



The Sentinel

Newsletter of the Rhodesian Services Association

"I have learned that if you must leave a place that you have lived in and loved and where all your yesteryears are buried deep, leave it any way except a slow way, leave it the fastest way you can. Never turn back and never believe that an hour you remember is a better hour because it is dead. Passed years seem safe ones, vanquished ones, while the future lives in a cloud, formidable from a distance. The cloud clears as you enter it. I have learned this, but like everyone, I learned it late."

~Beryl Markham, *West with the Night*

FROM OUR INBOX:

We were saddened to learn recently of the passing of war artist, Peter Badcock (1949 – 2024).

Peter was born in South Africa in 1949 and moved to Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) before settling in Southern Rhodesia in 1954. He had a career in commercial film making, exhibition and interior design, and public relations and advertising. Later, he turned to fine art and writing, publishing his first book, *Shadows of War*, in 1978. He served as a territorial with the Zimbabwe Rhodesian Security Forces, initially with the British



South Africa Police Reserve and later with the Internal Affairs National Service Unit; he was commissioned in July 1978. His second book, *Faces of War* (1980), involved twelve months of research and travel all over the country with units of the Security Forces. *Images of War* (1981) explored the gritty devastation of the South and South West African Border War, which drew to its own conclusion 10 years later, in March 1990.

Peter Badcock's final book, *A War Artist's Diary* (2021), chronicles war in Southern Africa with exceptional drawings and verse from his three best-selling books. It documents the turbulence and raw emotion of the Rhodesian Bush War, through to its end in April 1980. His powerful, photo-realistic pencil drawings, coupled with emotive verse, helped make his international reputation as one of the last war artists of the twentieth century.

www.peterbadcock.com



WAR AND REMEMBRANCE

HARRY WHEELER, NO. 266 (RHODESIA) SQUADRON RAF

Extract from: *Escape - Or Die*, by Paul Brickhill
London: Evans Brothers, 1952

It Feels Like This

Harry Wheeler's mother became critically ill at his birth in 1922 at Gatooma, in Southern Rhodesia, and Wheeler, of Irish-Scots descent, was brought up by a Dutch woman who had just lost her baby. He lived for a time near Johannesburg, and then with his father among the dusty, rough-and-ready gold mines of Southern Rhodesia, being educated at Prince Edward High School in Salisbury. The life made him a rather quiet, self-reliant youngster. Too young for the Forces in 1939, he became an apprentice electrician until he joined the RAF in Rhodesia in 1942, qualified as a fighter pilot and left for England next day. He flew Typhoons with No 266 [Rhodesia] Squadron, took part in the Invasion and a few weeks later was operating from Airstrip B3 on the Normandy Beach-head, doing close Army support, strafing tanks, transport and pillboxes. He was twenty-two when the following ordeal happened, a long, thin Rhodesian with deep-set eyes under hairy brows and a dry, composed manner. Always inclined to go his own way, he had a habit when flying of unclipping his oxygen mask and sucking at a tin of condensed milk. He wrote this when he came back, and it is so unusually vivid and unaffected that I have made few changes—a little trimming, a little added after talks with him, but that is all. It is as he saw it.

* * *

AUGUST, 1944, was my rugged month. On the 8th I was shot down by flak south of Caën but was able to crash-lob in a minefield behind our lines and got back to the squadron that night. Next day I was flying again and saw my pal 'Pithie' get it on his twentieth birthday. He was in flames and I heard him saying over the R/T that he was going to bale out but he didn't make it.*

On the 15th we were out beating up tanks and trucks in the Falaise Pocket. I was flying a new Typhoon, had a go with my rockets at a couple of heavy trucks and was pulling up through the thick flak when a shell exploded under my seat and the cockpit was full of smoke and shrapnel. I felt some of the shrapnel get me in the back, the left arm and the left leg and saw a lot of flames flaring under my seat.

I couldn't have been more than fifteen hundred feet then and knew pretty soon that the 'Tiffie' had had it. She was out of control, the port wing was dropping and nothing happened when I

pulled the stick over, except that she winged over some more and the nose started dropping. She was going down steeper and steeper and there wasn't much time.

I remember I tried to call up over the R/T and say I was hopping out, but my left arm wouldn't move so I couldn't get it up to press the transmission switch. Anyway, I'd no sooner thought of it than I knew I didn't have time. I pulled the hood jettison but she wouldn't go, it was stuck somehow from the explosion and I thought I was trapped and hammered at the side panel like a madman with my right arm, which was all right.

I got a grip on the panic and bashed away some more and the forward end of the hood opened a shade and the slipstream ripped it clear away. I was going nearly straight down now, must have been hitting over three hundred miles an hour and had a hell of a time trying to force myself out of the cockpit. It was all happening at a terrible speed, only a few seconds for the whole lot, and I was trying to do it all at once and not panic.

I got my head out and the air felt fluid at that speed and pressed me back into the cockpit. I was panicking again, rammed up with my legs, got my head and shoulders out and the slipstream sucked me out suddenly and my boots flew off. Just for a moment I was frightened I was going to hit the tail, but I did not I was falling face down, spread-eagled, saw the ground rushing up at me, pulled the ripcord and thankfully felt a terrific jerk as the parachute opened.

