

The Reunion

I entered the competition last year with a story about World War 2 and having won I had the opportunity to meet a fine gentleman called Ken Hay when I attended the veteran reunion along with some veterans I had already met.

Whilst at dinner he told me a few things about himself and how he was a prisoner of war. I thought I had finished with writing stories on WW2 until I heard what he had to say and ideas started forming to write another story.

When I got home I started to research prisoner of war camps as I didn't really know anything about them and hadn't thought about what it might have been like to be captured.

Ken sent me a copy of his memoirs and I asked if I could use some of his information in my own story and he kindly said I could.

This story is not about Ken but inspired by him.

At the reunion I also met Bill Edwardes and he gave me a medal in remembrance of the people that died on hill 112, Ken told me that his brother had also fought on hill 112 and that Ken had been captured just before so I thought I should definitely write a story about it.

I researched stories from veterans and watched documentaries about P.O.W. camps and some documentaries about escapes. That added to my idea of a story and the part where he says goodbye in English rather than German was of course inspired from a famous real life event.

All of the characters are fictional in my story but I am in awe of how brave real soldiers and the veterans were.

Chapter 1

Tick tock, tick tock, the pocket watch my Granddad gave me when I was young was now the thing I was afraid of because every second that went by meant I was one step closer to battle.

I don't remember my parents because they were never there to say goodnight to me or celebrate my first birthday, I live with my Granddad and as far as I remember I always had.

He's kind and funny and loves watches, right now he is hundreds of miles away because I was forced to join the army. All around me is my unit and I wonder whether they have loved ones and whether they are saying their goodbyes.

Our unit is part of the 43rd division and we arrived here in France just after June 6th and after seeing the horrible bloodshed on the beaches I knew it was going to be a tough time for me and my best friend Joseph.

Right now it is evening and raining, I look over to Joseph and I remember when we entered the dog agility course with Bella, my dog, we were fourteen and just as nervous as we are now. Oh how I love Bella and I miss her so much, I wish I could stroke her one more time and feel her smooth fur she always calmed me.

"Eat up" I looked down at the bowl that had been shoved into my hands, it looked like a lumpy soup and I had a horrible suspicion what it was made from but I was hungry and I tried a spoonful,

"What is that?" I asked

"Pig liver and pig heart broth" Was the reply.

When we took over this farm and orchard which was to become our first camp I was horrified to see the effects of war on the farmers land and livestock. The Germans had already passed

through here and there was no sign now of the family that must have lived here. The animals they had left behind were starving and slowly dying, I had seen Sargeant Arnolds and the field cook talking and pointing to the stys where a couple of weak pigs were lying down breathing heavily.

I didn't take another spoonful of the soup but I soon wished I had.

It was my job to go on night watch and after the journey over the sea and that soup I felt rather sick. The rain had stopped and the skies cleared, I was looking at the stars, I remembered a night like this last summer safe at home when Bella and I slept out under the stars and the stars tonight are just like the stars then.

I was slumped up against a tree on the edge of the orchard when I heard the most terrifying noise of my life. The horrible screeching was unearthly and brought back all the feelings of terror from my worst nightmares and before I could say , "Good God" I was halfway back to camp but I didn't need to wake the others as they had heard it too and were wide awake. We jumped into half dug fox holes and got ready for the Germans to come running through the bushes but after a while there were none, the noise however, the horrible noise was still going on and then I heard a man on my left say that the noise was a rocket launcher called a screaming mimmie. That noise I never forgot.

Eventually the noise stopped and my shift was over so I managed to get a couple of hours sleep but I dreamt I was back at home and that I was playing with Bella in the fields near our house and they were full of flowers.

Joseph was shaking me awake, I looked at my watch, it was 4 o'clock,

“Morning, we’ve received orders to move out, the unit further on has taken it hard and we need to go and join them.”

A small grumble left my mouth and I rubbed my eyes and got myself up and ready, it seemed half of us was staying put and the other half going forwards. I don’t know whereabouts in France we are, Sergeant Arnolds told us to not worry about it, if the Germans over heard us we’d be giving away valuable information.

As we listened to the briefing we heard that the screaming mimmies was where we were headed and that the Hampshire battalion was on an important mission and under heavy fire, there had been a big battle and only 40 men from one unit had made it back.

