two from you. Your letters each came with an Evening News enclosed in the envelopes.

Pleased to hear my letters have reached you telling you how Christmas went off for me. I didn't stop up to see the New Year in, I get as much sleep as possible these days. Dad was unlucky again, on nightwork.

I sincerely hope this will be the last year in the Army otherwise life won't be worth living. At least something was being done on airborne operations, but it seems as though we were sent here for hardly any reason at all. That is how it strikes me at times. I get more fed up with it all every day, nothing to enjoy whatsoever, except letter writing, and getting prepared to go back to civvy st. The War will have been over 12 months in May, and by then only 28 or 29 group will be demobbed, and still the Army thinks the war has only just started. But there is so much to save for, live for, and hope for that still we carry on trying our hardest not to give up hope. Nothing seems to be moving at all, except Class “B” release, and some of them in 50 group, and dragged into the Army.

I wrote to Don yesterday, a cheerful letter, thank heavens I managed it, God knows what he feels like.

You certainly had a happy gathering on Sunday 30th Dec., and I'm sure Jean enjoyed the hours which she spent with you. Yes Mum, Jean wrote and told me that she had a permanent wave, and the new dress. Until I come home and back with Jean, I'll never be happy, however hard I try in this country.

Pleased to hear all the lads O.K, please remember me when you see them again.

Must be closing now folks, I'll write again soon, but until then I wish you good luck and good health, and to all relatives.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x x

135: 17th January 1945

“A” Company

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

Thursday. 17th Jan. 46.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Have just received a letter from you, and it is dated the 10th Jan. Very pleased to hear from you. The paper enclosed in an envelope has also reached us.

How is Dad’s hand? I hope very much it is getting better, and healing up by this time.

I was glad to hear that you enjoyed the chicken, folks, which Jean’s mother sent you. It was very kind of her.

You won a goose in the raffle, that is lucky enough Mum for a 1/-. Did it go down well? I hope so.

I will keep an eye open for the parcels which you have sent along Mum. But please don’t leave yourself short, I can manage on the food out here.

How is the weather in London Mum? Any better now? Should be clearing up soon, the Spring will soon be here. The time goes so quick.

All goes well here, same old routine, never changes, but I can drag along until demob. Make the most of spare time studying, until next Christmas.

The reasons for slow demob., is because there are not enough men for the peace time Army. The civilian and soldier alike are at last awakening up to the childishness of it all, and not standing the old soldier nonsense longer than possible. As I said to the Major this morning, "It's alright if a chap wishes to stay a batchelor for the rest of his life". Myself I want happiness – real happiness which I know I'm coming home to.

There isn't anything else to tell you Mum – all goes well, nothing to worry about.

I hope you have seen Jean this week Mum, and I know you enjoy the company very much, and look forward to her coming, whenever Jean has the time to spare. I have had many letters from Jean and they are wonderful.

Must be closing now, I will write again soon, so until then. Good Luck, Good Health.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

136: 20th January 1945

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

Dear Mum and Dad,

All goes well here, I’m keeping well, the ending of a second boil is gladly welcomed.

How are things at home Mum? I hope you are all enjoying good health and all goes well. How are Len and Violet, and Dad’s stiches?

News is very scarce, and sometimes I often puzzle of what to write about. I haven’t been out, no reason to, also there is no enjoyment in going out. The great consolation is that I’m saving a little money each week, but no where near enough. Doing plenty of revising and studying for when I go back to work. I will be jolly pleased to go back there again to see how I can get along, and what improvement I can make. But these chances will come along, and then plenty of hard work.

We leave the Airborne in March, and move into the Jerusalem area, and there might be possibilities of attending evening education schools. If not I will carry on by myself.

Please remember me to all relations and friends. Best wishes to them all.

Have written to Jean this afternoon. Plenty of letters coming from Jean, they are wonderful. I’m sure you have seen Jean recently, and I hope ever so much Jean is in good health, and all goes well.

Wishing you good luck and good health, and here’s hoping I will be home again soon.

Your Loving son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

137: 4th February 1946

“A” Company.

2nd O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

Monday 4th Feb. 46.

Dear Mum and Dad,

A letter and a newspaper came to-day, in separate envelopes. Thank you very much for them Mum.

Pleased to hear that all goes at home, and you are all in good health. Jean tells me she had a lovely afternoon and evening with you when Jean came on Thursday. Pity Jean couldn't go with Violet to the banquet. It was very dear though wasn't it Mum. Violet was lucky, winning the night-dress case. 10/- at work. Good Luck sister, make the amount bigger.

Please don't bother sending cigs. along, or parcels Mum. It is very kind of you, but I just don't need them. I can manage fine out here and can look after myself until I come home, when I will appreciate everything very much. None of the other parcels have arrived yet, but will do soon.

I hope Bill Thomas is in good health, and enjoying his short leaves. He certainly deserves them. Good Luck to Bill. Is he doing much flying, Mum?

There are many rumours flying around, but I'm not taking any notice of them. Just carry on until demob. and then come home is my plan just now.

Must be closing now folks, All goes well, and I'm in decent health and really I mustn't grumble. But roll on demob, and real happiness, however hard the times will be.

So Cheerio folks, good health and good luck. My love to all relations. Your Loving Son

Sid.

x x x x x x x x

138: 5th February 1946

“A” Company.

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

Dear Mum and Dad.

Christmas pud., arrived to-day, and they have been made good use. Thanks very much folks. They were boiled well, cooled down, and masticated, then swallowed. Do you want the basins back? Otherwise, the officers can use them for drinking tea from, in morning and afternoon “brew-ups”. Stop them from using my pint-mug. Greedy blighters!

All goes well here folks, I’m O.K. Will be jolly pleased to come home and spent Sunday afternoons with you, and Jean will be more than happy then. Roll on ship!

I hope the weather is improving, after all Spring is well on its way. Weather here is similar to Spring in England, but now and again the rains come, and boy-oh-boy it does rain. Freshens the air, thats one good point.

I hope you are all enjoying good health, and all goes well at home.

Please thank Uncle Bob, for the 20 cigs. Mum, they are being appreciated at this moment. How is Uncle Bob, and Aunt Nell and the family? Is Nellie getting married Mum?

Must be closing now, so wishing you all the very best of luck, I will conclude.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x x

139: 9th February 1946

Sat. 9th Feb. 46.

Dear Mum and Dad,

A letter came to-day, the one which you posted on Feb. 2nd., and I was very pleased to hear from you.

Another 15/- better off, it is certainly giving the New Year a good start. I think I must have a gamble on something, perhaps my luck will see me through.

Plenty of visitors again the week previous to your letter I have here, but it is good to see them Mum, and I'm sure you enjoy the company. Please remember me to everyone when they call again.

I hope Lily came to see you on the Sunday, no Mum I made a mistake, I have your Monday 3. Feb letter here, mentioning how bad the weather was, as probably Lily didn't come. Dad didn't have much of a good day off, did he?

I received a letter from Jean to-day, and all goes well appropriately – that's good news.

Nothing much has happened here life is very boring, and studying when time is available is the only variation in life. Perhaps things will brighten up soon, may be some news of homecoming. From 22nd Feb. to the 27th Feb., there is a big exercise on, that will make a change, and be more like old times and for what I have been educated for, in the Army.

Must close now folks, but will write again as soon as possible. In the meantime, I must wish you good luck, and good health.

Your Loving Son. Sid

x x x x x x

140: 14th February 1946

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

Thursday 14th Feb. '46.

Dear Mum and Dad,

All goes well here, and there hasn't been much to disturb the normal routine. There isn't a great deal to tell you.

I sincerely hope you are all in good health at home, and everything carries on as per usual.

By the way Mum, those presents I said I would buy and send home to you, I still have not bought them. Since I went on that long trip all around Palestine, I haven't been outside the camp. I must wait until I get the next chance to go out. I have still got the money, I haven't touched any of it yet. I very seldom leave camp, there is no attraction outside whatsoever. I stop in so much I often think I am in England, and sometimes never see a native for days on end.

I had an interview with the Major yesterday morning and just mentioned that I thought I was being held down in this job, and asked one or two awkward questions, and I'm sure he is doing some serious thinking. Results have taken place already, and I find myself listening to a lecture this morning at 11 a.m. which proves that he is being a little more thoughtful and considerate. What I told him was regarding the Unit Instructors Course, why I didn't go, and asked why I was not informed of what happened about the job I was asked to take in the Lieut-Quartmasters Office. I put in for both, was asked to take both, But apparently the Company would not let me go and I wasn't told a thing, and I didn't know or hear anymore about it. So, in a round about way I simply told him what I thought of his principle. He said he didn't know anything about either of the matters, but that wasn't much of an answer. But I just wanted to explain to him in order that he would realise I'm not in this job to be taken advantage of, in other words, “Not such a damned fool as he thinks I might look”. I haven't been considered very much in recent promotions, and I mentioned the fact that I did the CQMS's job whilst he was on leave, and

many other things. A L/Cpl clerk who stayed in England when his battalion came overseas is now a Warrant Officer in the War Office. It just goes to show what a dead end job a company clerk's job really is. Leave this battalion and in a depot or other cushy administrative station and probably there is no reason why I would not get on. I told the Major I might just as well go back to duty, but he would not hear of it. I'm just waiting to see the results of the interview now.

Well folks I must be closing now, but will write again when the time is available. Wishing you all, good health, and the best of luck, and hoping all goes well.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

141: 16th February 1946

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

Saturday, 16th Feb. 46.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Seems to me that the food situation in England gets worse instead of the so much promised better days ahead. Times must be very hard for you Mum.

