

# Billy on Billy

*Excerpts from conversations with*  
MAURICE HAYES 2004

## *Who We Were—Who We Are*

**M**y father Arthur Rose Vincent was an Irishman, or an Anglo Irishman you can call him if you want—he always called himself an Irishman but you can call him Anglo-Irish if you want because he came from the class that was Anglo-Irish. He was born in India where his father was commanding the Third Huzzars and he left there by the time he was three or four and he never went back to India.

The family base was in Summerhill in Clonlara Co. Clare, which is just outside Limerick on the banks of the Shannon. That place doesn't exist anymore. It's still called Summerhill but it's really just stables that have been turned into a house. All those houses along there were all destroyed at one time or another since World War II.

His family came to Limerick around 1685/1690 or something as far as I can work out and one of them, John Vincent, was elected Mayor of Limerick in the

*Facing page,*  
*Arthur Rose Vincent*

late 1600s. There were six of them Mayors of Limerick over the next one hundred and fifteen years so they were not exactly gentry but they considered themselves gentry, anyway. They had Summerhill, which had a certain amount of land, but it is not a large place run by landlords or anything like that. It had a farm and they had a lot of servants, many of whom were extremely loyal, and today they remember the Vincents living there.

My father adored that place and he adored Castleconnell, which is right across the river, for the rest of his life. His hip was damaged in a football match when he was about eleven and it was set wrongly so he had one leg longer than the other and had to wear special boots for the rest of his life.

The Vincents were inclined to send their sons into the army, the British army, and his brother went in, but he couldn't go in with his leg so he went to Trinity College to study law. He passed his law degree there. He went to the Kings Inns and then he was sent out on the Munster Circuit and he got to know a lot of people in Munster that way. But he decided he couldn't make much money that way, because the pickings for barristers were pretty slim. So he joined the Foreign Office in England, it was all one country at that time. And he was appointed to the judicial service of the Foreign Office. He was sent to Kosuma in Kenya or Uganda in 1903.

From there he was sent to Mombassa and Zanzibar and then eventually to Siam after about a year or so, and China, Shanghai. He became a judge of course. And he was sent to Zanzibar in 1908 or 9 I think.

Now in 1906 when he was in China he was sent on leave back to England or Ireland and he decided to go through the United States because his brother, who had been on the Japanese staff in the Russo-Japanese War and had been the right-hand man of General Sir Ian Hamilton, had been to California and there had been introduced to a group of Irishmen by the name of Tobin and one of their sisters a Mrs Clarke. My uncle gave my father a letter of introduction to Mrs Clarke. He visited her in San Francisco and she asked 'What are you doing next?' And he said 'Well I am going to Europe on such and such a ship.' 'Oh' she said 'some very good friends of mine are going on that ship too.' 'Who are they?' 'The William Bourns. They have a nice daughter.'

So my father got on the ship and got to know the Bourns and the daughter, my mother of course. Then the courtship went on. I am not quite sure how, as none of these people left any letters.

In 1909/1910 my father decided to marry and he resigned from the judicial office in the Foreign Office because my American grandfather, who was quite a dominating character, said he wasn't going to marry any daughter of his off to someone in Zanzibar. Which was very narrow minded of him really, they would have been out of there in a year or so and moved on to somewhere more pleasant. So he resigned and was married in California in 1910 and then they went off to Ireland.

My grandparents went with them because they wanted to see Ireland—they'd never been there and my grandfather was very keen on buying a place there because he thought he should have a country place—why not Ireland instead of England, because his son in law was Irish, so he bought Ardilaun or Muckcross in 1910.

He made money in gold and water. He was a wealthy man by then. Gold in 1899 from the Empire Mine, which became the largest goldmine in California. He developed it himself really—it was functioning since 1854 but it was not really a big bonanza until he started deeper rock. He turned it into the largest goldmine in California. It is now a State Park. We sold it as a mining company; they still own the mining rights they could go back to mine if they wanted to.

When the war came in father was upset because couldn't go in to the army because of his leg so he volunteered as an ambulance driver with the French army. Then he was appointed High Sheriff of Kerry in 1916 or 15 and he had to go back there for a bit. Then he got a job with the British Foreign Office and he was sent to Chicago as the British representative in Chicago as part of the consulate. That was the beginning of 1917 I think. He spent almost two years—until the end of the war—in Chicago. He loved Chicago, never cared particularly about California, and he made great friends with actor Samuel Ensell, who was in Chicago in those days. My father had been born in the East End of London, and had been spotted by Edison and spent the rest of his life putting cheap electricity throughout the Mid West.

## *Billy the Boy*

I was born in London where my family had hired a house for me to be born in because it was more fashionable to be born in London than Kerry—my sister had been born in London too. The funny thing is when the Second World War came along and my father had a second wife and they were living in England he brought her back to Kerry to have her children.

After that we went to live in Muckcross in 1919 or 1920, I can't remember which, and then in 1921 my grandfather in California had a stroke and he was incapacitated. My grandmother was a real worrier and so everybody had to go back from Muckcross to California. Mother, father, sister, myself and my Great Aunt Ida who was my grandfather's sister visiting from California, Aunt Rosemary, who was the youngest of my father's stepsister's marriage. Well, we all went off to California. In 1922 there came the Civil War in Ireland. My father stayed in the US, but he could only stay six months in the United States because according to US migration he was a white native of India and there were no Indians allowed in the US. A thing that rankled him forever.

There was no trouble in Muckcross during the Civil War. The only thing that happened was the hay barn burned down but that was a squabble between two local people. The Killarney estates, Kenmare and Muckcross, neither were damaged at all in any of the troubles. The two estates of Kenmare was obviously because they were Catholics but in our case I think because we were good landlords, they weren't bothered and because there was good American money coming in the whole time.

So then, my mother and my sister went to Europe and my father was there part of the time but not all of the time because my grandfather put him as a Director of the Empire Mine, and an investment company, which was the owner of the Empire Mine and also on the Board of the Spring Valley water company, which supplied all the water to San Francisco. So, he was kept busy there, but he didn't like being a second fish in somebody else's pond.

I remember things, starting in 1922 when I was about not quite three, I can remember things then. I remember being christened for instance. I was never christened before because there had been wars and this and that. So I was christened then. I can just remember that. I didn't know what was going on. I was



*Filoli Gardens, California*

walking you see. My godparents were Samuel Ensell from Chicago, two major generals, Generals Sir Claude Champion de Crespigny, an old pal of my father's from school and my godmothers were Mrs Whitelaw Reed and Mrs FR Childs from New York. Mrs Whitelaw Reed came from California and she married Whitelaw Reed who owned the *New York Tribune* and was ambassador in France and ambassador at St James in London, a very well-known man and great friends with my grandparents.

Then in 1923, March, my grandfather was getting a bit better, he'd had another stroke in 1922, but in 1923 we went to Paris first, to see how things were going in the Civil War in Ireland and then we went across to Ireland. We spent about six months there in Muckross. I can remember bits of that but otherwise I don't remember it really well. Then we went back to California and this time my mother didn't like the living in Filoli because it was too far away from her friends so she rented a place for us and my father in Burlingame, the nearest town. We used to go every Sunday to Filoli. My grandmother sent her Rolls Royce for us. I have hated a Rolls Royce ever since then because it was a curly road, and made me sick.

I remember when we first went to Ireland in 1923 the train was running from Dublin to Mallow. There was no train to Kerry, it had been blown up. So we had to go in an old car and stop at every river because the bridges had been blown up and we'd have to wade across. I thought it was a very exciting place!

In 1924 we were back in California again, because my grandfather was getting worse again. We stayed until March 1925 when we returned to Muckross. At this time we were so used to going across the continent. It used to take around two weeks to get from California to Kerry. I loved the train from San Francisco to Chicago, we always had to change trains, get out of the train and change trains in Chicago the way the railways were built. But I loved the trains overland. I loved the train, I loved the countryside we went through, I loved the whole thing. It remained with me for years. I loved those trains. They were very good you know in those days, there was a black porter. They were marvellous, marvellous. They really changed your bed and everything. And then in the dining room there was good food, they were all charming and I suppose they liked kids you see. Then we used to stop and get out, when there was a big stop in Omaha, Nebraska. You

could get up and walk up and down when the train was stopped. I remember all this very, very well. Of course it was the second or third time I had done it.

