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There wasn't much work about in 1939 so I'd left Boston to work on a church at Lincoln as a bricklayer. We didn't know much about the war. I suppose we knew it was inevitable, but nobody really thought about it much. I was 21 when the war broke out. Sunday morning September 3rd at eleven I heard it on my landlady's radio. I had a motorbike and sidecar at the time and I nipped home to Boston. I went past an aerodrome where all the planes were lined up but nothing much happened at first. It was the 'phoney war'. A bomb dropped near us and put my landlady's window out but that was all.

Then in the January of 1940 I had to go to the barracks in Lincoln for a medical. There was snow on the ground and it was cold. It had been confirmed we would be completing the church and that finished about March. After that I worked on extending the barracks; that's when the Dunkirk evacuation was taking place. Then it was air-raid shelters and I went to Kirton-in-Lindsey for a while. They were in people's gardens, not very big; any builder could build them. Later I went to work for the Air Ministry on big shelters on the aerodrome. All the aircraft were dispersed round the 'drome and these shelters were for airmen to sleep "on the alert".

Then I went back to Lincoln. The Naafi got bombed on Waddington aerodrome and we repaired that. By June 1942 I was working on a flax factory where they made linen. By then I was on Essential Order Work. For the first time in my life I was guaranteed a wage whether it rained or not! Then I was called up and that was it – I said: I'm off now. I took all my gear back to my mother's house at Boston and caught the train to Hampshire. I didn't know at the time but I found out later that I had been destined for the Lincolns. Because of a slight defect in my hearing, I was sent into the Medical Corps, which I was very pleased about, better than the Infantry.

After some pretty rigorous training, square-bashing in Hampshire and some leave, I got transferred to a field ambulance at Horncastle before going to Mitchett in Surrey for a two months crash course on hygiene and sanitation, water purification, improvisation in the field, all about insects, flies and so on. During the course I fell ill and had to go into hospital for ten days. That interrupted the course and I failed Hygiene. I was called up before the CO and convinced him that I could retake it. That finished around December and I was just waiting for a posting then. At the Army School of Hygiene they brought in fellows for about ten days from every regiment to teach them about hygiene, sterilising water and so on. I was lined up to be a potential instructor. I came home on leave in March and next thing I knew I was on a train for Devon, to a mobile laundry and bath unit. I was the only RMC there. It was an Ordnance company. I was made up to Lance-Corporal and then Corporal. Then to Yorkshire, down to Brighton and the Normandy beaches not long after D-Day.

There were men terribly burned in the tanks. I don't suppose they would have lived. Terrible. We treated a lot of burns. There was a regimental First Aid post. I was also trained as a nursing orderly, but basically I was on Hygiene and Sanitation and supervised the sterilisation of blankets and so on. Sometimes we pumped insecticide powder into the men's clothing, it smothered everything and looked like snow; that was for lice. Scabies was a nasty thing, too, under the skin. Very itchy. You have to paint the entire body head to toe. My war wasn't a fighting war. Under the Geneva Convention I didn't officially have a gun. There was a lot of waiting, weeks of boredom between battles. Ambulances were driven by the RSC, not by the medics.

Soon after liberation we went into Belsen. No further comment.