

TT 13 Day 50 (his left leg) The Guvnor has been belly-aching about the gyp he is being given by his left leg and I am fed up with him for banging on about something that has served him really well for the whole of his life. I glower at him and tell him not to be so ungrateful and all he can do in return is nit-pick about my using the term 'whole of his life' as he says that with a bit of luck it isn't over yet.

This has all cropped up now as he is pretty crook (as the Australians say when someone is unwell) and because he has been lucky not to either get ill or be injured much over his 74 year life-span, he is impatient now. The background is that having put off a visit to his doctor for some months he was, at last, sensibly sent off for an x-ray which found, to no-one's surprise, that his hip was shot and he was walking in some pain because the joint had lost all lubrication and bone was moving on bone.

The human hip joint is a ball-and-socket type joint and is formed where the thigh bone (femur) meets the pelvis. The femur has a ball-shaped head on its end that fits into a socket formed in the pelvis. Large ligaments, tendons, and muscles around the hip joint hold the bones (ball and socket) in place and keep it from dislocating. Normally, a smooth cushion of shiny white articular cartilage about ¼ inch thick covers the femoral head and the acetabulum. The articular cartilage is kept slick by fluid made in the synovial membrane (joint lining). Synovial fluid and articular cartilage are a very slippery combination—3 times more slippery than skating on ice and 4 to 10 times more slippery than a metal on plastic hip replacement. Synovial fluid is what allows

us to flex our joints under great pressure without wear. Since the cartilage is smooth and slippery, the bones move against each other easily and without pain.

When the cartilage is damaged, whether secondary to osteoarthritis (wear-and-tear type arthritis) or trauma, joint motion can become painful and limited and this is what has infuriated the Guvnor. He tried to laugh it off when a doctor friend told him that it was obviously 'just an example of old age' and should be expected. The Guvnor told him in reply that his right leg was precisely the same age and was giving him no trouble at all.

He sat back and listened to me ruminating about his left leg and, for once, was quiet for all of ten minutes. I reminded him that his leg had loyally and devotedly carried a weight of 8lb up to 12 stone (all in old money) for 74 years; that it had begun exercising itself by kicking his mother in the stomach before he was even born and then toddled around learning how to climb stairs and get up from falling over; it ran around the playground until exhausted and it kicked footballs, rugby balls and boys its owner didn't like, and later, anyone who meant him harm; it went down the cricket pitch to smother early googlies, it swung to fine leg with the bat and twisted with the golf club in the follow through of the shot; it climbed drainpipes and balconies; it kicked straight-legged in the swimming pool, the lake and the sea and provided the steady bipod for the fishing rod and gun.

It was used to kick rubble piles, snakes, marauding monkeys and any other

attackers; it led the 'hup-two-three' of the halt command on the parade ground and marched on endless parades as sprog, cadet, led and leader; there, it was always first, obeying the order 'left, right, left, right; it lifted boots, flippers, shoes, flip-flops, skis, spikes and studs; it ran down the firing range and towards enemy positions and sprinted to the showers, meals and to bedrolls and sleeping bags; it scaled ladders and climbed trees, rock faces, mountains and scree and scrambled under things on hands and knees; it crawled through caves and down drains and pipes; it peddled bicycles and paddled pedalos and it was the first in the bath and to bed and also first out. It banged against tanks and carriers and trucks and took the strain when he jumped out of any of them; it met with stanchions and bulkheads on ships, helicopters, planes and cars in daytime and with walls and barriers, parapets and barbed wire at night and it scraped along shingle, rocks and asphalt; it supported a weary body and occasionally a drunk or disabled one. It was always forgiving of his carelessness and never let him down in a fix.

It carried the tools of his trade – guns, ammunition, spares for the kit, and binoculars, compass, map, food and water; it hefted the rucksack, backpack and bergen with 50 lbs weight and trudged with it over mountains, across deserts and through jungles and into bogs and swamps and to volcanic rocks; it pushed in the spade and gave impetus to the pick and it pushed boats off from shore and was first to hit the bank; it dragged him through mud, minefields, the thorn and the scrub;

it climbed up ropes using loop or knot or none; it gripped the flanks of the horse and straddled the camel and let in the clutch and out again many thousands of times; it balanced the map or a tray or a child and took the full strain when the other leg was occupied; it has been ripped by thorns, bruised and cut open more times than he can remember and has been stitched and cared for at home and away in Europe, in the Middle East, the Far East and tended caringly in Cambodia as well as in Wiltshire.

It has climbed chimneys and up parapets and spiral staircases into keeps and turrets, and down into wells and dungeons but never into the First Class cabin of a Boeing 747; it has taken an IRA bullet and been knocked from under him by the blast of one of their bombs; it has stood before his superiors both in homage and in friendship; it has carried the Queen's Colour, bowed to his Sovereign and to members of Her family; it has knelt before his God.

No wonder it is worn out; no wonder that for the first time it is not doing what it is told; no wonder it is crying out for some tender loving care; it is high time he stopped taking it for granted, said thank-you and gave it a new hip. Without Coronavirus, he would have had it by now.

I have been hard on him, but I know what it is like to have a duff leg as mine were trapped and ripped apart by next door's perimeter fencing. He was patient with me so I suppose I will have to reciprocate and, as he always says to everyone, 'It will all be OK in the end.' Good as new, but better!