

NO ORDINARY TUESDAY

by

Richard Alexander

SAMPLE pages (Book II, p66-73)

Please note:

1. The embedded QR codes have been blurred for this sample PDF.
2. On most devices this PDF will open in single-page view. However, the layout for many parts of the book has been written so that specific pages face each other, and are read together. Please take this into consideration when reading.
3. Formatting and margins are designed for A4 hardcover, so will appear misaligned or exaggerated.

Parley Too-Tree (23)

(useful bullshit : oct-nov '43)

David made his dissatisfaction unambiguously clear during conversations with his new CO, who was *"actually very fair, and agreed with me, telling me he would see what he could do."* But that wasn't enough to appease David, who took his own course of action.

His 'Record of Service' reveals dates of movement between units and suchlike, which has helped put his memories in the proper order. But there's something else on it, covering a few days in the middle of October 1943, not long after he arrived at the plant squadron. Being *"really pissed off"* with things in North Devon and missing his new wife, he waited until *"the office was empty"* to slip in a personal phone call. Private telephones were still quite the rarity, but the neighbours next door to Nancy's parent's house had one installed, and David had gotten their number. But by the time his message reached Nan, it had developed a vagueness akin to *"meet me under the clock in the station in London, at the weekend."* Unable to decipher the cryptic message, Nancy called back, which presented an awkward test for David. The office was now fully staffed, and she wanted him to precisely spell out what he meant, *"which was tricky, as I was talking about bugging off without permission. She wondered what was wrong with me, and there were some very interested ears in the office throughout that call!"*

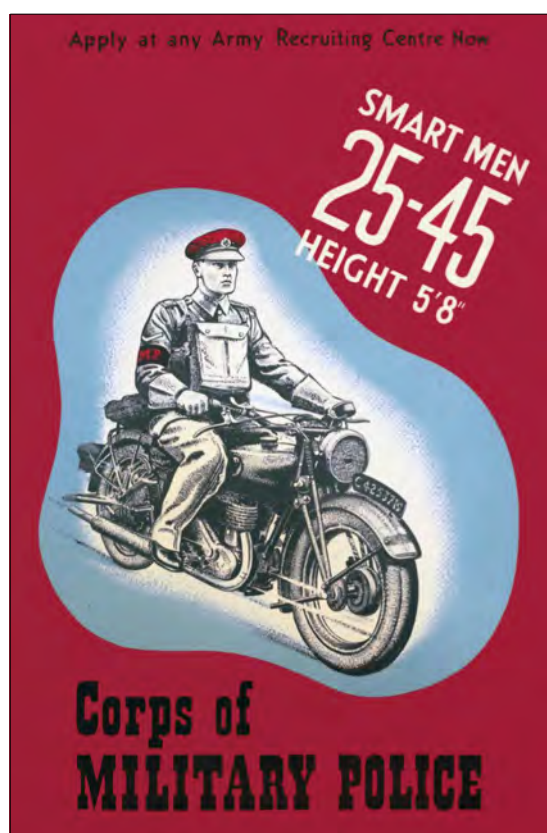
She got the message in the end, so David went AWOL and left for London on Friday, October 15, meeting his wife under the clock at Paddington Station. By Monday, he was doing the sensible thing and returning to his RAF station near Bristol. On the train back, though, things got a little bit difficult when the RAF warrant officer chose to sit in his carriage. Full disclosure: this wasn't the first time David indulged in a bit of unauthorised absenteeism, and he'd developed a distinct methodology when faced with this kind of situation based on advice from that *"cracking Irish lad"* who, like David, volunteered when the beach units were first formed. Specifically, if they saw any military personnel whose remit was to catch men *"wagging off without permission,"* their game plan was not to do what most AWOL men would—quite the opposite. He was no longer in the same unit or even part of the country as his fellow 'wagger', but David had learnt enough *"from the absolute best talker, ever."*



23.1 — Best Form of Defence (70 secs)

It's a confidence trick known as misdirection, and David laughs out loud at his preferred definition, insisting that *"the best thing to do was meet them head-on. Always make a bit of a fuss. Bullshit Baffles Brains!"*

Calling on his 'special training' in this area, David started chatting to the warrant officer on the seat in front of him, telling him all about his time in London with Nancy, and *"he seemed to be enjoying my company; we got on very well."* But presuming the WO would be getting off before the end of the



As this recruitment poster shows, men too old to fight could still be actively involved; they were not popular with most servicemen.

line, David played the part a little too well. Whatever David tried –stretching his legs, loo visits– didn't shake off the officer. Eventually, he managed to sneak off and loitered, hidden from view until the coast was clear once the train arrived at the station. He managed to avoid the military police and get to RAF Chivenor “*without being pulled,*” but as soon as he got to camp, “*they took me next door to the RSM, except it wasn't. Lo and behold, it's the fella I'd been with all the way from bleedin' London! Who then proceeded to call me all the cheeky bastards under the sun!*”

Despite his ulterior motive, David must have made a good impression with his friendly behaviour. The WO seemed “*slightly amused*” and only put David on “*very light punishment detail, for not very long.*” He certainly dodged what could have been severe punishment. The death penalty for Desertion had been recently removed, but his absence could still have seen David incarcerated or penalised further. Thankfully, it ended up on his Record of Service and provided the stimulus to hear another amusing anecdote from his career.