I only floated for about four or five seconds, I was so low. The aircraft hit the ground and exploded into flames with a great roar and I felt sick because I was so close to being in it, no longer myself, a living being, but a mangled, charred monstrosity burning fiercely with the aircraft, the fats of my body providing the fuel to feed the fires of self-destruction. I am told, this is so. It is not a pleasant, thought but I had no time to dwell on it, because I hit the deck in my socks.

I saw I was in a little field with a high hedge all round it and the Jerries who had been shooting at me on the way down were still shooting. The bullets were zipping through the hedges and though they were shooting blindly it didn't feel too good. I pulled out my revolver and ran and dived through the hedge on the other side, squeezed through all the sticks and leaves and got an awful shock to see a little Nazi standing beside me with a gun as I stood up. He was the first one I had seen and he was a little rat-faced uniform screaming something at me.

A lot of other Germans were running up, so I didn't feel inclined to shoot the little one but he looked as though he was going to shoot me. I think he thought I should have put my hands up but I couldn't move my left arm. I put my gun in my belt and was quite satisfied to go quietly, being wounded and having no boots and surrounded—I'm no hero—but he

started taking aim from about a foot away, or that is going through the motions of shooting from that range—it's hard to describe—so I got hold of his gun barrel with my good hand and pointed it to one side. He started swearing but he was only a little guy so he couldn't do much else for the moment. I was too scared just to stand there and be shot and then a big English-speaking Westphalian came running up and told him to ease up. I was glad of that.

There now that's how I was captured and the amazing thing is how fast it all happened, say six seconds for getting out of the plane, two seconds for falling free, gloriously aware of the cool, liquid air flowing past me, snatching at my clothes (I remember liking that), five seconds for the time I hung on silk and thirty seconds for the confused business - on the ground up till the time the Westphalian came up about forty-five seconds from the time I was sitting serenely in the aircraft and was hit. It does not seem possible it could all happen so fast. I was pretty sure the squadron would think I was dead (and as a matter of fact, they did—they reported me, "Missing, believed killed"). Maybe they'd seen the kite on fire very low and the explosion and smoke when it hit.

I do not know the Westphalian's name but shall call him Hans. I dare say, that will do. I always connect the name with German wood-choppers. He was a big fellow with a heavy face and mousy hair and looked as though he had a lot of kids. He spoke a bit of rough English and stood no nonsense from the other Germans. He was a sergeant

Hans went away, I think to report my arrival somewhere, and the other Jerries pinched my watch and things. I was feeling pretty dizzy and faint now and simply stood still with my left arm dangling down, watching the blood drip from my finger tips on to my left foot, soaking my sock. It struck me as rather funny that I should be standing there in my socks, surrounded by men whose language I could not understand staring at me, some with hatred in their eyes and others mildly curious.

The little sod who had captured me had not yet stopped cursing at me. I wondered when he would run out of swear words but he did not do so in my presence. I shan't soon forget his expression of loathing, how he circled round me cursing me all the time and then saying, "Amerikana? Tormie?" and when I said "Tommy" he wanted to shoot me again. I did not like him either. It was all very frightening and I did not want to die. Hans came back and suggested I sit on the grass while he took my name and number and so on. It was a small enough humanitarian gesture but it was a change from the cursing and it cheered me up a lot.

The dizzy sensation started passing away and when I really knew I was alive the sun seemed brighter and the grass greener, and my wounds did not seem to hurt so much. I could breathe without hurting, so I knew the shrapnel in my back had not gone through my lungs, and that was a relief.

A Volkswagen pulled up and Hans told me to get in. Driving out of the field a gate barred our way. Jerry would not be stopped by the gate, oh no—the driver drove straight into it but it would not give and we were all thrown forward violently. He backed the car away and tried again, but the gate held again. He did that three times in all, but the rickety old gate held so the driver climbed out and opened it, looking very foolish. It seemed funny to me and I grinned, and he gave me a dirty look. They took me to a dressing station in an old farmhouse. It was full of badly wounded men, most of them in a filthy condition and the stink was awful. There were a lot of yells and moans coming out of one room, and saw some surgeons come out of it looking weary and overworked, and peeling dripping rubber gloves from their hands, well smeared with gore (I fully expected to see a trolley load of arms and legs being wheeled out).

Anyway, I decided to tell them I was very fit and after some bandaging they took me away in the Volkswagen again. I was feeling a bit revolted. It was my first view of the side of war we don't like to think about. Ground fighting is an unpleasant, messy business. Hans took me in the Volkswagen to his CO and on the way I saw a Yank pilot in a Lightning buy it. He came down much the same way as I did and burst into flames, but the difference was he didn't get out. The Jerries cheered wildly. Hans did not, he said 'Your Kamerad was not as lucky as you.'

His CO was a scrawny, hard-looking individual. He was sitting in a tent and shot a few questions at me through Hans, which I wouldn't answer and then he made me wait. I heard him nattering on the phone inside. I can speak Afrikaans a little, which is a bit like German in a way, but all I could make out of he was saying on the phone sounded like, "Mack the Man flood." In Afrikaans that means, "Make the man dead—shoot the man," and I did not feel too good. He was having a heated argument with someone over the phone and I hoped like hell that the guy at the other end was better at arguing than he was. It was not very funny to stand there and listen to two men arguing as to whether I should die, or not. It was nearly too much for me.

