



## British Army Signaller Harry Read

Harry Read was born in Teesville, a small town in the North Riding of Yorkshire in 1924, the third child of Robert and Florence Read.

Mine was a very happy household. My parents were devoted Salvationists and the family home was loving and secure. Materially, it was a poor home because we were caught up in the Depression which in the north east of England was very severe, resulting in a great deal of unemployment. My father was among that great number of men who were unemployed for quite long periods. That must have created all kinds of problems for my parents of which I was totally unaware because of my happy upbringing. Furthermore, nobody had much in the way of possessions because everyone was poor. All were victims of the Depression.



Harry Read

Harry's father had been in The Green Howards during the First World War having fought at Ypres and the Somme. He had been wounded twice being hospitalised each time.

In 1930, the family moved to Grangetown, also near Middlesbrough. When the declaration of war was made in 1939 Harry's school closed temporarily, and he decided to leave school to begin working for the war effort.

I was just fifteen and was very anxious, like most other young fellows, to get into the war but my father was quite adamant on two things. One was that he would never sign for me to join up before my eighteenth birthday and the other was that I was not to go into the infantry. They were two very important considerations he laid on me.

Harry began working at the local shipyard as an apprentice plater. He hated the work and when he learned that shipbuilding was to become a reserved occupation and that he would have to remain in the trade until the war ended, he immediately found clerical work for a firm whose trade and premises had been commandeered by the government.

I worked in the Middlesbrough office of this firm. Men, of course, were being called up for military service all the time and we youngsters found ourselves with jobs that were far and away beyond our seniority. When I was sixteen, for instance, the office in Malton, also in Yorkshire, needed someone to handle the clerical work and I was asked to go and was happy to do so. That turned out to be a very significant move.

As well as being a Boy Scout, Harry was also a Sergeant in the Air Training Corps in Cleveland. However, when he moved to Malton, the local ATC had enough NCOs and Harry knew he would have to start again 'at the bottom'.

That was an awful thing for young fellow to learn and I decided that I couldn't face that. My firm had fixed me up with lodgings in Malton and, lodging in the same house



were the wife and very young daughter of a Regimental Sergeant Major of one of the units stationed in the Malton area. Quite frequently, the RSM would visit his wife and I found them to be a superb couple. They were generously minded, kind and very understanding of this sixteen-year-old lad who was away from home. When talking with the RSM - Mr Stephenson - about this business of the ATC and the fact that I didn't want to return to the bottom rung of the ATC in Malton, he asked if I had ever considered joining The Home Guard. Such a thought had never crossed my mind and I must have said something like, "Why would I want to do that?" To which he replied, "Well, when you were a Boy Scout you did Morse Code didn't you?" To my affirmative he suggested that if I joined The Home Guard it would be of value in joining the military and I could go into the Royal Signals as a wireless operator. And so the seed was sown.

Every time I went home to visit my parents I made an futile plea to my father to sign the piece of paper that would allow me to go into military service. Always he flatly refused - with some justification. There was his own experience of World War 1 of course. Also, my older brother was a commissioned officer in The Royal Artillery by this time serving in the Middle East, and my older sister was in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. The reasoning was simple enough, why should the third child and second son become a member of the forces? So Dad steadfastly held out against me. But when I was eighteen and we both knew that his authorisation was no longer needed, I went home and the conversation ran on these lines: "Dad, at eighteen and a half I will be called up anyway, it would, therefore, be smart of me to go in now, volunteer for the Regiment I want and, at least have the chance of being what I want to be." He put his blessing on that and I immediately presented myself at the recruiting office in Blossom Street, York. That was September 1942.

The Recruiting Sergeant wrote 'Desires eventually to serve in The Royal Corps of Signals, operator, wireless and line' in red ink on Harry's application. Soon he was sent to Prestatyn, North Wales for his initial training.

Harry enjoyed most things about soldiering including the physical training not least being part of the small group being prepared for membership of the Regiment's cross-country running team. Whilst training as a wireless operator, there was an appeal for volunteers to serve with the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division that was then being formed.

I thought that was a super idea! It solved a number of problems for me not least of determining where I would go when my operator training was complete.

After completing his operator training, Harry was posted to Bulford Camp on Salisbury Plain on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1943. He was among the first men there and their first task was to clean the barrack rooms in preparation for further recruits.