However, he was still stuck in North Devon and had no choice but to stay put; “*I was not exactly delighted with my contribution down there. Driving cement, supplies, or people from here to there was mundane. I had the mind that my skills were better utilised before [enlistment] when I'd been at Nunn's in Manchester. At least there, my experience as a mechanic [could help in] repairing fire and ambulance vehicles. Driving could be done just as well by much older men who couldn't be sent to fight a war. It just didn't make any sense. It was very frustrating, so I kept up with my requests to go back.*”

After about a month or so after his unauthorised weekend break, David's ‘steam’ campaign paid off. By the end of November, he was told he would be considered, once more, for an RAF Beach Unit, but first, he would have a rigorous test on the first of December. Pass that, and the move might go through; failure would likely keep him with the Plant Squadron for the rest of the war. So now, he faced an opportunity to seize the initiative and steer his career back to where he wanted it. After a couple of months as “*a glorified delivery driver,*” the big question was, could Teacher remember what he'd been taught?

Either way, there was a big test coming.

Surname (first) TEACHER DAVID				NUMBER 1664361					
Date 29.12.23.		Nationality British		RELIGION H/3 12/44	CIVIL OCCUPATION MOTOR FITTER		Period Employed		
Place { Town Hastings		Bexhill, SUSSEX		Employer IND. DA 056.21 ua		DIS 124			
AGE 32.2.4.3				CHILDREN NAMES		DATE OF BIRTH			
Maiden Name NANCY DIAMOND (Sister)				Place LANCASHIRE		NEXT OF KIN (To be entered in pencil)			
on and date Marriage or Family Allowance ceased to be issuable.				Name MRS D. TEACHER		Address 14 Danden Court, Buxton, Lancashire			
US ENGAGEMENTS				CURRENT ENGAGEMENT		PERSON TO BE NOTIFIED OF CASUALTIES			
Period (From To)		Rank on Discharge		Date of Enlistment 8.9.42		Name			
Former Service permitted:—		As Service yrs. days		Service Commences 8.9.42		Address			
.. Qual. Service ..				Transferred from ..		Relationship			
For G.C. Badge ..				Extended for ..		Date			
For Prog. Pay ..				Prolonged for ..		Date			
Authy. ..				Re-engaged for ..		Date			
PHYSION. Height Feet 5 Ins. 7 1/2 Chest Ins. 33 Colour of Hair D. Brn Eyes Blu Feet Fsh Marks Scars, etc. 3 L.A. app. sc.				MISCELLANEOUS				TIME FORFEITED	
NATIONAL REGISTRATION NUMBER 265.3				CARD SENT TO CENTRAL INDEX DEPT. ON				Authy. 60/43 Cause 18.9.43 From 18.10.43 To 08.02.44 No. of Days 5	

Part of David's service record, with Time Forfeited (shown near the bottom right of this portion) for his AWOL time in London in 1943.

KICKED

Grantham, Lincolnshire (December 1943)

"If you want to come home in a fucking bag, carry on whining about pain. But if you want to come home in a fashion preferable for your loved ones, then do it how we're showing you," bellows a burly man in a vest.

The shouting doesn't end there, with the instructor peppering his 'pep-talk' with choice expletives. David presumes his methodology is effective at focusing a wavering mind but still feels for the fella receiving the broadside, point-blank almost. He doesn't know him too well, but he's a nice bloke from what he's seen...

"...which is okay in the pub, but fuck all use when fighting for your life..." continues the rant.

It's strange; this stage in their training arrived without anyone noticing, but even the slightest sign of weakness will get pounced upon without mercy...

"...because it will keep you alive in the middle of chaos, and..."

Things feel different, with everything getting harder, stricter, faster, and longer. Even the sport's something gladiators would have enjoyed; extremely physical and no more Mr Nice Guy, yet still fair. No one had twigged the subtle ramping up, but it's undeniable; they're getting bloody hardened.

"...which will stop you pathetic little shits from crying out for your mummies like the big babies you are!"

And now, this brutal hand-to-hand fighting with no holding back. A few lads aren't happy being lumbered around, getting elbows in the face, fingers in the eyes, and even kicked in the balls. These rough bastards with massive muscles pounce on every objection. You don't even have to say a word; a single yelp is enough to cop a talking-to like the kid out front is 'enjoying'...

