

# HIS FINAL RIDE

It all started when I reached retirement and had little else to do. I fancied going away somewhere, and one idea that I had, was to follow up on a couple of letters that had been in our family since the 1940's.

My grandfather had been a despatch rider for the B.E.F. or British Expeditionary Force, that served in France during 1939 to 1940. His job; along with a team of others; was to carry messages from the Main HQ to the various army units spread out across northern France. The Big German push through Belgium and their subsequent rapid advance, had taken the British and French armies by surprise.

Within a very short time, the allies found their backs to the English channel, with no real sea transport available to save them, with the area of land that they held getting rapidly smaller.

During these desperate times, the army command was sending out orders to various regiments to retreat in such a way as to buy as much time for evacuation as possible, but such was the German army's speed of advance, that this plan was failing, with some positions being overrun, before they even got the orders to retreat.

Radio communications were non-existent between many units, with much of their equipment being lost or broken due to the dramatic rush across France before the enemy captured or killed them.

For most of these units though, communications were kept going by the squadrons of Despatch riders who risked life and limb to ride their motorcycles through the field of war, never knowing if their journey's end was still in British hands, or not.

Of course, both sides knew the importance of despatch riders to keep communications running and both sides relied on them. This explains why they were also an important target to be taken out if possible. If an enemy detachment had learnt of your latest advance and sent a rider to their HQ, then your advantage could well be lost, however, if you stopped the rider, then that information would

fail to get through. And stop them they did! One of the more covert methods was to stretch a steel wire across the road at neck height. I won't go into that any more deeply other than to say it was quite an effective method. Either that or just lying in wait and shooting the guy as he passed. Unfortunately, this is where we pick up the story with my grandfather again.

From official sources, he had been sent out on a journey of about 7 miles (about 10 Km) to an outlying intelligence corps post, with orders for their return to headquarters. Subsequent information shown that he did indeed deliver this message, and the soldiers did make it safely back to their HQ. Unfortunately, this was his last good deed as he had not got very far on his journey back to B.E.F. HQ, when he was mortally shot by an enemy sniper.

He was not killed instantly, and managed to stay on the bike until reaching a farm house a little further on. He rode into the yard and both him and the bike fell against a wall. The French family who resided there, had no love for the German Invaders, and so they took my Grandfather inside and made him as comfortable as possible, but he soon died from his injuries.

Unfortunately, the general situation was so bad, that there was no time, and no system in place to collect his body, as by now, the allies at Dunkirk were fighting for their very survival.

This emergency evacuation had not been foreseen, and the majority of the Royal Navy was out of reach, patrolling the seas around the rest of the world.

There was nothing for it, but for the British government to requisition hundreds of small private yachts, fishing boats, pleasure craft and other boats of all other descriptions which sailed out across the English channel in an effort to save our Army personnel. We did have to sacrifice most of our equipment, guns, tanks, everything almost, to the victorious German army, but at least with the bravery of thousands of naval reservists and massive support from the RAF, they managed to evacuate nearly everyone. The last main defenders in Dunkirk were mainly

the French army, many of which were killed, and there has always been a bit of a sore point between the French and British over that.

Well, the allies were saved, but it was a few days too late for my grandfather. It was not until after the end of the war, that a second letter came through. Following up records and with information received from the family, my grandfathers body had been reclaimed from the grounds of the farmhouse, where the family had buried him, and returned to England for re-burial.

Of course, this all happened many years before I was born, but I had been fascinated by my Grandfather's story, and would always go and pay my respects at his grave, whenever I was in the area. Our family had a few photographs of him, including one that he had asked to be taken when he passed out from his Despatch rider training, and the red "L" on his rear mudguard was painted out. So there he was, sitting backwards on the motorcycle, pointing to the fresh white paint where the "L" had been. He had a really proud smile on his face too!

A good friend had studied the photograph and had recognised the type of motorcycle as a Royal Enfield. I asked if it the model was a WD-C or WD-CO, but he replied that this was 1939, before they had made that model and that my grandfather had actually been given a 350cc pre war styled 'Bullet'. This had a slightly ironic feeling as I owned a 500 cc Royal Enfield bullet, but mine was somewhat newer, and had been made in India for the Indian army, but had been a private purchase from the factory and then imported to England.