I have just been reading the “Evening News” papers which you sent along. Yesterday was the first real chance I had to read them thoroughly. Having just finished reading the papers of late December and early January, which came by sea, I was under the impression that things were improving in England, but now having read these “Evening News” papers I have a different view altogether. It’s amazing how this Labour Government change the headlines in the papers, and very often ridicule themselves. I read the letters from housewives and I must add that it doesn’t give me much courage to carry on conscientiously in the Army, and I don’t suppose these chaps other than me are much better impressed, or shall I say depressed. Even talking of revolution in England, and I can’t wonder at it, sending more food to Europe, and what gets me down is that the Government won’t admit they are sending food to Germany. Beats me Mum, they should let them starve as they were quite willing and keen to watch and sneer over the starvation of another people. There is certainly a change of opinion in the Labour Government supporters. Must admit it is a terrific job, and at a time when everybody is tired and weary of restrictions, but surely there must be improvements soon. I have never read things and articles and letters in papers, which sound so offensive towards the M.P.s. and the Government. Well they took things into their own hands Mum, let them get on with it and if a revolution gets going it might take the contented grin off our Foreign Affairs minister’s well-fed face. Too cock-sure that’s the trouble. To them we are not human beings just a collection of the same old numbers, ready to do- or die, that their names may be famous. No wonder most of the troops with a bit of go in them are miles away from England. If there was a revolution I would go with the majority, which I’m sure would be going Labour’s Way now, but for the people by people who don’t want to be famous. All M.P.s eventually become the same, they have everything they want and get all they want so why should they bother about other people to much. Same old traditional reply, “All in good time.” Mr. Bevin says lay your cards on the

table, but the authorities here do their best to enlarge the Army, not liking to see one man leave. I listened to a lecture yesterday, and it was not lectured to us but pressed into us, why it is not wise to go back to civvy-street, the terrible ordeals there, the awful difficulties, and to stop purging about the demob. scheme, and it would be better to sign on, and all that talk. Proper Labour supporter no doubt, and he looked the typical Jew. Whatever the terrible ordeals, or difficulties they will never stop me from coming home when the time comes. Yes, so much is being done to re-educate us chaps. I've been waiting 6 weeks now for a correspondence course, and I'm just as near to it now as I was 6 weeks ago. The only interest is training to make war, to keep wars going from what I can see, of what goes on here. On Monday the 6th Air Landing Brigade goes on a five day scheme up in the hills in Jericho, near the Trans-jordan. Re-educating for civvy street, teaching us botany, I suppose. There isn't much consideration for anybody these days. However Mum, it will not be so bad for me, I'm riding in the Jeep most of the time, I recently mentioned to the Captain that this time, the slightest sign of extra than normal pain from my stomach I'm off to the Medical Officer. So instead of marching with the wireless set, I'm riding in the "Jeep". I've had enough of being easy to get on with, and conscientious. The "barbery" people get on much better. Being the quiet happy-go-lucky soldier doesn't seem to get me anywhere, and being conscientious often coming back from hospital didn't help me in the least, so until demob., I'll change my carry-on which effects the Army. I had a good "tick" to the Major the other day and he will be listening to a few more, just to let him know that I don't quite agree with good soldiering and the results that don't come from it. Still that doesn't matter so much, now that I will soon be out of the Army, somewhere where the real Boss can actually judge for himself, and not having to rely on to many persons in supernumary positions and the words they convey to the "higher-ups". That counts too much. So Roll on – civvy street whatever the terrifying obstacles may consist of. I didn't do as bad before and I wished I had realised then that I wasn't doing so badly, but I just didn't understand in those days, not enough was explained to me.

Well I'm going to pack in grumbling, or rather, giving my point of view more than grumbling, and close.

Wishing you good luck, and better times to come as soon as possible, and the best of health. Keep Smiling folks, at least I can come home and grow spinach and turnips – that's something.

All goes well here – expect the weather and talk of what's going on in England. Papers published here don't say very much about it.

Your Loving Son,

Sid.

x x x x x

P.S. Have heard the demob news. 32 by June. Not bad.

P.S.

Have you seen Jean yet Mum? I do hope so, very much. If you have Mum, how is Jean these days, is she well and taking the demoralising news as much in the best way possible. Letters are coming daily and get lovelier every day, but I wish I was with Jean and you all, this very moment.

Sid.

x x x

Have just received your letter dated the 8th Feb 46. Thanks very much for the Daily Express. Two letters from Jean. Lovely letters.

I only wish I was home.

142: 19th February 1945

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

Tuesday, 19th Feb. ‘46

Dear Mum and Dad,

A letter came to-day Mum, and I thank you very much for it.

That’s cheering news Mum, Jean came to see you on Sunday the 10th Feb., I was very pleased to hear that. It must be very hard on Jean folks, my being so many miles away, and I do my best to keep her as happy as possible by writing every day, and make my letters to keep them cheerful and Jean free from worry. Saving as much as I can but don’t seem to be doing so well, it is now 70 pounds – which is useless. The interest on the certificates works out to about 2 pounds 10 shillings. But there is quite a while until demob, and until then I will never get fed up with saving. I thrive on it now, but I’m thriving very little with only 70 pounds.

Pleased to hear that Son and Lily and Richard are well, and I hope Son enjoyed his leave – I’m sure he did, folks. Glad to know that Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie are in good health. Please convey my love and best wishes. Sorry to hear that Uncle Ern’s hand has not yet improved any, and is still out of a job.

I must send a few lines to Charlie Hart’s sister, as soon as possible Mum. It’s terrible that a young lady – like Betty, so sociable and happy go lucky should go down like that. I’m glad to hear that Charlie called a couple of weeks ago. It must be tough for him Mum nobody to come home to now. Did he leave his address by any chance.

No more boils yet Mum and at the moment I am fine, but cannot say I’m really happy. Never will be until I am back with Jean again.

I hope all goes well at home Mum, and you are all enjoying good health. By the way – don't forget Ma – no more parcels or cigarettes. I'm getting along – not so badly!

The 5 day exercise up in the hills around Jericho and Transjordan has been cancelled and a damned good job to. The weather has been raining, and snowing in the Jordan area. Wind – The tents blow inside out with one gust and then down comes the rain. Trust me – I don't live in a tent.

I'm looking after myself don't worry about that – I've too much to live for, to do otherwise. There is nothing I want – thanks all the same Mum, and it is very kind of you. You need it yourself and we live pretty well. Plenty of hard biscuits and they keep the teeth clean and sharp, and put life into a person. Good exercise! No food parcels or cigarettes Mum – don't forget.

Must be closing now, so here's wishing you all the very best of luck and good health.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

P.S.

Pleased to hear that the weather improved.

143: 27th February 1946

“A” Company.

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

Wednesday 27th Feb. 46.

Dear Mum and Dad,

A letter and an “Evening News” paper reached me to-day, and I thank you very much for it. I was very pleased to hear from you.

Life isn't getting me down here, I'm feeling many times better, than I did when I last saw you. It is the time wasting away that gets me going at times. If this Labour Government does a good job, then releases the controls, life might not be so bad when I'm home. You must also remember Mum that this country doesn't bring much recreation to anywhere. The chaps haven't been out for a month, outside the barbed wire, and the day trip to Jerusalem has just been cancelled which was to have taken place on Friday. I don't want to go out myself, I'm quite happy reading and writing, certainly not lifeless though, far from it. There is always that tension in the camp, the Jews go to far sometimes, and the opinion of the chaps here would rather upset the American Zionist Party and the Russians. They are not used to sitting and watching or taking. Myself, I'm not interested, unless something upsets me.

I received two lovely letters from Jean to-day, and they made me very happy and I have replied to them Mum. Jean came to see you on Sunday the 24th that is very pleasant news and I'm sure you made her very welcome Mum. If only I could be sitting in the armchair the very next time Jean came to see you, gosh wouldn't it be a happy gathering.

The 27 groups leave here in about ten days time thank heavens for that. They are the very first to leave this unit Mum, and they have been spoken about since last June. At last something will be moving, and gradually 41 group will come along.

About the 15th of March we all move to Jerusalem, just outside the town, probably, to remove the Red Beret for ever, thank Christ, it has a name now which literally “stinks”. I am not sure where we go to after that, but there is something about a move “in the wind”. It is only a temporary camp, under canvas, at Jerusalem.

By the way Mum will you send the relief nibs along if Mrs Millman is not short of them. 6 if you can.

Jean doesn't have quite so much to do these days Mum. Probably Jean will tell you. But nevertheless, you know Mum Jean likes plenty of work to do it passes the time away. That tells you plenty doesn't it? Jean wants the time to pass quickly, just like I do Mum. Please forgive Jean if she doesn't come to see you so often.

Remember me to Len Roles if he happens to call Mum. I hope he is well. That was kind of Eileen and Clem to send their best wishes, and please return my best wishes.

I'm very pleased to hear that you do not go short of food Mum – that has relieved my worries very much. But please do not bother about sending parcels Mum! I'm doing pretty well myself.

Remember me to Wilfred Mum, and I hope he enjoys his new job and J????

How is Dad these days, Mum? He never says much or conveys much. I hope he is well now – finger much better.

Must be closing now, I will write again soon.

Good Luck – Good Health

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x x x

P.S.

Army life is O.K, but there are happier places in the world when I'm at my age. I wouldn't have missed anything.

I've acheived nothing, but haven't done so badly.