He put the phone down and called me into the tent. Hans stood very gravely beside me, at attention. The CO asked for my identity card. I handed it to him, he glanced at it and threw it in the dirt. I suppose I was expected to pick it up but left it lying there. Hans picked it up and we loped off. When we got back in the car, I asked, "Am I going to be shot?" but Hans didn't answer, he only shrugged, and I started feeling pretty sick, I didn't want to die. I knew I would not be shot normally but these were anything but normal times. These Germans were being trapped in the shambles of the Falaise Pocket. They were in a desperate position and not likely to bother overmuch with prisoners—particularly someone who had been strafing them with rockets and cannon, and they surely hated us in Typhoons. I did not know what the verdict was for certain, but was pretty sure I was for it.

Hans drove me to another tent and three more German officers interrogated me, wanting to know about the buzz-bombs and all that sort of thing. One of them accused me of resisting capture and I guessed they were going to use that as flimsy excuse for shooting me. When they tried to search me, I turned out the front pockets of my battledress jacket and told them that if they wanted my emergency kit, they'd have to look in the dinghy pack on my parachute. I argued with them about that, so that they forgot to search my pants and I kept all my survival-kit in my pants pockets.

After that they took me out into a field and some soldiers came up with rifles and a pick and shovel and started digging a hole. I tried to remain outwardly calm and watched them digging. One of them was cursing all the time until Hans told him to shut up, and then I saw that the hole was not oblong, it was a round sort of shape. I don't know what it was for but I sighed very deeply. Hell, I was frightened.

Then Hans drove me to a German Army barbed-wire cage for prisoners but the Germans refused to take me, saying I was the Luftwaffe's responsibility. Hans looked pretty grim at that as he drove off again and after a lot of trouble, he found two German officers in a staff car who said they would whip me back to a rear prison camp in their car. Hans looked pretty relieved and from a couple of little things he said at the time about being lucky to have found them, I gathered I was to have been shot if I'd had to stay in the front area that night. Hans wished me luck then and loped off. He was a good Jerry and I was lucky to have fallen into his hands.

The two Jerry officers were all right, neither friendly nor unfriendly, in fact they rather ignored me. Now that the shock was wearing off a bit I was thinking about escape. I thought if I could give these two the slip, I might be able to filter through the lines back to the squadron, or lie up somewhere till our advance overtook me. So I was particularly glad when they said it was too late to drive to the rear areas that night and they parked under a tree with a couple more German Officers and brought out some bottles of champagne. They offered me some and it was very good, particularly as my back and left shoulder were getting very painful and I needed a bit of a pick-me-up. The Jerries kept polishing off bottles of the stuff, sitting under a tree and getting merrier and merrier. They kept offering me more but I said no, I was hoping they would get good and bottled, and pass out so I could mosey off into the woods, but one sly blighter stayed sober and after a couple of hours he handed me off to a nearby barn and locked me in for the night.

My wounds were getting worse and worse, and I had to keep sitting up all night to ease the pain. The rain was pouring down outside and I could see my escape plans getting dimmer.

In the morning, they drove me off in the car through Falaise, which was a shambles. It had been bombed and shelled a few hours before and the dust was still settling over the dead

ruins. You didn't see a soul. The buildings reeled drunkenly and the shop windows were bursting open, spilling all the odds and ends over the rubble on the pavements. We went straight through it and I was keeping a crafty check on where we were going with my compass and map.

It was a lovely day—for air operations—and I was hoping we'd be spotted and attacked so I could run for it in the general confusion. We saw a lot of kites about—ours—but none of them made a pass at us. I suppose if they had attacked, I'd have soon changed my mind about being glad of it.

Once we had to get out and walk up a stony hill that was too steep for the little car and I hurried on ahead thinking I might get far enough away for a dash, but one of the guards kept up with me. He must have been a thought-reader.

My back was getting worse than ever and it was swelling up a lot so that I began to look as if I'd flake out any moment: The Jerries called in at a field hospital so that my back could be dressed. They were rather decent about it. It was a big tent with a lot of wounded lying about on cots and on the ground, and a general noise and smell. I lost my compass here. I had it tucked into the bandage on my arm and forgot it when a German orderly unbandaging it, found the compass. He didn't know what it was and I tried to pass it off as joke, saying it was a lucky souvenir, but the doctor recognised it and said he would keep it for a lucky souvenir himself.

He had one look at my back and arm and put on that solemn look that doctors do when they don't like what they see. He said something and I gathered I was in for the knife. The Jerries in the car said they would wait, which was decent of them, though I think they were glad of the chance to sit down and do nothing.

A young SS fellow was having a boil lanced just before my turn. They had to hold him down and he made a hell of a din about it, which made me laugh openly, and he saw this and took exception to it. When they let him off the slab, he came across to me and looked me over. I did likewise. He told me he had killed four "Tormies", holding up four fingers and saying "Tormie" and drawing his finger across his throat and pointing to himself. He seemed very proud of himself I thought it would not be good policy to tell him how many Jerry troops I had belted with rockets and cannon. I saw no reason to be proud of it in any case.

