

1. Before the war

In our house there was a photo of Dad in his Black Watch uniform, complete with kilt and sporran. At the beginning of the First World War, he joined the Black Watch as a private soldier and did his basic training in Catterick but, before he could be sent to France, they recalled all teachers because they were needed at home.

There was a special deal for teachers to go back to university when they were demobbed (returned to civilian life) and another special deal which said that teachers could take a thing called Article 39, which would be recognised as equivalent to a Bachelor of Science degree, so Dad took this. He was a Headmaster by the time it was our turn, my brother's and mine, to go into uniform.

Dad could not afford university for both my brother George and me at the same time so I had been working in the tool design office of the National Steel Foundry for a few years, while George went to Dundee University, when it became understood by everyone that a war was coming.

My Dad found me at around ten o'clock one night and told me that unless I joined the Territorial Army by midnight I would be conscripted, and he asked what I wanted to do. I said I didn't mind if I was conscripted but I wondered whether I was in a reserved occupation.

We chased up to my boss's house only to find that he and his family were in bed asleep, so it was left at that, but then, about a week later, my Uncle Willie, who had connections with the local Territorial Branch of the Royal Signals, told my mother that he could get me into this branch rather than taking a chance of being conscripted into an Infantry mob, and that is the way I joined the Signals.

George, who was two years older, would not have been conscripted at this time, but he decided to join up. I was under the impression that university was not for him. Naturally, with his background in Chemistry, he preferred the Medical Corps and he showed up home one week-end to announce that he had joined up for seven years.

I said, 'Are you out of your mind?!' Everybody else was joining up for the duration.

His answer was, 'It's going to last that long anyway.'

As it turned out, he was right on the money.



David Taylor's father (also named David Taylor)



2. Home on leave for New Year, Jan, 1940

George and I both got home for the New Year of 1940, on a week's leave, so Christmas had already passed, mine being spent in Badajos barracks, Aldershot, and I would guess that George spent his where I went to visit him once, in Crookham. The men there were in what were known as 'spiders', although I seem to remember they only had four legs, coming from a central hall.

I doubt if I saw him for more than a few minutes at home; he had his girl, Nettie, and I had mine, Gladys, so that accounted for most of the week. I think we only went home to sleep and get breakfast.

I can't remember any discussions with either of my parents other than army stuff. I already knew that this would be embarkation leave, and we left for France very shortly after that.

Because I could ride a motor cycle and the officer who was allocated one could not ride, I was given the bike to ride to Southampton and still had that bike up till we left the Maginot Line. After that, I was doing the job I was supposed to be doing, 2nd operator on a wireless truck.



3. Travelling through France

Went to France, Le Havre, very cold winter, no water, pipes frozen.

We were actually read the riot act outside in the middle of the night for behaving badly when the officer and Sergeant Major came into the warehouse to find out why we were not starting our vehicles every two hours. Somebody reached up from the top bunk and jerked out the wiring for the lights, and then every epithet you ever heard and a few extra were shouted in the dark. Of course, they could not identify anyone, so we were told to get outside and that was it.

The only words I can remember are, 'You can be shot.'

We moved around a bit. The names I remember are Lillers, Bolbec, and then Steinwerk on the Belgian frontier. By that time we were split into our signal section, 'K' Section, and attached to our Brigade, 153 of the 51st Highland Division.

Around February or March, we proceeded as a full convoy down to Hagondange, a steel making town in Alsace Lorraine, which was in the Saar, and which was behind the Maginot Line, that row of French fortified defenses built in the 1930s.

After a week or so there, we moved up to the Maginot and into the area of international outposts, and did whatever we were supposed to do, including learning by the sound where the shells were going. We were in the area known as the Black Forest, and German Patrols would infiltrate our positions at night, led by dogs that were trained to avoid human contact.

Then the German army broke through on the Belgian frontier, so we had to high-tail it up to Abbeville where we were doing well and even pushed the Germans back out of Abbeville. Unfortunately, the French retreated on our left flank, and we had to back up and head for Le Havre – Dunkirk was all over by this time.

As a radio operator who could also do shorthand, I used to write out the news from the BBC and post it outside the truck. This is what I wrote.

'It is now official that the last of the British Expeditionary has left France'.

About two days later, I wrote, *'It is now known that a famous highland fighting regiment is still fighting in the Abbeville area'.*

As we withdrew to try to reach Le Havre we were cut off by Rommel's tanks around Saint-Valery-en-Caux and that is when I was captured.

