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<b>Title</b>	<b>Ralph Gooding reminisces over father, Arthur F Gooding</b>
<b>About:</b>	<b>Arthur Frederick Gooding</b>
<b>The story was shared at:</b>	<b>Age Exchange, Blackheath, London</b>
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<b>By:</b>	<b>Ralph Gooding</b>
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***Ralph, you're here to talk about your dad. Can you share his name with us and tell us a bit about where he was born and grew up?***

He was Arthur Frederick Gooding. He was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1895. He was the youngest of four brothers. His father, Thomas William Gooding, was a boot and shoe maker and had a shop in Lee High Road. The family lived in Taunton Road, Lee. My father attended North Brook School (which has since been demolished). After leaving school my father was employed in the offices of J Stone & Company. This was a large marine engineering company in Deptford and Charlton. He worked in the Accounts Department in Deptford for most of his working life. He ended up as Chief Accountant for the company.

***I know that you have very powerful memories of the kind of person he was. I know you said he had no hard feelings towards the Germans at all. He didn't see them as the enemy as such. Where did he enlist?***

He enlisted just over the road here; at the outbreak of War in August 1914 my father immediately volunteered to join the Territorial Army at Hollyhedge House on Blackheath. He was drafted into the 20<sup>th</sup> battalion of the London Regiment and was swiftly conscripted into a training course and sent out to France. His unit was thrown in at the deep end and he saw action in the bloodiest battles of the Somme. He was also involved in the holocaust of Passchendaele where all but 35 of their battalion were slaughtered. Another significant battle in which he was involved was Cambrai where it was the first time they saw tanks in action. My father went right through the War on the Western front but was severely wounded in the last month of the War and he was actually in hospital in England when the armistice was signed.

***Where was he wounded?***

The bad wound was in the calf muscle of his leg.

***Was that a shell?***

Yes, a German 59 shell known as a whizz-bang – they didn't hear them coming.

***Did he talk about this to you?***

Gradually I extracted it. He didn't talk a lot. It was more towards the end of his life. I remember at times he used to feel things in his back and I'd have a look and there would be a tiny bit of shell splinter so I'd get the tweezers and pull it out for him. This went on for years. He had his back to the explosion and the shell dust splattered his back but a big bit of shell went into the calf muscle.

***How old were you then?***

When I was about 12 or 14. He used to wake up in the night shouting sometimes. They had no trauma counselling. He had no bitterness at all. He was a very passive man.

***Just for the record, what are you holding?***

I'm holding the clothes brush that he was issued with in the Army.

***There is a number on this basic wooden clothes brush.***

I've been using it for years ever since. It's been in use for about 100 years and still showing no signs of wear.

***So Ralph is looking through the contents of a bag he has brought and he is holding a medal. What was his Regiment and number?***

2370.

***Of which Regiment?***

That was of the 20<sup>th</sup> battalion of the London Regiment.

***Did he ever talk to you about Passchendaele?***

The only time he ever mentioned was when he had to let go of one of his friends.

***Could you tell us that story?***

For many years after he had bad dreams. He told me of one very sad experience when they were involved in attack. He saw one of his comrades had been blown into a shell hole filled with muddied water. When my father stopped and bent down to help the man, an officer came up behind him and ordered him to go on and let go and move forward. When my father protested the officer pointed his revolver at him and said "if you don't move on I will shoot you" and he had to let go of his comrade and go back into the muddy water.

***That's a shocking story.***

He could have saved the man's life if the Officer would have allowed it but he wouldn't let him.

***I know you have a very interesting story about an encounter that your father had with German Infantry. Tell us about that.***

The British suffered a severe defeat and they had to pull back for a mile or two and they dug new trenches and there was a road that led straight to the front and a barricade was erected on this road. My father and another soldier, his mate Kelly, were stationed behind it. A few days later, two German soldiers came creeping down the road looking for the British and my father said "we can't just shoot them down in cold blood" so they shouted at them whereupon one of the Germans put his rifle on his shoulder and walked up to the barricade and started to talk to my father and his comrade in English. My father said he was impressed that the German's English was so good. The German then said "it should be because before the War I was a waiter at The Savoy Hotel in London. My father was fortunate in that he's spotted an officer coming and he told the Germans to scarp. The Officer then accused my father of fraternising with the enemy which is a crime for which you could be shot.

***That was very serious then. How did you find out that story?***

My dad told me that one. He could have been shot.

***So after the War, did your father ever go back?***

He had been back because he went to the Menin Gate with my mother. He was able to find some of the names of his comrades that were missing.