"...but it's still better than having to hold your insides from spilling out!"

Despite the unavoidable pain, there's also an understanding that what's being doled out is necessary. David thinks so; to him, it feels right.

"Nobody gives a shit about your feelings. Think about..."

All the hurdles encountered: all the beatings from mum; the mind games with 'him'; tough love from The Rifles; chasing acceptance from 'Senior'; refusing the easy options; all of it. It all cued up this moment, and David couldn't feel more at home—even though he doesn't have one anymore.

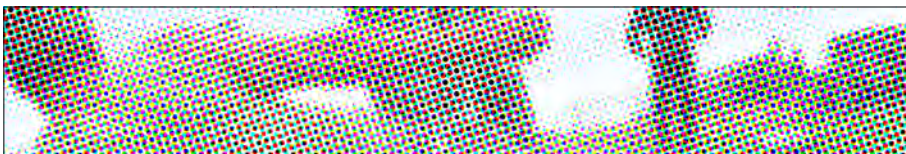
"...which is not my problem. Who am I? I'm not your fucking wet nurse. It's your life, and..."

Now it's all about taking personal responsibility, thriving on the physicality, absorbing the discipline and accepting every new challenge. David is sleeping like a baby, rising like a phoenix and loving every minute.

Nobody knows much about much right now except one universal consensus; at some point, they're going somewhere to be part of a massive invasion...

"...where they'll kill you for fun. So, do you want to be ready to live?"

David wants it more than anything.



FLYING

Manchester, England (August 2013)

"What a party this is going to be," exclaims David, "Sixty years! SIXTY!!"

Nancy couldn't agree more. Her smile says as much, and she can't wait to see all those familiar faces present to help make the occasion memorable. She's invested a lot of time arranging the coming celebrations to mark their diamond wedding anniversary. As they approach the entrance to the large room, a sense of anticipation is rife—she's delighted.

Going through the double doors and into the hall together, David stumbles a little, giving everyone a moment to remember, alright, as his trousers fall around his ankles. Glancing down at them, he bursts out laughing, which turns into uncontrollable howling the second he sees so many mortified faces among the assembled onlookers.

Not that David could tell, but a trouser leg had been snagging on his prosthetic limb, and as they made their energetic grand entrance, something had to give. As Nan tries to gather his slacks and get them fastened, David, still laughing, tries his best to speak.

"It could be worse, Nan! We could have lost the whole leg like last time!!"

"Oh, David, stop laughing! It's not helping!"

He knows she's embarrassed, but it's hilarious—to him. Others are nowhere near as comfortable with his prosthetic limb as David, but the stunned reaction of many guests makes the situation deliciously absurd. Life's there to be laughed at; whenever you can, you should!

A previous malfunction mortified a young couple coming up a stairwell as his entire leg detached and flew past their heads. David found the improbability amusing back then, too, as it left him high and dry until someone retrieved it. Passing strangers in the multi-storey car park tried to be subtle, but the process of walking the one-legged eighty-nine-year-old down steps with no crutches was farcical. Additionally, reattaching the limb while wearing trousers is impossible, so his subsequent dropping of them in public perturbed everyone even more—except David.

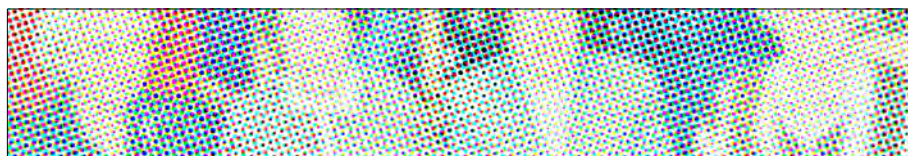
He'd been laughing so much that his remaining leg, the real one, was in danger of failure too.

Right now, he's doing his best (for Nan's sake!) to blank out the comical memory of a befuddled bloke legging it down the stone steps after his phantom flyer. As Nancy finishes fixing this current wardrobe woe, David surveys the room. Embarrassment is still frozen on a few faces, but there needn't be, as he couldn't have imagined a better ice-breaker!

His self-deprecating nature leads the way for most guests, giving them the green light to share the joke at his expense.

'The perfect note to start on,' thinks David, *'just perfect!'*

He couldn't have wanted anything better.



Parley Too-Fow-er (24)

(becoming brutal : dec '43)

Sitting the test was David's make-or-break moment; failing it would have kicked any hope of moving back into the long grass, possibly for good. But on December 1 1943, he unequivocally seized the opportunity with both hands, scoring 83.3%, which proved his suitability for an MT role in the beach unit and got him a promotion to boot.

