

“The Passing Years”

by Allan James Shackleton.

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“ THE PASSING YEARS ”

The unfinished memoirs of:
ALLAN JAMES SHACKLETON.
(1897 – 1984)



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Introduction

These are the unfinished memoirs of my father, Allan James Shackleton, a second generation New Zealander, a professional electrical engineer and teacher, who at the age of twenty, left home to fight as Rifleman 55636 in the services of the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces during World War One (1914-1918).

In the chapters that follow, many of which were written during his retirement years, Allan presents a detailed and honest account of the first thirty years of his life. Although *The Passing Years* is predominantly a family record, his nightmarish experiences in the Battle of the Somme during World War One (see Part Two) may be of interest to a wider audience.

In Part One, Allan describes his life growing up in the small provincial town of Waimate, South Canterbury, New Zealand, during the early 1900s. “Home life was one of strong religious overtones and a rather implacable attitude to alcohol. Neither of [Allan's] parents was particularly well educated but they worked hard and determined that their children would achieve something of the skills denied to them”¹ Allan, being their eldest child, was unfortunate to have experienced the “full force of his father's enthusiasm” in this respect.

In Part Two, Allan provides a detailed account of his involvement as a “poor bloody infantryman” (and later as a Lewis machine gunner) on the battlefields of the Somme during

¹ Extract from the eulogy by my cousin, Michael Shackleton, OBE, for Allan's sister, Bernice Shackleton, QSM. (1901 – 1998).

the First World War and in the subsequent Army of Occupation in Germany. His Company reinforced the last five members of D Company, Fourth Battalion, New Zealand Rifle Brigade, “who were still left” (i.e., still available for duty) after the battle of Passchendaele.

I have no doubt that his war experiences provided the initial motivation for his memoirs. He was always anxious to dispel the “glorified” perception that war was a rather exciting “gung-ho” affair where pistol-waving officers followed by disciplined and valiant soldiers charged at the enemy with great bravado – almost oblivious to the inevitable slaughter that lay ahead.

By contrast, in his open and somewhat understated style, Allan records the misery, terror and despair; flawed leadership; and the quiet heroism and compassion that he observed.

As his text shows, Allan was a compassionate, moral man in the old-fashioned and Christian mould. His Christian faith was obviously a comfort to him which, together with his abstinence from alcohol, helped him to “keep his head” when he and his comrades were in the midst of battle. His careful analytical assessments of the potential dangers that existed in his immediate surroundings in World War One (WWI) were also critical in ensuring his survival.

He records that shortly after the fighting around Lasigny Farm, a Court of Enquiry official had been shocked to discover that, of the men (all ranks) in D Company, Fourth Battalion three months earlier, Allan and the Camp Cook were evidently the only two still remaining. The Camp Cook normally took shelter in a safe place during battles. Some of his comrades who died during the fighting near Lasigny Farm on 5 April 1918, are interred in a carefully-tended Commonwealth graveyard located mid-way along the road between Lasigny Farm and their then headquarters in the village of Colincamps.

He also records that on his twenty-first birthday he experienced his first enemy gas attack near Ypres, and during D Company's attack on the Hindenburg Line, he and "Ossie" Osmers, without any immediate back-up, captured a large group of Germans.

Allan's WWI chapters provide little information on the relative disposition and movement of the combatants within his general area of operation. This is understandable given that any strategic information of this nature would be shared with the lowest ranks in the army on a need-to-know basis only.

After he was discharged from army service on 17 September, 1919, and still suffering from mild shell-shock, he would occasionally surprise residents in Waimate by diving for cover in a nearby gutter whenever a car back-fired or a sudden loud noise startled him ². Like many who survived, he was initially reluctant to talk about his wartime experiences, but in later years he became only too willing to describe his "stunts" and to engage in debates about the futility of wars.

In Part Three, Allan describes his life and challenges as a returned serviceman living in Rolleston House and studying electrical engineering at Canterbury College from 1920 to 1923.

During College vacations, he and his companions found relief from the pressure of study by undertaking two bicycle tours over unsealed roads in the rugged back country of South Island, New Zealand. With the aid of a trip diary kept specifically for the purpose (and still in my possession), he describes them in great detail. In later years he often reminisced about these expeditions with great enthusiasm - "not the blessed bike trip again" became a standard family admonishment, usually delivered with some hilarity. Because the tours were obviously dear to his heart, I have used one of his somewhat-indistinct

² As recounted to me by Allan many years later.

bike-tour photographs as a background for the cover of this book.³

Part Three also includes several chapters on his post-graduate training and the valuable engineering and commercial experience he received in Manchester, United Kingdom, while employed for approximately ten years by the Metropolitan Vickers Electrical Engineering Company (Metrovick).

At the age of 86, Allan realised that he would not be able to complete his manuscript. In his last chapter, 'Looking Back', he wrote, "I have not yet put on record much of my adult life; in fact I am about sixty years behind. Further, it looks as though I have just about encompassed my allotted span".

He died suddenly a year later before he was able to comment on such events as his subsequent (and no doubt poignant) visit to the Somme (c.1926) with his brother, Ron, and friends; his first encounter with his future wife, Mildred; and the influence that the Great Depression (1929-late 1930s) and World War Two (WWII) (1939-1945) had on my parents' lives.

In an attempt to span the 57-year gap in his memoirs, I have provided a brief account of my parents' remaining years in a final chapter entitled, "Epilogue". I have also included a "Timeline of Events" to help improve historical context.

In several instances I have made minor alterations to Allan's text to avoid repetition. I have also added a number of footnotes, and included a few photographs from family archives. I am sure he would have approved of these changes.

He would also have approved of the early release of the "The Passing Years" in electronic format through the South Canterbury Museum, Timaru, to coincide with the Museum's activities commemorating the 100-year anniversary of WWI.

³ Allan is the person to the right on the front cover; Ron, his brother, is probably the person to the left on the rear cover.

I am indebted to Tony Rippin, Curator of Documentary History at the South Canterbury Museum, for his recent encouragement to publish my father's manuscript. I am also grateful for the generosity of my cousin, Michael Shackleton, for recently giving me custody of numerous additional precious family papers and photographs.

Colin James Shackleton.
New Plymouth,
New Zealand.

April 2015.

PART ONE

1 Earliest recollections

A huge stack of gorse stood in a paddock which was later to be the location of the Waimate Gasworks. On the top of the stack was the effigy of Paul Kruger, but across the road where a band rotunda was later built, was a platform on which, to my infant eyes, marvellous fireworks were being discharged: Catherine wheels, Roman candles and especially the sky-rockets of all kinds which were being shot into the air. At the same time the stack was beginning to burn and there was great excitement. This was to celebrate the relief of Mafeking. But unfortunately I heard someone say, "If the sky-rockets fell back again down on your head they would kill you." Then my mother picked me up, her frightened, first-born child, in her arms and allayed my fears.

About the same time, contingents (or "reinforcements" as they were called in the next war) were going off to South Africa. Two older brothers of some of our young friends in the neighbourhood also volunteered and when they went off, gave us neighbourhood children a sixpence for a party to celebrate. That sixpence bought us enough good things to eat to make it a memorable occasion.

I do not remember the end of the South African war. I suspect the Mafeking celebrations had been too much for me, and my parents did not want a repetition. But one day in Victoria Square on the way to school, I became aware of a marble statue

which was a memorial to the two men from the district who had been killed in that war.

I do however have some earlier glimmerings of memory of lying in a cot in a house in Timaru Road and listening to the birds chirping in their nests in the eaves outside. This was in the new house Father had built when he married.

Father with the partnership of Peter Grant, had entered the store-keeping business under the title of “Shackleton and Grant”, father managing the drapery side and Mr Grant the grocery and hardware. Father had served his apprenticeship in the drapery trade in Dunedin, but had also been variously a school teacher and also an unsuccessful salesman for the new-fangled machines called “typewriters”.

He was the first boy born in the Waipori goldfields in Otago, although by this time his father had adopted the more prosperous and stable occupation of farming to supply the needs of the gold diggers.

Father had a sister, Emily, and a brother, Samuel. My earliest recollections of Uncle Sam were of lurid, poster-like pictures on the walls of his boot-shop depicting vivid shell-bursts in the sky and on the ground, soldiers defending Rorke’s drift and similar places of the South African War. And they were still there when the next war arrived.

Father and Mother were married in 1896. Mother’s maiden name was Catherine Elizabeth Tregoning, and my brother Ronald George and my sister Bernice Elizabeth, were all born in the Timaru-road house.



The Shackleton family, Waimate. c. 1915.
(Allan, George, Bernice, Elizabeth [“Bessie”], and Ron)

Mother had lived all her life in Waimate. Her parents, Michael and Elizabeth Tregoning, were among the first settlers in Waimate, having landed in open boats off the “Echunga” at Timaru roadstead about 1857⁴, and eventually came to Waimate where they attempted to take up land.

⁴ W.H. Jewell’s “Diary of the Voyage of the Echunga” gives the date of arrival of the “Echunga” (1007 tons under the command of Captain John E Cooper) at Port Cooper (now Lyttelton), as being 22 December, 1862. She sailed from Gravesend on September 1, 1862. “She was, as a matter of fact rather a decrepit old ship, which had spent the days of her usefulness in the Chinese and East India trades; and at the time of her one voyage to New Zealand she was so infested with vermin that her emigrant passengers thoroughly disliked her”.

Land was granted to the immigrants at the price of one shilling an acre and as much acreage as they could fence round. As Waimate was bush-covered, my grandfather laboriously constructed a post-and-rail fence, only to find that before he could complete it, he and others had been entirely enclosed by wire fences with wire the wealthy settlers had brought with them. The wire strung between suitable trees, quickly and easily enclosed large tracts of land.

Grandfather seems to have turned to contracting and is reputed to have made a considerable number of roads and streets in the locality. Waimate was a saw-milling town, but [in 1878] a disastrous fire destroyed the bush and the township fell on hard times. Grandfather died at a comparatively early age and Mother, the eldest of nine children, had to help bring up the others. So when her own children arrived, she was well equipped for motherhood.

Both Father and she were fully aware of the advantages of a good education, and they took care to see that we had a good start. I have very early recollections of standing at Mother's knee laboriously writing letters and figures on a slate with the special slate pencil. In those days there was no kindergarten or similar institution, but by the time I commenced regular schooling, I was well versed in the initial work of the primer classes.

2 Primary education

I was born on 21 March 1897, and commenced infant schooling in the February preceding the March of the year in which I was five years old, so I was not yet five years old. In order to make my early days at the school easier, my parents had a neighbour's boy named Price, a year my senior, to look after me. After a few days at school, when we were coming home, young Price

commenced throwing stones over a tall macrocarpa hedge on to the asphalt tennis court which was across the road from the school. While I was standing round waiting for him to finish he started to run off as fast as he could. Suddenly I found myself caught by the arm and taken across the road to the Headmaster, Mr G_____ P_____, who gave me a total of thirteen strokes on both hands with his particularly painful strap, for “throwing stones” that I did not throw. I can still remember wondering “when is he going to stop?” Needless to say my wrists were black and blue for days afterwards.

But I think it is necessary to say that the thinking then regarding corporal punishment was very different from what it is today. For instance, a few months later when I was in Primer 5, the Headmistress of the infant room, Miss Crawford, in checking our addition tables, said,

“Allan Shackleton, what is eight and four?”

I was not sure whether it was 12 or 13. Unfortunately I came down on the side of 13.

“Come out here,” she said, and I left my desk and stood quaking on the floor in front of the class when she gave me a “cut” or stroke of the strap on each hand.

“Now you’ll remember that 8 and 4 are 12,” she said, and I did. But I always remember too, that I once thought that 8 and 4 might make 13.

Father, being keen that his children should have a good education, vented the full force of his enthusiasm on me, the eldest. In the primary schooling he frequently checked my work, particularly in arithmetical tables and spelling: and woe betide me if I made a mistake, no matter how many correct answers preceded it. The result was that I had to put forward my utmost effort to keep out of trouble and I learned to concentrate and to memorise at a very early age.

Later in life I had much to do with the training of apprentices and it was heart-breaking to find the number who could neither read nor express themselves adequately. Some of them were already married and even the best efforts of their respective wives to help them, could not retrieve a hopeless situation which could have been remedied in their early childhood. Furthermore, if young children had been forced to concentrate and put forth their best efforts, they would have learned the pleasure and satisfaction of achievement, and I believe we would not have so many delinquents, frustrated and revengeful of their position in society today.

My progress through the primers was quick, largely due to the fact that, having been taught at home, I could read and write letters and figures, knew many addition tables and had mastered the mysteries of “a” “t” spelling “at”, “c” “at” “cat”, “r” “at” “rat”, so that I had no difficulty in reading, “a fat cat ran at a rat on a mat”, or that “the fox sat on a box”. Incidentally, judging again by what I had to deal with in later life, this method of spelling by syllables seems to have given better results than the so-called “phonetic method”, especially with unfamiliar words.

At the end of six months at school I was promoted with most of Primer 5 to Standard 1.

Within the next month the whole standard was examined by the Headmaster, probably as a check on the work of the Pupil Teacher, Miss Turner. When it came to the subject of arithmetic, I found I was heading for trouble. The problems were of the type, “Jim had 4 nuts and Tom had 5: how many did they have altogether?” Unfortunately, I did not know the meaning of “altogether”, and of course was not getting the correct results. Realising what that meant, I began to cry (I was still five years old). In reply to Miss Turner’s question, I agreed that I was not feeling well and was sent outside to sit in the sun under the classroom window. Shortly afterwards I heard the inevitable strapping of those who could not make the grade.

Daily spelling tests were conducted by the teachers right throughout the standards. A list at the top of the daily reading lesson had to be learned at home the previous evening and the next day we had to write the correct spelling of the words dictated by the teacher on our slates. The slates were corrected and marked and for every mistake in excess of two we received a “cut” of the strap. There was a similar procedure for tables.

Promotion to the various standards took place at the end of each year on merit. There always seemed to be up to half-a-dozen who “failed”, but no one had two consecutive failures in the one standard.

Fortunately for me, the system of “social promotion” of the present day was totally unknown, or I would have been idling in lower classes waiting for my age group to catch up.

Our syllabus might prove interesting to those familiar with present-day education. “Tables” were finished at the end of Standard 2, and simple problems of addition, subtraction, multiplication and simple division were also completed. In Standard 3 these operations were applied to the monetary system and we were taught fractions and decimals (including recurring and non-recurring) and the changing of fractions and decimals and vice versa. Included was a decimal monetary system of Pounds, Florins, Cents and Mils, the “mil” being one thousandth of a pound and thus having a slightly smaller value than a farthing which was then still in use. In Standard 4, we had shopkeepers’ accounts, “practice” problems, simple proportion and interest. Standard 5 taught us compound proportion, compound interest and profit and loss and Standard 6, stocks and shares and discounts with harder problems of all types, including problems on time for trains to pass each other, time for the hands of a clock to come into certain positions and time for baths and tanks to fill or empty while the water was also being drained out.

Reading and spelling became progressively harder as we passed through the Standards and in the Sixth Standard we were expected to spell and know the meaning of any word in the newspaper. Our teacher, Mr Charles Goldstone, found our spelling tests a good opportunity to read the newspaper. But he got a shock and so did we, when one morning he opened up his "Timaru Herald" to read of the wreck of the "Titanic".

We learned parsing and analysis in Standard 5, i.e., to classify all words with their grammatical names, such as "Noun", "Adverb", etc., and to classify all clauses and phrases similarly. About Standard 4, "Compositions" also appeared in our curriculum, and when in Standard 5 we had to write a composition on "Waimate in 1950", I let my imagination run riot. I had everybody riding around in self-propelled cars, with their first fingers overgrown with constant use on push-buttons, meals concentrated in tubes like toothpaste tubes, and wound up by a trip to the moon in a balloon which was struck by lightning, and I fell down to wake up in my bed after the dream. This was circulated among the staff and read to the senior Standards.

History does not seem to have occupied much of our school time, but geography made up for it. In one continent after another we memorised the rivers, lakes and mountains and all the rest of the natural features. Then we memorised lists of exports and imports and finished with answers to questions of the type, "Name all the countries that export tin".

Populations did not seem to concern us as much but in Standard One, I learned that New Zealand had a population of three-quarters of a million people. Some Standards later, we were told that Sir Joseph Ward had presented a "Dreadnought" battleship to Britain which cost 1,000,000 Pounds, or one Pound per head of population. So I gathered that by that time we must have reached the million mark.

Some scraps of information regarding the New Zealand railway system seem to have remained. The earliest was that the longest line was in the South Island from Hurunui to Bluff. That seems to have diminished in importance with the construction of the North Island Main Trunk line. Over a number of years we were regaled with pictures, especially in the "Otago Witness", of brawny labourers pushing the line through bush and rugged country with viaducts and spirals to complete the connection between Auckland and Wellington.

We were shown that the Government line out of Wellington climbed over the Rimutaka Range with a "rack railway" while a private line through the Manawatu sneaked the other way through the surrounding hills in comparative ease and without any great engineering feats: also that the private line paid ten percent dividend, while the Government one made a loss.

A sort of Arts and Crafts scheme ran through the Primary Curriculum. In the Infant Room we had paper folding and in the Standards we modelled with plasticene on varnished cardboard. Plasticene was a kind of putty which softened with the heat of the hands and became firm when it cooled. We also sketched and we learned the elements of balance and symmetry which seem strangely absent from the sketches of the modern student. Perhaps they have been lost in "free expression".

There were no organised games of any consequence in the primary school. Boys, including me, brought footballs of their own to school and we kicked them round during play-time and lunch hour and frequently had a "match" between random sides of large and small boys after school.

At this time we lived in High Street and a blind road, much of it overgrown with broom at the blind end, separated us from Dash's Carriage Works. When my brother caught scarlet fever, the family was in isolation for six weeks and the day we came out I displayed the dreaded rash and there was a further six weeks of isolation.

I remember my mother crying about this. The illness itself was short-lived and we complained to our father that the “kids would not play with us”. The next day he saw that we had a football and that afternoon with blind road was full of the neighbourhood children playing with us and our football. Isolation over, what better than to take it to school to play with.

While in the Sixth Standard I developed heart trouble. I was of course confined to bed, and although with my head on the pillow I could hear my heart-beat race and then suddenly stop dead for an appreciable second or two and then race away again, I took it naturally as one of the facts of life and not of death. I was even pleased at the blueness of my lips.

Prior to this illness father had exercised a certain amount of control over our reading and we were not allowed to read “comics”, but we did, borrowing them from neighbours’ children. Our favourite was the “Butterfly” which at that time had, as a supplement, the “Magnet”, which chronicled the doings of Billy Bunter, Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry and the rest of the Greyfriars School. We were always impatiently awaiting the next issue. I might add that we were allowed to read the “Boys’ Own Paper” and for quite a number of years Father used to give us bound copies in the form of the “Boys’ Own Annual”, and the “Girls’ Own Annual” for my sister, as Christmas presents. But with my illness there was positively no restriction and my bed was continually strewn with “comics” of all sorts, openly and unabashed. Gradually I recovered and lessons became such a part of my convalescence, that on return to school, I was ahead of the work the class had done in my absence.

Of course I was warned against any physical strain whatsoever at school, but the lure of football was too much and I did not realise what a “clanger” I had made, when after a few months, I asked my father at an evening meal, for half-a-crown to go to Timaru to play in our seven-a-side football team in a

tournament there. There was an emotional mixture of consternation from my mother and unbelief from my father. But when the whole tale was told, they were overjoyed.

So I went – but we lost.

3 Timaru excursions

Timaru has a very warm spot in my childhood memories, because every year, with one unfortunate exception when we went to Oamaru, there was a school excursion to Timaru. The earliest memory was of struggling over a shingle beach reeking of rotten seaweed, with the waves almost washing the railway station. Later the sand and shingle built up around the breakwater in Caroline Bay and the cliffs were removed, providing firm playing areas on the sand and revealing a full view of the four expresses passing through a day. This was much more exciting. So were the breakwater and the wharf which sometimes had a steamer unloading.

The evening before an excursion was full of excitement for us. The corned beef was boiled and the bread cut and buttered and the sandwiches made to fill a large basket. Spare clothes, especially pants, had to be packed, because we always ventured too far into the sea and got thoroughly wet with the oncoming waves.

We usually had a restless sleep that night, but just before dawn we heard the whistles of the two long trains which struggled to get round the wide hairpin bend which formed the approach to the Waimate Station. We could hear the engines puffing and the wheels slipping on the rails. Sometimes they had to divide the trains to get them round.

After a hurried breakfast we went with all haste to the station to find the streets well-filled with people with the same idea. All

the shops in the town were, of course, shut for the occasion. If we were early we might be lucky enough to find seats in normal carriages; otherwise we would have to sit in converted goods-wagons with tarpaulins fastened to the roofs and sides as protection against the weather, which was almost always favourable. The trains did not seem to travel fast enough for draughts to be a problem, although smuts from the engine and residues from the wagon's previous usage were.

Arriving at Timaru, we hurried from the train to Uncle Jack's tea-rooms where Uncle Jack, baker and pastrycook, gave us a very warm welcome. After cups of tea for the adults and "fizz" for the children he loaded us still further with bags of cakes and sweets (everything gratis) for consumption on the beach.

Uncle Jack's real name was John Hutchison. He married father's sister, Emily, whom we had known as a chronic invalid and who ultimately died when I was still very young. They had one son, John, who was the "apple of his father's eye" and was killed with a bullet through his head the first day he was in the "front line" trenches in World War I.



PTE. J. A. Hutchison of Timaru.⁵

⁵ Photo retrieved from a card in family archives entitled, "In Honour's Cause" from Mr & Mrs J. Hutchison, Latter Street, Timaru, 23rd February, 1918, returning thanks for kind expressions of sympathy.

Uncle had learned his trade in Scotland and took up business in Palmerston in Otago. After a few years he came to Timaru, where the quality of his goods established him firmly in the cake and tea-room trade. On one “excursion” I overheard him telling my parents that he had gained practically a monopoly of the tea-room business in Timaru. When we came for the next “excursion”, he was not so pleased; the bottom had largely fallen out of the tea-room business. There was practically none after six o’clock, when previously it had formed a good solid part. Uncle had not taken account of the effect of the “moving pictures” which were being established as a means of passing the time in the evening. But his tea-room competitors had, and had unloaded on him.

However, he survived and when he ultimately died, left behind a record of generosity clandestinely bestowed on needy people in the town. On one excursion we saw a man approach him and after a short conversation, Uncle gave him some money. Uncle afterwards explained that he had just bought another share in a company for harnessing the waves at the breakwater. A man named S_____s became fascinated by the power of the sea waves and set out to harness them. After years of endeavour, and sinking all his money in the venture, he used to sell shares in his “company” at a shilling a share. Uncle knew full well that “buying shares” was a euphemism for “making a gift” and that the whole scheme of harnessing was completely worthless, but from time to time he still helped S_____s by “buying a few shares”.



The Hutchison family. (John, John A Jr., and Emily).

Photo by Appleby, Palmerston, Otago.

I am finding it remarkable that amid all the happy impressions of those excursions it is the impression of the kindly, honest, sincere, straightforward and Christian personality of Uncle Jack that predominates, and I have no doubt, influenced me. (I wonder if Christianity is spread by a process of “wiping off” as it were, and not so much by exhortation). Of course we enjoyed to the full the bathing, paddling, exploring the wharves and breakwater, and watching the loading and unloading of the ships and the occasional train go by. But it is amazing to realise now how much Uncle Jack contributed to those excursions, not only in gastronomic enjoyment, but as an example of a good way of life which refreshed us mentally and physically.

The return journey to Waimate after an excursion was of course, an anticlimax. Most were tired and irritable and the younger ones usually slept. But I was always buoyed up by the fact that

there would be another one next year. The whole school, both primary and secondary, joined in these excursions. For me in the primary school, the end seemed a long way off; that is, providing I made the grade into the secondary department, which was a district high school.

4 Secondary education at the Waimate District High School

Secondary education was free, but only to those who had reached the necessary standards for proceeding further. To gain entrance to a secondary school, it was necessary to gain a Free Place by passing the Proficiency Certificate Examination. This gave a Junior Free Place. At the end of the two years in the high school, the Senior Free Place Examination had to be passed to be able to study for another two years to sit the Matriculation Examination for entrance to a university. For a lower standard in the Proficiency Examination, a Competency Certificate was granted which allowed attendance at a high school by paying fees.

There were also Education Board Scholarships: Junior for entering a High School and Senior at the end of two years. There was quite a rivalry in those districts under the South Canterbury Education Board which of course included Waimate. The Scholarships were worth five pounds a year if one lived at home; but paid boarding fees if one had to live away from home. I managed to gain in turn both a Junior and Senior Scholarship.

In preparation for the Scholarship Examinations we had special classes before and after school, some of them taken by the Headmaster. But his classes had the glorious uncertainty that you never knew whether he was going to turn up or not. Some of the more venturesome sometimes gambled that he would not.

The results were really painful if you lost the gamble. The only classes I really remember much about were those for a paper called “General Knowledge”, which dealt largely with what is now known as “General Science”.

We also had extra classes for Teachers’ “D” Certificate. It seemed to be assured that we were all going to be teachers. But I do not remember much about them, except that I was initiated into the “Principles of Class Discipline”.

The Proficiency Certificate Examination was undoubtedly a milestone in our education, and was heralded by the appearance on examination morning of big boys and girls who were strangers to us, and at whom, with the superiority of our greater numbers, we darted rather hostile glances. They were the candidates from the outlying country schools, such as Morven, Waihao Downs etc., who were also going through the mill.

The whole day till about 5 o’clock was occupied in the examination. The diving wall of two adjacent rooms was folded back, and we were herded, sometimes closely packed, into the very large room so formed. We were fully alive to the advantages of copying (provided the one you copied from could supply the correct answer) and so were the teachers. We were therefore issued with cards containing the questions, and the pupils on either side of us each had a coloured card which had different questions from ours. There was some confusion however, when it was found that only another boy and I “had got all our sums right”. But the trouble was that no one else had a card like mine and it was issued by mistake. I never knew whether it was easier or harder than the general standard; but I did not care, as I “passed”.

Accordingly, still at the age of eleven, I took my place in the “First Year” class in the Waimate District High School. The first thing we had to do was to buy books from the only local bookseller, Mr Franklin, succeeded in later years by Mr Len Thomas. They were: Longmans Latin Course, Part I; Julius

Caesar's Gallic Wars; Chardenal's French Course, and Hogben's French Course Natural Method; Hall and Knight's Algebra; Hall and Stevens' Geometry; Pendlebury's Arithmetic; Carter's School History; Marshall's Geography and "The World and Its People". In addition, we bought a drawing book, drawing instruments and exercise books for various subjects, all of which totalled two pounds thirteen shillings, which at that time was about the average weekly wage. There was no such thing as "free books" although there may have been clandestine grants where indigence required it.

I soon found that my Sixth Standard routine of "homework after tea till about nine o'clock", did not allow me enough time to get through all the homework required for the next day at the High School. Another hour was necessary before tea for me to do enough study to keep me out of trouble. In each of the "Four Years" in the High School there was a total of about eighty pupils taught by two teachers, one of whom was "M__k" Laing. Obviously much of the "teaching" was "memorising", and the situation was not improved by "M__k's" affinity for his locker at the bowling club over the road.

I had a bad start on "Geometry", when I tried to memorise the proofs verbatim, in the same way that I memorised poetry. The painful first week convinced me that there must be a better way; which fortunately I tumbled upon. Our geometry lesson went something like this: take out a piece of paper, and write out the full proof of "Vertically opposite angles are equal". If time permitted we also wrote out answers to the exercises based on the theorem. But the final words from M__k at the end of the lesson were, "For tomorrow learn the next theorem". And we did!

As I became more successful and hence found geometry less painful, I began to like it. Similarly with algebra, when I early hit on the fundamental principle, that it is no good trying to do new work unless the previous work is known and understood. I

came to look on mathematical problems as puzzles and thoroughly enjoyed solving them.

But a new day was dawning on the educational horizon. Instead of struggling to say in French, “the pen of aunt’s gardener is lost in the house”, we were now learning to tell one another in French, to “close the door”, or to “put the book on the table”. But the beauty of it was that after a time we did not have to think about it in detail; the French words just came tumbling out. It was quite exciting, but it did not last very long.

Although we had learned that all Gaul was divided into three parts, I still thought the ideal way to translate Latin into English was to substitute an English word for the Latin word, like an exercise in “Substitution” in algebra. Once one tumbled on the brainy idea the Romans had of getting rid of small words like “to”, “from”, “by”, “with”, “of”, “was”, “had”, etc., by joining up all suitable letters to the main word they went with, then one was “well away”. That was what I thought. It was a kind of mathematical game. Of course, we daren’t forget that the Romans put the verb at the end of the sentence.

About this time also, a new building was being erected in the school grounds and known as the “Technical Block”, whatever that was. One room had a number of gas stoves and sinks in it (by this time the gas-works had been established). Another room had a lot of shelves with bottles on them and also again benches with sinks and taps. Another room was obviously a carpentry shop with benches and tools. Typewriters were in another room.

To inaugurate the Technical Block, a public lecture was given which showed the wonders of electricity and magnetism. Gunpowder was fired by electricity; water was split into two gases, one of which burned by itself, and the other made things, even school nibs, burn violently. Little motors worked with electric current. It was all very exciting. It was all the more exciting when I found that there were books in the local public

library which told all about it. We were being introduced to the technological age.

Then there was chemistry too. But we did not do much with physics. We found that the school routine was being interrupted with woodwork classes in which we learned the elements of cutting a block of wood squarely and truly.

The next year was a glorious one in which the school went wholly technical with a pronounced agricultural bias as befitted the district. We had lessons on types of soil, rotation of crops, how to survey farms by triangulation and best of all we had “practical work”, when M__k took us to a paddock which had previously been ploughed, and shortly afterwards he would disappear. I never quite knew what we had to do but it was not long before the clods would begin to fly. If this was “practical work”, we could “stand a lot of it”. The more formal work struggled along, a pathetic discard.

