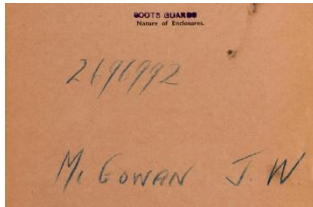




History Recon Research Enquiry

Name of enquirer	
Name of subject	John Waugh McGowan
Regiment	Scots Guards
Army Number	2696992
Regiment	Army Air Corps
Army Number	22266505

1. Enlistment and Training – ‘Little Sparta’



John Waugh McGowan was born on 10th June 1919 and was just twenty years old when Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939. His surviving documentation records his wartime Army number as 2696992 and confirms that he served with the Scots Guards.

Unfortunately, no precise wartime service record for McGowan has been located during this research. It is nevertheless possible to reconstruct the broad course of his service from his Army number, the records of men who enlisted immediately alongside him, the subsequent documentation which survives, and information preserved by his family. For the purposes of this report, these sources have been brought together to provide an account of his wartime career.

McGowan's service number allows the beginning of that career to be dated with considerable confidence. Three immediately neighbouring Scots Guards numbers have been identified: 2696991, 2696993 and 2696994. Their surviving records show that all three men enlisted within a remarkably narrow period. Number 2696993 enlisted at Glasgow on 6th November 1939, while 2696991 and 2696994 both enlisted at Motherwell on 13th November 1939. With McGowan's number sitting directly amongst these three, he was almost certainly recruited into the Scots Guards between 6th and 13th November 1939.

McGowan therefore joined the Army little more than two months after the outbreak of the Second World War. He was part of the rapid wartime expansion of the British Army, but entry into the Scots Guards brought with it the traditions and exacting standards of one of the Army's senior Guards regiments.

Newly recruited soldiers were initially posted to the Guards Depot at **Caterham-on-Hill in Surrey**, before subsequently passing through a Training Battalion and then a Holding Battalion. McGowan's early service can therefore be reconstructed as beginning at the Guards Depot in November 1939, followed by a period with a Training Battalion during the



first months of 1940 and movement through a Holding Battalion later that year, before he was ready to join an operational battalion.

Training as a Guardsman had a formidable reputation. The Guards Depot was famously known as 'Little Sparta', a nickname which reflected the intensity of the regime and the discipline demanded of its recruits. Men entering the Guards were expected to attain exceptionally high standards of physical fitness, drill, turnout and personal discipline. The relentless attention to detail traditionally associated with the Guards was not simply ceremonial: it was intended to instil obedience, resilience and an ability to perform instinctively under pressure.

For the wartime recruit there was also the practical business of becoming an infantry soldier. McGowan's training would have encompassed weapons handling, musketry, fieldcraft, route marches, physical training and the routines of military life. The polished Guardsman seen on ceremonial duties was only one aspect of the regiment. Its primary wartime purpose was to produce disciplined infantrymen capable of fighting as part of a battalion, and McGowan's generation would soon have ample opportunity to put that training into practice.

By the second half of 1940, the neighbouring records show men from McGowan's enlistment group beginning to move from holding formations into operational battalions. McGowan's subsequent service was with the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards, the battalion whose wartime movements correspond with the family's knowledge that he served in both North Africa and Italy. His transition from recruit to trained Guardsman therefore brought him towards a battalion which would spend much of the war engaged in some of the British Army's hardest fighting.

2. Into Battle – The Western Desert and Gazala

By the time McGowan completed his training and joined the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards, the battalion was already serving overseas. At the outbreak of the Second World War it had been stationed in Egypt, where the growing threat from Italian forces in neighbouring Libya placed British troops in the Middle East on a war footing. The battalion subsequently became part of the 22nd Guards Brigade, later redesignated the 201st Guards Motor Brigade, and served as motorised infantry alongside British armoured formations in the Western Desert.