Back to the present and I started to become more than a little curious about my Grandfathers 'last ride' and the Farmhouse where they had taken him in during his last moments. I knew where it was located from official documentation, and also the name of the family that had lived there during that time. My curiosity grew into an insatiable need to know more, and so not being very good at the French language, I explained everything to my friend Paul, who was quite fluent, and asked him to try the telephone number that I had found for the farmhouse .

Paul had that, "Only doing this for a very good friend." expression on his face, as he dialled the

number.

Paul said an initial "Bonjour", and then another sentence or two, before suddenly reverting to English. Apparently both the husband and wife spoke excellent English, as Paul handed, well; 'thrust' the telephone at me.

I only manage a hello, before the man on the other end said with gusto, "You are the son of the brave soldier who came here?" I was somewhat in shock but managed to reply, "I am his grandson." "GOOD!" said the voice loudly, "I am Daniel. My own father is 82 now, he was ten years old at the time, and remembers it very well. You want to come visit us? We would love you to come visit, You welcome all times!"

I was so taken aback at this 'instant' approach, but regaining my composure a little, I arranged a trip to visit them in a month or so, when the weather would hopefully turn a little better. I searched out the photo of my Grandfather on his bike, scanned it, enlarged it a little and made a couple of copies. I was hoping that Daniel's father might possibly remember him.

I had no idea then, concerning exactly how much this trip would change my life, but I was shortly to find out!

The day arrived, and Paul dropped me off at Dover about mid morning. The ferry journey was rather similar to other ferry journeys that I had taken in the past, but with the exception that I was very pre-occupied with what lay in store, when I reached the french coast. We came in sight of the beaches. I started to fall into the trap of imagining what hell it must have been to be fighting for your life, all the time hoping against hope that another small boat would come along and this time, take you way from it all, back to England and safety.

I had to grab a hold of myself. This was not the time or the place. I decided that I would visit the beach properly, to see it for myself, but that was not going to be today.

Having walked off the ferry, I was greeted by various assorted friends, family and the taxi drivers, holding small boards with names on. My name was on a board, as I had expected, so I walked over to the guy holding it and said, "Hello". He grabbed me, hugged me and then kissed me on both cheeks. Luckily, having

already travelled to France a few times and learned the customs, I just reciprocated, and we had by then, become firm friends!

Daniel was about fifty-five, and told me that the family had lived in that farmhouse for over two hundred years, and unless it fell down, they would probably be there another two hundred.

We journeyed through a small village with the somewhat unfortunate name of Killeem before swinging off to the farmhouse somewhere before Moulin Des Pauvres.

As soon as the noise of the approaching vehicle was heard, people seemed to appear from the main farmhouse, outbuildings, in fact; from all around!

They were genuinely overjoyed to see me, and even the young son, a 14 year old named Jean-Claud spoke reasonable English.

Having been introduced to everybody, I sought out Michelle, their grandfather, who had been the ten year old that had seem my grandfather back in 1940. He was happy and jovial enough for a few minutes while we chatted just generally, but then he started to look a little uncomfortable, before finally saying, "You want to know, don't you?"

The room went silent, and at a wave of the old man's hand, it emptied like a milk bottle with the bottom smashed off!

I took out the copy of the photograph that I had brought with me and passed it to Michelle. He glanced at the picture, but then quickly turned his head away. I could see he had tensed up, but after a moment, he seemed almost to swallow, and then took a good look at the picture again "Oui!" he said, "This is the soldier that came here. I will never forget his face. I was a ten year old innocent boy the day he arrived, but that day I became a man, determined to fight for my countries freedom. This man was not even French, but he had come to our country to help us fight against the enemy. That meant a lot to us all."

He handed the photo back and continued, "We had planned to have 'aperitif' and déjeuner after, but I am thinking that our meal could be a little delayed now?"

I understood. 'Aperitif' is a time before a meal, that the whole family stop what they are doing and come together. The popular drink is 'Pastis' which is an alcoholic drink flavoured with aniseed. It became popular after absinthe was banned in France, but other drinks such as port, spirits and the like may be drunk instead. I like aperitif, as it is traditionally served with some type of food, cashew nuts, crisps, or other small bites. Déjeuner, of course, just means lunch, which is usually served about an hour after the aperitif.