We gathered our equipment and fell into line marching along the small, French country road, silent and with our guns ready. On the way I saw a soldier lying down in the field to our left just off the track, I could see from the uniform that he was British, but it looked like he was asleep, I turned to Joseph,

“ Wait here, I’m going to see if he’s alright.” I said

“Wait!” Joseph shouted but I was already halfway there, as I got closer I slowed down, I realised that he was dead because there wasn’t much of him to wake up.

When I got back to Joseph he didn’t say a word, he knew way before me and thinking about it, it didn’t make sense, a soldier just taking a nap near enemy territory. We didn’t say anything to each other for a while but then I saw a buzzard gliding overhead,

“ look “ I said whilst pointing up

“Wow” Joseph said

It was amazing to watch and it seemed to follow us as we marched to the next camp whilst we sang, whistled and hummed, ‘run rabbit, run rabbit, run, run, run.’ It made us

chuckle and took my mind of where we were until we ordered to be silent and we remembered where we were.

When we stopped for a quick rest, I remembered I needed to wind my watch, I took it out of my pocket and wound it carefully just as Granddad had shown me so many times. I stared at the clock face and thought of him and Bella and fields full of flowers.

I slipped it back into the breast pocket of my jacket and we set off again, I had a deep feeling of dread as we were moving closer towards the noises of my nightmares.

Chapter 2

The road we were on soon took us past two Churchill tanks that were completely burnt out. Next was a village and the noises were much louder.

Our orders were to join with another division in a small woods south of the village with the objective of taking over the only high ground in the area just beyond the woods.

Leaving the road now, we crept through a farmers gate and entered an open field surrounded on three sides by high hedges and at the far end, the woods.

Our guns at the ready, we crept along the hedge crouching and in single file, Rob was carrying our radio and communications equipment was so loaded down he was finding the uneven ground tricky to walk on. I offered to carry one of the boxes and a cable to make it easier for him as i knew how important his job was. Being able to receive orders from Head of command was vital.

I knew I'd feel better protected in the woods as i'd be less exposed but by the sounds of the mortar i could hear we were getting closer to the front.

The division we found and joined in the woods were in a sorry state, dirty, tired and many wounded they seemed grateful to see us arrive and some of the medics that came with us started to tend to their injuries. They had been battling for the high ground for over a week and were hugely low on supplies, ammunition and men.

I passed back the box and cable to Rob he positioned himself behind a huge tree he had already started to set up the radio. The rest of us were ordered to move forward and join the frontline.

The woods were heavily bombed and there were craters big enough to climb into, the trees started to thin and we could see a line of men in between the remaining ones and some in craters in the small field beyond. The firing and mortars had gone quiet so seeing a large crater nearby with two men in it already I jumped in and nestled myself between them handing them a cigarette each.

“God bless you” said one.

“Ta” said the other.

The noise started up again, it was crazy, German machine guns spat bullets out of the copses at the opposite side of the field and our anti tank guns were now thundering back.

The thud of mortars, the hiss of flamethrowers and here and there the sharp sound of a sniper. A sniper.

It finds its target to my left and the still lit cigarette fell to the floor.

My instinct was to run back into the woods behind me and gain more cover but standing up now would be even more dangerous.

The German fire rate was increasing and we were being bombarded, I can just about hear the orders to retreat being bellowed by our sergeant and I start to rise but I am instantly knocked backwards from a blow to my chest.

When i was younger, before the outbreak of the war, my Granddad and I, on sunny days, would go to Bellas Lake, that’s what we called it as it was her favourite place. We would fish and paddle whilst Bella would playfully splash and leap in the shallows. Sometimes she would actually scare the fish towards us and it was quite funny to watch so we didn’t mind but one day, Bella, managed to corner a big fish in the shallows.

Granddad and I were both standing in the water trying to fish beyond her disturbance when all of a sudden the fish she was

chasing leapt out of the water and over the top of me! Bella tried to follow, excited by the chase and she jumped but not high enough and she collided in to my chest knocking me, flailing, backwards and i was submerged in the cold water. The shock of hitting the hard ground of the crater felt just like hitting the cold water on that sunny day in the lake.

Chapter 3

Joseph

I could hear distant voices between the firing mortars and shots as we walked through the woods, I could see Jake up ahead of me and as the mortars and firing quietened I watched as he left the woods and jumped into a crater.

He had always been brave and kind even when we were children together he knew what had to be done and got on with it. I was holding back under more cover of the trees taking it all in, I needed to work it out first, this was the frontline, at least the firing had stopped.