This was a demanding form of warfare for an infantry battalion. The distances involved were immense and the landscape offered little protection from either the climate or the enemy. Movement depended heavily upon motor transport, while water, ammunition, fuel and food all had to be carried across long and vulnerable supply routes. Dust and sand were constant problems, affecting weapons, vehicles and equipment as well as the men

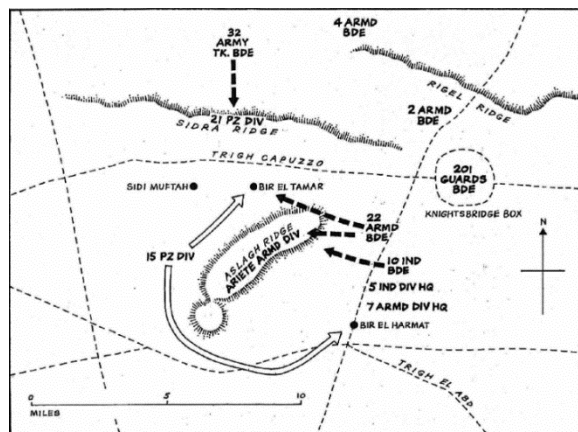
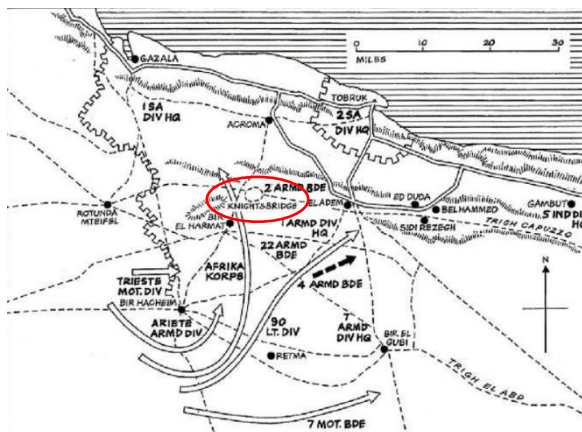


themselves. For McGowan, the contrast with training in Britain could hardly have been greater.

The 2nd Battalion saw action during the fluctuating campaigns which followed, but one battle in particular came to define its service in the Western Desert. In the spring of 1942, British forces had established a defensive line extending southwards from **Gazala** on the Libyan coast. Rather than forming a continuous line of trenches, the position was based around a series of heavily defended strongpoints known as 'boxes', protected by extensive minefields and intended to impede any attempt by Axis forces to break through or outflank the British position.

The 201st Guards Motor Brigade, including the 2nd Scots Guards, occupied the important **Knightsbridge Box**. The name was deceptive: Knightsbridge was little more than a desert road junction, but its position made it strategically important. When General Erwin Rommel launched his offensive on 26th May 1942, German and Italian armoured formations swept around the southern end of the British defences (see left hand image below). What followed developed into the confused and extremely violent fighting of the Battle of Gazala.

For nearly two weeks the Guards held their position while a huge armoured battle developed around them. The situation became progressively more dangerous as Axis forces penetrated the British defensive system and the fighting concentrated around the area known as the 'Cauldron'. The Scots Guards were infantrymen operating in a battle increasingly dominated by tanks, artillery and anti-tank guns, and their position eventually became dangerously exposed.



The crisis came on 13th June 1942 (see right hand image above). By this stage the wider British position around Knightsbridge was collapsing and the 2nd Scots Guards were defending ground on Rigel Ridge, north-west of the road junction. Their position had been prepared under considerable pressure and was supported by anti-tank guns and South African artillery, but it now stood directly in the path of a major German attack.

At around 14:00, tanks and armoured vehicles of the 21st Panzer Division, accompanied by infantry, attacked the Scots Guards position. The battalion's forward companies and anti-



tank detachments fought on for several hours against overwhelming pressure. The resistance was sufficiently determined to delay the German advance and allow elements farther to the rear to escape, but the forward positions were eventually overrun. Eight Scots Guards officers and around 250 other ranks were captured, in addition to those killed and wounded during the fighting.

The remnants of the Guards position withdrew during the night as the battle around Knightsbridge came to an end. The wider Battle of Gazala proved a severe British defeat and was followed by the loss of Tobruk and a retreat eastwards towards Egypt. For the 2nd Scots Guards, however, the fighting at Knightsbridge had been particularly costly. The regiment later compared the scale of its casualties at Gazala with those suffered in a major battle of the First World War, and GAZALA was subsequently carried as one of the Scots Guards' Battle Honours.