***When did he go back?***

In about 1947, 1948, after the Second World War. Then he went back again when I was in the Army in 1950. He went to France again.

***Did you meet up with him then?***

He came to meet up with me in Germany.

***Tell us about that.***

I was in the Army and I was stationed at Badenhausen and there was a lovely place called Hauseberger [sic] where I made lots of friends. There was this little cafe/small hotel and I booked my parents in there and there was another couple staying there. My father didn't speak German but he spoke French and he found that this German man there spoke French. They started talking and they got a map of France and Belgium and they were comparing where they were during the War.

***Did they have a drink together?***

Oh yes. My father and mother stayed there for a week and so did the German couple.

***The affect the First World War had on your father really came to light with the outbreak of the Second World War didn't it?***

Yes. We moved into Mottingham and unknown to us an old friend of his had moved into the same road. I remember the morning that the Prime Minister declared War. All the people were out in the road getting excited and saying "we'll show them what's what and we'll finish it this time". This friend of my father's had lost a leg in the First World War. He came limping down the road and they sat on the wall outside our house and my father and Alan were sitting there absolutely glum while everyone else was getting excited. My father was saying "look at them; they don't know what War is all about". They were thinking these men have got to go through what they went through. He couldn't believe it was all going to happen to him again.

***What happened in the Second World War? He would have been in his late 40s?***

Yes, he was an Air Raid Warden.

***So he had an eventful life then?***

Yes. He got a medal for being an Air Raid Warden. He was in the Home Guard as well.

***Were there any sayings or attitudes as a person that he had formed from his experience of the First World War?***

He felt it was a waste of time looking for bad things in people and doing anything spiteful. He said you could always find the good in people.

***You have brought some things with you which we will copy but I'd love you to describe them in your own words. You have a watch here.***

This went right through the First World War with him. It's slow now but it's still working.

***Can you describe what you're holding?***

It's a pocket watch. It went through the various battles with him – on the Somme, Passchendaele, Cambrai.

***So that watch would have said 7:30 on the morning on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 1916 and at different times that watch would have read the exact time of the attack and the moment whether your father's life would continue or not continue. That's a very precious thing for you to have. You have a few other things too – his clothes brush.***

This is the New Testament which was given to soldiers. This reads "Active Service Testament 1914/1915".

***Can you read what it says inside?***

It says "presented to Arthur F. Gooding by the Friends of St. Albans with good wishes in remembrance of their stay of the troops in the City". This is a message from Lord Roberts – "I ask you to put your trust in God. He will watch over you and strengthen you. You will find in this little book guidance when you are in health, in sickness and strength there you are in eternity". There's a list of names here of some of his close comrades in the unit in his battalion. He mentioned Ralph Hunter. He thought very highly of him and he was killed. I'm just wondering whether I was called Ralph after him. He has a cross beside his name because he was killed. There is a cross beside Harry Person and somebody Cook.

***So his mates all signed his bible and three of those men were killed?***

Yes, Kelly did survive because we met up with him in between the Wars. We discovered he was living in New Beckenham and we went and had tea with them once.

***That's amazing.***

He was the chap that was with my dad behind that barricade.

***You have some other things too?***

These were buttons off his overcoat.

***On there we are looking at the White Horse of Kent.***

This is his badge – 20<sup>th</sup> London Regiment. This part of London was in the county of Kent in those days. Here are the medals too.

***I'm going to take a photo of you with all these medals.***

I have some photographs here. This one, he was about 21. This one here is us a family on holiday at Broadstairs – my father with me sitting on his shoulder. His family were very fortunate because he and his four brothers all survived the War. His younger brother even falsified his age.

***Why do you think it's important to remember the First World War? What is the value of it in terms of looking forward?***

For me, the thing to remember was the whole pointless slaughter. It was a series of stupid alliances that were mad between countries. I think my father felt this way too. The First World War was an opportunity for all the countries to have a go and grab what they could. It was just a greed for power.

***Ralph, you have told us a wonderful story and have an amazing collection. Thank you.***

Actually, my father was guilty of desertion. When the War finished he was discharged from hospital and sent back to his unit and then the War had finished. They were all transported up to Crystal Palace. There were

hundreds of them in the grounds and they were told they were going to get an inspection by the General and his staff and they would have an official parade and be officially discharged and dismissed from all future duties. He said it was bitterly cold and they were up there for about half an hour. He said they all got fed up and he noticed a green door and it opened. He saw a 75 bus route there so he hopped on the bus and went home. So he was never officially discharged from the Army.

***That is a brilliant story. His War ended by getting the 75 bus!***

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