The following year saw a return to more serious work, as we had to sit the Matriculation Examination at the end of it. But when the results came out there was almost an unbroken collection of “f’s” for “fail” opposite the Waimate District High School section. That was enough for Father who then made arrangements for Ron and me to transfer to the Timaru Boys’ High School.

5 Entertainment - moving pictures

I was introduced to “moving pictures” at a pre-school age; so early that I was thoroughly frightened at the shadowy shapes of fish with their gaping mouths that came up to the front of the screen and looked so sinister. Fortunately there was an orchestra in red uniforms below the stage in the Oddfellows Hall in Waimate where the pictures were being projected.

When I began to cry, my mother said, “don’t be frightened Allan, the soldiers won’t let the fish hurt you”. Apparently I was familiar with the soldiers wearing red uniforms.

For most of the time that I was attending school in Waimate, The Oddfellows Hall was the “theatre”. The accommodation consisted of chairs for the best seats, bare wooden forms with backs for the next lower-priced and wooden forms without backs for the cheapest. Being boys, we stood against the wall on the ends of the unbacked forms, which not only enabled us to obtain a full view of the pictures but also to make a very satisfactory noise by hitting the loose tongue-and-groove boarding which formed the lower part of the walls. We supplied gratis the sounds for crashes, shooting, etc., which the “silents” could not produce. Unfortunately for the more mature, the noise was also extended to the more tender scenes involving the hero and heroine. We used to think it “great fun”. But looking back on it, how the adults in the audience put up with it, I do not know.

At first, the “bioscopes” and “biographs”, as they were called, came very infrequently, but as the number of their visits increased, they became known variously as, the “pictures”, the “flicks”, the “cinema” and the “movies”. As “bioscopes” they came under the auspices of the Salvation Army, but later a man came from Oamaru and projected, first with lime-light and then attempted to use electricity. We were already familiar with this, because a Mr Maberly was using electricity for an arc lamp in front on his joinery factory at the back of Inkster’s, the tailor’s.

In the changeover to electricity for the pictures, a dynamo had been mounted in the doorway of a side room in the Oddfellows Hall and was driven by a tractor engine standing outside. Coming down High Street, I still remember the thrill of seeing this traction engine steadily puffing away. Unfortunately the dynamo refused to generate, even with the engine doing its best with clouds of steam coming out the safety-valve. So a

disappointed audience received its money back, and went dejectedly home; for this was really a notable event in the life of the community. Unfortunately audiences were turned away several times before a programme was successfully projected. Here we received our first indication of how “tricky” electricity could be.

The cause of all the disappointment and frustration was that two wires in the dynamo had been wrongly interchanged. About 1912 the picture proprietor transferred his pictures to the Silver Band Hall in Sherman Street where he had a permanent “set up” for weekly shows. About the same time, compulsory military training had been established in the Drill Hall, and it was a good ten minutes between the Hall and the pictures. As training ended at 8 o’clock and the pictures commenced at that time also, some fast speeds were made in order to miss as little of the programme as possible. But not only that; the arrival of the panting cadets looking for seats in the darkened Hall caused some considerable and unappreciated disruption of the programme.

In the early programmes the pictures were not very clear, but still enjoyable. No matter what the event was, it seemed to be always raining; presumably due to scratches on the film. At first the projector, with its attendant gas generator, stood in the middle of the Hall and its operation in full view of the audience. As boys we always kept a close eye on the amount of film left on the spools to see “how much more was to go”, and this indicated how far away was the end of our enjoyment.

A full programme consisted of four spools. While the first and third empty spools were being removed, there was a singer on the stage whose song was illustrated with coloured lantern slides. I well remember a particularly poignant song about a small boy who had “stowed away” on a train to see his dying mother. But he had been discovered, and so the chorus went on with his plea:

“Please mister conductor, don’t put me off the train,

The best friend I have in the world, sir, is waiting for me in vain”, etc.

Each spool usually comprised three types of subjects – educational, dramatic and comic. Father was quick to appreciate the educational value of the “pictures” and I was as quick to point out the educational parts of a programme. Of course lessons had to be completed before we could go. I had used the term “educational” for want of a better word, but it includes scenery such as that taken from the front of a train when the whole audience seemed to be moving forward; also included were stale news events such as the San Francisco earthquake in which the dramatic effect was enhanced by the film being coloured red, the first attempt at colour in the pictures.

Since all these pictures were silent, an understanding of plots was originally helped by a running commentary spoken from the side of the screen. Sometimes there was a musical accompaniment to the picture which varied according to the scene. For instance, “soulful” music was played when the hero and heroine were coming to grips; but this was often drowned by unromantic small boys in the audience. Similarly vigorous and fast music accompanied the cowboys “chasing” the Indians.

In later years, the progress of the pictures was interrupted by explanatory descriptions being projected onto the screen. But as far as possible the actions of the actors themselves had to carry the story along. This of course produced over-emphasis which would not be tolerated today, but the successful actor was one who could show that he was “falling in love” without his actions being excessively ridiculous. No wonder there was consternation and apprehension in the ranks of the silent stars when “talkies” exploded into the picture realm.

It may be interesting to record the development of the earliest “comics” from the antics of fat John Bunny and thin Flora Finch in the “New Stenographer” through Foolshead (Pathe) who escaped from prison by turning himself into a kind of snake and sliding down the inside of the drainpipe in “When Prison Bars are Useless” (the advent of trick photography), to the immortal Charles Chaplin: not forgetting Mack Sennet and his Keystone Kops and “Bathing Beauties”.

The first talking film I saw was in 1909, long before the revolution in “pictures” introduced by the “talkies” such as “The Singing Fool” and “Sunny Boy”. The picture showed an Indian girl dressed in costume and singing “Red Wing”, which song by the way, could be classed as the fore-runner of modern “pop” music. The music had a lightness and a swing which made it popular for years (and still is often heard) and which quite belied the sad story that it told.

The sound for the talkie was produced by an acoustic gramophone on the stage at the corner of the screen. By this time the self-announcing cylindrical records of Edison-Bell on the Edison phonograph had been supplanted by the present flat disc record. The instrument itself was similar to those current at the time with the horn above the turntable whose resemblance is perpetuated by the H.M.V trade mark, only of course there was no dog. It had an illuminated pointer at the side which rotated in synchronism with a similar pointer in the corner of the picture. The projector was in the centre of the hall as usual in full view of the audience and operated by a crank handle.

At first all went well and we were amazed. We had no difficulty in following the song as we knew the words. Suddenly the picture stopped and on turning to the projector we saw that the spent film, instead of winding back on a spool after projection, was lying in a tangled mess on the floor. The belt driving the spent-film spindle had come off its pulleys. It was a matter of moments before the operator put it back and

projection was resumed. Unfortunately the gramophone had kept on working and the picture and sound were completely out of synchronism. Red Wing was singing when the picture showed she wasn't and vice versa, her mouth framing words but there was no sound. This was the first time that we had seen that sort of thing and we found it hilarious. The loose boards on the panelling of the walls of the Oddfellows Hall never got such a banging before.

The following afternoon there was a presentation of the "Mikado". I had never heard of Gilbert and Sullivan or the Mikado before and in spite of the novelty I was soon very bored. Probably due to the necessity of changing records, some of it was silent and some "talkie", and the words were almost unintelligible. I remember making a big effort to follow when three girls came dancing across the screens singing "Three Little Maids from School Are We". But we all agreed at school the next day that they would be very popular if they came to our school like that.

However, the limitations of that talkie system were fairly obvious. The volume of sound from the horn was not enough for even a small hall, and there were difficulties through wear and tear and the comparatively short life of the records. So we had to wait till the electronic age arrived to solve all these difficulties; and little did we realise the wonders that it would bring.

6 Theatres

Very occasionally we had travelling theatre groups playing in the Oddfellows Hall. I was not interested in them very much, but I saw one group that came round playing "Uncle Tom's Cabin". My attendance was not dependent on the fact that I had managed to persuade my father that it was "educational". As

far as I could see, the plot had no semblance with the famous book (which I had recently read), except that there was a scene purporting to be a river crossing, in which a large amount of freshly cut foliage formed a prominent part. When the players had departed the next day, it was noticeable that the Oddfellows Hall grounds had been pretty well denuded of second-growth shrubs and other foliage. Apparently the company relied on a plentiful supply of locally-grown stage scenery. Obviously profits could not be made from the small audiences of a township like Waimate, if expenses for transporting stage equipment were high.

7 Recreation

As boys we supplied our own recreation most of the time. In addition to kicking the football around, playing hockey with hockey sticks made from suitably shaped branches from the tall broom on our side road, we had periods of playing marbles, tops, skipping and other games which are universal whatever the nationality of the children. We also made a lot of playing equipment, such as sledges (which we pulled in races over grass, shingle and even over gutters and ditches), toboggan-runs (the highest part being the mid-rail of a seven foot fence) and of course carts of various kinds. We were lucky in that there always was a stock of spare packing-cases at the back of the shop and there was always plenty of wood lying about. We seem always to have had a hammer and a saw and there were plenty of nails in the packing-cases.

One day we made a hut and of course we had to have a fire and finally ended up by stewing unripe pears from a neighbour's tree which was loaded with fruit. We also poached some birds eggs we found in a nest in the tree. I wish I could remember clearly whether we ate the eggs or not. They poached alright

and were therefore fresh enough, so I suppose at least the more venturesome members of our gang did.

In the holidays and sometimes at the weekends, we ranged further afield; to a swimming hole at Garland's Bridge about a two-mile trek up Mill Road; or to the top of the hills at the back of Waimate where we pulled down a cabbage tree each and slid on it to the bottom, flying across sheep tracks and all. These expeditions usually took all day and we used to sit on the top of the hill eating our lunches and watching; among other things, the two expresses, North and South, crossing at Studholme Junction. The puffs of steam when they whistled were always an exciting sight, because the sound did not arrive till a long time afterwards. Then we would watch the Waimate train of two carriages and a guard's van crawl along the branch line to the Waimate station.

Parties in boyhood seemed to be things to be endured and it was not till well on in High School that I found much interest in them and at that stage they pop up more prominently in my memory. To be popular at parties one had to have some accomplishment such as play an instrument or recite or otherwise add to the evening's entertainment. Hence nearly every one of my friends was learning to play the piano or the violin, and there was no escape for us, the Shackleton children. We all had to learn to play the piano. I found it hard work and practiced under duress. Scales and "studies" I abhorred, but as the years rolled on, I reached a mediocre competency as a pianist. Ron was much better and could play "by ear". I couldn't; no more could I memorise to any great extent.

However, there came a turning point in my reluctance to learn. My parents had a party and we were put to bed. At this time I had already acquired a certain skill with electric gadgetry and had made a "microphone" from three nails in a saucer hidden behind the piano and connected to an old telephone earphone on my pillow. I considered the results quite satisfactory and

enjoyed the evening; especially when my adult cousin, Bosanco Tregoning, played some simple waltzes. Next morning I found that “Bo” had left her music behind. So with memories of the previous evening, I attempted them and was amazed and delighted to find that I could play them reasonably well. I found that I had quite a flair for rhythm; so what matter a few wrong notes here and there so long as the “beat” was perfect. So when “ragtime” came on the scene, here was its dedicated disciple.

Competitions were a “sine qua non” at parties and I got a shock when I once won one. But Ron and I concocted an original one. We made a story utilising the titles of the current popular songs. This was long before the days of “pop” music. Then, a popular song remained popular for a year or two. But no matter the vintage, so long as it was well-known, we used it. I read the story which had a large number of missing words and phrases. These were supplied by the titles of songs whose choruses Ron played on the piano at an appropriate pause in the story. Those who guessed the most titles and wrote them on the special sheet already provided, won the competition.

Occasionally circuses visited Waimate. The tents were pitched on vacant paddocks adjacent to the school; which was very bad for school discipline. The whole town could hear the special train bringing the circus as it struggled round the notorious bend to bring the wagons into the siding. Then there were the roars of the animals as the cages were being unloaded, so that we already had a heightened expectation of the wonders to come. There were no schoolboys “creeping like snails unwilling to school” on the day a circus arrived. It was remarkable too, that before school commenced, and at play-time and at lunch-time, a general deafness used to afflict a greater part of the children and sometimes the teachers too, so that they “did not hear the bell”.

The performance and the individual acts were full of wonderment to us and although there has been little difference

in the type of acts over the years, no one warned us that as youth passed to maturity and finally old age, the glamour which so excited us would also fade never to return.

But not everyone welcomed the circuses. The crowds that flocked down Queen Street to the tents were only equalled by the crowds that went to the trains for the school excursions. The difference was however, that the excursions stimulated trade, while the circuses took a lot of money out of circulation in the town and shopkeepers had to expect a difficult time maintaining their cash liquidity and reducing the debts of their customers.

Before leaving the subject of circuses, a one-man one-act circus deserves mention. A stunt man who called himself “Captain Cook” advertised that he could parachute from several thousand feet in a hot-air balloon. True the balloon did rise up into the air with Captain Cook sitting on a trapeze underneath it. But while we were expecting it to rise still further, we realised it was already beginning to fall and the balloon gently wafted to the ground again, finally becoming caught with Captain Cook in a tree. For the record, both the balloon and Captain Cook were ruined, although he escaped with a not-unexpected collection of scratches and bruises. But as a boy becoming interested in physics, I found it an interesting experiment showing that “hot air rises”.

8 Military training

In writing about boyhood entertainments, I think I really should include the “cadet system” and the later “compulsory military training”. As soon as we reached Standard 1, we became part of the cadet system and variously through the primary school we were issued with jerseys and “Glengarry caps” forming the uniform to be worn on the days we had parades. These were

once a week and lasted forty minutes. Senior and older boys were issued with red sashes as a sign of non-commissioned rank. We were lined up in companies in single line and “numbered off” in fours. The numbers one and four in each group of fours were the pivotal units on which the remainder of the four swung depending on whether the order was “fours right” or “fours left”. These orders brought us into “column of route”. For a large “company” the “column” became too long and about the time of the introduction of compulsory military training in 1912, the “two rank” formation of lining-up was adopted. Before compulsion, cadet training was done more or less in school hours depending on how well we drilled.

But when compulsion came in, I was of military age and instead of drilling under the auspices of school, I, with my other school mates had to drill with the ‘townies’, who gave us quite a new outlook on military drill. We had to parade from seven to eight p.m. in the “drill shed”, a large corrugated sheet-iron structure with an asphalt floor (an inheritance from the Boer war), which had also been used by the Volunteers. We were issued with khaki shorts and stockings without feet which were to be used over our own stockings.

The first few parades seemed to go without incident, although the barking of orders by the regular army officers did not endear them to us, and especially to the “townies”. While our movements were confined to the inside of the drill-shed all went well enough, even although they were interspersed with humorous clandestine comments from the ranks. However, our officers became too ambitious and attempted to drill us outside in the large paddock in which the drill-shed was located. They seemed to have forgotten that it was dark outside; that the moon did not rise till the parade was over; that khaki was hard to see in the dark, and that the paddock had an unlimited supply of clods. First one or two clods came flying through the air to land close to the officers, and finally so many that the parade ended in chaos, and many of us had already slipped away and raced to

the “picture-show” in Sherman Street. Next week policemen were very much in evidence at the parade and also for the weeks following. So parade nights were merely a boring prelude to the excitement of the “pictures” that followed.

9 Boyhood hobbies

As far back as I can remember, I seem to have been “making things”, but it was not till the inauguration of the Technical Block at the High School that my ideas channelled to electricity and magnetism as the basis of a hobby. My first steps were to acquire an electric battery, and from the technical books in the back room of the Waimate Public Library I gathered the information that coke and zinc in a solution of sal-ammoniac ought to produce an electric current. The gas-works by this time being in full swing, there was plenty of coke obtainable; and the zinc came from the lining of an old piano case. At that time all piano cases were lined with sheet zinc. Plumbers used sal-ammoniac for soldering and sixpence worth of that lasted a very long time.

In our house which we had moved to in High Street, a bell operated by a push-button at the front door, was already installed in the kitchen. It was a simple matter to replace the existing battery with my zinc-coke brainchild, all being suitably wired up with the bell. But it would not work; the bell refused to ring. So I made up another jam-jar “cell” and this time it did work.

Then Symon’s, the bakers, were having trouble with their electric bell and somehow or other the matter was referred to me. Their bell was operated by “dry cells” and I knew they would not operate if they were completely dry. So with a hammer and a nail I made a few holes in two of them and immersed each in separate solutions of sal-ammoniac. This

arrangement worked so successfully that Symons generously gave me the other cells that they had given up as useless.

Shortly afterwards Mr Nicol, the flour-miller, asked me if an old telephone that “did not go” would interest me. So I found myself the happy possessor of a telephone magneto; a silent bell and an earphone for the hand-piece, but no microphone. A little research suggested that three clean nails in a saucer, as on the occasion of the party already mentioned, was a successful substitute.

On a business trip to Dunedin, Father bought me a “shocking coil” and a secondary battery and an accumulator. We stood in a ring joining hands, with the first and last in the ring clasping hand-grips which were energized from the coil and battery. But this was not very entertaining and the experience of getting a shock soon palled. There was a current belief that shocks had a beneficial effect on one’s health. But we never noticed any improvement.

There was also the difficulty of keeping the accumulator in working order. We used it sparingly, but we found that the sparks that could be obtained by joining the terminals with a piece of wire or metal were much more entertaining than the shocks. After a week or two the plates in the accumulator began to become white and finally it stopped sparking. There did not seem to be much information in the township as to what the trouble was, until a Mr Richards who had a bike shop told us that it should be kept fully charged, and that those interesting sparks were not doing it any good either. The white colour was really a kind of rust which could possibly be removed by “overcharging”. But again that was not very successful, and the accumulator was relegated to the “has beens”.

But that was partly due to the fact that I had acquired other interests. I had come across a weekly publication called “The Model Engineer and Electrician” which lifted the veil from electricity as a hobby. Even more exciting were the

advertisements for electrical gadgets and apparatus, which I used to moon over like a love-lorn loon. I tried to follow some of the directions for making simpler apparatus and equipment, but I was woefully short of any basic tools.

Uncle Sam, Father's brother, used to visit us at Christmas for a family "get-together", but he spent most of his time in the large galvanized shed that Father had built for storing wood and coal and gardening equipment. One Christmas, Uncle built a bench for me which was a big step forward.

The greatest development in the realm of my hobbies really arose from the growth of couch and docks in the garden. Father decided that they were a menace to successful gardening and obtained a quotation of eight pounds from a gardener to clear the back part of the section. Father considered that the price was much too high and offered me the eight pounds to do it. With visions from the "Model Engineer and Electrician" of what that money would buy, I toiled for several solid weeks digging and removing every bit of couch and dock-root from that garden, all periodically inspected by Father. When it was finished I spent several more weeks making out an order on the Economic Electric Company, Twickenham, London for tools and apparatus to be shipped through Father's London agents.

In the light of modern prices that list might be interesting. The chief item was a Pelton wheel and a 40-watt generator driven over the wash-tub from the high-pressure town water supply which had been installed some several years previously. This required a voltmeter and an ammeter, but unfortunately I did not know about an automatic cut-out for charging two small accumulators for a hand torch which I had included. Another important piece of equipment was a bike-generator which lit front and rear lamps and was driven from the front wheel. Other sundries were; a small galvanometer, eight pounds of copper wire of various gauges and kinds of insulation, a small soldering iron, self-fluxing soldering wire, a cold chisel, 2

wood-chisels, a 2-inch metal vice, tin snips, several bar magnets, iron filings and electrolysis accessories, potassium iodide, two potassium bi-chromate cells, spare potassium bi-chromate, two Le Clanché cells, a hand-driven emery wheel, a honing-stone, and probably more that I have forgotten.

Unfortunately the order took nine months to arrive in Waimate and I had only one summer-holidays left to experiment with it before I went to Timaru Boy's High School. The assembly of the generator and Pelton wheel on a stout base-board which could be played across the wash-tub presented no difficulty, except that until I had the pulleys of the Pelton and generator satisfactorily lined up, the consequent noise of the racing of the Pelton, due to the belt coming off, caused my mother some consternation.

However, there were two great disappointments. The generator would not generate and my efforts at soldering were unsuccessful. I thought the failure of the generator was due to the fact that the speed was not great enough, but in spite of a large pulley on the wheel it remained "dead". I had almost decided to give it away, as by this time it was only collecting dust on a shelf, when I accidentally moved a permanent magnet near it and it sprang into life and sparked at the commutator. The sparking was easily remedied and I was happy again.

But it was only years afterwards that I realised that a methylated-spirit lamp did not give enough heat for a soldering iron.

However, I managed to make all sorts of gadgets, such as switches which turned electric lights on or off in a room when doors were opened or closed. I did attempt an ambitious project of making a motor which was to drive a small toy electric locomotive. But I was foiled because I could not make or obtain a straight spindle for the motor. However, one or two other simple types of motors were successful.

Ultimately I sold the generating set to a master at T. B. H. S., as times were changing and it looked as though it would be some years, if ever, before I would be able to indulge again in my hobby. But even when I became an old man, parts of my rudimentary gadgets would sometimes be found in a forgotten corner of the “tin shed” reminding me of my early struggles to “make things”.

10 Religious training

Perhaps I am devoting too much time to my boyhood days, but my biography would not be complete without some account of the religious training that we, my brother and sister and I, received at the hands of our parents.

My mother was brought up a Wesleyan Methodist but when she married, joined my father in the Waimate Knox Presbyterian Church where we were all christened.

All five of us attended the Sunday morning service regularly which was followed by a lunch comprising mashed potatoes, which had been previous peeled before leaving, and the meat pieces heated in the coal-fired oven which also had been suitably banked-up before leaving for church. The lunch also comprised stewed fruit bottled in season, when the bottles totalled well over fifty all proudly displayed on shelves in the large walk-in pantry. Lunch over and washing up completed, it was about time to go to Sunday School.

In my early childhood, Dad biked to Hannaton and took the Sunday School there. This he did for many years till age made it too much of a trial. Mother at times took the infant classes in Knox Sunday School. But we three children regularly attended Sunday School in the afternoon, arriving home about four o'clock. Afterwards we either went for a walk or stayed at

home reading selected literature, some of it obtained by subscriptions to suitable children's magazines through the Sunday School. The Presbyterian publication, "The Outlook", figured largely in Father's readings on Sundays. Newspapers at one time were restricted to weekday reading, but as the years rolled on that was relaxed.

The curriculum of the Sunday School was based on graded lessons. The timetable consisted of an opening hymn and prayer by the combined school, the hymn being taken from Moody and Sankey's hymn book. Then the school divided into classes behind curtains, where texts from tickets were heard. Westminster Catechisms, theoretically learned by heart, were checked, the appointed portion of the Bible was read and the lessons discussed, followed by re-assembly of the whole school for another prayer, hymn and the dismissal.

For some years Sunday School Examinations were held and this gave rise to family rivalry from which we suffered. Nevertheless, it made us take our "studies" more seriously and increased our Biblical knowledge.

In the evenings Mother and Father went to church, but in the era of the kerosene lamp, they probably felt that we were safer when we were fully occupied. So each Sunday evening we had five verses of Psalms to memorise, and when that was done we could look at old numbers of "The Graphic" and "The Illustrated London News" which depicted the progress of the once Boer War. We found this part an improvement on verse memorising, particularly as we did not understand much of what we memorised. But we followed avidly the adventures of Tiger Tim in the Jungle Jinks which formed part of the Children's section of the "Graphic".

Although we found the memorising irksome, particularly of those passages that meant nothing to us, still in later life and in various circumstances, as Father told us, they have become meaningful and a comfort and a help, when sometimes

suddenly, with a lifetime of experience behind me, I have been uplifted by a vivid realization of what the Psalmist really meant. I feel myself that we are not doing our best for the rising generations when we confine their knowledge to what they can understand at the time of learning. Understanding comes with the wider experience.

The Minister for Knox Church for most of the time I attended was Rev. Alexander Morrison, a true Christian who strove valiantly amid an indifferent and somewhat unappreciative congregation to extend the Kingdom of God. His sermons always ended with an exhortation “to be saved”, and my parents seemed to judge (which they always did), the worth of a sermon by the amount of emotionalism there was in it. Following the theology of his day, he stressed the absolute necessity of “being saved” to earn a comfortable place in eternity, but largely failed to impress his hearers because most of them appeared to think that eternity was a long way off and that “salvation” cramped one’s style and behaviour. So it was postponed to a more convenient time. Similarly there were members of the Church who found his evangelical efforts rather a trial and seemed to be members of the Church as a result of social pressures. Church attendance was considered necessary in order to have a good standing in the community. On the other hand their financial contributions were a source of economic strength to the Church; so at the same time they had not to be offended. Then the Minister had to do “visiting”; some did not desire it and some did. I suppose experience showed him whether he was welcome or not and just how much spiritual uplift should be included in his visit.

In the spiritual life of the Church, the Minister was assisted by Elders, who when circumstances required it, sometimes took the service, including giving the sermons. Father was an Elder but never took a service. His duties seemed to be delivering Communion Cards to communicants ready for the monthly Communion Service.

The Rev. Morrison, in line with other Ministers, endeavoured to establish Bible Classes. But with very little success. They require a certain cultural attainment in writing and discussion which was largely absent among the older boys in Waimate. But I have recently realised that Bible Classes that I was associated with in later years, have had a profound effect on my life.

11 Timaru Boys' High School

Owing to the disastrous results that we all had in the Waimate District High School Matriculation Examination in 1912, Father lost confidence in the school. So in order to save us from the handicaps in life which were thought to be certain to accrue from a lack of adequate education, Father arranged for our Education Board Scholarships to be transferred to Boarding Scholarships at the Timaru Boys' High School and Ron and I duly appeared at the Rectory, where we boarded, at the beginning of the school year in 1913. And there were a lot of others besides us who suffered from new-boy tremors.

Our arrival had coincided with a large upsurge in the numbers attending the School and at the Rectory there were several more from Waimate; and others came from surrounding districts and townships.

A new Headmaster had been appointed. William Thomas, a man of high ideals, wide outlook and vigorous drive, who later was to become famous as Chairman of the Committee that produced the Thomas Report - which Report it is not too much to say, revolutionized the aims and outlook of education. In all branches of the School's activities he was supported by a loyal staff. This was illustrated very well by our first evening at the Rectory.

Most of us sixty boys there were feeling very much out of place. But Jeremy Tait, the master in charge of the musical side of the school, organised a sing-song round the piano with a makeshift orchestra. What with the mistakes of the indifferent instrumentalists, but encouraged by the staff and the jolly songs we sang, I began to realise that this might not be a bad sort of outfit after all.

One of the songs, which later on almost became a sort of national anthem for the School, was called the “Village Pump”. The first verse ran thus:

There is a little village far away,
Where they grow new potatoes, corn and hay.
There is a little rill that drives a little mill,
And the mill, it keeps a-working all the day.

* * * * *

But the pride of all the town's the village pump.

Second verse:

Now squire, he likes a bit of fun.
So when his boy was twenty-one
He gave us all a treat,
There was nuts and things to eat
And the kids got a lolly and a bun;
But to celebrate the day in a proper sort of way
He shoved another ‘andle on the pump,
On the pump, pump, the village pump,
He shoved another ‘andle on the pump.

The words went with a “catchy” tune and rhythm and the song was an instant hit.

But it took me a long time to become used to sleeping in dormitories and a broken night's rest did not make the following day any more pleasant. I longed for a little peace and quietness on my own. Having a "fat intolerance" I disliked the mass-produced food, which generally had a liberal fat content, and I disliked also the strict schedule that we kept to. With slight variations it went like this: Up at six-thirty; sometimes a cup of cocoa and a biscuit after a run round the block (about half a mile) followed by a cold shower and breakfast. Then there was half an hour free time till school commenced. The mid-morning break was often taken up by practicing football elements, such as scrums, tackling, line-outs, etc, or by "physical jerks". Lessons again, followed by the lunch break, which allowed about half an hour free time before lessons resumed. After afternoon lessons there was sport of some kind and we were rounded up to see that we all took part. Another shower after that was essential and by the time we were dressed it was tea-time. Another half hour bread [sic] and it was "prep" time, till supper and bed. Potential First Fifteen members had another run round the block before bed.

At times when pupils were feeling very home-sick they were allowed to go home for the weekend. In the case of Ron and me, we were allowed out of school ten minutes early to catch the Second Express South from Christchurch and arrive home in Waimate a little after five o'clock. For the return journey to school on Monday morning, after leaving the branch line train at Studholme Junction, we boarded a mixed-goods train, comprising passenger carriages, goods wagons and sheep trucks. When the train had a head wind sheep pollution was very marked in the passenger carriage behind. There were two of these mixed trains plying each way daily between Timaru and Oamaru. They crossed at Studholme Junction, the Waimate train fussily withdrawing up its branch to enable them to do so.

It was while waiting for these operations to be carried out at the Junction one morning that we read in the "Timaru Herald"

which had just been brought by the train from Timaru, the headlines “War Clouds Gather Over Europe”. The thought ran through my mind that this was going to be exciting, never thinking it was ever going to affect me and that I should be so vitally involved.

In due course the war arrived, but to me, a school-boy, it was a far-off thing to read about in the papers. Then came Gallipoli. There was no wireless and we were entirely reliant on the newspapers for our news and casualty lists. News came to the Rectory that a huge casualty list was posted up in the main Post Office in town, and as by this time nearly everyone had relatives of some kind involved in the war, we were allowed to go down to the Post Office to see the lists. Not having relatives that I knew that were involved, I stood on the outskirts of the crowd and had my first experience of that strange, sullen foreboding mood of a crowd which recognises that death is hovering over it and striking here and there; and not a thing could be done about it. I was to feel that many times in the future. However, apart from the departure of a master to the War, life went on in a fairly even tenor.

One day we had a visit from a Mr McDonald (I am not sure how he spelt his name) who had been to China and was thrilled at the possibilities that were available for helping China “out of its long sleep”. He exhorted us not to forget China when we left school and were considering avenues for our life’s work. I remember derisively thinking, “What a hope!”