The little SS type swaggered round and the others thought him pretty good. There was a band round his forearm with 'Hitler' written on it. When it came to my turn on the slab, he looked on with great interest, hoping I'd yell out no doubt but I was determined not to. The doc probed a bit in the hole on my back but it did not hurt. I screwed up my face as if it did hurt, but did not make a sound and the Jerry looked disappointed. I chuckled to

myself because it seemed funny and then the Jerry loped off. The doc said I had a big piece near the lung and a couple of dozen pieces in the arm and they would have to be done somewhere else. He gave me a shot in the arm and I drifted off into unconsciousness. When I woke up some time later, I asked for more. I'd easily become addicted to drugs. Must watch that.

They put me in the back of the car and drove me a few more miles to a base hospital at Evreau. The drug had made me feel dopey and a woman threw a bucket of water in my face to wake me up. There were hundreds of wounded Jerries about and they put me on the slab and gave me chloroform. I don't like chloroform.

When I woke up, I was all bandaged and they were loading me into an ambulance. That ride from Evreau to Paris was the worst thing I've ever had. I can still hear, if I allow myself to, the moans and cries of the Luftwaffe pilot above me who kept thrashing around in his agony. He was burned all over his head and body and wrapped in paper bandages (all the Jerries had), which had come undone, exposing the burned flesh.

There was the Yank whose system was poisoned by a gangrenous hand and who kept shouting out in delirium to someone called Mike or Mac telling them to look out. Then he'd clap his swollen and good hands together spasmodically and lash out at the fellow next to him. This boy was an Englishman with an amputated leg and the Yank kept kicking it. He would yell and curse horribly. I asked the Germans to let me change places with him, even though the Yank's wound smelt putrid, but he would not let me. This din went on for about six hours. The roads were blocked with a lot of horse-drawn carts the Jerries were using, and we went pretty slowly.

About six in the evening, we got to the Hôpital de la Pitié in Paris. I was very tired. They took me up to the top floor where all the prisoner patients were, and it was crammed to the eyebrows. The wards were over-full of serious cases and scores of double-decker bunks lined the cold white walls of the corridors to take the overflow. There were no doctors, only a skeleton staff of German and French nurses and dull-looking German guards leaning lazily against the walls. There didn't seem to be much in the way of medical supplies. I found a bunk for myself in one of the corridors and piled in, beginning to feel pretty good again because in all this confusion it ought to be a piece of cake to escape. What I wanted more than anything was some shoes or boots to make me mobile.

In the morning when I woke up my pants and battle jacket were gone so it looked as if I was stuck, unless I could swipe someone else's. All I had then was a rather bloody shirt, some underpants and my big green silk scarf which we all wore on the squadron to prevent chafing of 'weaver's neck' looking around all the time when you're flying. On the bunk next to mine I noticed an African man he was slender with an aquiline nose and an

aristocratic sort of face, and was sitting there very composed, not saying a word looking rather lonely, and I saw he was putting on a ragged British battledress. I spoke to him in English but he looked a bit baffled, so I tried him in 'chilapalapa', which I speak a bit, and his eyes lit up like a lamp-post. He started nattering away, looking terribly glad, and it turned out that he came from Nyasaland. I talk that language very well, so we nattered for a long time.

He'd been caught in Tobruk nearly three years before and all that time he'd been a prisoner in Europe, cut off by language and class and all that sort of thing, terribly lonely and homesick and not knowing what it was all about and when it was going to end, if ever. He had been utterly forlorn, not able to talk to anyone, but in some funny way it had broadened his mind immensely so that I could not help wondering at it. Yet he was a simple, sincere man for all that His name was Kbwana Yusuf and he told me how he was being marched from Chartres towards Paris when a lorry ran over his guard and himself, he being pinned under his guard as the wheel passed over them, killing the guard. He was a young fellow and I asked him if he would like to try and escape with me and come be a batman on the squadron. He said, "Inde, chabwino Bwana" – (meaning he'd like to very much).

As he was quite fit and I could not use my left arm I asked him if he would wash my clothes and he did so cheerfully; I gave him two hundred francs from my escape money as a 'bonsella'. The day passed almost pleasantly talking to Kbwana and I forgot all about the war. It took my mind right back home again. I thought I would like to have him work for me after the war. He said he would like to and I gave him my name and address but I guess he has forgotten it. I should have written it down for him.

The Germans never gave us any rations as they were supposed to, but they brought us round Red Cross parcels that day. Kbwana did not like the chocolate in them. He said he'd give a lot for a pot of sadza (ground maize) instead, so I gave him my cigarettes for his chocolate. I didn't get to meet too many of the other prisoners at this stage. They seemed to be all sorts, mostly foreign, though a few were English and Dominion and American. I talked to a couple, but there were no Air Force people among them and most of them anyway were too sick to talk. Still, it was a great relief to feel that there were some of my own kind around. A rumour started flying around that afternoon that the Allies were within two days of reaching Paris and all the boys started to feel a bit cheerful. If only we could be left there long enough, I thought. If only

About 4 o'clock a bunch of Germans came in and took away a lot of the less seriously wounded men. My name was not on the list, thank God, and I found out that the list had been made up the previous day. I guess that's what saved me that time. If they had known I was a pilot, they'd have nabbed me right away. I'd like to thank the unknown thief who

pinched my battle jacket with the wings on it. Maybe they saw him with it and took him because of the wings. That would be funny. Poetic justice. They took Kbwana away with this first lot. I was having a look at the washing at the time and did not know he was taken or I would have tried to hide him away. I was sorry to see him go. How strange it was that he should have been there, he who had no real ideas about the war, the reasons for fighting it, but only had an idea that he liked the English and disliked the Germans. He had seen enough of them. He wanted to go home. How strange it was that we should have sat there, he translating what the Germans said to me (he could understand some but not speak it) and I translating English to him. Now he was gone I don't suppose I will ever see him again.