They had listed me as a recruit for The Air Landing Brigade, that is, the Brigade that used gliders. I was disappointed that I had been so recorded because I had volunteered specifically for parachuting. While the Army was getting its records straight I did a couple of flights in gliders which I thoroughly enjoyed. In fact, the first time I ever



flew was in a glider. Then, within a matter of days - the early part of June 1943 - a group of us entrained for Chesterfield where, on arrival, we marched the twelve or thirteen miles to Hardwick Hall which had become a physical training centre to prove whether or not we could cope with all that was expected of a para.

The training at Hardwick Hall, Derbyshire, was very tough but Harry remembers relishing the challenge and enjoying the camaraderie. He received word that his father was gravely ill and was given compassionate leave to return home. His father died and, after the funeral, Harry returned to his squad at the training camp. He was given the opportunity of continuing with his original squad or being 'back-squadded'. He chose to continue but found the break in training had affected his fitness, he had to go through the aches and pains of getting relaxed muscles back to peak condition, while competing with men who had had no such break, even so, he completed the course. Training continued with jump training at Ringway - now Manchester Airport - where recruits jumped from old Whitley Bombers.

For the first few days we leapt out of mock-up aircraft on the ground and did our stuff on all the other training projects in the hangar which was all very interesting and demanding. Some fellows couldn't manage it and they were returned to their units. But it seemed all good fun to me. At that time, the standard number of jumps to qualify for the much-coveted wings was nine. If however, the weather was bad, inhibiting flying, and if reinforcements were urgently needed elsewhere, the number could be dropped to eight jumps or even seven. We were fortunate and did the full nine.

My first jump I hated. It was from a cage suspended beneath a Barrage Balloon, the balloon and cage being anchored to a truck. The balloon ascended under the control a man operating a large drum around which hundreds of feet of wire had been wound. The balloon rose slowly and steadily to 850 feet with the six men in the cage standing around the hole in the floor through which we would go. Five of us were nervous, the sixth was the instructor who exuded nonchalance, gave good advice and well-intentioned humour that didn't always work. Each in turn we had to sit at the edge of the hole and, on the word of command, push ourselves off and out. Because there is no slip-stream the jumper falls 150 feet before the parachute opens. 150 feet is not very much unless one is falling it! To be truthful, I didn't like that first jump and we had to do another almost immediately afterwards. When I had landed and rolled my chute up and walked towards the truck that had the refreshments I was saying to myself, "You are not liking this very much, Harry. No one would mind if you said you wouldn't do it again." But I was in a squad of blokes not all of whom were telling the truth because they were all saying, "Hey, what a marvellous experience, super this, super that and the other." So I said to myself "Well, maybe the next one will be different" and it was. I quite enjoyed the second one and continued to complete the course.

Fully trained, Harry received his wings and red beret. He returned to Bulford at the end of July 1943 and, after two weeks privilege jump leave, began training for D Day. This included maintaining fitness levels, shooting on ranges, unarmed combat, operating wireless sets and occasionally manning the Signal Office.



One day I was sent for and our CO told me that they had received a note concerning a recommendation that had been made in my initial training, related to the possibility of going to OCTU. "Do you wish to follow through with this?" was the question. Since the original interview I hadn't given it very much thought but, and this sounds quite stupid, I didn't wish to miss D Day. Had I opted for officer selection and the training that went with it, I would have missed the big day itself. So I said, "Thank you very much, Sir, I would rather stay where I am." I stayed, therefore, with J Section, 6th Airborne Divisional Signals. The decision did not affect unduly the course of the war but it certainly affected me.

Preparing for D Day, Harry and his unit were to jump in the presence of The Princess Royal on Salisbury Plain. The weather conditions were poor and everyone hit the ground hard, bounced, and the strong wind got into the parachutes and dragged them along the ground.

There we were being dragged along at an unseemly rate of knots, pulling like mad at the lower rigging lines to spill the air out so that we could stop and detach ourselves from the chutes. I felt my left knee objecting strongly to the force of that landing.

A couple of days later, we did a night drop that came into the category of being a little bit horrendous. It was not a good night and they were testing the efficiency of a new landing flare which meant that, intermittently, we had this massive burst of light and then pitch darkness. We did not know but our aircraft came in lower than we had expected - we jumped out OK, there was a sudden burst of light, then the accentuated darkness and, thump, we had landed. We had no way of gauging where we were in relation to the ground. Some chaps landed in a clump of trees that didn't do them much good. The leg I had already hurt I hurt further. Subsequently, I ought to have done something about the pain and possible damage, but what if they had sent me back to my unit? So I soldiered on with a leg that kept reminding me that what I was doing was not very smart. I did the route marches and everything else required of me but I was always conscious of the fact that I had a problem in my left knee.