I commenced at the School in Form 5, the Matriculation Form, but I did not sit the Matriculation Examination. Somehow or other it was considered that I was University Scholarship material and the passing of that examination would automatically give me “matriculation”. I was in rather a unique position, because owing to my young age for this stage, I would be able to have two attempts at the Scholarship, and that meant two years in the Sixth Form. The first year in the Sixth I was

made a prefect, and I had a suspicion that the wise Headmaster did it more for my benefit (at least initially) than for the benefit of the school. I was inclined to be retiring and not a good “mixer”. I think he thought it would “bring me out”. Instead of keeping on the edge of the crowd, I found that my responsibilities required that I should lead it; and I did my best with apparently some success, so that in the second year in the Sixth Form I was made Head Prefect of the Rectory with further responsibility, some of which I thoroughly enjoyed; particularly Saturday afternoon trips to “Fuller’s Pictures”.

The cinema had now reached the stage where shows were projected nightly with sessions on Saturday afternoons. On wet Saturday afternoons when sports were cancelled, it suited the staff and pupils to have the Rectory pupils attend the “pictures”. They were usually in my charge and I was treated rather deferentially at the ticket box when I used to ask for (say) sixty-five tickets for the dress circle and pull a handful of coins and a few notes out of my pocket. On one occasion I was invited to go to the Projection room where a former school friend, who had now left school, was operating. He suggested that I should control the speed of projection while he re-wound a spool of film. This I was delighted to do, although I was a bit wary of an unprotected red-hot rheostat on the back wall. Says my friend, “I am running a bit behind time. When the Movietone News comes on there is a horse race, so speed them up as fast as you can”. I did. I don’t think the audience saw horses running so fast before. But the scene suddenly changed to a funeral before I could slow it down and I don’t think the audience saw mourners move so friskily before, neither. The audience shrieked with laughter, but the Manager burst in in a rage. But when he saw one of his best customers operating, it was all glossed over. But a few days later, the film “The Birth of a Nation” (I think) caught fire in the projection room and was destroyed. Fortunately the fire was contained and there was no panic.

On fine Saturday afternoons we were usually involved in sports of some sort. I was hopeless at cricket, but by accident developed a tricky “serve” at tennis which saved me from being hopeless at that too. Football I enjoyed, partly for the zest of the game and partly because we sometimes visited teams in outlying districts, such as Winchester and Temuka. These visits broke the drab routine of school life. In my last year at school I found that I had become a prominent member of the First Fifteen, and played as a “hooker” in the front row of the two-three-two scrum that we played then. That meant that the other member of the front row and I, had to carry the whole weight of the scrum through our backs and at the same time hook the ball to the back of the scrum with our feet.

Each year a football tournament was held involving Christchurch Boys’ High School, Otago Boys’ High School and us, and each year one school would be host to the other visiting teams. In addition there were annual matches with Waitaki Boys’ High School. In all these matches rivalry was very keen infecting a large number of local residents. Our coach was Eric Cockroft, who was at one time a “possible” All Black, but did not actually become one. In any case he knew all the finer points of the game and had us thoroughly trained, fit and keyed up to win.

After a hard period of training we were rubbed down by willing and not altogether unskilful school mates with “Speedy Oil”, an embrocation of uncertain origin, but undoubtedly of great beneficial effect; especially at half-time when we trooped off the field to submit to the ministrations of our amateur masseurs.

For years, Waitaki had a monotonous succession of “wins”. But each year the defeat was less ignominious, till eventually we won, and great was the rejoicing. I have memories of having to lie down before the match all morning to save our energies, and of being taken to Timaru Caledonian Park in taxis and resplendent in our blue footballs caps with their silver tassels.

But not much remains clear about the match, except that I was approached by two scruffy-looking characters who offered me five pounds if I would let Waitaki get the ball in the scrum occasionally. My disgust at their suggestion was so evident that they hastily disappeared.

We won and it was with considerable and justifiable pride that the Headmaster gloated over the results. Among other things, he praised the efforts of each member of the team in turn ending with the words, "And he was a hero too" followed by much clapping by the school. However, by the time he had done this fifteen times it became a catch phrase, which as far as we were concerned always ever afterwards rounded off laudatory remarks about anyone in whatever sphere; "And he was a hero too!"

Details of matches have long passed into oblivion, except for two instances. In a match with Otago Boys' High School I had a front tooth broken, another knocked out and several loosened. In a "line-out" my mouth came in violent contact with the elbow of my opposing number. But I still played on. In the subsequent visit to the dentist arranged by the Matron, I was expected to have some minor dentistry. However, thanks to the poor workmanship of a Waimate dentist, the Timaru dentist said, "The rest are not worth saving anyhow. You may as well have them all out," "Right", I said. "Go ahead". When I woke up from the gas there were teeth all over the floor. There was consternation at the Rectory too, when I arrived after a rather dizzy and wobbly ride back on my bike. However, in due course I received a false set of teeth and life and food got back to normal.

The other scene which escapes from oblivion had me running with the ball in front of the grandstand with my shorts torn off me; but I did not let that deter me as we were getting into a good position. However, the hoots of laughter from the stand suggested that I had better do something about it, and I sunk to

the ground; but not to cover my shame. We had been instructed to wear swimming costumes under our togs for just such an eventuality as this. And after the other players had formed a screen, which was quite ineffective as far as the grandstand was concerned, I donned another pair of shorts which had been produced, amid much guffawing from the spectators.

I think more was made of the incident than would be made at the present time. In those days it was mandatory for a man bathing in Caroline Bay to wear a full costume with a skirt which effectively hid contours which are now obvious in “hippie” wear in the streets and which pass without comment. In that respect it is interesting to reflect how modesty has now become almost a thing of the past. I recall a conversation with my mother not long after I had commenced going to school when she said that a certain young lady was not a nice lady and when I asked her why, she replied “She even shows her ankles under her skirts”. About the time of World War I, some daring females appeared in the streets in X-ray blouses and long trousers, without skirts. But it did not become common till long after. The moral climate was not ready for it. There was also some talk about it being illegal for women to masquerade in men’s clothing.

While I considered that all this football and training was good in its way, I was concerned that the time thus spent was reducing my chances for gaining a Scholarship to the University. Also, in the second year in the Sixth Form, it was becoming clear that I had a chance of becoming Dux of the school. There was however, a formidable rival, a Martin F__r, whom I always considered had more brains, and was cleverer than I was. Furthermore, he was not a footballer at all and could spend many more hours over his studies than I could. When I complained about this situation to Cockroft (who was also my Science master), he rather cryptically remarked that I was not to worry about that, and that I was gaining in other ways. I doubted it.

My strong subjects were Mathematics and Physics, including Electricity and Magnetism. When I came across ideas new to me in things electrical I immediately absorbed them ready for future use. But Martin could “run rings around me” in English and Latin. Where the subject required memorising facts, as in Historical English, I made very sure I knew them. But in essays and questions of style, I seemed to have no aptitude whatever.

We studied extracts from a “Book of Modern Prose, 1470-1900”, and afterwards had to write an essay on the subject in the style of the author. What hopes! For instance there was a speech by Edmund Burke on American taxation and we had to study it and write a speech on the subject in Burke’s style.

But no matter how hard I tried, my efforts had only Shackleton’s style and no other. I felt I was losing ground fast in the Dux race. So I hit upon the plan of memorising the key sentences which I underlined and which gave the gist of the extract, hoping that any Shackleton “fill in” would either not be noticed or be excused. It worked! My marks improved wonderfully. But after several lessons I noticed that Thomas, who was the English teacher, standing very closely over me all the time I was writing. The next day he did the same, leaning over me to the point of embarrassment. At the end of the week when I used this system for the five lessons of the week, Thomas announced, “On Monday we shall have a test on this week’s work”. Fortunately there was the weekend and I repaired any defects in my memorising, so that when Monday came I was at it again. So was Thomas – even more embarrassingly so this time. When he had marked my paper he called me to the front of the class and asked how I kept so close to the original style. I told him I had memorised it. I then had to repeat verbally another extract, which I did successfully. The rest of the conversation went on the lines that he did not think that I was the type to cheat, but thought the evidence against me was very strong. He was greatly relieved and suggested that if I was able to continue this method, I was by all means, to do so.

Fortunately as the days progressed I found it became easier and easier and when exam time came, it required very little effort to refresh my memory of the various extracts.

But Latin was also hobbling me in the Dux race and I was not a popular pupil with the Latin master who went by the nickname of “Splosh”. Unfortunately I made a terrible “blue” in the first lesson I had with him, simply because the pronunciation that “Mick” taught us at the Waimate District High School sometimes differed from that used by “Splosh”. He asked me to read some Latin which commenced with the word “mon”. I pronounced it with a short “o”. After I had proceeded a little, Splosh repeated the line for me pronouncing “non” like “noan”. I was blissfully ignorant that he was correcting my pronunciation, so I resumed with the short “o” for “non” again. Splosh repeated the sentence again, and again I said “non” with the short “o”. By this time, the class, appreciating the reason for the repetition was finding the situation rather amusing and commenced to titter. But what the class thought of me and what Splosh thought of me were poles apart. In any event, I had to see Splosh after class and apologise for what he called my “outrageous impertinence”. It was in vain that I explained that that was the pronunciation we had used in Waimate. To him I think, I was just a new boy trying to take a rise out of the teacher. But for a long time my written exercises were nearly always returned with the lowest marks in the class.

One day, happening to compare the errors on a friend’s paper with mine, I saw that I had only about half the errors that he had and yet he had a much higher mark than mine. I think we agreed that perhaps my errors were more serious than his and consequently I lost more marks. But in the Sixth Form this was a very serious matter. I discussed it with my Father and he arranged that I should take a course in Entrance Scholarship Latin by correspondence at Gilby’s Correspondence School which was then in Christchurch.

It was Thomas's practice to allow responsible Rectory pupils to visit relatives on Sunday afternoons and evenings. So I made regular visits to Uncle Jack's place, a large brick house overlooking Caroline Bay. All correspondence lessons were sent to and from Uncle Jack's address. So were the textbooks kept there, including Arnold's Latin Prose and Cicero's "De Catalina" and "Pro Archia". Most of the work was done at Uncle Jack's, although rules and constructions etc., to be memorised were written out on pieces of paper and carried in my pocket to be "swotted" as opportunity permitted.

To give Splosh his due, I recollect that in one memorable lesson he admitted that my Latin was improving and so my marks did too. But Fowler still had a big lead. To round this part of the story off, when the official Scholarship Examination results did come out, I far surpassed the rest of the class, coming fourth top in Latin in New Zealand. And again my school marks in the formal end-of-the-year examination showed a very much better result than was ever indicated by my ordinary class marks.

There was one remarkable thing about our examinations in the Sixth Form in particular. They were never supervised. The master at the beginning of the time allocated, would write the questions on the blackboard and then depart with the words, "Collect the papers, please Scott" (the Head Prefect), stating the time for this to be done, and there would not be a word spoken or even a suspicion of cheating till the time was up.

In spite of our best efforts, examinations have an element of the lottery in them. As I have already mentioned I had no difficulty with Mathematics and was expected to score heavily in both papers for the Scholarship Examination. In the first paper I did, but in the free morning before the second paper in the afternoon, I suffered a bilious attack and entered the exam room with a thick head and in no condition to deal with Mathematical problems. Although I struggled hard, things just would not click and I came out very dispirited. To add to my

disappointment after tea about an hour later, I found I could do almost all of them. Nevertheless I did but little more than gain a “pass” mark in that paper.

When the results were published I realised how much that attack cost me. I was fifth from the top of the “Credit List” and another ten marks off would have put me in the “Scholarship List”. That seemed to be the death blow to my ambition to go to the University and become an electrical engineer. But little did I know how this was working for my good. I am afraid my story is being over-weighted as though examinations and football were the only activities in our school life. We had school concerts, debates, orchestral performances and school plays. But drama was not such a fetish of school life as it became in later years.

We also had boxing lessons and a Mr Jimmy Stewart used to appear on certain nights of the week and initiate us into the mysteries of “the straight left”, “right hook”, etc. The culmination of these lessons was “Tournament Night” when boxing bouts were held with all the ringside formalities. Boxing was not among my more successful achievements, but in my final year my brother Ron, fought his way into the “finals”, but was beaten by an opponent who was almost a stone heavier. However, he was certainly the most popular boy that night for his game and skilful boxing against a much heavier opponent. When he was awarded the medal for “The Most Scientific Boxer”, Father was immensely pleased and so were we all, especially when it was well reported in the “Timaru Herald” which of course circulated in Waimate.

Another bright memory of my final years was the School Band. I always enjoy a good band and although the T.B.H.S band, as far as I know, won no competitions, it always lightened up life for me when it played. Several of the players had already acquired a competence in Salvation Army bands and with that stiffening of players always gave satisfactory performances,

especially when farewelling departing troops on their way to camp.



Timaru Boys' High School Prefects, 1915.

Back row: B.H. Howell, A.J. Shackleton, K.M. Dalglish.

Front Row: A.C. Fahey, N.R.C. Thomas (Head), S.M. Satterthwaite.

I did manage to become the “Dux” and at the prize-giving at the end of the year my parents and some friends from Waimate came up to attend the prize presentation. I found I was walking up to the platform a number of times to receive prizes, but the climax came when after I had been presented with the Dux Medal, the Chairman of the Board of Governors, Mr Howell, in presenting us with our football caps, singled me out with a few personal remarks to the effect that he was proud that the school was turning out good all-rounders who could excel in both the academic and the sports fields – or words to that effect.

And so ends my days as a school boy.

12 Now the Schoolmaster

The War was still relentlessly proceeding on its dreadful course and one by one the masters at the school were disappearing in its bloody maw. The replacements on the staff were women teachers and in a boys' school there was a point beyond which this was not desirable. So three of us prefects who would be leaving school as pupils, were asked to stay on as masters. One of them was William Menzies (affectionately known as "Pie") who also came from Waimate. It was a rather a difficult transition to make from pupil to master, especially when it came to exercising authority over pupils who the previous year considered you as an equal.

I taught English and Mathematics to Third Forms and Reading to a class in the Preparatory School which had been established a year or so previously. I struggled along to the best of my ability, being coached and advised by Thomas and managed to avoid the more serious pitfalls, more or less.

To meet the Compulsory Military Training requirements the school formed itself into a Cadet Company of which the masters were the officers and guided by a "regular" Sergeant-Major who "took" the parades. As a prefect I had had the rank of a Sergeant and was already fairly competent on giving instructions in the various drill movements.

We also had the required fortnight's camp at the school, the cooking being done on open fires. The memories of that camp remain mainly from a parody about it at the school concert based on a chorus from "The Arcadians", an operetta then being performed at the Timaru Theatre Royal. The parody went somewhat thus:

"We had to double each day from morn till night.

We sloped and trailed and grounded,

And although the sausages we could sniff,

We doubled till we were stiff.

It was a short camp, but a gay one”.

Apart from preparing lessons I found the evenings dragged after the intensive “preps” of the previous years, and so on Thomas’s suggestion I studied as an extra-mural student at Otago University, taking English, Latin and Mathematics as my subjects. I passed the terms examinations in Latin and Mathematics, but in English I failed. Probably this was because a knowledge of the old Anglo-Saxon language was required. I found it quite a hurdle but I was overjoyed in the terms examination itself, when I realised that what we had to translate into English was the Anglo-Saxon version of the first chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. In my earlier years I had memorised this and had no difficulty in recalling it. Unfortunately in the “post mortem” which always occurs after each exam paper, I realised that in my exuberance I had given the examiner two verses more than was given in the Anglo-Saxon.

However, time rolled on and after a few more months teaching the following year, I found myself in the Army.

PART TWO

1 Army camp life

By the time I was of military age of 20 on 21 March 1917, conscription was in full force. The male population was divided into categories or divisions of single men, married men with no dependents, married men with one, two, three or four. The conscripts were decided monthly by ballot from each of the divisions in turn till that division was exhausted. By the time that I was eligible for conscription, men were being balloted from the division of married men with three children. Of course as soon as I enlisted, I was put into the division of single men and automatically my name came out with the next ballot.

“Pie” Menzies and I enlisted together and together we were each presented with a wristlet watch and the good wishes of the school. Farewells were disturbing, but we were buoyed up with the thought that it would be some months before we left New Zealand and the war might be over by then.

However, I had a chance to avoid the war altogether. I had sunken arches or “flat feet” and in my medical examination I was warned that they would cause me a lot of trouble and that through them I might not be able to keep up with general war conditions. At the same time, I was doing a good job at T.B.H.S where I could ill be spared. Medically then I was a border-line case and the decision really rested with me as to whether I would go or not. I realised that all my contemporaries

would be “away” and beside I had some idea of being in a war “to end all wars”. So I said that I would like to go.

On the appointed day, 29 May 1917, Pie, myself and several other young chaps of our age group paraded at the Army Drill Hall, Timaru, together with much older men totalling one hundred and twenty in all to form part of the Thirtieth Reinforcements.⁶ We were then subjected to addresses which in retrospect are perhaps worth noting.

The Mayor of Timaru, Mr Maling, said that we were living in an unparalleled epoch in history, when the future destiny of the world was being decided and we had the honour to help in that cause. The Rev. J. H. Rogers encouraged us perhaps by saying that we were giving ourselves for the Empire which would train us to fight, to conquer and even if necessary to die. If we did die, it was the most glorious end a man could have. The Church would pray for us and loving hands would minister to our wants in sickness and in health. We would have the sympathy and affection of those who remained behind. We stood for a cause which was that of honour and justice, the liberty and protection of the weak. Was there any other better principle for which we could fight. It was God’s cause and we must live as an embodiment of that cause and be men of absolute honesty. We should not be afraid to say at the back of all we were soldiers of God. God would protect us and when we returned we would be able to say we had been true to the cause for which we had fought. Mr Rogers concluded his address by invoking God’s blessing on us and hoping we would all return safely. (Reference: “Timaru Herald”, 29/5/1917).

⁶ As reported in the Timaru Herald, 29 May, 1917, but Allan's official records show him as being in the 29th Reinforcements.



The South Canterbury Quota of the 30th Reinforcement outside the Army Drill Shed, Timaru, 28 May, 1917. Allan is in the front row, 2nd from the left. (Photograph: The Allan Studio).

We were then marched to the railway station to the accompaniment of the South Canterbury Regimental Band. There was some waving and a little light-hearted banter from the sprinkling of people lining the streets, but there did not seem to be the jollity that had marked some earlier send-offs. Perhaps that was because there were too many men in our ranks who were leaving respective wives with several children behind. At several stations on the run to Lyttelton, the troop train collected more khaki freight and finally left us on the wharf.

The crossing was uneventful and on the Wellington Railway Station we were very glad to receive our “breakfast” comprising a cup of tea and a sandwich made up of two thick slices of buttered bread enclosing an equally thick slice of tinned corned beef; meat we were destined to become very familiar with as “bully beef”. Anyway I was hungry and enjoyed it.

The train took us to Trentham and we were marched through the camp with the occupants lining the road looking for familiar faces among the new “intake”. I caught sight of an old school friend and stepped out of our ranks to ask where his hut was so that I could rejoin him when I was free. Then I rejoined a convenient “four” that was passing and with them went into a hut where we were allocated our platoons, company and hut.

That night I realised that there was not a soul in the hut that looked anything like a kindred spirit. They were all from the West Coast (South Island) and a number of them were coal miners. Attempts at a conversation with one or two about my own age did not get a very hearty response. They were not hostile but just neutral and I realised that I was being well weighed up. The crux came just before “lights out”. I noticed that several had knelt down by the side of the “stretchers” and seemed to be saying their prayers. That gave me courage to continue my practice of doing so, also. In the middle of them I heard someone say “sotto voce”, “Hey! What’s he saying his

prayers for? He's a Proddy". Apparently "in his book"
Protestants do not say prayers.

On the next page: Outside the Trentham Hut.
(Allan is in the back row 4th from the left).



They found, and I realised, that on the parade ground or training ground I was more than their equal. I was much more alert, quicker in my movements, faster in running and seemed to know as much as the Corporal who was training us. I, who had many times instructed boys how to “form fours” or “on the right form platoon”, etc., had to listen while a rather slow-speaking and slower-thinking Corporal struggled with his explanations.

I had not been in camp many weeks before I was surprised to be made a Corporal and the responsibility did not make a hard life any easier. Among the more remembered duties was that of the gargle parade. I had to get up an unearthly hour before dawn and collect an unspecified quantity of crystals of permanganate-of-potash and mix them with water to give to the platoon for gargling as soon as they were dressed. On the first morning I made myself very unpopular by making far too strong a solution and as they said through their coughing and choking, “nearly killing them”. However, once more the adage proved true, “experience teaches” and with the addition of more water to the crystals the next morning, they admitted that their lives were now out of danger and gargling became more endurable.



(Previous page: "Featherston Camp. Gargle Parade" a 1915-18 postcard by Mence & O'Halloran).

I was of course much younger than most of the men in my platoon and although I was careful to keep the authority I had to exercise well in the background. I think some of them resented, as they said, "being bossed by that kid". But one day they changed their minds and through no planning of mine. I was marching a squad through the camp grounds when we passed a General or someone like that. He was accompanied by a lesser light who was showing him considerable deference. As soon as we met them I should also have paid deference to his rank by giving the order "Eyes right" and saluted myself. At the critical moment I found I just could not do it. I was very tired and did not have enough energy left for it. As the squad marched past I could feel that they were all waiting for the order that did not come. As soon as we got past the General, there were one or two comments such as, "That's the stuff to give 'em, Corp". They thought that I had done it as an act of defiance; but I thought, "Is it bad enough for a court martial?" That night before "lights out", the whole platoon had heard about it and were chuckling, particularly when someone asked me why I did not give the order, I rather unguardedly said, "I just could not be bothered". However, I never heard anything officially further about it.

Infrequently, we were given Saturday afternoon leave to go to Wellington and on one of these occasions someone in their wisdom had organised a company football match for that same afternoon. In order to get any volunteers for the match an express train was specially stopped at Trentham to take the players to Wellington after the match. I volunteered to play and as our side was short of a "hooker", I played in that position. Of course we played in army boots, familiarly named "Bill Masseys", but as I seemed to be quicker than the others, avoided

kicks on the shins. At this stage I was slight of build and a little apprehensive of the tough thick-set, nuggety opponents. However, Cockroft's training at school enabled me to play apparently quite effective football. When we came off the field after the game there was quite a different attitude towards me. So much so that when we arrived in Wellington, some of them invited me to "Come into a pub and have a drink". In some respects this changed attitude was very gratifying, but at that time I was a teetotaler and so I replied, "Thanks very much, but I am a wowser and don't drink". They laughed and said that there was no wowser about me.

But I did not go and eventually ended up in the Y.M.C.A in Willis Street where entertainment for troops was being provided. The fact that I found this a dreary and boring experience is no reflection on the organizers who had taken on an Herculean task of finding entertainment for lonely soldiers aimlessly wandering the streets "on leave". To find satisfactory entertainers, night after night, which I presume was attempted, was an impossible search. I was glad when the time came to catch the train back to camp.

In other respects as well, the Y.M.C.A excelled in catering for the leisure hours of the soldiers, especially in camps. Facilities were provided for reading and for writing letters on "Y.M" paper where the reminder to "Write Home First" was prominently displayed at the head of all writing paper, which was supplied gratis. There were concerts, sing-songs and various other entertainments and on Sundays, variations of religious services. In fact the Y.M seemed to do all that camp limitations would allow for the pleasure and comfort of the troops.

I do not know who originated the idea, but each Company was asked to take part in a competition to give the best concert. I admitted to being able to play the piano "a bit" and was immediately booked for an item. I acquired some of my more

familiar music and practiced on the Y.M piano in the large concert hall. I had only got going when a “Y.M bloke” interrupted me with a statement that I was just the man he was looking for. It seemed that the pianist for the hymns for the Sunday evening service was suddenly not available and could I help them out. I did, but it was a new feeling sitting on a piano stool in front of the piano looking over a sea of faces which just about disappeared at the back of the hall in the mist of smoke. I had one or two ideas about playing hymns, and felt that the dirge-like manner in which most were usually played should be kept for hymns of the type “Abide in me”. By banging fairly hard on the piano I persuaded, I think, even the very doleful singers to realise that most of the hymns were cheerful and that although they were not exactly ragtime they could be sung with zest and verve. I was not asked to play again. Perhaps their “regular” was again available.

I was a little nervous about playing at our Company concert particularly as it was opened by another pianist who thumped away at “Blaze Away” with much gusto. My effort came in the second half of the programme and it was with some trepidation that I played Coleridge-Taylor’s “Valse de la Reine”, slightly speeded up and emphasizing the rhythm. I received quite a good reception, but as it was the only one I had dredged out of the past, I could not respond to an encore. Except for one item, the rest of the programme comprised songs, recitations, etc; the kind of fare of “party pieces” which were later on elbowed out after the War by improvements in the art of the mechanical reproduction of sound.

The star item of our concert was a band, mainly brass, which as far as the absence of one or two important instruments would allow, creditably played “Colonel Bogey”. Our Company won the competition.

From Trentham we were transferred to Featherston. The journey over the rack railway over the Rimutakas was

interesting, but one realised that only an inexhaustible supply of Government money could have effected it. After a few weeks of normal and comparatively comfortable camp routine, we were transferred to Tauherenikau.

2 Tauherenikau

So far, camp life had been on the whole a bit of a bore, so that when we learned that we were to go to a camp in Tauherenikau we thought that it would at least be a change. It was! When we arrived, it was pouring with rain, and the only building in the camp was a large hall which was run jointly by the Y.M.C.A and the Salvation Army. The whole area seemed to be a limitless wind-swept waste dotted here and there with groups of bell-tents and stunted trees which, showing marked evidence of the effect of the prevailing winds, boded ill for us and our tents. The very entrance-way to the camp consisted of two posts which obviously had formed the supports for a gate which had now disappeared. But to pass between the posts we had to wade through a sea of mud which was deep enough to cover the toe-caps of our boots.

I pass over the details of settling in, but that evening, the whole camp tried to get into the recreation hut for the very welcome cup of cocoa and a bun that could be obtained. It was enough trouble to fight your way to the cocoa but even more difficult to drink it without spilling it because of the dense crush. I met several old friends and although the refreshment temporarily raised our spirits, by comparing the discomforts we were variously suffering, we foolishly lowered them even more than before.

And it was many days before we could raise our spirits. The tents leaked onto the wooden flooring and the blankets, so that our clothes were cold and always more or less damp. Of course

sickness was rife. But more ominous were the single shots that were occasionally heard, mostly at night. It was firmly believed, as it was commonly expressed, "Another joker has done himself in. Well he is now better off than we are".

Be that as it may, one morning we had hardly started off on a route march, when a man in the "four" immediately in front of me, and considerably older than I was, suddenly whipped a blade razor from under his sleeve and slashed his throat with it. Someone tried to stem the blood that was pouring out of the gash with a handkerchief, but it disappeared into the bloody mess. To me the hopelessly dejected man seemed to have made an irrevocable job of it, but inquiries from our officers some days later received the information that he was recovering quite well. Of course he was! In the mood we were in, could they have told us anything else?

For many of the men the misery was heightened by the fact that they were separated from their respective wives and children and were homesick. The change from home comforts to this cheerless and bleak wilderness was too much to take. Added to all this was the terrible (to them) uncertainty of the future.

For my part I was not so badly affected as they were. I was young and perfectly fit and thought as little as I could about how miserable I was. In addition, boarding school life had helped to make the transition to camp life easy, as apart from the question of comfort and happiness, there was much similarity between the two kinds of life. A redeeming feature was that in camp we were comparatively safe.

At length we were transferred back to Trentham and got ready for the "final leave" before going overseas to France.

There was however, one important parade from which no one, without exception, was excused. This was the V.D. parade held in the largest hall in the camp. There we were given all the intimate details about sexual intercourse and the very great

danger of catching venereal disease. We were told what precautions to take, what to do if we suspected we had it, and above all we were shown nauseating pictures of the horrifying effects of it. It was meant to scare us off any chances of getting it. We were all unanimous that "it was a mug's game". But many did not realise that of the two guides for action, reason and emotion, emotion was the strongest, and therefore when the two came into conflict, it was emotion that won, unless its danger was recognised and controlled. And who among that Company had learned to control his emotions. So when the crisis came it was reason that flew out the door.

In addition to this lecture, our platoon had another salutary lesson. In Tauherenikau one of our popular and well-respected platoon Sergeants suddenly left us and was reported to have become blind as a result of washing his face in a basin which had previously been used by someone for washing his V.D sores.

Most of us spent our final leave with our families. Parties and presents cheered us up, but although the donors chose wisely and as expensively as they could, many of them were simply useless for front-line soldiering. Uncle Jack gave me a fountain pen with a metal pocket sheath and a pair of ebony whale-bone hairbrushes.

Father and Mother gave me a small pocket Bible which I could carry in the breast pocket of my tunic. Mrs Morrison, wife of the Presbyterian Minister, gave me a sealed envelope as the train was moving off the Waimate station, with instructions to open it when I had a quiet opportunity. It was the kind of present which usually encloses a cheque. When the quiet opportunity arrived, I found it to contain a typed sheet of the hymn, "Fight the good fight". Somehow I was arrested with the idea of a morally "good fight". How did fighting line up with Christian principles? I was beginning to realise that there were possibilities in the soldiering life which were questionable.

As the day for embarkation drew near, family groups with a khaki member as centre, could be seen wandering gloomily round the camp grounds. Mother and Father formed one of those groups and I showed them around. Of particular interest was the ablution arrangements and the “hard case” ablution attendant regaled us with the information about the embarrassment that some men experienced when they stood stark naked among other men also stark naked and fully exposed under the showers. It was rather an unnecessary piece of gratuitous information and I was quick to explain to my people that I had got past that stage of development when I first went to Timaru Boys’ High School.

At length the dreaded day came and we were marched on to the Wellington wharf with the usual fan-fare of bands, cheering crowds, etc. I made my farewells to my family pretty brief before embarking on the “Ruahine”; but some of the goodbyes were heart-rending. One soldier was saying goodbye to two ladies of about thirty years of age, and from the deck of the ship we saw first one lady and then the other break down into uncontrollable grief. Finally the soldier himself broke down, and although the authorities allowed him to be the last on board, it still required the attention of two officers to get him there.