Then in 1925 we stayed in Muckross and I got to know everyone there. We had Danny Dwyer, the fellow who used to drive the cars for us. Then there was John O'Shea, my father's personal servant, who went everywhere with us. He's the second man I remember in my life after my father. He was from Muckross. His father lived there and was a boatman, and John was an extreme republican and he became a leading member of the IRA. My father when he was in the Senate had to get rid of him because he'd be painting 'Up the IRA' and so on, on the walls in Muckross. I never discussed politics with John but I knew him well until he died in 1986 and I was devoted to him. He was a great fellow and he educated himself very well, going all around the world first-class—he could talk about anything to anybody. I was devoted to him, and so was my father and they came back together later on.

I had a nurse who was Norwegian. My mother had her in San Francisco and she used to come with us all over Europe, Hannah was her name, Hannah Johnson. She was a Norwegian and she was, well my sisters used to say—'Where is the ugly duchess?' or something. Because my sister had governesses—she was four and a half years older than me and she had governesses—she was a bit more advanced than I was. I eventually got into the governess when Hannah left us.

There was one I didn't like at all—Miss Christie—she was half French, half English. She was in California too, and came back to Muckross. She tried to teach me to read in 1925 in the school in Muckross. She left soon after that and then Miss Lady came in 1925. She was a pleasanter woman than Miss Christie and she continued to teach me to read and I read my first book in August or September 1926—*Alice in Wonderland*—and after that I read all sorts.

There used to be all sorts of people coming to Muckross. Californians, friends from England, friends from France coming to stay during the summer and my father would have shooting parties in the winter—the shooting was very good in Muckross. They used to shoot woodcock.

WB Yeats came twice to Muckross, once in 1925 and once in 1926. I best remember him coming in 1925. In 1926 he was a guest when there were other people staying too. When he was there, Shane Leslie was there, and his wife, they



*The Bourn-Vincent family at Muckross with many of their principal employees, c. 1916*



didn't get on at all. They were always arguing—jealous I suppose about each other's work, I don't know. Then Yeats I remember, I used to watch him out in the garden, where he would be talking, tapping the trees and talking to himself, and I said to my father 'That poet man's a bit crazy, he is talking to the trees!' But he was a charming fellow and I remember one day, my father liked to fish at Lewis corner and went off in this car, a Buick convertible with a rumble seater, a dickie, and the nurse and I were in the rumble seat and Yeats and my father were in the front and we went off to this lake to fish. I don't think that Yeats was very keen on fishing but he liked scenery you see, so he sat on a stone, and then we went back again in the car. Going back again Yeats and I sat in the rumble seat and my father and the nurse sat in the front. She had gone to get into the rumble seat again but Yeats said 'No, No, No, you're the lady and you must sit in front in the comfortable seat.'

I must now tell you about Grass Valley because Grass Valley is where the Empire Mine is. My grandfather had built a cottage there—that's what we called it—people call it Bourn Mansion now. It was a smaller house than Filoli or Muckross. I loved that place. We would go every summer for about two or three months. The mine was running the whole time. The noise from the mine was really overpowering. It went thump, thump, thump. The stamp mill was going, and made the garden in the house impossible. It was a very nice house, very fine but it wasn't very good to live in because it got very hot in the summer. When you would sleep you would be pouring with sweat inside the house. We used to sleep in beds in the garden. I can hear the mine thumping now and occasionally it would stop—there would be some failure in the stamp mill—and everyone would look around—'What's hapened?' I got to know the miners there.

I got fascinated with the American Civil War and read endless books on it. Then we went back to Europe in March 1928. This time my father was already over there because he had only been able to stay for six months in California and he met us in London. My sister was not very well so mother decided to take her to Paris and my father would take me to Muckross, so we went to Muckross together. My mother and sister went to Paris where my sister had her appendix out. After a couple of months there joined us and that was the last year we were all together in Muckross. Later that year, we were all in Cannes for Christmas again and we got back from Paris and my grandmother, who was a great worrier

as I said before, sent us a message saying my grandfather was very ill and the Empire Mine needs you. So we packed up and got into the last cabin and there were terrible storms and we had to spend the evening on the platform in Cherbourg because the ship couldn't get in—there was a real mix-up. But we got on the ship and one day went by and then the next day my mother collapsed. She'd caught pneumonia. She was put in the ship's hospital. She was terribly ill and we had the most terrible crossing. We were about one and a half days late getting into New York. It was a terrible storm all the way. She was taken off to quarantine. They would take you off on a special boat to hospital. We were staying with Mrs Reed who was my godmother who had a mansion in the middle of New York which was later purchased by the Catholic Archbishop. It is now a hotel where that woman Helmsley said no rich people pay taxes.

My sister had taken charge of us as a family. Apart from myself there was a maid from Muckross and a French maid to look after my mother. She was only fourteen and she had to take care of us. She got on the telegraph with my father in Muckross and said to him 'You must come over mother is very, very ill.' So he got the *Mauretania* which was a very fast ship and he arrived there about five or six days after we arrived in New York. And two days after that my mother died in New York. Then we set off across the continent with her body, on the train.

I was nine. And we set off across the continent in a private car which was attached to the back of a railway express. They used to have trains going over there by express, which was the fast mail and official things. We were attached onto the back of that in a private car. My mother was in a coffin and there was a nurse change even though she was already dead, poor thing.

Then along came my father, and John O'Shea, my sister and myself—that's five isn't it—and my grandmother's nephew, Horace Moody, came from New York to represent the Moody part of the family. Another fellow got on in Ogden. So we arrived in the Bay at Belmont because in those days the stain stopped in Oakland and you had to get the boat across to San Francisco or you went around the bay to San Jose. She was laid to rest in Filoli and the following day there was the funeral. She was buried in Filoli on a hill, which was excavated and then became the graveyard for them. She would have been around 40 when she died. She was born in 1886, so she would have been around 43.

### *Bill at School*

Then I was sent to school for the first time to get me out of the way, while all the fuss was going on about my mother dying. I was sent to Mrs Shinn's school in San Mateo and that was where all our friends' children went so I wasn't lonely, I knew then all and I spent from February to June there in that school. I made great friends with some of the boys. I think my best friends there were Howard Park and Binn. After that I hardly saw them again, Howard was killed in the war in the South Pacific and Binn I lost touch with after the war. He sort of just disappeared. So then we were back to the San Francisco circuit of acquaintances and so on, and I had a good time in 1929 in Filoli. I made friends with all the gardeners, and all the servants and so forth. I knew all of them very intimately. I really adored them. I had a wonderful time in Filoli when we were there and we stayed there.

We went back to Europe in the beginning of October and my father didn't know what to do with me, but my Aunt Claire, another one of his step-sisters who had come out when my mother died, and another one of her sisters who lived in Limerick, Mrs Cleave, had her son in school near Rugby—Dunchurch—so my father decided to send me there, although he had never seen the place and didn't know anything about it. We arrived in London and I was equipped with all the English clothes that I would need to go to school and we went off in a car to find this place. We had lunch in Rugby and I was horrified by the food—I thought 'Good Lord, this is awful!' I'd never really been in England, you see, so I was plonked down in Dunchurch with Mr Cook, the Headmaster who had been my uncle's Brigade Major in the war. I felt very strange, but thank goodness Terence was there, my cousin. He was six months younger than me but he was very friendly. I knew him slightly from Muckcross and he really introduced me to Mr Cook's school. I was pretty miserable when I was first there, but after a while I got settled in and I really enjoyed my time there. But it only lasted just over a year because when I was going home for holidays at the end of December 1930, my father met me in London and I felt ill. I had awful pains in my legs so I had to go to hospital. They put me to bed in the hotel and got the doctors in. They didn't tell me what was the matter with me but there was a nurse in the hospital and my father rented a house in London in Onslow Square for my sister, from a Mrs Burkhard who was to bring her out.

