

THE RAWLENCE FAMILY



I was born in 1947, but much of my early childhood memories involved the after-effects of the Second World War. We lived at first in London and then, when I was three, moved to a farming estate 15 miles away. But London was still very scarred by the Blitz. After leaving the army, my father worked as a property developer buying up devastated bomb sites and building new office blocks on them. He became successful.

Mike, my father was always very social and was a great raconteur. Most of his friends had fought in the war and had marks to prove it too. Some were amputees and one in particular had been stuck in a burning tank and it took a five-year-old great courage to look at his horrendously scarred face without having to turn away. Rationing continued until 1954. In fact, it was tightened after the war in 1946 to allow more food to be available to the 22 million refugees and homeless in Europe, many of whom were housed in former US and British army bases. When we went shopping with our mother, we were aware of what was in short supply and the long queues. Even children had their ration books. All who could, grew their own vegetables, and we had poultry rabbits and pigs. My father also contributed to the pot, by shooting game: pigeons, pheasant and hares.

Most of our games were war based. The country estate contained several disused bunkers, part of a defensive ring around London. These mini fortresses provided a concrete back drop to our games of imagination. We even managed to purloin items from my father's old uniform to add authenticity: army binoculars, a range finder, even a rusty bayonet. It kept us occupied for hours.

My father's friends could sometimes be persuaded to tell their stories. My brother's godfather was called Jimmy Mason. His elder brother Gully had been heir to the family title of Lord Blackford. Jimmy was the second son and not groomed for that responsibility. Both boys loved to fly and had owned and flown their own airplane even in their teens. Gully was the first to join the RAF and as a spitfire pilot was killed in the Battle of Britain. Jimmy joined up next. He survived the war. As a pilot they were always on standby. When an enemy bomber raid was detected the order came to "Scramble" and they had to grab their flying kit and dash to their aircraft. Jimmy related how during one such raid he was shot down and landed in the sea. He was rescued soon after, but the sailors could not help pointing and laughing at him. He was still in his pajamas! Jimmy's life was not a happy one. He inherited the title, and with it, great wealth and responsibilities as chairman of several large concerns and insurance companies. He could not handle it and became an alcoholic and died young. His only son also died young, of a drug overdose, aged twenty-four. The title of Lord Blackford died with him. The family is buried in a small church in Dorset, the nearest to the village of Blackford, and there is a stained-glass window commemorating Gully in his RAF flying kit.

My father told his story the most. Ironically this was because his war lasted only 2 months. Others who had endured more were perhaps reluctant to speak so freely.

Operation Torch was the code name for the Allied landings in North Africa in November 1942. It was the first time that US troops under General Eisenhower saw action. By then of course the British had been fighting for over 3 years.

My father had been at Cambridge when war started, and he joined up soon after. After basic training and attendance at an Officer Cadet Training Unit he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the Irish Guards in July 1940. He spent the next years in UK training his men. He embarked with 1st Battalion Irish Guards for North Africa as part of the British First Army, on the last day of February 1943.

On 21st March the battalion was on the offensive in the line opposite the enemy. The enemy occupied a farmhouse some distance away. Reconnaissance patrols, seeking specific information such as the exact positions of enemy strengths and defenses, are usually led by young officers, who gain valuable experience. My father was chosen to lead the battalion's first patrol that night. It was his twenty-third birthday. The patrol of six men was successful and reported back that they saw 12 Germans leaving the farmhouse in some haste. They knew that the area would be heavily mined, and they came across a notice in French. My father in his schoolboy French translated it "Careful you are entering a minefield" "His sergeant politely corrected him "No, sir. It says you have now left the minefield".

The next night the Commanding Officer called on 2nd Lieutenant Rawlence, who had seen the ground, to lead a small fighting patrol to secure a prisoner. This time they found the farm deserted except for one Arab who told them that the Germans had left. Then all hell let loose; the Germans had been expecting them and had their small arms and mortars trained ready. My father and one guardsman were wounded. The patrol managed to break clear and withdraw to their lines through the tall dewy corn carrying the wounded guardsman. My father - wounded in the head and the chest - collapsed once, and said he would be all right, and that they should please leave him as he was slowing the withdrawal. The Sergeant, knowing this was the most dangerous thing, insisted that he should keep with them. This undoubtedly saved his life. He just managed to get back, but collapsed on arrival. A member of the patrol said he could hear my father's chest wound blowing and his laboured breathing. "He was puffing and blowing like a broken-down cab-horse".

And that was the end of my father's war. He was attended to by Battalion Medical Officer who had set up the Regimental Aid Post with the White Fathers at a French mission nearby. He then spent a further whole year in various military hospitals on the North African coast, eventually being invalided home. He took up his duties again as a training officer, ending his days in the Army with the rank of Major.