The pilot who was to take the “Ruahine” out of the harbour was Captain “Larry” Inkster, who was also my uncle, having married my mother’s sister “Dinnie”, at whose hands I had received many kindnesses while on weekend leaves. Father also “wangled” to be on board the “Ruahine” as she went out, and left with Uncle on the pilot boat. But it was only prolonging the agony. For my part I thought of the strange places I would see, while my parents and brother and sister had to remain and hope for the best at home.

3 On the “Ruahine”

Our Company had the steerage accommodation on the “Ruahine” and I was in a four-berth cabin. The other three in the cabin happened to be mates and as I could not play Bridge, it appeared that my presence was not very welcome. So I changed into another cabin, being encouraged by another incident which also urged the change. My parents had given me a large biscuit tin filled with cakes and sweets, and although I shared some of it with the others in the cabin, when I came to “treat” myself after a day or two at sea, I found an unusually large portion of the contents had disappeared. Of course no one could (or perhaps “would”) offer any explanation. They were also heavy smokers, and as I did not smoke at all, I found that a smoke-filled cabin was not a good cure for sea-sickness.

However, in accordance with the usual transport practice I was reduced to the rank of Lance-Corporal and would lose that rank when we disembarked. This I would be very willing to do as I found that on the boat I was messenger boy for everybody and had little time for lying about in the cabin or even on deck. All the original cargo space was used for accommodating soldiers, much of it being below the water line. Ventilation was by means of canvas chutes which were alright when we had a head-wind, but a following wind, or even the dead calm of the tropics, reduced to a marked degree the supply of fresh air to those in the “black holes”. The consequence was that whenever the weather permitted it, everyone came up on deck and all available space was occupied; except some of the hatches where, platoon by platoon we did some pretty solid “physical jerks”. But in the course of my duties in moving about the ship I often had to make my way over sardine-packed humanity. So if by some mischance I kicked, knocked, trod on, or stumbled over, one or two bodies, the quality and volume of their imprecations certainly destined me for hell.

But there were plenty of pleasant times too. In the course of my rounds I met a Timaru man whose daughter had been much admired by the High School boys. He was a cook for the officers' mess and we just about made ourselves homesick by talking about Timaru. On the occasions when we arranged to meet, he always arrived with buns, cakes or some other of the more tasty food from the officers' mess. This was a welcome relief from our plainer fare.

I had also received a carton of about a dozen stiff-backed books of the type of Zane Grey, O. Henry, etc, to read on the boat. And of course I loaned them to my friends, and as reading material was very scarce I acquired an artificial popularity; at least till, in spite of my best efforts, I had lost track of so many books that my resources for lending were becoming very limited. But by this time we had reached the Panama Canal and American ladies, bordering the sides of the locks to cheer us through, tossed bundles of American magazines on board. Unfortunately these dwindled into an acute shortage too, as a lot of the soldiers used the less glossy ones for purposes which were necessary for their comfort and cleanliness but for which the paper was not designed.

When we left Wellington Harbour there had been much speculation as to where we were going, but with the sun appearing on our left hand at noon when we faced the bow of the boat, we soon realised we were going east and probably through the Panama Canal. Apparently we were among the first to go through and all the material and machines for the construction work were lying about, if not still in use. In going through what was then the immense "Calubra Cut" (but now called the Gaillard Cut) we were held up for several hours because part of one of its huge sides, towering high about the top of the mast of the ship, had slipped into the canal and we did not know whether we were delayed because the canal did not give sufficient room and depth of water for us to pass or "they" were afraid more might come down and engulf us.

The fresh water supply in such a tightly packed ship was a problem and sea water was used freely in the ablution rooms which were often temporary “lean-tos” on deck. We had “sea water soap” to make a lather with the sea water, but it was not a very successful arrangement. Consequently when in our passage through the Canal, nature obligingly turned on a sudden tropical shower, the more venturesome were soon happily lathering their naked bodies in the rain. It was quite a sight to see these dozens of naked bodies getting a good lather up under this heaven-sent opportunity. But alas, they did not know the vagaries of a tropical shower and before they realised what had happened, a blistering sun was shining down on them from a blue sky from which the rain clouds had almost disappeared. The frantic haste with which they dived for any little pool of water that remained on deck, gave further entertainment, orchestrated by the rude and impertinent comments of the more cautious members of the ship’s company. Next morning there was a large sick-parade of men claiming to suffer from anything from itchy skin to a skin disease.

The episode was soon forgotten as the various wonders of the Canal including the Gatun Locks and the coaling facilities at Christobal, came into view. But we had no shore leave and there was a rumour that we were behind schedule. Perhaps this was because we had soldier firemen and equally amateur coal trimmers who failed to keep us on an even keel.

So we sailed out through the Caribbean Sea to the Bahamas where we joined a convoy. By now we were sailing in complete darkness with not a light showing and with guards posted at strategic points, including out-swung lifeboats whose occupants had to shoot at anything they thought might be a periscope of a submarine. We crept up the East Coast of North America and finally arrived at Halifax Harbour where the Bedford basin contained a large number of war vessels of various kinds, including the little “Mokoia”, a sister transport we had said

farewell to when it was pitching and tossing in a rather turbulent sea which had hardly affected us.

But our turn was to come. We had pulled up at a coaling wharf with its ominous mountains of coal and no coal-handling equipment. It did not require much sagacity to realise that we were to handle the coal and load the ship. It appears that the “Ruahine” was the slowest ship in the convoy and in order to speed it up we had to load this Welsh anthracite steaming coal (sic, my comrade miners). So the next morning, with the promise in our ears that when we had finished we could have shore leave till midnight, behold us running up and down gang-planks with baskets of coal on our shoulders and dumping it into bunkers.

After our weeks of idling on the voyage we soon began to flag at this coolie work. The end result seemed to be trivial for the large amount of effort that we had to exert and it was not long therefore before we found where the lightest baskets were obtained. At lunch time we realised we had not achieved much except get ourselves and the ship in a filthy, black, dusty mess.

Our officers seemed to have realised that too and gave us a good pep talk before we commenced again, and as a further stimulus a large “ragtime” band arrived on the scene and with sprightly and “catchy” music attempted to improve our rate of working. Nevertheless, we finished under artificial light and after we had cleaned the ship and ourselves, it hardly seemed worthwhile going ashore. But I was anxious to see Halifax as I thought I might not have a chance of seeing it again. It was a prophetic thought.

I had a mate, Tom P____l, a half-caste Maori, whose general ideas on life seemed to be similar to mine, and together we decided to do the town. We learned that there was a “fair” on the outskirts of the city, and boarding the tram that was to take us there, we sat down on a seat together. I realised that we were the objects of unusual interest from the other passengers but put

it down to the uniform and the “lemon squeezer” hats. However, when the guard came for our fare, a conversation something like this ensued:

“Where are you guys from?”

“New Zealand”.

“Going to the war?”

“Yes”.

Pointing to Tom and addressing me, “Is he with you?”

“Of course”.

“Oh, I guess it’s alright”.

I did not realise till years afterwards that his problem was that we had overstepped the colour bar.

And when we did arrive at the fair we found that it was all over and packing up was in progress. However, we had had a big day and were quite ready to get back to the ship and sleep. During the night we moved out into the Bedford Basin.

The chief excitement for the next few days was submarine drill in which we lowered lifeboats and climbed down the ship’s sides by means of rope nets, which were a kind of rope ladder in multiple. After rowing round a little we would go back to the ship and climb back on board again. This was more difficult than climbing down for our feet would somehow come up level with our faces. We were green with envy when we found that some of the other boats had rowed to the country villages on the other side of the Basin and been given a cordial welcome by the local populace.

Eventually the convoy moved out into the stormy Atlantic with not a light showing and destroyers darting in and out of the lines of ships. We did manage to keep up with the convoy or perhaps they slowed for us, but when a thick fog enveloped us that was the last that we saw of them. A few days later, with the fog still

blanketing out everything, we woke up to the sound of trams. I hurriedly dressed and rushed up on deck to find the fog dispersing and revealing miles of shipyards along the banks of the Clyde, as we were later soon to learn. Soon sirens began to blow everywhere and men and women dressed in overalls (tut tut) rushed to the vantage points to wave, cheer and shout to us. It was a thrilling experience and there was no doubt about the enthusiastic welcome we were getting. There was quite a continuous exchange of banter and some of it was quite bawdy. But it was a relief to know that we were safely across the Atlantic Ocean.

Before we disembarked at Glasgow, the word went round to “get away” with as much food as we could carry. I got the idea that it was quite unofficial and we were thieving from somebody. Nevertheless, I thought I might as well take advantage of the situation too. We were told officially to prepare ourselves with ‘twenty-four hours’ rations as it might be some time before we got to a camp in England. I made myself several “sandwiches” of slabs of cheese between two hard ships-biscuits and in addition carried off about a ten-pound tin of corned beef and some sugar and bread.

4 An introduction to war-time England

It was dark when we disembarked and boarded a train which eventually pulled up at a siding in a deep “cutting”. There was a row of houses at the top and soon Scottish children were serenading us in their quaint and attractive accent, with all sorts of songs of the type “Just a wee deoch and doris” to “Will ye no come back again?” I thought the latter song was a bit inappropriate for the occasion but it seemed to go down well with the troops. Then a childish voice called out, “Have ye any mate (meat)?”, and immediately our soft-hearted loons,

succumbing to the emotional atmosphere engendered by the songs, began giving them some of the extra meat, sugar, etc., that we had brought off the boat. I had an inkling that perhaps if it was so scarce as the children indicated, it might be a good idea to keep it. I do not know how long their kind-hearted foolishness lasted, but I went to sleep and woke to find the train was moving through the early morning English countryside. Feeling hungry I gnawed at my ships-biscuit sandwich. It was just as well that I did, for shortly afterwards the train dumped us at a siding from which we had to walk several miles, carrying all our gear including our heavy kit-bags. We struggled through rough, dew-pearled country lanes and by the time we had arrived at our destination we were quite ready for a good breakfast.

We found that we had arrived at Brockton Camp in Staffordshire and when we were allocated our huts, which were the usual Nissen type accommodating forty men with all sleeping and eating equipment, we saw that we were directly adjacent to a German prisoner-of-war camp, which of course was surrounded by vicious barbed-wire entanglements. We thought they were a pretty scruffy lot as they scowled their hatred at us.

Breakfast was slow in coming, but when it did arrive we found it comprised a kipper and a thin round of bread and margarine each. Our comments were loud and to the point. "It was not even good enough for a starter". Now I realised why we had been encouraged to carry off the ship as much food as we could, and how foolish it was to have given it away to the Glasgow children. I finished off breakfast with another ships-biscuit sandwich, still smug in the knowledge that I had a large tin of bully-beef hidden in my kit.

Lunch consisted of two slices of bread and some cheese and marmalade. This was not enough of a good thing and so one by one we produced our remaining spare food and divided it up.

Tea comprised similar starvation rations and when it was finished we decided to go and buy some. But we were in isolation for ten days with an armed Tommy guard at the entrance to our quarters, just for that very purpose, to see that no one broke bounds. I then felt relieved that I no longer had the Lance-Corporal's stripe which I had to give up on landing in England. I could not be held responsible now for what I thought was going to happen. But when the guard saw a large crowd of determined New Zealanders descending on him, he gave up and we went out unchallenged. However, we did promise to be "good boys" and be back by "lights out".

Tom P. and I working together had very little success in our foraging, due of course to the fact that the whole area had been pretty well done over long before we arrived. So the next night we set out on a run and got as far away from camp as we thought time would permit. We were fortunate to knock at a farmhouse where New Zealanders were a welcome curiosity. When we explained our visit they set us down to a large meal of rabbit pie, potatoes and green peas, followed by stewed fruit and custard. Never was a meal more welcome, for our fast travelling had completely wiped out any good effect that our meagre tea at the camp had had on our appetite. They refused our offer of payment, but we insisted because we said, "we would like to come again tomorrow night". "Alright", they replied, "half-a-crown each; but see you do not tell anyone about this or bring anyone else with you". And so we were sustained each night for our ten days in "isolation". On the final night we told them we were going on "overseas" leave before going to France and with our profuse thanks gave them a tunic button for a souvenir. They gave us a packet of boiled sweets, which in those sugar-starved times was quite a sacrifice which we well appreciated. We never saw them again and our desultory correspondence gave place to a lasting memory of the great kindness we had received from them and the sacrifices we

realised later, they must have made to supply us with those meals.

In the meantime during our “isolation” the four-page copies of the current national daily newspapers told us of the disaster that had overtaken Halifax which we had left about ten days previously. Apparently many of the ships we had seen in the Basin were loaded with explosives and ammunition and an explosion on one ship had set off all the explosives on all the other ships. The result was that the city of Halifax was literally flattened.

On top of this came the news of the slaughter of the New Zealand Division at Passchendaele and a few days later we were issued with our ration tickets and railways passes for our four days' leave prior to going to France. It seemed we were not to have the three-months' training in England to toughen us up after the sea voyage and get us ready for the rigours of front-line warfare. Passchendaele had seen to that. Apparently “they” were scraping the barrel to fill the gaps in the Division. I followed the general practice of having my “pass” made out to Aberdeen so that I could travel anywhere I wished between London and Aberdeen, although my intention was to spend it in London.

5 Final overseas leave

Our first days in London were impressive, including the cold, drab, foggy days of autumn. Most of us made our way via the “tubes” to the Y.M.C.A. Hut in Russell Square. I enjoyed the change to the more civilised method of living and noted with interest the various requests for unused ration tickets as well as the instruction at various places on the walls of the dining rooms, “Stir like hell. Sugar is scarce”.

I had obtained a map of London and by drawing two straight lines at right angles and intersecting at Trafalgar Square, had divided London into four parts, one part to be done each day. But it did not quite work out like that. I set out the first morning with a group from our platoon who thought my idea might not be bad. But at the first “public house” we came to in Southampton Row they all disappeared inside to “have a quick one”. The “quick one” dragged on for over half an hour with me waiting outside just to enjoy the strangeness of everything. During this time I had been subjected to some persuasive but unwelcome female blandishments. In the end I went off on my own and on entering St Pauls Cathedral was shaken by the sense of the historicity of the place. All these kings and great men had really lived and were resting here. The legendary figures of the history lessons at school were now becoming a reality not previously perceived. It was quite an emotional experience not without its humorous side to me. I thought, “There lay several of the old blighters on whose account I had probably “got the strap”, because I had not remembered their dates”. History was not my strong subject and I now regretted it. I was so absorbed in this experience that I did not leave enough time in the afternoon to do justice to Westminster Abbey where I had a similar experience. But I realised my “quadrant” plan for seeing London was impracticable.

In the evening another thrill awaited me, when I managed to obtain a seat in a revue called “Bubbly”. The only thing I had seen before even approaching this type of show was “The Quaker Girl” by Lionel Monkton at the Theatre Royal in Timaru. Monkton’s catchy music appealed to me and I thumped away at it on the piano for years afterwards. But “Bubbly” was “something again” with the glitter and spectacle superimposed on the catchy music. Some of the scenes were based on the war in France, and of course it did not look too bad.

Next day I called on Father's London agents, Whiteaways, and having found their building, had to find my way to a Mr Fox's office. Stepping out of a lift on his floor, I found myself the cynosure of the eyes of at least a hundred typists, each at her own desk and facing my way. There was no doubt of their friendly interest as I walked down an aisle which divided groups of rows and I for my part realised how pretty English girls were. Even when seated with Mr Fox in his office, which was enclosed in windows that gave an interrupted view of the main office in every direction, I still felt - or thought I could - all those eyes watching me.

Mr Fox was still suffering from the shock of arriving at his office to find that a German bomb the previous night had damaged the two top floors of their multi-storied building. However, he took me to a military tailor where I was outfitted in a uniform of good cut and cloth, which, although it did not conform to military regulations, was worn by most New Zealanders as befitted their fabled wealth.



Rfm 55636 in “a uniform of good cut and cloth”.

Father had kindly arranged for a substantial credit for me at Whiteaways which came in useful. On the other hand, as I did not “go in for” drinking or gambling, my paybook also showed a substantial credit.

Mr Fox was also kind enough to invite me to stay, for some of my leave, at his home in Muswell Hill. The journey by tube to the then terminus, Highgate, and then by bus to Muswell Hill took almost an hour and a half. This to me, then used to travelling short distances in New Zealand, was a big waste of time.

Mr Fox’s household consisted of his wife, young son, and two girls about my own age. One girl was his daughter and other his wife’s cousin. When we arrived the girls were struggling to play a piece of music on the piano called “In the Shadows” which was also a popular party piece in New Zealand. After the usual introductions the girls asked me if I could play the piano as they were having some difficulty with the time. So I played it for them to their apparent complete satisfaction; but not to mine, as my lack of practice was very obvious. But the rest of the time till tea time was spent helping the girls with their playing, and during that time there was a distinct thawing of the atmosphere.

Apparently the “colonial” was not so very wild, but he did “drop a few bricks”. I thought that the “tea” was the last meal of the day and had some difficulty in satisfying my hunger with the light meal provided. At about 8.30 it was announced that supper was ready in the dining room. This was another surprise as it consisted of sausages, mash and vegetables, followed by a “sweet”. They were surprised, as I was, to realise that the terms “tea” and “supper” had different connotations in England and New Zealand.

I spent the next day sight-seeing in London but arranged to meet the girls after their working day in the city to take them to the Palladium. There were some religious barriers to this in the

family, but they were lowered as I heard the parents say, "Something might come of it". I had bought tickets for the orchestral stalls, and I, with the girls on either side, found we were seated almost in a sea of gold braid of high ranking officers. The girls were uneasy about this, so I said, "Look, my money is the same as theirs. So let's forget them and enjoy ourselves". And we did. There was one scene where the "funny man", acting like a moron, wanted to know what the letters R A F meant. He was told "Regularly after flappers". This produced a round of laughter from the audience and I clapped rather too heartily for air-force officers in the vicinity and received some stony stares which of course, did not have the effect they had hoped.

I left the Fox household next morning and continued my sight-seeing, ending up with opera, this time "Aida". This again was a totally new entertainment experience thoroughly enjoyed, especially as I had the company of another Digger. As the opera house was emptying the air-raid alarm went, one or two women fainted, and the stream of outgoing people reversed itself and poured back into the theatre. There was some confusion as those in the building proper had not heard the alarm and were waiting to go out while those outside were wanting to come in. Someone called out "It's the Zeppelins!" and so my solidier friend and I went outside to watch in awe the fingers of the searchlights searching the sky. We were almost immediately pounced on by an air-raid warden who ordered us to get into a shelter. After some parley, realising we were New Zealanders, gave us permission to walk back to our lodging.

Next morning we heard that a bomb had dropped in Piccadilly Circus and we went round to see. But it was all railed off and the evidence of destruction was all fenced off and we could see very little. The newspapers however, railed against the inadequate protection of the city and fairly let themselves go. Obviously they were very "jumpy".

After another day of sight-seeing, including Petticoat Lane, we returned to camp and a few days afterwards we found ourselves on a train on our way to France. In the grey dusk of the October evening we saw little of the English countryside and even less of the port we were leaving. We were unloaded almost immediately into the cross-channel steamer and, with destroyers continuously shooting across our bows, came safely to Boulogne. After disembarking we were marched over cobblestones to a camp which was known as “One blanket hill” and sure enough, we were issued with one blanket each, and settled down for a grey drizzly night in bell tents. But these did not leak.

6 The “Lost Battalion”

The next morning we were loaded into the typical troop train in France, where the carriages/trucks were labelled “Hommes 40”. Chevaux (en longue) 8”. So we squatted on our packs on the floor and seemed to be in the process of being shunted all around France. I dozed off to sleep and was awakened in the small hours of the morning with shouts of, “Come on! All out! Get a move on!” So, dazed and miserable, we tumbled out of the trucks into a cold and rainy night at some unidentifiable station or siding. We were ordered to get ourselves into columns of threes and headed by a Corporal, we marched off.

“Where are we going to, Corp?”

“You’ll see”.

“How far is it?”

“You’ll see”.

“Do you know where you’re going?”

“Enough of that. You’ll see”.

So we marched for several hours and passed through numerous villages, each one of which we thought would be our destination for the night. But no; on we trudged and stumbled over cobblestones, till foot sore and weary, we were heartily sick of it. I was on the outside of our “three” and told the stranger next to me that I was going to fall out at the next village we came to. “I’m with you, Dig,” he said. To my amazement, at the next village all the column behind followed our example. We found a carpenter’s workshop and we dossed among the shavings for the rest of the night.

I was woken by the rest of the “residents” looking round for something to eat. They had already stripped an apple tree outside when the owner arrived. It made no difference to us whether he was speaking to us in polite French or swearing at us. We had no idea what he said.

I suggested to those around me that the best thing to do was to go in the direction we were heading yesterday and buy something when we came to suitable shops. About fifteen of us moved off, and the rest were for staying and postponing any further effort. When my party came to a cross-road there was a difference of opinion as to which way to go, and as we were a stubborn and perhaps short-tempered lot, I found myself with a group of five. After we had passed a patch of blackberries there was none left on it, and when we passed a paddock of turnips it was quite apparent afterwards that we had been there too. But this only made a square meal more desirable.

Eventually we did come to a shop which was also obviously a bakery. So I marched in and in my best Fifth Form French said, “Voulez-vous moi donner du pain, s’il vous plait?” This rather surprised my companions, one of whom remarked, “The bug—r speaks the lingo”. Unfortunately the meaning did not register with the mademoiselle who was serving us and I was finally reduced to pointing to a loaf and saying, “Du pain, s’il vous plait”. She gave me the loaf, but refused payment. Then the

others wanted one each. After I had pointed out that bread was probably rationed and had to be accounted for, we were content with only one more. With requests “not to make a welter of it” and a “fair thing is a fair thing”, we divided the loaves among us and scraped the jam out of the Player’s cigarette tin in which each kept his ration.

We wandered on till later afternoon, when we were surprised by an officer riding a horse who immediately drew up in front of us and asked, “Are you part of the last reinforcement?” To our affirmative, he ordered us to follow him and when it was late at night we arrived at a farmhouse which was to be our “home” for an indefinite time. We were given a welcome meal of stew and lay down to sleep in the hay-loft above the cows.

The next thing I remember was someone blowing “reveille” on a bugle and I immediately went to sleep again. So did my exhausted companions who were with me in the hay-loft. Somehow or other we were not missed after breakfast, probably because we were not officially on the Company Roll. However, when it was realised that we had disobeyed “reveille” etc., we were paraded for punishment.

After a heated harangue which emphasised that we were on active service and that orders must be implicitly obeyed, we were asked if we had anything to say. I spoke up and said, “We have been walking almost continuously for two days with practically no food and were fairly well exhausted. So much so, that Reveille did not waken us enough for us to realise where we were. We did not intend to disobey”. That seemed to have eased the situation a little and we were told that orders have to be carried out at all times and in spite of our exhaustion. That seemed to be the end of the affair and as our stiffness wore off, we took stock of our position. It seemed we were now in “D” Company, Fourth Battalion, Rifle Brigade of which all but five were earlier part of our “lost reinforcements”. The five were all that were left of “D” Company after Passchendaele. In other

words, the Company had all but been wiped out. The five were all made sergeants.

7 Initiation into war

After our seven weeks voyage and our periods in isolation and on leave, we were physically very unfit, and I think our routine for the next few weeks was designed to toughen us up. We had the usual route-marches with “full packs up”. Physical drill, Musketry drill, etc., culminating with a pseudo attack on trenches with live ammunition, probably to initiate us into the real thing and “battle-toughen” us. We were drawn up for this in single ranks on a small plateau, which gently sloped on one side to lower levels. One single rank fired live ammunition straight ahead and rushed over the edge of the decline to lower levels. As soon as they had disappeared over the edge, the next line fired their live rounds, so that the previous line heard the bullets whistling overhead as they ran down the slope. As so it went on with the remaining lines. There were all sorts of rumours of how many were killed, but I did not see any bodies and there would be plenty of obvious signs if such an eventuality did happen. The “stunt” was never repeated.

So our hardening up process went on till one night we eventually found ourselves de-training at a railhead directly behind the lines. Now we were confronted with the “real thing”. It was cold, raining and very miserable, of course, and just further to dampen our spirits everything was hidden in the black darkness. On the horizon gun flashes could be seen and the occasional wail of a shell could be heard. We did not know then that when a shell wails it is not destined for us. But until we realised this, it was rather disturbing. Everyone moved quietly and without lights and that made things even more eerie. We stumbled on closer to the front line with the signs of

shelling and its destruction becoming ever more frequent. Some shell holes were full of water and some were dry and what was more ominous, the dry ones smelt of recently burnt cordite. Was “he” re-loading the guns ready for a salvo in the same direction, or had “he” stopped for tea?

Eventually we arrived at a railway embankment where the rails were distorted into all sorts of peculiar shapes. Dug in the sides of the embankment were “bivvies” lined with corrugated iron in the shape of a half-cylinder, and with sand-bag walls outside screening the entrances. These were to be our home for some time. They were damp and very cold. I endeavoured to make a fire with the “coal” which was lying round the embankment and after I had exhausted all the available material for kindling it, I learned that it was slag and would not burn. Whatever coal had ever been spilled there had been burned by previous inhabitants long ago.

We were given some hot stew for tea and had also the “unexpended portion” of our twenty-four hour’s ration which consisted of a lump of cheese, a reasonable portion of a loaf of bread and some marmalade which we kept in our Player’s cigarette tins, all tied up in a white calico ration bag. After tea I put my unexpended portion at my head, thinking that would keep the rats off, of which there were obviously plenty, and went to sleep. Suddenly I woke up spluttering and I was sure a rat had put its leg in my open mouth. On looking round I saw two beady eyes gleaming at me in the darkness and on feeling round I realised my ration bag was empty (except for the tin) with a convenient hole (for the rat) in it. Evidently the rat had taken the precaution to have his meal first before waking me. Then it seemed to me that we were almost immediately roused for sick parade followed by breakfast. I was rather stiff and sore and was pleased to find that apart from a little light “fatigue duty” we had nothing much to do in preparation for “front line fatigue” that night.

8 Front line fatigue duty

So after dark we moved off to form a working party to carry wooden duckboards in the support trenches. Duckboards were like short ladders about six feet long with the “rungs” only a few inches apart. The two main sides which supported the rungs were wider apart at one end than at the other, so that the sides of the small end could fit inside the wider end. Mounted on small supporting piles they made a small continuous bridge at the bottom of the trench all along the trench. And we found later that they were necessary for satisfactory progress over the mud at the bottom of the trench.

We each collected a duckboard from a dump at the end of a corduroy road which had very evidently been receiving recent attention from Fritz. The “road” itself was in effect a bridge slightly elevated above the muddy morass, and pitted with shell holes filled with water. Part of the road had recently been successfully shelled and along its length were portions of horses and limbers which the shells had torn apart. Shortly we stepped off the road in single file onto the viscous mud on which we could see a zig-zag line of white tape, but on no account to tread on it. Obviously the tape would be lost in the mud. Suddenly a shell screamed and exploded some distance off with a muffled plomp and sometime afterwards we were relieved to find that we were walking in the protection of a shallow trench. Drainage was obviously a problem and as we struggled along slipping and sliding each with a duckboard on his shoulder, we had, in addition, to cope with our rifles, greatcoats, web equipment and ammunition and gas masks. We finally left our duckboards in a heap and that was all that was required of us.

All that was necessary now was to get back to the railway dugouts safely. I was very tired and it was all I could do to keep the man in front of me in sight. I had no idea where we were as we had left the tapes, but my boots were covered in glutinous

mud, my puttees were hardly visible as the mud extended to over my knees, but I had a suspicion that most of the puttees were buried in the thick coating of mud round my ankles. On the corduroy road we withdrew to a pile of sandbags which proved to be a kind of labyrinth entrance to a Y.M.C.A canteen. Never was cocoa more welcome even though it was made with only warm water and we drank from communal mugs which were disused condensed milk tins whose jagged edges showed that they had been opened by cutting round with a pocket knife and required caution to avoid cutting one's lips. The Y.M "blokes" were extremely anxious that we should be all out of sight and even although it was pitch dark were leaving nothing to chance. They thought the Germans had some sort of observation on their dugout which was hardly proof against flares. As it was, things were a bit lively. We had hardly left the "canteen" when a shell burst far too close to be ignored.

I saw a man suddenly lunge forward and his "tin hat" (steel helmet) fly into the air. My senses seemed to be be-numbed with fatigue and I made no attempt to dive for cover. But it was not necessary as it was only a stray shell. When the "casualty" was picked up, apart from being a little dazed and having a sore head he was unharmed. A splinter from the shell had hit his tin hat, dented it and knocked him over. Eventually we arrived at the railway dugouts, and completely exhausted, I almost immediately fell asleep in spite of the mud, rats and all.

The routine for the next twenty-four hours was the same as the previous twenty-four, except that this time we were shelled with the duckboards on our shoulders, and not wasting time to discard the duckboard I jumped straight into a dry shell hole. I don't know quite what happened but I had a searing pain in my groin. I staggered through the rest of the night continuously in pain and the spell at the Y.M dugout was never more welcome. Again I arrived at our bivvies exhausted, but this time I was past sleep. The rats were having a party in the far corner of my bivvy, but I was too tired to bother.

9 Collapse

When the Corporal came round in the morning for names for sick parade, after I had given him mine I overheard him say “There’s another of those lead-swinging bastards of the new reinforcements in there.” However, I never attended the parade. Nature made an urgent call and I managed to arrive at the latrine and successfully perch over the pole which was the business part of the latrine. I had a violent pain and remember thinking that I must avoid at all costs falling over backwards into the trench below. The next thing I recall was a kind of swinging movement while I was lying down. Then it gradually disappeared and then came on again. After several periods of similar sensations, I finally realised that I was being carried on a stretcher. Then I heard somebody say, “The lucky bugger is coming round”. So I was, but I had no strength either to move or speak. I was left on the stretcher deposited outside the aid post. My bearers had disappeared and a light rain was falling. Suddenly my attention was riveted on a Captain, who was standing at the foot of the stretcher bawled, “What are you doing there man? Do your trousers up!” Apparently they were still in the state of undress required at the latrine. But I had no strength and could only make a sickly grin at him. “How long have you been there?” Again a grin. Then he stormed between the sandbag at the door of the aid post, and I heard him shout, “What are you men doing playing cards? Don’t you know there is a very ill soldier outside requiring immediate attention. No wonder we are losing so many men from sickness. If that man dies, I will court-martial the lot of you for gross neglect of duty.”