Then it all happened so fast, the noises started again, there was smoke and shouting and then I saw Jake falling backwards onto the crater floor. I couldn't see the floor of it from where I was stood but he must have been shot as he didn't get back up. I was shouting his name hoping with every second that he would get up and I'd see him again, I had to run to him, to help him but the orders to retreat were being shouted. The other soldier that had been in the crater with Joseph made a run for cover just as I decided to run to the crater and check on Jake.

The soldier grabbed me and said

“ you're heading the wrong way”

“ I have to check on my friend he was in the Crater” I said

“no point doing that or that will make three dead in there.” He replied still holding me firmly.

Every muscle in my body gave up and the soldier had to half drag, half carry me back towards our camp.

Everyone was in defensive positions back in camp but I couldn't begin to imagine how I could pick up a gun and and carry on without seeing to my best friend first. There was something in

the back of my mind that was going over and over the thought that Jake wasn't dead, how could he be? I needed to see for myself.

Chapter 4

Jake

The taste of blood woke me up, the first time I had tasted blood I had cut myself on a bramble bush thorn, I was eight and I had automatically put my finger in my mouth. The taste was irony and salty but the taste in my mouth now was overwhelming. It was mixed with mud and the smell of smoke, I was dipping in and out of consciousness and the pain in my head from where the blood was leaking was increasing. My chest was feeling tight and bruised I looked down and could see the breast pocket on my jacket was ripped and I was surprised to see there was no blood. I know I had been shot, I had heard and felt the bullet. Remembering that was where I had put my watch I started to fumble with the button, my fingers were numb with the chill morning air but after some time I managed to open it. It must have been very early in the morning, had I been out here all night? The sun was weak in the sky and there was a heavy dew on the grass.

Clumsily I pulled out my pocket watch, the glass front was cracked and it had a dent on the back near the bottom left half of the case, it must have stopped the bullet.

Suddenly I heard voices, it wasn't English and it brought me great horror because it was the same sounding language I'd heard Granddad listening to on the radio.

He had muttered to himself,

“Bloody fool, he wants to start the Great War all over again”

And he was right.

The voices were getting closer and closer until they were right on top of me.

I dropped my watch just before they looked over and into the crater and they started to shout something at me, I knew the gist of what he wanted me to do because of the tone of his voice but mostly because of the gun.

I raised my hands in the air and slowly stood up, I felt faint and another wave of blood came gushing from my head wound.

One of the soldiers, the one with the gun aimed at me, spoke what sounded like orders to the other two slightly younger soldiers and they jumped down into the crater. One of them then nudged the still body that to my horror I now realised I was next to and rolled him over with his foot.

When they saw the puddle of blood and lack of life they turned their attention to me.

My rifle was on the ground and they saw me look towards it, another order came and one of them picked it up. With the butt of his own rifle he began to push and shove me, indicating for me to leave the crater, the body of my colleague they dragged and we left I could only guess towards their camp.

Chapter 5

Joseph

The other soldiers were saying that the battle for the high ground had been like this for days now. The offensive attack and claiming the ground one day only to be forced back by night but the orders to keep pushing and counter attack still came. Rob had set up his radio and the orders came in again to continue, that it was of utmost importance. We had lost so many men, friends, family but we knew there was a bigger picture and to stop now would mean they had died for no reason. The orders were to push forwards again and this time I wanted to be at the front, to look in that crater and say my goodbyes.

As we pushed through the sparse end of the woods again it all seemed to be deserted, we could see clearly the field with waist high wheat scattered with craters. As we inched further towards the edge I could see Jakes crater, as I got even closer it looked empty apart from a shiny, glistening piece of something metal. I ran closer hoping, just hoping that there might be a hollow and that Jake had hidden and that the glint was the top of his gun or a button on his jacket. I burst through the treeline and into the crater and as I landed in it the humming of German fire startled me and our return fire shot over my head.

I looked around, no bodies but the glinting metal turned out to be Jakes pocket watch. As I picked it up I could see the glass was cracked and there was a dent on the back case. We were advancing so I stowed the pocket watch in my pocket and moved on with the others.

We advanced slowly into the wheat field under a barrage of German fire, I could see soldiers falling besides and near me but we pushed forwards, our unit was ordered to push towards the source of the German machine gun. Someone must have found the gunner because the nearest machine gun had stopped shooting at us, we crept forwards and came across a crater with a wounded German soldier clinging to his machine gun. He was fatally wounded but had a knife in his hand and tried to swipe at us as we got closer. He looked young, younger than me but determined, the soldier to my left shot him dead and his knife chinked as it hit the stony ground.

