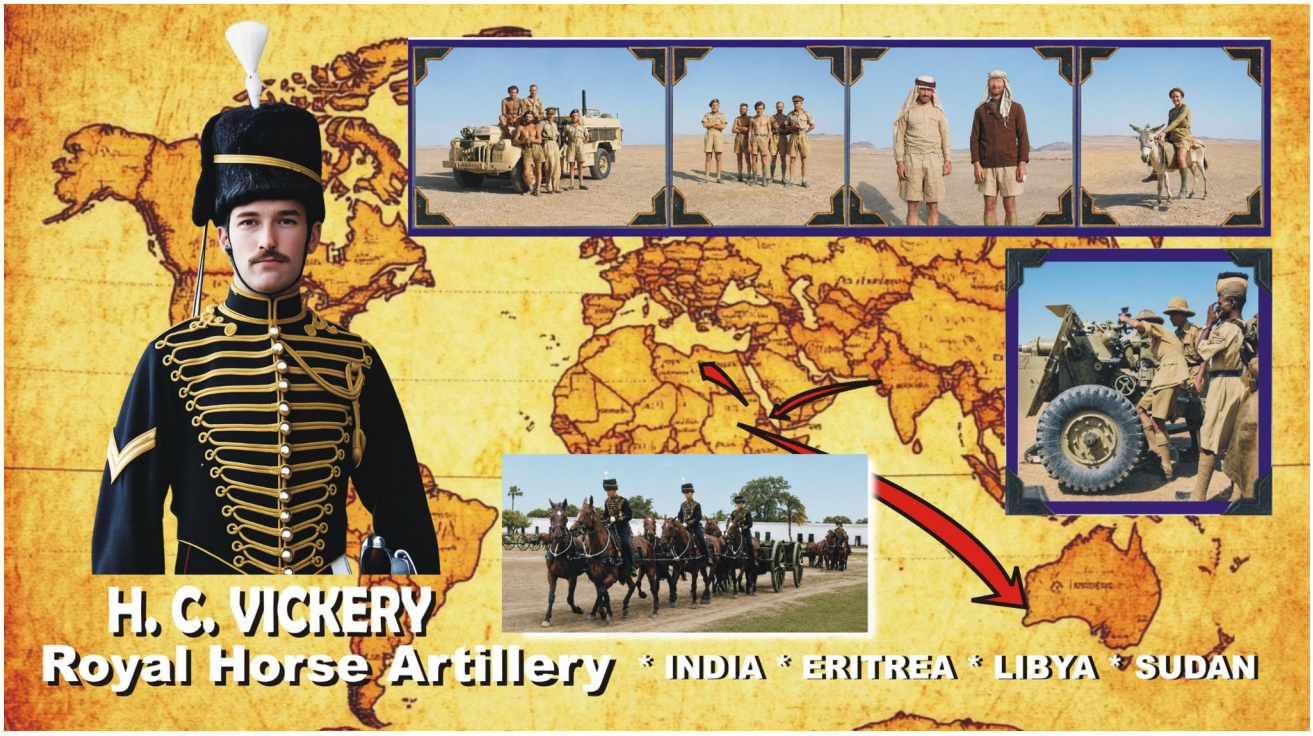
The Son Who Carried On Video - Backgrounder by Lyn Vickery

Tales of My Forefathers - Episode Two



A Childhood Broken Open

Henry Charles Vickery was born in Delhi in December 1912. Before his eighth birthday both his father, Albert Edward Vickery, and his mother, Alice, were dead. The five children were suddenly left without the family world that had surrounded them.

Harry, as he was known, entered the Lawrence military school at Sanawar with his younger brother Geof and two sisters. His younger brother Maurice later died there in 1923. Harry's childhood had become a succession of losses, but the surviving family story remembers him not for self-pity, but for getting on with what had to be done.

By 1926 there is a photograph of him after a day on the rifle range with other boys in much the same situation. In January 1927, still only fourteen, he enlisted. A few months later he entered the Military College of Science at Woolwich as an Apprentice Probationary Artificer and left India for England.

The Artificer

An artificer was a highly skilled military tradesman - a specialist technician responsible for complex mechanical equipment, guns, vehicles and machinery. The role carried status because armies depended upon men who could keep difficult equipment working under difficult conditions.

Harry qualified steadily. By December 1931 he was an Artificer Royal Artillery Class II, and in 1933 he gained his Army Certificate of Education, First Class. His work suited the practical nature remembered by his family: he repaired machinery, solved problems and kept things moving.