The losses also had an immediate effect upon the battalion. So depleted was the 2nd Scots Guards that it was temporarily amalgamated with the 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards, while the 201st Guards Brigade was subsequently withdrawn from the front to rest and rebuild.

For McGowan, Gazala represented the brutal reality of service with an infantry battalion in the Western Desert. The 2nd Scots Guards had not simply witnessed the great armoured battles for which the North African campaign became famous; at Knightsbridge they had occupied and defended one of the positions around which that battle was fought, and had paid heavily for doing so.

3. Medenine – Revenge for Gazala

After the losses suffered at Gazala the battalion was subsequently based in **Palestine** and **Syria**, where its strength was restored and it prepared for a return to active operations.

By early 1943 the situation in North Africa had changed dramatically. Axis forces had been driven westwards across Libya and into Tunisia, where they were attempting to establish a final defensive position. In February the 2nd Scots Guards began a journey of around 2,000 miles by motor transport along the North African coast to rejoin the fighting. The battalion arrived in Tunisia at the beginning of March, just as preparations were being made to meet an expected German attack around the town of Medenine.

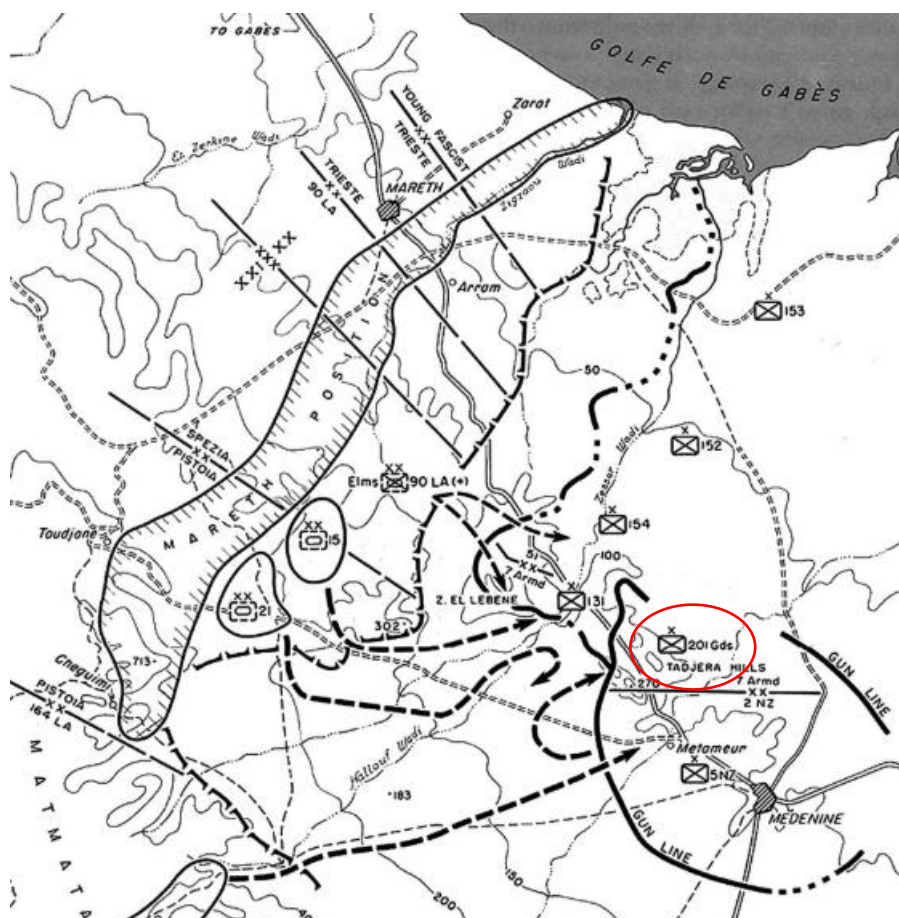


The Guards were now considerably better equipped to deal with the German armour than they had been at Gazala. Of particular importance were the battalion's 6-pounder anti-tank guns (see image above), weapons capable of defeating the German tanks they were likely to

encounter. These were positioned carefully and concealed, with orders to hold their fire until the enemy armour had come within effective range.