Leaving him behind we pushed further onwards towards our objective and although it had taken all day to get there, such a short way, the crest of the hill was in sight and we charged up into the orchard on the summit. Our scouts informed us that the Germans had a strong defense line on the reverse slope and so we got ready for an immediate counter attack.

Their machine guns were cross firing all around and there was flying shrapnel from the mortar shells, the noise was ear rattling.

When I was a young boy my parents had insisted I go to church every Sunday but I never thought about if I was a Christian but that night I had never prayed so much not to be killed the way Jake had.

The battle kept on going fiercely into the night until we made our final push, we had taken heavy loses again but like a band of brothers we were united and determined.

As the early sun started to rise I could see what little progress we had made, there had been much less return fire so our hope was that they had taken heavier loses than us or were running low on ammunition. I looked around me at the destruction, at the other men waiting for their orders, in the quiet of the

morning a single bird started to chirp and sing. I traced the sound and saw it sat on a branch, such a beautiful sound in such a horrible place. Its melody was uplifting but was cut short by an enormous explosion and everything went both silent and dark.

Chapter 6

Jake

I don't know what they did with the body of the dead soldier but I was being marched on away from the fields and into different woods, there was a clearing with a large tent. There were German soldiers, some sat smoking others leant against trees and they stared at me as I stumbled closer. One of the soldiers who had found me entered the tent and I could hear him talking but I couldn't understand a word. He promptly returned followed by another who was carrying a box and placed it on the floor in front of me they pointed for me to sit. I gladly accepted as I was feeling faint and my head was still bleeding and causing me much pain.

If they were going to kill me, I reasoned with whatever was in that box I wished they would get on with it.

The German opened the box and that is when I realised that it was a medic box, it had bandages and cotton wool and bottles and I saw that rather than hurt me they were going to see to my wound.

The details of what happened next are lost to me, I know the soldier had tipped one of the bottles on to some cotton wool and had began to clean the wound but at that point I must have passed out because when I came round it was dark, I was in a cramped train carriage and we were moving. There were a lot of us in there, so cramped most had to stand but the swaying of the carriage was making it hard to stay up, there wasn't enough room and the wounded like me were taking up a fair bit of the carriage from lying down. There was an awful smell

coming from a bin in the far corner, it had a lid on it and by the smell I guess it was the facilities.

Hunger, pain, thirst and the swaying carriage put me back to sleep and it was the screeching of the brakes that woke me much later. After a few moments we heard German voices, the bolt sliding back on the door and the door creaked open.

We were ordered to get out of the carriage and with difficulty I managed to get up and I staggered off the train looking around me in front of us were five German soldiers who had been with us on the journey and they had their guns pointed at us.

There was a bucket of water and a cup stood by their feet and we started to take it in turns to drink.

I looked around, we were at a large station with other trains like ours and if we looked tired and hungry it was nothing compared to the crowds of people on the other platforms, they looked like skeletons.

They had yellow star of Davids sewn or painted on their clothes and the horror of what I was witnessing shook me.

They were being herded and lined up in front of a big table where two Germans sat with a book, maybe they were giving their names? Once they had passed on the information they were being roughly separated, men to one side, woman and children to another. They were being shoved and although I couldn't understand the words I could hear the distress.

A German Officer, who had been walking up and down staring at the crowds, started shouting at a boy who was on the nearest platform to me, it looked a the soldier had found something in the boys pockets, it was a piece of bread and a yo-yo.

It all happened so quickly, I guess the boys mother had started to shout at the German, he had drawn his hand gun and he turned and shot the mother. I couldn't believe my eyes and I pushed through the soldiers who were guarding us as they had

turned to watch the scene. I managed to reach the boy and I picked him up, I was telling him it was alright but I don't think he understood me and he was crying loudly. The German Officer who had shot the mother pushed me over and the boy fell out of my arms.

Some of the other soldiers from my train were trying to push forward now towards me but the German soldiers started to gather round them and were forcing them towards an awaiting truck.

All of us were pushed into the back of the truck, I had got there first as the officer had shouted at a soldier and they had roughly picked me up and marched me to the truck, then two more had been pushed in behind me, four more until everyone from our carriage was in and I was completely squashed.