I digress... I had only just arrived, and Michelle was offering to tell me what he knew about my Grandfather, and even although I was gagging to know, I knew better then to upset the plans of my hosts, especially the timing of lunch. It took most of my self control to convince myself, and then tell him, that it could wait until after the meal. With that he shouted, "Daniel... Aperitif!" and soon the rest of the family joined us as we sipped on Pastis, while helping ourselves to some slices of Pate en Croute, which is basically pork pie to you and me.

During the family gathering, Daniel rushed to tell me something, but I guess due to his obvious excitement, he did it in French. Michelle stepped in very quickly with what sounded like a rebuff, again in French. Turning to me, Michelle said, "We will have much temps... Sorry 'time' for you to see, after the meal." My mind went into overdrive as I pondered on what exactly I would get to see after the meal. My best conclusion would be something to do with where my grandfather had been buried, or maybe where he spent his last minutes? Oh god! I had waited so long, and had also come all this way. The waiting seemed to be forever.

Lunch was called. Lots of it as is the French custom. The entree or starter was sliced ham. Next came the meat, and a nice bit of roast duck it was. Assorted vegetables came and went, followed by the cheese course, dessert and then finally, coffee. As we drank the coffee, Michelle said something in French and there was a nod of agreement from his wife. I knew what had been said as I had heard it before. It is a saying that you can still hear the older generation say after a good meal in northern France. I don't know the exact French phrase, but it translates into English as, "That's another one the Germans won't get!" which refers to the meal just eaten. It is still said to this day.

Normally, the French take time to chat over coffee, but today, Daniel made a discreet wave at Michelle, who made some apology and stood up, indicating that I should follow him.

Having left the dining room, we entered what I had supposed to be the french equivalent of the lounge, when Michelle slowly bent down, took hold of the edge of a rug that must have measured about a metre by two meters and pulled at it. To my utmost amazement, the whole thing started to swing upwards!

It was only after the rug stopped, that I could see what happened. This was the entrance to a hidden cellar. The whole contraption was a counter balanced area of wooden flooring that was covered by a run that was slightly bigger! You just pulled on the short edge of the rug, everything started to swing upwards, leaving a narrow staircase that led down into the basement! Goodness gracious, Enid Blyton and the Famous Five would have been proud of this!

He descended a few stairs, and then he reached out to his left and took hold of something. Mumbling, “Non Électricité” and striking a match to light an old looking oil lamp, I understood his meaning. We progressed to a corner, where he points and says that this is where my grandfather spent his last moments. There had been a bed in the corner then, but that had deteriorated since the war and been thrown out many years before my visit. He remembers so clearly his father saying that they had to hide the English soldier here, in case the Germans came, and that he spent his last minutes on this earth, thanking them, whilst clutching a photograph of his wife to his heart.

I am pretty much in shock, trying hard to hold myself together, when he throws the final nail into my remaining composure. Michelle tells me that his father was away the day that the British army came in 1945 to reclaim the body, and nobody here knew where his father had hidden his personal effects, so they could not take them back to England. He looks straight at me and with a dead flat face asks, “Do you wish to have them?”

Jelly. My body feels just like jelly. Actually, to be truthful, I have no idea what I feel like, but I can assure you, it's way, way too far from 'normal'!

Michelle walks over to the corner of the room, he starts counting along a row of bricks, He gets to seven and then starts trying to pull one from the wall. He signals defeat, and so I go and help him. Very soon , the brick comes loose, he reaches into the hole behind, then his hand comes out holding an old tin.

He looks at me with what looks like great concern as he passes me the tin. He then says, “You might need time, I will go, see us when you are fine.”

For a man of 82 years, he manages to get up the narrow staircase very quickly, but I just spend time staring at the tin. I look at the corner where my Grandfather spent his last minutes, until I suddenly become aware of exactly how much my family probably owes this French family.

I find that the seal is good, but finally prise the tin open. I am sure it has been sealed since my grandfather's passing. Inside, I find six woodbine cigarettes, a book of army matches, a needle and some green thread, a few old French francs, an English half crown coin, instructions on what to do if you are captured, some type of soldiers record card, and... A picture of my Grandmother, holding my father in her arms. This last one reduces me to tears as I look at the corner, and see a finger print in what looks like blood.

It must have been at least half an hour later, when I finally managed to gain enough composure to walk up the steps and out of the cellar. Michelle came up to me, and suggested that we go outside and get some air.