First of all they sent me to the Isle of Wight to get better. But the doctors they drove me mad. They were awful. One said I needed a treacle enema every day. I had a treacle enema every day. It nearly killed me. Thick black treacle. I've never heard of anything so ridiculous. I don't know how my father ever let these fellows do it but he did. So, I was in bed most of the time, and then I got a wheelchair and went to Shanklin Bay.

It wasn't a pleasant time, but we went on to Muckross again and there I got a bit better, and then I'd get ill again and then that went on and on. That year I had a tutor. An English tutor came over to teach me. He taught me quite a lot actually and that year went by and then the next year started and my father thought that he had better take me to Italy because the weather was better there. We stopped to see the doctors in London but my father finally decided to fire them all because they were talking about all sorts of things. They were hopeless people, Harley Street specialists. Absolutely hopeless. So we went back to Dublin and there we were introduced by our doctor from Killarney, Dr O'Sullivan, to Dr Moore, who was a small little man, but very efficient, very sharp. I was put under his care and he really cured me. I had both my tonsils out and after two or three months and so on, he did this, that and the other. Of course since I had been in Muckross, I had an Irish nurse, so I got better and better. Then my grandfather and father decided to give Muckross to the nation so we couldn't live there anymore. So, we were out on the road.

My father was worrying about where to send me to school, because I was supposed to go to Eton but I was too old for Eton, and my health was a problem. He discovered Bryanston, which was just starting in those days, around the third year it was going. I was sent there and I thought it was quite amusing, because you could wear shirts and shorts and then in the winter you would put on a pullover. I didn't like it at first because I wasn't really friendly with all those English boys, but then I got to like it a bit better. Anyway I settled in there again. The extra-ordinary thing about Bryanston was that I learned a hell of a lot there. They had a new system of education there, they don't teach you in classes, you're on your own. You'd have a class and then you'd be put on your own to do what you wanted to do, like a university, you see. I thought that system was pretty good. The only problem was half of them were communists and socialists. But

that was a good education in itself. My father didn't realise that when he sent me. The head master was a very good fellow, so I eventually settled in there. I didn't like it for the first year but after that I made friends and got along all right. Then I discovered, or they discovered for me or someone discovered for me what I suppose was my talent—acting. I used to act in all the plays there. I was considered quite good. I played in *Murder in the Cathedral* and around eight or nine other plays. The production was supposed to be so good that they took it to Cheltenham to the festival. We played there and I enjoyed that tremendously.

In the beginning of 1936 my father said to me 'Now you have passed all your exams for university, you are a year too young to go there, so do you want to stay at Bryanston or would you sooner go to Germany?' I said 'I want to go to Germany.' Every day in the paper Hitler was doing something. I wanted to find out all about it, you see.

My father was appointed to the Senate by William Cosgrave. That happened in 1931. Somebody died, I can't remember what his name was. A Senator—Kenny or something—and he had to appoint a replacement so he appointed my father. My father was there as an independent. Then in November that year there was an election, so my father had to be re-elected. There were, I think, eight independents in the Dáil and you were looking for nine votes so he got the independents in the Dáil together. They were a funny crowd. One was Jasper Wolfe from West Cork who was a solicitor. My father had known him when he was on the Munster Circuit, and he approached him first and then he approached Alfie Byrne, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, who was another independent and the other one he approached was Major Myles from Donegal, and the three of them got all eight independents to vote for my father. The others were James Craig, from Dublin, his son or grandson had been dealing with Muckcross for the last thirty years, and then there was Mr Coburn from Louth and Mr Goode from Dublin South and the two from Trinity, Professor Smith and Professor Dalton.

The following year, 1932, was when he had to give up Muckcross because he was very busy with all these things and he got involved in forming Fine Gael. He was great friends with Frank McDermott. I used to see him until a bit before he died in Paris, I liked him very much. They were great friends you see, and he was always trying to get him into that Centre Party with Dillon. Eventually they

decided to form Fine Gael and then of course McDermott resigned. He fell out because of the Blueshirts and also over the League of Nations. He thought de Valera was right supporting the League of Nations over Italy so he resigned from Fine Gael.

My father decided when he left Ireland to live in Monaco. Except from going to Ireland during the war he had given up living in Ireland but he had to spend five or six years living there after the war started. He kept a villa in Monaco. He signed a lease for three years in 1937 and the lease was up on the 1 May 1940, so he had to go out on the 1 May and Lord Beaverbrook took it on 1 May. An amazing thing to do, and my father said to me ‘My goodness, what did he do that for?’ But he kept it for years, and Churchill used to come there afterwards. A lovely place but it’s kind of been ruined now.

### *Billy on Hitler*

Well my father decided I should go to Germany so I said ‘Where?’ and he said ‘Munich’, and I said ‘Fine. That should be an exciting city, yes, very nice, nice people, young people and so on.’ And then he said ‘We had better find a decent place for you to stay.’ There was a lady in Monte Carlo, Mrs Myles who was American by nationality but she was actually Hungarian. She was born in Hungary, and she knew everybody in Munich and she said ‘Don’t worry, I’ll find you a place to stay’. We went off to Munich in a car for her to introduce us to all these people, and the people she introduced us to were the Baron and Baroness Von Shantofsky, who were Poles. He was a Polish painter and was very well known in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany and all over Europe. He painted all the royal houses of Europe and for a lot of people in England too, always portraits. So we went to meet them and they lived in a house in a suburb of Munich. He had a studio there in the house and they were not poor but they were always straining for money all the time. He was a little man but a very good painter. The wife was a German Baroness, she was *enormously* fat, an *enormous* woman—I was with them for seven or eight months and I only saw her go out of the house twice.

We went to Munich and my father decided that the Shantofskys were suitable people for me to stay with but then there was the question of who was

*'Billy Vincent was an intelligent and good-humoured man of the world, with a broad European education and estates in Killarney, who could handle the CO better than most of us. He was also excellent company and I still see him, when we were on leave together in Teheran, emerging from the most prestigious night-club there, with a flower-pot under each arm, to talk his way successfully in French into the waiting car of a bemedalled Persian general.'*

Extract from *Rough Road to Rome* by Sir David Cole



*Willy Vincent (left), Sam Irving and Sir David Cole in the town of Isernia in November 1943*

going to teach me. They said that they would find someone to teach me in the university or somewhere. They had found Dr Raeger, who was a German about twenty-nine years of age, a professor in the university. He spoke perfect English of course, perfect French, perfect Italian and Hungarian I suppose, and he was very bright, very agreeable. I used to go to him every afternoon at two o'clock and stay until six. Then at seven he would send me to the Shantofskys again on the tram. He was a vehement Nazi. He was a member of the party and had all sorts of jobs besides what he did at the university. He worked in the university all morning and then he worked for them, I don't know, at night I suppose. He had all sorts of contacts there and he knew them all and he said to me 'Would you like to learn something about the Nazi Party?' So I said 'Yes' and he took me to all these places. He took me to the Arbeitsfront, you know all these people with spades, and he had a cousin who was in the SA who took me around. He was not very enthusiastic about the SA himself, but anyway he used to take me around. the SA to see what they were doing.

Their great bogey man was Ed Stoller. He had been a minister in that communist government in Bavaria in 1919 and had got wounded afterwards. Of course they had him there as the most evil man who ever was but I was surprised of course because when I was at Bryanston some of the masters thought he was great because they were communists! So it was very confused, the whole thing, and I said at one stage 'Ed Stoller is very well regarded in England'. 'Oh, I can't believe it, I can't believe it', he said!

I used to have the most awful rows with Dr Raeger all over the Church; I wasn't a Catholic you see, but I said 'You're so far off, you're attacking all these priests', and they were attacking all these priests in the press and everything. And he said 'Oh, that's so out of date. You live with that crazy family'—because they went on saying 'Oh if only we had our dear King back, if only we had our Kaiser back' and so on. Then I'd go to Dr Raeger and he'd say 'How can you live with those people?' So I had both sides. I enjoyed myself enormously and I made some friends there, all dead now.