The reply of the medical orderlies was inaudible and I must have passed out again. When I came round there was quite an air of relief in the aid post. Eventually during the night an ambulance arrived, but everyone was jittery. Some shells had fallen close and to carry me on a stretcher from the aid post to

the ambulance several hundred yards away took valuable time. Walking was quicker and so with someone supporting me and someone else carrying my equipment which had somehow arrived, we stumbled along and scrambled into the ambulance.

Right away we were off to the casualty clearing station. There I was given every attention and although I walked into the station I was immediately assisted to lie down on a stretcher. I hoped the good work would continue to go round about me.

The next stage was an ambulance train to Boulogne. Somehow I clambered into a compartment of a typically English suburban carriage with passengers sitting in two rows facing each other with the seriously wounded in stretchers where the parcel racks usually are. The majority of the other passengers were West Indians from Jamaica who were finding difficulty in surviving the bitterly cold weather.

10 55th General Hospital, Wimereux

We arrived at the Fifty-Fifth General Hospital at Wimereux outside Boulogne. I think I was bathed, given some pyjamas, put into bed and to a blissful sleep, secure in the knowledge that I was as safe there as anywhere in that part of the world.

The ward was a Nissen Hut which accommodated over thirty beds, and I was awakened by a stench. At one end of the ward some patients with trench feet were having them dressed as gangrene had set in and they were worried about amputation. There were also what I thought were severe pleurisy and asthmatical cases, but proved to be gas victims who were coughing vile brown mucus from their lungs.

When it was found that I was awake, a V.A.D. who spoke English with a beautiful accent and had a face to match, gave me a bowl of gruel or something similar. She left me to feed

myself, but in the process I fell asleep. Similarly in taking my temperature I fell asleep also, with the thermometer in my mouth. So they had to stand over me especially at meal times to see that I did not spill the milk diet that I was on, over the bed.

However, after a few days I began to be ravenously hungry and got some of the “walking sick” to get me some chocolate from the canteen (at the then luxury price of ten shillings a pound) and some tinned sausages. The chocolates were a great disappointment as they were practically unsweetened, and disaster overtook the meal I was having with the sausages. The medical officer had suddenly appeared on his round and I just had time to whip the opened tin of sausages under the bedclothes. I then had two problems; the first was whether he would pull the bedclothes back to examine my groin (which was still painful) and the second was whether I had the tin the right way up under the bedclothes. In both cases my fears were groundless.

As the days wore on, I realised my health was very much improving, but unfortunately my kind of illness did not give me much scope for impressing the medical officer on his rounds, like the gas cases did with their excessive coughing at the right time. However, it was the English V.A.D. with the beautiful voice and face and figure to match who gave me warning of my impending departure from the hospital. She said,

“Look, New Zealand, you are sleeping too much and getting better too soon. You are marked for Blighty, but at the rate you are improving you will not get there”.

Much as I tried to follow her suggestion, I still dropped off to sleep at the slightest opportunity, until one day the axe fell.

11 Convalescing

But I was only transferred to the Convalescent Section, where, with two Tommies, I was given the light duty of cutting out all the blood-stained parts of uniforms which had belonged to wounded soldiers who had passed through the hospital. The Tommies were lorry drivers of the Army Services Corps. Their lorry had received a direct hit and the back was blown to pieces, so they said. In any case both were badly shell-shocked and were still very “jumpy”. We also had to cut the buttons off the uniforms and empty out the pockets. This operation was most popular with them, as often there were passionate letters from wives. We also found that some of the wounded must have spent large amounts of money on buying bundles of charms which invoked saints to prevent bullets or shells from approaching the wearer.

We worked in a large marquee which was full of bales, some of which contained the blood-stained uniforms. But many of them contained woollen gift material of non-military origin, such as socks, mufflers, balaclavas, etc. They had all been used till they were dirty, and then because they were not military issue, were not washed for use again, but were discarded. We were told we could do what we liked with them except give them or sell them in their made-up state. So we unravelled the socks, which incidentally were usually far superior to the army issue, and “flogged” the wool to the mademoiselles at the hospital gates, mainly for chocolate.

Discipline within the hospital grounds was fairly lax and so after we had made what we considered was a good showing of work done, we adjourned to the canteen to thaw out. The marquee was unheated and it was mid-winter, with snow and ice lying around. One of the Tommies was a very good pianist and played on the canteen piano all the popular songs with plenty of frills even by ear. That used to cheer us up.

I think I obtained more mental refreshment from these songs, than from anything else, even though lots of songs were morbid and depressing. But we often sang them with a ludicrous emphasis on the more morbid parts which cheered our spirits. For instance, one very popular song emphasised the feeling we all had but with ribald emphasis we derived a lot of fun out of it. These are some of the words:

“I want to go home,
The whiz and bangs and shrapnel around me do roar,
I don’t want this old war any more,
Take me far over the sea,
Where the German’s can’t get at me,
Oh my, I don’t want to die,
I want to go home.”

By singing the penultimate line as:

“Oh my-ee, I don’t want to dy-ee”,

we certainly detracted from any serious ideas that the song may have engendered.

Then there were those in a really light vein such as:

“Sergeant Brown, Sergeant Brown,
Keep your eye on Tommy for me,
He might go wrong on the boutinong,
When he reaches gay Paree,
He’ll learn to parley-voo, they always do,
When a mademoiselle they see,
So if my boy Tommy wants to parley-voo,
Let him come home and parley-voo with me.”

By the time I arrived on the front line, “Mademoiselle from Armitiers” was a back number, but bawdy additions helped to retain her popularity.

We were allowed leave to Boulogne and on one occasion we took the opportunity to have our photographs taken. I financed the venture, but being a trusting or soft (take your choice) New Zealander, I suffered a total loss. When the photos were finished I divided them between us without taking the precaution to obtain payment before delivery. However, I do not regret it as I still have a good copy of the photo as a souvenir of the good times we had together.

One night there was an ominous growling noise in the sky. Some in our hut claimed it was a Zeppelin, but others said it was only a big bombing plane. I did not know even if it was one of “theirs” or “ours”, but as it was obviously getting closer, speculation arose as to the target. Most in their ignorance felt we were safe because, they said, Germans did not bomb hospitals. Unfortunately for that comforting argument about our safety, there was a camouflage factory down the road and a near miss would hit us. As it approached and came directly overhead there was a heavy silence in the hut. But as soon as it was realised that it had passed overhead and the sound was diminishing, everyone started talking at once and continued for some minutes. We had almost forgotten the danger, till there was an almighty crunch which reverberated round the sky. The comments and exclamations were largely unprintable, but the general drift was that it was an unusually large bomb that had been dropped. It was, and the following afternoon we obtained a leave pass to go to Boulogne to see the effect. We learned that it was down near the docks among the closely-packed houses of the dock-workers. The direction of the crater was indicated by the degree of damage. First there were the cracked windows which gradually got worse till, ten yards further on towards the crater, they were shattered. Then the roofs began to show signs with leaning walls emphasising the increasing intensity of the

blast. Collapsed walls and piles of rubble were the next stage followed by completely flattened houses which had increasing deposits of mud, till we climbed the rim of the crater to get a glimpse of the deep, wide pond which was slowly filling with water. I, of course, took no measurements but the water still had about ten feet to rise before it reached ground-surface level. The pond was an approximate circle about fifty feet in diameter. We agreed it must have been Zeppelin to be able to carry a bomb which would create such enormous damage.

All the others in my hut were Tommies who attempted to arrange a football match.

“Can ye play footba, New Zealand?”

“Yes, rather!”

“Where do ye play?”

“Forward.”

“Would ye play in a game on Saturday afternoon against the next hut?”

“Yes, if you want me.”

I overheard some snatches of conversation to the effect that our side ought to do pretty well with that “big New Zealander”. There was quite a lot of interest in the match and of course we played in army boots.

I got an idea that there was something wrong somewhere when the line-up for “kick-off” was different, especially when the ball was kicked in my direction and I scooped a round ball up in arms and set off down the field as hard as I could go. There were peals of laughter from the sidelines and hard words from my team. I then realised that the football game they asked me about was not Rugby but the “sissy English type”. I got a quick briefing of the rules and endeavoured to keep out of trouble. But when the ball came my way I could not control the reflex action of picking it up and running. Eventually I played the rest

of the game clasping my hands behind my back, but that was not before the opposing side realised that if they kicked the ball to me, I was good for a free kick for them. We lost, but in all my games of Rugby, I never suffered some many kicks on the shins as I did in that game. So much for Rugby being a rough game.

Shortly after this, my mail at last caught up with me. Apparently my changes had been too frequent for the Base Post Office in London to keep track of me but I arrived at the hut one evening from “work” to be greeted by about twenty-five letters and a cable on my pillow and five calico-wrapped parcels on my bed.

The cable was from my father who had received no news of me after my departure on London leave. He sent a five-pound reply pre-paid cable for some news. I found that soldiers had cheap rates and I was entitled to reply in over one hundred words. This I did, but I got it back; could I not condense it a little? I did. But I have never understood why the letters I wrote after I settled down in “D” Company had not been received in New Zealand.

I read the latest letters from the various sources to get the latest news and then arranged the others in their own chronological order. But the parcels were the subject of the greatest interest from the hut. Most of them were from home and the calico wrapping each had, surrounded a soldered air-tight tin in which there was usually a rich cake and any gaps left between the cake and the tin were always filled with lollies to the limit of the permitted weight. So much so that allowance had to be made for the solder the plumber used in sealing the tins.

One of the “parcels” was in the shape of a shell produced by an enterprising baker and comprised a section containing a cake and another housing a plum pudding, while the “nose” was filled with lollies as pseudo-shrapnel. Unfortunately the plum

pudding had gone mouldy and I threw it away in the rubbish bin.

It was immediately pounced on by a bystander who, after being assured that I did not want it and had not thrown it away by mistake, proceeded to boil it in his Dixie on the stove that was burning to keep the hut warm. I also shared about fifty percent of the parcels with the rest of the hut as an extra treat for tea and was received into favour again after letting the hut down so badly at “football”.

But Christmas was approaching and as it was about time for another section to be discharged from hospital, we were cheered by the announcement that we would all remain in the hospital till the New Year. So Christmas was really a time for rejoicing, and although we were well fed unstintingly, with beef stews and puddings of all kinds, the Christmas dinner was something to remember. For days previously willing hands were adorning the mess-room and the camp generally with every variety of seasonal decorations. Snow figured largely in their efforts, so much so that we could readily anticipate a cotton-wool shortage.

It was when carols were being sung by groups perambulating round the camp that I first felt the pang of homesickness with the memories of bands on the lawn at home in Waimate, and choristers waking us up in the early hours of a Christmas morning. But by contrast the dinner was very different from that at home, where we would go into the garden and pick the raspberries, black and white currants and strawberries, all for the basis of the fruit salad. Then pick and pod the green peas, dig and peel the new potatoes, etc., for the vegetables, but not forgetting roast lamb and mint sauce.

However, there were novelties that we only sometimes, or never had at home, such as crackers, a bottle of stout, and of course turkey. I caused a bit of a stir in my section when it was realised that I did not drink my stout. I had not acquired a taste for it and considered it unnecessary and unwise to start.

The dinner was followed by a full-scale concert of the type that I was becoming familiar with. Funny men who were not really funny but they were obviously doing their best to amuse us and we were doing our best to be amused, and so gave them a good round of applause to cheer ourselves up. The songsters and more serious items got the same treatment. But egged on by the stout and beer and our determination that it should be so, we all came to the conclusion in the hut that night, that it was a jolly good Christmas.

12 New Year

New Year's Eve came and went and so did we – to the Base Camp at Etaples. I was allotted a place in a bell tent which was already occupied by about a dozen Tommies returning again to the front line, one after being wounded twice. The front of his body was a patchwork of scars, and we all knew full well what we were going back to. After dumping my kit and gear I made for the canteen where I stayed till almost lights out and returned to the tent which was acquiring a thick covering of snow.

After lights out, and just as I was dropping off to sleep, I heard a mysterious tapping noise in various parts of the tent. This went on for some time till I could stand it no longer and so sat up and called out,

“What the hell is going on here?”

A voice said,

“Shall we tell him?”

Another voice replied,

“Yes. He's alright”.

So this is what they told me.

All were returning to the front line after being wounded and some severely. They did not relish the idea at all and were giving themselves “self-inflicted wounds”, guaranteed undetectable, to make themselves unfit for the front line duty. This was done by wrapping a moist cloth round a knee and tapping gently with a large spoon on a spot where the cartilage would be damaged but did not show a bruise. After nights of painful persevering, swelling and inflammation took place until eventually the knee gave way. The story to tell on sick parade, they said, would be that they had a return of the complaint that they had when they put their knee out playing football. They added that they hoped, with some confidence, that they would be considered at least unfit for front line duty, and although the process was extremely painful they were still alive. Needless to say, I did not join in their activities.

Next day we were in the throes of the “bull ring” routine where they endeavoured to make fit, fighting soldiers of us again. One day on a route march “with full pack up” two of my tent mates fell out, limping badly, and the next day they were waiting at “sick parade” to be examined. They were absent that night from the bell-tent, so I presume the scheme worked. Some of their tent mates maintained it did too and brushed aside my suggestion that perhaps they were kept in confinement pending a court martial for a self-inflicted wound. However, as the tapping proceeded nightly after lights out, the conspirators must have still had faith in the success of their self-inflicted torture.

13 Front Line again

After several weeks of base-camp life, I rejoined my unit again in the back areas after it had had apparently a pretty miserable and sometimes unfortunate time in the trenches, to which we shortly returned. This time I realised the difference between

front line, support and reserve trenches. We went straight into the front line and when I was put on gas-guard, I was shown the S.O.S signal which was a rocket for calling for help from the supporting artillery behind the line and from anyone else who could give a hand. But when I asked how it worked there was some consternation. I was shown. I was also told to keep some Mills bombs handy too in case Jerry raided. This he was quite likely to do as there was nothing between us and his lines except about one hundred yards of "no man's land". Pleading ignorance about how to work the bombs too, I was shown how to throw them. I was then told to throw one myself, which I did. Unfortunately, my hand throwing the bomb hit the back of the trench and the bomb shot straight up into the air and obviously would fall down on top of us. Fortunately I had put a lot of effort into it and by the time it returned to the trench we had all time to take cover in adjacent bays. But it was a good start for a front line soldier and did not endear me to the old hands.

Except for the fatigues for rations, etc., the stay in the line was uneventful. Everybody said it was too quiet and although we had one rather bad time, the old hands took it philosophically and said that Jerry just wanted to keep us on our toes.

During one period in the support line, most of our platoon were billeted in a pill-box, a huge concrete structure heavily reinforced with railway irons. The scars it bore showed that it had been the subject of pretty effective attention from Jerry's shells. In fact, it had been blown slightly lop-sided. But the machine gun emplacements were pointing backwards and it was evidently one that had been constructed by the Germans when they occupied this territory, and worse still, no doubt they had its range. The walls were several feet thick, and the partition walls forming several rooms were not much thinner.

Unfortunately there was not room for all of us in it and the rest of the platoon hoped they would survive in the bivvies in the

trench outside. I considered I was lucky to be among those allocated to the pill-box, but when I realised that we were literally packed in like sardines in a tin, I began to have doubts. I saw the funny side of it when I recalled the old music hall joke of the family, including children, who all slept in the one bed. "When Pa turns, we all turn". When I was lying on my side there was room enough, but if I turned on to my back I pushed into both my companions on either side. And they did not hesitate to voice their disfavour in quite lurid terms. Illumination, apart from shafts of light coming through the slots for the machine guns, was by one single candle stuck on the top of a "tin hat".

But the greatest misery for me was due to the fact that everyone smoked. We were issued with five cigarettes daily of either one or two brands, "Ruby Queen" and "Camel". To my uncultivated taste they were both foul, particularly the "Camel". Heresay had it that they were derived from the rear end of the anatomy of the camel, and there was no need to mention this fact in the name, as the taste and smell indicated that quite clearly. Furthermore, whatever ventilation system there was, was unable to deal with the pollution, particularly when we were "straffed" or shelled. Then everybody stoked up. They said it steadied their nerves. I was very popular at that time, because being a non-smoker I was renowned for being able to produce a cigarette in an emergency.

But when the general feeling became tense due to shell fire, the nervous state of a heavy smoker with no more "smokes" was pitiable. This was especially the case when we had some direct hits on the pill-box, the concussion from which made my head ring, and on one occasion blew the candle out. Those were the times when we were thankful for German thoroughness when we hoped it was applied to the construction of the pill-boxes.

In due course my turn came to live and sleep in the trenches. I had a "bivvy" to myself which was made of the usual semi-

circular corrugated iron just high enough to crawl in and placed at right angles to the direction of the trench. It was known as a “flare-proof” bivvy having only about six inches of soil about it at the thinnest part. I had enough sense to realise that bivvies near the pill-box might be unhealthy when Fritz paid attention to the pill-box again. The “near misses” or those shells that fell wide of the pill-box might catch some bivvies. There was another “catch” too. The bivvies must have been made by small Tommies for themselves, because I found that my ankles protruded out of the entrance which was sometimes covered by the flap of sacking. But that did not prevent anyone coming down the trench in the dark bumping into my feet and waking me up. The consequent mutual recriminations on these occasions considerably enlarged my vocabulary.

But one night I suffered an even worse indignity. I was awakened by someone hauling me feet-first out of the bivvy shouting,

“Here’s another one!”

I had hardly started to use my now extensive resources for abuse when he dropped me with a,

“What the hell were you doing in there?”

He would not believe me when I said, “Sleeping of course”, because all around me the trenches had been battered with shells. They had got the wounded on the way to the aid post, and were preparing to heave me, presumably dead, into a convenient shell-hole. How I slept through it I do not know and the extensive damage to the trenches bore evidence of the narrow squeak I had.

Shortly afterwards we moved into the Manawatu Huts outside the walls of Ypres and now a relatively safe area. Each day we were taken on a light railway up to the “lines” to strengthen old German pill-boxes which, as already mentioned, were facing the wrong way for us. It was tough going carrying sandbags of

shingle and cement slung across our shoulders. The way along the trenches from the dump to the pill-box itself, was hard too, with sloppy rounded floors and no duckboards where a step slightly off-centre threw you out of balance and the load gave you a hard thump on the back to remind you to do better. This was the first time that I had anything to do with cement and although, if I ever got back to civilian life, I did not intend to be a labourer, I collected quite a few tips from some who were obviously old hands at the game.

This was happening around the end of February and the beginning of March and the weather was bitterly cold. One day when we came to a pill-box that we had to strengthen we found dead Tommies being carried out of it and I heard an officer (not one of ours) say,

“No. They are all dead”.

Apparently, they had lit a brazier in the pill-box and as the outlets to the outside were well above floor level, the deadly carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide gases formed from the burning coke, being heavier than air, did not escape but poisoned and drowned them.

We of course, already knew about the collapse of the Russian Front and we were told that the whole German fighting machine was being massed opposite us, preparatory to an attempt to make a lightning breakthrough to end the war. Living conditions were bad in Germany and the people were restless and war-weary. But if we held them now, victory for us was only a matter of time.

So everything was done to make us more efficient fighters and to strengthen our defences. Old trenches that had fallen into disuse behind the forward lines were repaired and old observation posts for the artillery were treated similarly. We also practised bayonet fighting and rapid rifle fire with dummy ammunition, till we were heartily sick of it.

14 Frantic German efforts

However, very early in the morning of my twenty-first birthday, 21 March 1918, I was awakened from a deep sleep in the hut by the slight smell of phosgene gas. Without giving it much thought I fastened the nose-clips of the gas mask onto my nose and put the rubber mouth-piece in my mouth, but without putting the mask proper over my face. All breathing was thus effected through the mouth-piece via the purifying chemicals in the canister kept in a satchel strapped on the chest. A valve in the connecting tube allowed saliva to escape. I dropped off to sleep and was awakened by dawn by shouts of, "Shut the bloody door!" and some confusion at the entrance to the hut. And with good reason. Clouds of poison gas were pouring into the hut and I was not slow, as were the rest, in getting our masks well and truly on. It is difficult to communicate through masks, so I decided to sit down and await developments.

It seems that when changing gas-guard, the man who had finished his shift did not properly wake the man who was to relieve him and who thus went off to sleep again. In due course we learned that all the food in the cook-house was poisoned and we would have no breakfast. Anyway we could not have eaten it with all the gas about.

It was not yet dawn but away on our left there was a terrific thundering of guns and we realised that the awaited German push had started. All along our own front which was a comforting number of miles away, things seemed to be quiet. As dawn broke we could see the gas lying densely like a fog in the hollows nearby and so shortly afterwards we were moved off to higher ground at Sanctuary Wood, where with shovels we had brought, we had to dig trenches. Here the air was comparatively pure, so we discarded our gas masks. We still had the unexpended portion of our twenty-four hours ration, comprising bread, margarine and cheese in our "dixies" and

therefore more or less air-tight; similarly marmalade in the Player's cigarette tin and water in our water bottles. I also had a flask of Horlick's Malted Milk tablets and a tin of Ivelcon soup cubes which I had arranged for Mr Fox to have sent from London every fortnight.

We found digging the trench a fairly easy task as the ground seemed to have had some pretty heavy fighting over it and was well churned up. The sun was shining brightly and in spite of the uncertain future, we were in rather a hilarious mood.

One "Digger" found he was impeded in his digging by the buried arm of a man still attached to its body. So he dug carefully round it and as he deepened the trench, the arm projected more and more into the trench. Apparently the arm had not been dead very long and a group nearby filed past and shook the hand with the words, "Good luck, Dig", or similar. (The word "Digger" had long been the generic term for a New Zealand or Australian soldier).

Further along a group found themselves digging through a strata of putrefying flesh, bones, uniform etc., all being buried in a hole which was shaped like a saucer about ten feet across. Evidently the bodies had been piled into a conveniently large shell-hole as a communal grave and covered with a layer of earth. But this gang was unlucky because when they had just about finished the trench to a depth of about eight feet the whole stinking mass slid away from the side of the trench to the bottom and some barely escaped burial. Of course it all had to be shovelled out again – but I was not there.

That night we moved into new billets at the railhead, Poperinghe, where we stayed the next day, and the following night boarded a train in "battle order". We left our valises with our change of clothes, blankets, greatcoats, etc., behind, carrying toilet gear, unused rations, etc., in our haversacks, with two hundred and twenty rounds of ammunition, entrenching tools, etc. We travelled all night and woke up to find that the

train had stopped in wide open country with no sign of a station or siding.

The first sign we saw of war were several fleeing Tommies. They were running away and had obviously panicked. This had upset the train crew who said that they had strict orders to save the train at whatever cost; so rumour had it. But it was a good climate for rumours, one of which said that some of our officers rounded up the fleeing Tommies and made them join us; also that officers shot a few for cowardice in face of the enemy, in the time-honoured custom "to encourage the others". In fact the rumours became so wild that they discredited the earlier ones which may have had a basis of truth. Anyway we did see the Army Services Corp driving limbers across country loaded with cases of small arms ammunition, and dropping them here and there so that we would not run short in the rear-guard action we would be likely to make.

Eventually we were marching along a road in column of threes against the direction of the occasional local French farmer refugees who were travelling with their household goods piled on a dray with the family cow being led on behind. The ordinary route-march routine was being observed of fifty minutes marching and ten minutes spell every hour. As we were travelling light this made no demands on us and no one seemed to be worrying about the proximity of the Germans.

By nightfall we had entered a wood and having already eaten all our rations were then looking for the next day's which were due. But we had the sad news that there were none. The Germans had bombed them in the back areas. Our next stop was near a German dump where, on fossicking round, I found some tins of their trench cooking material which was like solidified methylated spirits. In my pocket I had a dozen Ivelcon soup cubes and with the water in my bottle I made myself some hot soup. It smelt and tasted really good. With the help of the water from their bottles and my methylated spirit

find, we had our section provided with hot soup. The word, aided by the aroma, soon got round and I spent the remainder of our rest period, explaining to strangers that I had no more left.

When the next rest period arrived however, I was again hungry and now very tired, as were all the rest. So I immediately dropped down on a flat-topped pile of rock for road-mending and went to sleep. I dreamed I was buying some plain packets of biscuits from a Y.M. canteen and a soldier came up to me and said,

“Don’t buy those, Dig. There’s tins of sausages round the corner”.

But before I could, I was woken up by the whistle with the realisation that the hunger which had driven me to dream about buying food was still with me and I had a feeling of extreme and unreasoning disappointment.

Now we were not marching but just staggering along half asleep, bumping into one another and sometimes falling or tripping over. For a long time I was just putting one foot in front of the other, oblivious to my surroundings, when I realised we were marching through a town with frightened enquiries from the townspeople in doorways and upstairs windows, “Qui va la?”

When they found we were khaki soldiers, and not grey, they came out and clapped and cheered. That bucked us up a bit and we marched through the town to the far outskirts with a lighter step.

When we stopped, we dropped onto the ground and it was some time before I took enough interest in the proceedings to grasp the fact that the whole battalion was drawn up in groups. Soldiers occasionally went past with big loaves of bread under their arms, which they said the townspeople had given them. So I went back to the town, which I learned was Amiens. But my enquiries for bread were unsuccessful. I was too late and was

about to return when I was accosted by a boy who asked, “Du pain?” “Oui!”

He told me to wait and arrived back with a large freshly baked loaf for which he would accept no payment except my very grateful thanks. Before rejoining my section I had enough of that load as would starve off my hunger for a while. The rest of course, I gave to my section.

Then we moved off and finally we were located in what appeared to be an overgrown dry ditch. When night was coming on, I realised that we were in for a cold time, with not even a greatcoat. So I set out to find some straw or some covering. I had gone about a couple of hundred yards when I was challenged by a Digger machine-gun post. I made appropriate reply drawing on my army-enlarged vocabulary. I also pointed out to them that they had their machine-gun pointing in the wrong direction because we were half-left from them. Apparently they thought they were “covering” us. Realising the potential danger of the situation I readily gave up my fruitless search for straw.

The following morning we were still without rations, but when we heard where there was a pile of bread, not destined for us, I immediately went over determined to get a loaf, by hook or by crook. While I was skirting around the pile trying to work out some plan of action, an officer from a group of officers nearby called out,

“You’ll do! I want you!”, indicating me.

As we approached each other I said,

“What for sir?”

“I want you to come with me to do a little reconnaissance to find out where the Germans are. Would you sooner have a revolver or keep your rifle?”

“I think I would be handier with my rifle and one up the spout”.

“Right. Off we go”.

As we moved off I heard one of the group say,

“Where did he come from? He’s _____”, and I did not hear the rest. But I had no doubt that the black buttons on the Rifle Brigade on my uniform seemed out of place to him when everybody had brass buttons.

We scouted round for a while till we came to a farmhouse, and I suggested that what Germans there were about, would probably go into the house for shelter.

My officer then said,

“Right. You see what you can round the back and I’ll try the front”.

As I approached the back I could hear voices and listening closer, found they were partially drunk Germans making the most of the farmer’s store of wine. I reported back to the officer and back we went to the bread-heap. As we approached it he said,

“Right. Thanks. You’ve been very helpful. Your crowd are over there and I think that you had better join them”.

And so with a sickly grin and a murmured thanks, I did rejoin them.

I found my section sheltering against the bank of a sunken road. They were quite surprised when I told them that they were taking cover on the wrong side of the road and more particularly when I told them how I knew.

That night we moved into trenches, that this time were not ditches overgrown with weeds. They looked as though they were recently repaired and we knew how and why when we found grey German greatcoats and equipment, evidence that the Germans were not far away and would probably return for them. However, we were very cold and so wore the greatcoats. We

looked hopefully for food among their valises and were surprised to find packets of Huntly and Palmer biscuits, Cadbury's chocolate and English tinned food. It later transpired that they had been plundered from the Tommy canteens when they broke through the British lines.

Now we began to realise what a mess we were in. In endeavouring to make a continuous line so that the Germans could not make a surprise attack in the rear, we found we had one man for about ten yards of trench, and that there was nothing for it but to watch back and front and wait for daybreak.

At daybreak a plane flew low over our trench sounding its Klaxon. We waved and shouted to it, and a few hours later we received a stinging blast for wearing German greatcoats. It seemed the pilot of the plane (a single seater) had reported that the trench was now occupied by Germans with no sign of us. However, we still had to spread out and make it appear as though the trench was fully manned throughout its whole length. In order to give it verisimilitude I remembered Robinson Crusoe's idea and so about half a dozen of us ran along the trench and began firing Jerry's own rifles and ammunition at him from random and different positions. Again after a while we had a visit from an irate officer wanting to know what was going on. When we explained he said,

"Don't do it. You are giving your position away".

I replied that the Germans knew we were there or they would have come back for their greatcoats long ago. Anyway we were cheered by the fact that the Australians were coming on one flank and the Canadians on the other and we had to hold on till they came.

15 Sparring for positions

We never really knew when they did arrive for we were now engaged in a number of raids or sorties to improve our positions. We knew that the Germans were completely disorganised. They had apparently gone faster and further than they had anticipated and thus produced utter confusion among themselves. Those we had met were more or less acting on their own, and thinking they had unprotected open country in front of them had not taken much precaution against a surprise attack. Unfortunately for us it seemed that we were facing machine-gun fire almost entirely. We thought they must have come on special motor cycles, although we never saw any.

On the other hand we were informed that the next time we attacked we would be supported by a barrage; and that greatly heartened us. In the Ypres salient, when a barrage commenced there is no combination of words which would adequately describe the din of the continuous firing of the guns. The concussion is so intense and vibrating that I have seen it cause the loose parts of my jacket below the buttons to quiver and shake merely with the sound waves.

So we moved off confidently before dawn to our next hopping off place which was in a sunken road. While waiting for the signal to attack a shell exploded harmlessly on the rim of the road, and again deflated us, because we did not know whether it was "his" or "ours". Our orders were that when the barrage stopped we had to rush a trench ahead of us and work along and clear it of the enemy. Another company was to follow us up and leap-frog through us. However, when the barrage did start there was a "bang" made by several guns and then no noise at all while they reloaded and then some more desultory firing. This was a very disappointing and dispiriting affair. In the meantime, the German machine guns had commenced their clatter.