David had walked into his test with his future uncertain but walked out as a Leading Aircraftman (LAC). A day later, he arrived at his new unit: No. 2 RAF Beach Unit, based in Dorset on the South Coast. He was immediately dispatched north to the RAF Regiment Depot in Grantham for a Battle Inoculation Course. *"It was quite the welcome back,"* and a stark contrast to the previous two months spent *"sat on my arse, hands on the wheel."* His hands were now being trained to fight by the *"excellent instructors who were brutally simple. We learnt how to react as quickly as possible. To protect yourself, get the enemy unbalanced and on their way to the ground, all before they can think."*

He'd been through some rigorous PT during his last beach unit posting, but the unarmed combat was another step up. The instructors *"would demonstrate where the body is vulnerable, [and] which parts to target. Techniques on turning helmets, elbows, feet and even fingers into weapons. They drilled us on keeping calm and channelling the fear to use it to our advantage."* Some men initially felt this a step too far—being brutally bashed around by burly instructors—whose full-on approach produced some angry responses from some men.

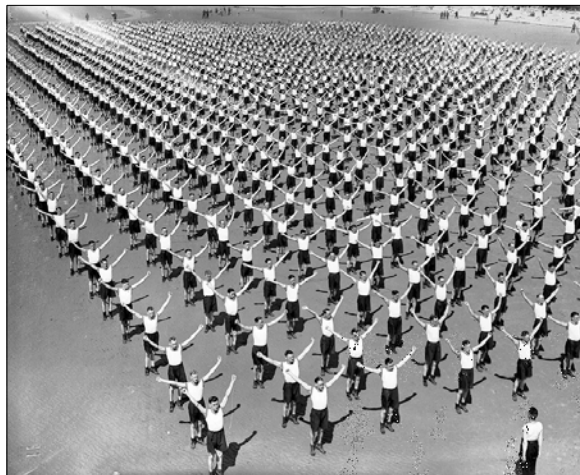


24.1 — Battle Inoculation (71 secs)

Some might question why the beach units—created to ensure smooth logistics and movement of vehicles, men, and supplies and were undoubtedly not special forces—needed to add unarmed combat to their skill set. But planners knew the units would be landed very early during the operation so they could get on with the job as soon as possible. Which would mean they'd often be without weapons close at hand, occupied instead with whatever logistical task they were performing. So as David implies, they would be disadvantaged if an early

German counter-attack managed to overrun the landing area. It was also made abundantly clear that under no circumstances would there be any orders to evacuate—no matter what. Some might see this as callous and indifferent to the human cost of 'no withdrawal'. When framed against Allied beliefs that the invasion might be the only attempt to avoid years, even decades, of an unwinnable war, 'no retreat' in this scenario becomes understandable. Hence the importance of preparing and hardening every element of the early operations. The unarmed combat drills taught lethal, permanent answers *"because it's war. There's no such thing as temporary [in a situation] like that. It's there to be done, and if you don't, then the enemy will. Should that happen, it's your family's turn [to be] on the receiving end, as they get a telegram containing the words no one ever wants to read."*

They were encouraged to indulge in as much sport as possible, which might sound counter-intuitive considering the physical exertions their instructors put them through, but it helped alleviate the mental pressure of the intense training and kept their fitness tip-top. David *"relished it all; boxing,*



Masses of RAF men train in unison on Blackpool beach. (date unknown)





footy, some rugby and even a bit of cricket.” They were becoming “incredibly confident, convinced we could beat anybody. I guess we were arrogant too, having been trained to win in body and mind, never to lose control or let fear take over.” Inter-service games brought a different intensity, still mostly in good spirits, and the bruising physical encounters rarely boiled over into a punch-up. They started to feel interconnected, “not just with your unit but with all the lads serving,” and there was plenty of laughter to accompany the toughness of their ‘upbringing’. The journey from boys to men was not yet complete, but they were well on the way, with everything helping instil a “tremendous belief in oneself and care for others, and we beach unit lads wore the Combined Operations badges with great pride.”

24.2 — Dependent On Each Other (87 secs)



David's lackadaisical days were well behind him, and building comradeship had a lasting, positive impression. Perhaps, in his case, even more so than the adverse effects of war. They trained, ate, rested and slept, all together, in the same place, at the same time. *“There was nothing we didn't do together. How can one spend many months like this, under such scrutiny, [going] from boys to fighting men, without feeling comradeship? [It's] a fantastic feeling, which I still miss today...”*

Conversely, one of the most significant problems facing service members of all ages is losing that feeling. For those side by side in battle, the intensity of feeling is even greater. It has been described as an ache that, for some, will never go away, a terrible malaise that can infiltrate and influence every daily routine. I read something out to David:

“The rush of battle is a potent and almost lethal addiction, for war is a drug.”

This is the first time he's heard it, and he agrees *“wholeheartedly. I've never heard it put like that before, but it feels so true! Something connects all serving men that's almost impossible to...”* His words trail off. Define? *“Yes. That's it.”* I tell him it's a line from a relatively modern movie, which had borrowed it from a book. Again, he insists that it's no less accurate, no matter where it originates. Months later, I remind him of the line again, an occasion which brings a slightly different response, detailing something else—his pursuit of skirmishes with Germans.

