

### **My first stripe**

It was a memorable day for me in 1941 when I was called into the Colonel's office at 232 Searchlight Training Regiment Devizes and presented with my first stripe. Naturally I was proud and quickly wrote cards to my parents and to as many friends and relatives as I could think of. My friends there at the Camp were delighted and decided that a group of us (all Privates/Gunners/Fusiliers, etc., the lowest form of life in the British Army) should go out of Camp to celebrate at the pub at Bishops Cannings. All went according to plan and I bought drinks all round.

Then we walked the half mile back to Camp – which did not go according to plan. We had none of us bothered to read the notices which had been posted round the Camp that day. When we reached the Camp gate it was manned by guards led by the Regimental Sergeant Major, a terrifying man. He was exercising the right of the Regiment to hold a Boundary Day, which meant keeping the Camp area clear of unauthorised people for 24 hours, which would establish the Regiment's ownership of the area. Oh dear! We all had our names taken and the RSM said to me personally "You as senior soldier are in charge of this rabble. You report to my office at 9 tomorrow morning."

We all slunk back to our billets and I wondered whether my promotion would be the shortest in military history.

I cannot remember whether I slept at all that night but somehow I got through it and turned up at 9 a.m. at the RSM's office. He emerged from his office and in his own inimitable way looked at me as if I was something nasty the cat had brought in and said "What the hell do you want, boy?" I started to explain what had happened the previous evening and he cut me short saying "Don't talk daft, boy. I've never seen you in my life before and I don't particularly want to do so again. Push off and don't put a foot on that parade ground – it's mine."

I fled thankfully but I came to realize that if that RSM had said "Jump" I would willingly have jumped – even to my death.