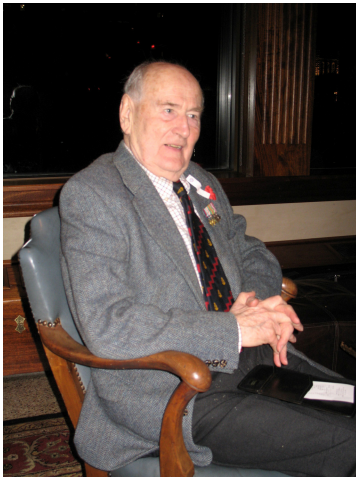


**Eric Sorensen's reminiscences of his time in Tickhill during
World War II.
He now lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.**



I was commissioned in the Royal Artillery in early January 1944, shortly before my 20th birthday. After ten days leave, I was despatched to join the 61st Medium Regiment Royal Artillery, sometimes known as the Welsh Yeomanry, stationed in Tickhill.

My posting to Tickhill, far away from my home town in Hertfordshire, gave rise to some foreboding.

In typical army fashion, I had spent the first two years of my army career training in the Field Artillery on the 25 pounder gun. I had had no experience with the much larger and more cumbersome 4.5 inch cannons with which the

61st Medium Regiment was equipped. I wondered whether I would be able to cope with the unexpected challenge of having to restart my army career, not only with unfamiliar equipment but with unfamiliar procedures.

One grey winter afternoon I remember being met at Doncaster train station by a young lieutenant accompanied by a driver. They drove me in a pick-up truck to this mysterious place called Tickhill which, since receiving notice of my posting, had given me so much trouble finding on a map! Driving through the narrow streets of the village for the first time, however, I was pleasantly surprised.

The Officers' Mess and the officers' sleeping quarters were located in the Friary, an impressive but grey sombre building on the outskirts of the village. The interior was dark and gloomy. Little seemed to remain of the Friary's sacred and dignified past which reached back into the several hundred years of its history. The cavernous rooms with its bare wooden floors had been stripped of its old monastic furniture and replaced by standard British Army wooden chairs, benches and tables.

The Friary was to be my home for the next several months.

My short stay in Tickhill was for me only a few grains of sand sifting through the hour glass of my life. Looking back on those years long since passed, however, I relive many, mostly very happy, memories.

I remember the lovely St. Mary's Church and its bells which played a nostalgic melody at every fourth hour of the day and night. I recall, one quiet, still evening, turning out and inspecting the guard at midnight to "The Last Rose of Summer". I was quite moved by this seemingly insignificant event which remains forever in my memory.

If I remember correctly, the tunes were changed every day. Included in the repertoire were "The Minstrel Boy" and "Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms"; I never hear these haunting melodies without casting my mind back to Tickhill and the winter of 1944.

Does St. Mary's Church still play these beautiful tunes throughout the day? I remember the pub, The Travellers' Rest, across the street from the Friary. In those days I was a non-drinker, but somehow or other I earned the affection

of the landlord and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. George Morel.

One Sunday George Morrell telephoned the Officers' Mess to ask, to my astonishment, if I might be interested in killing a Pig that afternoon! It was a rather strange request, I thought. Nevertheless, later in the day I donned my army overalls and went across the street. I held the poor struggling pig while George Morrell nonchalantly cuts its throat from ear to ear. The squealing was awful and blood was all over the place. Shades of things to come I thought to myself.

George Morrell was very pleased with my efforts. My Commanding Officer, a Welshman of dour and humourless disposition and more than twenty years my senior, heard eventually of my escapade and was much less impressed. The Major thought that my behaviour was unbecoming of an officer. On reflection, sixty five years later, I think that he was probably correct. He gave me not such a gentle dressing down. The Major's attitude towards me softened the following Sunday, however, when the officers sat down to a wonderful dinner of roast pork, crackling and apple sauce! All of the officers agreed that the dinner had beaten the hell out of wartime Bangers and Mash. Not surprisingly, as it later turned out, the pig was "black market"

The Morells had a very pretty young daughter who was much discussed in the Officers' Mess. Sadly for most of us younger officers, Marian was seriously involved with one of the local "squires" and it was rumoured that she was secretly engaged. The subject of romance therefore never raised its head. I also became acquainted with Mr and Mrs. Matthews who owned a small farm, near the Mill Dam I think. They were very kind to me. I was not an infrequent guest at their farmhouse for Sunday dinner when they shared their meagre rations with me.