The Germans had said they would be coming back for more and we were all hoping and hoping that we, individually, would be left behind. I had been limping around a bit but now I climbed back into my bunk ready to look very sick when they came back. I took off my vest so my wounded back would show more, spread the bandages on my arm and leg as far as I could and tore up my 'Verwundet' card with all the details of my wounds on them. I was caught on the wrong foot. The Germans came back sooner than I thought they would and ran in and saw me sitting up on my bunk talking to the chap two bunks along. They came straight for me and indicated I must walk downstairs to the ambulance. I pointed to my leg, showing the bandages and shook my head. They pointed to a stretcher and I asked, "Deutschland?" They said, "Ja" and I said, "Nein" very emphatically, and two of them grabbed hold of me to hoist me away. I hung onto the bed with two hands, groaning, and they tugged and tugged but I wouldn't let go. I thought it was pretty safe to do that – they didn't have any pistols on them, so they'd have had to take the bunk as well as me to get me. They tried to persuade me, saying that everyone was going, so I told them in Afrikaans (which they could understand a bit) that they could take everyone else in the hospital first and then I would go. They looked bewildered for a while, they just did not seem to know what to do in these circumstances, so they turned and took some other guys who did not seem to know how to argue.

The fun was not over yet. The chap I was talking to (his leg was badly shattered) kept telling me to hide quickly, but I didn't dare get off the bed because the Germans were clumping about the place and would grab me if I did. So I lay there hoping and hoping they would not return and then two more came along and told me to get up and move. They had guns. I was lying down when they came up and was pretty sure these two had not seen me sitting up before, so I started drooling at the mouth and breathing in short, sharp gasps as I'd seen a fellow breathing earlier in the day, dying with a hole through his lung. I looked at them as one does when thinking hard, without seeing them, so to speak, and murmured "Loong" (lung) and "Blut" (blood), pointing to my mouth and coughing, and then pointing to the hole in my back. They nodded and looked quite sympathetic and

then they walked away. God, it was a tense moment. I suppose they thought I'd soon be dead. All the lung cases there died, as far as I know. I suppose it was only because they were half drunk they fell for it, because they hustled away a lot of chaps who weren't fit to be moved.

It felt pretty good after they had gone. I didn't think I could have bluffed them so easily. And then an English-speaking French padre came round and said the Jerries would not be coming back and that the S.S. were machine-gunning the streets to clear them of civilians. We could hear the burst of fire out in the streets and knew that we looked like being in the thick of a battle for Paris, but it still felt pretty good. I was quite happy and terribly pleased with myself. We started organising ourselves then and an English Army officer, with his arm lashed in a steel and leather cradle round his shoulder, took charge of the place. There were three hundred of us left and we moved out of the corridors into the wards, those who could walk, like me, helping those who could not. We cleaned the place up, as it was pretty filthy and a few of us tried to do what we could for the helpless ones. There was not much we could do. The Germans had taken all the medical supplies. Anyway, I carried bedpans and did what I could and that night none of us got much sleep, because the gunfire in the streets had worked up to quite a pitch.

There was a fight going on outside the hospital somewhere. The French Resistance boys had come out into the open. You could always pick out the Jerry machine guns, their rate of fire was so fast it sounded like calico tearing, but much louder of course. The French had the mostly slower firing British guns. The Jerries had some of their wicked 88mm mobile guns and they bellowed forth from time to time. After a while I dropped into a half-doze, but there was an engine in the hospital laundry going and its chug-chug-chug worked into my dreams and then another burst from the guns would wake me up in a fright. Now and then you could hear the crunch, crunch of Germans marching in the street. The fires in the boiler house sent flickering shadows dancing across the walls, and then someone banged loudly on a door below. It must have been the butt of a rifle. There were some sharp shouts in German, then silence again. I got all tight inside. More loud bangs and then a hell of a crash as though a door had been smashed open. Then silence – nothing else, just silence. It was very weird. I dropped into a sort of sleep again and woke up with a heavy thump. I was lying on the floor, my back wound hurting terribly. I had fallen or jumped out of bed in my sleep. I'm always doing that. I crawled back into bed feeling like a goat and shivered till morning.