My father had a fragment of a German medium mortar shell lodged in his lung for the rest of his life. At Cambridge he had been a superb athlete and scouted for an Olympic place. But he never ran again.

His younger brother Edward also joined the Irish Guards. I should mention that most of its officers came from Anglo-Irish families, a very close-knit community, which included Field Marshal Alexander, the Allied Commander in Chief in North Africa. Edward was commissioned into the Third (infantry) battalion, commanded by his cousin Joe Vandeleur, a flamboyant character played by Michael Caine in the film "A Bridge Too Far". In Operation Market Garden, in which Edward was involved, American and British airborne forces were to drop and capture intact the Arnhem bridges and the ground forces were to link up, spearheaded by the Guards Armoured Division with the Irish Guards taking the lead.

Edward was killed in bizarre circumstances. Edward was the battalion transport officer. This involved the resupply of petrol, ammunition and rations, and ensuring that traffic could get to and from the front where the supplies were needed, and from which casualties had to be evacuated. This hazardous task he performed on a motorbike.

The battalion had just secured an important goal, a key undamaged bridge over the Escaut Canal (to this day named Joe's Bridge) At some stage in the day he came off his bike and being concussed was

laid out in an ambulance. The next morning as the battalion was static, Edward was awoken by an alarming sound he instantly recognized. The rumbling tracks of a German tank entering the camp area. The enemy were counter-attacking. There is not much a lone soldier can do against a tank. There was one anti-tank launcher weapon called a PIAT that could be fired by an infantryman. Edward left the ambulance to find one and then ran off around the corner to take aim. He was killed instantly.

For several years I was in correspondence with a young Dutch military historian who was writing a wartime history of his small town's wartime experience and had been asked to supply photos and a brief bio of Edward. A nice book (eventually translated into English) was produced. Then in the summer of 2019 I received an invitation to a whole weekend event that the town of Valkenswaard was holding to celebrate the 75th anniversary of their liberation in September 1944. The descendants of all the known British soldiers who had liberated them were invited. As well as my siblings I extended the invitation to all my relatives for whom Edward was also their deceased uncle. That included my seven US first cousins, three of whom made the trip. I had not seen them since we were children over fifty years before.

The town did us proud. As well as dinners and exhibitions, our visit coincided with re-enactments of Operation Market Garden: mass paratroop drops and a march past of veteran vehicles that had been lovingly restored by enthusiasts, including a section of 20 Willis Jeeps that had been driven from Prague. As the cavalcade streamed by, we were in the street with our Union Jacks and Dutch flags.

There was one British veteran there; he had been 19 at the time. The last survivor. But in the small museum dedicated to the war we discovered carefully recorded videos of older veterans' stories when they had returned in years past. One recorded Edward's death. Eddie, he called him, was last seen alive disappearing in some haste to some barns with the PIAT. When they went to find him, all that was recognizable was his ribcage.

Up to that moment I had bought the British myth of the glory of the fallen. I had bought poppies every year and stood for two minutes silence at the Cenotaph. The reality of Edward's gory death disavowed me of the glorious myth. War is a terrible thing.

I had visited Edward's grave once before. When I was eight, I went with both my grandparents and father on a very emotional visit to see not only their son's grave but also the graves of my grandmother's two brothers killed aged nineteen and twenty-one in the First World War.

In the small cemetery, kept immaculately by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, near Edward is the grave of William Cavendish, the Marquess of Hartington, killed two days before Edward. William would have been the next Duke of Devonshire, the richest aristocrat in Britain. He was married to JF Kennedy's sister. When Joe Kennedy came to London in 1938 as US Ambassador, he wished to further the Kennedy lineage and was pleased that Kathleen had made such a successful match. Unfortunately, his posting as Ambassador only lasted until 1941, when he was forced to resign. Not only was he for maintaining US neutrality in opposition to Roosevelt but he was having secret meetings with German diplomats and outspokenly antisemitic, as his FBI files reveal.

Our family's civilians had war experiences as well. My grandfather Norman, a decorated Great War veteran, was made Salisbury's Chief Air Raid Warden. His team was on permanent look out for enemy air raids and their job was to raise the alarm. He boasted proudly that he never slept a night in his own bed throughout the war. Salisbury was bombed only slightly. It transpired that the Luftwaffe pilots used the tall spire of Salisbury Cathedral as a navigation aid in their raids over Southern England. The manufacture of Spitfire aircraft was carried out in over eighty locations in the United Kingdom. One of them was in Salisbury, but untouched by enemy bombing.

My grandparents' house was a large suburban villa, and they welcomed a family of evacuees from London for the first months of the war. The family later decided they would rather face out the blitz in London in their own home. My Grandmother once showed me the internal corridor where they all slept when there were air raid warnings.