The anticipated attack came on 6th March 1943. Rommel's intention was to strike the Eighth Army before it could launch its own offensive against the **Mareth Line**, the principal Axis defensive position in southern Tunisia. German armoured formations, including the 21st Panzer Division, advanced against prepared British positions around **Medenine**. It would prove to be Rommel's last offensive in North Africa.

This time, however, there would be no repetition of Gazala.



As the German tanks approached, the British anti-tank guns remained concealed until they could engage at close range. The 2nd Scots Guards played a prominent part in the defence. Their anti-tank crews allowed the German armour to come onto their positions before opening fire, engaging tanks at ranges where the 6-pounders could be devastatingly effective. The battalion's guns accounted for a number of enemy tanks as the German attack was brought to a halt.

The fighting was particularly significant for the Scots Guards because among the attackers were men and tanks of the 21st Panzer Division – the same formation which had helped overwhelm the battalion at Gazala nine months earlier. The regimental history has

consequently remembered Medenine as a form of revenge for Gazala. The circumstances were now reversed: instead of Guards infantry struggling to hold an increasingly isolated position against German armour, the Germans were advancing directly into a carefully prepared anti-tank defence.

By the end of the day the Axis attack had failed. Heavy losses in tanks made further attempts increasingly costly and the offensive was abandoned. Across the battlefield dozens of Axis tanks had been destroyed or disabled, while British losses were comparatively light. Rommel's attempt to disrupt the Eighth Army's preparations had achieved nothing of lasting value.

For the 2nd Scots Guards, Medenine could hardly have provided a greater contrast with the disaster at Knightsbridge. The battalion which had been shattered at Gazala had been rebuilt, re-equipped and returned to battle. This time it had met German armour from prepared positions and helped decisively defeat it. MEDENINE subsequently became another of the regiment's Battle Honours.

The victory also marked the beginning of the end of McGowan's war in North Africa. The Axis bridgehead in Tunisia was steadily compressed over the following months until resistance finally collapsed in May 1943. For the 2nd Scots Guards, however, the end of one campaign was already leading towards another. The battalion would soon leave Africa behind and prepare to take the war onto the European mainland – Italy.

4. Salerno – The Invasion of Italy



The conclusion of the North African campaign did not bring a long period of respite for the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards. Within months, McGowan and his comrades were preparing for another major operation, this time as part of the Allied invasion of mainland Italy. The battalion was now serving with the 201st Guards Brigade, part of the 56th (London) Division.

Italy had surrendered to the Allies on 8th September 1943, but this did not mean that the invasion would be unopposed. German forces had anticipated



the collapse of their former ally and moved quickly to occupy key positions across the country. The Allies therefore faced the prospect of fighting their way north against an experienced German Army which was determined to make full use of Italy's difficult terrain.

On 9th September, the main Allied landings began around **Salerno**, south of Naples, under the codename Operation Avalanche. The objective was to establish a substantial bridgehead on the Italian mainland, capture the port of Naples and secure airfields from which further operations could be supported. The 2nd Scots Guards landed on the first day of the operation and were soon advancing inland.

The initial landings succeeded in putting Allied troops ashore, but the situation quickly became precarious. German resistance stiffened as reinforcements were brought against the beachhead, while the terrain restricted the movement of the Allied forces attempting to expand their foothold. The Germans occupied commanding positions overlooking the coastal plain and launched a series of determined counter-attacks intended to drive the invaders back into the sea.

For the 2nd Scots Guards, much of the early fighting centred upon the area around **Battipaglia** and a large tobacco-processing complex which became known simply as the Tobacco Factory. The surrounding roads and railway lines made the area tactically important, while the substantial buildings provided strong defensive positions. Between 10th and 18th September, the battalion was involved in repeated and costly fighting as the Guards attempted to secure the area against determined German opposition. The following extract from the official Battalion War Diary paints a "typical" day during this period:

11th September 1943

A day of sniping by both sides and shelling by us. G Company's OP proved its worth. Lieutenant Dollard and platoon killing, with a Bren, several Germans, including an officer. Magnificent work by 65 Field Regiment who were in support of us.