He said the tin was mine, as it should be returned to the family, it having been missed in 1945.

It wasn't anywhere near dinnertime yet, when Michelle started to relate what he knew and what he had seen back then in the war.

He was only ten years old, when a moto (motorbike) arrived at his father's farm. It was ridden by a soldier who seemed to be wounded badly. Michelle's mother told him and his older brother to go inside, but his father had said that the boys should stay and learn, as there was no escaping the war now. They carried the corporal inside, and took him down to the

basement. He fumbled for the tin in his breast pocket, but did not have the strength to open it. We opened it for him. He took out a cigarette and we helped him light it, then he grasped a picture and held it. He told us that he was sorry but the Germans would be here any time, but he was convinced that the British and the French would be back to drive the 'Krauts' from our soil. He took another puff from the cigarette, stared at the picture for a few moments, and then his eyes closed for the last time.

Michelle looked at me and said understandingly, "You have tears. It is ok, during the German occupation of our land, I had many tears too!" suddenly, Michelle's face seemed to almost fold as he rapidly got up left the room. Daniel explained, "My father had a brother about 7 years older than him, but the Germans discovered that he was involved in our resistance, came for him, tortured him for names, and then killed him."

After a few minutes, Michelle returned. I think we gave each other that 'knowing' look, and he seemed to cheer up and started talking again.

"The german army was so close, and we had no idea what would happen to us if we were found with an English soldier, even a dead one. That is why we buried his body, hid his personal tin, and concealed his motorcycle. We were so frightened that if the Germans found out, we would all be killed, or sent to the camps." He continued, "We had hoped that the resistance would continue, and we hid the motorcycle in the barn, behind bales of straw, hoping that it might be useful to us in the fight against the German army. But after my brother was taken, we decided that it was too much of a risk and it just stayed hidden there."

I had heard about German reprisals for helping the enemy, but now I was hearing about it first hand. I was no longer surprised that they had hidden everything.

I had been astounded to hear about what had gone on in France, but it had produced one loose end that I dearly wanted to tie up if possible as I asked, "What did happen to my Grandfather's motorcycle?"

Well, they totally floored me with the answer, "It's still here, would you like to see it?"

I have no idea what type of sounds came out of my mouth, but I guess my new French friends translated them correctly as "Yes!"

We all went out to a very old looking barn with stone walls. Inside it contained the winter's store of straw for the farm's cow population, hundreds of bales, which were lined up against one of the 'long' sides of the barn. At the far end, there were less bales, and it was possible to get nearer to the back wall. Michelle pointed and said, "It's behind there... Daniel?"

Daniel signalled to everyone, where he wanted the bales of straw moved. It was obvious that he liked things done in an orderly manor. While the family were doing this, Michelle said, "It has been a long time since we have seen it. Once, every few years, we would become low on our straw, and it would appear again. We would kick the engine over, in case somebody would come and claim it, but nobody ever did."

I asked when it was last uncovered, and after a moment he replied, "Must have been 8 years ago. I was old then," he shrugged as he continued, "Older now, but there it was, Daniel managed to get the starter to move, but we think it's oil has gone a bit thick!"

I swear that I was listening, but it seemed like my life had taken on a new focus, which quite literally, was now focused on the area in front of me, where the family were removing the last two or three bales of straw.

I heard young John-Claud shout something. Daniel called him back and then said to me, "He has not seen it since he was about 5 or 6 years old. There is a... er, how do you say, 'lumière' over there?" I walked over to the indicated shelf on the wall and picked up one of the three torches. I did that strange but common thing of pointing it at my face while trying the switch to make sure that it worked. It most certainly did! I followed the family to the back of the barn, hoping that the big yellow circles in my vision would fade quickly.

Myself, Daniel and Michelle had one of these large torches each and as we rounded the pile of bales, the first thing I saw was a patch of white. There I was, staring at a very familiar looking rear mudguard!

