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Int
William Ryan

20th April, 1967.

W. A. O'Brien, Esq.,
54, Limes Road,
Waltham Cross,
Herts.

Dear Mr. O'Brien,

Your name appears in the records of those who may have taken part in the airborne assault on Holland in September, 1944. I am therefore writing to ask for your help with some research that we are doing on behalf of Mr. Cornelius Ryan, author of The Longest Day and, more recently, The Last Battle.

Would you be kind enough to answer the following questions in the spaces provided. Please return this letter to me as soon as possible so that Mr. Ryan may include your experiences in the account of the airborne invasion of Holland which he is planning to write. The book will include a chapter entitled "Where They Are Today", in which your name and occupation will be listed with full acknowledgment. Your assistance will be very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Randolph

Michael Randolph
Editor, British Editions

- 1) Are your name and address correct on this letter? If not, please amend them.

BOTH CORRECT

- 2) If you can be reached by telephone, please give your number.

SORRY NO TELEPHONE

- 3) What is your present occupation?

AFTER 52 VARIABLE JOBS I NOW WORK AS A BUS DRIVER FOR LONDON TRANSPORT SERVICES (Van)

- 4) What was your rank and unit in September 1944?

PRIVATE. 11TH BATTALION PARACHUTE REGIMENT. 1ST AIRBORNE DIV.

- 5) What was your age in September 1944?

23 YEARS

- 6) Were you engaged or married then? To whom? If married, did you have any children at that time?

I WAS MARRIED TO ELLEN BUSH, AND AT THAT TIME HAD A SON, 4 YEARS OLD. TERENCE WILLIAM.

- 7) Where were you born?

I WAS BROUGHT UP IN JR BARNARD'S HOME, FOR FOURTEEN YEARS I NEVER KNEW MY MOTHER OR FATHER, OR WHERE I WAS BORN

- 8) What previous action had you seen? IN 1940 I WAS IN OUR LOCAL REGT. 1ST HERTFORDSHIRE, I VOLANTEERED FOR TRAIN FERRY DUTY FROM HARICH; TO CAKIES, AS A LEWIS GUNNER FOR ANTI AIRCRAFT, AND FOR DESTROYING LOOSE MINES, I WAS IN THE DESERT FOR NEARLY THREE YEARS, IN THE RASC. WITH THE 7TH ARMOURD DIV
- 9) When did you learn that you were going to take part in the operation in Holland? ABOUT FOUR DAYS PREVIOUS. WE HAD A FEW BRIEFINGS BEFORE THIS, WHICH WERE CANCELLED DUE TO THE MAIN ARMY BREAKING THROUGH FOR INSTANCE WE WERE ON THE AIRFIELD ALL DAY ON D. DAY, READY TO TAKE OFF.
- 10) What was your reaction? Were you, for example, anxious, resigned or relieved to be going into action? I THINK I FELT A MIXTURE OF ALL THREE, ANXIOUS BECAUSE I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THIS, EVEN NOW, RESIGNED BECAUSE I COULD ^{NOT} DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT ANYWAY, WHEN ONE IS A PRIVATE IN THE ARMY, ONE DOES AS ONE IS TOLD WITHOUT QUESTION.
RELIEVED BECAUSE I WAS YOUNG, AND WANTED TO GET ON WITH THE JOB.
- 11) What was the trip like into Holland? Did you see anything unusual? Do you remember any conversations you had, or how you passed the time on the journey? THE TRIP WAS UNEVENTFUL, JUST THE USUAL TALK. WE WERE QUITE HAPPY, ACCORDING TO OUR BRIEFING WE WERE ON A EASY THING. I PLAYED MY MOUTH ORGAN FOR A WHILE, THE HAM SANDWICHES IN THE BOX WHICH WERE PUT ON THE PLANE NO ONE TOUCHED, THERE WAS A LITTLE APPREHENSION, BUT ON THE WHOLE IN OUR PLANE AT LEAST WE WERE CALM.
- 12) How did you feel about a daylight operation? Do you recall any conversations with your friends about it? What was said? THERE WAS A KIND OF BRAVADO IN THE "PARACHUTE REGT" ONE NEVER SEEMED TO HAVE ANY FEELINGS OF FEAR, JUMPING FROM AIR PLANES WAS COMMON PLACE. I DON'T THINK IT MATTERED, THAT IT WAS GOING TO BE A DAYLIGHT DROP, I DID SAY TO MY FRIENDS THAT THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY CHAOS, AS WE REMEMBERED FROM NIGHT MANOEUVRES
- 13) What were the rumours? Had you heard, for example, that if the invasion of Holland was successful, the war would be over by the coming winter? YES ALWAYS THERE WERE RUMOURS, WE NEVER SPOKE OF FAILURE, SO WE PRESUMED IT WOULD SHORTEN THE WAR, ALSO WE TALKED OF STOPPING THE DREADFUL V2 ROCKET ATTACKS ON ENGLAND, WHICH I THINK WERE BEGINNING TO HAVE THEIR EFFECT, ON MORALE
- 14) Did you keep a diary or notebook of what happened to you during any part of September, 1944? Do you still have it? NO, SORRY I DIDN'T KEEP A DIARY, BUT I HAVE A FAIRLY GOOD MEMORY, AND IF I CAN HELP YOU WITH INFORMATION. I WILL DO SO WILLINGLY.
- 15) Were any of your friends killed or wounded on the day of the drop or on subsequent days? YES ONE OR TWO KILLED ON THE FIRST DAY SEVERAL WOUNDED FROM AIR BURSTS, AND SNIPERS.

