

SENT BY:- Derek Everton

A book is available, 'THE CRABTREE STORY' from 'THE CRABTREE SOCIETY' and good bookshops for anyone interested and can access details via the website or ring 01543 877770.

Hi, further to the interesting article about The Crabtree company in Walsall I thought it would be interesting to send 'The Bugle' details of an Uncle of mine who was my father's youngest brother. He worked there for some years and he was one of the valued long serving employees who was presented to the Queen during her visit on the 24th MAY 1962-- and was also a World War Two unsung hero whose story has never been told.

Frank started work in the Moulding Shop at J.A. CRABTREE & Co Ltd in 1936 and worked there until he was called up in 1939 and assigned to The South Staffordshire Regiment to be sent to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force to fight the German Army.

Frank's wife Dorothy, still going strong at 94 years old (And very skilled at using her i-Pad) explains how they met:-

"Although we were at the same school in younger days and were aware of each other, Frank and I met officially after he'd got back from Dunkirk, he was standing where I was sure to ride past from work and I stopped to say 'Hello' and it went on from there and we began writing to each other and he couldn't wait to get married. Frank and I shared a birthday and also got married on that day too . I always thought he chose that day because he wouldn't forget either or he wouldn't have to buy any presents. It was unusual to say the least our meeting up and sharing a birthday . We had wedding and birthday cake made by my Mother because- "There was a WAR ON!"



Dorothy and Frank's wedding 1942



FRANK EVERTON- SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT

Dorothy recalls the situation at the time:-

" When at the young age of 18 Frank was sent to France after only three weeks training the British contingent that Frank was with were shipped off to France with one rifle between two soldiers. The Germans were well equipped and well trained and our lads were put to digging trenches (like in the First World War) and the tanks just rode over them". "Frank was put to be a 'Runner' between trenches with messages from one to another until their situation became hopeless they were told ---"Get to Dunkirk as best you can." It was a case of every man for himself!

On the way back to Dunkirk Frank and other soldiers got captured and were held prisoner but somehow they got away after one of the soldiers managed to kill the guard that was holding them, enabling them to head back towards Dunkirk to fight another day.



ON THE RETREAT TO DUNKIRK

From the photographs Dorothy provided, we can see the carnage that existed during the fall back to Dunkirk with hundreds of vehicles and masses of equipment abandoned after being rendered immobile so that they would not be utilised by the enemy.



Dunkirk Beaches

Dorothy goes on to say :- " The photos I expect were taken on Dunkirk Beach where troops were to assemble ready to be evacuated. After they were taken the Luftwaffe began bombing the beaches so Frank took to the fields and was there on his own, surviving on Swedes and Turnips until all went quiet and so he decided to risk it and head back down to the beaches. On his way he heard English soldiers voices, so he joined them . That night they saw a light flashing in the sea, it was a small fishing boat from Folkstone. They managed to scramble aboard and so to the UK."



B.E.F Digging in.

" Frank's clothes were tattered and torn and when he arrived back he was checked in told to find his way home and report in. He reported at Birmingham and was eventually sent to Ireland where he learned to repair vehicles."

During this time he invented a certain item (not known, it was kept secret) which was very useful to the War Effort and afterwards was transferred back to the East Midlands after which he was interviewed in London by some top officials with the outcome being that he was transferred back to Ireland to continue his work there. His Captain in Ireland was very impressed by his ingenuity and what he had invented and said he would help him present it to the officials but fate was to play a hand as the Captain was given another posting and eventually killed before he could help Frank with his quest."

Frank was married to his lovely girlfriend Dorothy on 28th November 1942 but after a very short leave was back again to Army work in Ireland.

From his RAOC company he was then to join the REME for the rest of the War and ended up retained in Germany repairing Mercedes vehicles until 1946.

His wife Dorothy adds:- "When Frank arrived back he wouldn't talk about the war. I only know as much as I do from listening to his nightmares and he had plenty the first few years after it was all over. It wasn't an easy life with Rationing and Shortages of one thing or another but we got through it!"

Dorothy's mother had lost three brothers in the First World war and two brothers taken prisoner in the second, one had lost all his toes through frostbite.

Frank had also lost a beautiful older sister Kathleen Everton during WW11, she was doing war work at Crabtrees but transferred herself to Kynoch's where munitions were produced but tragedy struck as Kath was inhaling the Black Gun Powder used in the assembly of cartridges.

Dorothy recalls the sad story:-

I was very fond of Kath she came to our house in Wolverhampton Rd on the evening I gave birth to my son Grenville and there my Mom and Dad sat with Kath until Nurse Church and Dr McCulloch had left. When the Doctor sent me to Hospital to have an x-ray (because he thought I was having twins). Kath said she would be pleased to have one of them as my Mom was wondering where we could accommodate two more babies but as it turned out I was only expecting one.

At that time everyone thought Kath had got TB but it was far worse than that and about twelve people from the Department where they made bullets died. Kath had her tonsils out but that was a mistake she went through hell, Frank's other sister Rose used to nurse her, it was a bit grim to say the least. Bill her husband had extended leave to be with her. She had only left CRABTREES to earn more money to enjoy after the war. She had visions of buying a house where I could live with my two babies as she felt she was unable to have any.

She was 27 when she died. She was attractive and when Frank was on leave he used to take her dancing, they were very fond of each other. It was a tragedy losing her.

During his time after the War Frank Everton worked at Crabtrees (although his passion was mending cars) and worked in the MOULDING SHOP at LINCOLN WORKS in Walsall and in time was made Branch Secretary by the Transport and General Workers Union and held the post until his death in 1978. During 1962.



FRANK ADDRESSING A TGWU MEETING.



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visited Crabtrees and was given a factory tour. Her whole time there was well documented and a short film was made of the event too. Frank was introduced to Her Majesty the Queen during Her visit as can be seen from the photo .