144: 2nd March 1946

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

Saturday, 2nd March 1946

Der Mum and Dad,

Have received your letter dated the 23rd Feb. with evening paper enclosed. Also a paper by itself in an envelope. Thank you very much for them folks.

I was pleased to hear that Jackie is on leave, by this time he has gone back no doubt, and I'm glad to know he has a “stripe”. Making good quick progress!

I heard from Jean that Len Roles is home, also Cyril, and I was surprised to hear that. It is good news though folks, and to anyone who spends more than three years in these countries, deserve very much to come home. It was kind of Jean to write it in her letter. Since then you have probably seen Jean and she has told you about it. Has Len been to see you yet Mum? I expect he has.

There isn't much to tell you folks. Move to the outskirts of Jerusalem on the 16th March, stay in that camp for a couple of weeks or more, lose 1/- a day, and then move to some place else, heaven knows where! But I'm hoping for the best.

I can quite understand young Richard being very lively. That's the best way to be, plenty of life in the world to-day.

Went to Haifa yesterday, and bought Jean a pair of shoes. I hope they fit Jean, very much I do Mum. I will be buying a few things for you soon.

I hope the weather is getting much better in England; and all goes well for you.

Must be closing now folks, almost tea time.

Cheerio for Now,

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x x x

145: 29th June 1946

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

Saturday, 29th June.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Pleased to receive your very welcome letter, which is dated the 23rd June.

Jean did enjoy her holiday Mum, and I’m very pleased with the news. Jean deserved one very much, after the busy V day and holidays. I only wish I could have been with Jean to make her holiday a thousand times happier and more enjoyable. But – thank heavens I’ll be home soon!

Pleased you received a card. A letter came every day from Jean, just the same, and made me very much happier! When Jean came back everyone was asking whether she enjoyed her holiday. I believe Jean came to see you on the Tuesday, and told you all about it. The Saturday and Sunday were very busy days for Jean. Unfortunately the mail I wrote to Jean, meant to reach Jean whilst on holiday was delayed in the post, but Jean was very happy to receive them on the day of return to London.

Len to go to Canada perhaps! I believe I read something about it in the papers. If he goes, I hope he realises very much from the experience. Carefree young lad isn’t he, forgetting that he must go to work.

Hope Violet likes the new job, and is picking up the new routine.

Jolly nice of Geo. Fryer to call Mum. I’m replying to his letter soon. I hope all goes well for him, and his family at 43.

I haven't replied to Mrs Davies' letter yet, but will do very soon.

I have written to Son, and asked for more detailed information. I don't want to be away from Jean any time, after these last 12 months. It has been tough going for both of us, as you know too well.

Have been out again since 3 o'clock very early this morning, but was back at 6 p m this evening. Searched a Jewish settlement – got booed – jeered at, and called Fascists. Just received the news we are out again at 5 in the morning. The papers and wireless will tell you all about it. General Cunningham told the Jews he is fed up with their fun and games and that the Army at last is rolling its sleeves up. I'm quite relieved and pleased – the tension has gone. The Arabs are rejoicing! HA! HA! Poor buggers! Every terrorist will soon be on the run. 1000 Bombers would do to Jerusalem what Jesus Christ should have done! But never mind I'll soon be back with Jean, and you all at home – that is my everything. I'll find more excitement than I have ever known when I walk down the aisle and wait for Jean. I hope the day is not too far away – it just cannot be many months from now.

Well folks, I hope Jean's visits make you happy, I know they do, and I hope Jean looks reasonably fit and well. Just hurry up the day when we are all together again for always, everyone will be so much happier.

Goodnight folks – I'm off to bed – up at 4 a.m. and the time now is 9.30 p m.

My love to all concerned. I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels just now, and I'll write again as soon as I can. I hope you are all enjoying good health.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x

146: 8th July 1946

“A” Company

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

Monday, 8th July

Dear Mum and Dad,

Have just received your letter telling me that the V. Allotment was stopped since the 24th June. I must admit that I wish you had mentioned it much earlier, but I might be able to get the 5/- a day allotment dated back to the 1st July '46.

The enclosed letter is one which I have typed out, and will be signed by the Major in the morning. That is my job, but 120 men to look after as regards pay queries. There are plenty.

I have received a lot of documents from Son, and must be writing to Mr Davies soon, perhaps he can help me too!

Bye for now – please explain the enclosed to Jean. With the new rates of pay the V.A.s do not stop, but mine has been stopped for a different reason. Exceeds $\frac{3}{4}$ s of my pay is the cause. 6/- is more than $\frac{3}{4}$ s of my total pay which is 7/-, and the allotment was stopped completely instead of being reduced to 5/-. However I have submitted another form as you will see by the enclosed letter to the Paymaster.

I hope all goes well.

Bye for Now – I'll write again soon – busy!!

Please help me out!!!

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x x

P.S.

Let Jean have the furniture money until this query is cleared up.

Did the Post Office woman say why? Sid.

147: 14th July 1946

“A” Company.

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

14th July ‘46

Dear Mum and Dad,

Thank you very much for your letter dated the 6th July. It reached me yesterday.

By this time Jean has probably been to see you and you have explained that the allotment has been stopped. Also Jean has seen the copy of the letter I sent by this time. It should soon be starting again, and you should receive a book commencing from the 1st July, for 35/- a week. I shall try and send some money home each week to make up the total to £20 each week – perhaps more. I will be very pleased when it is all cleared up and things running smoothly again. Thanks very much for paying Jean the money each week, that is a great help. The letter went by air mail to the paymaster.

How is Jean these days Mum? The letters sound as though she is getting very excited. I am too – and I’m counting the days. Our letters help the time to pass quickly.

Son sent a lot of papers to me, and I’ve written to him thanking him for them. They are to do with the further education after release leave. I must write to Mr Davies to clarify everything that I am attempting. Two references are required. I have explained everything to Jean. I was interrupted by a guard at the city jail, otherwise I would have written to Davies before this. There is always much to do here these days, and sleep is always very sensible. I don’t want to come home feeling tired, and would sooner regain lost sleep here.

I have received all the newspapers you have sent, including the half sheets in separate envelopes. The Evening Standard was the latest one – it came on Friday evening.

A bundle of papers came a few days ago, and I was busy with the Hackney Gazettes adverts columns.

Jean has probably told you of the idea she has about the flat in Walford Road. It would take a lot of explaining in this letter, which of course would tell you exactly the same as what Jean has told you. I'm keen about it – there might not be another chance for months. Jolly good show to Jean, always very alert about everything in the homemaking line. Yes I'll be very pleased and happy when we are all together again. I am sure you are very pleased about it folks!

I hope you are all well, and Aunt Ede much better now.

My love and best wishes to all concerned.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x x x x x

148: 16th July 1946

“A” Company.

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

July 16th.

Dear Mum and Dad,

Many thanks for your letter dated the 10th July. I was very pleased to hear from you.

It was the day Jean had been to see you, and the news cheered me up very much. I’m very pleased that Jean looks fine – that is wonderful news. Plenty of fresh air and sunshine does the trick. By the time this letter reaches you Jean will have been again on Sunday the 20th. It was very kind of you to tell Jean that Dad and yourself will do the same for us, as was done for Son and Lily. Jolly kind of you folks, but, there is sometime yet before Jean and I do get married. I have an idea that there are a few surprises awaiting me when I get home, and as you already know I must see what those wages are. When I say sometime – I mean a matter of a few months, perhaps less, which will give Jean and myself time to get really prepared, and time for me to save a few more pounds. However, we cannot tell what will happen until Jean and I are together again and then we shall have much better idea of the matter, where, and when. There is lots to be arranged yet, and discussed, before we take the step down the aisle. But, thank heavens, Jean and I will be with each other again in a few weeks and we will be able to get our heads together! We are both absolutely “fed up” with being single! Arrangements are better to make when we are together and not 3,500 miles apart.

My boil has gone, and I must admit I’m getting fed up with the damned things! But they are very common here and I must think myself lucky compared with chaps who are much worse off, with more serious complaints such as dysentery – malaria – and all the usual tropical fevers. Boils – chaps are all experiencing them just lately, and diarrhoea, owing to excessive tinned food, Even spuds! I could write a page of the tinned stuff we eat. Eggs are the only variety, which we have about 4 times a week – usually – sometimes 6. They might be the “small part” cause of the boil.

I have heard from Don Thomas, he expects to leave (India) his unit on the 20th July.

Letters come from Jean daily and even though Jean has been very busy just lately a letter usually arrives. I still write every day however busy I am, or whatever the tiresome duty.

I hope all goes well at home. Please convey my best wishes to those concerned.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x

149: 21st July 1946

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

Sunday, 21st July 46

Dear Mum and Dad,

Thank you very much for your letter of the 13th, I was very pleased to hear from you.

I thought perhaps you had made a mistake about my voluntary allotment, and I'm very pleased to know that it didn't stop, but was reduced to 5/6 per day. After you have taken a pound each week out of there, 38/6 weekly that will leave 18/6 per week to go into the Post Office. I have enclosed a pound postal order which will help to make these savings about 22/6 per week.

[Page 2 missing at IWM]

. . . who completes 12 months service here, and have six months more to do get 14 days leave. Those who have 12 months service here and due for demob, might possibly get away earlier. It is indefinite. The demob in England is ahead of schedule but it is not ahead here. The 36s according to chaps letters, have been released in England, but the 36s only left here today – this camp!

Today I was asked to sign on, and then take a course for the job of Orderly Room Serjeant, but I told them straight and turned it down – FLAT!!!! I explained I had been with the regiment over 4 years and they couldn't think of anything like that

[Page 4 missing at IWM – the way this letter is structured means that one sheet has been lost, with pages 2 and 4 back to back]

. . . they want.