The Shantofsky's had two daughters. They were twenty-four and I was only seventeen, but their mother and father wanted them to get married you see, so they had this flock of young Luftwaffe officers coming in all the time either to see



them or to make court with them, and I got to know them all. They were an interesting crowd of people because the two Goering boys—Hermann’s nephews, one was called Arnie and I can’t remember the other’s name I didn’t know him that well, but I knew Arnie Goering very well. They were nice, and they used to say ‘Oh Uncle Hermann, isn’t he ridiculous—he wears all these uniforms!’ and so forth. But they were fond of him. They were very, very friendly with the Imperial Crown Prince, Little Willie, who fought at Verdun, was Commander in Chief at Verdun. They were very friendly with him, and we used to go there every time he was in Munich, I must have seen him eight or ten times. One time he gave a dinner party for us all in the Regent Hotel. There was lots of bowing and scraping ‘Oh, your Imperial Highness’. They used to do that in those days. He was an amusing chap, he was full of little witticisms and jokes and things like that and I was looking at him in awe when I first met him, but you could talk to him very easily. He was a very pleasant fellow as far as I could see anyway. But he had living with him in Berlin Lord Jellicoe at that time, the same thing as I was doing, you see. He had him living there, I didn’t know him then, I met him afterwards. He asked me if I knew him but I didn’t know him then. The Admiral had written to him and said ‘Would you find a place for my son?’

I could see what was coming. But I always hoped that they would find some way to peace. I realised there was no hope when he scrapped the Munich Agreement and went into Czechoslovakia. I always hoped before... because a lot of what they wanted was right, you know, what they wanted was right. I mean, it was ridiculous they wanted to take Austria, it’s all the Common Market anyway now. Then there was all those Sudeten Germans, well good God, they were all Germans, why should they devote themselves to Czechoslovakia? So I could see there were a lot of things in the Versailles Treaty that were very unjust, you know definitely. I had to write an essay on that in Cambridge—it was the main cause of the Second World War.

I could see what was going to happen, but I always prayed that they would find some other way out, because I had made friends with a lot of these Germans, they were decent fellows.

I saw Hitler twice. There was a place in Munich called the Carlton Tea Room and whenever he was passing through Munich to get to Berchtesgaden he would

stop off to get tea or coffee and people would go in there to look at him, the same as I did. They would just go in and take a table to look at him. He was having coffee with somebody else and talking away. I watched him a couple of times in those great parades they used to have—and they'd stomp out, and listen to the speeches. He was an amazing man because, you know, he was a tremendous orator; he would start off very peaceably, talking like this and gradually he would talk himself up to an extreme, and working a voice up with him until he was shouting and bringing the crowd up with him. They'd all be shouting and yelling. It was amazing.

Then there was the anti-Semitism. Everywhere there was the anti-Semitism. 'Jews not wanted here', 'No Jews allowed in here'. You couldn't go into any of the decent restaurants in downtown Munich. Signs up everywhere. You see, the only people who were vehemently anti-Nazi who spoke to me about it was the fellow who was the lawyer of the Shantofskys who was an educated man, a good fellow, and a doctor who came to see me.

Everyone was a Nazi because they were getting everything. The place, before I had got there, was an absolutely destitute state. Unemployment was terrifying and he got rid of all that—in whatever way, but he did—building roads and whatever. And there was no answer to it. Democracy had no answer to it. What did they say, they had no answer. And the other leaders didn't stand up. If they wanted to they should have spoken up. If they wanted to play the hard-line they should have gone in when he went into the Rhineland, but they didn't, and then they went to Austria saying the same. Same thing in Czechoslovakia, and then finally Chamberlain decided they can't go into Poland!

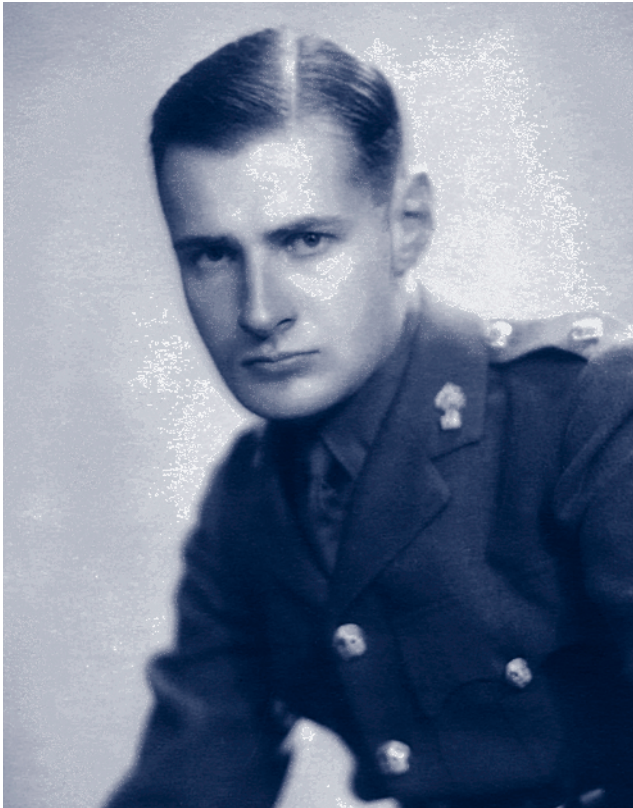
I was in Munich about a month before Chamberlain came. I went back to Germany to visit the Shanofskys and Raeger and everyone I knew there and I left to go to the South of France at around 8 or 10 August, I think, so I was there when they were all rushing off to Munich. It was a very interesting time, but I was fascinated by the whole thing. You couldn't help being swayed by it, because what they said was true to a large extent.

And of course the Spanish Civil War was going on at that point, and all the bookshops had maps marked with 'Franco's here' and they'd all be cheering because Franco was moving ahead. I didn't know whether to cheer for Franco or

not because two of the masters at Bryanston who were communists had been in the International Brigade and had both been killed, so I was a bit divided. I'd hoped until the end that they would find some kind of solution, but after the outbreak of the war, I couldn't see how the British thought they could win the war. I knew the only way that they could win was if they brought the Americans in, because I had seen America and I knew it, and the Russians. In fact, I remember I was sitting in Northern Ireland in the north of Derry on manoeuvres on the twentieth-whatever of June when Hitler invaded Russia, and we turned on the news on the wireless and I thought 'My God, there's a chance now we'll win the war', because I didn't see any chance before.

When I went to the United States that year I went by myself for the first time, my grandfather had died the year before you see. And grandmother died the year before, before him. He outlived everybody. Everybody thought he was going to die for years and years but didn't. So my father said now you must get a friend of yours from Bryanston to go to America with you. Well I had awful difficulty choosing friends, one because I had a very good friend there but he was a Welshman and he was, well I just couldn't see him with my parents, you know. I couldn't see him going around for dinners and so forth in Monte Carlo or in America. So I said I can't ask him, so I asked another fellow who had played with me in *Murder in the Cathedral*, a very funny fellow, he's dead now, but he came with me and he was a good choice. But Bryanston was a funny place, because the boys weren't like they all are at Eton, wealthy and upper crust, they were usually the reverse. Many of them were Quakers and—well Fred Sanger won two Nobel Prizes, he's a chemistry genius in Cambridge, he was in the same class as me, he was a Quaker of course. His brother I was very friendly with, he died last year, Leo Sanger. They didn't go to war, they were conscientious objectors. Then there were several communists... what was the name of that man who was the head of the communist party? Wood? His two sons were there, I was very friendly with them but they were absolutely out and out communists. And there was one fascist man there too.

So I went to America with my friend, I had to go there you see because my father and my grandfather didn't get on very well in the end, and the way he had left his money was everything in trust to me and my sister. So I had to get to know the trustees, that's what I went out there for and get myself known a bit in California.



*Billy Vincent in uniform*

*'Shortly after our arrival at Vibo Valentia, Monty set up his Advanced HQ there. The first of us to become aware of this was Willy Vincent, who had just parked his anti-tank guns in a particularly comfortable field whence an officious staff officer sought to eject him on the basis that the field was required for Eighth Army Advanced HQ. Willy, on the principle of 'finders keepers', stood his ground. Monty himself then chanced to appear and ruled that since Willy had been there first, he should stay. 'We,' said Monty, 'will find another field.' It was a ruling to endear any army commander to any infantryman, and a striking illustration of how our generals had changed since the Great War. How willing would Field-Marshal Haig have been to look for another château, let alone another field?'*

Extract from *Rough Road to Rome*  
by Sir David Cole

My father didn't know where to send me; he'd never been to Cambridge. My grandfather had been there, so he had cabled him and said 'I'm sending Billy to Cambridge, what college should I send him to?' And the reply came back 'Delighted he is going to Cambridge send him to any college except the one I went to which is Downing.' He didn't like Downing College.

