

*The Life & Times of a Belts Farmer ( 24 )*  
*L. (Bob) Combes.*

A date was fixed for all four of us children to be baptised and would he do the same for Father. This the rector said would be perfectly in order, but at the last minute, Father put his foot down and said that nothing would persuade him to go through such an ordeal ! And that was that.

The First Great War - the Kaiser's War as so many of the army types called it - was to prove a greater upheaval in our personal lives than we could have anticipated. Towards the end of 1914, Father was notified that part of his farmland had been selected as an ideal site for one of the Army Training Camps that were to be erected in the South of England. For a start, 200 acres were to be commandeered for this purpose, the land being conveniently situated with well-drained fields sloping gently to the south, which was in fact the best land on the farm. The steep downland to the south formed a perfect background for what was destined to become a rifle range.

Father went to great lengths to try and prevent this happening, but no matter <sup>to</sup> what authorities he protested, there was nothing he could do about it. It was heartbreaking for him, having worked hard for a year to establish a solid farming programme and being given this ultimatum just when he was beginning to see the result of his labours. Most of all it was a tragedy for him to know that his flock of Hampshire Down sheep would have to go and that his holding would be cut by nearly fifty per cent, to say nothing of the restrictions and disorganisations that would come in the train of an army camp. But he had to accept the inevitable and he began to think that if he could not stem the flood, he would at least make what profit out of it that he could.

In the meantime, the contractors arrived and surveyed the property and in no time at all, steam engines were hauling loads of hardcore to lay down for the camp roads, as well as timber and all the other essential building materials.