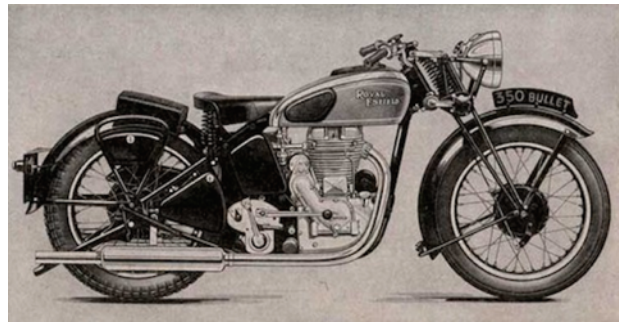
Michelle said that the motorcycle had spent

most of its life in the small space behind the bales. This was initially done to hide it from the German army, but after the war, it had been left there almost as some kind of memorial. He added that the last time it had been outside and seen the light of day, was about 18 years ago, when they had wheeled it out for a quick inspection and dust off.

By now, Daniel and one of the farm workers got the bike off its centre stand with the intention of wheeling it outside, but the wheels seemed very stiff. Not wanting to risk damage to it, they just lifted it up, walked it out, and got it back on its centre stand. It was magnificent! Michelle continued with the story, by telling me that as far as he knew, my Grandfather was the last person to actually ride it. After the fuss at Dunkirk had died down, his older brother had intended to use it to help with his part in the French resistance, but although he had spent hours with it, he never managed to get the engine to start. Shortly after that, petrol became virtually unavailable, and so the bike was left hidden behind the straw.

Michelle smiled almost wickedly as he told me that the German army had turned up on a number of occasions, looking for escaped prisoners, aircraft crew or members of the resistance, but although they searched the place many times, they never did uncover the grave, or the bike. At that point, there was what seemed a brief and uneasy pause. I guessed that he was thinking about his long dead brother, and so I said nothing until he jerked back to reality and suggested I sat on the bike.

Just at that moment, the women of the household appeared again, with some quaint looking feather dusters, and proceeded to carefully remove the dust and also a few bits of straw that had got caught in various places. When they had finished, I could see with amazement how well preserved the bike was. Maybe it had been something to do with the humidity, being hidden behind the straw for so long, for as far as I could see, there was no rust on it, except for the main stand and a small dented area on the frame, where the paint had gone. Even the chain still seemed to have some type of grease on it.



I bent down to examine the bike more closely and Michelle followed my explorations with his eyes, and as I got to the small dent he said simply, "Bullet." I noticed some brown staining on the right side of the seat and there were similar patches in those hard to clean crevices down the rear right hand side of the bikes depatch pannier framework. Slowly, I turned my head toward Michelle. He put his hand on my shoulder and stiffly said, "Blood."

Up until this point, I had been really anticipating seeing my Grandfather's old motorcycle, and I had been overjoyed to see how well it had fared over the years. I thought I had got over my earlier emotions in the basement, but suddenly coming face to face with my grandfather's blood, on the motorcycle he had been fatally wounded on, suddenly brought a wave of emotion that hit almost before I realised it was happening.

I guess that Daniel and Michelle had been prepared for this moment. While I spent a few miserable moments, unaware of anything around me, Daniel passed a small glass into Michelle's hand and then discreetly left the courtyard. Michelle bent down, passed me the glass and said, "Drink this." The glass contained quite a double measure of cognac, of which I took a sip, but I heard Michelle say, "alles!" which meant 'all', so not in a state to even think to argue, I just swallowed the lot. My throat started to burn followed by my stomach and I must say, the notion that 'a stiff drink will pull you together' was certainly true in this instance.

I stood up and was about to apologise, but Michelle's expression of understanding seemed to make it unnecessary, so I just passed the glass back and said quietly, "Thank you very much!"

Finally, I had (with the help of the cognac) come to terms with the situation, as I bent down to re-start my examination of the 350cc bullet, but

with a more positive and enquiring mind.

The machine was beautiful. It certainly had a few familiar touches that were clearly Royal Enfield, but as a pre war bullet, it did not really seem to have that much in common with my own, newer bullet.

Back in the barn, I had for some reason expected the bike to be a drab army olive green colour, like my own Indian army bike, but I had forgotten and indeed was surprised to see that it was in fact a very nice dark shade of green which was almost shiny. I believe it had been called 'Army Service Green' back then. I had expected there to be an army number in the form of a "C" followed by a few digits in white on the tank sides, but this bike had nothing like that on it, only a square on both sides at the front, the top half is white whilst the bottom half is light blue with the number '40' written in red inside it. This seems to indicate a Royal Corps of Signals bike, attached to the headquarters, so that seems correct.

