

Field Marshal Lord Harding of Petherton (1896-1989)

Lord Harding prepared the following autobiographical notes in instalments in 1974, which he sent to Hanna Nicholas

Summer of 1919	In England during summer of 1919 then to India with 12th Machine Gun Battalion as a Captain - joined 2nd Battalion Somerset LI in Lucknow as a subaltern - a long descent from Lieut Colonel!!! - but promoted Captain again a year later on appointment as Adjutant. Soldiering in India in those days was a good life for a young unmarried officer - plenty of games - shooting - pig sticking - polo and social life - not too much work but enough to keep interest and all possible within the limits of pay.
1925-26	Home on leave after six years in India - studied for Staff College exam and got engaged to be married to Mary Rooke a brother officer's sister and living at that time with her mother and stepfather at Long Ashton, near Bristol. Very happy and determined to get to Staff College and make a success of army career.
1926	Rejoined Regiment in Khartoum - and saw something of the Sudan continued work for staff college.
1927	Returned to UK with Regiment. Got married and heard had passed Staff College exam.
1928-29	Staff College, Camberley - son (John Charles) born - worked quite hard on two year course - learnt a great deal - particularly from Field Marshal (then Colonel) Montgomery who was my teacher in tactics - and a brilliant one.
1930	Regimental duty
1931-35	Staff appointments at Southern Command HQ (Salisbury) and Catterick (Brigade Major 13th Infantry Brigade - note Somerset LI is 13th Regiment of foot).
Winter Saar 1935-6	Saarbrucken as Brigade Major (senior Staff Officer) of British Contingent International Force which comprised British, Dutch, Italian and Swedish contingents - very interesting and useful experience.
1935-6	Regimental duty - company commander - on the way back!!
1937-9	General Staff at the War Office with responsibility for first a) Disarmament - League of Nations matters as affecting the army - Intelligence or intervention by Germany, and Italy in Spanish Civil War - then as second war approached changing to responsibility for b) Supply of war material to potential allies - not a very happy assignment as had little enough for ourselves During these years we lived in a London flat and our son started his school career. It wasn't easy to make both ends meet on my pay but my mother-in-law helped and we usually went to Long Ashton for holidays - sometimes to my parents at South Petherton - quite a good life on the whole - and then I was promoted a Brevet Lieut. Colonel (rank but no pay) and was selected to command 1st Battalion The Somerset Light Infantry then serving in India
July 1939	Left for India leaving wife and son with mother-in-law - wife planned to follow after school holidays - that prevented by outbreak of war.