Because it was a large family home, lesser members of the family closed down their own homes and moved in to save on resources and share food supplies etc. My Grandmother's sister and husband a retired lawyer both having worked in the Far East were employed in the local censorship office because of their language skills. Their only son Edmund, my father's first cousin, was away at sea. He had joined the Royal Navy aged 12 as an officer cadet. Edmund was serving on the famous aircraft carrier The Ark Royal. In May 1941 he was commanding a flight of Swordfish biplanes. They were sent north from Gibraltar to destroy the German battleship The Bismarck, that was threatening Allied shipping in the Atlantic and had just destroyed the pride of the British fleet HMS Hood. Edmund's strike force spotted the Bismarck and in two separate runs launched two torpedoes that hit the ship and immobilized her. The next morning Naval destroyers went in for the kill and Edmund from his airplane witnessed the Bismarck's sinking and German sailors leaping from its side. He was awarded the DSC, the highest decorated member of the family.

My two aunts contributed. Eleanor drove a mobile soup kitchen in London serving the anti-aircraft gun crews at night. This was in addition to her daytime job as a publisher. Mary became a nurse, at first in Salisbury where the United States established a purpose-built hospital¹ to cater for the D-day wounded, and later in the Scilly Isles.

Salisbury was an important centre in the build up to D-day. The south of England was full of the US Army and Eisenhower's command headquarters was in Wilton House near Salisbury. (My grandfather once took Eisenhower trout fishing)

Inevitably, given the dearth of young British men either away fighting in Italy, the Middle or Far East, or worse in prisoner of war camps, Eleanor met and married a United States soldier. Donald Carlson, a farmer from Wisconsin. They had a daughter - Linnet. After the war the British government paid for the brides and their children to sail to the States in the liner Queen Mary. Linnet to this day is proud of the special passport she was then issued with and her number on it; 1. She keeps it in her bank vault in West Palm Beach.

Eleanor's sister Mary went to visit them in Wisconsin. She met and married Donald's brother Richard. Mary was a dairy farmer's wife. She had five children and got up at 5 am every day to milk the herd. A far cry from learning flower arrangement at her private girls boarding school in Salisbury.

And that is how I come to have seven American first cousins.

Now we must turn our attention to the other side of the globe, Japan, where my mother Lorna grew up. There were not so many foreigners in Japan in the 1920s when Lorna was born. Indeed, when one of my sons visited Yokohama recently to trace his ancestry there, the librarian pulled down a volume for the correct year and all the foreigners living there then are registered. Tracing was made easy. My Grandfather, Henry, was a respected banker. He had organized a huge loan to finance the rebuilding of Japan after a disastrous earthquake in 1923. He was also banker to the Imperial family, with whom he was on intimate terms.

Lorna and her sister Barbara at aged ten were sent back to England to boarding school, Cheltenham Ladies College. Before air travel, it was a six week sea voyage between UK and Japan. They only

¹ Part of the American hospital is still in use as outbuildings and out-patient departments at Salisbury District Hospital, Odstock.

saw both parents once in the time until they were eighteen. That was when their parents came home for four months leave, Otherwise, they spent their school holidays in a home for other children of colonial parents.

After school in 1939 Lorna enrolled at the Sorbonne University in Paris. Her father Henry grew increasingly alarmed for her safety, reading the darkening news from Europe. At last he cabled her to return home forthwith. Lorna did, and enjoyed a gay social life among the expats in Tokyo. She soon became bored though and as she had secretarial skills took on the job of private secretary to the wife of the British Ambassador, Mrs. Craigie.

Henry was Chairman of the Anglo-Japanese Association the main liaison body with the Japanese for commercial and other negotiations. A tough role in those times. After the 1922 Washington Treaty on naval arms limitation in which Britain was a signatory, the previous friendly feeling (Japan had been our ally in the Great War) towards Great Britain changed. The Japanese government became increasingly xenophobic and militaristic. Isolated foreign businessmen were arrested and my grandparents' servants started to desert them. It was Prince Chichibou, the Emperor's brother, who finally approached Henry and advised him and his family to leave. They caught the last ship to leave before War was declared and sailed for Canada. My grandparents spent the rest of the war in Canada.

Lorna, ever restless and ambitious, used the wartime to travel. Using her experience, she worked first in Washington as secretary to the Indian Agent General; equivalent to Indian Ambassador today (India was not an independent country then) and then answered demands for call up by the British Government. The government organized her travel in an Atlantic convoy. Her ship was in a convoy of thirty ships in four lines within a circle of protecting destroyers. Her ship was the slowest and the last. There was a death on board and the ship slowed to a halt to carry out a burial at sea. The crew and passengers were all nervous as they saw the convoy disappearing ahead of them and then all hands were on deck to catch up, after the ceremony. When they arrived in Liverpool, they learned that four U-boats had been destroyed and that their convoy had been the only one to get through without a casualty that month.