Magdalene was a very conservative college, you know. I think out of sixty-five or so freshmen who came in the year I did, around forty of them had been to Eton, because the man who was the Master was from Eton and he favoured Etonians greatly. I felt a bit lonely when I went there first but then I got to know some people. I had two very good friends, one was Lloyd Roberts who became a top surgeon in London, he's dead eighteen years now, and Freddie Barnardo, he was a son of Dr Barnardo. He was very nice. This fellow had been a doctor in the Indian civil service and he was a great friend of Willingdon who was the Viceroy there, he was his sort of mentor. He wrote a book about it in California, about his life. Those were my two best friends, and there were many others of course. Freddie Barnardo was killed in El Alamein. There's hardly anyone I knew in Magdalene who is still alive, and every time I pick up a paper someone else is gone.

### *Bill at War*

In the war I joined the Guards. My father knew Beatty, General Beatty who was related to the Kenmares, whose wife was a Kenmare. From there you could go into the Brigade Squad if you wanted which was a squad, just a regular squad in the guards but it comprised of people who might become officers. So it was from all the regiments in the Brigade of Guards. So I went into there and then I went to Sandhurst. That was the least distinguished part of my career in the army because I was unwell and I caught mumps. Then they ordered me out immediately and I had a terrible, terrible time. It was a dreadful winter. Then we were given a week's leave and I went to France where my father was and there I got worse. They kept me an extra week and they sent me back. That didn't go down very well with my company commander. It was ghastly. My time there was not distinguished. So I was not accepted in the Irish Guards.

I was sent to Inniskillings, which my uncle Mr Bartley had been advising me to go in to because he had been with them in Iraq. He was the army commander

in Iraq. So I went into the Inniskillings. Now, I really didn't know anything about it. Knew they were an Orange regiment full of Orangemen and I was absolutely terrified. I went over to Northern Ireland, never been in Northern Ireland before, and my father was a Senator down South and a nationalist you know. So I was absolutely terrified as I went up there. It was a lovely day. I got off the train in Omagh. The depot was in Omagh. They had just put in a new camp to take in all the people that were going to England—drafts. I found the officer's mess and there were five or six officers there all dressed in white shirts and flannels or something or other and they said 'Oh get out of that uniform'. It was a Saturday I think, and then somebody said 'Would you like to play tennis?' and I went and played tennis. Everybody was so friendly that I didn't know what happened to all these frightful Orangemen. So I stayed there for six and a half years.

I stayed in Omagh for about six months and then I was sent to the 2nd Battalion, which had been in Dunkirk and Scotland. It was now just outside Liverpool and we went there. We had these enormous warehouses full of cotton and the Germans were dropping incendiary bombs, so we were rushing around with spades and buckets and so forth trying to put out fires. That went on for I would say a couple of months. I arrived just before Christmas of that year and stayed until the New Year. We were part of the 5th Division which was the regular division that had been in Dunkirk. They got themselves reorganised, sort of anyway. Then we were shifted from there, the whole division was shifted from Liverpool over to Northern Ireland again. We went to Armagh first for about two weeks and then to Dungannon where we remained for the next eight or nine months. That was quite an eye-opener for me. One half of Dungannon was Catholic and the other half was Protestant and they hardly spoke. Our battalion had their headquarters in what used to be Lord Ranfurly's old house there.

We had two companies in the Protestant part of town and two companies in the Catholic part of town. The company I was with was D-company and we were in the Catholic part of town. Then the CO said 'Now you will have your own mess because we can't have one mess for all these people.' We said 'Can we set up the officers' mess in McAleers' Hotel?'

Kitty McAleer was the proprietor. She was quite a character. She had a brother who would have been quite IRA at the time. He stayed there for a couple



*Kitty McAleer (left) with a staff member*

of months and then he went to Pomeroy where there were more IRA than in Dungannon. It was an amazing place, McAleers' Hotel, because there was a bar at the back you see where everybody used to come and drink, and then they also had an undertaking business and they also had the auction business. We used to say they would drink you to death then bury you and then sell off all your goods!

I became friendly particularly with Kitty McAleer. She was a great lady. She ordered us around like we were just children. It was a great time. Later on I got a horse and I kept it there. Then just down from us was the real Catholic part of town. The fellow there was an MP, Joe Stewart. He had a pub down there that was supposed to be out of bounds. We were not allowed to go there and when I used to go down there I used to drink in the pub anyway. I made friends with lots of people there in Dungannon, great people, but not very much

with the Protestants you see because the Protestants didn't like associating with us because we were in the Catholic part of town. They used to ask you know, doctors and lawyers and things like that, they used to ask the officers in the Protestant part of town, they would ask them to parties. Never asked a single one of us. I suppose guilty by association! But I really enjoyed my time in Dungannon. It was an eye-opener for me.

We were there almost a year I think, then February it would be '41 or '42, I went to Wokingham, which is just near London. There we were given embarkation leave and we were equipped with all sorts of things, weapons and this that and the other. Then we left from there and we got the train and we were taken to Glasgow and we went straight on to the dock to the ship. We got on and I thought we would never get off. But I was very fortunate because most of the officers there were six in a cabin. It was bit packed. We had the whole brigade on and there was the Brigadier of course, with the aircraft carriers and all sorts. I had a room with a Catholic padre Fr Power. In our regiment there was a Presbyterian padre and a Church of England padre as well. And the Brigadier said there was four cabins under the bridge, which is pretty luxurious, so the Church of England and the Presbyterian padre were given one room, or one cabin. Then Fr Power was in another cabin so he said to Fr Power 'Now you can select what officer you

want to share with.’ So he selected me, thinking I was Roman Catholic. But I think he always thought he was going to convert me. The funny thing was he used to go out on the deck early in the morning and say mass, you see, to the soldiers. He had a man who used to come in and get his wine or whatever and take it and put it out. We used to get a bottle of whiskey you see as a ration in those days. When the Americans really got going in the war that was done away with, but in those days we were British and we got a ration so I had a bottle of whiskey and used to put it in the place against the washstand. He had his wine on the other side. One day he came in and he said ‘Oh my God, I have committed a deadly sin, it’s terrible, terrible’ and fell down on his knees and he was praying and praying and he said ‘Oh you are nothing but a heathen, you don’t understand this.’ So I said ‘What is going on?’ He said ‘Oh damn Mahon he took your whiskey instead of my wine and I gave them all a drop of whiskey.’ I said ‘What did you do with my whiskey?’ He said ‘Don’t ever tell a soul, don’t tell a soul!’ It was very funny.

We were going to Singapore. We sailed around the ocean for days and weeks and we got to Sierra Leone. We were not allowed off the ship there. Then we didn’t know where we were going. Singapore fell in the meantime. So then we got going again and we got to Cape Town. We sat in Cape Town on the ship. Again we were not allowed off. We had been on the ship for five or six weeks! We got off in Durban and we were there about five days and then we were told to get back on the ship. When we got back on the ship they said ‘Now you must get your guns down in the hold.’ We had to get them out of these little shells and they said ‘You are going to invade Madagascar.’

So we set off to invade Madagascar and we were going in the ship’s lifeboats. We didn’t have any landing craft then in those days. I was the intelligence officer so I was sent in, in a little boat first and the rest of them came in, in the lifeboats. The lifeboats had never been in the water and they all sank when they were going in. Fortunately it was shallow and they could walk in. But God knows it would have been chaotic if we had ever been torpedoed with these lifeboats which were absolutely no good at all.