The daughter of the house, Patricia, kindly taught me to ride a horse, or at least she tried very hard! On about my third, and probably final, lesson the horse (I believe that its name was Bonnie) decided that it had had enough. It made up its mind to bolt for home. And bolt it did, leaving me, having let go of the reins, clinging in desperation to the saddle on its back. The horse ducked under the upper half of the stable door which had been left closed I was scraped ignominiously off its back and thrown to the ground to Patricia's amusement. She shrieked with laughter. That was one of my less happy memories of Tickhill!

Patricia, too, was engaged to be married to a very fine young man whom I once met. They married not long after my departure from Tickhill. Sadly, shortly after the end of the war, Patricia wrote to tell me of the tragic and early death of her husband.

Another of my memories of Tickhill was of the Parish Meeting Room where the good ladies of the village served tea and cakes to the soldiers. Tickhill was full of wonderful people in those days and, judging from your Website, continues in the same tradition.

During my stay in Tickhill there was no bombing. Sheffield was bombed heavily once, and perhaps twice, during that winter. I can remember the red glow in the night sky over Sheffield, the sound of distant anti-aircraft fire and the dull thud of exploding bombs.

The big event of the week was always the Saturday night excursion into Doncaster. Never less than 30 or more soldiers were crammed like sardines into the back of an open and draughty three tonner. An officer was always

required to accompany each truck on those occasions. Among other things, it was his unenviable duty to ensure that the driver and himself remained sober throughout the evening.

The return journey was always a rowdy affair and often called for disciplinary action against those less able to control their exuberance after a week of being confined to the sometimes sobering atmosphere of Tickhill.

I still have memories of sitting in the front seat of a three tonner being driven through the quietened streets of Bawtry at one o'clock a.m. on a Sunday morning with the always deafening accompaniment from the back of the lorry. Where are they all now, I sometimes ask myself? Most of those gallant men are probably no longer with us.

At the end of April, just as I was beginning to master the handling of the 4.5 inch guns, it was obvious that my days in Tickhill were numbered. The Allies were preparing for the opening of the Second Front in early June.

At the tender age of twenty, it had long since been decided that I, and others like me, were too young and too agile for the cumbersome Medium Artillery and its slow moving equipment. Older men and older officers were considered more appropriate for the task.

Younger men were needed for the lighter and faster moving Field Artillery, the twenty five pounders on which I had received my training. I was about to leave Tickhill forever.

Without notice, I was one day sent to report to a Reserve Camp of young officers in southern England near the ports of embarkation. After the breakout in Normandy I was once more transferred to another Camp, in France. There we nervously awaited postings to Regiments which needed to replace those officers wounded or killed in action. We did not wait long. In early July, my name appeared on the 7 a.m Postings Board.

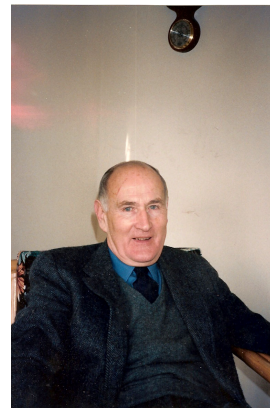
I was despatched the same day to a Field Artillery regiment in the line. Several weeks later I was again transferred, to the 5th Regiment Royal Horse Artillery of the 7th Armoured Division, affectionately called The Desert Rats by Winston Churchill.

I was demobilised as a Troop Commander in 1947 and returned to University to conclude my interrupted studies.

After graduation with a law degree, anxious to please my father but much against my better judgement, I went to work in the family business. I gave up in frustration in early 1950 and fled, with \$40.00 in my wallet, to work as a roughneck in the oilfields of West Texas, U.S.A.

In 1983 I retired as International Tax Counsel for the Mobil Oil Company in its Headquarters office in New York. In 2005 my wife and I moved to our present home in Minneapolis to be nearer to our four grand children. I look back with fondness on my memories of Tickhill and trust that some of to-day' residents may enjoy my reminiscences.

Sincerely, Eric W.Sorensen.
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.



9 November 2009