When the barrage did stop we waited for our orders to attack from our company Commander who was near us; but none came. Well that suited us and we waited. Then there came the usual sounds of rifle and machine-gun fire and bombs bursting in the trench in front of us. When we did finally move along this trench it was so full of our own dead khaki soldiers, many with their skulls shot in half, that we just had to walk on top of them to get along. All the dirty work that we should have done had already apparently been done by them and we occupied our objective.

Another attack the next day took us to the top of the hill which was our final objective. This was preceded by a Stokes trench mortar attack, and so accurate was it, that what Germans were not killed, were in such a dazed condition that they readily surrendered. In the “mopping up”, in a rather deeper “funk hole” than usual, I found a dazed and thoroughly frightened German officer who requested,

“Trink wasser, Kamerad”.

Taking pity on him I gave him a “pull” at my water bottle and sent him along the trench to join the other prisoners. When a few minutes later I joined the others, they were laughing and said that the Germans when offered cigarettes got down on their knees crying.

“Merci, kamerad. Merci!”

I was told that by this time the Germans had found that they were opposed by New Zealanders, and they had believed their propaganda that we were cannibals and gave them a “cleansing cigarette” before killing them and eating them. Although some of the Germans seemed to be pretty poor mentally, I did not think they were so bad as that. However, I heard the tale later in other quarters too, but did not know whether it was our tale retold. Later we were told that the officer we had captured was so grateful for the water and the treatment he had received that

he willingly outlined the German plans; which proved to be very useful.

We found that from the trenches we had gained we overlooked much of the enemy trench and back areas, while on the other hand when we had gone about twenty yards down our support trenches to the rear, we were entirely hidden from the view of the enemy, and could come out of the trenches and so safely overland, which was much easier and quicker than in the trenches.

Now that we had time to look around we began to realise what a mess we were in physically. We had slept in any sort of position, sitting or lying down, depending on what sort of facilities offered. We were fairly exhausted, filthy and lousy and spent much of our spare time digging the lice out of the seams of trousers and underwear, having periodically to stop to wipe the blood – our blood – off our thumbs from the squashed lice. Our hands, especially the backs, were coated in caked clay through which the hairs protruded. They caked clay was also kneaded into the sleeves of our jackets which in turn rubbed on our wrists and made them sore. As occasion permitted we kept periodically rescuing our puttees from the mass of clay mud that formed puddings around our ankles. We began to have trouble with our trouser buttons which gave way owing to the weight of the clay the trousers were carrying. If the thread held, then the cloth gave way. All the water that was available in the trenches seemed to have been used for making tea, although some of the more enterprising saved some tea for shaving. But the results were not very successful. Most of us preferred to forget about shaving and risk collecting mud on the resultant whiskers. We stayed there for about a week improving and strengthening the condition of the trenches and it was with joyful hearts that we were relieved and went into the support trenches.

Going out we passed our relief in the same trench, and one “Digger” picked on me (did I look soft?) and offered me a

thousand pounds, which he claimed he had on him, if I would change places with him. How he hoped to effect the change in paybooks, records etc., I did not bother to ask him, but he was certainly in rather a bad mental shape.

The bivvy that I was allocated in our new trenches, was flare-proof with a cloth covering at the entrance so that a light would not show on the trench wall outside in the dark. It had a board flooring covering in straw, a copy of the "Auckland Weekly News" and a length of candle stuck on an old tin hat to read by. There was room for only two of us and then hardly enough head-room to sit up. I shall never forget the bliss of lying on my back and reading with the help of the candle, the "Auckland Weekly News".

I was very surprised at the great happiness I felt, because in "civvy" life the conditions would be considered most uncomfortable in the extreme, having regard to the wet clay that still adhered to us. I have come to the conclusion that happiness is a relative quality and is dependent on the general conditions that one is accustomed to. I recalled too, that Thomas Carlyle had a similar thought in his "Sartor Resartus". We are all inclined to think that the world owes us so much in our own right. If we get more we are happy and if less we are miserable. Well, he suggests, make your demands as small as possible and it will be easy to gain the overplus and get happiness. If you make no demands at all, then your life will be full of happiness. For even unity divided by zero gives infinity. Well I reckon we must have got down to zero.

However, we were not there very long, and apart from the usual fatigues of various kinds, we had an easy time.

16 The fifth-of-April stunt

When we were ordered up to the front line again, in general we were not much concerned, as things were very quiet; ominously quiet I thought, but did not say so. Obviously the Germans would be re-grouping and preparing for another attempt at a break-through. Our newly-reinforced platoon was in charge of a brand new officer from New Zealand with obviously very little trench experience and would find moving about in the dark (as we would be) a confusing experience. So when we did move up to the front line, I was on the look-out for trouble. I knew the front line was not very far away and even if we were moving over to a flank, I realised we were going too far forward. Suddenly I stopped and whispered,

“Hey, stop! We’re in the German lines. I can smell them”.

As so I could. But those nearby began to laugh and immediately a German star-shell went up practically under our feet. We froze, because it is a peculiar fact that although the illumination that it gives is brilliant, one cannot be picked out from the surrounding objects unless one moves. Immediately the light went out we turned about and moved noiselessly in the opposite direction as fast as we could without stumbling. Now we had to get back to our own front line without being shot by our own men. On the way we were met by an officer-led patrol that had been sent out to look for us. We were long overdue.

While we were waiting for our stragglers our officer asked me if I would be “platoon runner”. I had already come to the conclusion that a platoon runner had the worst job in the army. He had to carry messages for his platoon as required and it often meant going overland without the protection of the trenches, and sometimes under fire. Yet, knowing all this, I said “yes”. As soon as I had said it, a thought came, “What the hell are you saying. This is just about suicide!” Yet somehow I had not the will to change it.

Our platoon headquarters were in No-Mans-Land between the two opposing lines and in the cellar of a farmhouse known as “La Cygne Farm”.⁷ The house was little more than a brick rubble on the roof of the cellar. Our platoon was split up into several groups which were “listening posts” near the German lines, in most cases screened by a thin hedge. One of my duties was to visit the posts periodically and report back. I found them very agitated. They said that the Germans came up and while out of sight shouted that they would get them in the morning. I told the posts to come back to headquarters. They were not doing any good out there. But of course I had no authority but it was only general common sense, and for them that was not good enough. I reported this back to our headquarters and the officer said, “Of course. Tell them to come back”.

In the meantime, I had noticed a lot of smoke blowing towards our lines, but it had not yet penetrated to the cellar. It was clear



Lasigny Farm in 2006.

⁷ Almost certainly Lasigny Farm which was rebuilt in the 1920s after the war and still existed as two separate but dilapidated buildings each with its own basement when visited in 2006. Allan probably misinterpreted the pronunciation of the proper noun “Lasigny” as being “le cygne” (“the swan”).

that Jerry was going to make a full-scale attack at dawn.

While I had been absent, an artillery officer and two signallers with equipment had joined us in the cellar as an artillery observation post. The artillery officer told our officer that a smoke screen did not necessarily mean an attack. “He” put a smoke screen over at Messines but did not attack.

While this discussion was going on, I, being hungry, decided to have something to eat. I had just taken a few things out of my haversack when Jerry’s barrage opened up followed a few seconds later by ours. All hell was let loose. We could hear the shells from both sides screaming overhead destined for each other’s lines and we felt comparatively safe till, after a few minutes, a shell fell short and blew in a corner of the cellar. Our officer climbed over the rubble and through the brick-dust and smoke and exclaimed,

“Good! Here are our fellows coming back!”

Our Sergeant who was following him, looked out and yelled,

“Our fellows be buggered. They’re Fritzes. Go for your lives!”

I had to spend a few seconds fixing my haversack and by the time I was out of the cellar, there was no sign of the others. I ran along a trench towards our lines and found it full of clay soup almost up to my knees. Naturally my speed was very slow. It was a typical nightmare scene. I could not run fast at all, but the quicker I got back to our lines, the better chance I had of remaining alive. I could see the shapes of the Germans on all sides moving forward as dark shadows through the smoke. Suddenly several bullets whistled round my head, followed immediately by vicious smacks as they hit the side of the trench. Almost immediately I tripped over some wire hidden in the “soup” and fell full length into it. I remained there for a moment or two and after extricating myself, made my way along the trench till I came to a block where it had been filled in. Suddenly a head bobbed up and waved me into our front-

line trenches. It was now fairly quiet here, the German barrage having moved on to the support trenches on the mistaken assumption that the Germans would now be in our front line.

On looking over the parapet of the trench I saw another line of Germans coming to attack through the smoke and too close to be ignored. Then I realised that I had lost my rifle. A moment or two before a "Digger" on the right had got a bullet in his stomach and while he was writhing with his hand over the hole, he dropped his rifle. An officer nearby and I both made a dive for it. I wrenched it out of his hand, exclaiming,

"You've got your revolver. I've got nothing!"

So he released his grasp. Unfortunately the rifle had become covered by mud and after trying to get a clean rag to remove it, including my shirt tails, I found the only dry stitch on me was my field-dressing in its water-proof wrapping. So I used that. By the time I had got the rifle operational, most of the attack seemed to be over, and the din had ceased.

The relief was terrific; but I was still hungry. I had noticed along the trench a bag of rations which had been disembowelled by a shell and helped myself to its contents. Soon I was joined by others nearby. While we were at it we were surprised by our C.O., Major-General Barraclough calling to us,

"How are you getting on, boys?"

He was crouching on the back of the trench behind us. When we replied "O.K.", he said, "That's good. He only got into our front lines for a few yards and we soon got him out of that. Well, stick to it. He has done his worst", and with that moved further along the top of the trenches. We resumed our eating, but the general comments were, "Well, he's got guts".

Soon we finished the fragmented bread and someone said to me, "How about having some of ours, Dig. It ought to be about here somewhere".

It was obvious he did not realise that I very kindly was letting him eat his own rations. So I decided that I had better go along the trench and look for my own unit. My immediate companions were all the “brass buttons mob” in which with my black buttons of the Rifle Brigade, I was obviously out of place.

I ultimately found my company after they had given me and the rest of platoon up for dead.

We stayed some days in the line and during that time we had some French newspapers come with the rations and they displayed banner headlines to the effect that the New Zealanders had saved France.

17 “Digger” life

When we were relieved, we went into “reserve” and were given the pleasure of a shower bath. It was a very primitive arrangement with the minimum amount of water coming through a few holes in the bottom of a petrol tin. Before the bath we had to change our towels at the bath store. But I had lost mine at La Cygne farm and the “attendants” would not give me another unless I handed one in. I was quite annoyed about this, particularly as front-line troops were always rather jealous of those in comparatively safe occupations behind the line. However, I hit on the ruse of having a mate tear his towel in half, and for the two halves we handed in, we each received a good towel.

From now on and for a few months we settled down to a fairly quiet and comfortable routine interspersed with occasional “strafes” or salvos of shells which were often more annoying than dangerous. When we were clear of the front line we would generally move round freely, without the protection of the trenches.

On one occasion when several of us had to go to Colincamps on fatigue duty, we were moving casually along a well-worn path, when suddenly a high velocity shell, known as a “whizz bang”, landed about eight yards in front of us. Unhurt, we started to run. Then one landed about the same distance right on the path behind us. We realised that he was chasing us with his whizz-bangs. So as well as running the direction of the village we changed to a flank. Sure enough another landed behind us, but by then we reached the safety of a hedge at the end of the village from which we noticed a German observation balloon high in the sky. We considered that was the cause of our little incident.

On another occasion our section was detailed to live up to our nickname and “dig” for the engineers. We considered engineers had a soft job. If any hard work was to be done, the engineers always got us, the P.B.I, “poor bloody infantry”, to do it. This job was going to be a long one and we had to make special bivvies for ourselves to sleep in. We were making a more-or-less communal one in an old gun pit. We found material to make a corrugated iron roof in one corner. The free end of the roof was supported by sand-bags of earth, the whole being covered by about a foot of loose earth.

When we had just about finished, a German plane came over from our back areas. Then it turned around and came back over us before resuming his flight.

“That’s enough for me”, I said. “We’re spotted. I’m moving”.

The rest laughed and sneered at my apparent cowardice, “being windy” it was called. I did not wait to argue the point, but moved over to another deserted gun-pit about twenty yards to the left.

I had just begun to settle alone in the safe and comfortable bivvy I had made, also out of galvanised iron, when all hell was again let loose. Machine-gun fire was mixed with bursting

shells, but as far as shells were concerned I was out of the picture. The strafe was so fierce I thought the Germans must be going to attack. Suddenly there were moans and a cry for help from the direction of the rest of the section in their gun-pit. I had hardly got from the shelter of my pit when the bullets went whizzing by. It was hopeless for me to attempt to reach them and still remain alive.

The strafe stopped as suddenly as it started, and I dashed across as quickly as possible in case it started up again, to find their bivvy a shambles. The sandbag supporting post of the roof had received a direct shell hit, and the whole roof and its load of earth had fallen in on the wounded and shell-shocked occupants. When it was all sorted out there was only one man left who was able to take the other end of a stretcher so that we could carry out Bill who had a hole in his thigh, which was bleeding very freely. The aid post was not far away and we started out overland and were almost immediately shelled, so we had to return to the trenches. The shelling continued all the way and we were fatally slow.

“Can’t you buggers get a move on”, complained Bill. “I’m bleeding like a cut pig”.

And so he was. The stretcher held a pool of Bill’s blood. We decided that the situation was now so serious that we had to risk the shells. But they suddenly conveniently stopped and we had him at the aid post in a few minutes. Mindful of my treatment at an aid post, I got hold of an orderly and he promised to attend to Bill immediately. The walking wounded of our section also straggled in, but none of them was very seriously harmed. The next morning on enquiry at the aid post we learned that Bill had died in the night, as the age of blood-transfusion had not yet arrived. The section lost a good, reliable and helpful soldier. One of the best!

Another section replaced us to work for the engineers and those of us who were fit enough rejoined our platoon.

18 Lewis Gunner

Shortly afterwards we came out of the line “for a rest”. There were the usual fatigues, physical drills, route marches, etc., all to toughen us up again. An innovation was a practice shoot at a rifle range, and although I never considered myself anything more than a good average shot, I found I had the highest score. The sequel was that a few days after, I had to report at a Lewis Gun school well out of even earshot of the war. The tents we were billeted in had their rectangular shaped floor sunken about three feet in the ground as some precaution against bombing.

Actually the life here was comparatively idyllic. Our classes were held in an orchard in which the trees were in full blossom and the animal noises in a farm nearby provided a soothing, and almost forgotten, accompaniment to war-weary troops. I found no difficulty in learning the operation and the remedies for the various defects of the gun and was soon able to remedy them blindfolded – for night operation. We also learned how to avoid the vicious tricks of abandoned German machine guns in which the breach would double back and slice one’s fingers off. So, much of our lesson time was spent on our backs dreaming about what it would be like when the war was over, and similar nostalgic musings.

We were visited by several good concert parties, and “Crown and Anchor” and “Housie ‘Ousie” depleted the pockets of the troops of their pay. I was quick to assess the safety provisions of our sunken floor and so on the first day installed myself in a corner nearest the door. That night the man who was sleeping next to me offered me two thousand francs to change places with him. He “ran” a Crown and Anchor board and consequently had tens of thousands of francs on him. But he was very conscious of the fact that a heavy loser might violently take his money back and more. In the morning of course, he would deposit it with the pay-clerk. So with the clay bank on

one side and me as an ally on the other side of him, he felt comparatively safe during the night. Needless to say I exacted no tribute.

Actually I found very little use for money. I always had plenty of diversions to fill my time without the excitement; luxuries such as scented soap and toothpaste were usually easily obtained from a Y.M canteen without much cost, and a coarse cooking chocolate, which was very sustaining, could also be obtained at village shops. So the inroads all of them made on my pay-book were minimal.

19 A wiring party in no-man's land

At the end of the fortnight I returned to my platoon which again had quite a number of strange faces, replacing old familiar ones. It seems that while on fatigue in the front line, a strafe had landed among them all. I said,

“I suppose some silly fool who could just not do without his smoke, gave Fritz all the information he wanted.”

No reply.

Of course I had become a member of the Lewis Gun section of our platoon which sections were considered suicide squads owing to their supposedly disproportionate casualties. However, I took some consolation from the fact that the only persons the Germans were likely to concentrate on, were the “Number One” and “Number Two” on the gun who were actually engaged in firing it. With luck it would be quite a while before we had sufficient casualties to make me even “Number Two” on the gun.

However, I had a re-think the next time we were on fatigue in the front line. This time we were a wiring party. We had to erect a barbed-wire entanglement between our front line and the

Germans. All of course had to be done noiselessly in the dark. Unfortunately for us the Germans had the same idea that night too - that a barbed-wire entanglement was required between the two front lines.

While we were moving with our stakes and coils of wire out of the trench on to no-man's land, we could hear the occasional clink from the Germans at work. The iron stakes were shaped like a corkscrew and had special loops about intervals of a foot along their length. They were screwed into the ground like a giant corkscrew and the barbed-wire was threaded through the loops afterwards. That was the theory. Practice was different. Several "windy" members of the party did not take care to see that the stakes were well screwed in the ground and when the pull of the wire came on them they fell over. Running out the wire off the reels was pure guess, too. The man having the free end could not see what was happening with the reel. Being barbed, the wire of course, was continually being caught up on the reel, and when it was released, owing to it being pulled from the free end, the reel got out of control and the wire sprang up in wide circular loops, which caught on anything handy. I was manipulating a reel and my sleeves were soon in shreds and my hands and wrists were bleeding.

But even worse was to follow. I was ordered to take my turn to man our Lewis Gun which was posted on the German side of our wiring. I took over very cautiously as whenever he moved we could dimly see the machine gunner protecting the Germans as he was only about fifty feet away and was aiming at us. He didn't fire so I came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to live and let live. Evidently he had the same idea too. But would he change his mind before we were finished? What if they finished first?

It seemed hours before we were called in, although in reality it was less than an hour. Suffice it to say that no shot was fired on either side and there was no more thankful man than I, when I

finally slid down into the comparative safety of the front line trench again.

But a day or two afterwards we were in complete disgrace. Our fence had more or less fallen over and it was only the stiffness of the wires themselves that gave it any semblance of a fence. On the other hand, the Germans' was standing proudly erect, a first class job. Nevertheless, I considered that our confused jumble of misplaced wire would probably cause more trouble for a raiding party than a fence in which every wire was in position according to an obvious lay-out plan.

20 Routine French life

Our next sphere of operation was in Gommecourt Wood where the second growth of trees which followed the destruction of the First Somme was itself being battered. Here there were a large number of old German dug-outs which we made use of. They were about forty feet underground and had two entrances, one of which with a coke brazier heating the hot air up one stairway, was responsible for the circulation of cold air which entered the dug-out at the other stairway. The sense of security experienced in the dug-out was more than compensated for by the feeling of complete exposure and intense anxiety when we came out into the trenches again. Although I recognised that the trenches were no more dangerous than before, still it was some time before the exaggerated fears wore off.

In other respects too, the dug-outs were a very mixed blessing. The Germans, mindful of the fact that they had left the wood honey-combed with dug-outs used delayed-action shells which, instead of bursting on the surface of the ground, buried themselves deep into the ground. Fortunately, I had only one experience of this. We were sound asleep one night in a dug-out when there was an almighty crash and quivering of the

ground. We soon found that the central passage had been completely blown in and filled with earth dividing the dug-out into separate distinct halves. No one was killed but we all had to get out on top as the air circulation was completely blocked, and if we stayed we would drown in our own carbon-dioxide.

For a while there did not seem to be anything of any great moment happening as we occupied sectors in which we again came across the names of the villages of Heberterne, Auchonvillers and Fonquvillers, but which now only indicated heaps of rubble. So quiet was it that I took the opportunity of improving my French. I obtained from England a copy of Marlborough's "French Self-Taught" which comprised a grammar and a book of key and common phrases with attempts to show the pronunciation. That part of it I later practiced on the villagers at the slightest opportunity, but with not much success. My New Zealand school French did not agree with theirs. However, if the conversation was supplemented by signs, the meaning was usually made clear.

21 Absences from the Front Line

Some of the bivvies in these sectors were obviously made for Tommies and my feet more or less protruded outside beyond the door flap. One particularly cold night my wet feet stuck out into the trench and although they woke me up several times during the night with their extreme coldness, I slept more or less blissfully until "stand-to" time just before dawn, when everybody is awakened and alerted in case of a sudden attack. If the attack is successful a counter-attack has the disadvantage that it has to be done in daylight in fully view of the opposing enemy; or it has to wait till evening when there is time for the defenders to make adequate preparations to receive it.

On this occasion at stand-to, I could not feel my feet nor stand up. I paraded “sick” and at the aid post the orderlies had to cut my laces out to get my boots off. I was surprised to see that my feet and ankles were perfectly white. I did not like this fact that I had trench feet, as I had seen the havoc it can do to feet and legs when I was at 55 General Hospital at Wimereux.

My feet were bathed in hot water and rubbed with whale oil till I could reasonably-well stand up.

“Now”, said the Medical Officer, “Get your pack and walk down to the horse-lines”.

“But”, I said, “that’s about five miles away”.

“Yes”, said the M.O., “By the time you get there you’ll have the circulation going properly and you’ll have a week’s ‘excused duty’ there”.

So, armed with the necessary chit, off I set on my stumbling journey.

But my feet had so greatly improved after several miles, that I got a lift on a limber returning from the front line, taking care to get off again before we were too close to the horse lines. But during that week I watched the circulation in my feet very closely and returned for duty again in the trenches.

The trench routine was again interrupted for me when one day I broke a tooth in my upper dental plate. It was a very important tooth for without it I could not hold my gas mask in my mouth. I was immediately sent to Battalion Hospital to have it repaired. I was absent from the line for only about ten hours, but on the way I had a very narrow squeak in a communication trench. The trench ran beside a road on which the Germans had observation. The smell of recently burnt shells on the road suggested that the trench was a better place, and had no sooner jumped into the trench when the shells began to arrive uncomfortably close. I sat in a funk-hole with my knees drawn up under my chin and my hands clasped round my legs.

Suddenly I realised that my knees were in an exposed position, so I stretched my legs out flat on the bottom of the trench. Within a minute a shell burst on the parados at the back and a piece of shell about the size of my hand hit the side of the funk-hole with a vicious smack just where my knees were before I moved them. What I had often thought is, “how did I get that hunch?”

One day we were given twelve hours leave to Doullens, a place so far from the trenches that life was almost normal. As soon as we arrived our section made a bee-line for an estaminet. They ordered cognac all round, but I ordered coffee. The mademoiselle who brought it did not seem to like me having coffee. There was some cross-talk about it and one chap was getting rather rude about my coffee, much to the amusement of the mademoiselle. So I said to her,

“N’ecoutez pas lui. Il est fou”.

“Fou?” she questioned, tapping her forehead.

“Oui”, I replied.

Then she laughed loudly, much to the chagrin of the others, and came over and devoted her attention to me. She asked me a number of questions which I, in turn, did not properly understand, but all seemed to be wanting too much information about us. To each one I said,

“Pas compris”.

So she reverted to her so-called “English”, and then our “mutts” nearly fell over themselves in their eagerness to supply the answers. I told them to shut up; that she was probably a spy. And they did. But mademoiselle’s behaviour was so unfriendly that I decided to leave and I understand the others gave her no more information. There did not seem to be much to do in the village so I went to the pictures, which was a wonderful change. There were a few American soldiers about too, which was

heartening, and the whole leave, though short, was a real psychological tonic.

A short while afterwards I, being one of the longest-serving front-line soldiers in our platoon at the time, was sent with five others down to the horse line for a week to enable accommodation to be provided in the trenches for an equal number of American G.I.'s. This was to enable them to become "battle seasoned". When I returned to my section again, I was told that they gave a very favourable impression when they first arrived. Every night at dusk, and sometimes at dawn and other times, a German machine-gunner used to skim the top of the trench with machine-gun bullets. You could hear them arriving as he worked his way along the trench, and when they came close it was only necessary to duck your head below the level of the top of the trench while they passed harmlessly over. This was too much for the Yanks. They were all for going out after "Parapet Joe" as we called the offending gunner. It was sometime before they could be convinced of the futility of it. There would be another "Parapet Joe" to take his place if he were removed. But our chaps thought it showed good spirit. Unfortunately in a dawn strafe a shell landed in the trench, killed one of them and wounded several others. That finished it for the G.I.'s as useful soldiers. Our chaps said that they practically lived on the bottom of the trench on their stomachs. If a shell came within miles they were down there. As for going to get their own rations; that was out of the question. Our chaps helped them, hoping that they would soon recover their nerve. While it improved toward the end of their stay, it was pretty obvious that another casualty would have set them back again.

A week or two later I had another lightning contact with American soldiers. It developed from the fact that Routine Orders one day contained the order that all ranks who were in "D" Company, Fourth Battalion, on April 5, were to parade at Battalion Headquarters at 2pm the next day for a Court of Enquiry. That of course involved me and I guessed it would

probably be something to do with our “listening posts” at La Cygne Farm.

Then on the way to Headquarters the next morning, I had to pass over the dangerous section where I had already had the recent narrow squeak and as I approached the brow of the hill, which Fritz seemed to have under observation, I got into the trench and began to speed up. When I put my head up again, prompted by an unusual noise, I saw a column of American troops marching in threes straight toward the danger zone. I jumped out of the trench and ran over to the officer-in-charge and told him that this part of the road was extremely dangerous, as the Germans could observe anything.

“Get your men over to the trench there as quickly as possible and go along the trench”.

“Who are you and what right have you to give me orders!”

“Never mind about that”, I replied. “I’ve been at this game long enough to know when the next moment is likely to be fatal. Look at those fresh shell holes. There will be some more soon and I am not waiting”.

With that I dashed off to the trench again and proceeded to Headquarters. Contrary to my forecast the expected shells did not arrive before that part of the road was out of my sight and earshot. So wondered what sort of “mutt” those Yanks would think I was.

I arrived at Headquarters with about half an hour to spare before the parade, but seeing no-one about who looked as though they were waiting to parade, I checked that I was really at the right H.Q. In due course the Sergeant Major came out and bawled,

“Fall in on my left for the Court of Enquiry”.

Another man and I fell in, but as no more seemed to be coming forward, the Sergeant Major bawled out his order again, but with no further result. All three of us were quite surprised.

However, after checking with the Court in the orderly room, the Sergeant Major came out and ordered the other man inside. In about two minutes he was out again and it was my turn. After the preliminaries I was asked where I was on April 5. I told them I started off as a platoon runner in the cellar of La Cygne Farm and I heard one officer whisper,

“Now we are getting somewhere”.

Interrupted by an occasional question, I told them what I have already described in previous pages about this event. When I had finished the officer acting as Chairman, said,

“Thanks very much, you have been very helpful”.

“Right, Sergeant Major, show in the next one”.

“There are no more, Sir”.

“Do you mean to tell me that we have had almost a complete changeover in the personnel of the Company in the last three months?”

“Yes, Sir. That is correct. I have checked the rolls”.

By this time I was just about through the door, and heard no more.

In the last month or so I had become rather fatalistic about becoming friendly with new arrivals because my short-lived friendship was broken by my friends disappearing from our unit by one or other reasons that a front-line soldier is heir to.

However, I had an idea that my partner in the enquiry was one of our Company cooks. He confirmed it, and in line with cook's apparent general practice, was in a safe place when the April 5 stunt was on.

It was nearly dark when, on my way back to my unit, I passed over the dangerous part of the road again. But this time it was a “hive of industry” to coin a phrase. Several dead Americans

were lying around and wounded were being removed to the protection of the trench and away to an aid post.

I did not linger as occasional shells were still arriving, but I did get the strength of the situation. It appears that the Germans waited till the most favourable opportunity when the entire target was more or less clearly displayed and more guns were brought to bear on them with tragic results for the Yanks.

There is little more to recount about this “quiet” period. We did go for a rest behind the lines and I was feeling pretty fed up. I realised that so far I had been extremely lucky but my luck could not hold out for much longer. So I thought the air force might be worth considering. That night there was a “dog-fight” almost overhead and one plane came down in flames. Being in a trench seemed safer and I scrapped the idea of becoming a pilot.

But it came out in routine orders a few days later that any carpenters in the unit were to report to a certain hut. If the lessons I had learned in the Waimate District High School on how to true up a piece of wood, and the experience I had in building a hen-house and fowl-run at home in Waimate made me a carpenter, then I was one. If not, I thought it was still worth a try. So I reported.

“Are you a carpenter?” I was asked.

“Well, I am a bit of a bush carpenter,” I replied.

“I can true up a piece of wood and hammer a nail in a board. But if it is any highly skilled work, I am afraid I am not your man”.

“What do you know about duck-boards? We want them laid round the camp”.

“Oh, I’ve had plenty of experience with them at Ypres”.

“Alright, if you can be released from your Company, you can start tomorrow morning”.

So I started the following morning and had another “carpenter” working with me who seemed to know but little about the trade and less about laying duckboards. He also was really just “chancing his arm”. However, the position of the duck-walks had already been marked out and the material made ready for fixing in place. All we had to do was to drive the small piles that they stood on, fix the crosspieces that supported the duckboards to each pair of piles and nail the duck-boards on the crosspieces. The ground was quite amenable to receiving the piles, encouraged by a maul or sledge-hammer, and our only problem was, how long could we make the job last for.

It was with some satisfaction that each day we saw the troops march out from camp for their route marches, physical jerks, fatigues, etc., which were part of the “resting” process. Of course we were diligently at work when the troops and/or officers were about, but still managing not to make any marked progress. However, we usually worked steadily for about two hours each morning and about two hours in the afternoon to show something for the time we should have spent on the job. For the rest of the time we could usually be found in the canteen reading or yarning. It took us several days to “time” the camp inspections, when of course we were always “hard at it”. We had hoped that we might be kept on when the unit went up to the front-line again, but it was fruitless, and I joined my unit to the accompanying envious enquiries from my section,

“How did you wangle it?”

