

and played a few sets at the tennis club.

On the way home some silly woman barred my path, extracted a large white feather from her handbag and tried to fix it in my buttonhole. Told her that if she did not clear out of my way I would teach her a few words of Army language.

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We marched in column of fours through Fovant village to the station. The Regimental Band played the Regimental March as we followed our Company Commander, Captain Oram. Our road was lined by the villagers who had turned out to cheer us on our way. Fruit and chocolates were lavishly bestowed on us by the friends we were leaving.

We had bequeathed to them a memorial of our stay in their village. On the side of a long hill on the Downs we had engraved a gigantic Maltese Cross, our Regimental badge, cutting into the turf and filling in with blocks of chalk. A labour of love, or, as the Army described it, a compulsory voluntary fatigue, which occupied our leisure on three Sunday afternoons. Picks and spades were issued and we took the fire buckets from our huts.

The London Rifle Brigade outplayed us; their very intricate badge, designed by an architect, was much larger than ours.

A friend tells me that these long lines of badges are very carefully tended and periodically cleaned by the local people. A fund has been collected for their preservation.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Early Days*

More unlikely material for a soldier could not be imagined. When I was a very small boy I had worn a sailor suit; later, the frilly white shirt and velvet suit of a Little Lord Fauntleroy. Another year saw me resplendent in a Highland tartan kilt with sash and sporran. Never did my mother visualise me as a soldier.

Eton jacket and striped trousers followed, but I did not attend that celebrated College. At the age of ten I went to Oakfield School in Crouch End; an old and dignified mansion, standing in spacious grounds which included a football pitch and cricket nets in respective seasons. We had a cricket field a short distance away.

Oakfield School was, as a large notice board at the gates announced, FOR THE SONS OF GENTLEMEN. The local butcher's son would consequently not be eligible as a pupil. The son of a wealthy owner of a West End Draper's Emporium had quite a different status and was welcomed with open arms.

Horrible little snobs we were. Our first question to new arrivals was always "What's your father?" My reply, in a very proud voice, "Doctor William Leppingwell Livermore, Esquire, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P." was deemed eminently satisfactory to the crowd of youngsters clustering round me.

Until that eventful day my two younger brothers and I had been excellently taught by a governess. We found that we were actually much in advance of pupils of the same age, except for Latin and French; these were quite beyond the scope of the dear girl's knowledge. I was so fond of Mary Hope (delightful name), that at the age of seven I calculated I should be able to marry her when I was a man of seventeen.

Oakfield was a good school and we enjoyed our days there. Discipline was strict and any badly prepared homework or any fooling about in class brought speedy punishment by caning on the hand. More serious offences were dealt with privately in the Head's study. I remember only one public thrashing – a boy had thrown a firework in another kid's face. Whether such corporal punishment is right or wrong is a moot point, but I do know that we all resolved that we would take care not to earn such punishment and we handled our fireworks with caution.