I stood up for a moment, and for the second time, Michelle suggested that I got on the bike. Initially, I had a strange feeling about getting on the same bike that my Grandfather had used, hard to put my finger on, but something along the lines of interfering with history, or some nonsense like that, but Michelle reminded me that his brother had already sat on it, during the failed attempt to start the engine in 1940!

The tyres were shot years ago, and both were flat, literally, but to hell with it! I had a sudden change of heart and decided that I would feel very proud to sit on my Grandfather's old bullet, and so taking a little more extra care than normal, I climbed aboard.

Due to the flat tyre, the bike leaned further back than I was used to, but still the broad stand kept it upright. I had quite expected the springs in the seat to squeak, but strangely, they did not. I found the foot pegs, leaned forward and took hold of the handlebars. These were much wider than my current bike, and gave an almost majestic feeling to the riding position. Looking down, there was an old Smith's chronometric speedometer marked from 0 to 80 miles per hour, with a mile counter that read over 22,000 miles. I can imagine in the last few days leading up to Dunkirk, my Grandfather along with the rest of the despatch riders must have been

riding almost continually, to keep the communications flowing.

Instinctively, I twisted the throttle grip before I could stop myself. To my surprise, it did turn part of the way, but then stayed there. I returned the throttle grip to its usual position, but the cable just flexed unhappily. I silently cursed myself. I had not meant to do that, and would now need to find the other end of the cable at the carburettor slide, to try and return it to its normal position.

I climbed off the bullet, and bent down beside it. The cable disappeared down between the front forks and then reappeared from under the tank, just about where I had expected it to, but trying to wiggle the end where it went into the carburettor was not having the intended effect. Michelle must have been watching with interest as he said, "I do not remember if my brother took the toolkit, or if it is still there?". I was about to look for it when a thought suddenly stopped me as I said, "Sorry, I've got the throttle stuck, it's not even my motorcycle and I'm trying to fix it! Beautiful condition though it is, I guess it is unlikely that it will ever run again, But I will try to return the throttle slide as that is my fault."

The back wheel's axle is bolted directly through the rear part of the main frame. This reminded me that this machine was built before the days of shock absorbers and dampers. The damping system on this model are the springs that support the single seat, while the shock absorber is basically your bum!

Michelle watched intently as I tried to open the right side toolbox. There is a triangular frame that runs between the back wheel axle and the mudguard. On each side, there was a toolbox that was almost kidney shaped, mounted in the top part of this frame.

The toolbox was kept closed by a wing nut of sorts, and although it was initially a little stiff, I soon had it well on the way to coming off. I had not noticed Michelle's departure, but he must have made a trip into one or other of the buildings, as he now tapped me on my right shoulder and offered me an old type of oil can, complete with long neck and trigger. Having thanked the man, and applied a little, the wing nut finished its journey in a manner more befitting a well maintained piece of equipment.

I carefully set the wing nut to one side and went to open the toolbox cover, which seemed very stiff, but by pulling alternately on the two upper corners, it moved fraction by fraction, until it finally swung open. Inside, there was something that looked to be made of canvas and rolled up. This looked uncannily like an old fashioned tool roll to me, so I started to remove it, but I could feel other objects start to dislodge onto the top of my hand, so I used my other hand to help pull these objects out first. Soon I had an array of stuff laid out on the ground between me and the back wheel.



I find a tin marked K.L.G. and inside it, carefully wrapped in greaseproof paper is an ancient looking spark plug. It is one of the types that you can actually undo, take apart, clean and assemble again. The canvas unrolled and flattened out easily to reveal what was quite a comprehensive looking set of tools, while there were a few other bits that I did not instantly recognise.



I looked at the tyre levers and laughed quietly to myself. Unfortunately, the tyres were much too

far gone, for any amount of prying and poking to get them inflated again! Armed with a small screwdriver and an odd shaped spanner, my attention now shifted to the carburettor.

Again, it was a little bit over stiff, but after an initial good twist, the top of the slide housing came undone easily. It was soon apparent that it was the cable that was stiff, as the carburettor slide moved relatively easily. I pulled on the slide to make the cable return and noticed with a certain satisfaction as the throttle twisted back to its starting position.