That was the first of the ten nights we had there while Paris was falling. I got used to the shooting after that and slept through it all. Though most of the others had hell every night. There's no use telling what happened in the next days. First, some French doctors and nurses came in about the third day, having dodged the bullets in the streets. They

had heard we were there and wanted to look after us and as we were the first Allied men they had seen they made a wonderful fuss of us. The nurses came round kissing us all in turn and from somewhere they brought out bottles of champagne and some wonderful grub. The doctors all seemed to be specialists and the nurses were very pretty. They did a wonderful job with the sick, but it didn't stop people dying all the time. I helped to carry some of the bodies down and put them in the coffins and one of the boys used to read something from a French bible over them. Unfortunately, no one knew which part of the burial ceremony to read, so it meant that the guy had to read it all and it was very long. A few of us used to try and stick around in the mortuary till he had finished reading, to give the man some sort of send-off and then it was all over, bar the banging in of the nails. We had to leave them in the mortuary and it was midsummer, which was not too good after a while. It seemed so damn silly that all these men should be dying. War is a fool business to be sure. I used to feel a bit silly at these 'funerals' because, having no pants, I couldn't very well stand there in my underpants, so I wrapped my green silk scarf around my waist like a sarong. The nurses all thought it was funny as hell and said, "Oo-la-la" whenever they passed me. I kept wishing my legs weren't so long and thin.

The French brought in their wounded from the street fighting and brought in wounded Germans, too, and when a German died his mates took their turn behind us to take him down to the mortuary and read the service over him. We waited and waited in the hospital while the shooting went on all round and it was getting pretty tense. People were looking thin-lipped and edgy. We kept on hoping the Germans would not come back into the hospital and wondering where the Allies were. The battle was still going on noisily in the city and a Frenchman brought in a radio and tuned it in to London. It was strange to hear the BBC announcer's voice echoing round the wards, but the strangest part was when he said the fighting in Paris had now ceased. There were some horse-laughes round the ward and then a particularly vicious burst of machine gun fire outside the grounds. The Jerries never got back into the hospital in strength. A sniper broke in one night and shot a doctor, and another night two nurses were shot standing too near a window.

The morning after that I heard a tremendous commotion in the street, a lot of shouting and roaring rolling along nearer and nearer. I pinned my sarong on and ran down and through the front door and there was an armoured car tearing along with a French tricolour waving over it and French soldiers leaning out of it, waving and grinning. French people were pouring into the street from their houses where they'd been hiding in the cellars for days and they were screaming and jumping and kissing and waving flags they'd been storing up for years and years for this moment. My God the steam had really blown the safety valve and they were going crazy. A lot of them were crying and then

they found out I was an RAF pilot and a mob got round me and a lot of girls were kissing me and an old man was kissing me on both cheeks and the noise was a roar all round.

More armoured cars rolled down the street and it was obvious that the boys were here to stay. I got myself away from the French, went back into the hospital and walked round telling everyone that the boys were here and that Paris was free. A man in my ward who was dying said, "Thank God." He was crying. The man in the next bed, who was going to live, said, "Christ, about time, too." I got hold of a pair of pants and a jacket from someone who had just died and went back out into the street and got as far as the Champs Elysées and the Unknown Soldier's tomb in the Arc de Triomphe. It was a pretty mad day. Snipers were still around and the occasional rattle of shots sent us ducking for cover, but outside that it was mostly kisses and champagne till I got sick of it and crawled back to the hospital. Some of the boys were carried in on stretchers, completely bottled. God, I was tired and limp. All I could feel then was that I wanted to get back to the squadron as soon as I could because I was pretty sure I'd been reported as probably killed.

That was my last night in Paris and that night the Jerries bombed us. A stick of bombs straddled the hospital, blowing in the windows and shaking up some of the sick boys pretty badly. We thought we'd better beat it all down to the cellars till it was over. We carried the sick ones down. I carried a French-Canadian called Maurice and it was a bit of a strain on my back and leg and arm. We stayed down there the whole night waiting for more bombs and I spent most of the time chatting to a very pretty little French nurse. The French shot her next day for collaborating with the Germans. Poor kid. She was only about eighteen and her collaboration consisted of sleeping with a few Germans. She was too young – certainly when the Germans arrived – to be really responsible for her actions., but there was not much justice in Paris at this time. It was like the tumbrils in the Revolution.

I'd had enough of Paris now. All I wanted was to get back to the squadron and let the people know I was alive before the boys auctioned my kit. There were some American ambulances arrived that day and I hitched a lift a few miles back out of Paris on one. Then I hitched with an American driver taking a truck back along the 'red ball' (priority) route. He drove all night and kept falling asleep at the wheel, so I had to stay awake and grab the wheel every time his head dropped. At sunrise, I tagged a Yank in a Jeep heading for Cherbourg. He didn't have a map but I did, so I directed him a long way off his road till we went through Caën where the squadron used to be and I hopped off there before he found out how far I had led him astray. I walked out of town across the fields to where the airfield used to be and there it was, still there, with the kites at dispersal. I spotted the familiar 'ZH' on the side of the kites and that was a good moment. I'd been afraid

the squadron might have moved on. I wandered in casually around the back of the dispersals and came on old Dave Morgan suddenly. Someone was shooting the place up and I asked Dave what was to do. Were they leaving? He looked frightened for a moment and then he said, "Wait a minute, Harry, what are you doing here? You're dead!" He looked thunderstruck, as though he'd seen a ghost. I said I wasn't dead and he came out of his trance and said, "Jesus, it's good to see you. Where've you come from? What the hell happened? We thought you were dead." He turned round and screamed, "Hey, Dinkery, look who's here." Dinkery came running up and said, "Christ ... Harry ... No!" Paddy Culligan came out of the mess and so on. It was very strange indeed. It's good to have people so pleased to see you after they thought you were dead.