The preparation for D Day was really quite thorough involving a variety of schemes. They were tough and rough but, by and large, enjoyable. I remember the last one we had before D Day when we were sent into the Somerset area where the ground was as near to 'D Day ground' as could be found. A jump was associated with the exercise but the weather worsened and continued to do so. The rain was torrential. We bivouacked - two fellows putting their groundsheets together for shelter and sleeping underneath the inadequate canopy - except that we didn't sleep very well because of the mud and utter discomfort. When we started off again we continued to pull the canvas trolley that held our radio set and equipment. A couple of us pulled and a third man was at the back end to help with the control because we and it kept slipping down the wet, muddy slopes. We were drenched through with the rain, more or less caked in mud and, suddenly, it occurred to me that it was my birthday. Not the best of ways to spend your twentieth birthday.



We went back to Bulford. The next few days were even more strongly focused on D Day: checking our personal weapons - In my case, a Sten Gun - ammunition, rations, the contents of our packs and our wireless sets.

The Division was given a weekend leave shortly before we were to move into the designated security areas before D Day. Those who lived too far away to be back in time decided to risk going home and, on our late return, were charged with being AWOL (Absent Without Leave) and fined three days pay. Since the Army needed us on D Day we had reckoned that we would not be punished much more severely than that.

The Division was moved into a concentration area, Harry's area was in Down Ampney, Oxfordshire, where they had no contact with the outside world.

Shortly after we arrived in our field and had settled into our tents we were assembled to learn the strategy of the campaign and to learn the precise parts we were to play. It was a very sobering experience. Whatever feelings of exultation any of us might have had were punctured as we were briefed.

It was clear from the briefing that very substantial casualties were expected on the landing itself. No wonder our section had such a generous supply of wireless operators! The casualty expectation looked to be in the region of 50%. If others thought as I thought, the prospect of a safe return home was diminishing by the minute but, having put our lives on the line there was no thought of backing out, we would sell our lives dearly. We were all in the same boat and we trusted each other to do our jobs well.

We were supposed to take-off on the night our fourth June and were all geared for that. I think it was during the afternoon that word came to the effect that the weather conditions were severe and the campaign was put off for another 24 hours. At least, it gave a lot of men another 24 hours of living. The next day, the fifth, we boarded the transports and were driven to the airfield.

The RAF treated us very kindly. If I remember aright, they gave us a slap-up meal of bangers and mash after which we trooped out to the airfield where all the aircraft were lined up awaiting us. They looked very, very impressive. They were American Dakotas - C47s.

I am guessing that it was about 10pm when we emplaned having been hanging about for a very long time. Getting a whole brigade into aircraft and airborne is a time consuming task but, eventually, we roared off the runway and were airborne. Getting a fleet like that into formation before heading for the battlefield was time consuming also and, after stooging round and round seemingly for hours, we set off for France. Our time of destiny had arrived. An interesting moment came when the pilot spoke on



Map issued to officers of the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division.



the intercom inviting us to look down to view the coastline informing us that we were passing over Poole Bay. In retirement my wife and I live in Bournemouth and often, when sitting at ease on the beach I hear a piston-driven aircraft flying over and, immediately, in my mind I am sitting in a C47 looking through a small window at the white waves as they struck the beach just after midnight on that far-off day.

Quite how long it took us to reach the French Coast I do not know, but we had the command to stand, hook up our parachutes and check the chute of the man in front. Our aircraft lurched drunkenly upwards and we wondered what had caused it. Over the intercom came the pilot's voice telling us that he had released two large anti-personnel bombs 'just to keep the enemy's heads down'. We were reassured but he might have forewarned us. The aircraft moved into a significantly slower, steady course, the red light came on, then the green and we were moving as quickly as possible to the exit. We were so cluttered with kit that we needed help to reach the door and get out and the despatcher did not fail us. The roar of the engine increased as we left the plane and we were battered by the slipstream before our chutes opened - our war had truly begun.

The descent was interesting. There was no throat-swelling fear, just the awareness of what had to be done. The sky was alive and alight with shells, tracer bullets, and noise from the explosions and yet we felt - I felt - an air of detachment. In the distance an aircraft plunged to the earth in a ball of fire and then, I landed. If that is the right word to use because between me and the land was a couple of feet of water. It was an unexpectedly soft landing.