All goes well here – was on a patrol the night before last, and had a bit of excitement with an R.A.F. POOH-POOH-OLD CHHHAAPPIE. He was drunk and tried to act the terrorist, by standing in the headlamps and holding us up with a sten gun and then demanded a lift back to his camp. Yours truly was sitting in the front of the truck and almost had a blue fit when I saw him standing there all ready for anything in the middle of the road. His hair was black, with a black moustache – he wore no blue R.A.F. beret, and I thought I saw the Great Jehovah! I dived out of the door and stood waiting with my (T) – RUSTY Rifle and then he came towards the truck. I smelt the beer in his breath as he almost neared the truck, and saw his Sten gun was not loaded, and then he asked very forcibly for a lift. I was just going to bounce him one, when the driver who vanished God knows where to, slapped him on the bean with his rifle butt. The driver had go on top of the truck and hit this bloke from up there, before I had the chance. I didn't know who was up there and I thought to myself, "Christ – Its my turn next, But, as it was I heard his voice like a lark in spring, say, "Take that you 'brylcreamed naughty boy'" HA! HA! What a tame thing to call a chap like that. We chucked this chap in the back and took him back to the camp cell. Next morning the R.A.F. arrived in strength and yours truly was writing a long statement about all that happened. I don't know what happened to this chap for doing what he did, but that was up to him. The next morning he told me he only had a month to go for demob, and I told him to think himself lucky that he didn't have his intestines splattered all over Jerusalem the night before. Bloody fool, but it was a laugh and broke up the monotony of the 5 hour patrol. It happened at ten to 12 at night. Funniest thing I've seen for months the way the driver bounced him on the bean. It makes me laugh that is why I have mentioned it. Otherwise everything carries on very much the same. The time passes quickly – thank heavens!

Plenty of letters came from Jean, and very happily and excitedly written, and of course they keep me happy and cheerful. I don't write exactly the same in my letters to Jean and to you, because a difference of news in my letters makes more for you and Jeanie to talk about when the time comes.

Please remember me to Ben, or Arthur or Bill when they call again. I hope all goes well for them. My best wishes and love to all the friends or relations who come along to see you.

Must close now. I hope very much that you are all well at home and also Mum, I hope your leg is not playing you up too much.

Your Loving Son

150: 23rd July 1946

“A” Company,
2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.
M.E.F.

23rd July 46

Dear Mum and Dad,

Thank you very much for letter dated the 17th. It arrived last evening. This evening part of a newspaper arrived the date stamp was the 19th. The other part has not yet arrived. It should be here tomorrow. Also yesterday received two letters from Jean, and one from Arthur.

Sorry to hear that Son has been ill again. I hope the weather has helped him by this time.

Quite a busy day when Arthur, John and Vera Hackett came to see you, after Son, Lily and Richard came in the afternoon. I hope they were all well.

I have typed another letter to the Paymaster to tell him to ???????? the VA at 5/6. Don't be surprised if it is reduced again to 5/- owing to the long letter, the copy of which I sent to you, because you told me it had stopped. It will clear up before I am demobbed, I suppose!

Can't understand why John goes bald on about £10 a week. Beats me!

I hope you have received the £1 postal order by this time. The letter and p. order was posted yesterday, but the Army Post Office is opposite the King David Hotel - by a few yards.

It is possible that the papers mentioned something about the slight incident in Jerusalem yesterday. We saw the explosion from camp here. We didn't go out immediately but went out at 2 o'clock early this morning to form a cordon around the Jewish Quarter of the Old City – stinking place it really is.

Then our old friends the 8th and 9th Paras searched the place. Found two of the chaps – shot one dead, and the only cure for the other one is to put him in a coffin. The chaps are held back too much – they won't let us do anything to shake these Jews. The American Jews are the things that hold back the order for justice to be done. The Arabs are raging about it, but they enjoy peacefulness to a great extent, but I'm sure they will take matters into their hands again. Their religiousness is driving them to it. They showed us words in the Bible whereby Jesus Christ said he was fed up with them, this morning after daylight. We're still the laughing stock! The day after the order that British troops had no need to carry arms, the King David Hotel is blown up. But I suppose we'll carry on doing guards in the wrong places until somewhere else is blown up. The Palestine Police Force would make good professional soldiers – making money anyhow and anywhere. These Jews seldom come near troops, when the troops are armed. We are all confined to camp until things quieten down, and a few thousand more Jews taken in custody. We pray to the "Star of Bethlehem" to get a faint smack at them. HA! HA! That's a special brand of beer in this country these days.

I told you in my last letter about the R.A.F. chap holding up 3 chaps and myself on a mobile patrol around the camp. He was drunk. The Officer – old Will H—— came along to see the trouble and was witness also. He happened to be in a taxi following the truck we were in. The enclosed explains everything. If he gets a Court Martial, I hope the bloody fool doesn't – I shall probably lose my maths course. But my release should be O.K. Quite a few weeks yet! It depends upon the evidence we give tomorrow. I wish I had shot the bloody idiot now, especially if he holds up my demob. He has only a month to serve himself. Yours truly falls in every c—
- I'm sure.

Must close now – and get to bed early, only had 2 hours last night, and I must get ready for tomorrow.

I hope all goes well at home.

Your Loving Son.

Sid.

x x x x x x

151: 28th July 1946

“A” Company

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I

M.E.F.

Sunday 28th July

Dear Mum and Dad,

Thank you very much for your letters. I was very pleased to hear from you again. Glad to know that all goes well.

I was very happy to read in your letter and Jean’s letter that you all enjoyed the Sunday 21st, afternoon when Son, Lily and Richard came to see you. Not many weeks now and I shall be there with you – good show too! Jean tells me how Richard grows. Jean told me that she stayed until 8pm, and the letter was very happily written.

I have written to Son today, something to do with education and I enquired of his health. A letter came from Mr Davies yesterday, it pleased me very much and I have written to Son asking for a little help with a very complicated application form. He has probably experienced them before, and information here is difficult to obtain.

I shall see what I can do to get a pair of shoes for Violet. I hate accepting the money but that’s just how things are at the moment. I can get them easily enough, it only means a bus to town a good look around, and an evening stroll back – simple enough. I’m trying to save some money now until just before I come home to buy a couple of things. It won’t be very much Mum, but something is better than nothing. I can get an extra 1/- a day back dated to July 1st. It means a few more pounds, on 1/- a day until the end of my release leave, which should be about eleven weeks leave starting from the date I’m released. I’m sure I shall get it. It is the new system of pay whereby I go from 2 Stars to 3 Stars. There is no reason why I shouldn’t get the money.

Sorry to hear of the strict rationing but perhaps a few months time will see the finish of it all. I hope so very much, for everyones hopes.

Must have been a suprise when Aunt Daisy came to see you and with the baby. Is Fred still in the Army or did he come out of it? I hope they are all well - please remember me, send my love.

Very quiet here, nothing out of place, and I'm taking care of myself. But I can't stop these boils! I'm sorry I didn't tell you about the boil on my chin. I thought I did, but Jean tells me you were very suprised to hear about it. I have a little trouble with the gland under my right ear but it's nothing to worry about. I thought it was my throat, but it is not and never has been. I'm not worried about it, I shall be home soon. I'm O.K. otherwise!!!!!! I can't look after myself anymore than I am doing!!!!!!

Must close now, and here's hoping you are all in good health and all goes well.

Sid

X x x x x x

152: 30th July 1946

“A” Company

2nd Bn. O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

31st July 46

Dear Mum and Dad,

Thank you very much for your letters dated the 18th, 23rd and 25th. They arrived yesterday and the day before. I’m sorry I haven’t written sooner but we are being run off our feet at the moment. For the next nine days we are on continual duties either 12 hours or 24 hrs a day. Time seems to go quickly but it isn’t much of a life after 12 months of so-called peace.

First thing I must tell you is that I haven’t had any more boils since the one on my chin. But my glands are still giving me a little trouble. The Medical Officer tells me it is absolutely nothing to worry about, and will probably vanish when I get back to England. It’s the climate – that’s all. Otherwise I’m fine.

Was out on Monday night, on the curfew patrols, busy on Tuesday, and out again this morning – searching, but the job was finished by 2 pm. Sleep in camp tonight, but out all Thursday night on the curfew patrols again. We sleep on the site of a demolished house and the Jews peer proudly from the windows of their luxurious flats, upon their mandatory power sleeping like a lot of tramps, more than less in the gutter. No wonder these long-nosed bathbuns have no respect for the British. It’s the War Office that needs shaking from the 1805 era, and our comrades in Parliament should be able to do something. What a perfect HEAP everything has become! Thank Christ I leave this shower on the 10th August to go on my course to Cairo. I won’t have a good time there I’ll wait until I come home. Believe me I’m going to — — — — —. Perhaps I’d best not write about what I am going to do, it might amaze you.

Plenty of letters are coming from Jean and they really keep me happy and level-headed. Thank God – we shall be together again in a few weeks time. How does Jean seem to you these days Mum? I guess she is getting more happy and excited now, that is what I wait to see most of all

– Jean as happy as can be – and then I will be happy too! Being here doesn't help one bit, but I try my best to make my letters as cheerful as possible, but we get buggered around something bloody. I can't tell you all, you would never believe my words. It sounds so fantastic to think of VE Day, VJ Day and V. day. Christmas Days – Bank Holidays – these things are blank in my mind. Oh – for the first day home. I won't be in England, but in a world of my own, with Jean.