Night attack at 2130 hours after artillery barrage. Right Flank right with the main Battipaglia-Salerno road as its objective. G Company in the centre with the job of clearing the factory and F Company on the left - objective the crossroads. Part of Right Flank reached their objective (Lieutenant Fraser's platoon) but the rest became separated and surrounded and were overrun by AFVs and taken prisoners. Major Bulkeley, Captain Willis and Company. HQ were the only ones to escape, the former having a number of narrow shaves after he had gone back to try and collect the company.

G Company fared better and got into the Tobacco Factory but were forced to withdraw, losing Lieutenant Sir N.J. Cayzer killed and Lieutenant Dollard wounded. F Company came under very heavy Spandau fire from the crossroads. Lieutenants Beckett and McLeod were killed and Lieutenants Phillipson and Capt. Weston Smith reported as missing. The company withdrew to its original position. Other officers missing were Lieutenants Clarke, Fraser and



Elliott. The two last turned up a few days later after escaping from the Germans, and Lieutenant Clarke was later reported prisoner of war.

The battle around Salerno was very different from the fighting McGowan had experienced in North Africa. The vast expanses of the Western Desert had been replaced by a much more confined landscape of towns, villages, cultivated fields, roads and hills. German troops could use buildings, walls and the broken terrain for cover, while artillery and mortar fire could be directed onto the relatively restricted routes available to the advancing infantry.

By the middle of September the entire Salerno bridgehead was under considerable pressure. German counter-attacks threatened to divide the Allied forces and for a time there was genuine concern that the invasion might fail. The fighting around Battipaglia formed part of this wider struggle, with the 2nd Scots Guards helping to hold and expand the ground won during the initial landings.

The crisis gradually passed. Allied artillery, naval gunfire and air power helped blunt the German counter-attacks, while increasing numbers of troops and equipment were brought ashore. The Germans eventually began withdrawing from the immediate Salerno area, and on 18th September the 2nd Scots Guards were able to occupy the Tobacco Factory around which they had fought for more than a week.

The battalion subsequently moved into the hills north of Salerno as the Allied advance continued. By the end of September it was finally withdrawn for a period of rest and reorganisation after almost three weeks of operations following the landing.

Salerno had secured the Allies their foothold on mainland Italy, but it also demonstrated what the campaign ahead would involve. The German Army had no intention of surrendering the country without a fight. Italy's mountains and rivers offered a succession of natural defensive positions, and the Allied advance northwards would become a prolonged and costly struggle.

For McGowan and the 2nd Scots Guards, the fighting at Salerno was merely the opening stage of that campaign. During the months which followed they would advance northwards into increasingly difficult country, eventually becoming involved in one of the most famous and bitterly contested battles of the Italian campaign: Monte Camino.

5. Monte Camino

Following the fighting at Salerno, the Allied armies continued their advance northwards through Italy. Progress became increasingly difficult as the relatively open ground around the coast gave way to a succession of rivers, valleys and mountain ranges. The Germans made full use of this landscape, establishing strong defensive positions across the natural barriers which stood between the Allies and Rome.



By November 1943, the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards had reached one of the most formidable of these positions: **Monte Camino**. Rising above the surrounding countryside, the mountain dominated important routes through the area and formed part of the German defensive system blocking the Allied advance. Its steep, rocky slopes offered the defenders excellent observation and numerous opportunities to construct concealed and mutually supporting positions.

The battalion entered the battle on 5th November 1943. For McGowan, it represented yet another dramatic change in the character of his war. The vast distances and armoured manoeuvres of North Africa were now a distant memory. At Monte Camino, progress depended upon infantry climbing steep mountain slopes against German troops occupying prepared positions above them.

