

By *Sanners Gow*

Ice Cold in Alex

The skweel in the photae wiz Shand Street in Macduff and it looks affa dark an foreboding. For playin though it wiz a cracker o a place. It hid big dykes like a fort an ye could see the Hill o' Doune and the hail o Banff bey an mony's the time me an my mates steed there repellin boarders or firin oor 25 pounders at the Jerry ships as they attempted a landin in the bey. There wiz even a wee covered entrance intae the bilerhoose that acted as oor submarine an mony a time I've spent playtime bein shut doon for depth-charges. Jist a brilliant place for an active imagination. That wiz the gweed bit!

The bad bit wiz gan ower the threshold intae the skweel proper that fan the problems started.

Een o the very ferst things that I learned about skweel wiz that if ye didna ask questions ye didna get a row so very quickly at the threshold I'd close aa waterticht doors an close doon for depth-charges and only surface at playtime. Maistly that workit fine but noo an en I'd forget masel an speir something I shouldna. I'm nae gan intae ony details about the type o questions I'd speir but let's say they rockit the teacher's boat fyles an ended wi a row or a scud in the lug or fyles baith wi lines thrown in for a special treat. Nae big deal really because I'd jist shut doon an rin silent again for a while. That wiz until ae day the janny and thes young teacher came intae the class and it ended up wi me gan awa wi them. They teen me intae a bit o the skweel I'd nivver been inside afore that lay aneth the music room and aneth that wiz the bilerhoose. It wiz a fair size o a room wi mair or less the same fleerspace as the music room but much lower. At ae corner wiz a pile o fit lookit tae me like timmer fish boxes an apart fae a puckle benches like kirk pews an a couple utility cheers there wisna onything else in the room. The janny wint tae a wee door an opened it leanin in tae switch on the lecht an steed aside tellin ma tae gang in an pull oot some bunting. I could see why I'd been chosen because wee though I wiz even I couldna staan up straacht in it. But mighty it wiz an Aladdin's cave tae me stappit wi boxes o dusty cloots an ither stuff that by the looks o some o them must've eence been used for plays an sic like? The janny tellt ma faar tae look so I crawled up tae faar the coils o bunting lay an started draggin it oot amid clouds o styowe. Then! Then! Then in deen at I uncovered a pile o British army soup plate tin hats and at the side o them wiz a puckle dummy Lee Enfield 303 rifles made for bairns tae use. Grabbin een I could see that they even hid a bolt that ye could slide back an forrirt an some even hid slings on them so ye could hing them fae yer shooder. Mighty me fitna find! The janny lookit in an shouted if I wiz arecht that's fin he saw fit I'd found

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but he jist smiled an tellt ma tae leave them an get the bunting. (Later on I fun oot that he'd been a prisoner wi the Japs so maybe that's why he smiled fin he'd seen the look on my face?) Onywy I dragged aa the bunting oot an atween me, the janny an the teacher we managed tae uncoil athing. Then athing wiz shut doon an me an the janny teen the coils outside an shook the styowe aff. I wiz covered fae heed tae fit and the teacher dusted me aff wi some paper tools an sent me back tae ma class. My ain teacher jist glowered at ma throwe lowered broos as usual nae doot takin in the styowie sotter I wiz in but I wisna carin ava the only theng in my mind wiz the soup plate tin hats an the Lee Enfield rifles. I nivver tellt onybody about my find but keepit that een tae masel an jist fantasised aboot gettin ma haans on them. Then months later I'd a manna fae Heaven moment that came in the shape o the very teacher that I'd gotten the bunting for. She wiz lookin for fowk tae jyne her new drama class so at thes I jist started my usual shuttin doon process at the very thocht o drama. That wiz until she said the drama class wid be held in the room aneth the music room. The very room that held the tin hats an rifles!! I stoppit mid closin my waterticht doors an shot ma haan up an volunteered on the spot. My ain teacher near wint in a dwam an my mates near fell aff their seats at thes een. Onywy at thes a couple mair pupils volunteered ana. The Drama class wiz tae be held ilka Thursday efter skweel so the drama teacher gave us notes tae oor parents. My mither an father seemed pleased enough that their feel son hid jyned something at last.