So we got in there. It was very, very hot, lovely weather, it was very, very hot. We stayed there about a day on the beach and I think we moved in and there were other troops who had gone in and they were fighting in the trenches. We were



supposed to be a reserve brigade or something. We had to walk everywhere, night march though the heat, it was terribly hot. And we got to... Diego Suarez was the name of the town. It was a naval base. We got in there and then the Free French gave up. We took them. They gave up and we were settled down in a place south of Diego Suarez in a sort of colonial farm, French people running it. They were just settlers, I suppose. We stayed there for about two or three weeks. We used to go out on patrols. It was amazing because you would go into these woods, jungles you know, and the smell of vanilla would overpower you. It grows wild there. And it would overpower, the smell of vanilla, absolutely overpowering. I will never forget it, it was incredible. Then we would find a village that would have one Arab in charge of the village and everybody else was like a slave to them. We stayed there for about three weeks I think, but we had no precautions against malaria at all, nothing. We were just like a crowd of dudes from England.

After that we went back on the ship which was waiting in the harbour for us. The rest of the convoy had gone off. We were told we had to go. We were going of course across the Indian Ocean to Bombay and we were going unescorted because they were all gone. We got onto the ship again, and we set off and on the way over there about twenty on the boat died of malaria which they caught in Madagascar you see.

I will never forget arriving in Bombay. I got up about four or five in the morning to see us coming into Bombay and looking at Bombay I fell in love with it. It's a marvellous place. I really adore it and I loved our time in India. Most of the officers hated it. They hated it. Then we were met by the hospital trains with all these people with malaria you see. I didn't have it. Then we went to Ahmadnagar which was up in the hills, Bombay is down below and this was way up in the plains above Poona. Poona is up there too, about a hundred miles on, a military place.

We knew we were going to Burma when I was told I was going on a jungle warfare course. I was sent with people from the other regiments for a day and we were sent to Sagar which was a pretty place at that time in Central Provinces. Then the monsoon was on, it was pouring with rain all the time. There we settled into our course on jungle warfare, which really was a course in explosives. We had to crawl on our bellies and blow up a railroad or blow up this and that and we

had to do this from beneath. We had to judge how much explosives we needed and so on, a lot of it was mathematical. We used to do classes. We used to get up at about five in the morning and we would go out, in the pouring rain and we would blow up this and that, with all sorts of explosives. We got to use them and got to know them. I used to see it afterwards, years later, they would say ‘Oh there is a new explosive’ but we used to have it then. I really had a marvellous time, blowing up this and that.

We would come back to our house and go into a classroom and produce theories, to see how much explosives you needed for this or that or the other. Then after lunch, we would go out again and then we would come back all soaking wet and then we would prepare for dinner. Then you had to get dressed. We had a sort of service uniform, we didn’t have any blues or anything like that but some people there did have, in the Indian army and so on. You went into this dinner and you had a place, and your bearer stood behind you. He served you your food. My bearer was a very, very good character. Then the general would come in and toast the King and do all this sort of business. I really saw then what the army in India did; it was really an eye opener. I really liked the Indians; I loved my time there.

Then we went back down and then I had to train a lot of people in this explosives thing. Then we were sent up the Ranchi, it was just west of Calcutta. There we were stationed. We were told we were going to Burma, but we were only there about five days when a whole lot of trucks came along. ‘Get in these trucks you are going back to Bombay.’ And the whole division moved back to Bombay and right through Bombay to the docks and into another ship.

And off we went. Where are we going? We didn’t know. The next day we were told we were going up the Persian Gulf to Basra. We went to Basra. We went down towards Kuwait, terribly hot. It was the end of August, it was terribly hot. I have never been so hot in all my life. We really couldn’t do anything except lie in the tents. Then we went up to Baghdad, we went on a train. We got out at Baghdad into trucks again and we went from there to Persia and we were stationed just outside Kermanshah. A desolate sort of place, holy places there. Then we were told that we had to have anti-tank guns. We had no anti-tank guns. We had no anti-tank guns but the war had been going on down in the desert and was still going on down there.

The CO sent for me and said, 'Now I want you to be king of the anti-tank company. You must go with about twelve NCOs and you must go to an anti-tank regiment there. There they will train you in anti-tank weapons and you will come back here and you will get some anti-tank guns and you will have your own company.' So we went off and we started with the 2nd anti-tank regiment for about a month and we learnt all about anti-tank weapons. The guns we had were two pounders. No good at all. The anti-tank regiment had those too. Then I came back and we trained the others in anti-tank guns. Then we were moved out of Kermanshah. We were outside there, outside the town about 15 or 20 miles in the Great Salt Desert, it's called the Great Salt Desert. And God we thought we can't stay here. It was getting very cold, very very cold. It was high up you see. Then suddenly somebody discovered all this stuff we were sitting on was salt so we would dig a hole, we would wet it and it would become plaster. So we got out and put the tent on the top and then to get warm we could get a primus stove which you could buy anywhere there and paraffin you could get anywhere you know, it was all over the place. We sat there for the winter and we had these stoves going in these little huddles under the ground and we sat out the winter there. It was terribly cold. We got the rations, and then we went here and there and away.

I went up to Tehran a couple of times on leave for three days. We would see the Russians there. The Russians we met there were very nice, the officers were very decent people. Most of them had already been wounded you see in Russia and they were sent down to Persia. They were decent fellows. You could see they were disciplined and so on. Then it came down to February '43 and of course they had won the battle of Stalingrad. You see in the summer before, the Germans had reached Groznyj, which is what they are fighting about now. It's a great oil producing place. And that is why the Germans wanted it. The British I suppose were fearful that they were going to get through so they moved the 10th Indian army out of India into Persia with the Russians. That is why we went there. Anyway we were moved down to Baghdad in the rainy season. My God it was an awful drive, sliding around in the mud. Then we came across to the west into Jordan and into Syria and then we came to a place 20 or 30 miles outside Damascus. There we had our neighbours, the Circassians, they were Russians you see because this was going on in those days against the Tsars in the last century



*Blanche Herbert in the Boudoir, 1865*

where the people in Circassia were fighting the Russians. They all emigrated down to Syria and the French turned them into cavalry. They had a lot of horses. They were our neighbours out there. They were decent fellows. We stayed there for a while, then I was sent down to Egypt on a course.

We were getting six-pounders, which were much better guns. And nobody knew anything about them so I was sent down to Cairo, the first time I had been in Cairo. I had a great time there and learned about the six-pounders. Then I came back and by that time they had moved down into the Lebanon. They were in Tripoli which is north Lebanon. They were doing mountain warfare training. Because it had all been in deserts you see. So they had a good four weeks of mountain warfare training. It was a marvellous country, lovely country. Lebanon was great, I liked it very much, a marvellous place. We used to go into Beirut to have a look around there.

Then I was sent to the 10th army division in the desert, up in the north of Syria. They were doing manoeuvres with the Turks. We went up as observers. That was quite interesting. Anita Leslie, she was around all the time. When I went into Damascus to the hotel to get a cup of coffee or something she was sitting there with Lord Lansdowne. It was the last time I saw him. Then we went back to Lebanon and we moved to another place which was near Syria again. At this time we were moved down to the Suez Canal and Port Said where we were going to go somewhere. There were a couple of big boats there, cruise boats. We were put on them and we had to get off them into landing craft, all this business. Then we were sent to a troop ship. We didn't know where we were going. Then we discovered when we had set sail, we were going to Sicily. We landed in Sicily in June or July 1943.

We landed near Syracuse. Syracuse became Alexander's headquarters. The funny thing was when we were on that ship they used to show us movies in the evening and the movie they showed us when we first got it was the Boys from Sicily. We were right there. Of course the first thing we had to do was gather our guns which had been on different ships, you see, and get ourselves sorted out. We were trying to do that and then we got into this town and the liaison officer came along and he said to one of our officers—'You can drive down there and your battalion, the marching body will join you there.' But of course this was nonsense because this

town was in the hands of the Italians. We got up there and a fellow went down on this carrier, weren't gone very far and they started shelling us and one of my soldiers who was with me, was badly wounded. One of my guns was knocked out, we were just sitting on the road. There was false information given to us but anyway we got over there and we got our guns and we started off. We were advancing and we got to a place called Lemon Bridge which had been taken by airborne forces on the day of the invasion. There had been a big battle there. Animals, there were dead bodies everywhere, it was horrible. We were told we had to advance across the plain and that we did. Then we ran into the biggest battle we had.