The terrain made almost every aspect of the battle more difficult. Heavy equipment could not simply be driven forward with the infantry, while ammunition, food and water had to be brought up increasingly difficult routes. The same problems applied in reverse when wounded men had to be evacuated from the heights. The approaching Italian winter added cold, rain and deteriorating conditions to the difficulties already presented by the mountain itself. The Battalion War Diary paints a perfect scene:

5th November 1943

The Brigade moved forward late in the day through Teano to another concentration area on the northern slope of a ridge running east and west. The hill was a forest of eating chestnuts, and addition to the diet was welcome. From here it was possible to see something of the task which lay ahead. On the left was the River Garigliano running north and south, and on the right was a road full of American traffic running north from Roccamonfina to join the Appian Way at Mignano, around which the Americans were engaged in attack and counter attack during the whole of the succeeding week. In front of us, some two miles across the valley, was the range of hills known as Monte Camino, which the Brigade was to attack. This range resolved itself into three main ridges sloping southwards into the plain. On the right was the highest peak (963 metres) with a monastery on the top of it. This sloped down to the plain by what was known as Razorback Ridge. Next on the left was Point 819, descending via Point 727 down what was known as Barearse Slope to the village of Calabritto at the foot. Between these two ridges there was a corrie by which a track went up from the village of Mieli. At the head of the track there was a wood which ran left-handed and up to Point 819 and directly above the head of the corrie were olive trees & cultivated terraces which stretched right-handed to the foot of the Monastery feature. Further to the left, beyond Point 819, were a series of ridges running north and south. which brought the hill by descending steps to the River Garigliano.

The first attempt to take Monte Camino developed into a gruelling struggle. The Germans were strongly entrenched and the attacking infantry faced machine-gun, mortar and artillery fire as they attempted to work their way upwards across exposed and broken



ground. Positions which appeared close on a map could require exhausting climbs to reach, and the defenders possessed the considerable advantage of occupying the higher ground.

Despite determined efforts, the initial assault failed to secure the mountain. The exhausted attacking troops were eventually withdrawn and allowed time to recover before a second attempt could be mounted. Monte Camino remained in German hands and continued to obstruct the Allied advance.

The battle resumed in force at the beginning of December. This time the attack was supported by a much greater concentration of artillery, while British troops once again fought their way onto the mountain. The 2nd Scots Guards returned to ground on which they had already experienced weeks of bitter fighting, but the German position was now subjected to sustained pressure from several directions.

After several more days of fighting, the German defenders were finally forced to withdraw. On 9th December 1943, the struggle for Monte Camino came to an end. The battle had lasted, with an interval between the two principal assaults, for more than a month. Its importance to the regiment was subsequently recognised with the award of the Battle Honour MONTE CAMINO. The official Scots Guards history describes it as the 2nd Battalion's next major battle after Salerno and characterises the fighting as a particularly gruelling struggle against prepared German positions on steep, rocky slopes.

The capture of Monte Camino did not suddenly transform the campaign. The advance through Italy remained slow, and the 2nd Scots Guards continued to serve through the winter as the Allies struggled northwards against successive German defensive positions. By this stage the battalion had been campaigning overseas for years and had fought in environments ranging from the deserts of North Africa to the mountains of southern Italy.

In March 1944, the 2nd Battalion finally left Italy and returned to Britain. For McGowan, it brought to an end the phase of his service remembered by his family as his time in North Africa and Italy. It did not, however, mark the end of his war. After rebuilding and retraining at home, the 2nd Scots Guards would eventually return to the continent for the final campaign against Germany.

6. The Final Campaign – North-West Europe

The 2nd Battalion Scots Guards returned to Britain in March 1944, bringing its long period of campaigning in North Africa and Italy to an end. The battalion had suffered heavily and the months that followed were spent rebuilding, receiving reinforcements and training for a new role as infantry within the Guards Armoured Division.

It was not until February 1945, almost a year after leaving Italy, that the battalion crossed the Channel and joined the division in **Holland**. By then the Allied advance had reached the



German frontier, and the 2nd Scots Guards were committed almost immediately to the **Battle of the Rhineland**.

The conditions were very different from those McGowan had experienced in North Africa and Italy. Winter weather, extensive woods, fortified villages and waterlogged ground made movement difficult, while German troops continued to offer determined resistance from prepared positions. As infantry within an armoured division, the Scots Guards were required to clear and secure the ground through which the tanks and supporting forces could advance.

