

The words and poems of Ron Reeve, 1TS and later 5BW written after the war.

### “My Dearest Friend” Poem

**Ron:** *“The subject of the poem was a “Private JOHN LEWIS<sup>1</sup> was a very popular member of our Platoon by virtue of his friendliness and helpfulness to us all and, more important still, his absolute reliability. His death was felt very keenly. There was a very strong bond of comradeship between us all. On the day that JOHN was killed we were attacking across about 600 yards of ‘No Man’s Land’ and he was the first man to go down. We were in the leading Platoon and I saw him fall only a few feet in front of me. He was killed at just turned midday on the 28th June 1944.”*

Autumn leaves come tumbling down  
To give the earth a mantle brown  
The drooping stems of summer rose  
Heralds coming winter snows  
Which clothe, like blushing bride, in white  
The resting earth and hides from sight It's cloak of brown.  
Then winter passes, springtime comes  
And Mother Nature beats her drums  
To tell the warming sun and rain  
To caress the earth and soil again  
And give to them the kiss of life  
To free them both from wintry strife  
And frosted gown.  
New—born fledglings in their nest  
Sing welcome to an earth new—dressed  
In sweet red roses, cornflowers blue  
And butterflies of gentle hue  
Rompers foals, babes in prams  
Playful kittens, bleating lambs In a wakening world.  
Lowling cattle in the fields  
Of shining grass the good earth yields  
Winding lanes through countryside  
Which hedgerows tall try hard to hide  
The sighing hymn of evening breeze

---

<sup>1</sup> Private ARTHUR GEORGE LEWIS, 14428021, Black Watch (Royal Highlanders) 1st Bn. The Tyneside Scottish. Died 28 June 1944 Age 19 years old. Buried at HOTTOT-LES-BAGUES WAR CEMETERY IV. F. 2. Son of James and Grace Lewis, of Elm Park, Romford, Essex.

Send leaves a—flutter in the trees Like flags unfurled.  
 Placid streams, fast—running brooks  
 Sunny banks and shady nooks  
 Fisher—birds that dip and rise  
 Among the hovering dragon—flies  
 Where willows cast their speckled shade  
 On life which caring Nature made no willing blend  
 Straw—thatched cottage, painted white  
 Flowered garden shining bright  
 And framed in gold as sunset pales  
 A quaint old mill with age-stilled sails  
 These lovely things, both old and new  
 Remind me, every day, of you My dearest Friend.

## “Juvigny” Poem<sup>2</sup>

**Ron:** *“this poem was prompted by my memories of a place called JUGVINY where we held the line for about a fortnight and where Jerry used to shell us every afternoon. In it I've tried to convey to the reader the destruction of the countryside, the waste of lives and the callous attitude that a soldier is forced to adopt towards his comrades' bodies and memory. As soon as a soldier is killed, he ceases to exist in every sense of the word. If anyone enquires after him after a battle, even if it is a very close relative as sometimes happens, he is simply told - 'he has gone for a '----' (to the toilet in other words) and he is never spoken of again. I can quite clearly recall the faces of many of my mates who were killed but, for this reason, I cannot remember their names with the exception of two of them and then only because they died particularly horrible deaths.*

*Re 'clop of hooves' (verse 4) the Germans used to bring up their supplies to the front line by horse and cart. As soon as we heard them our artillery would open fire on them and their artillery would fire back on us!”*

How fair your land proud Normandy  
 With dusty roads and apple tree  
 And sleepy village on valley floor  
 Beside the Seine.  
 But gone the farmer, gone the plough  
 Garden flowers all gone now  
 Foreign soldiers bent on war  
 Are here again.

No happy laughter heard from child  
 Only soldiers screaming wild  
 As, to death, they bravely go  
 In honour bound.  
 Come harvest time and every field  
 A goodly crop of death will yield  
 From seeds the guns of war now sow  
 With every round.

---

<sup>2</sup> Probably Juvigny sur Seullles.

<sup>3</sup> “Shit”

Your leafy lanes now churned to dust  
And Frenchmen's homes to rot and  
rust

Their once-proud owners now so sad  
And far away.

Now lines of trenches parallel  
Pave a road that leads to Hell  
For luckless soldiers,

Khaki clad or dressed in Grey.  
A clomp of hooves on dusty road\*  
A creak of cart with heavy load  
Heralds a coming thunderous duel  
And screaming shell.  
Muted thumps, then many more  
Glints of light on shells that soar  
Across sunny skies to add more fuel  
To this fiery Hell.

Stand to! Stand to! The word is passed  
Who knows now long this duel will last  
Nor who, forever, will lie and stare  
With sightless eyes.  
At the havoc wrought by Satan's hand  
Across this blood-soaked Norman land  
Where brave men fight in cold despair  
'Neath summer skies.

And there across the parapet  
Lies one who has, his Maker, met  
But does God know that this shattered heap  
Was but a boy.  
This bloody mess once lived and breathed  
It's beating heart, with pride, once seethed  
But discarded now to endless sleep  
Like a broken toy.

Though now you're dead, my bonny lad  
And has left, to cry, a Mother sad  
You are but one of a score times seven

Who, today, did fall.  
You are not alone, there are thousands  
more

Who, like you, gave their lives in war  
To march forever in a soldier's Heaven  
Good comrades all.

But silent now those hungry guns  
They've had their fill of mothers sons  
And from parapet your useless corpse  
Is kicked aside.  
Though etched, your name, in Glory be  
Your comrades have no memory  
You risked your life in proud disports  
You lost and died.

