
FEATURE ARTICLE



In the last issue of our newsletter I told the story of [John] Charles Harvey, who lost his life during the retreat from Dunkirk. I was not to know then that, as a result, his nephew would later provide me with a detailed account of his own father's war record.



In that previous article mention was made of Frederick, the youngest son of Lillian and John Harvey, but it was not known at the time of writing that he was also involved in that same rescue operation from Dunkirk, the difference being that he lived to tell the tale, and that tale follows.

*This article is based largely on information from Frederick's own stories of his wartime experiences passed down to his family

Frederick Harvey 1919- 1995



Frederick was the seventh and youngest child of John and Lillian Harvey, and the only one to be born in East Ilsley in 1919. He and his two brothers Walter and John Charles went to school in the village. At one time, when young, his brother Charlie apparently rescued him from drowning in the village pond.

School photograph, c1924 showing Freddie, front row, extreme left.

In this, and the detail above, what appears to be Freddie shaking his fist at the camera, is in fact the knee of the girl behind him.



The family lived in a cottage in Broad Street, but after his two elder brothers left school he moved around with his mother, to various places in the local the area. After leaving school, Frederick looked for various jobs, and eventually learned to drive. In 1938 he met Ann Wilson (known to all as Nancy) who had come down from her home in Rainton, County Durham for work. They married a year later in 1939.

On the 2nd January 1940 Frederick enlisted in the army, and as he was able to drive was assigned to the Royal Army Service Corps. In what was a bitter cold winter he did his basic training in Herne Bay. The accompanying photograph shows him wearing a much-needed heavy overcoat.



From a postcard dated February 1940 sent from Herne Bay

He later moved to Gloucester, where he joined the 5th Ambulance Car Company. By March he was driving to Dover and from there on to Dunkirk in France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. He was just 20 years old. He stayed there until the final part of the evacuation, as the German Army steadily advanced.

He left Dunkirk around the 1st June with the 5th Ambulance, driving down the coast evacuating wounded soldiers and airmen from hospitals. About 20 days after leaving Dunkirk he left the ambulance in a field and they were all taken onto a boat home, making their escape to England, arriving in Plymouth on 23rd of June.

He was given leave and a rail pass to Durham where his wife was expecting their first child, and where she had gone home for the birth. Frederick arrived in Durham on the 26th the day before his son was born. The baby was named John Charles Harvey after Frederick's brother who had been killed during the retreat from Belgium on the 16th May while serving with the 1st Battalion Royal Berks.

At the end of his leave, Frederick went to Heckmondwike in Yorkshire for a while before travelling up to Scotland where he embarked for Egypt. The journey took six weeks because the ship had to avoid the Mediterranean and travel by way of the Cape, calling at Freetown and Cape Town before making its way up the west coast of Africa and on through the Red Sea to Suez and on to Cairo where they picked up water lorries for the Desert Campaign.



They then proceeded to Sidi Barinni in Lybia where they were attached to the Armour Brigade "The Desert Rats". After several months they journeyed to Jerusalem, and on from there by rail to Aleppo in Syria. After calling at Damascus they returned to Alexandria. They were picked up from there and sent by ship to Tubruk on the 23rd of August 1941, where they stayed until December of that year. A lack of action meant that there was never much to do, and so to keep the men busy the officers instructed the men to build dummy tanks from bits of scrap cloth and wood from packing cases. This took some time, but after the job was completed a single German bomber came and destroyed the dummy tanks.....but with wooden bombs.



Frederick, sitting, right. Tubruk 14th September 1941



His unit managed to be taken out just before Tubruk fell and returned back to Alexandria by way of Mursa Matrun.

Tubruk January 1942 just prior to leaving for India.

The day after his 23rd birthday, 21st February, 1942, Frederick left Alexandria for Port Suez. He arrived the following day but had to wait two further days before they got on a boat. Finally on 27th they sailed for Bombay, India, arriving on the 8th of March.

From Bombay they moved on to Calcutta, and were assigned to Louis Mountbatten and General Wingate's long range penetration force into Burma. Here, as part of the Air Supply Unit, their job was driving supplies to the airfield, where he would assist in the loading and unloading the transport and the aeroplane which was to drop food and supplies to the 'Chindit' forces on the ground behind Japanese lines. It is not known whether he actually had any opportunity to fly with the supplies, but he was involved in both Imphal and Kohima.

On 9th June 1942 Frederick reported in his diary that he had been on manoeuvres and on the 10th, that he had been bitten by a snake. As a result he spent a couple of days in hospital. On 15th the monsoons started. On 27th June he recorded his son John's 2nd birthday. He was based in Ranchi and records that although he was on guard duty on Christmas day it had been a 'fairly good Xmas'.



He left Ranchi in 1944 and went to Bangalore in the south of India. He stayed there quite a while before eventually getting a train which after two weeks travelling got back to Bombay. He left Bombay early 1945 came home via the Suez Canal through the Mediterranean to Gibraltar, arriving back home in Portsmouth in February 1945.



Frederick in Chindit uniform

The next mission in which Frederick was involved was disarming German guns and radios and equipment in Oslo, and taking charge of them as prisoners of war. He was later to do similar duties in the Channel Islands. He was finally demobbed in late 1946 and allowed to return home.

Frederick then moved to Pangbourne where he raised a family of five children. He started his own building company and lived there for the remainder of his life.

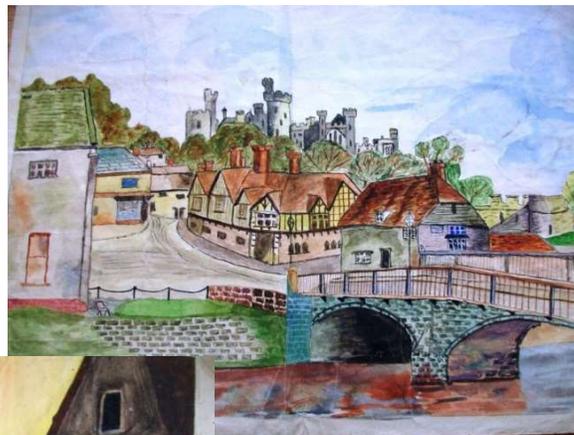
Frederick Harvey the artist



It would seem that Frederick spent much of his spare time drawing and painting. He was obviously a keen amateur artist and several of his paintings and cartoons have survived. There is a cartoon drawn in pages from a 1934 diary but which is likely to depict the Italian dictator, British Prime Minister on the

date from much later. It Mussolini on one page and the facing page, and probably dates from around 1940, as Neville Chamberlain did not become PM until 1937. The images are based on cartoons, (such as the one above right), of both leaders, which were around at the outbreak of the war.

An earlier cartoon signed and dated 1938. The caption reads "Now let's see if she works".



These two paintings done in watercolour depict scenes of Arundel and Chichester. The Arundel picture (above) is taken from a postcard of the time and is of Arundel Bridge with the castle in the background.

Next, is a very competent view of Chichester showing the cathedral in the background. It is unfinished. There is an area of unpainted white paper in the foreground which shows traces of preliminary drawing. Again, this could well be a copy of a postcard or calendar illustration but the actual source is unknown.