I hope you are all well at home and everything goes along as per usual.

I'm O.K. but being messed around by a handful of Jews really gets my goat. I have letters to write to Davies, Son, George, an accountancy association but when I shall get them done – Christ only knows. No wonder chaps cease to ?????, but I've never felt like it so much in all my life. Can I go out – must I do this or that – about 2^D in my pocket – but these few weeks are a Christ-sent present.

Well folks don't get worried, but I must blaze off steam sometimes. When I come home I hope to make up for a few of these good times I have missed, and believe me I'm certainly going to. I will be with Jean there, that will make me as happy as I want to be. We're being buggered around terribly and always nothing comes from it. Just for a square deal with these bathbuns out here I'd give 12 months away, but no, so many Jewish people have risen to the heights in the British Government, we cannot stop cold-blooded murder, even though the British race and government believed, once upon a time, in a justice for everyone that outshone the rest of the world. Slipping that's the trouble – British statesmanship is proceeding down the pan there's no doubt of that whatsoever. I suppose the loud bump will be ?????, unless they buck their ideas up.

Must close now folks – don't get worried, but I'm just telling you how I feel at the moment. Getting it off my chest in their words!!

Bye for Now.

Your Loving Son

Sid

x x x x x x

153: 30th August 1946

“A” Company,

2nd O.B.L.I.

M.E.F.

30th August 46

Dear Mum and Dad,

A few lines to let you know what is happening, and what is likely to happen in the near future.

It appears that the Voluntary Allotment stops on the 31st August, tomorrow, and no more money will be in your hands until the money reaches you which I'm going to send home to pay for the furniture.

What I'm going to do as soon as I get back to camp on the 8th September, is to send home £7's. So until the money reaches you Mum, will you pay the money to Jean, for me please. It will be a help, if you can manage it. I know you have had an expensive time just lately, what with the wrist watch for Violet, and the tea service and various other things you have bought. Probably you are thinking that the wedding, when it happens, is going to be an expensive one, or cost money. Well just rest assured that the less you spend on the whole affair the happier you will be make me. I owe you more than I could ever repay, so please hang on to what money you are thinking of spending, and wait and see how things turn out. For heaven's sake don't go spending anything yet. Wait until I come home. I know what you are thinking – but don't worry yourselves – hang on to the money – we'll soon see what it might cost. I know you are bound to be thinking of something but please don't think it is going to cost a lot. God Forbid that I ever take advantage like that!!! Just do me that favour of keeping as much as possible in your pockets!! Jean mentions a quiet wedding and perhaps she has mentioned it to you folks. I hope she has, because that is the way I want it to be as well. Life has been a very quiet one so far, so I don't see why the wedding shouldn't be a quiet one. Well – we'll soon see once I have been at work for a few months – perhaps less.

I'm afraid I haven't been able to manage Violet's shoes Mum. I'll carry on trying!!! I draw money in advance on the first pay day after I get back to camp, About £20 altogether, to the

14th October, including the 1/- extra on the new rates of pay for becoming a 3 Star soldier with effect from the 1st July 46. £7 I send to you for furniture. £13, for presents, soap – plenty of soap if I can get hold of it quickly enough. I have two tin boxes to send it home in if I get that much. I'll do what I can.

By the way Mum, I have sent home, a box of books and personal things in a tin box, and a small parcel of Jean's letters. Sentimental old sod, aren't I! They should reach you in 3 weeks or 4 weeks! In one box there is enough string to last you for months. Should be useful. It was hanging around and I thought you could make use of it. Do you remember the string vests I used to wear. HA! Bloody useful! What!

An interesting lecture yesterday. It was Pay as you Earn Income Tax Scheme. I learned most of what goes on and understand just how it works and effects people. It will be useful. I'm keeping a good grip on it. The useful time to get married, babies. Allowances are greater. Marry on April 4th 1947 and the allowance goes up to £290 to be deducted from 1946 to 1947 amount tax payable. Useful to know! HA

I hope all goes well at home, and you are all well. I'll be pleased to get a letter in Mum's writing. Dad's writing set me thinking! Probably a letter will arrive tomorrow!

All goes well here!

Must close now, but I'll write again, when something of interest crops up! I think I start home either the 17th or 25th September. You can imagine how much I want it to be the 17th.

I'll try and order 2 lbs of Tea from SP???? Before I come home. All postal arrangements guaranteed and paid for.

My love to all concerned.

Cheerio for Now.

Your Loving Son.

Sid

x x x x x x

The £7 furniture money will pay.

2nd Sept. (Last money to Jean)

9th “ (the 26th August)

16 “ (CORRECT?)

23 “

30 “

7th Oct

Phew!

14th Oct

Storage!

Glossary of Names

Sid's references to family and friends are many and confusing; in particular, his use of the terms 'Uncle' and 'Aunt' should not be taken to imply a close familial relationship, though he clearly thought of those people as family. He refers to the 'big happy family' in his letters, on three occasions. The Glossary of Names which appears at the end of this document attempts to identify the various individuals to whom reference is made in the letters.

Person	Name	Relation	Approx Age in (June 1942)	Notes
Mum	Daisy Verrier	Mother	40	
Dad	William Verrier	Father	51	Regular soldier with DCLI pre-1914 to 1920
Son/Sonny	Claude Verrier	Brother	21	
Violet V	Violet Verrier	Sister	17	
Len/Lenny	Leonard Verrier	Brother	11	My father
Grand Dad	Bill Williams	Grandfather	66	Father of Mum and Uncles Bill, Ray and Bob. Died in 1944.
Uncle Jack	John P Savage		48	Served with Dad pre-1914, throughout WW1 and in Georgia.
Aunt Violet	Valentina Savage		43	From Berdyansk, Ukraine. Married Uncle Jack Savage in Ukraine, 1919.
Violet S	Violet Savage		22	
Lily	Lily Verrier	Sister-in-Law	20	Née Savage. Married to Son/Claude in 1943
Jackie	Jack A J Savage		16	
Aubrey	Aubrey Crabb		22	Married Violet Savage in January 1945

Richard	Richard Verrier	Nephew		Born 1944 and still living. First child of Son/Claude and Lily
Aunt Ede	Edith Billis	Aunt	49	Née Verrier. Sister to Dad.
Uncle Wal	Walter Billis	Uncle	53	Another DCLI soldier, badly injured, Ypres 1915; ARP Warden, killed 19/2/44
Aunt Lil	Lilian Smith	Distant Aunt	38	Née Billis (sister to Walter Billis). Husband and baby daughter killed 1940.
Junie	June Smith	Cousin	7	Daughter of Aunt Lil; evacuated with Len to Manchester in 1944
Uncle Walter	Walter Verrier	Uncle	50	Brother to Dad
Aunt Lou	Louisa Verrier	Aunt	48	Sister-in-Law to Dad
Billy Verrier	Mark W Verrier	Cousin	24	Provisional identification; Son to Walter and Louisa
Uncle Ern	Ernest Verrier	Uncle	44	Brother to Dad
Aunt Ethel	Ethel Payne		42	Ernest's partner; they were each married to someone else.
Ivy	Ivy Payne		17	Ethel's daughter
John	Victor John Payne	Cousin	1	Child of Ethel and Ernest, provisionally.
Uncle Ernie	Ernest Williams	Great Uncle	71	Uncle to Mum; brother to Grand Dad
Aunt Beat	Beatrice Dyer	Great Aunt	56	
John	John Williams	Cousin	27	Son of Aunt Beat and Uncle Ernie
Arthur	Arthur Williams	Cousin	22	Son of Aunt Beat and Uncle Ernie
Sid Williams	Sidney Williams	Cousin	31	Son of Aunt Beat and Uncle Ernie
Bridie	Bridget Williams		32	Wife of Sidney Williams, born in Ireland
Peter	Peter Williams	Cousin	2	Son of Sid and Bridie Williams
Uncle Bill	Bill Williams	Uncle		Brother to Mum

Uncle Ray	Raymond Williams	Uncle	38	Brother to Mum
Aunt Hilda	Hilda Williams	Aunt	40	Uncle Ray's wife
Jean	Jean Williams	Cousin	8	Daughter of Uncle Ray and Aunt Hilda
Ray	Raymond Williams	Cousin	9	
Uncle Bob	Robert Williams	Uncle	36	Brother to Mum
Aunt Nell	Elizabeth Williams	Aunt	38	Uncle Bob's wife
Nellie	Elsie Williams	Cousin	11	
Bobbie	Robert Williams	Cousin	13	
Daisy	Daisy Williams	Cousin	8	
Lenny	Leonard Williams	Cousin	5	
Aunt Mary	Mary Dyer	Great Aunt	52	Wife of Raymond Dyer (uncle to Mum) who died in 1944.
Cousin Ray	Raymond Dyer	Cousin		Killed in Italy, 1945
Mr Thomas	Harry Thomas			Friend and neighbour, WW1 submariner, fr
Mrs Thomas				
Bill Thomas				
Don Thomas				
Dot				
Gladys	Gladys Sexton	Cousin	26	Provisionally; daughter of Mum's Aunt Maud.
Beattie				
Bertie Verrier				Not Yet Identified
Aunt Dais				Not Yet Identified; appears to have had a baby c.1943.
Uncle Sid				

Fred				“Aunt Dais, Fred and the baby” – not yet identified
Tony				“Aunt Dais, Fred and Tony” so Tony is the baby, 1943?
George	George Williams?			Or could be George Dyer
Bob	Bob Fox			
Len H	Len Harvey			
Len	Len Roles			