Harry jumped at 01.20 hrs on 6 June.

I had landed in the area, west of the River Dives that the Germans had flooded with water to discourage airborne troops. It was a successful ploy on their part. When daylight came we could see the silk circles on top of the water indicating that a parachutist had descending and drowned before he could free himself from his harness. It was a salutary sight.

The plan outlined to us in the concentration area was that, on landing, we would look for a strong green light and rendezvous on it. Lights there were in plenty but not one that looked remotely like a rendezvous light. I thought I had better move through the water in the general direction of our flight. Picking up the heavy wooden-sided accumulator I had jumped with, I put it on my shoulder and fell straight into a trench full of flood-water. With much difficulty I extricated myself remembering that, before flooding, the Germans had dug trenches across the land to add further hazards to their defences. Another few paces and again, I virtually disappeared and had to scramble out. This was to happen frequently but, on the third occasion, I concluded that the accumulator had become a pointless burden so I tipped it back into the ditch and continued walking. We had landed fairly near to a village called Robhomme but we were further east than we should have been, hence the flooded area.



Shortly after this I met another man from my aircraft. He was a member of the defence platoon and I knew him only as Paddy. We plodded on together for a while and met another little group that had an artillery Captain in charge. It was still quite dark and when they said which way they were going Paddy and I were not impressed and continued our own way. We waded through water both deep and shallow. Occasionally we were shot at, but we must have been bad targets as we continued towards Robhomme. In the afternoon we came to a knoll with a few trees offering shelter. We valued the opportunity to dry out a little, have a meal and keep under observation a farmhouse that looked as if it might be valuable to us. When we had witnessed no movement for a time, we walked towards the farmhouse - again we had to go through some water, and when we reached the door, Paddy knocked while I covered him with my Sten gun. The door opened and the warmest of welcomes awaited us from the farmer and his family. In the large living room there must have been twenty to thirty other airborne troops present, as was the village priest.

The priest had just arrived and counselled us to stay put. To move in any direction would, in his judgment, be foolhardy. He told us that nearer to Robhomme there was another group of Paras. He promised to contact them and tell them about us. We slept well that night on the straw in the barn and the next day the priest returned to say that someone would come to us from that other group and give us instructions. The priest had not been gone long before a Sergeant came along - a Sergeant who was very anxious to let it be known that he was in charge - but the message was that later that night someone would come for us, would lead us to the other group and that all together, we would journey to le Mesnil which was the proposed place for the headquarters of our 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Brigade. In due course, we made our way towards the other group and we were formed up into a single file. The people they didn't particularly trust with firearms - namely we headquarters lot - they stuck in the middle while the infantrymen were fore and aft and we made what seemed to be a very, very long journey during that night.

It was a potentially hazardous journey because every now and again the column shuffled to a halt and there was gunfire either front or back. Then the command came to advance and we would go past a vehicle containing the bodies of the Germans who had just been killed.

Early in the morning - five or six o'clock - we linked up with our own units. Paddy and I just walked into the 3 Para Brigade headquarters both of us amazed at the small number of men there. We had expected a greater number. Chaps I didn't know wonderfully well, even though we were in the same section, greeted me like a long-lost brother. I guess we lost at least a third of our men - not all killed, of course. Some would be wounded, some prisoners, some 'just missing' and one or two like ourselves straggled in after us. The losses were not good and that radio set we had packed with such care and were supposed to operate never did appear. We lost so much equipment it was unbelievable.



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Our Brigade Headquarters was set up in a farm - a working farm still despite the fact that it was now in the front line. The Signal Office was in a small barn, next to it was a larger barn that was used as a mortuary and next to that, a large barn which became a Field Hospital where a team of medics, tirelessly, compassionately and skilfully attended to the wounded. A field just down to the right became a temporary burial ground. In our cramped, dark and somewhat smelly Signal office we had our field telephone exchange and the Brigade wireless set.

The Brigade Commander was Brigadier James Hill and I remember him well. When, in August we were able to break out of our entrenched position, I was one of those assigned to work on the roving set that accompanied the Brigadier. So, I either trudged along behind him with one those wretched voice-only wirelasses on my back or, when we had the luxury of the jeep the we used decent set installed in the rear. The Brigadier was a very brave man and a superb soldier.