24.3 — Is War a Drug? (45 secs)



My mind goes back to early in our friendship when we visited the Netherlands, with David speaking to groups and individuals on quite a few occasions. Observing from a third-person perspective was intriguing: the age difference was one aspect of this (as much as eighty years), but the sociological gap was markedly different. One particular talk was with currently-serving members of the Dutch Armed Forces, who were very interested in finding out if he missed serving. His immediate affirmative response drew great smiles and appreciation; they were kindred, separated by time and nationality only.

Like many who survived the lottery of war, David spent decades working hard to integrate into society. In the Netherlands, too, people seized the chance to rebuild once peace returned—with one key difference. Their liberty to make choices came only through the actions of others, and many Dutch are determined to remember how this came about. To them, it's not just a historical moment but something still relevant to each subsequent generation born unto freedom:

a present from the past that has gifted them a future.

MYSTIFYING

Utrecht, Nederland (1942)

Jacob sits in silence, sketching away in full view of the no-longer-suspicious fascists. In the past, they repeatedly stomped over to snatch away his terrible drawings for examination. But as Jacob's deep-thinking *vader* predicted, deliberately making them bad exploited *Nazi* arrogance, inviting derisive laughter and sarcasm until their 'superior' intellect grew bored with mocking a child. Now he can *draw* to his *hartje's* content, anywhere, without an inquisition. He's become almost *invisible* just like his *vader* said.

Jacob's *mama* admires her husband's ability to accurately gaze further into the future than most people, which has brought a soothing influence to their household after the *Duitse invasie*. He had calmed her when she was frantically packing, petrified the *Luftwaffe* was about to burn Utrecht to the ground. He assured them that the *Nederlandse* government would take the pragmatic approach, preferring to keep their *land* as intact as possible after Rotterdam, regardless of the terms. *Mama* says his foresight allows *de familie* space to breathe, enabling them to be free in mind, despite the occupation of their *land*. She has frequently reminded the *kinderen* to thank their *vader* for such *wijze* guidance.

'*Dank je, Vader!*' thinks Jacob, reflecting as he switches his two pencils around.

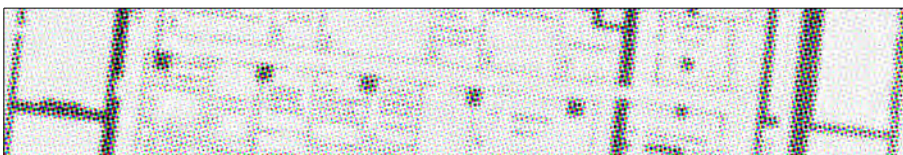
Jacob sticks out his tongue, making him look silly to any examining eyes that may retain a passing interest—more of his *vader's* advice. The Nazis must see only a cluttered mess on the paper, so once the *cruciaal* details are made using the hardest pencil, Jacob carefully uses the softer one to shade over the notations. People, places, faces; all disguised as the doodles of a *domkop!* Later, with the right hands and methods, the softer pencil markings can be gently erased, leaving only the faint lines and *tiny* scratches of the secret scribblings.

Jacob feels genuinely terrible for the people going missing. The *Joden*, already compelled to wear yellow stars because their *religie* is not *Arisch*, were sent away to who knows where or what?! Not long after, when *de Duitsers* went *oost* and invaded *Rusland*, life in Utrecht turned sour for everyone of every religion. The Nazis wanted workers to go to *Duitsland* to build more *wapens en bommen* so they could keep warring. But so few *jonge mannen* volunteered, the *fascisten* have been taking them from their homes instead. Even the *industriëlen*, who were happy to sell their products to *Duitsland* before, now realise what future the country needs—it is not a *fascist* one.

It's strange; Jacob knows he could not previously *connect* what goes on far away to events happening right here in his home city. Yet, in months, he's developed a mature understanding of world politics and how this war affects countries he'd barely heard of before. All the hushed talk is about the Allies now and a *dream* they will one day lift this dark shadow of occupation from the *land*. Some say they will come, whilst others cannot imagine why *families* from other *landen* would let their young men come here: to be killed or captured for someone else's freedom. Jacob's *vader* believes they will, *absoluut*, but it is *tricky* for the teenager to get his head around.

'*Why leave their land, come here, and rescue people they do not know?*'

It is a concept he simply cannot fathom.



RATIONALE

Naarden, North Holland (May 3, 2017)

"Well, I must say, I've had a fabulous day. I've enjoyed every minute; very interesting," David tells Rich over a pre-dinner drink in the hotel bar, *"but I do worry about you having to do all the driving, here, there and everywhere!"*

"I don't mind, David, honestly. Coming here is just what I need right now, and besides, it's an eye-opener, watching people's reactions when they see you over here," Rich replies before having another sip.