THREE

- 16) Do you remember any conversations you had with them before they became casualties? I REMEMBER TAKING ADDRESSES FROM THREE MEN, NOT FROM MY BATT WHO WERE DYING FROM WOUNDS, THEY ASKED ME TO WRITE TO THEIR MOTHERS. WE ~~WAS~~ WERE IN A CELLAR IN OSTERBEEK, THE GERMAN SOLDIER THREW A GRENADE THROUGH THE WINDOW, I NEVER CONTACTED THE PARENTS.
- 17) Were you wounded or captured during this period? Can you give details? I WAS NOT WOUNDED, BUT I HAD INJURED MY BACK ON MY PARACHUTE JUMP, OWING TO MY LEG BECOMING TANGLED UP IN THE RIPPING LINES, MY PARACHUTE WAS ONLY TWO THIRDS DEVELOPED AS I DROPPED, ALSO LATER IN THE BATTLE, PART OF A ROOF COLLAPSED ON ME, IN A HOUSE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF ARNHEM, AFTER THE ^{WAR} I HAD AN OPERATION TO MAKE IT RIGHT I RECIEVE A SMALL PENSION NOW. I WAS CAPTURED ON SEPT 26. 1944
- 18) Do you remember any significant dealings you may have had with Dutch civilians or members of the Dutch Underground? Please explain.
NOTHING REALLY SIGNIFICANT. WE KEPT OUT OF THEIR WAY. WHEN WE FOUND THEM IN THE CELLARS IN OSTERBEEK, IN CASE WE GOT THEM INVOLVED IN ACTION.
- 19) What do you recall most vividly about the country of Holland?
VERY FLAT, AND PEOPLE VERY KIND. I HAVE BEEN TO ARNHEM AND OSTERBEEK SEVERAL TIMES SINCE
- 20) Do you recall any incidents with the Germans - fights, surrenders, truces or conversations you may have had with them afterwards? THE MORNING OF THE 20TH WAS VERY QUIET, AND WE WERE AROUND THE LITTLE CHURCH IN OSTERBEEK. A GERMAN TANK CAME DOWN THE ROAD, THE GERMAN OFFICER PUT HIS HEAD OUT AND SAID IN PERFECT ENGLISH ALL RIGHT LADS FOR YOU IT IS OVER, AND THEN WE WERE ROUNDED UP BY GERMAN INFANTRY
- 21) Do you know of others who took part in the operation, to whom we might write? Please give their names and last-known addresses.
SORRY. NO CONTACT WITH ANYONE.
I GO ON THE PILGRIMAGE IN SEPTEMBER. I COULD GET ADDRESSES IF YOU REALLY NEED THEM.
- 22) Do you recall seeing or hearing anything that seems humorous now, even though it may not have seemed so at the time?
I REMEMBER BEING MARCHED WITH OTHERS AFTER BEING CAPTURED INTO ARNHEM, THE PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS WERE TRYING TO GET SOME JEJECTED PHOTOS OF US, BUT WE WERE SINGING AND CHEERING AND LAUGHING IN THEIR CAMERAS, ALTHOUGH WE FELT ANYTHING BUT HAPPY.
- 23) Do you recall any incident, sad or heroic or simply memorable, which struck you more than anything else?
DURING THE BATTLE IN OSTERBEEK, WE WERE IN AND AROUND THE LITTLE CHURCH, THINGS WERE PRETTY GRIM, WOUNDED AND DYING WERE ALL AROUND, WHEN A DUTCH WOMAN CRAWLED INTO THE CHURCH, AND SAID HAVE COURAGE BOYS, GOD IS WITH YOU, THIS THING STICKS IN MY MIND MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

Please turn over

- 24) In times of crisis, people generally show great ingenuity or self-reliance; others sometimes do stupid things. Do you recall any examples of either?

NO I DIDN'T NOTICE ANYTHING UNUSUAL, UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE HAD BEEN UNDER EXTREME TORTURE FOR TEN DAYS, AND I THINK THAT IT WOULD BE EXCUSABLE, HOWEVER WE HAD REACTED.

If you need extra space for your answers to any questions, please write below. When you have completed this Questionnaire, we would appreciate your returning it in the enclosed reply-paid envelope. We shall, of course, acknowledge it. Thank you very much for your help.

I THINK I HAVE ANSWERED THE QUESTIONS AS WELL AS I CAN. THIS BATTLE HAS EFFECTED MY LIFE VERY MUCH SINCE IT HAPPENED, I NOW HAVE DUTCH FRIENDS WHO COME TO LIVE ME FOR A WEEK EVERY YEAR, AND MY WIFE AND I STAY WITH THEM WHEN WE GO ON THE ARNHEM PILGRIMAGE

I HAVE A PICTURE HANGING IN MY SITTING ROOM PAINTED BY JAVIS SHEPPARD, OF PART OF THE BATTLE AT OSTERBEEK CROSSROADS IT IS VERY GOOD INDEED, I ALSO HAVE LITTLE MEMENTOS OF THE PILGRIMAGES WHICH THE DUTCH PEOPLE HAVE GIVEN ME, I SHALL BE GOING THERE AGAIN IN SEPT.

THANK YOU FOR INCLUDING ME IN THE BOOK, I WOULD BE GLAD TO HELP YOU IN EVERY WAY I CAN, AFTER THE BATTLE THE JOURNEY INTO GERMANY IN CATTLE TRUCKS IN WHICH WE ^{WERE} SHUT IN FOR FOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS, MIGHT HELP YOU, I WOULD WELCOME ANYBODY WHO WANTED TO COME TO MY HOME TO ASK ME ANYTHING.

THANK YOU AGAIN

YOURS SINCERELY

WILLIAM ARTHUR O'BRIEN
54 LINES ROAD
WALTHAM CROSS
HERTS