The question that was a little more difficult to parry was,

“Why did you not let me/us in on it?”

I was quick to point out that not having any line experiences at Ypres, they would not have acquired the necessary skill for laying duck-boards.

“Skite”, they laughingly told me.

However, times were changing. The Germans had adopted a new plan for front line “trenches”. They were like large isolated shell holes peppered over their front and each manned with a machine-gun team capable of withering cross-fire. In the dark one could penetrate deeply into the system before being aware that you were trapped by the fire of those you had passed between and had left in your rear.

A new method had been developed too, of “storing” us in the trenches. Instead of “bivvies”, accommodating us in pairs, we were packed into “flare-proof dug-outs” holding about two platoons at least at a time. They were really large spacious rooms with about six inches of soil on the corrugated iron roof which was supported by occasional joists. We had very little to do but keep under cover and as the days went by, I revised irregular French verbs on the quiet, and I do not know who was more surprised, the officer or I, when he caught me intent on my grammar book, and asked me what I was reading.

22 The beginning of the end?

But our lazy days were just about finished. We moved out one day to “support” trenches and after dusk “stand to” we heard the rumble of limbers close by and other unusual noises which were usually heard in the back areas and had no business in the front lines. Cautiously we went out to see and found cheeky guns and piles of ammunition right in front of us. Enquiry revealed that a “big stunt” was on the morrow at dawn and we were in reserve. That part was good news anyway.

But the dawn was foggy and when the barrage opened we could not see a thing. A few desultory shells landed far enough away from us to be ignored, and obviously if the Germans were retaliating their barrage was not coming our way. In about a quarter of an hour our guns seemed to be firing from in front of

the line and by mid-morning the fighting moved out of range of us. But now the fog was clearing and through the haze we could see a sunken road literally full of surrendering Germans slouching, some with their hands up, to our back areas. And they kept coming on without a break. To our war-weary eyes it was one of the best sights of the war.

During the day we moved up to a large heap of rubble divided by the remains of a sunken road, in which we found a sign-post "Puisieux" and dug-in as well as we could for the night. Well after dark the expected counter attack started with the usual all-hell-let-loose routine from which we were strangely exempt. It was accompanied by one of the best displays of fireworks that I have seen. They were the S.O.S signals asking for support and consisted of flares shot into the sky and almost hanging there, suspended by their own parachutes. They were a profusion of reds, yellow, orange, white, etc., and seemed to out-do the bright stars in number.

We of course, had to "stand to" ready to go into action at a moment's notice, but the unwelcome order never came. Things were very "edgy" during the night with occasional bursts, mainly of rifle fire, with more concentrated effort at dawn "stand to", assisted by gunfire.

During the day we seemed to be well away from the action but during the night we moved up to a sunken road which overlooked a gully where we were told to "dig in". We had an idea that the Germans were not very far away and when daylight came we were surprised to see them casually carrying on in front of a collection of huts. Someone then fired a rifle-shot and the scene changed magically.

Undoubtedly we had got the Germans on the run and apparently the orders were given to keep them running and "harass the enemy", and "exploit the objective". Unfortunately these were often carried out in broad daylight and made us "sitting ducks"

for machine guns and snipers. So much so that Barraclough was taken off his pedestal and given the sobriquet of “butcher”.

We moved stealthily without hardly any loss to a sunken road where we were told to “dig in” for the time being. I had started to clean out an old funk-hole and was about halfway through when I thought that the trunk of an old tree growing on the bank above me, could stop a shell and the splash of shell splinters would come right on top of me. So I commenced digging in another position along the road, but before I could complete, the Germans started shelling very strongly with their shells bursting well behind us. Obviously they did not think that we were so far forward. But strangely enough a stray shell did hit the tree and the man who had taken over my first funk-hole, in spite of my warning, got the expected shrapnel wounds on his chest and one shoulder. He was not seriously incapacitated and commenced walking out to the aid post. On the way out he got a bullet through his left hand which ever afterwards was useless to him.

We found later that we were to the left of Bapaume between the Bapaume-Arras and Bapaume-Cambrai roads, where the land sloped appreciably down to a railway embankment about one hundred and fifty yards away, and with no cover over that distance.

There was some hesitation after we received the order to “attack and harass the enemy”. It seemed like suicide to run all the way down the hillside in broad daylight and completely exposed to the enemy. I had a theory, “go while the going is good”, and as there was nothing happening on the slope, I jumped up on the top of the bank and ran down that slope as hard as I could and literally for my life. After I had gone about ten yards I noticed that what I thought were half a dozen grey moths were keeping about a foot in front of my feet all the way. Then I realised that they were machine-gun bullets striking the dry, grey earth and hitting up little dust plumes. I was right out in the open by now

without any protection except the railway embankment ahead. I was beginning to tire but I simply had to maintain speed or the gunner would alter his sights and “get” me. How I made it, I do not know. I flung myself behind the protective embankment to get my breath, awaiting the rest of the platoon. My effort had distracted the attention of the Germans from the rest of the platoon who, by sneaking behind a thin screen of shrubs away on the left, arrived safely at the embankment and we joined up. Cautiously we spotted the offending machine-gun which had a clear, open space in front of it, but if we could get round to his rear unnoticed, we could throw a Mills bomb from some convenient cover there.

We first rushed some army huts which were half-right between us and the gun, and all agreed that my scheme of the rear attack was acceptable. I suggested that some of us stay at the huts and draw the Germans’ fire while the others worked their way in a wide circle to the Germans’ rear. They were not so enthusiastic about drawing the fire when the question arose as to who were to be the decoys. Two others joined me for the job, and we blazed away always quickly from a new position each time, and as quickly changed. We soon had the Germans blazing at us as we dodged round and through the huts. When it was really becoming too hot we decided to move to another set of huts separated from the first by a narrow track which was in full view of the machine-gun. The other two managed to get across unharmed, but as the second one was reaching safety a burst of bullets came down the track, indicating that the gunner would be waiting for me.

So I just “sat pretty” till I thought he had given up. But he hadn’t! In darting across the gap I felt a terrific sting in my right arm and instantly dived into a nearby trench. It proved to be a dry latrine with the emphasis on “dry”. But there was no mistaking what had once been its function.

With joyful visions of being shipped to “Blighty” and losing one arm, I began to take stock, being a little concerned that no blood was showing, although the pain was there alright. Sure enough there was the hole where the bullet had entered my sleeve and, not so good, was the hole where it had left. So I slit my sleeve up to inspect. All my wound consisted of was a burn round my arm with the flesh being penetrated for a distance of an inch along the surface. What a disappointment and goodbye to “Blighty”! Gradually the pain lessened and as the road to the aid post was still being plastered with shells, I decided to carry on. The rest of our section was nowhere to be seen and as I skirted round to get behind the machine-gun post, I fortunately ran into a strange Sergeant Major who was carrying a cooked roast sirloin of beef. My movements were easy to explain, but what was he doing out there? It seems that there were plenty more platoons out “harassing the enemy”. Anyway I really enjoyed sharing his roast beef.

We had moved out of sight of the machine-gun and I began to look for the rest of my platoon. I found some of them who said that the attack had lost the element of surprise and Fritz had shot eight of them. As soon as a man moved he was a dead man. It appears that they did not attack from the rear. So much for “exploiting the objective”.

We waited till dark and commenced to “dig in” in a short length of trench sufficient for the cover of the eight of us who were now left. Unfortunately, it was damp, chalky ground which made for heavy pick and shovel work. When we succeeded in loosening the chalk with the pick, if we stood on it the pieces stuck together again and we had to use the pick on it again. When we did get it onto the shovel it stuck on like a leech and we could not get it off. Half way through the night we were exhausted. We would do what we could, climb out of the trench, completely spent, lie flat on our backs till we felt we had enough strength to make another attempt. By dawn we had hardly got down deep enough, but someone had found a large

area of camouflage netting with which we covered the trench and the white chalk we had thrown up on the surface. Otherwise we would have been a first-class target for shelling.

I had dug the right-hand end part of our trench which was the hardest to dig. It entailed breaking the chalk away from the end of the trench as well as the front and rear sides. It was also in a most awkward position which would not allow a free swing of the pick. I had done this so that I could shape a seat in the end wall and sit down to rest my weary ankles. The prognosis of the doctor who examined me in Timaru for active service seemed to be coming true.

When I had comfortably arranged myself in the seat, three mates from the South Island West Coast insisted that I should give up my end position to them. They gave no reason for their request except that they wanted it and if I did not get out of the way they would heave me out. I had no option but to accede. So, still to rest my ankles I dug a hole in the floor of the trench further along and sat in that amidst a certain amount of ribald comment. And there I sat more or less all the following day.

The next day our planes came over several times sounding their klaxons, to be followed closely, more or less in pursuit, by German planes. However, we did not worry about either. We felt quite secure from view under our camouflage netting. We were too. About midday a panting and irate runner almost fell on top of us, and when he got his breath back said,

“Why didn’t you bloody bastards signal your position to our planes? Don’t you know what the bloody klaxon’s for?”

We didn’t know.

It seemed that a full scale stunt with barrage was planned for early dawn, but the artillery did not know where to place the barrage, as no one knew how far forward we had advanced and they, out of their kindness of heart, did not want to put the barrage down on top of us.

Before dawn, the stunt started as planned. We were in reserve and did not have to move from our trench. Except for an isolated machine-gun post or two, the attack met with little or no opposition. Then the prisoners began to come in and the trio that ousted me from my end position, went out “ratting” them. Soon “their” three sides of the trench were covered with a display of rings and watches that had been taken from the terrified prisoners and which would do credit to any jeweller’s shop. For my part, I could not be bothered. Resting my ankles, sitting in the hole seemed to be much more desirable and important. We were being subjected to the occasional desultory shell fire that we got on these occasions and no one took any notice of it.

Suddenly there was a piercing shriek and a huge roar and my head felt as though a big hand had got hold of it and tried to wrench it off, just as we used to wrench the heads off birds in our boyhood days to sell to the County Council. At the same time, bits and pieces were raining down on me, all in a cloud of smoke. As the air cleared I looked round to see what had happened. There was not much of the middle man of the trio left. I was told afterwards that there was hardly enough to fill a sandbag to bury. The head of the man at the end was lying by itself all among the watches and rings, while the head of the man next to me was hanging by some sort of cord on his chest. Both the headless bodies were still standing supported by the sides of the trench. It took only an instant for my memory permanently to photograph this scene and when I looked in the opposite direction, I saw through the smoke that the others were climbing out of the trench.

“You bastard! If you make another move I swear to God I’ll put this bayonet through your bloody throat”.

I was flat on my back with a brass-button Digger standing over me with one foot on my chest and his rifle raised in a striking position with the bayonet ready to lunge at my throat.

“What the hell are you playing at, Dig? Where am I and how did I get here?” I questioned.

“There you are”, another voice said. “Didn’t I tell you? The poor bugger is shell-shocked.”

Explanations followed. It seems I was behaving in a very irresponsible manner, especially whenever I heard the sound of a plane. I was thus revealing their position to the Germans, making them a likely target for the shelling. So much did they consider that their lives were being endangered, that they were irate enough to have considered that extreme action was necessary. They then showed me where there was a good new German dug-out about two hundred yards to the rear, and suggested that I take refuge in that till I was able to get a better grip of myself. This I did and at dusk, realising that there were no signs of further shelling, found my way back to our platoon. Only four of us were left, and the front line had advanced seven miles during the day. It appeared to us that the seven miles could have been just as easily obtained without “harassing the enemy” and the useless expenditure of our platoon, not to mention the expenditure which may have been incurred by other units.

The other time when we foolishly (to our eyes) harassed the enemy, did not have such disastrous results, but in view of the big advances made the following day, seemed equally useless.

Next day was quiet and in the mopping-up process we inspected the machine-gun that had given me the bullet in the arm, and found that the Germans had been using “dum-dums”. The bullets were copper-plated and therefore would poison the wound. They had two grooves at right angles filed on their tips so that when they hit anything solid they would spatter and make a nasty gaping wound. Apparently my arm was swinging behind me when it was hit and the grooves in the bullet had caught in the cloth sufficiently to deflect it round my arm. The news of the copper plating caused me to inspect the scratch on

my arm more closely. Sure enough, it was beginning to fester so I reported at the aid post. It was in vain that I facetiously protested that I had been too busy fighting a war to worry about that scratch. After the wound had been dressed I was ordered to report again in a few day's time and if it took a serious turn I would be court-martialled for a self-inflicted wound, because I did not report immediately I had received it! However, it healed up quite well so that now it is even difficult to see the scar.

23 More “harassing the enemy”

Again we were drawn up along a sunken road, but this time it was to chase the enemy out of position along another sunken road on the other side of a canal that we had to cross. There had been a wooden bridge across it which had been blown up and only the heavy baulks of timber were left floating on the water. By taking advantage of scrub growing practically down to the water's edge, we were able to get to the bank of the canal without being seen, and there was no sign of enemy activity at all. There was a convenient bank about twenty yards from the other side of the canal. So again following my principle of “going while the going is good”, I stepped onto a baulk and by using adjacent baulks as stepping stones I arrived at the other side and was running to the protective bank before a machine-gun began cracking out. But this time it was not firing at me but at the others, who seeing my success were trying to emulate it. Apparently, there was considerable confusion whenever two men tried to balance on the same baulk, and both usually overbalanced together into the water. Fortunately they managed to grasp a baulk to support themselves, because laden down with ammunition, bombs, etc., they would otherwise sink like a stone.

When I reached the objective, I found that it was enfiladed by cross-fire from a two-storey building some considerable distance away. I heard the firing of the machine-gun, but it was a second or two before the bullets came flying past, during which time I was able to take cover against the bank. When the others arrived, some wet, we carried on to a small plateau where we joined together some recently-formed shell holes to construct a trench. But the whole episode was fool-hardy and could have been done equally well with far less risk at night.

That night there was a considerable amount of sniping by both sides and my friend Corporal C___y went out into no-man's land to see what was going on. Unfortunately a sniper "got him in the neck", so I was told, and that ended his life. He had already been seriously wounded twice before and was fatalistic about the third time being unlucky, but if ever a man deserved to survive the war it was he. And men such as he were essential to help build a better future when this bloody nightmare was over.

For the next week or two, there was little to report except a small daylight attack in which we were to be supported by tanks. I was never much impressed with tanks, perhaps because I remembered the derelict monsters squatting on skylines we had seen on the Ypres Salient. In that position and perhaps because they were slow moving, they seem to have been "sitting ducks" for the German gunners. However, the tanks that came to help us came late and we were well on to gaining our objective when they arrived. They were "whippets", and moved with commendable speed. Almost immediately the German gunners spotted them too. A shell destroyed the endless track of one and it began to move round in a circle. The crew jumped out and ran for the back areas. A second one toppled over sideways in a shell-hole and its crew followed the example of the first tank crew. The combined example of the two crews was apparently too compelling for the crew of the third tank not to take notice of, so they stopped their tank, and ran off likewise. To be quite

fair, the Germans had got their range and it was only a matter of minutes, perhaps seconds, before they would have had a direct hit. We were also beginning to get some attention from the gunners, so I had something more important to think about than the fate of the tank crews. However, we gained our objective without any losses in our vicinity.

From then on there was nothing of very great moment till we arrived at trenches in front of Havrincourt Wood. The whole wood was alive with activity. It was a natural camouflage for guns of all sizes and their attendant ammunition piles, tanks, troops, portable cooking stoves, water tanks, limbers, wagons and the whole paraphernalia belonging to an army. As the trenches we were quartered in were some distance from the front of the Wood, I was not concerned much about the wonderful target it would be for the Germans who should at least be aware of its potentialities for camouflaging and should strafe it occasionally at least. Altogether it was a very heartening sight. But what did it portend?

24 The attack on the Hindenburg Line

It was obvious that something big was brewing in the Wood and the question for us was would it be a “cake walk” or “blood and guts”. As we waited and the days wore on, one or two got a bit “edgy”. I suggested reading something or doing some activity to take one’s mind off the uncertain future. I myself had fully recovered from my shell-shock, in which I was helped by my French Grammar. In addition, there was always the hope that we would be “in reserve” and thus escape the initial intensity of the attack.

One afternoon the fateful news came. We were to move off to the front line at 2 a.m. “So try and get some sleep in”. At dusk “stand to” we were informed that the “stunt” had been

postponed twenty four hours. It was doubtful whether that was good news. True: we stood at a good chance of living another twenty four hours. But what then? At the next dusk “stand to” we were told that the stunt was again postponed. “The Tommies had not yet come up on the right”. It seems that they were striking trouble and that did not improve the outlook of the troops. The following day dragged on. J___y K___g, a friend of mine, did follow my suggestion and dug a flare-proof funk-hole in the side of the trench. Then late in the afternoon a shell landed near the top with him in the funk-hole and burst sideways into the trench. When the smoke had cleared, J___y had a blackened face. If he was shell-shocked he did not show it. But the nasty part about it was that if he had not followed my advice and dug, the top of the trench would have been solid, the shell would have burst up harmlessly into the air, and J___y wouldn’t have had a black face, to say the least.

Someone took bets that there would be another postponement, and he was right, although the odds seemed to be against him. The next day of waiting was terrible. The strain was really telling, especially as the news got round that it was to be a full-scale attack on the Hindenburg Line.

I had become tired of the French Grammar and the irregular verbs and remembered the miniature pocket Bible that my parents had given me and which I carried in the left hand breast pocket of my tunic. Quite casually I opened it up and began to read where it opened of its own accord at Psalm 91. As I read it, I did not consider that it had any special significance for me; but it did have rather a calming and lulling effect. I half recollected the Sunday nights in which I had to memorise it while my parents went to Church. The old kerosene lamp standing on the dining room table with the collection of “Graphics” and “Illustrated London News” at one end, and which we did not look at until we had memorised the five verses regularly set. There must surely have been some development of our power of concentration when we always learned the

verses first before enjoying the pictures of the Boer War and the adventures of Tiger Tim.

While I was reading it, one of our section, in passing, asked me what I was reading. I replied,

“The Bible.”

“Do you believe in that stuff?”

“Well, most of it.”

“I wish to Christ I did.”

“Well, it is not too late to start.”

But he drifted off and after we had moved into our “hopping off” positions for the “stunt”, I never saw him again.

And this is what I was reading:

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wings shall thou trust; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night: nor for the arrow that flyeth by day: nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day. A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shall thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most high, thy habitation, there no evil shall befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thou foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder, and the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

Because he has set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him; I will set him on high because He has known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation”.

So the afternoon wore on. I think I might have slept a little and felt rather refreshed and when at dusk “stand to” there was no postponement, I felt quite philosophical about it. Before we moved off to take our places in the front line, half a mug of rum was issued to each man. I again achieved momentary popularity when I gave mine away. There were two reasons for so doing. First, I did not drink it and second, more importantly, in the next twenty-four hours a man would want a clear head and all his wits about him. So with this “Dutch Courage” the troops moved with a bit more equanimity up to the front line with apparently one exception. His nerves were in a bad way before this strain and when we came to move off he rolled in the trench screaming, “I won’t go. I won’t go!” and he was foaming and dribbling from his mouth. Our officer came along and threatened to shoot him for something in the face of the enemy. I did not catch what he said. But what I did notice was that as the officer began to fiddle with his revolver holster, he realised he was looking down the spouts of several rifles with grim looking men with their fingers on the triggers.

“Alright”, the officer said, “I’ll deal with you in the morning.” After the stunt started, I never saw the officer again.

When we arrived at our places in the front line where we were to scramble out of the trench for the attack, we were given another half mug of rum. Needless to say, the troops were ready for anything except that which required a cool head, especially seeing that these were our orders:

“Zero hour is 3.00. The barrage will play for three minutes on no-man’s land and then advance at the rate of one hundred yards

a minute, and continue till the objective is reached, a trench about three hundred yards distance.”

So we waited while zero hour approached and the remaining seconds relentlessly lessened for us to “hop the bags”. When zero hour did arrive of course we had the usual cacophony of noise of every gun within miles firing as fast as it could load with their flashes lighting up the darkness.

Immediately men on each side of me began to scramble out of the trench. It was no use my yelling at them to stop. I couldn’t be heard, but I pulled one man back and held up three fingers to stand for three minutes, and he understood. Somehow or other others who had kept their head, got the impetuous back for the three minutes. When that time had elapsed we all scrambled out, but unfortunately things were so wild and indescribable that we all, instead of doing one hundred yards a minute, were doing it in ten seconds or under. The air was full of bullets, wheeping past and they seemed like devils searching round for victims. But peculiarly enough there were then no enemy shells landing among us.

I did not run as fast as the others, not so much because of orders, but because I was now “Number Two” in the Lewis Gun team and it was my duty to carry the bag of spare parts for the gun. On the other hand there is no lonelier place on earth than behind a barrage, so I was keeping up fairly closely to the men on my right and left.

Suddenly they both dropped to the ground and I dropped too, putting the spare parts bag in front of me for protection. Equally suddenly the man on my right got a direct hit from one of our own shells and the flash of the burst in the dark showed the fragments of his flesh and uniform being shot into the air. A moment or two later the man on my left was similarly fragmented into eternity. He too, got a direct hit from our own shell with a similar sight ensuing. This time I thought I heard

the high pitch of his scream amid the lower pitch of the explosion as he similarly was fragmented.

Then I heard a gun fire directly behind me and its shell was coming straight for me. It seemed ages before it arrived and I knew that this was going to be close. Then I felt its hot breath on the back of my neck as it passed over and burst several feet directly in front of me. I was unhurt. Shortly afterwards another one started to come and I thought that if the range of the gun is shortened ever so slightly then the shell will “get me”. Again I felt the hot breath and again the harmless burst.

I don't remember much about the third one, but I seemed to come out of my body and standing up in the dark looked down at myself lying on the ground behind the spare parts bag. Then I was enveloped in a white light. I was the white light. It was in me, through me and all around me. There was also a suggestion of something beyond which I am inclined to write with a capital “S”. But I had a strange sensation of being absolutely naked, not physically, but mentally and spiritually. Everything was exposed. I remember feeling, rather than thinking, that it did not matter what people thought of me, who my parents were, what I owned, how much money I had in the bank; in fact all those things unwise people devote their lives to, was of no consequence. What really mattered was the quality of me; what sort of person I was; what was my spiritual worth; what was the value of the me that lives for ever.

Suddenly I realised it was broad daylight and there were some of our men in the trench which was our objective, now about ten yards away. One of them saw me and when he waved me in I dashed into the trench unharmed. A number of the faces were strange and there was not an officer nor an N.C.O amongst us. But Bill G. was there with three inches along the top of his bayonet covered in blood. He and I at one time had discussed the relative merits of using the bayonet or bullet close quarters. I was for the bayonet next time and he told me that on this

occasion circumstances drove him to it. He lunged at the German's throat but buried the bayonet in his chest and could not withdraw it with the German writhing on the end and screaming, "Merci kamerad, merci kamerad". So Bill had no option but to pull the trigger after all and end the German's agony and life.

A few yards along on our right the trench had been filled in to form a road across it. On the other side of the filling were the Germans. Apparently two of our adjacent battalions advancing side by side, in the loneliness of the attack, had moved each towards its own centre, leaving a gap of several hundred yards between the adjacent flanking men of the battalions. This had left a well-fortified trench full of Germans, which was part of our objective.

The road had to be crossed to get at them and three or four dead Diggers, who had already attempted to cross it, indicated that it was not going to be easy. First we tried throwing Mills bombs but the Germans out-ranged us with their stick bombs. We then used the special cup attached to the muzzle of the rifle which now gave us the advantage of a longer range for the bombs. But after a few shots the wooden stocks of the rifles split. At the same time the Germans began to retaliate with the deadly "Minnie". We had no answer for that but retired back along the trench out of range at the same time keeping our Lewis Gun trained on the road. But a sniper got the "Number One" and so it became my turn to operate the gun. Needless to say, I took up another position which I hoped the sniper would not see.

Shortly afterwards a strange Corporal came along loaded with sandbags of Mills bombs, and detailed men off for a bombing raid, including me. In vain I protested that I was Number One on the Lewis Gun. He said, "That's an order". "O.K", I said and collected my bombs and left the gun. A concentrated artillery barrage was to be put down at 6pm on that part of the

trench and before the Germans could get their heads up we had to wade in with the bombs and take the rest of the trench.

At 6pm it was a good barrage; short, sharp and plenty of it in the right places. When the barrage did stop, we said to the Corporal,

“Righto Corp, you lead”.

But he whimpered, “No, no”, and sank down on the floor of the trench, scared stiff and crying helplessly. We had to act quickly or the Germans would be getting their heads up, ready for us again. So a man named Osmers said to me,

“Come on, Shack, we’d better get going”.

I replied, “Righto, Ossie, you lead”.

And he did and got across safely. So I, picking up a rifle that a nearby dead “Digger” had discarded, and carrying a sandbag of bombs on my shoulder, also arrived safely. I found this trench was much more elaborate than the one we had left. It had a fire-step (on which one stood to see over the top of the trench) which was shoulder high from the bottom of the trench. In addition there were numerous dug-out entrances. So Ossie and I began bowling bombs down the steps of the dug-outs and listened to the very satisfactory crunch which they made on their explosion. I began to think about the Germans coming out of the dug-outs we had already passed, and attacking us in the rear, but took some comfort in the fact that the other “Diggers” following us would look after them. I did not know then, that we two were entirely on our own. I was beginning to run out of bombs and wondered what to do about it, when I saw a dirty towel hoisted above the trench on the end of a rifle.

Osmers now being behind me, I yelled out “O.K” and signalled them to come down the trench past me as I was standing on the fire-step. They had discarded all their equipment and arms. One German came past with an Iron Cross ribbon; so I snatched it off him and got the pin in my hands for my pains (sorry). But

they kept streaming past; ten, twenty, thirty, and I lost count because a German called out something and they suddenly started to scramble over the back of the trench and run away. But Ossie's and my rifle both cracked out together, firing from the hip at the mob, but at no one in particular. I was too busy watching the general effect and re-loading to take in details. But that was enough; they all filed past quietly after that.

So Ossie and I worked our way still further along the trench to clear it up, when we were overtaken by an officer and a Sergeant who said,

"Is this where you are? Anybody ahead of you?"

"None of our blokes. But we were going to see if there were any more Germans".

The Sergeant said,

"No. You stay here. I'll go".

And then we learned that we had been on our own. After we had waited some time for the Sergeant to return, I volunteered to go along and see where he was and with the agreement of the officer discovered him dead, with one arm gone, head pulped, and his waist and trunk a gory mess with most of the right half completely blown away.

Apparently he was carrying the bomb ready for throwing and must have released the spring inadvertently and in five seconds it went off.

On the way there I passed a bay in the trench which was full of the discarded equipment so on the return I salvaged a pair of field glasses (which I still have) and an automatic pistol and a spare clip of ammunition.

When we rejoined the rest on the other side of the road we made enquiries about the Corporal.

"Oh, he's taken the prisoners back to Headquarters".

I was later told that he received a Military Medal for capturing seventy prisoners in this stunt. "C'est la guerre!"

That night we were withdrawn from the front line, but those who relieved us, had to face an unsuccessful flame throwing counter attack just before dawn. I had never experienced one of those, but on discussing it we realised that they were pretty futile provided you were not caught within flame range. One bullet into the nozzle of the flame would probably be fatal for the carrier.

25 Exhaustion

From then on our part of the line kept advancing without anything really unusual happening. One day when we were lazing in the trenches doing a bit of de-lousing, a man named D___o appeared. At one time he had been one of my cabin mates on the "Ruahine", but I found him most difficult to get on with. For one thing our outlooks on life were poles apart and we jarred on each other. He swore that "they" would never get him into the front line, and so when he appeared in the trenches I reminded him that the front line was about two hundred yards away and that is mainly where you get killed. He replied,

"Well, I am not there yet and it will take more than 'them' to get me there".

"Oh, I don't know how you'll do it. But good luck to you".

Next morning I enquired where D___o was and received the reply,

"Oh, he has gone back down the line again. He paraded sick and has got V.D."

By this time I was getting very battle-weary and felt occasionally light-headed. I thought that it must be my turn for

the Spanish flu which was decimating our ranks about that time. However, a day later when we were moving off again to take up positions for another stunt (which proved to be the capture of Le Quesnoy, in which our platoon was to play a prominent part) I fell over and had difficulty in standing up even without the harness.

I was helped to the medical officer who immediately took my temperature and found it was 99.8. When I replied to his question of how long I had been with the unit, he expressed the opinion that I had earned a rest anyway and sent me down the line to the Divisional Rest Station. There we lay about on stretchers all day and night and I was utterly bored. So much so that I ventured to smoke a cigarette for something to do. That night I had a hazy glimpse of shadowy figures gathered round me and someone saying,

“Well, I am afraid Corporal, that is another one you’ll have to lay out and get ready for burying in the morning.”

Morning came and they by-passed me with the breakfast. As soon as I realised that I was not getting any, I yelled out and asked what the game was. They told me that I was considered dead, or so near it that it did not matter. When I said that I was hungry, the M.O. was called and I was allowed breakfast.

After a rest of several weeks my strength returned and I rejoined my unit. They had a great tale to tell about scaling the walls of Le Quesnoy and capturing the town. It was the most romantic (in the broad sense of the word) stunt of the war and with my usual luck, I missed it.

Still our advance rolled on and it was obvious that the Germans had no heart for fighting and those left behind to carry out rear-guard actions and delaying tactics, seemed to be glad of an opportunity to surrender. Their most effective counter-measure seemed to be in the use of time-delay bombs on vital means of communication such as bridges, cross-roads, etc. One favourite

trick of theirs was to blow out every fish-plate at the junctions of the ends of railway irons making the track completely useless. On one occasion in crossing a track and on looking about three hundred yards in both directions I could not see a join that was not blown out. So the engineers had to lay completely new tracks overland. I was shortly to have some experience of these new tracks.

26 On the way to Blighty

One day a Corporal came calling out,

“Where is this lucky bugger, Shackleton, 55636?”

When I responded, he instructed me to report to Battalion Headquarters for a new uniform and clothing to go on “Blighty leave”.