They're waiting for Willem, whose car they'll follow to a special dinner nearby. There's still concern about getting David's wheelchair into a small Dutch house, but the day's been so interesting they've given up worrying about it. They can also come back here to eat should problems manifest.

Neither man spoke out of politeness. It had genuinely been a good day, a change of scenery a boon to both for different reasons. Plenty of chat in the car and on the ferry indicated they share many values and an almost identical sense of humour.

"What did you think of the school visit, David?" asks the film-maker-cum-driver.

"Fabulous. Quite different to many of the children that come into the museum. Not one of them will have been older than twelve, yet the lot just sat still and listened intently, no fuss."

"Were their questions different from the kind of thing that British k—" Rich inquisitively starts. The question tempts David to jump in before it's even finished.

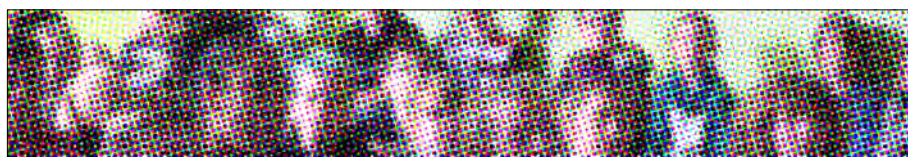
"Totally! Nobody asked me where I charged my mobile phone for starters... and nothing about the food, either," comes the passionate response. *"Yes, as Good As Gold, they were."*

The small group had travelled overnight on the ferry from England's East Coast. Within a couple of hours of being in the Netherlands, they'd met up with a Dutch army representative and wheeled David into a primary school in Oldebroek. After a talk about his service, the children were allowed to ask him anything at all, after which they formed a very orderly line to get a souvenir postcard of David, shake his hand and say *dank je*. Then it was on to a military base near Wezep for lunch, another talk and a Q&A session; only, this time, those who sat listening to David were serving members of the Dutch Army.

During both visits, Rich was free to wander, observe and film. A standout thought hit during the latter when he spotted clear parallels: children and adults alike wanted to understand not 'what' David did by volunteering but 'why'. David's retort was astoundingly simple but had a confounding effect. He told them it was about *"doing the right thing,"* which didn't make it any easier to understand as a concept. It produced smiles, admiring glances and even applause, but it still didn't stop the shaking of heads, raising eyebrows, or frowning of brows.

Millions of people like David back then felt the idea of not doing the right thing, regardless of circumstances, was lamentable and unacceptable, despite the near-certainty this would likely bring danger into their lives.

For them, it was a simple notion of necessity.



Parley Too-Fife (25)

(endless exercises : early '44)

At the end of 1943, then into the new year, David's new unit (No. 2 RAF Beach Unit, created from No. 76 and No. 77 RAF Beach Units) was restructured and transferred from Air Ministry control to Second Tactical Air Force (2TAF). This change would significantly affect David's future in less than twelve months. 2TAF was a new entity formed in 1943, which would provide air support (of differing means) for the Army in a European invasion.

Skimming over administrative restructuring, the next ORB entry of interest details a trip to Beach Group Practice Camp (based in Gullane, Scotland) for Exercise Roundabout. A small-scale but long-term exercise, it was mounted at the port of Leith (near Edinburgh) and consisted of ten phases, starting in mid-December 1943 and finishing in April 1944. During each phase, eight to ten coasters (small ships) carried mixed stores from Leith to Gullane, about 20 miles east along the Firth of Forth. David and his comrades participated in one of the early phases of Roundabout from December 28 until January 12. At Gullane beach, the stores were off-loaded onto amphibious vehicles, barges or landing craft or discharged directly from beached coasters. Everything was transported back to Leith by road to use the stores again for the next phase; it all went around in a large circle, hence the name Roundabout. The exercise provided Sea Transport Service and Movement Control Service personnel with much-needed experience in short sea-voyage procedures. It was also good practice in loading and stowing mixed stores and the rapid unloading onto beaches, day and night, in all weathers. About this time, their CO had seen detailed maps of the beaches they were to land on but wasn't told where they were. The ranks knew nothing but had *"already sussed we would be part of some invasion plans due to the amount of time spent on beaches. But we didn't know what [D-Day] was going to be or where."*

About six weeks later (mid-February), their CO saw the maps again, which now included more specific detail with names of towns, rivers and other distinguishing features. Despite the vast number of personnel involved (and the sheer volume of meetings), that very little of this information slipped outside their secret network is remarkable. The Nazis knew the Allies would be invading, just not where or when. The methods used to throw Nazi spies off the scent ranged from the brilliant to the outlandish, from fanciful to far-fetched. Planners were willing to contemplate anything that would complicate the task of deducing the real intentions of their invasion force. The most important thing was to give them so much to consider that the entirety of the Nazi's counter-invasion plans would be wrought with uncertainty. I'll highlight a few of the methods later, and there are many brilliant books on this subject, but David typically summarised it as another case of *"Bullshit Baffles Brains and no mistake!"*