And who will remember in years to come  
The lad who answered the martial Drum  
And followed it, where only the brave  
Dared to tread  
None I fear will recall your name  
Just another pawn in another game  
A forgotten hero in a forgotten grave  
Just one of the dead.



**Ron:** *"The photograph at bottom right is one I brought home from the war. In July 1944 we were 'holding the line' at a place called JUVIGNY<sup>4</sup> in FRANCE. It was a 'quiet sector' of the line. Jerry used to shell us every afternoon from 4.00pm till 4.30pm exactly and also during the night but at all other times he left us completely alone so that we could wander about in complete safety. Indeed, we could see him wandering about his lines during the day so he must have been able to see us. People who have never fought an Infantryman's war will never be able to comprehend how strange war can be at times. Anyway, off to the right of our line was a ruined farmhouse and my mate, STAN SUSKINS and I got permission to wander over there to see if we could find any vegetables etc with which to*

*make a stew. The 'front line' is the most unhygienic place in the world but the food we used to 'organise' for ourselves was the tastiest and most enjoyable possible.*

*But first the photograph. When we arrived at the farmhouse, we found it to be a total ruin and I cannot emphasize the damage done to it enough. It had been a one-storey building but every single stone in every wall was completely flattened and yet, another strangeness of war, in the midst of the rubble stood a bedroom dressing-table almost undamaged with two framed photographs on top with the glass on both of them intact. One was of an oldish man and the other was this photograph of a little girl. I've always been fond of children and this little girl was so pretty I couldn't resist the temptation and so took it. If the people who had lived there had moved out before their home was destroyed, they would have taken it with them and, since they hadn't, it was obvious that they were dead. Their bodies were probably buried under the rubble we were walking about on including that of the dear little girl. This may sound rather callous to the reader but death and dreadful wounds was as much a part of our lives, and as natural, as eating and sleeping is to you and if we had allowed our minds to dwell upon it, it would have driven us insane within a week.*

*I would like to say more on this subject but I can't find the words to describe the horror of it all and, in any case, I find it too upsetting to think about it even now, nearly 50 years afterwards. I have often thought about writing to the French Embassy in London to see if they could find relatives of this little girl who might want her photograph back but I never seem to get round to it".*

## A Bacon 'Clanger'

*"I must now go back a bit to our lines. Immediately behind us was an 'anti-tank' ditch which was about half a mile long, about 15 feet deep and about the same in width. The idea was*

---

<sup>4</sup> This is probably Juvigny-sur-Seulles. Although there is no specific mention of it in the War Diaries, it was in the Battalion area of operation.

*that when tanks advanced, they would drop into the ditch and not be able to get out again. We didn't dig it; it was already there when we got there. However, it was an ideal place in which to light a fire when we wanted to do any cooking.*

*When I was at home my mother used to make a BACON CLANGER<sup>5</sup> which was delicious, and I couldn't get enough of it. Now when searching around this farmhouse we came across a large tub of plain flour and guess what the first thing I thought of was. We looked around and found a tin tub like the one we used to bath in when I was a child.*

*We then found a reasonably clean bedsheet amongst the rubble and loaded ourselves up with as much firewood as we could carry. Some of the other chaps fetched more as we needed it. We put an army groundsheet on the ground and, with water from a nearby stream, mixed up a large piece of dough. We didn't have a rolling pin so we patted it flat with our (unwashed) hands. Amongst our rations was some tinned food known as MACCHONICHIES<sup>6</sup> (I'm not sure if that is the correct spelling so I've written it phonetically) which included some tinned rashers of bacon. (It was all tinned food and very nice to. The AMBROSIA CREAMED RICE which you buy today was originally the same make as the tinned bacon which the Ambrosia Company has copied).*

*We spread the rashers over the dough, liberally mixed with onions (an essential part of a 'clanger') then rolled it all up 'rolly-poly' fashion and then wrapped it up in a piece of the sheet with the ends tied (like the ends of a sausage) and stitched the edge of the cloth along its length to prevent it from coming undone (just like mother used to do) and then popped it into the bath which, by that time, was already half filled with boiling water (from the stream again of course) and then sat back waiting for it to cook.*

*It was rather larger than the ones mother used to make but with so many mouths to feed it had to be. To get enough rashers we had to scrounge round the whole PLATOON which consisted of 36 men, a Lieutenant, a Sergeant, a Radio Operator and 3 Sections of 11 men each i.e., a Corporal, a Lance Corporal, a Bren-gunner (a light machine-gun firing 30 rounds a minute) and 8 Riflemen. It was 3 feet long and about 9 inches in diameter. I didn't know how long to cook it but mother used to say about 2 hours (as near as I can remember) and so, because of its large size, I cooked it for 3 hours and it came out perfect. We had the feed of our lives.*

*The Platoon Officer (Mr MURRAY) was particularly pleased with it and asked me to make another but before I could do so he was carted away on a stretcher with both his feet blown off<sup>7</sup>. A great shame because he was a good Officer".*

---

<sup>5</sup> A steamed Suet pudding made with bacon and onions.

<sup>6</sup> "Maconochie" was a stew of sliced turnips, carrots and potatoes in a thin broth, named for the Aberdeen Maconochie Company that produced it.

<sup>7</sup> Probably by a 'Schu-mine'. An anti -personnel mine used by the Germans and which caused many casualties.