Appendix B: Song Lyrics

Original Songs

Narrative Ballad

[Melody: 'Arthur McBride' (Traditional)]

Verse 1

Come all you good people attend to me well
 It's of a young soldier, his story I'll tell
 How serving his country, misfortune befell
 And brought his proud family great sadness
 Through France and Belgium and through Germany
 From Normandy's fields to the cold Baltic Sea
 And afterwards Palestine brought him to grief
 And the rest of his life spent in madness

Verse 2

In June 'forty-four our young soldiers did fly
 As the sun it did set on a pale English sky
 To battle they went in a box made of ply
 To land in the Normandy moonlight
 The gliders set down by the cold river Orne
 The soldiers dug in round the Chateau St Come
 For two months they stood, did the brave 6th Airborne
 Midst the mud and the blood and the cordite

Verse 3.1 [omitted from both performances]

As Christmas did come and the snow it did fall
 Once more our young soldier did answer the call
 To Belgium they hurried and there did forestall
 The last of the German advances
 From Dover to Calais, then on to Namur
 And then to Dinant and the Battle of Bure
 But the worst of the hardship they had to endure
 Was the weather and poor circumstances

Verse 3.2 [second performance only]

So after our soldiers' baptism of fire
 Those months in the trenches, behind the barbed wire
 And Belgium's cold forests, they all did aspire
 To rest and find peace in old England
 But barely a month from their joyful return

Instead of the peace they'd so painfully earned
 They found themselves faced with much greater concerns
 A landing by day in the Rhineland

Verse 4

In March '45, our young soldier once more
 Embarked in a Horsa and flew off to war
 The day went so badly that all of them swore
 They'd never more travel by glider
 Flying to Germany, crossing the Rhine
 Coming in hard by the railway line
 Many's the glider a funeral pyre
 For the many men dying inside her

Verse 5 [omitted from second performance]

And after the war our young soldier he thought
 He'd done his fair share in the battles he'd fought
 But the army had plans of a different sort
 And to Palestine sent the 6th Airborne
 Arriving by chance in a disputed state
 From great liberators to figures of hate
 With no end in sight and no homecoming date
 Our young soldier grew bitter and careworn

Verse 6

And when after all our young soldier returned
 To his home in north London his family found
 His mind was unbalanced and no longer sound
 And all was distress and confusion
 At Long Grove the doctors confirmed their worst fears
 In spite of their efforts, in spite of their tears,
 He never recovered in fifty long years
 A life wasted in institutions.

Verse 7

Come all you good people, attend to me well
 Of soldiers and sailors and aircrew I'll tell
 They fight for their countries, enduring the hell
 Of the blood and the death and the madness
 From the first dawn of time and throughout history
 On every land and the oceans between
 Our young men and women have sacrificed been
 And their loved ones are left in great sadness.

Sidney's Garden

Verse 1

Grandad at the table, Grandma making tea
Sidney in his garden, that's where he likes to be
All the world is in its place or so it seems to be
But Sidney's thoughts are not in Sidney's garden.

Verse 2

Sidney's in the garden, cigarette in hand,
Digging holes for bedding plants to make the garden grand.
But in his mind he's digging in some far off foreign land,
Sidney's digging trenches in the garden.

Verse 3

Sidney's walking in the park, far from all the guns
Admiring all the flowers, soaking up the sun
He knows there'll be mud and blood before the day is done
But just for now he's happy in the gardens

Verse 4

Sidney's putting pellets down, to keep the slugs at bay
To save the lives of little flowers or so he likes to say
But in his mind its aniseed to draw the dogs away
Sidney's on the front line in the garden

Verse 5

Grandad at the table, Grandma making tea,
Sidney staring into space or so he seems to be,
In a world all of his own, who knows what he sees...
Let's hope he's seeing flowers in the garden.

Claybury/Palestine*Verse 1*

Behind the screen of forest green, stands Claybury
Sterile, clean, labyrinthine, a sanctuary
Tranquility, stability
Fragility... futility
And all of life's broad tapestry
Behind the screen

Verse 2

In Palestine, the battle lines are never clear
We stand between the Levantines; we live in fear
And all the folk we go among,
They speak in unfamiliar tongues.
We never know what is to come,
In Palestine.

Quiet Nights

Verse 1 [Letter 32: 6th June 1944]

Dear Mum and Dad, well at last I can write
 We've been very busy preparing to fight
 It's no Billy Beano; this time it's for real
 Tell Dad, very soon I will know how it feels
 We are off to the Second Front, into the field:
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.

Verse 2 [Letter 1: 3rd June 1942]

Dear Mum and Dad, well I just had to write
 Today we went up for our very first flight
 We've been on range trying all different guns
 The weather is glorious, plenty of sun
 But now I must close, for the day's nearly done
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.

Verse 3 [Letter 3: 18th August 1942]

Dear Mum and Dad, how I wish you were here
 Its lovely in Devon at this time of year
 We swim every morning, and train by the sea
 Climbing and shooting and lots of P.T.
 And tonight, with two girls, at the ballet I'll be!
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights

Verse 4 [Letter 6: 6th November 1942]

Dear Mum and Dad, what a pleasant surprise
 The surgeon says I must go under the knife
 I've been out all night, standing guard in the rain
 I didn't get wet, but I'm tired all the same
 So I'm off for a tea and to keep out the way
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights

Verse 5 [Letter 11: 12th May 1943]

Dear Mum and Dad, here I am, back in 'dock',
 I'm feeling fed up and I've had to take stock
 Saw the doctor this morning, he says it will heal
 If not I'll be in for a different ordeal
 No use to the army and out on me ear
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights

Verse 6 [Letter 21: undated/18th March 1944?]

Dear Mum and Dad, I can't get home today

My mate and I got in a bit of a scrape
 We headed to town on a bit of a spree
 We were late back to camp and got three days C.B.
 Three hours cutting cabbages isn't for me!
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights

Verse 7 [Letter 23: 1st April 1944; Letter 24: 2nd April 1944]

Dear Mum and Dad, well as you can see
 Everything's changed – now we're in Lincolnshire!
 Its not very bad, but its not very good
 We sleep on the floor of a hut made of wood
 Now I'm off to the WVS for some food
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.

Verse 8 [Letter 27: 16th May 1944; Letter 30: 28th May 1944]

Dear Mum and Dad, I enjoyed my few hours
 Being home with this big happy family of ours
 It isn't so bad getting back to the camp
 Two hours on the train then a bit of a tramp
 Through dark country lanes where there are no streetlamps
 Your 'Old' Loving Son, Steak & Kid.

Verse 9 [Letter 33: 10th June 1944]

Dear Mum and Dad I must keep this one short,
 This place we are in - its not a health resort
 The mail isn't good, I don't want you to fret
 But I really could do with some more cigarettes
 And could you please send me some Hackney gazettes
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights

Verse 10 [Letter 36: 15th June 1944]

Dear Mum and Dad, I am doing my best
 To write a few lines when we get a short rest
 My chum has been wounded, quite badly I fear
 But I want to pass over what's happening hear
 I'll be pleased to get home to a nice glass of beer
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights

Verse 11 [Letter 81: 3rd December 1944; Letter 84: 30th December 1944]

Dear Mum and Dad, this was not meant to be
 I should have been home, but I'm back overseas
 I wanted to visit my wounded friend Bert

See young Richard christened and go watch the Spurs
 Instead we are having a cheap foreign tour
 Cheerio, best of luck, Quiet Nights

Verse 12 (extended) [Letter 106: 23rd March 1945]

Dear Mum and Dad – what a terrible war
 I've just heard the news about Charlie next door
 Its upset me a lot – I hope you are all safe
 By the time you get this we'll be off, but have faith
 And farewell to the Big happy family
 Aunt Ede, Aunt Lil and Junie and all
 Hopefully soon I'll be back at the door
 All my love, your loving son Sid

Verse 13 [Letter 107: 26th March 1945]

Dear Mum and Dad, you'll be pleased I'm ok
 Despite all the horrors of last Saturday
 Much worse than D-Day – we knew it would be
 But now I can say that I've seen Germany
 We treat our hosts fairly, but do as we please
 Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.

Verse 14 [Letter 127: 11th August 1945]

Dear Mum and Dad, I'm so happy today
 Your parcel arrived and I've eaten the cake
 There's this marvellous news of the coming of peace
 I'm already feeling my tenseness decrease
 It'll be some time yet 'til I get my release
 Bye for now, your loving son, Sid.

Verse 15 [Letter 128: 1st October 1945]

Dear Mum and Dad, we are now on the ship
 We're all looking forward to making the trip
 We're sailing tomorrow, from dear old England
 The Duchess of Bedford – she seems very grand
 So now I am off for some time in the sand
 Cheerio, your loving son, Sid.

Verse 16 [Letter 132: 27th December 1945]

Dear Mum and Dad, had a parcel today
 Tinned salmon and biscuits and whisky and cake
 Everything intact, the cake's really fine
 But I can buy whisky here, ten bob a pint

Your need is probably greater than mine
 Your old loving son, Steak and Kid

Verse 17 [Letter 133: 1st January 1946; 134: 7th January 1946]

Dear Mum and Dad, had four letters today
 But the war has been finished a year come this May
 I've done my fair share – this is no longer funny
 Being stuck in this land of so-called milk and honey
 But all I can do is keep saving my money
 Good Health, your loving son Sid

Verse 18 [Letter 150: 23rd July 1946]

Dear Mum and Dad I am sure you've heard tell
 Of the incident at the King David Hotel
 Ninety-one dead and dozens more harmed
 One day after we were told not to bear arms
 And now we're enduring the old city's charms
 Cheerio, your loving son Sid

Verse 19: [Letter 153: 30th August 1946]

Dear Mum and Dad, you'll be so pleased to know
 In three or four weeks I should be heading home
 I've already sent you some books in a tin
 With a few things of mine, and some letters from Jean
 Two pounds of tea and some spare balls of string
 Cheerio, your loving son, Sid.