By the middle of March 1945, German forces had been driven back across the Rhine. Once the Allies had crossed this final major natural barrier, the advance into northern Germany gathered pace. For the 2nd Scots Guards, the final campaign was consequently a relatively short one, carrying them from Holland, across the German frontier and deep into Germany during the last months of the war.

By the beginning of May 1945, the battalion had reached the area around **Bremen**. It was here that its wartime campaign finally ended with the German surrender and the conclusion of the war in Europe.

For McGowan, nearly six years had passed since his enlistment in November 1939. His full-time military service, however, continued beyond the end of the fighting and would not formally draw to a close until the following year.

7. Demobilisation and the Reserve

The end of the war in Europe did not bring an immediate end to McGowan's military service. Britain's wartime Army was demobilised gradually, and it was not until 20th August 1946 that his Scots Guards documentation records his transfer to Class Z(T) of the Territorial Army Reserve.

DESPATCH NOTE & RECEIPT FOR SOLDIER'S DOCUMENTS.			
FROM: RECORD OF 2ND SCOTS GUARDS,			
ARMY No.	RANK	NAME	CORPS.
2696992	Sgt	BIRDCAGE LONDON, S.W.1. MCGOWAN J.W.	SCOTS
		(Class Z(T) TAR 20 AUG 46)	



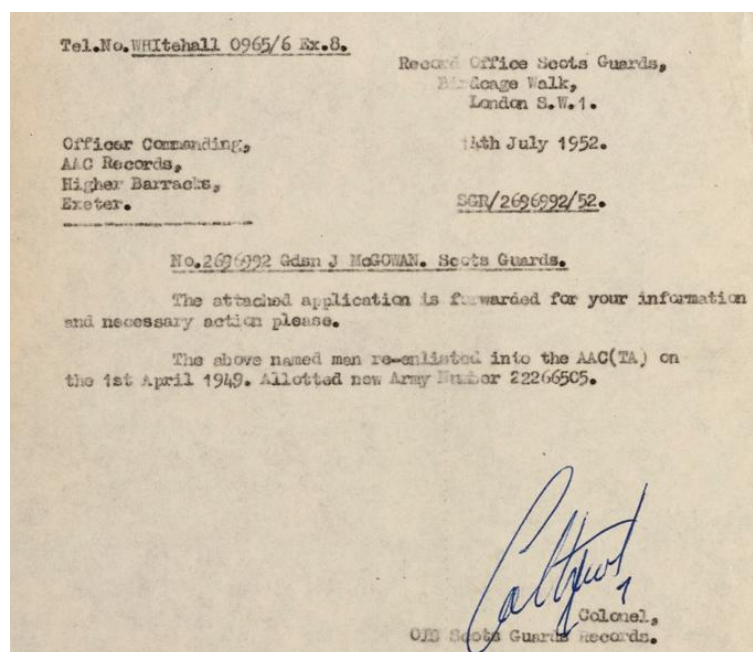
This marked the end of his full-time service. The Class Z Reserve allowed former servicemen to return to civilian life while remaining liable for recall in the event of a national emergency. McGowan had therefore left active military service, although he retained a formal connection with the Army.

That might ordinarily have marked the end of his military career. Instead, less than three years later, McGowan chose to serve again. In 1949 he applied to re-enlist in the Territorial Army, beginning a new chapter of his service with the Army Air Corps and Britain's post-war airborne forces.

8. A Return to Uniform – The Army Air Corps

McGowan's transfer to the reserve in August 1946 did not prove to be the end of his military service. Less than three years later, he voluntarily returned to the Army, beginning a second and very different period of service.

By this time McGowan was living in Gateshead, and on 31st March 1949 he re-enlisted in the Territorial Army. His surviving paperwork records that he was formally discharged from his previous reserve commitment under Territorial Army Regulations 1936, Paragraph 204-6(a) as a consequence of his re-enlistment into the Army Air Corps (Territorial Army). Subsequent correspondence records 1st April 1949 as the date on which this new period of service began.