The stutter of the trucks engine indicated that we were on our way, the truck was smooth going along the road until we turned off onto a country road and with every pothole and bump it bounced and winded everyone.

Once or twice I bumped my head on the side of the truck and that shot pains of agony through my head right down to my feet. It was hours before the truck stopped, full of pain and silence and when they ordered us to leave the truck we all struggled to stand, I stumbled off the back and face planted into a puddle. Now I was soaked through but I was better off than the soldier that was being carried off the truck by the Germans, I guess he must have suffocated.

Someone helped me up and I took in our surroundings, there was a barbed wire fence around a series of huts, they looked old and cold, they marched us pass these and took us to some other huts that looked more like homes. We stopped and they split us into two groups and we filed into the huts. I was still soaked and I was amazed to find there was a fire inside and I

went straight over to it and relished in the warmth. I had expected we were going to have a hard time here but having a fire helped and I guess we weren't having to fight but did that mean we had to sit in this hut until the war had finished? What about the stories I had heard about what was happening? Others were dying, my friend Joseph was out there somewhere and how they were treating the Jews? I had seen it at the station, they aren't any different to me.

I talked to the others in my hut until dark, we told our stories, how we got here, our names, our nationalities. There was only one other Englishman named Timmy, he was a nice man all of them were but there was something about Timmy. I don't know if it was just that he was English but I felt like I should stick with him and I have a feeling he was going to become a good friend.

Chapter 7

In the morning a man walked into our hut and placed a bucket of sloppy substance which at a guess could have been some sort of oats, not much taste but it was warm. There was enough for us all to have a bowl but not enough for seconds, once again all day we were talking our heads off, there was no more food until night where they brought some broth and clean water. One of the French soldiers had a pack of cards and so we played and gambled for each others morning meal, the French soldier was good and had won three extra bowlfuls by the end of the evening but in the morning when the breakfast came he was taken away along with three others.

Timmy guessed that they had been taken for questioning but if they did they weren't brought back so we shared out their share amongst us.

By the next morning more people had gone, there were no explanations they were just taken but the amount of food we got was the same so that helped to fill the empty hole in my stomach. Timmy was still with me but in total there was now only eight of us left, it was only a matter of time before they came for us but for what? If they try and torture me or Timmy I will make sure we escape, I will make it home and finally see Bella.

I'm glad the French soldier left his cards as it has been weeks now and they haven't taken anyone else, it has made me think more about a plan to escape though and Timmy and I have been watching the camp carefully. The doors to the huts are always locked at night and there are four guards that patrol the camp the rest we are not sure about. My head wound now was much better and only hurt occasionally. One of the men spoke

German and he had been teaching me some of it I thought it might come in useful for our escape plan.

It was in the dead of night when they did come for us, I was woken by the noises of Timmy and three others being dragged away I shouted at them and got out of bed. They decided to take me too and I was dragged out into the compound where we were separated and taken for questioning.

An Officer asked me what my name was and where I was from, I didn't give anything away and we were then roughly taken to the older huts we passed when we came in, they were broken and battered. They unlocked the doors and pushed us in.

It was dirty inside, the men were in their bunks and looked at us they had scars and were covered in soot and dust, there was no fire and in the corner was a pit that stank of human waste. I found my first night in there hell, all of the time it felt like they were staring at us, we didn't dare go to the bunks to sleep instead we sat on the floor leaning against the wall, I'm not sure if they were prisoners of war or just prisoners but they weren't friendly.

In the morning a sharp sounding whistle woke us up, I think it was a roll call as they got up and made for the door, we followed. There were about 160 of us lining up with two German soldiers holding clipboards calling out names from a list. I was exhausted, as I looked around the men I could see those that had disappeared from our hut. They looked thinner and withdrawn.

It was a shock to hear my name called and they had to repeat it before I grunted in response, the soldier stared at me for a few seconds and then moved on.

When the roll call was finished a small group of us were led out of the compound to a nearby road, it was broken and had potholes, this must have been the road we came along. Our job

was to fill the holes, some of us had to smash up large rocks to fill them and others made a type of cement. They seemed to know what they were doing and I could see many other holes that had been filled already. There was no rest and no food either.

One prisoner tried to run from the work towards the woods that surrounded the prison camp but a German soldier saw him and shot him, we all learnt a lesson not to try to run away.

