

### **The Regimental Sergeant-Major**

He was tall and upright with a strong jaw, loud voice and apparently short temper. His favourite expression was ‘What are you looking at, boy? I’m not a \*!\$##\* film star’. I met him in 1940 when I was transported to the 232 Searchlight Training Regiment at Devizes. The Parade Ground at the camp was his. Woe betide anyone caught on the hallowed tarmac except when they were on parade.

I had been at the camp nearly a year when I was promoted to Lance Bombardier (aged 21) and proudly sewed my single stripe on each arm. My Gunner friends were pleased for me and wanted to take me to the nearest pub, The Crown at Bishops Cannings. The evening they took me there was on the day that the north gate of the camp was declared ‘out of use’ by the Camp Commandant (I never knew why) but it meant that on our return to camp from the pub the guard at the gate was accompanied by the RSM (to our horror). He gave us all a telling off and told me that as the senior man present I was to report to his office at 9 a.m. the next morning.

I spent a sleepless night visualising the loss of my newly-earned stripe, got up early, polished up my uniform and stood trembling outside the RSM’s office at 9 a.m. The RSM came out. He seemed taller than ever and his voice was louder than I had ever heard it. He barked at me “Who are you, boy? What do you want?” I reminded him of my name and my misdemeanour of the evening before. He bellowed at me “Never seen you before in all my life. Go away!” I fled, thankful to get away; and I never heard another word from the RSM about the incident. I had the greatest respect for that man and would have followed him anywhere.