The Army Air Corps of 1949 was very different from the organisation which bears the name today. Created during the Second World War, it had brought together several of the Army's airborne elements, including the Parachute Regiment. Following the war, airborne forces



also became an important component of the newly reconstituted Territorial Army, providing Britain with a reserve of trained airborne troops.

This context helps explain the terminology found throughout McGowan's surviving paperwork. While several documents describe his new service simply as AAC (TA), another specifically records his enlistment into the Parachute Regiment (TA). His new service was therefore with the Territorial airborne forces which at this date remained under the wider Army Air Corps organisation.

Gateshead is particularly significant in establishing where McGowan fitted into this structure. The North East had its own Territorial airborne presence, and Gateshead was home to 17th (Durham Light Infantry) Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, part of the post-war Territorial airborne organisation. McGowan's residence in Gateshead, combined with the specific reference to the Parachute Regiment (TA) in his papers, therefore identifies the local context in which his second military career began.

His return to service also brought a change of Army number. The familiar Scots Guards number 2696992, which had accompanied him through the Second World War, was replaced by 22266505. The two numbers provide a useful dividing line in his career: 2696992 belonged to his wartime Scots Guards service, while 22266505 belonged to his new period of service with the Territorial Army.

The surviving correspondence reveals how this transition was administered. In April 1949, McGowan's existing records were sent from the Scots Guards authorities to AAC Records at Higher Barracks, Exeter, following his application to re-enlist. His former reserve liability was formally terminated and his documents transferred to the organisation responsible for administering his new service.

The paperwork also shows that this second period of service extended beyond his initial enlistment in 1949. Correspondence dated 14th July 1952 again identifies McGowan by his

11418

Infantry & A.A.C. Record Office,
Higher Barracks,
EXETER.

Scots Gds
Officer i/c.....Records.
London

Date.....7.6.49

NO 2696992 NAME MC GOWAN J W
Regt/Corps 21 Res. Scots Gds

The above named soldier has been re-enlisted in the Parachute/
Territorial Army for a period of 4 Yrs
with effect 1-4-49
to serve with Army Air Corps TA

He is being taken on the strength of this office A.P.B104/1
for the month of June 1949
and should be struck off your A.P.B104/1, Part 4
(21 Reserve) as a discharge in the same period.
Allotted New Army No 22266505
Kindly publish appropriate assembly in your
Inf & AAC

new number, 22266505, and confirms that he had re-enlisted into the AAC (TA) on 1st April 1949. His military career therefore continued into the early 1950s, several years after his departure from full-time service with the Scots Guards.

McGowan had first entered the Army as a twenty-year-old Guards recruit in the opening months of the Second World War. A decade later, now living in Gateshead, he made the decision to serve again. This time his military life would be connected not with the Scots Guards but with the Territorial Army's airborne forces and the Parachute Regiment.



Conclusion

John Waugh McGowan's service reflects the extraordinary demands placed upon a generation of young men whose lives were transformed by the Second World War. Joining the Scots Guards in November 1939, at the age of just twenty, he underwent the regiment's famously demanding training before embarking upon a wartime career which took him far from home.

With the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards, McGowan experienced several very different forms of warfare. In North Africa the battalion endured the disaster at Gazala, rebuilt itself and returned to defeat German armour at Medenine. Italy brought another change of environment and another series of difficult battles, beginning with the landings at Salerno and continuing into the mountains at Monte Camino. After returning to Britain in 1944, the battalion was rebuilt once more before joining the final campaign in North-West Europe, ending the war deep inside Germany.

For McGowan, however, the end of the Second World War was not quite the end of the story. After leaving full-time service and passing into the reserve in August 1946, he chose to return to the Army in 1949. His re-enlistment into the Territorial Army's airborne forces, under the new Army number 22266505, added a second and very different chapter to a military career which had begun a decade earlier in the Scots Guards.

Taken together, the surviving records and wider history of the units in which he served reveal a career stretching from the opening months of the Second World War into the post-war Territorial Army. From the deserts of North Africa and mountains of Italy to the final advance into Germany and his later connection with the Parachute Regiment, McGowan's service encompassed some of the most demanding years in the modern history of the British Army.