The ferst necht we were teen intae the Drama room I checked the wee treasure door but het wiz shut but I could see recht awa that the room hid been cleaned wi the fesh boxes made intae a wee stage wi twa timmer seats on tap in the center o the room. The teacher wiz young compared wi aa the rest o the teachers and hid a spark in her ee as she tellt us aboot actin. Noo afore I gang ony faarer wi the story an in the months since I'd been last in here gettin the bunting I'd seen a film caa'd 'Ice Cold in Alex' I dinna ken if ye've seen it but John Mills and Anthony Quail end up crossin a Jerry minefield as they waakit in front o an ambulance checkin for mines. Onywy it ends up wi Anthony Quail pittin his fit on a mine wi an ominous 'CLICK'. Noo I mind on my faither sayin as we watched the film that that wiz him a deed man. Accordin tae ma faither the ferst click wiz the mine bein armed an as seen as he teen his wecht aff the mine wid explode. Noo John Mills wint doon wi his bayonet an prodded roon aboot the mine while Anthony Quail steed stock stell wi the sywte o terror rinnin doon his face. He wiz a deed man an fine did he ken it. Then John Mills pulled the mine oot an threw it aside sayin it wiz only an teem upside' doon bean tin. The reason I'm tellin ye thes is because aa my adventures that follae on fae here are linked tae that one shot in the film.

Onywy the young teacher wiz really enthusiastic aboot drama an ilka time we'd gang she'd hae us deen various thengs. Some actually interestin like if yer in a group an yer in the background an ye'd tae mackie-on yer spikkin ye jist say 'A little bit o butter, a little bit o butter aneth yer breath an mak the required motions as if yer actually haein a conversation wi the person or persons in front o ye. Wiz quite impressed wi that een. The only problem though wiz the tin hats nor rifles ivver

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made an appearance only bein stuff about some lad caa'd Yorick that he kent or something like at an puckles about once more intae the breach. The Kingie an Queenie sat on the mock stage an we the plebes were taught foo tae grovel in their majestic presence. Didna like at bit in the least. The only 'on my knees' bit I wiz gan tae dee wiz fan I got my tin hat an Lee Enfield an use my bayonet tae get the mine fae ablow my mate's fit.

We live in hope or so they say an ilka Thursday on enterin the drama room my een snappit tae the recht tae see if the wee door wiz open an the rifles an tin hats ready an wytin for me tae show abody foo thes actin cairry on is deen. (John Mills greet yer een oot!) But na na 'Alas poor Yorick!' an 'Breach' eence again. Noo though the teacher hid an aal fitbaa made tae look like a skull an the Royals an lairdies wore cloaks made oot o blackoot blinds. As time gid on I got mair an mair bored wi thes till ae necht we the plebeians actin as servants hid tae waak about cairryin aal tin trays o mackie-on mait servin oor betters. I stell get cringe factor ten at thes memory. For some reason I stell canna explain I waakit inaboot tae the fish box stage an started servin them oot o ma tray wi custard pies fair in the physog. Abody wiz millin aboot grovelin an bowin at thes pynt until the teacher shouted for abody tae "STOP!" Abody did thes an there wiz total silence apart fae some fidgitin. The teacher said in an angry voice "Some of us are not taking this seriously?" I kent in that instant that I'd become 'US' an wiz transported intae the plural an seconds later her een tracked roon the room an landed on muggins now 'US'. Her angry eyes were tae me like lookin up the twa barrels o 15 inch cruiser guns and I kent in that instant I wiz gan tae be blasted worse than ivver staanin on a mine in the Libyan desert could dee. But the only theng that did happen wiz her pyntin tae the door sayin loudly "Go away!" So I did. An wi ma heedy fair hingin I left as ordered. Some sniggers follaet ma oot the door. The heedy wisna hingin because I wiz shamed in front o fowk but because I'd nivver noo get ma haans on the tin hats an Lee Enfields. An ken thes I nivver did! An that stell rankles even efter mair than fifty five years.