Laughing Willie

Verse 1

Laughing Willie, why do you never smile
 Must you always be so bloody stern?
 Is it all the things you saw when you were fighting in the war?
 Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?

Verse 2

Was it five years marching mile on bloody mile?
 Five long years and never once at home?
 Was it Ypres or Salonika, the winter snow in Georgia?
 Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?

Verse 3

Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?
 Did two world wars extinguish all your joy?
 Or was it that you knew there was nothing you could do?
 Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?

Verse 4

Was it trudging down to Epsom on the train
 To see the living son you knew you'd lost?
 Every weekend, without fail, in sun or rain or gale;
 Laughing Willie, why do you never smile?

Verse 5

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do,
 Do you really think poor Sid will be ok?
 When you're packing up the bag with the chocolate and the fags,
 Daisy, Daisy, do you believe its true?

Verse 6

Every Thursday when you set out on the train
 Are you hoping this will be the day?
 When suddenly it seems like all these years were just a dream
 Daisy, Daisy, how do you bear the pain?

Verse 7

Uncle Sidney, how I wish that I'd done more
 To show you had my love and my respect
 Did you think I didn't care, because I wasn't there?
 Uncle Sidney, I wish that I'd done more

Verse 8

I could have sent you parcels now and then

I could have come to visit Living Space

If I'd known then what I know now, maybe I'd have known just how...

Uncle Sidney, I should have been your friend

Race to the Sea

[Melody: 'The Galway Races' (Traditional)]

Refrain 1

We're the 2nd Ox and Bucks and we're off to see the sea!

Verse 1

In August Nineteen-Forty-Two, to seek for recreation
 The regiment left Bulford bound for Ilfracombe in Devon
 With half the men in army trucks,
 The others on the railway
 And when we got to Barnstaple
 We found ourselves competing
 We're the 2nd Ox & Bucks and we're racing to the sea!

Refrain 2

We're the Second Ox and Bucks and we're racing to the Seine!

Verse 2

So we moved out through Normandy and started on our journey
 On the seventeenth of August to seek the German Army
 From St Richer to Heuland,
 Le Pt Castel to Tourgeville
 We crossed the River Touques
 And we marched right on to Foulbec
 We're the 2nd Ox & Bucks and we're racing to the Seine!

Refrain 3

We're the 2nd Ox & Bucks and we're racing to the sea!

Verse 3

We hit the ground in Hamminkeln
 And slogged our way to Rhade
 From Greven to Ladbergen
 And through Stockhausen to Frille
 We stopped a while in Heitlingen . . .
 And when we reached the Elbe
 We were under starters orders
 We're the 2nd Ox & Bucks and we're racing to the sea!

Dig In

Verse 1

We landed on the sixth of June
 Just eastward of the River Orne,
 And when we got to Escoville,
 The Colonel cried, "Dig in!"

Chorus

So we dug
 Yes we dug
 And we dug
 Yes we dug
 And we dug
 And dug and dug and dug...
 Digging for Victory!

Verse 2

The Germans weren't defeated yet
 We fell back to Herouvillette,
 We picked a shady spot to rest...
 The Major said, "Dig in!"

Chorus

Verse 3

On June the thirteenth we moved on
 Up to the Chateau of St Come
 And just beside the crossroads there,
 The Captain said, "Dig in!"

Chorus

Roll On*Chorus*

Roll on a bloody long time
 Roll on a bloody long time
 For too bloody long we've sung this bloody song
 Roll on a bloody long time

Verse 1

Roll on a bloody long time
 Roll on a bloody long time
 The Germans advance so now we're back in France
 Roll on a bloody long time

*Chorus**Verse 2*

Roll on a bloody long time
 And roll on a sunnier clime
 I just want to go where there's no bloody snow
 Roll on a bloody long time

*Chorus**Verse 3*

Roll on a bloody long time
 Roll on some turkey and wine
 And a Christmas lunch plan which is not a cheese sandwich
 Roll on a bloody long time

*Chorus**Verse 4*

Roll on a bloody long time
 I just want to write a few lines
 But that's just supposing the ink wasn't frozen
 Roll on a bloody long time

*Chorus**Verse 5*

Roll on a bloody long time
 We're fed up with living in grime
 I'll take a nice camp bed instead of this cowshed
 Roll on a bloody long time

Chorus

Verse 6

Roll on a bloody long time
And get us home out of the line
Just now its unwelcome to see France and Belgium
Roll on a bloody long time

*Chorus**Verse 7*

Roll on a bloody long time
Today we discovered war crime
I thought I was tough, but now I've seen enough
Roll on a bloody long time

*Chorus**Verse 8*

Roll on a bloody long time
The match is approaching full-time
What I wouldn't give up to watch Spurs win the cup,
Roll on a bloody long time

Chorus

Whatever Happened

Verse 1

Home from the Army, driving Mum barmy
 Another big nuisance to feed.
 Like a fly on a kettle, I can't seem to settle,
 I'm restless and zestless – I miss the routine...
 And whatever happened? Whatever happened?
 Whatever happened to Jean?

Refrain

Whatever happened? Whatever happened?
 Whatever happened to Jean?

Verse 2

Now I need to find work, but I'm going berserk,
 For nothing is quite as it seems.
 I wake in the night and I'm back in the fight,
 Silent or violent I'm locked in my dreams...
 And whatever happened? Whatever happened?
 Whatever happened to Jean?

(Refrain)

Verse 3

Now I can't carry on as if nothing is wrong
 I can't face the world as I am.
 Find me somewhere to stay, and then lock me away,
 Leave me to rot, 'cause I don't give a damn
 And whatever happened? Whatever happened?
 Whatever happened to Jean?

(Refrain)

Adaptation Songs

Wish Me Luck As You Wave Me Goodbye

Original Lyrics

(Phil Park/Harry Parr-Davies)

Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye
 Cheerio, here I go, on my way
 Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye
 Not a tear, but a cheer, make it gay
 Give me a smile I can keep all the while
 In my heart while I'm away
 Till we meet once again, you and I
 Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye

Adapted Lyrics

Verse 1

Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye,
 Cheerio, here I go, on my way.
 As our glider descends from the sky,
 Link your arms; raise your legs; let us pray.
 All I can hear is the silence of fear,
 'Til we crash into the fray.
 All I know is I'll live... or I'll die:
 Wish me luck, as you wave me... goodbye.

Verse 2

Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye
 Here we go, once again, on our way.
 Invading once more from on high
 Will we make it this time, who can say?
 This time they know where we're planning
 to go
 And we're landing there by day...
 They can blast us right out of the sky
 Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye

Verse 3

Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye
 Cheerio, as I go . . . who knows where
 Who knows what they're doing, or why?
 Who knows whether they really care?
 Needle or pin, EST, Insulin
 Will it cure my deep despair?
 Here I go, sane or mad, live or die...
 Wish me luck, as you wave me . . .
 goodbye.

With My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock

Original Lyrics

Harry Gifford/Fred E. Cliffe

Introduction:

Every year when summer comes round, off
to the sea I go.
I don't care if I do spend a pound, I'm rather
rash I know.
See me dressed like all the sports,
In my blazer and a pair of shorts.

Verse 1:

With my little stick of Blackpool Rock,
Along the promenade I stroll.
It may be sticky but I never complain,
It's nice to have a nibble at it now and again
Every day wherever I stray the kids all
round me flock.
One afternoon the band conductor up on his
stand
Somehow lost his baton - it flew out of his
hand
So I jumped in his place and then conducted
the band
With my little stick of Blackpool Rock

Verse 2:

With my little stick of Blackpool Rock,
Along the promenade I stroll,
In my pocket it got stuck I could tell
'Cos when I pulled it out I pulled my shirt
off as well
Every day wherever I stray the kids all
round me flock.
A girl while bathing clung to me, my wits
had to use
She cried, "I'm drowning, and to save me,
you won't refuse"
I said, "Well if you're drowning then I don't
want to lose
My little stick of Blackpool Rock."

Airborne Folding Bike

Introduction:

Every time an invasion comes round, off to
the front I go,
When my glider lands on the ground, I can be
rather slow
So to keep me moving along
Taking all the sights in and singing a song...

Verse 1:

With my little airborne folding bike
Across the battlefield I go
It may be flimsy but I never complain,
It's nice to rest your feet and let the wheels
take the strain
Every day wherever we stray the bullets
round us flock.
The sergeant major shouted, he'd a voice like
a bear,
"Go and tell the Colonel – there's a tank over
there!"
So I jumped in the saddle and went off like a
hare
On my little airborne folding bike

Verse 2:

With my little airborne folding bike,
Across the battlefield I go
New orders today and we're off on a spree
We're off to meet the Russians – it's a race
to the sea!
Every day wherever we stray the bullets
round us flock.
A Russian gave me vodka, "Za Zdarovye!"
he cried,
I knocked it back like water and went blind
in both eyes
And when I got my sight back he was off for
a ride
On my little airborne folding bike

Appendix C: Example Musical Scores

Sid's Slow March

Musical score for Sid's Slow March, measures 1-12. The score is written for four staves (two treble clefs and two bass clefs) in 3/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music features a steady, slow march tempo with a mix of eighth and quarter notes.