Being in le Mesnil was not easy. There had been a lot of hard fighting before we could be established there and we were under almost constant attack. Ours was the situation where when you manned the trenches at dusk you were amazed that you were still alive to do so, and you had the same feeling of surprise when you manned the trenches at dawn. Every day was a bonus. We took an awful pasting at times and our Para Battalions around us which had also been reduced dramatically in size by the drop and the subsequent fighting, performed miracles. They were quite magnificent. Holding our compact position for a number of weeks was fraught with danger. The Germans knew that if they could break through our defences they could do serious damage to the whole invasion force. With our limited and light arms we had to keep a well-equipped enemy at bay, and so it continued, week after week. After we had been in le Mesnil for about ten days we were withdrawn from the line exchanging places with the 5<sup>th</sup> Para Brigade. They occupied a magnificent old chateau in Ranville and we learned that the 5<sup>th</sup> Para were very good at digging trenches. Their 5 star trenches were a luxury compared with our less well-dug holes. When, however, we returned to le Mesnil another ten days or so later, it was to find that, courtesy of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, we too had 5 star accommodation. And so the war of attrition continued.



Brigadier Hill, second from left.  
Brigadier Hill has also been interviewed  
and has placed material at the Centre.

In the August we broke out of our defensive positions - perhaps that is not the right way to describe it - the enemy withdrew and we helped them move a little faster. The withdrawal was due to the defeat of the German armies in other parts of France. Our position was rather like a hinge and on it the liberating armies swung in a large,



victorious arc across the country. It was at this time that I was alternating being with the Brigadier in the jeep or back-packing the lighter, more mobile wireless set.

I recall one occasion when a Battalion was out of contact with us and it was assumed that their wireless set was not functioning. Brigadier Hill wanted to make contact with the Battalion and he, his ADC and me with this wretched replacement set left our positions to find them. The enemy was defending the top of a hill and the road ran straight up it from bottom to top. It seemed as though the Germans were firing their deadly 88 guns straight down the road at us. I felt that, if we stood up, they would take our heads right off. We made our way up the hill through the wood at the side of the road and I stood in amazement as the Brigadier and his ADC stopped, produced a map and, with shaded torches began working out the route to the out-of-touch Battalion. They stood as though they believed themselves to be indestructible even though every time the shells whizzed past we all went to ground. Unfortunately, when I dived and hit the ground the wireless set hit me. In the end, we linked with the Battalion and the working set was exchanged for the defective set. I Where the jeep came from I do not know, but, for the that return journey a jeep appeared and, with bodies perched everywhere, including the Brigadier, ADC and me we returned to our lines. For most of the journey, the Germans occupied one side of the road and we the other.

Shortly after that episode and having advanced fairly swiftly in the wake of the fleeing enemy, we were pulled out of the line for the purpose of doing another drop that would enable us to trap large numbers of enemy troops. As we understood it, we were to drop on the other side of the Seine thereby preventing the enemy from retreating across the river. However, such was the speed and momentum of the advance, that it became clear our role was no longer required and plans were made to return us to the UK. Having landed on 6th June we returned via the Mulberry Harbour to Southampton and then to Bulford. We were given privilege leave immediately and, while we were on that leave, the spectacularly brave and glorious, albeit unsuccessful, exploits of the 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division took place at Arnhem. What heroism they showed!

Harry was sent to the military hospital in Shaftesbury. The medical staff decided against an operation on his leg as they were unsure how to treat some of the injuries caused by parachute jumping. Instead, they downgraded him medically to B7 and returned him to the Signals Holding Battalion in Thirsk for general duties.

...which bored me stiff. After a winter spent messing around doing this that and the other I thought there might be some wisdom in returning to the Airborne Division if I could get my A1 medical rating back. I also needed to get a trade rating too because my general duties service had lost me my operator status. When I tried to set in motion my return to the Airborne Division I was told that my medical records had not followed me to Thirsk. In the meanwhile, I applied to take a driving course, this being one of the shortest and most useful courses to take, and I was sent to Catterick for this purpose. My medical records never reappeared even though I asked repeatedly for the appropriate procedures to be initiated. But events were moving swiftly: the atomic



bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the war in the east was over and, in effect, the Army had no further need of my services in a fighting capacity.

I was posted from Catterick to Stromness in the Orkney Islands as part of Scottish Command Signals and, when the Orkney units were closed I was posted to Edinburgh still as part of Scottish Command Signals. I was demobilised in June of 1947. My demobilisation was from the City of York where, almost five years earlier, I had enlisted. A delightful touch, I thought.