Pithie had not got back. Royce had got the chop in a dogfight against a swarm of Germans. But oh, I was so pleased to see all the others again. The Wingco, Johnny Baldwin, had a bath fixed up for me. Barney Wright, my CO, who is a 'press-on' type, said, "Would you like a week's leave?" and I said, "No, I've got a hole in my back. I'd like more than that." The doc looked me over and said I ought to have twenty-eight days. That night I was in Ted Donne's tent and got to sleep quite early, but not for long. Little Joe, Zombie Laing, Ginger Cunnison (who had watched my aircraft fly into the deck and explode) and Henderson turned up after a visit to the front line, and hearing I was back came across to see for themselves it was true. They asked me what had happened and I tried to tell them. I got so far and then my mind went blank – I simply could not think or talk intelligently. Try as I might. Being woken suddenly when I was so very very tired was a bit of a shock and my body started to tremble violently all over and my face to twitch. I tried to say I'd tell them in the morning and then Ted told them to leave me.

I lay there trying to stop my fool body from twitching and trembling and my mind from wandering off along endless channels of thought. At one time I felt I was being wrapped in cotton wool. Then my mind, my being, seemed to grow smaller and smaller till I became a mere speck burning in my head. This frightened me and I fought against that train of thought. My body would not stop trembling so I let it do so. I concentrated on making it tremble till I grew tired, but this took a long time.

Eventually I slept for a while, only to be woken by the sound of the Typhoons being started and run up very early in the morning before it grew light. The explosions of the Koffman starters sent my mind racing back to Paris and the street fighting. My body started trembling again and I grew annoyed. I was like an old woman. I did not like my face to twitch. I thought the tendency might stay with me, but it has not done so since that night, I am glad to say. It was just that I was very tired.

Wheeler was a ferry pilot for six weeks after his escape until, bored with that, he got himself posted back to his old squadron. Commissioned then, he stayed on operations till the end of the war. He returned to South Africa in September 1945, did a four-year degree course in electrical engineering at the University of Cape Town, then a two-year postgraduate course in England. He settled in Southern Rhodesia where he practised as a professional engineer.

Many thanks to George Parker for his assistance with this write-up.

* Harry's good friend 'Pithie' was Peter Green who is listed on our Roll of Honour.

<https://orafs1.rssing.com/chan-11353596/latest-article9.php>

If anyone can put us in touch with relatives of Harry Wheeler, please let us know. It's believed his niece, Dawn Duncan, is living in Melbourne.

ROLL OF HONOUR

Corporal Michael David Kilcoyne Lawrence BCR (Posthumous) 2 Engineer Squadron, Rhodesian Corps of Engineers

Service no. 728600

Killed in action: 8th April, 1979

Corporal Michael David Kilcoyne Lawrence was assigned to the Mine Detection Vehicle Troop, 2 Engineer Squadron, in May 1978 and served with this troop until his death on 8th April, 1979. During this period, Corporal Lawrence was almost continuously deployed on mine detection duties and he declined to take any periods of R&R, preferring to remain in the operational area. He personally located and accounted for 39 landmines, including 11 equipped with very sensitive and dangerous booby traps.

Corporal Lawrence was ambushed 14 times, while leading convoys in the operational area. He was killed by terrorists in an ambush on 8th April 1979 and awarded the Bronze Cross of Rhodesia on 5th October, 1979. His citation states that he "rendered exceptional service to his country and showed great courage, resourcefulness and devotion to duty, beyond that which he would normally be called upon to do."