The battalion ran into stiff opposition at Lemon Bridge, the bridge across the river and they had very heavy casualties there. I think that three or four rifle company commanders were either killed or wounded. I had lost one service man and the other one was killed near Lemon Bridge. I got injured myself. We had an extraordinary Commanding Officer. He was called Joseph O'Brien Twohig. He was a fiery fellow, he joined us when we were in the Persia and he really put the battalion into shape. He was an extraordinary fellow. 'Führer' everybody called him. He wouldn't take no for an answer and he was very dynamic and so on. But anyway he ran into this thing at Lemon Bridge and he also lost a lot of his officers and men there.

Eventually the Germans gave up and we moved forward. We were then switched around to another place, to Sferro Station and that was a real hell-hole. We got shelled all the time. It lasted for about five days and then we moved on again. We landed on about the 10th of July and I suppose we finished our campaign in Sicily about a month later. Then we were in a farm with a decent farmer, which was a pretty good place. There we re-equipped and we got replacements for all the people who had been killed and wounded. Then we got into the landing craft and we invaded the 'Toe of Italy' as it was known then. There were two divisions landing there, one was ours and the other was Canadian. Montgomery said we would be supported by tremendous artillery. My God the artillery was so tremendous, it was overpowering. The smoke screen they put down meant you couldn't see a thing.

I had met Montgomery already a couple of times and I met him more later on, but in our landing craft I was the fellow in charge of the troops and we didn't

know where we were going. There was this awful smoke everywhere and we ran right into the wall of the place and we got off and we didn't know where we were. It was really chaotic. And then we sorted ourselves out. We were landing among the Canadians and the Canadians were among us and it was a very chaotic couple of hours. Thank God there was nobody opposing us that day, it would have been awful. Then they had, it was marvellous, they had to go up this mountain. Of course I couldn't take my guns so I was at the bottom with all the guns until the mules arrived, they had mules then. Then a couple of planes came over and dropped bombs and the mules scattered all over the place, God! It's funny looking back at it but it wasn't at the time.

Then we gradually went up the coast but it was terrible, you see the Germans blew every bridge. The engineers did a tremendous job. But people in Palermo couldn't understand why we couldn't advance up the coast more quickly, but you couldn't, you see. You could with one car but you couldn't with a whole load of guns and everything else. We got up there eventually and then I got ill.

I was evacuated because I had something wrong with my ear. I was put on a ship, a hospital ship that was going to Algiers. I went on the hospital ship for about two days and they cured me. I was cured then but all these people were there with jaundice. I caught it there. The American troops had got it, and our officers got it, but the troops never got it. I don't know why. They called it the officers' disease—maybe because we got a little whiskey in our ration.

When we got into Algiers we had one idea: to get back to Italy. I didn't want to stay in Algiers. And we, the three of us of our brigade who were there, managed to get an American colonel to put us on a plane for Sicily. By that time I had gone up to yellow, so the medical captain put me into a hospital in Palermo which was American. I stayed there for about four weeks until I was cured of it. Eventually I got back to my battalion. The American colonel had given me a thing to say I was needed there so I got on a plane and got back to my comrades. I found the rear echelon of my battalion who were very pleased to see me.

We got to Naples and then we were moved around to the Sangro which was right on the extreme east of Italy. There we spent Christmas in Casoli. We were with the partisans you see. They were good chaps. We were with the Eighth Army then, and we were moved right around to the other coast to the Fifth Army.

Clarke was a general of the Fifth Army. McCreery was in charge of the corps. Anyway the river there was called the Garigliano. The river comes to the Ausente Valley, and then is joined by the Rapido and then it becomes the Garigliano and goes down to the sea. This is really the first Battle of Monte Cassino that we started off... We had a lot of casualties. I was wounded there, but not while crossing the river, when we got into our boats. Our company was able to reach their objective and C company on our right reached their objective. There were only four companies in the whole damn army corps that reached their objectives. We were like a sore thumb. The Germans had marked where they thought we were likely to cross and they just showered it with shells and sank many of the boats... I was wounded the next morning. There was a counter attack, you see they counter attack. And we were driven off. We joined C company which was on our right. We were there that night and then the next morning we were calling for defensive fire all the time. We were just sitting ducks. There were four officers, of whom I was one, and we were all having a pow-wow, lighting our cigarettes. We couldn't do that in the dark you see, and it was just getting light and one of our batteries was firing short and the shells landed right on top of us. I was wounded in the leg...

I was evacuated then, I was really badly wounded, then. The next few months were spent in hospital. We all had a horror of getting back to Algiers where we would be put into a camp which was a general sort of a place then you wouldn't know where you would be sent to. There would be no respect for your battalion or anything. But you see you become so attached to a battalion. I suppose I had been with the officers for three years. So it was like home. Then of course they realise you would do anything to get back. So our Commanding Officer sent a truck for me before I should really have gone out of the hospital because my leg was still bandaged. There were about four of us who had been wounded who wanted to be in the battalion so he kept us there and I went to the local aid station to get my leg dressed every other day. It was like being at home.

I stayed there I suppose for about two months in 1944. Then we had to rejoin the people in Anzio. By this time you could get to Anzio for about three or four days and then we went up to Rome. We were out on the coast from Anzio, the British were on the left. We got into Ostia and then we were left to go into Rome. Went in there by jeep. Of course we had our Irish caps, our caubeens, which I had



had made by an Italian tailor out of Italian uniforms. There we met a doctor who said 'Are you people Irish?' So we would say 'Yes'. He said 'You know my mother is Irish.' That was extraordinary, an Italian. He said 'Would you like to meet her? She would love to see you.' It was the Marconis. He had a sister, you know.

I met Delia Murphy, the wife of the Irish Ambassador to the Vatican. Kiernan, I think he was. I didn't meet him the first time but when I was wounded again, you see I went back down to the Irish College and there were various nurses who were Irish looking after us. They used to go over to the Irish College to talk to the priests in the evenings. Then one of them said to one of the priests 'Oh where do you come from?' and he said 'Killarney.' 'Oh,' she said 'We have an officer from Killarney'. 'Who's that?' he said. 'Oh my God' he said 'I know the name.' He knew my name you see. And so he came over to see me, it was Fr Quinlan. We became very friendly. He died about two years ago. We kept in touch for years. I was very fond of him. He said, 'Oh I must tell Monsignor O'Flaherty.'

Monsignor O Flaherty, Hugh's uncle, he came down to the hospital to see me. He had a car you see, nobody had a car in those days, and he used to take me around. He really showed me Rome from the bottom. He knew every place in Rome and he showed me round. There was no traffic you see except some army vehicles, you know, armour. I couldn't walk very well. So he took me around in his car, all around Rome. We went everywhere; he was really marvellous to me. I was there about six weeks I suppose and he would always come round at least twice a week and take me out. He was a great fellow, he was amazing, all those people he saved. He introduced me to all the Irish priests, I can't remember who they all were but there was one, a Franciscan monastery there which is allied or something or other with the monastery in Killarney. And full of Irish Fathers there. And there was one Fr Quinn who was in charge and this young Franciscan took me in and introduced me to him. I thought he was rather rude, he said to the young priest 'Now you go away'. Then he came to me and he said 'Would you like a drop of whiskey?' There was a picture behind his desk which he moved aside and there was a little safe and he brought out a bottle of Irish whiskey.

Then I went back again. The CO had changed by then but this business of getting his officers back still persisted and he sent a truck down for me. The second time I was wounded was just before Bologna. It was incredible I was

wounded there, I was placed where you get all the rations and ammunitions and send them up by mule to the rest and I was there and I was waiting for the meal change to come back. We were just standing there and a couple of shells fell and I said ‘Those are getting fairly near.’ And then another one fell and I said ‘God that is getting very near, we better go back into the shelter.’ And one hit me in the back and knocked me down. It was a big piece of metal. I was pretty well spent you see. It knocked me out. Then I went back to Rome and spent time there in hospital. Then I went back again and by this time I was wounded twice, I was put in charge of the water company, which was a bit less onerous. I was in charge of that till I left the army.