It was at this point that Daniel came by and noticing me on the ground amongst the tools, said to Michelle, "The Englishman is fast! Do I need to go and get a can of fuel yet?". Michelle and I both laughed as Michelle replied, "Not yet, but I think that if we leave him with it..." Having at least got the throttle back to its rest position, I tidied the tools into a pile, but left them out. I could not really put a finger on why I did not put them straight back in the toolbox, but something from my experience seemed to think that it would be a pointless exercise to do so.

My experience won the day. It was a case of extreme curiosity and also 'Just wanting too...' which led to me first opening the other toolbox, (plus there were two more on the main frame in the quarters that went to the back wheel.

Thankfully, having undone the screw, I did not have to ponder how to prize the second toolbox cover off, as it actually fell open at the first probe of my fingers. There was no toolkit in this side, but the box itself however, was not empty!

The first and largest article turned out to be the bullet's despatch log book. I was going to put it to one side for later, but I just had to have a quick glance inside. It contained a record of all the journeys that had been made, and as the handwriting was the same throughout, I guessed it would have been my grandfathers. It was interesting to note that the last entry had not been completed. This was the return trip after giving the message to withdraw to the position he had been sent to at a place called Kruystraete. I asked Daniel about it and with a smile he answered, "But it is not more than 4 Km from here. would you like to go there?". It was a nice offer, but I didn't really think that I would gain much, seeing that it had just been a

stop off to drop off some orders.

I continued exploring the second box and next out was the vehicle logbook which detailed the servicing and listed in meticulous detail everything that had been changed, adjusted or otherwise checked. I also found a civilian looking instruction book, showing a happy looking guy zooming along on his bullet, wearing thirties clothing and no crash helmet. I added that to the pile that contained the despatch log book, and then went back to examining the engine.

There was evidence of mud that had got caught in between the cooling fins which did not surprise me, but now I was getting curious again. One of those "just wanting too's" turned up in the form of checking out the rocker covers. Would be easier if I just... Pop the tank off... AH! yes, there we go, just undo the rocker covers, Um, that went well, and they seem in excellent condition...

So absorbed was I like a child with a new and exciting toy, that I did not notice Daniel and Michelle returning. It was Daniel that spoke as he said with amusement, "You were correct Michelle, see we give him a little time and..." but they both dissolved into laughter, which I did not initially understand until I looked down and realised that Quite a quantity of th bullet was in bits and all around me! I suddenly felt so embarrassed as I tried to explain, "Um, eh, oh! I'm so sorry, I just wanted to see what... um oh! I'll just put it all back together again!" As I finished stumbling this out, they both roared with laughter, and with quite some embarrassment, I looked up, just in time to catch Michelle nodding at Daniel. Still laughing, Daniel turned to me and replied, "Do what you like with it, it's your moto now!".

Again, I had been taken by surprise, but Daniel explained, "Our family have wondered if anybody would come since 1940. It is not ours, we just gave it a home. Your army left all their equipment here in 1940, so, we guess that you should have it now and after all, it looks like you have already taken charge of it!" I tried to think of some obvious reason to explain the ownership of the bike, but it seemed sense, the British army had abandoned around 20,000 motorcycles during the flight from dunkirk. They could hardly turn round now and claim they still had an interest in it's ownership. I guessed that the

most plausible claim would be Michelle's family.

I was having trouble with the fact that this bullet had been hidden here for over 70 years, and it just seemed wrong to take it from the people that had been entrusted with it's safety for so long. But on the other hand... It had also been used, or I suppose entrusted to my Grandfather. I was not sure if anything existed like an 'inherited right' but sense suddenly hit home. Well, sense as far as I was concerned. This Royal Enfield has been used by my grandfather, his handwriting was in the maintenance log and his blood was still in the crevices of the seat and panniers. Damn it all, this motorcycle must belong to my family by right! I did manage to thank them. I found it very awkward to get the words and meaning to sound right, but yes, I was very happy to take over custodianship of this heroic metal war horse. Again, it seemed that the French were still way ahead of me. Michelle and Daniel had foreseen this possibility as well, and what little maintenance there was scheduled for their farm equipment, had either been completed early, or would be put off until the end of my visit. I was given the run of the workshop, as they carried the bullet in and set it up on a metal bench. It would take me several more trips to collect all those bits that had been taken off, under the umbrella of "Just wanting too...".