

My Grandfather – Henry Hicks

Henry Hicks was born in Stepney, London in 1880. He was the son of a vellum binder, who was in poor health and died young.

He was fortunate to go to a good school in the area and then left when he was 14 to work in a shipping office, near the docks. He was a messenger, and his job was to go down to the docks and obtain information on the cargoes that various merchant vessels newly arrived contained. Then bring back the details to the shipping office.

He seems to have enjoyed this and thought he'd got a lot of confidence. At 19 years old he enlisted in the **Horse Guards** and after familiarisation with horse riding lessons and basic training, he commenced duties in his Company riding in various parades and escorting Royalty on occasions. Among these, his troop escorted Edward 7th as a prince to various houses where he (the Prince) was entertained by various highborn ladies. Whatever the weather, pouring rain or shine , they had to wait until the Prince wanted to leave, and then escort him back to St. James Palace.

During this time he enrolled in an educational certificate course and gained five merits. The Certificate is signed by Colonel H. Douglas-Jones, Director of the Army School.

He rose up to Sergeant, and was duly sent to France. I do not know if the horses were sent out as well. He did not talk about his experiences much.

Grandfather however may have been lucky not to be taken prisoner. He'd somehow got separated from his unit and hid in a farm hut. A labourer approached him and urgently told him there was a German patrol close by. Whilst he was not naturally athletic, he had no difficulty in moving quickly and fortunately managed to get back to his unit.

While not actually wounded, due to the conditions he had had to endure his health suffered.

However when the war was over he had transferred to The Royal Flying Corp, and attained the rank of W.O.1. By that time, he was also in charge of a Pay Corp Accounts Dept. and numerous staff. Altogether, 25 years service, with a Long Service Medal.

Next came “Civvy Street”, and he was sometime adjusting to this and striving to get fit again. He tried being a bus conductor on an early public transport, but after a week or so a bus inspector, who’d been keeping an eye on him, told him they would have to let him go, as he was clearly exhausted.

After some further disappointments trying to get suitable work, Grandma suggested he contact the Army Office, who gave assistance to people in difficulties. They helped him get a job as a barrack-room warden and there he stayed until retirement.

After the war the Grandparents took my Mother and I into their house in Grantham, when Mother divorced Father.

by James Glover

Ps. During WW2 Grandpa ran a refreshment service, serving tea and light lunch for working people and occasionally P.O.W.s, all saluted Hitler with right arms outstretched. Fortunately there wasn’t any unpleasantness ensuing.