We were going into all these towns, the Germans were giving up and so on. Then we eventually got into Austria and there we stayed for three years. We went to Vienna for the first winter and it was terribly cold... We had a second colonel who was the father of David McConnell. And I had good friends there. We used to go down to the local town at night to the night clubs.

There was one lady who took a shine to me, a Russian officer... She had a row of medal ribbons. I couldn’t talk to her except in German you see and she knew a little German. She was always grinning. I don’t know what the matter was with her, it was quite amusing. Then she wanted me to go in and inspect her company, so I agreed to do that. I was inspecting these poor soldiers and she sees something the matter with one officer and she takes her stick and whacks him on the face. She was quite ferocious.

You see we met the Russians all the time. Sometimes you would find them really great troops and other times they were awful. When we first met them in Austria, the first ones we met were there only a couple of days. They were armoured troops. They were really first class. Then they would go, and then these absolute hordes of people from all over Asia would come in. They were absolutely dreadful. No discipline or anything, they were just wild.

### *Billy at Work*

When I came out of the army I went to California. I was wondering what I would do, you see I had things to do at my grandfather’s estate but it wasn’t full time. So I was looking for something to do. This friend of mine was working with Hiller,



the helicopter people, and he said ‘You know we have stacks of correspondence from all over the world, nobody ever answers it. Would you come down and look through it?’ So I came down and I started looking through it. It was fascinating, people writing from all over the world and nobody ever answering them. And so I eventually stayed there for fourteen years. I really went there by chance. It was amazing. I loved it there. I introduced helicopters to people from all over the world.

We were just starting making them you see. First we had to get the thing certified. That took about a year and then we got it certified and we could build them. We built them and delivered them in ’49 and the first one we sold was in France. We had a great man here, Commander Borris. He was Jewish/French. He was in the Free French Forces from the very beginning. He was a great aviator and so forth, a really tremendous chap, brilliant.

### *Billy on the Funds*

The first I heard about the American Irish Foundation was in 1964 when the Irish Consul in San Francisco asked about twelve people of Irish descent to a dinner honouring Frank Aiken, who was the Foreign Minister, and everyone went in black tie. He was looking for money for The American Irish Foundation which was started by de Valera and Kennedy. After that, I never heard another word. Then about nine or ten years later Kevin Mallen, he was one of those who started this thing; he called me and said ‘I would like to see you.’ I went down to see him in his office and he said ‘You have just been elected to The American Irish Foundation.’ I said ‘I never heard anything about it since I came to Ireland. It must be dead and gone.’ ‘Oh yes’ he said ‘it’s just been revived. Jack Mulcahy has come on board and it’s just been revived. The first thing he wants you to do is go to Ireland as a guest of Mr Mulcahy. He has taken a 747 and he will take you on a tour of Ireland.’

I came on this trip and we came to see Mulcahy and went to his house in Limerick. He was buying up everything at the time. There must have been two hundred and fifty or so for the 747 was full. There were various other people came and joined us on the way. There was Considine, who was the great columnist for Hearst newspapers in Chicago. There was also Oscar Hammer, who was the head of Occidental Petroleum, and there was Alice Faye, who used to be my idol when I was about eighteen years old.

We went to Dublin to Trinity College where they were producing a new history of Ireland which Mulcahy had contributed to, but which he thought was far too pro-British. We were asked to Áras an Uachtaráin by President de Valera, who was very courteous and pleasant. I didn't have much chance to talk to him, though I did sit beside him for five minutes and we talked about Muckross and my father, whom he knew, and was very anti de Valera as he blamed him entirely and felt him responsible for the Civil War. He was very soft-spoken. He was very old then. It was quite an event for me anyhow.

I became a Director. So was Mulcahy. John Cosgrove was President at the time. Mallen was Treasurer and a couple of years later they elected me President.

At the instigation of Tom Jordan we started the Literary Award with \$5,000 that first year. It went to Austin Clarke. His wife said 'For God's sake, don't give him all that money at once or he'll go off to Monte Carlo or somewhere and spend it all. You have to give it to him in little bits.' So we gave it to him in monthly instalments. That was done for several years. The next man was Seamus Heaney, then a relatively unknown poet. After Seamus came John Banville, followed by Dervla Murphy. One of the conditions of the prize was that they should reside in Ireland for the year they got it. She accepted the prize, but said 'I do all my writing overseas'. So she decided to buy a bicycle and ride around in Ireland. She went round the whole of Northern Ireland talking to ordinary people, Protestants, Catholics and everyone. She wrote a book called *A Place Apart*. It's a first-class book. It was really a most touching book.

Then they said to me when I was there, that there was a young fellow from Ireland called Tony O'Reilly who started a thing similar to ours and they wanted me to go to see him. I said I would. I had an awful time trying to get to him, I didn't know Tony O'Reilly. I only knew him as a great rugby player. He was already very prominent. I had an awful time trying to get to see him. We made a date and then there was a snowstorm and he couldn't leave Pittsburgh and anyway after about six months Sean Donlon, who had just been made ambassador in Washington, and Walter Curley got us together.

We went to a dinner at Cote Basque in New York which was Tony's favourite restaurant at the time. Tony was accompanied by Chuck Daly. It was obvious to me that O'Reilly wasn't interested in merging at all. But he said 'Now why don't



*President John F Kennedy and President Eamon de Valera launch The American Irish Foundation 1963*

you and Walter come to my office tomorrow morning,' so I thought there was a glimmer of hope—Walter Curley was on our Board. And so we went down. He suggested that as a start we would put two directors on their board and they put two directors on our board and then we will take a look at it. So I thought it was a good idea and I said 'Well I will have to take it to my board, the board of directors, to get their approval.'

So we fixed a date for a board meeting at the Union Club in New York. Tony was at a hotel round the corner waiting for our answer. To my horror they didn't buy it. They didn't buy it at all. And so I was left high and dry. I just said to Walter 'What on earth are we going to do now?' He said 'I will go and see Tony and will say that we would have to wait.'

The ones that were against it were Mulcahy, a very distinguished old gentleman from Boston, Joe Gannon, and the Ambassador in Dublin, Moore, he was against it. Why he was against it I don't know. Our Board were preponderantly old gentlemen and they thought they were losing control. They saw younger people coming along and they didn't like it.

We were not able to do anything so we went on our way for about six or seven years and we had the West, they had begun to grow more in the East and Middle West and they had also become more active so anyway we finally did it. John Brogan became President and I said 'You know we'll have to do something about the merger with these fellows. It's ridiculous. We have the same aims, and we're going after the same millionaires. It's a nonsense.' He was determined and he got together with Dan Rooney. Dan Rooney really did it.

Brian Burns who was the lawyer sorted it out. When he but puts his mind to something he really does it. He had those two things sorted out legally, my God, so quick we didn't know what was happening. They couldn't agree on a name at first because we wanted The American Irish Foundation to be included in the title. So finally both sides compromised and it was agreed jointly we would be known as The American Ireland Fund. This kept the initials AIF as well as the term Ireland Fund so both could feel they had made a good compromise. They agreed on the logo afterwards at a meeting in Ashford, and we still have it today.

Then we were all in the garden of the Irish Embassy in Washington. Various people made speeches declaring they were going to merge the two bodies. We

shook hands with Ronald Regan to seal the agreement. But as it was, it was a lot of people didn't like it but it has worked well. It has gone all over the place mainly through Tony O'Reilly. It's is a big, big thing now from the shaky start. We've come a long way, done some good, don't you think? We have tremendous power in so far as we are this extraordinary network. The more we can gather people together, the more points of contact we can have around the world, the greater we become, the more benefit to Ireland.

I am proud of what we have done to make Ireland a better and more peaceful place. I think what has been achieved in the last fifteen years has been remarkable, and I hope we have been a part of that, to make that possible. I lived the first part of my life in Ireland and I love the country, I love the people. It all gives me great pleasure. I just think of Kerry and the beauty of it all. And all the people round Muckross. They were the people I grew up with. I just love them. I never met a crowd of people like them anywhere else in the world. I am a Kerryman to the core.