The work over the next few weeks was just as back breaking but none of that compared to my next job of working in the mines. The first morning I got sent down with no explanation they gave me a heavy pickaxe and took me to a small narrow passageway with steep steps. It led to a man-made cave and it was very dark, I had been practising and my German speaking was getting good. I could hear the conversation between the soldiers on guard and they were talking about needing more and more coal for Hitler and that we'd be working everyday to get it.

It was hard work, we started early in the morning and as we finished in the evening the next shift would start. I had to use my pickaxe to chip away at the coal and then carry it back out to the entrance, the little sleep I got was full of the sound of my axe hitting the stones and it would echo around my head.

It was no better for Timmy and he was not like when I first met him, it was like he was in a trance and he wouldn't talk much not even about escaping but I was thinking about it more and more.

Once a month we had a day off and mostly we sat outside in the compound too exhausted to do very much it was here that you heard stories about the others and it is where I met a prisoner of war that said he had broken out of another prison

much harder than this one and that he had a plan and he was looking for three other men to join him.

That meant Timmy and me but who else? There was one man I had been watching, he didn't talk much but I had been watching him for a while, he would sit on his day off and make model bridges from used matchsticks that he had collected.

He was very clever and after I had explained to him what we were thinking he agreed to join us, he was called Novarich and when I took him back to the man he said his name was Jedrick. Jedrick explained that he had been making a German Officers uniform as one of his jobs was laundry duty and that he was just starting a German soldier uniform too, he had hid them under the floorboards.

His plan was to use them to just walk out through the main gates.

It took a few more weeks to make civilian clothing for us all and the documents we needed for the plan to work. Novarich had made a miniature model of the compound and we would practice the timings of the guard patrols with it.

The plan was for me to wear the Officers uniform because I was the only one that could speak some German, Timmy and Novarich were our prisoners and Jedrick would be in the German soldier uniform we would all have our civilian clothes on underneath.

We had forged papers that showed an order allowing two prisoners to be taken to the local town on work duty.

We decided to go at night making it harder to see our faces and when the night came I was so nervous and wasn't sure I'd remember the words I had been practising over and over again. My heart was racing as we approached the gate and the guard saluted when he saw me. I handed over the papers and the guard began to open the gates, I couldn't believe it was that simple, I was so excited about the thought of freedom that when the guard had finished opening the gate and stood aside I made a fatal error.

I said "thank you" in English not German.

"Halt" the guard shouted and raised his rifle at us.

We stopped dead in our tracks just then we heard the loud sharp whistling of a falling shell. It landed somewhere near the camp and with the guard distracted we decided to run for it.

I looked behind me as I ran the guard was shouting and firing at us as other shells were landing and exploding nearby.

Timmy was shot in the arm by one of the guards bullets, he shrieked in pain and we dashed for the cover of the trees, we risked stopping to look back just as a shell landed at the gates exploding the gatehouse and the guard too.

All of the prisoners were at risk, if this was ally forces on the move then we had to find them and get them to stop and hope they didn't shoot us. Jedrick was seeing to Timmy's arm, he had ripped a strip of fabric from the fake German uniform and

had tied it tightly on Timmy's arm. It was then I realised I was dressed as a German Officer and quickly I pulled it off and threw it to the ground.

The next round of shells were firing directly over the top of us which meant carrying on through the woods if we were going to find the source.

Timmy's face was getting paler and paler and his pace slower and slower, he had lost a lot of blood but we had to carry on. There was no light to help us see and we were tripping over the tree roots, it was difficult but the sound of the artillery was getting louder and we were grateful for the sound as it kept us going in the right direction but fearful for those we had left in the camp.

As the last shell shot from the round we broke through the woods and met a cobblestone wall, we were out of breath and leant against it to recover and wait for the next round to give us direction.

The ground started to rumble, it was a familiar feeling, like when I had stepped off the Mulberry Harbour and onto the blood soaked beaches, it was the rumbling of tanks.

The deep sound of tracks on mud was getting closer when all of a sudden the cobblestone wall up from us exploded as a Sherman tank burst through it at great speed and determination. There was shouting and American voices, soldiers were running through the gap in the wall. We made our move and one of the Americans saw us, stopped and pointed his rifle at us shouting for us to put our hands up.

"I'm English " I shouted " and you're firing at a prisoner of war camp up there you have to tell them to stop."

He shouted something again but his voice was lost and muffled by the sound of more tanks thundering past.

Timmy had collapsed on the floor and Novarich knelt besides him, leaving them there Jedrick and I ran to the American and explained what was happening,

“My commander is back at the field base, you’d better come with me and hurry.” he shouted.

