

Friends lost track of each other when war ended

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Apted and Vidler will never forget their month spent in s-Hertogenvoich, in Holland.

"Whenever you landed in a new town, you always go nosin' around, to check things out," said Vidler, "It was a Dutch army place and there was this row of concrete garages. I looked in the window and saw all this Gerrie (German) ammunition, and aircraft guns—I thought 'Jesus Murphy, all that stuff (ammunition) just laying there.'

"I went back to my room, and no sooner got there when I heard this bloody explosion," continued Vidler, "Somebody had gone in there, and the Germans had it booby-trapped—the whole damn thing went up."

"There were three or four Polish guys in there," said Apted, "They were going in there picking up potato mashers (German hand grenades) and were throwing them in the pond, havin' fun. They set the thing off by going in there."

"Between the few of us, we had to go and pick up all the body parts," continued Apted.

"We put them all on a big sheet of plywood so they (the Polish army) could deal with them," said Apted. "A Polish officer came down to us, and said, 'Thank you,' and we let him look after them from there."



Jack Vidler (back row, by artillery barrel) with his outfit, as they posed with an artillery piece.

Photo courtesy Jack Vidler

By the first of April, 1945, Apted and Vidler made it to Germany, at a place called Cleve, just over the Dutch border.

"That place was bombed to hell," said Vidler, "It had taken quite a bit of bombing there."

"From there, we were transferred to Groningen, in the north end of Holland, April 21," said Vidler, "We were there when the war ended. I was billeted with a Dutch couple there, and they were listening to the radio. It was May 5, and I think I was writing a letter home—all of a sudden they both jumped up and were screaming and yelling and hugging each other—they suddenly realized I had no idea what it was all about, the report was all in Dutch, how would I

know? That was the end of the war in Holland."

"And that night," said Apted, "the boys were out in the streets, running up and down, firing machine guns, partying like hell."

Later they were shipped to Oldenburg, Germany, May 9, and June 1, Apted was sent to a hospital in England, to repair a rupture he'd experienced in Belgium. That was the last they saw of each other. In 1946, Vidler tried to look up Apted and found he was living in Lakeview, near Long Branch in Toronto, in wartime housing.

"I got his address, and went down to visit him," said Vidler, "And when I got there, I found his kids had mumps—I didn't go in the

house, and we had a very brief visit outside."

And the two never saw each other again, until 2001.

Apted had lived a good portion of his life in the Nanicoke area, for more than 28 years, working in construction, and in 2001 finally decided to move to the Halton Hills area, to be able to better care for his wife, who was experiencing health problems.

Vidler settled in Toronto after the war, until a year ago, when he moved to Halton Hills.

"My son Gord had been bugging me for years to move here," said Vidler, "And how I came to find Harry, I gave a list of names from the outfit to Gord, and he looked them up on the Internet. I was surprised to find Harry's address was right here in Georgetown."

They got together and have been seeing each other ever since, re-forging that friendship that had been established back in 1943, when they met in that works yard in Dorking, England.

And they still attend the Remembrance Services together, to remember and honour those who were lost during the wars.

"I feel a bit guilty at times, when we talk about veterans," said Vidler, "I don't really feel like a veteran, but I guess I did my part, just fighting with tools and an acetylene torch instead of a gun."

Both Apted and Vidler were often in harm's way, when they were patching up vehicles, welding together smashed equipment of refurbishing an artillery piece. They did their job, but, as Vidler said, using different tools.

And regardless of how they might feel about their role in the war, there are likely a huge number of veterans who were fighting with weapons, instead of tools, who were very grateful that they had men like Apted and Vidler behind them, keeping the war machine running and advancing.

Because together, as a team, both groups managed to win the war.

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