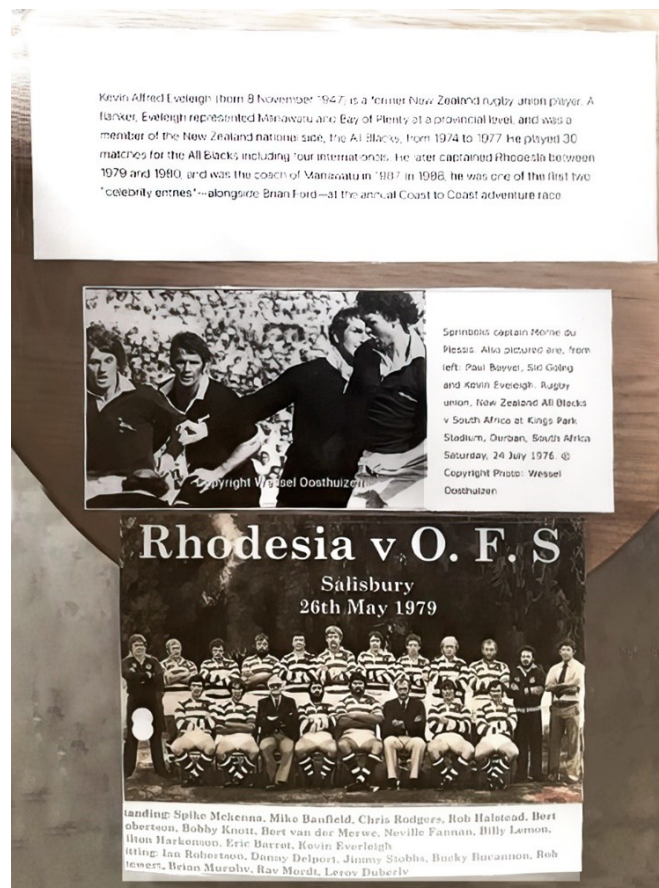


THE LION & TUSK MUSEUM

~ Hugh Bomford

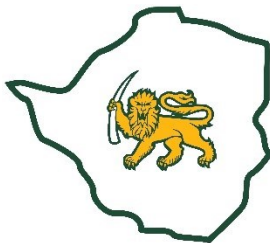
Kevin Eveleigh

Kevin Alfred Eveleigh is a former New Zealand rugby union player. A flanker, Eveleigh represented Manawatu and Bay of Plenty at a provincial level and was a member of the New Zealand national side, the All Blacks, from 1974 to 1977. He played 30 matches for the All Blacks including four tests. He later captained Rhodesia between 1979 and 1980, playing 25 games for the country. Kevin was not the biggest flank in stature, but he more than made up for that by being one of the toughest players that Rhodesian, Zimbabwean, and New Zealander players have ever encountered. Back in New Zealand, Kevin was the coach of Manawatu in 1987 and in 1988 he ran in the annual NZ Coast to Coast adventure race.



We are trying hard to contact Kevin and his wife, Lesley, who we believe are still living in New Zealand. If anyone can help us, please email: theeditor@rhodesianservices.org

Former All Black, Kevin Eveleigh's Rhodesian rugby jersey in a temporary display position in The Lion and Tusk Museum. We are grateful to Roy Wither for providing this historic artefact.



THE CQ STORE

Our CQ Store is one of the main sources of revenue funding The Lion and Tusk Museum. Over the 20 plus years that we have been operating we have strived to supply unique goods along with old fashioned personal service to our customers. There is no other store in the world that carries the diverse array of goods aimed at the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean market. We are frequently adding new products and updating our website <https://www.rhodesianservices.org/cq-store.htm>

When you buy from the Rhodesian Services Association CQ Store and you are supporting the preservation of Rhodesian history through The Lion and Tusk Museum.

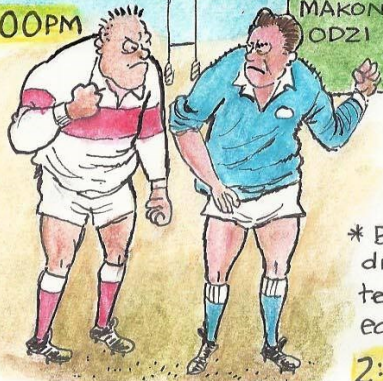
Rhodesian Rugby

COUNTRY DISTRICTS

DISTRICTS RUGBY WAS BRUTAL. IT WAS PLAYED ON CONCRETE HARD DUSTY GROUNDS. HUGE AFRIKAANER FARMERS DOMINATED.

AFTER THE INITIAL CRATES OF CASTLE AND LION HAD BEEN DOWNED THE SINGING BEGAN

3:00PM



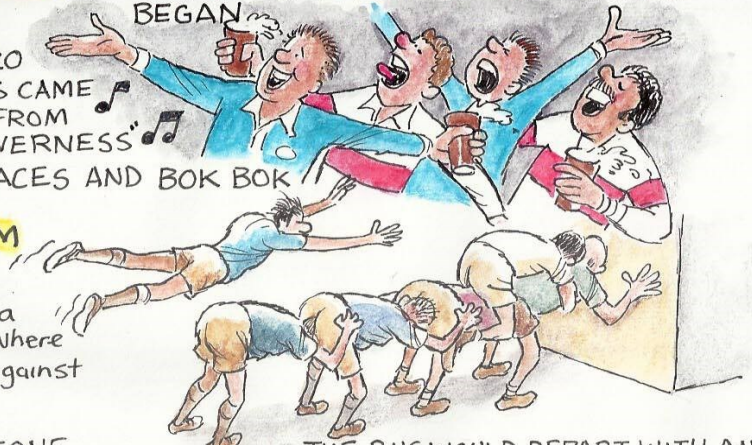
MAKONI 12
ODZI 10

4 AND 20 VIRGINS CAME DOWN FROM INVERNESS

* BOAT RACES AND BOK BOK

9:00PM

* Boat races were a drinking game where teams competed against each other.



5:00PM



2:00AM SOMEONE WOULD SHAKE A BEER AND SPRAY IT....



3:00AM

THE BUS WOULD DEPART WITH AN OPPOSITION CHRISTENING.



WHEW!
Vick Mackenzie
2016

This newsletter is compiled by Jackie Jackson for the Rhodesian Services Association, jackie@rhodesianservices.org

To view previous newsletters, go to our [Archives](#)

Views, language, and information expressed in *The Sentinel* may not reflect current understanding, they are provided in a historical context.

The Lion and Tusk Museum is a collection of historical, cultural, artistic, and scientific information displays, videos, photos, and writings. These depict Rhodesia and Rhodesians of all races, from the late 19th century until the country's transition to Zimbabwe in 1980. Neither the museum management, nor its team of volunteers, have political, racial, or gender-specific agendas, and they unreservedly condemn any scandal-mongering misconceptions to the contrary.



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Postal: PO Box 13003, Tauranga 3141, New Zealand

Physical: Unit 10, 14 Portside Drive, Mount Maunganui, New Zealand

Web: www.rhodesianservices.org and www.thelionandtusk.org