We ran after him and came across a camp with tents, jeeps and men following yet more tanks in the direction we had ran from.

We burst into the tent and saw him sat at his temporary desk with radio giving orders.

I quickly told him that it was a P.O.W. camp they were shooting at, that they had to stop right away and send in medics.

Immediately he started giving instructions through the radio telling them to cease fire and await further orders. The reply came back saying that they were being shot at but had identified the source and could they shoot back.

“ No!” I shouted “that is the camp”

“Tell the Shermans to advance but keep the infantry at a safe distance” the American commander barked.

He turned to me,

“ Best you get back out there and show them where this camp is” he said

“ My friend is injured, we left him by the woods” I said

“ Take a medic with you” he replied “and you’d best hurry”

Chapter 9

The American soldiers managed to liberate the camp without any prisoners getting too badly injured and Timmy and I were now on a boat on our way home. His arm was sore but luckily the bullet had gone straight through so they had stitched it up and bandaged it carefully.

We had said our goodbyes to Jedrick and Novarich who had both set off in search of their homes and families.

All I could think about was Granddad and Bella and after I had said goodbye to Timmy I set off home.

Everything looked the same as I walked through the woods and the gate to our house, the agility courses I had made for Bella were still there untouched. I knocked at the door and heard Granddad approaching muttering and swearing,

“It better not be you again, I’ve already told you I don’t want the ruddy newsletter”

The door flung open and he stood there his face frozen in disbelief,

“Jake, I thought you were dead!” he said

“What?!” I replied as we hugged each other tightly, tears in our eyes.

At that point Bellas face appeared around the kitchen door, she looked older and her whole body wagged when she saw me, her lips curved up like a snarl but it was a smile.

We sat at the table, Bella was in my lap trying to lap at my cup of tea whilst Granddad explained that he had had a visit from Joseph who had been sent home through injury,

“ He said he had seen you be shot and the army had said you were missing in action presumed dead. He even had your watch”

“My watch” I exclaimed.

“Yes, he said he had found it but it was broken and I couldn’t bear to fix it so I told him to keep it.”

I explained how it had been in my pocket and how it had saved my life for sure.

Chapter 10

It was a couple more years until the war officially ended and in that time I tried to find Joseph but his house had been bombed out and no one seemed to know where he had gone.

Granddad, Bella and I lived quietly in our house until first Bella died and some years later Granddad died, it didn't feel right living there without them and so I sold the house and moved to Devon.

Nobody seemed to really talk about the war and slowly everything moved on it was when I retired that I really missed having a dog and so I got myself a brown, fluffy farm dog with a bushy tail and eyes like Bellas. I also brought an Ipad although I didn't really understand how to use it but I had seen the children next door use them and they soon taught me what I needed to know. I still get annoyed with the ruddy thing but actually it's quite useful. Especially for finding people.

I had found Jedrick and Novarich and even Timmy and we had started to email one another, he had had a family, and even grandchildren. He told me about a reunion of veterans that he always goes to and invited me along to meet up at the next one. Meeting Timmy after all that time was great, we met in the lobby of a hotel and talked and talked until we had to change and go in for the dinner. We sat at a table with a couple more veterans and there were plenty more of us around the room. There was also a boy with his mum who sat with us and he wanted to know all about me and my story about the war and I told him some of it, how a watch had saved my life. He said his friend had a World War two watch and that he was sat on a different table and I watched him run off to another young boy.

They stood talking for a while and then he pointed at me, they came over and as the boy approached I thought his face looked familiar, in his hands was a watch with a broken glass face. Just then the speakers bellowed that the speeches were about to start and would we welcome the guest speaker, the young boy said,

“That’s my Granddad.” in an American accent

I looked up and there standing on the stage was Joseph. I took the watch from the boys hand and turned it over, there was a dent on the bottom left half of the case.

It all made sense, the reason the boys face had looked so familiar and why I hadn’t been able to find Joseph, he must have moved to America.

Joseph started to speak, welcoming everyone here tonight and explained who he was and why he was here, how he had got involved with the setting up reunions when he had moved back to England a few years ago.

He paused, raised his glass and said

“ To friends and family who couldn’t be here tonight, we shall not forget them”

With tears in my eyes I stood up with the watch in one hand and my raised glass in the other staring at my best friend.

Joseph had noticed the movement and as he looked over to me our eyes met for the first time in over sixty years.