All beach unit COs knew what part their men would play during a Combined Operations landing on D-Day. They understood their essential role –logistical support for 2TAF– had to be executed as close to perfection as possible. So while the men would know nothing about where they would be going, they were highly drilled with intricacies and anything else they might encounter. Exercises came and went at an increasing pace. David was exposed to an enormous variety of vehicles intended for use as part of an invasion force, Hobart's 'Funnies' among them. These machines were ground-breaking and revolutionary but were often mocked and derided; *"in all honesty, most of us thought they looked bloody stupid!"* During this period, David raised a concern with his superiors based on his observation during training.



25.1 — Extra Instruction (62 secs)

His question about the Navy crew ensured they had at least a basic understanding of the





craft they would be travelling on. *"A couple of the lads were pissed off that I'd opened my mouth and landed them something extra, but I thought it was a relevant point that needed addressing. A pity no one else did!"*

With training and exercises proceeding as expected, they were presented to a high-ranking officer at the end of February, the General Officer Commanding the Canadian troops earmarked for the landings on Juno Beach.

(No. 2 RAF Beach Unit)

Bournemouth | February 27 | A parade was held in Bournemouth. All No. 2 Beach Unit personnel attended. The Parade, inspected by General Keller, G.O.C., 3rd Canadian Division, was a rehearsal for February 28, 1944.

The sharp-witted could deduce someone special was paying a visit very soon from the word 'rehearsal'. The penny didn't drop when they were *"presented to the Canadian General, which was a big deal, I'm sure, for any Canadians among us, but we weren't too impressed. Maybe they'd interrupted a [football] match or something?!"*

(No. 2 RAF Beach Unit)

Bournemouth | February 28 | GENERAL SIR BERNARD MONTGOMERY G.O.C., in C. No. 21 Army Group, inspected a full parade of No. 102 Beach Sub-Area with Nos. 7 and 8 Beach Groups. All personnel of No. 2 Beach Unit attended. The G.O.C. in C. addressed the parade after the inspection.

Unsurprisingly, David remembers the visit with clarity, even after seven and a half decades. It was *"obvious things were going on, [because] Monty visited and gave us a little pep talk. He was short but distinguished-looking, and his demeanour [was] impressive. He noted how important it was for us to do our best, had heard about our training, and was proud of us. We didn't need the encouragement, but it was warmly received nonetheless."* The general also had some essential personal advice for the young men.

25.2 — Monty's Advice (46 secs)



General Montgomery during a smaller inspection, this occasion is thought to be during May 1944.

While still in the dark, men from the many different tri-service beach outfits were to end up in far-flung, ostensibly unrelated places in Scotland, South Wales or Devon. The steadily increasing scale of the exercises indicated that the dream of getting *"back into the fight"* was becoming *"closer to being a reality, and rapidly."* So, although we can now ascertain precise details of the training they were a part of, they frequently knew next to nothing. Inevitably, they *"would talk about it*

[especially during downtime]. Everyone was fit and raring to go, so some were more inclined to gossip than others. We didn't know if it would be in Europe or somewhere like Africa. I guess the exercises, the waterproofing, and the beaches only ruled out places in Northern Europe. I preferred not to get too involved and became mentally laid back the more we prepared. I just thought what will be, will be. We'd find out soon enough!"

The unit's ORB confirms things were progressing swiftly:

(No. 2 RAF Beach Unit)

Cowes | March 16 | Squadron Leader R.A. Sandison visited H.M.S. VECTIS at COWES, ISLE OF WIGHT. He made bids and obtained phasing for No. 103 Beach Section personnel and M.T. vehicles for OPERATION "OVERLORD".

HMS Vectis sounds like an ocean-going vessel, but it's a shore establishment (known informally as a Stone Frigate) for the Navy. Initially, the Royal Navy was prohibited from ruling over land, so it would get around this by commissioning a piece of land as a ship! Overlord was well into the latter stages of planning. Within ten days of that entry, another one details a large-scale exercise was to go ahead.

(No. 2 RAF Beach Unit)

Bracklesham Bay | March 26 | Exercise "GOLDBRAID" commenced. This Exercise is a full scale Exercise by 3rd Canadian Division and is to take place at BRACKLESHAM BAY, Nr CHICHESTER. All squadron personnel are taking part.

