



# A TALE OF TWO SERGEANTS



## Sergeant Verdun Storey

...was born in the rural Norfolk village of Worstead in 1916. As a young man he had worked on local farms, he had not intended to join the army but had gone along to offer a bit of moral support for his pal Jack Forrest when he went to enlist in May 1934. The Recruiting Sergeant did a good job and both Jack and Verdun ended up joining together. Verdun served in 2nd Battalion, The Royal Norfolk Regiment. A good sportsman and an outstanding soldier he was soon promoted and was known as a no-nonsense senior NCO, a man who could be relied upon, a man who would never expect any of his men to do anything he had not done or could not do himself. He was the sort of man who made the backbone of any battalion.

### **Verdun and 2nd Royal Norfolk up to May 1940:**

2nd Battalion, The Royal Norfolk Regiment was the first complete infantry Battalion to the British Expeditionary Force to land in France in September 1939. They were greeted as heroes as they marched through towns and villages to take up their defensive positions beside the Maginot Line. The troops dug in and then waited week after week, but no attack came. Indeed, the orders were if German soldiers were spotted men of the BEF were not to open fire. In some areas of the line things became quite amicable and British and German soldiers waved to each other as they went about their duties. Through the bitterly cold winter of 1939-40 American newspapers began to talk of a 'Phoney War' and even British newspapers struggled to keep interest in what at the time was a stagnant campaign that seemed very distant to the British public.

All of that changed on 10 May 1939 when Hitler launched his Blitzkrieg on Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

## Sergeant Billy Chape of Heaton, Newcastle

...was a Geordie through and through. In 1939 Billy was married and had two young daughters. In the years before the war he had worked in the Engineering Department of Newcastle Breweries (famous for their Newcastle Brown Ale). A number of Directors in the brewery were Territorial Army officers and when the storm clouds of war gathered in 1939 it was expected that the men of the brewery would 'do their bit' too. Billy joined his newly raised local Territorial Army unit, 505 Field Company, Royal Engineers in May 1939. The Territorial Army was rapidly expanding and needed NCOs, Billy was both amiable and a natural leader of men and had been promoted to Sergeant by the time war broke out in September 1939. Billy's unit proceeded to France, landing at Cherbourg in late January 1940, they were deployed as a Field Constuction Company based at Chemy du Nord, France until May 1940.





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Sgt. Verdun Storey and 2nd Battalion, Royal Norfolk Regiment were sent to man defensive lines along the River Dyle near to, and including the historic city of Wavre, Belgium.

Sgt. Billy Chape and 505 Field Engineer Company, Royal Engineers were sent to Grammont (Geraardsbergen), Belgium

Both of these Sergeants were held in high regard by all, they led by example. One of them made it to the beaches of Dunkirk and was evacuated home...the other didn't.

Follow their stories day by day through the challenge and find out what happened.



**Walk in the steps of the veterans  
of old to support the veterans  
of today, discover the forgotten  
stories of the soldiers who fought  
in the fighting retreat to Dunkirk**



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