When Lorna finally presented herself at the recruiting office, she did not join any of the armed forces. When they learnt of her experience, she was directed to the US Embassy in London. Because of the influx of American forces, embassy staff numbers were growing, and Lorna's relevant experience was valued. She worked in the propaganda department for a boss whose job was to travel around the UK lecturing the British on the American way of Life.

Being an attractive and party loving girl she soon fell in with young officers on leave in London and one of them happened to be an officer in the Irish Guards. And that was how she met Mike, my father.

We must now for a moment return to Japan. Not all of Lorna's family left for Canada, Lorna's elder sister Barbara had fallen in love with the Third Secretary in the British Embassy in Tokyo, a man called John Mason. They had married in April 1941. John's mother, Mrs. Mason, had come out especially for the wedding. She wished to stay on for a bit. After Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war against Japan by the US and the UK, all foreigners were interned. The British Embassy staff were interned in the grounds of the Embassy. They were not treated badly. In parallel the Japanese Embassy staff in London were reciprocally interned. The only moment of violence was when the Embassy staff were fired on as they took to the roof cheering the Doolittle raid, the first time the US from aircraft carriers successfully bombed Tokyo.

Mrs. Mason came in to her own and organized the catering for the compound, pooling resources and cajoling the Japanese for supplies. I am uncertain if the diet was a problem or not. The staff were eventually exchanged with the Japanese London Embassy staff at Lorenzo Marques (now Maputo

the capital of Mozambique), organized by the Red Cross. Barbara, her husband John and Mrs. Mason then travelled on to England, where John, sickening, died. Barbara and John's mother were bereft. As Mrs. Mason had been away so long her large empty house had been commandeered by the Army. Hearing their news had been another motivation for Lorna to leave Washington to be with her recently widowed sister.

Thus it was that the sisters were together in London in 1944. Lorna was sharing a flat near St James's Park, when on 18 June 1944 a V1 (Doodlebug) Rocket fell on the Guards Chapel, Wellington Barracks as the Sunday service was in full swing. 121 were killed and Lorna's flat nearby was deemed uninhabitable. She then moved in with Barbara and Mrs. Mason.

Post script

Both my grandfathers as civilians were decorated for their contributions; Norman in Salisbury an MBE, Henry in Japan a higher ranking CBE.

But the strangest award of all I only discovered last year. I was visiting my first cousin, one of Barbara's children, who gave a dinner party while we were there and brought out the family silver. The *pièce de résistance* in the centre of the table was a large silver bowl encrusted with gold and Japanese calligraphy. It had a marvelous provenance. The Bowl had been inherited from her mother's godfather, Major General Pigott. Pigott as a younger man had been the military attaché at the Tokyo Embassy at a time when Japan and Britain were allies. In that role he had struck up a close relationship with the young Emperor at that time, Hirohito.

Major General Pigott had long retired to Croydon by 1953. He was then an old man. Hirohito had not forgotten him. The Japanese Imperial family had received an invitation to Queen Elizabeth's Coronation in Westminster Abbey. The climate then in Britain was still very hostile to anything Japanese, let alone a visit by one of the Imperial family. Memories of ill treatment of British prisoners on the Burma Railway and in the camps of Singapore were still very raw. But the Emperor really wanted his son, The Crown Prince, to attend. It would be a rare opportunity to meet with the other royal families of the world. Pigott, provided the solution. The Crown Prince travelled to Britain incognito. He stayed with Pigott at his home outside London and on the day of the coronation was smuggled into Westminster Abbey. The bowl was an Imperial thank you present. Anti-Japanese emotions took a long time to subside in Britain.

Lorna and Mike married the week of VE day in Salisbury. They lived in London and just outside and had three surviving children. Mike was successful as a property developer, at first in London and then globally founding a large company in Australia. They divorced in 1968 and Mike married his second wife - an Australian - and went on to have two more sons. After her divorce, Lorna took up studying again and qualified as a barrister in her fifties. She went back to Japan once. She had arranged to be met at the airport by the family's devoted cook who they called Cooksan. The plane was delayed for half a day, but Cooksan waited on for her and on their drive he pointed out, with pride, the two large toy factories that he now owned. Henry had a stroke in New York and came to live with us for a few months before dying of a second one. His wife Hilda lived on for several years.

After her husband Norman's death in 1967, my grandmother Corrie went across the Atlantic to live with each of her daughters, eventually dying at age 99 with Mary in Wisconsin.

The family home in Salisbury lay neglected for several years after my grandparents' deaths. Mike had attempted to develop it, but all his plans were rejected because it was a Grade 2 listed building. I returned from living in India to take it over which is where I brought up my four children.