Several 2TAF senior staff paid a visit during Goldbraid to see how things were shaping up, and they completed the exercise by March 31. By then, David had become very acquainted with Canadian troops, starting a deep connection with those from the Land of the Maple Leaf. This clue to what was coming went unnoticed, and *"we didn't think much of it [at the time]. We sometimes saw some Yanks, but not in large numbers. These lads were a bit different, but I liked the Canadians. They were friendly and well trained too."*

The final entry for March is notable. The key word here is 'continent':

(No. 2 RAF Beach Unit)

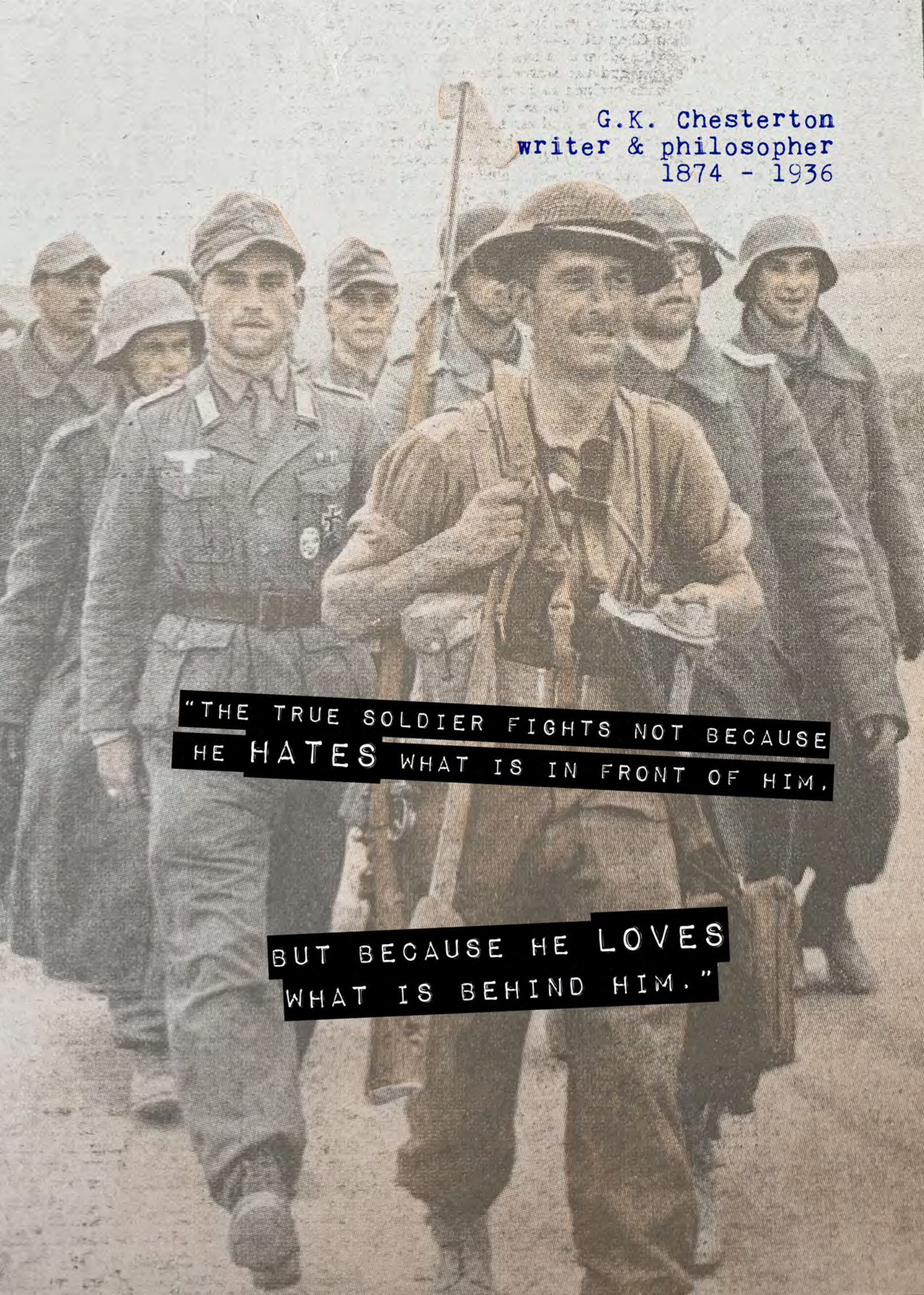
Hambleton | March 31 | Exercise "GOLDBRAID" completed. All the Unit personnel returned to previous locations.

All beach units will fly R.A.F. Ensigns on the Continent - authority issued by Senior Movements Staff Officer, 2nd Tactical Air Force.

A clear indication that David and his comrades wouldn't be in the UK much longer.



Men from the 3rd Canadian Division in action during a training exercise; possibly 'Goldbraid'.



G.K. Chesterton
writer & philosopher
1874 - 1936

"THE TRUE SOLDIER FIGHTS NOT BECAUSE
HE HATES WHAT IS IN FRONT OF HIM,

BUT BECAUSE HE LOVES
WHAT IS BEHIND HIM."