Sid's Slow March

Mick Verrier, 2/22

Musical score for Sid's Slow March, measures 13-24. The score continues from the previous system, maintaining the same instrumentation and key signature. It includes a repeat sign at the beginning of measure 13. The music concludes with a final cadence in measure 24.

Quiet Nights

The first system of the musical score consists of two systems of three staves each. The first system (left) features a vocal line in the top staff and piano accompaniment in the middle and bottom staves. The second system (right) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The music is in 3/4 time and G major.

Quiet Nights
Gina Version

MICK VERBUR

The second system of the musical score consists of four systems of three staves each. The first system (left) features a vocal line in the top staff and piano accompaniment in the middle and bottom staves. The second system (right) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The music is in 3/4 time and G major.

Claybury/Palestine

Claybury/Palestine

Mick Verrier

Musical score for Claybury/Palestine, composed by Mick Verrier. The score is written in 2/4 time and consists of two systems of three staves each. The first system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#), a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp, and a bass clef staff with a key signature of one sharp. The second system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp, a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp, and a bass clef staff with a key signature of one sharp. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests and a final fermata on the first staff of the second system.

Laughing Willie

Laughing Willie

Mick Verrier

Musical score for Laughing Willie, composed by Mick Verrier. The score is written in 2/4 time and consists of two systems of three staves each. The first system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#), a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp, and a bass clef staff with a key signature of one sharp. The second system includes a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp, a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp, and a bass clef staff with a key signature of one sharp. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some rests and a final fermata on the first staff of the second system.

Appendix D: Questionnaires

Family Questionnaire



Family Questionnaire

Project Title: Sid: The Life and Letters of Private Sidney Robert Verrier (1923-1997)

Please consider the following questions and answer them in writing or by recording your responses; use whichever manner you find most convenient. You may answer the questions on your own or in the form of a discussion with another practitioner if that proves to be more inspirational.

Please consider and give your responses to questions 1-8 (Section A) before continuing to the remaining questions (Section B).

SECTION A:

1. What is your earliest memory of Sid?
2. Referring to your answer to question 1, do you consider this to be a happy memory?
3. What is your clearest or strongest memory of Sid?
4. Referring to your answer to question 3, do you consider this to be a happy memory?
5. How would you describe Sid, in terms of:
 - a. Appearance?
 - b. Demeanour?
 - c. Behaviour?
6. Apart from your answers to questions 1-4, are there any specific incidents you remember involving Sid?
7. What is your last memory of Sid?
8. Is there anything else you would like to say about Sid, based on your personal recollections?

Family Questionnaire (version 1)
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SECTION B:

9. Do you remember any family stories concerning Sid's childhood and/or youth? If so, please say what you remember.
10. Do you remember any family stories concerning Sid's war service? If so, please say what you remember.
11. Do you remember any family stories concerning Sid's service in Palestine? If so, please say what you remember.
12. Do you remember any family stories concerning Sid's mental illness? If so, please say what you remember.
13. Can you describe what impact/difference Sid's condition and circumstances made upon the lives of you and/or your close family in the period 1947-1997?
14. When you think about Sid now, how do you feel?
15. Do you talk about Sid to friends or family who did not know him? If so, what do you tell them?
16. Is there anything else you would like to say, based on your recollections of what you heard from other family members?

Family Questionnaire (version 1)
ERAMS reference: ETH2021-0234

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Practitioner Questionnaire

Project title: **Sid: The Life and Letters of Private Sidney Robert Verrier (1923-1997)**

Please consider the following questions and answer them in writing or by recording your responses; use whichever manner you find most convenient. You may answer the questions on your own or in the form of a discussion with another practitioner if that proves to be more inspirational.

Please consider and give your responses to questions 1-8 (Section A) before continuing to the remaining questions (Section B).

SECTION A:

1. To what extent do you talk to your audience during live performances?
2. What sort of things do you say to your audience during live performances?
3. Do you usually prepare a script for the spoken elements of your live performances?
4. Have you ever prepared a script for the spoken elements of your live performances?
5. Do you ever incorporate readings of poetry, prose letters or any other written material into the spoken elements of your live performances?
6. Do you consider that you have been influenced by other performers in your use of spoken word during live performances? If so, whom?
7. If you have given more than one name in your answer to question 6, who do you consider to have been the greatest influence on you in your use of spoken word during performances?
3. Would you like to make any other comment on the use of spoken word in live musical performances?

Practitioner Questionnaire

SECTION B:

9. Are you familiar with the Radio Ballads produced by Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger between 1957 and 1964? If so, do you consider these programmes to have been influential upon your own practice in any way, and can you describe how this has been the case?

10. Are you familiar with the Radio Ballads produced by John Leppard and John Tams between 2006 and 2018? If so, do you consider these programmes to have been influential upon your own practice in any way, and can you describe how this has been the case?

11. Which, if any, of the following radio programmes have you heard?

1. The Ballad of John Axton
2. Song of a Road
3. Singing the Fishing
4. The Big Heave
5. The Body Blow
6. On the Edge
7. The Fight Game
8. The Travelling People
9. The Jewellery
10. City from the Gut
11. The Song of Steel
12. The Enemy That Lives Within
13. The Horn of the Hunter
14. Swings and Roundabouts
15. Thirty Years of Conflict
16. The Ballad of the Big Ships
17. The Ballad of the Miners' Strike
18. The Ballads of the Games: Chymajia
19. The Ballads of the Games: Berlin
20. The Ballads of the Games: Munich
21. The Ballads of the Games: Conterocro
22. The Ballads of the Games: Svingja Odlc
23. The Ballads of the Games: The Marathon
24. The Ballad of the Great War: 1911
25. The Ballad of the Great War: 1915
26. The Ballad of the Great War: 1918
27. The Ballad of the Great War: 1917
28. The Ballad of the Great War: 1913
29. The Ballad of the Sobolev Rescue

12. Is there anything else you would like to add about the Radio Ballads, or about your own performance practice?

Appendix E: Audience Feedback

The following table sets out the results across the eighteen responses to question 1:

Heading:	Statement:	Lowest Value:	Highest Value:	Average Value:
Concept	It was an interesting idea	4	5	4.8
Presentation	It was well presented	2	5	3.9
Distinctiveness	It was different	3	5	4.7
Captivation	It held my attention	3	5	4.4
Challenge	It was thought-provoking	3	5	4.6
Relevance	It had relevance to the world in which we live	0	5	4.5
Enthusiasm	I would come to something like this again	3	5	4.6

Question 2 asked audience members whether they found any elements of the story especially interesting or engaging. Responses varied widely, including the following:

“Loved the letters and imagery along with story”

“The storytelling using multimedia”

“The letters in the background”

“The written letters – quite personal”

“The letters. Sid’s history. The upsetting tales of the mental hospitals.”

“The shocking wartime experiences of the glider troops (airborne).”

“The section of ‘Crossing the Rhine’, a tense section.”

“The garden flashback was beautiful”

Question 3 asked, “What emotions are you feeling as you leave the performance; again, a range of responses was elicited:

“Melancholy”

“Sadness”

“Moved, reflective”

“Thoughtful”

“Very emotional”

“Empathy, joy, melancholy.”

“Somber, smile on face tho. Heartfelt show.”

“Sadness and loss but felt the passion and endearment behind project”

“Sadness but also glad to have heard his story”

“Great sadness but some joy from the final song”

“Admiration – I think the project is very wholesome, done with love and passion.”

“Elated as you have addressed some important issues that are rarely discussed.”

“Appreciation of stories of own family and impact on them of both WW1 and WW2”

Question 4 invited audience members to raise questions, or to make comments. One response to this question was:

“As a German with a great-grandfather that returned from WWII traumatised and subsequently died under mysterious consequences in a mental institution I appreciated the empathetic portrayal of PTSD and would be interested in a comparison of how the UK and Germany treated returning soldiers.”

Other responses included one indication that the intentions of the piece might have been clearer: “Curious as to the key themes of the piece?” In general, however, there were few questions raised: question 4 was left unanswered by fourteen of the eighteen respondents.

Question 5 was intended to obtain simple numerical evaluation of audience satisfaction. The question asks audience members to rate the performance on a 1-5 basis, set against their own expectations, where 1 is ‘Below Expectations’ and 5 is ‘Above Expectations’. There were no responses below 3 (‘Met Expectations’). Two audience members gave 5, with the remaining being divided between 4 (7) and 3 (9), giving an average of 3.5. Expectation, however, is subjective: two audience members clarified this, one giving a 3 with the comment, “But my expectation was very high and met.”

Question 6 asked audience members, “How could your experience have been improved?” Once again, a range of responses was received, with several focussing upon technical aspects which did not quite work and, in particular, timing issues between the live performers and the recordings. Two respondents wanted more emphasis on certain aspects of the story, whilst two others suggested that a libretto should be provided to the audience. In one case it was suggested that this should give the lyrics of the songs; the other suggested printed transcriptions of the letters, as they ‘...found it hard to read them and listen at the same time.’ One response to

question 6 says, simply, “It was Brilliant”; another, more considered response offers mostly constructive feedback on how to improve the performance.

Independently of the questionnaires, audience members gave feedback in other ways. A great deal of verbal feedback was given to members of the cast following both performances and was generally very positive. The Lakeside Theatre’s technician emailed the day after the performance with some information about the video recording and signed off with “Cheerio, best of luck, quiet nights.”