Around the same period he developed a lifelong love of photography. His Rolleiflex camera travelled with him, and the surviving albums record India in unusual detail - military drills, ceremonies, landscapes, stations, local people and ordinary moments between postings.

Royal Horse Artillery and India

In December 1935 Harry was posted back to India with the Royal Horse Artillery, serving with E Battery and later C Battery. His photographs preserve the mounted artillery, training and ceremonial life of the period as well as journeys through northern and central India.

By 1939 he was serving with 4/4 Field Regiment at Trimulgherry in the Deccan. He was now a Bombardier Artificer, an NCO responsible for maintaining guns and equipment. Family links were also being rebuilt: he was in contact with Geof, Stephanie and Ivy, and the orphaned children had begun to create adult lives of their own.

Then the calm ended. In July 1939 Harry left India aboard the P&O ship SS Chitral, heading towards a new posting as Europe moved towards war.

East Africa

Harry's route carried him into the Sudan and then the war in East Africa. By August 1940 he had joined the Sudan Defence Force. The campaign against Italian forces in Eritrea demanded movement through steep, broken country where wheeled vehicles were often useless and pack animals carried artillery and supplies.

In one family account Harry described mules losing their footing in ravines while still loaded with guns and equipment. He expected to find badly injured animals, but instead the men unloaded them, helped them back onto their feet, repacked the equipment and continued. It is a small story, but it captures the practical character that runs through the rest of his life.

Italian rule in Eritrea collapsed in 1941. Almost immediately the strategic problem shifted west. Rommel and the Afrika Korps arrived in North Africa, and the desert war intensified.

The Western Desert and Jalo

The new demands were about distance, navigation and supply. Convoys moved across hundreds of miles of desert with no satellite navigation, no mobile communications and only bearings, mileage, landmarks and experience to keep them on course.

One of the major undertakings in Harry's story was the Jalo supply operation. Trucks moved across roughly 650 miles of open desert and stony country from Wadi Halfa towards Khufra and Jalo, carrying essential food, fuel and ammunition. A bad bearing or misjudged distance could leave an entire convoy stranded.

Harry's service brought formal recognition. He was awarded the Military Medal and later received commendations connected with his work in the Middle East. Family papers also preserve recognition from senior command, including General Miles Dempsey. The decorations matter, but the story behind them is more characteristic: difficult work completed correctly, often far from public attention.

War Ends - Another Life Begins

By 1944 Harry had completed twenty-one years of service. The end of the Second World War did not return the world to what it had been. Britain was exhausted, India was moving towards independence and the imperial system that had shaped both Albert's life and Harry's youth was entering its final phase.

In October 1945 Harry married Mavis in West Perth. Their relationship had begun as a correspondence and became a marriage that lasted until his death. Duty soon took them back to Africa, where Harry moved into a senior mechanical and transport role in the Sudan.

He became Superintendent of Workshops and Director of Mechanical Transport for Sudanese government transport, based for a period at El Obeid. The work was increasingly civilian in character even though it grew directly out of the technical military life he had known for decades.

Family Life in Sudan

Lyn Vickery was born in 1947 into this post-war African chapter. Family life moved between places such as El Obeid, Juba, Torit and Khartoum. Travel came by ship, train and aircraft, and the family photographs preserve a world of Nile steamers, long journeys and remote postings.

For a young child it could feel like adventure. For Harry and Mavis it also meant judgement and responsibility. Political conditions were changing rapidly and the old structures were weakening. By the mid-1950s Harry concluded that it was time to leave.

The family departed Africa and settled in Western Australia. Harry bought property, rebuilt a home and gradually created a successful civilian life. After an existence defined by institutions, postings and war, he had finally chosen where to stop.

The Son Who Carried On

The title of Harry's story fits because carrying on was what he did. He carried the responsibility left by his parents' deaths. He carried concern for Geof and his sisters. He carried soldiers, convoys and equipment through difficult country. Later he carried Mavis, Lyn and the next generation into a new life.

One treasured photograph shows him in the desert with a shovel, digging out a bogged military truck so the convoy could move again. He later told a teenage Lyn: 'The only job where you start at the top is digging a hole.' It was simple advice about humility, work and beginning where the job actually begins.

Harry died peacefully at home in 1980, surrounded by family. His life had begun inside the world of Empire, passed through orphanhood, military service and war, and ended in the home and country he had chosen for the next generation.

Albert's story had ended with a chain reaction. Harry's was the life that carried it forward.