

# Creative writing: national service

[Government](#), [Army](#)



I, David Vivian-Currie, had been used to the upper-class life until I was forced to join the war through National Service. I had received the dreaded letter on 29th May 1944, a week before it detailed me to leave. I was to help recapture France from the German's. Until I had received the letter, I felt that I had lived quite a pleasant life: I had attended Duncie Hall in North London and, at the age of thirteen, had moved onto Eton, where I became a school prefect in my final year. My father, John Vivian-Currie, was a well-established banker who had always tried to give me the best opportunities in life.

After realising his success in banking, I decided to give it a try after I left Eton, and by the age of twenty-five, I had risen to the position of my father's assistant. He had avoided National Service due to age reasons. I however, had not. Due to my schooling I entered the army as captain, so I was in a better position than most of the soldiers. However, I still knew that I had virtually no chance of surviving. Today, 5th June 1944, I was sitting in the tiny transport boat with the remainder of my platoon, preparing ourselves for the journey to France, that would decide the rest of our lives.

There was not a cloud in the sky, however, it was still quite brisk, I was glad that I had decided to put an extra pair of breeches on, but it didn't really matter, for I would probably be dead in less than twelve hours. At eleven o'clock the boat started to move, over the choppy English Channel, for some of us, this was the last time that we would ever see our homes. Overhead, it was possible to hear the jittering from the engines of the Spitfires and Lancaster's, above us.

The aim of these planes was to bombard the landing spots around the coast, destroying any gun emplacements, the success of this raid, would decide the success of this invasion. I decided to sleep for a while as tomorrow would be one of the most important days of my life. Was I to live or die! I woke at half past four by the sounds of the bombardment occurring a mere six miles away. I felt horribly ill. I wasn't able to hold it back any more, I had to lean over the side of the transport vessel and vomit. I was so scared! There were a few other men in the boat that were suffering from the same problem as me: fear!

Soon enough the boat started to smell of the putrefying stench of sick. Normally I would feel even worse at this sordid stink, but it wasn't the time to worry about that. We were less than two miles from the French coast, about an hour before landing. I decided to make a final check of my equipment, machine gun, yes, grenades, yes, water bottle, yes, pistol, yes, helmet, yes, bandages, yes. I thought that was everything, but then I realised that I had forgotten my radio. I had a problem. How was I going to keep in contact with the commanding officer?

I looked up only to see the French coast and I started thinking, " Oh shit, here we go. " I managed to compose myself, I called my platoon around me. Instead of going out of the front and being slaughtered by German machine guns, I suggested that as soon as we reached the beach we should jump out of the side of the transport vessel, into the shallow water. This way we had a better chance of survival. Approximately five minutes after I finished debriefing my platoon, the boat driver shouted " two minutes," we were

close. All of a sudden we became under heavy machine gun fire, the night bombardment obviously hadn't been very productive.

I shouted the order to get out of the boat, oh no! Due to the lack of communication I had forgotten to tell the driver that I had chosen not to go out of the front, he opened the door and, almost instantaneously, nine men were dead. I had managed to climb over the side, as had ten others. We had been in France for less than two minutes and we had already suffered heavy casualties. With the rest of my men, I moved up the beach and found some cover behind a huge rock about 40 metres from the cliffs. We were safe for the moment, but soon we would have to move on.

There was an abandoned trench about seven metres away, with a concrete wall in front of it that should provide some much needed cover. I shouted the order, and we sprinted up the beach to the trench. We had made it without suffering any more casualties. Now was the time to attack. I positioned Phil Wainsley, the sniper, in position; he had a clear view of a small machine gun emplacement, which was operated by two tall, bearded men. I watched the emplacement through a periscope that one of the privates had stolen from an Italian Colonel a week previously. After seeing that both men had dropped dead, I shouted that it was safe.

We rushed up the beach to find the best position to lay down some covering fire for the rest of the army running up the beach. I looked along the coastline, to see bodies everywhere. It was horrible. The sea was red from the blood of those that had lost their lives, there were people searching for friends, relatives, and in some cases, lost limbs. I turned round to find that I

was on my own platoon had moved up the side of the hill. I pursued them quickly, trying to dodge the oncoming bullets. I caught up with them at the bottom of a set of stairs leading up the side of the cliff to the main gun emplacement.

We waited there for a moment and then ran up the stairs to the emplacement; there we threw two grenades into the building. We waited for the smoke to settle from the explosion, and then charged in killing any survivors. The battle had been won, we had taken control both of the gun emplacements, it was now safe for the Navy to come to the beach, they had been waiting a few miles off the coast. It was essential that they came. So that we could set up a camp, reducing the chances of losing our position. It was half past twelve before all of the equipment had been unloaded from the large warships; however, it would take two hours to set up.

I was now reunited with my senior officer, my regiment, The South Alberta Regiment, and armoured car regiment. I was just sitting quietly beside my armoured jeep, not believing that I had just survived that onslaught. I was in a new world, from being a banker to a Captain in the English army, I felt like a massive juxtaposition. I suddenly heard somebody shouting my name, it was the captain in the Royal Logistics Corps, informing me that I was to report to Colonel Radley, the highest ranked officer in the camp.

When I reached his tent, I was flabbergasted, it was beautiful inside: along the left hand side of the room was situated a large bed, with the woodwork made from pine. Just past the bed, there was the most beautiful mahogany table. Along the opposite side of the room, was positioned a Cedar wardrobe

and chest of drawers. I must say that I was very jealous of the Colonel, even though I was a captain, I still had to share a tent with my platoon: not the most comfortable of places. After gazing around the room, I was asked into the head office of the camp, this is where all of the senior ranking officers worked.

I walked through the room, which was littered with communication appliances and typewriters. A Corporal led me through the room to the Colonel's office. Once in the office I saluted my senior, and listened to what he had to say. He was saying that due to my bravery and superb leadership of my platoon, for leading the allies over the cliffs, and securing a position. I was being awarded the Victoria Cross, and promoted to the role of Major. I started to think that the army wasn't so bad after all.

A promotion, and being awarded the best medal possible, after spending less than forty-eight hours in the army. However, I was still feeling very weird, being away from home, not knowing if I would live long enough to see it again. The Colonel then informed me that I was to take three tanks and two jeeps to try and regain control of Dieppe, a small French town a short way along the coast. After hearing this I saluted and thanked the Colonel, and briskly marched towards my regimental base. There I selected fifteen other men to assist me with this assignment.

We filled the vehicles with fuel and ammo, and set off. I started to feel a little queasy again. After reaching Dieppe, I could understand why regaining control of it was so important to the Allies. It had a well-established harbour, big enough and deep enough to contain an entire fleet. The coastline was

very steep, making a coastal attack virtually impossible. Dieppe was also a link between Calais and Le Havre. When we reached the town square, which looked as if it had been deserted a long time ago, we became under heavy machine gun fire from the derelict church steeple.

This however, didn't really cause a problem for the tanks. There was rubbish everywhere, from buildings that had been destroyed. There were walls missing from certain houses, and others were just non-existent, just gaps in the street where they had previously been. After sorting out the problem in the town square, we stopped to gather our bearings after checking that there was no one else around. We sat down inside a small deserted cafe??, which smelt a little like rotten pot-pourri, not a smell that I want to remember.