I don't think any of us could see beyond D Day - certainly not among we younger fellows. From our late teens we had been conditioned to do everything in relationship to that great occasion. We used to listen to Vera Lynne singing her nostalgic, morale-boosting songs and we shared the yearnings of everyone for days of peace and normality but I certainly had no view beyond the war itself and being active in the war. But as I look back I see how formative those years were. I think to be in the Paras, as with the Commandos and other special units, you learn to endure, to just keep going when other people stop. You learn that you can always do a bit more, push yourself harder, make even bigger demands upon yourself and that becomes engrained in your character. You have the confidence of knowing that you have faced up to the biggest physical demands that the military can make of you, and you have passed. That's helpful. You know that you took part in one of the biggest battles in the Second World War - a definitive battle - and it gives you confidence for just about everything else in life. I am very grateful for the time I spent in the 6th Airborne Division: grateful and proud.

When the subject of hardship in war came up, I often said, partly expecting to be misunderstood, "Well, of course, I had a good war." And so I had! I wasn't wounded, I was scarred neither in body nor in mind. I wasn't like the chaps in the Far East who suffered unbelievably at the hands of vicious, twisted, sadistic men. I was never incarcerated in some awful prisoner of war camp. I was never on a death march. I was in the war without any of those things happening to me and, in an odd kind of way, I am glad of the experience although I would never like it to be repeated. As far as I am aware, the experience has harmed me not at all.

Shortly into my military experience I backed away from my Christian faith but, strangely enough, when I went on D Day, I took a pocket Bible, with me. The more I think about it the more unreasonable a thing that seemed to be. It was not until mid 1945, when I was beginning to think seriously about the future, what I would do, the kind of person I wanted to be, that I began saying to myself things like: "You don't really like the kind of person you are becoming. You are capable of living a better kind of life than this, a more worthwhile kind of life, unless you do something soon you are not going to be a very nice person to know." I remember saying to myself: "Maybe the faith that your Father had, which you have rejected is the faith that you ought to take up again." Those insights coincided with going home on leave and my brother was home on leave from the Middle East at the same time. My brother hadn't lost his faith, and I looked at the wholesomeness of his life, the quality of it, I realised



that I had to change. It was while I was doing my driver's course at Catterick that I made my return to the faith.

### **POEMS BY HARRY READ**

#### **ON RECEIVING GENERAL RICHARD GALE'S BOOK,**

*With the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne division in Normandy.*

#### **ALONE (1)**

Just flicking through the pages stirs my heart  
And memories move gently through my mind,  
Was I not of that mighty force a part?  
And did I not with them my manhood find?

I sense again the tension of the flight,  
The nonchalance, the jocularity  
Concealing fear with death in sight,  
The swift unfolding of our destiny.

I felt that almost fatalistic thrill  
As we prepared to exit from the plane,  
The coolness caused by fear's compulsive chill,  
The question: 'Would I see my home again?'

The jump - the slipstream - now this war I own,  
The shooting - landing - vigilance - alone.



### ALONE (2)

ALONE and wet - so soon to be half-drowned -  
This was the land the Germans chose to flood,  
And in those trenches dug deep in the ground  
I struggled through the water, weeds and mud.

Around, small battles more intensive grew,  
Above, more aircraft followed on our path,  
In lazy arcs the tracer bullets flew,  
Beyond, planes earthward plunged in fiery wrath.

I waded on and, on some higher ground,  
Met up with Paddy, also from my stick\*.  
Quite clearly, nothing seemed to be as planned,  
Was fortune, good or bad, about to play a trick?

If safety and success in numbers lay,  
We had no choice but try another way.

\* *Stick, the name given to group exiting the same aircraft.*

### TWO OF US

I learned that Paddy came from Galway Bay,  
Now, every time I hear that haunting tune  
My mind slips gears and back I go t'D Day,  
And all the hazards of the 6<sup>th</sup> of June.

Although the battle noises were intense,  
Our stretch of water seemed to generate  
An air of unreality - a sense  
That we were not quite part of war's estate.

And yet, we knew our lives were still at stake,  
We still could drown, be killed by sniper's fire,  
In ambush die, or unwise pathway take:  
This separation was not our desire.

We would have been encouraged much to know  
Our feet had found the safest way to go.