Strangely enough, I was not nearly as excited as he seemed to be. It was just another order to be carried out in an endless chain of events. At Headquarters I found a large number of other “Diggers” all being processed for “Blighty”. We were put on the train and rolled and ambled over open country at about fifteen miles an hour on a make-shift railway line obviously replacing a permanent one already ruined by the enemy. We lurched along to a large open paddock with some sort of railway shunting network laid out on it. There we stopped and I was dismayed to find that the engine had gone off and left us. Well I was not going to miss my Blighty leave. So I told the other thirty-nine in our wagon that I was “slinging my hook” and going off to the fair-sized town of Caudry which we could see about two miles away. They all thought that it was a good idea and followed and eventually so did all the rest of the soldier-freight in the train.

Arriving in the town, I asked a Tommy who seemed to know his way about,

“Which is the way to the station?”

He asked which station, and then I remembered that in this part of the world there are several main stations, and my reply, “The one which trains go through on their way to Boulogne”, brought the necessary instructions, but my following split up at almost every intersection over arguments as to what the Tommy had said. Eventually I saw an air-force truck full of officers pulled in by the footpath on the other side of the street. I rushed over and repeated the request I had made to the Tommy.

“Hop in, New Zealand. We’re going there too”.

So I clambered aboard and almost immediately the truck moved off leaving my “followers” stranded. We did get a train and it was packed solidly, but I managed to wedge myself among the passengers who were mostly civilians.

We travelled at the usual ambling gait and shortly afterwards we slid past the empty trucks we had deserted in the open country. Then they were coupled up to our train and off we went. Instead of panicking we should have just waited in the army trucks for the civilian train to couple us up. At the next stop, I thought the empty trucks were preferable. So did a lot of other soldiers.

We again lurched across country till we had a stop at Abbeville; in fact a long stop. Becoming bored I went to the engine-driver and asked him how much longer were stopping there. He said,

“About an hour”.

That, I thought, would give me a chance to see the place. So with others I set off down the road, being followed by an increasing stream of soldiers. Then the engine gave a whistle. I did not wait to see what that was for, but expecting the worst, made a dash for the train and my “carriage”. Unfortunately I

was at the wrong end of the stream for returning to the train and men were still clambering into the truck in front of me when I realised that the train was moving fairly quickly now and in a moment or two would be travelling too quickly for me to get on. So grabbing a convenient hand-hold which provided for the use of the “shunter”, I scrambled onto the buffer of my truck and, feeling quite safe, hung on there for about an hour till the train again stopped. I then rejoined my travelling companions just as they were deciding that the best thing to do with my kit and its contents (which I had left in the truck), was to divide it among themselves. They said that they thought I had been left behind and would not need it any more.

And so the journey went on with stops for meals and other reasons, but the whole character of the journey was changing. We had lost the civilian section of the train and were now travelling as an army train on a “permanent” way which seemed much more permanent. At every road-crossing and station, groups of civilians were waving to us and shouting,

“Fini la guerre”.

I thought that they were either being sarcastic or wishing us well on our Blighty leave where, at least for a fortnight, we would be finished with the war.

We eventually arrived at Boulogne and I made my acquaintance with “One Blanket Hill” camp again where I slept the night. Next morning saw me aboard the Channel steamer, but just as we were about to cast off there seemed to be some change of plan. “Submarine warning”, I thought. No. It was just to take on board a company of the now tired, dirty, unshaven “Diggers” who had followed me astray at Caudry.

I kept well out of sight on the crossing till we reached Dover and soon realised that with the prospect of the delights of leave in London, there was no room in their minds for revenge against me.

27 The Armistice Hour

As our “boat” train, loaded with troops, was drawing into Victoria Station, we heard a clock starting to strike eleven and immediately bells were clanging, whistles blowing, and the roar of huge crowds of people cheering, etc. In fact it was the noise of a barrage played with instruments of a higher pitch. It was eleven o’clock on the eleventh of November 1918.

I have never been able to locate the place where we disembarked from the train. We must have been run into an inconspicuous siding, but huge crowds were there. Immediately we were on the platform we got the familiar order,

“Tallest on the right. Shortest on the left. Size!”

After that was executed I found I was marching off at the head of the column in the middle of the leading “three”, between an Aussie and another New Zealander. As soon as we cleared the platform all we could see was a mass of faces pressing forward but kept in check by policemen, mounted, as well as on foot.

When the crowd saw us they let out one roar of cheers and shouting and surged towards us on both sides. It was useless for the police to try to make a way for us to get to the “underground”. The crowd would not be stopped and it looked as though we were going to be crushed, or at least seriously injured. So I shouted to the two on each side of me to form a scrum at the same time grabbing them about their respective waists with me as “lock”.

“Now, get your hands down and go!” I shouted.

I do not know what happened to those behind us, but we got to the “tubes” alright where we had to go to Farringdon Road station to our “refitting” depot there.

We found we were actually in the charge of a New Zealand Sergeant whom I knew and who admitted, when we were safely

in a compartment, that he did not understand these “tubes”. I said,

“Righto Bill, I’ll let you know when we come to the stop before Farrington Road, and you can warn the rest to be ready to get out at the next stop”.

I had already solved the mysteries of the maps on the walls of the compartments during the four-day’s leave before going to France. Unfortunately the “tube” was packed and I got well separated from Bill by people moving out and in at each stop; but I could see him and most of our group were with him. At the appointed station I shouted to Bill along the carriage,

“The next one is ours, Bill”,

and he acknowledged the message with,

“Righto Shack”,

much to the interest of our fellow civilian passengers. I overheard one near me ask her neighbour,

“Did you hear that? That private was giving orders to the sergeant”.

The reply was,

“Oh, you can expect anything from those colonials”.

But it was good tempered. On the whole the civilian population treated us with benign tolerance and I am afraid there were times when in the exuberance of our situation (or beer) we did not deserve it. However, I think that most of us unconsciously maintained a standard of behaviour in line with the good name we hoped we had as New Zealanders.

At the depot, we bathed and again changed into a complete new set of underclothes and uniform. But at the first opportunity those of us who were financial enough, purchased a “decent looking outfit” as befitted a “wealthy” New Zealand soldier on the munificent pay (compared with the Tommies’) of five

shillings a day. I acquired a good-fitting tunic of officers' cloth, "flash" riding strides, a lemon-squeezer hat, with brim of unusually large proportions, Fox's officers puttees and kid boots. In this I was ably supported by Mr Fox of Whiteways. He also suggested a mohair muffler, pig-skin gloves and an oil-skin raincoat. Of course all this went to my father's account. He had previously and generously made arrangement for just this sort of thing.

28 London after the Armistice

For some days I stayed at the Shakespeare Hut in Russell Square, a hotel run by the Y.M.C.A. entirely for colonial troops (including Australians). The trouble was that the city was literally mad; people joy-riding on buses and thronging the streets laughing, cheering and shouting with a camaraderie I have never seen equalled. Unfortunately I could not rise to it myself. I kept thinking,

"It is all over. We will be able to live in peace again. We can now go home in safety".

But it did not make my pulse beat any faster, nor did I get any thrill from it, nor was I capable of grasping the historicity of the occasion.

A group of Tommies and girls seeing me standing aimlessly nearby, dragged me into their dancing ring.

"Come on New Zealand. The war is over!"

"Yes", I said, "So it seems", and I thought, "What next? Getting home, I suppose".

So I excused myself and wandered down Southampton Row into Trafalgar Square. This time it was "well-oiled" Aussies who wanted me to join in their drinking jubilations. They

carried me along in the direction of a nearby “pub” and it was not until I expostulated that I was a “wowser” and didn’t drink that they let me go.

“What”, they said, “a ‘Digger’ a ‘wowser’! That is hard to take”.

But we parted with mutual expressions of goodwill and handshakes all round. And I strolled as best I could through the packed streets toward Trafalgar Square, keeping a wary eye on the lookout for over-enthusiastic revellers.

Of course, I received the usual invitation of a prostitute, (this one very attractive, especially after a spell of nine months in the trenches without any female company to speak of) who promised me a good time at her beautiful flat where there were “some other nice girls too”. But she made no impression neither. There were tales circulating, of “Diggers” who had accepted this kind of invitation to a flat, being drugged and robbed by the gang who frequented the flat, and being found some days later floating down the Thames. Of course the tales might have been merely preventative propaganda, but it was just as well to realise the possibilities.

The next day I decided to visit a relative of Uncle Jack who lived in Aberdeen. But I had to negotiate a series of the right queues, most of them ten to fifteen yards long when I joined them. First I had to idle through a long queue to get a permit to buy a ticket, then there was the long queue to buy the ticket, and finally the long queue to get on the train, always being sure that you were in the correct line for that particular operation. I spent so much time dealing with these queues that I decided to postpone my trip till the next day. But the rejoicing in the streets still went on.

That evening I was joined by a mate from the Shakespeare Hut and together we attempted to attend a theatre – any theatre – but we did not have a hope. Every theatre we tried was full. We

were wandering rather aimlessly and despondently in Leicester Square when a “Y.M Bloke” came up to us and asked us if we had anything in view for the evening. After we explained our position he suggested that we go over to the Y.M hut in the middle of the Square. “There was a bit of a concert on, and some dancing.” He did not believe my reply that I could not dance, but said that did not matter, as one of the activities was lessons in the Maxina, a new dance that was becoming all the rage.

We did not relish the idea of going back to the Shakespeare Hut so early, so we went over. We were welcomed with just as much effusion as to suggest that they were really pleased to see us. The concert items were not impressive, but I found myself in the hands of a very pleasant and amiable English girl who was showing me the steps of the Maxina. Although I had my light kid boots on, they must have hurt her toes more often than I like to think about. I was clumsy, but by the time the evening was nearing the end, I achieved a certain amount of competence and was beginning to enjoy my leave. Unfortunately she had other arrangements for “being seen home”.

The following day I decided to visit another of Uncle Jack’s married sisters, this time in Rochester, because, as I had hoped, there was not the time-consuming routine to get a seat on a train as there would be to go north again. At Rochester I was made most welcome and the taste of normal home life helped me to keep my values straight. However, I did make a bad “faux pas” the thought of which caused me to cringe for a long time afterwards.

Several of us were gathered round the fire casually yarning and the hostess, perhaps to carry on the conversation, remarked how inspiring it must be to the men to be led on by a brave officer, waving his sword, etc. This was so contrary to the fact that I explained in disgust,

“Oh, that is all bullshit”, a common army expression for strongly contradicting a statement.

Of course I immediately apologised and all that, and my apologies were readily accepted with laughter. But if an officer wanted to live through a stunt (and he often didn't) he had to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, even to wearing a private's uniform. Similarly, N.C.O's, especially Sergeants, removed their stripes. We had a theory that the Germans specially “picked off” the officers and the N.C.O's when they had a chance. Certainly several times we arrived at our objectives without any authorised leaders.

Apart from further warm-hearted hospitality under difficult rationing circumstances there were two prominent points of interest on the Aberdeen trip. One was, that in passing over the Firth of Forth Bridge we saw what was reputed to be the surrendered German fleet lying at anchor below. On the way back it was not to be seen.

The train we were travelling in was packed so tightly as to be very embarrassing. I could not find a place where even rudely I could force myself between passengers. Then I remembered the guard's van. The guard was not at all enthusiastic about taking me in the van. I think he thought that I was planning to rob it. (“You know; these Colonials”). However, I persisted and promised to be a good boy. So I had at least a ride to York, where the guards were changed. The old guard asked me to approach the prospective guard as though I had not had already a ride in the van. I saw his point, but the train was now only reasonably full, so I did not have to ask any favours from the new guard.

I found the city of Aberdeen grey and depressing but some of their girls “enterprising”. I was walking along a crowded street with my cane in one hand and my pig-skin gloves in the other, when suddenly my gloves were snatched by two attractive girls who, giggling, ran off with them. As I had an appointment to

lunch with my host in the city and was already late, I did not take this diversion very kindly. So of course in accordance with their presumed plan I chased them. But of course it was a difficult job in the crowd and I became the object of good-humoured interest as I tried to rush past slow-moving pedestrians. Eventually I caught the girls but was in no mood to carry the game on further, much to their disgust.

After several days there I decided to see something of Scotland while I had the opportunity. But a few wet, cold miserable days in the Trossachs convinced me that this was no season for viewing what I considered was unimpressive scenery.

So I went back to London and the Shakespeare Hut. I took day trips that the Y.M. were running to various parts, such as Hampton Court, Kew, etc., and in the evenings I did the rounds of the theatres. I heard Dame Clara Butt and Kennerly Rumford and had quite a thrill when I heard her sing "Land of Hope and Glory".

The good-humoured, riotous behaviour of the crowds had simmered down a little and a rather sinister element had crept into it. For instance the Aussies had made a huge bonfire at the foot of Nelson's Monument from the wooden spokes of the captured German guns on display there. When it had all died away and the mess was cleared up, it was found that there was a huge crack in the massive stones that helped to form the foundation. So more than ever I found it desirable to keep to theatres for evening entertainment. Once or twice I managed to get a seat at the "pictures" and thoroughly enjoyed seeing Charlie Chaplin in "Shoulder Arms". Its topicality appealed to me.

One evening I discovered that "Faust" was on at the Opera House. I was vaguely familiar with the plot and had in my civilian life thumped away at the "Soldiers Chorus" on the piano and now a new world of Opera opened before me. I was thrilled. I had had some passing acquaintance with opera music

by means of gramophone records, but never anticipated such an emotional disturbance from the actual performance.

While I was at school Father had bought us a “Cheney” acoustic gramophone, which at that time was considered the best. Instead of the usual metal horn swaying above the record, a wooden one doubled back under the spring-driven mechanism. The result was a sweet tone instead of the rasping metallic tone previously obtained. But the electronic age had not yet arrived and all record manufacture was dependent on the effect that the sound waves produced by the performers had on actuating the comparatively heavy record-cutting apparatus. The result was that the smaller waves of the harmonics were lost and except in violins and pianos, the quality was thereby greatly reduced. The record too, was made of a mixture of shellac and finely powdered slate, and the needle, sliding over the trail of powdered slate and the metal particles of the worn needle left by previous playing, increased the scratch sound inherent in the composition of the record.

So to hear the real music direct, was a revelation. The next night I tried “Aida” at Covent Garden but the best position I could obtain was standing behind the stalls. This, together with the fact that I was unfamiliar with the story and could not catch the words, made it less of a success than the previous night. But never mind the words; the music was most enjoyable for its inherent qualities.

I had been looking forward to a leave well-extended beyond the usual fortnight, but all the extra that I received, was two days and I had really found that I had spent more than two days “chasing it”. Anyway with a final visit to the Fox’s and after rounds of sightseeing, I was again back in France.

29 The march on the Rhine

By this time our Division was already on the march through Belgium to Germany. We were put on the road from the Base Camp in the general direction the Division was travelling. Our Battalion was still about ten kilometres ahead and we were told to catch up on it. We were travelling in a small isolated group and this independent travel was just what I wanted to enable me to see more of this strange country. I still was not without funds. All went well for about twenty-four hours by which time there were only three of us left together. The others said “why worry?” and were inclined to take it easy. Anyway no one was anxious to join the Division. We had kept a sharp look-out on traffic on the roads in case we were picked up by over-zealous military police. But late in the afternoon I found a staff car bearing down on us and it was too late to dive into a ditch for cover. Supported by entries in our pay-books, we explained our absence from our units and so were ordered to get into the car and returned to our own unit. This was easy for them because one of the officers was from our own Battalion.

And so we commenced our trek through Belgium. This was a part of the war that I thoroughly enjoyed. For one thing, being Number One on the Lewis Gun, in the then parlance of the army, “gave me a bit of a win”. The guns and ammunition were carried on a limber and what more natural than that most of my personal gear, normally carried on my back in a valise, should find its transportation with the guns and ammunition, only retaining the light articles so that the valise should retain its full shape. Even then it had to be sometimes lightly packed with straw from a barn in which we had slept the previous night. Another advantage was that I did not carry a rifle and one hundred and twenty rounds of ammunition; only a revolver and its spare ammunition. Consequently walking up-hill or over greasy cobblestones did not inconvenience me in the least. But I used to feel sorry for my mates who had “lived it up” the night

before in an estaminet and found the “morning after” rather trying. So I used to arrive at the end of a day’s march with several rifles slung over my shoulder which I had carried for some who had found the going hard. It was just as well that I did, because one morning, our then over-zealous officer took it into his head to have a snap kit inspection when we were delayed in starting off. And I was caught red-handed with my valise full of straw. I didn’t think that he intended to catch me out and seemed to be surprised that he had done so, particularly as I was useful with my pigeon French in helping with the billeting arrangements with the local inhabitants. Sometimes I became the unofficial billeting officer, always taking care to see that the bed and room that our officer got was at least as good as what I reserved for myself. So this morning he seemed to seize on my rifle-carrying propensity as a reason for excusing my peccadillo.

Our general route was up the Meuse Valley to Hebesthal. We marched anything from eight to ten miles a day, usually at a little over two miles an hour, which included a ten minute rest at the end of every hour. About every third day was a complete rest day and most of us then took the precaution to look after our feet and socks. We had to bring our scorched feet and blisters along with us and they were no excuse for a ride in the ambulance van.

Sometimes we were billeted in estaminets and halls specially cleared to receive us and sometimes in local residences. My first billet was in a private house and to get to our room and beds, my mate and I had to pass through the bedroom of Monsieur and Madame, of course with profuse apologies and much “très bon”. Below our window a stream gurgled over rocks and made music in our ears.

There was a great sense of adventure (without danger) on our marches. We never knew what was going to happen next. The first large town or city came to was Charleroi and we had hardly

approached its outskirts in early afternoon before our day's march finished. So after the usual preliminaries of becoming installed, and as soon as possible, I made my way to the centre of the town to find the square full of carcasses of beef, bread and other rations. The local inhabitants also gazed at the food, particularly the meat, in awe. We found out later that for them, a piece of horse-flesh was a luxury.

Suddenly from across the other side of the square I heard my school-boy nickname called out and there was "Fatty" whom I had not seen since I left school. Fatty was a singer and I had accompanied his songs occasionally at school. He told me he had met a mademoiselle in the street and she had invited him out to her home at place called "Jumet" for a party that evening. Would I come and accompany his songs? "Too true!" So together we duly arrived at the party, Fatty with his music. There were several mademoiselles and grownups and a Belgian soldier in uniform also at the party. I found myself talking to an attractive mademoiselle who had a smattering of English and wanted to learn more. So with my smattering of French we got on very well.

Then Fatty was asked to sing and of course I had to play for him. But I did not realise how devastating a year or two away from the piano - and especially doing heavy manual work trench digging under enemy fire - could be on one's technique. The song Fatty was attempting to sing was "The Trumpeter" and the first lines go,

"Trumpeter what are you sounding now? Is it the call I am seeking?"

My attempt to play the "introduction" was calamitous. The only thing that was right was the time. But Fatty was equal to the situation. He commenced to sing at the right place, but with the words,

“Shackleton, what are you playing now? Is it the song I am singing”?

There was enough English understood by the company to appreciate the joke and they began to smile. So I threw my hands up in the air and surrendered in typical German fashion, “Merci kamerad” amid general laughter.

But the Belgian soldier was a first class pianist, and besides playing Fatty’s accompaniments gave us several piano solos ranging from ragtime to popular classical music. Anyway it was a good party and when it was time to leave to catch the train to Charleroi we all linked arms singing while marching down the street to the tram stop. Then it dawned on us that we still had about four miles to go after the tram had dumped us at the city square, and of course the last tram would have left the square long ago. Actually Fatty belonged to a different brigade and we each did the final distance on our own going in different directions. I arrived back at 3.30am to learn that reveille was at 5.30am. The following day’s march was one in which I did not carry anyone’s rifle.

We passed through Namur and Liege and I was surprised to find that while I could understand the inhabitants on one side of the city, sometimes I could hardly understand them at all on the other.

A highlight at Namur was that our platoon was chosen to represent the Division in a guard of honour at the funeral of a local dignitary. To us it was just another part of the day’s routine. We polished up, got ready for inspection, had a little instruction in “slow march” and then marched off and found ourselves flanking both sides of the hearse. The funeral moved off with the band in front playing Chopin’s Funeral March. I was the leading man on our side of the hearse and had a good view of the crowds that lined both sides of the street. At first we got discreet signs of approval and smiles from the mob, but in the end there was clapping and smiles which seemed to be

rather out of place for a funeral. It must have been distressing for the relatives of the deceased and I felt sorry for them.

As we progressed towards Germany the weather was becoming very cold. We did not notice it much when we were on the move. One day when we finished our day's march about two o'clock in the afternoon, and although the room in which our section was billeted had a stove, the owner had no coal. However, he said that there was a coal mine over the hill about three kilometres away and he would lend us his wheelbarrow, one of the very long-handled French ones. As the grapevine said that we were going to be here for several days, as the Germans were not falling back quickly enough, I thought that it would be worthwhile using that wheelbarrow. So off I set alone with the barrow and eventually arrived the mine-head.

I knocked at the office door and explained that I wanted five kilograms of coal, having no idea that how much coal that was. There was some considerable discussion with about six people, male and female, who seemed to comprise the whole staff in the vicinity, before I realised that the discussion was not centering around the material I wanted, but around the quantity. I soon disposed of the point with a lordly gesture of sweeping my hand over the tray of the wheelbarrow with the very useful words "comme ça". After that it was plain sailing. They overwhelmed me and my barrow with coal gratis, and I could not throw their generosity and kindness back at them by refusing to take so much. I decided that it was too complicated to have to explain to them that I had to push that coal over the hill. But with my best profuse thanks I made the mental reservation that I would dump some of it at the first opportunity. But it never came. As a khaki soldier I was the object of much interest along the road and the honour of "Nouvelle Zélande" forbade the display of weakness that the load was too heavy for me. It was a tired soldier who arrived at our billets, only to learn that we were on the move again next morning, first thing. Anyway, our "billeter" was very pleased to have the coal.

And so we trudged on. But I was getting tired of sightseeing the local churches, cathedrals, museums and other places of interest. Whenever possible I bought a local map to see if there was anything of unusual interest worth seeing.

At Verviers the word got round that an electric tram ride over a hill would take us to the Hotel Britannique “where the armistice was signed”. So after considerable enquiries I found the tramway. But so had a fair proportion of the rest of the New Zealand Division. As each tram left it was reminiscent of the erstwhile Dunedin cable cars during rush hours. When each tram left there was not even a toe-hold anywhere on that tram. There were frequent unscheduled stops on the way probably due to circuit-breakers of the electric supply station tripping on overload. The journey over the hill was spectacularly beautiful in the twilight. The fir-studded slopes were covered with a dusting of snow, somewhat like a stereo-typed Christmas card.

We saw the “Hotel Britannique” and after wandering rather aimlessly round the streets realised the trams had stopped running. We found out that a fault in the powerhouse had developed due to overload and the electrical supply was cut off. However, some of the local people, realising our predicament, took us to a railway station, got us on the right train and arranged with other passengers to see that we got off at the right station. This we did and with the aid of the map I had previously purchased, found my way back to my billets.

We knew of course that we were nearing the border and would soon be in Germany. For one thing the language was changing. Apart from the military ones, there were numerous signs in German as well as in French. One village we passed through had one set of signs in French on one side of the street and another set in German on the other side. The middle of the street was the boundary. So I thought it would be a good idea if I started to “pick up” some German. Several of our billeteers were only too ready to oblige and the first thing I got from them

was how to count up to one hundred in German. Then I tried the days of the week and go on to phrases such as “How much?” “Where is?” etc. Much of the conversation was carried on with a kind of French on both sides, but for any advance I made in German, I was often required to advance my “tutor” a corresponding distance in English. However, it was all very entertaining if not sometimes, very instructive.

30 Entering Cologne

One day we boarded a train and after travelling for a short time realised that all of the signs were in German and that we were in Germany. But it was just part of the day’s events and another interesting happening. We disembarked on the outskirts of a town which we soon found was Cologne and marched through the city. Of course everybody stopped and stared or glared at us, but judging by their physical condition, we were not likely to have much trouble from them. One routine halt at the end of fifty minutes of marching found us in front of the famous Cologne Cathedral. But I was surfeited with churches and cathedrals and even then did not appreciate its beauty.

When the signal was given to halt we moved on to the sidewalk off the road throwing off our packs and mingling with the crowds of German onlookers. A man whom I took to be a typical German complete with soft hat, feather and whiskers and all, spoke to some of us in perfect English and enquired what soldiers we were.

“New Zealanders”, we said.

“That is impossible. The New Zealanders were practically wiped out at Le Quesnoy”.

“No fear. That stunt was a cake-walk. It was the softest stunt we ever had. As far as our Company was concerned, we had practically no casualties at all”.

“Are all these soldiers then New Zealanders? You have not been reinforced by soldiers from other countries?”

“No”, I chipped in. “We have not been reinforced from other countries. Your difficulty is that your country’s propaganda machine has lied to you”.

“Yes”, he said dolefully. “I am afraid that you are right”.

He then began speaking in German to the civilians round in which I took to be a very angry voice. But I may be wrong. German to me is a very angry sounding language. What he told them I can only guess, but as he was speaking, his audience transferred their glances from him to us. But the dispirited and hopeless expression on their white, pinched faces was a saddening sight to us too.

Shortly after we got moving again we were marching across the Hohenzollen Bridge across the Rhine, a huge steel structure taking about four railway tracks and as many road tracks. But contrary to marching routine we did not break step going over the bridge and before we got across we found that the bridge was swinging so much that it was interfering with our step.

From now on we seemed to be marching through almost continuously built-up areas with their attendant harsh cobble paving, which was tiring for walking. Eventually after passing through Mulheim we arrived at the comparatively country town of Dunwald. This was to be our Headquarters, our sector for guarding the Rhine bridge-head. The Headquarters and guard-room comprised the front rooms of the most imposing house in the village, which was the home of a man who appeared to be very important. The villagers showed him every sign of respect, bowing and touching their hats. Our Company’s accommodation was in a bier hall which had been cleared for

the purpose. Numerous stoves round the large hall indicated that we should be fairly comfortable. The washing water came from taps directly out of the ground and was icy cold. The lavatory accommodation consisted of the long rail on which we perched over a ditch; also running its length. The hole was inadequately screened by sacking, over which we could see the civilians walking along the road within easy viewing distance.

When we arrived we found that gift parcels from New Zealand had preceded us. In fact a backlog of undelivered ones had also caught up with us. Consequently when tea-time came round no one had any appetite for the two big dixies of really good stew which the cooks had provided for our platoon. The question immediately arose as to what to do with the stuff. As no one seemed to have a better idea I suggested we give it to the civilians who were living at the rear of the house and got a mate to help me carry a Dixie down the passage which we found was blocked by a locked door. After some considerable parley I persuaded them to open the door as we wanted to give them some "fleisch". I often wondered what their thoughts were when we first knocked. None of them could speak English, and the German I had managed to pick up was not equal to the occasion. The family name was Buch and consisted of the mother and father and two daughters, the youngest of whom was of school age.

In desperation I tried French and got a response from the school-girl who was learning it at school. But her French with a German accent and mine with a patois-plus-English accent did not make communication easy. However, we were eventually allowed into the living room with our stew and told them to get basins for themselves so that we could empty the Dixie.

While this was going on the word had got round and the neighbours began to file in with their basins. There was some disappointment when the late-comers realised the "dixie" was empty. I told them to stay while we got another one. Over the

years I can still hear the exclamations of “fleisch, fleisch” from the semi-starved villagers.

In the corner of the room I saw a piano and before we left with the empty dixies I had, at my request, received permission to come and play the piano whenever I wished. The villagers had looked upon our coming with fear and trepidation, and more particularly as we were “wild and savage New Zealanders”. So in another way then they found the stew episode reassuring.

In due course, we settled down to a routine of guard duty, physical jerks, route marches and any other thing the “heads” could think of to keep the troops usefully occupied and out of mischief. Picket duty was also an interesting occupation. The civilian population was not allowed on the streets after the 9pm curfew, so on picket duty we had to patrol the streets to enforce the regulations. But the troops treated it as a bit of a lark. When we did find someone illegally on the street and she (usually) saw us coming, she just popped into the nearest house and waited till we had gone. When we “got wise to this” we fruitlessly waited till they came out again not realising at first that there were also back doors to the houses.

I spent a lot of time doing guard-duty partly because, that for every twenty-four hours of duty, we were granted twenty-four hours leave and I used much of it by spending a full day in Cologne. I made arrangements for my evening meal to be saved in a deep enamel plate and panniken that I had bought at the first opportunity and had left on a stove. On my first day’s leave I wanted to buy some postcards so at a stationer’s which had a good display of them I asked a salesgirl “Geben sie mihr postcarten, bitte” in my best German.

“Yes”, she replied. “What would you like, plain or coloured” in faultless English.

Generally speaking we, with our limited linguistic experience, were surprised at how many Germans could converse in another

language, usually French or English and sometimes both. We were surprised too, to learn how keen the people were to learn English. In the street cars, for instance, it was not unusual for a man I was sitting next to, to take a phrase-book out of his pocket, point to an English phrase and attempt to pronounce it. I usually joined in the game, and after correcting him, asked "Deutch?"

On my leaves I travelled extensively on the trams and street-cars up and down the Rhine, visiting various places of interest. Sometimes I had a friend and sometimes was solo, but never did I feel fool-hardy in being on my own. When first we began to use this form of transport there was some attempt on the part of the conductors to make us pay a fare and we all steadfastly refused. However, on one early occasion there was some rather bellicose instance on the part of a conductor, in which he was becoming supported by several German men passengers. I thought it would be expedient to have my revolver ready (which I carried as a Lewis Gunner) at least for intimidation, and undid the restraining strap from the holster. Several Germans standing by saw my action which revealed the loaded chambers. One of them immediately said something rather briskly in German and immediately there was peace. The other "Diggers" had only "side-arms", in other words, bayonets carried at the side. When the conductors still continued to demand fares we ignored them or laughed at them and after a few days they did not bother. Whether the conductors got tired of the game or whether they got orders not to demand fares, we never knew. I expect the authorities decided to ignore what could at times produce explosive situations.

Generally our behaviour was that of a normal passenger, except in one point. It irked the troops to see women, some of them obviously undernourished, having to stand while the men sat in comfort, especially the men with fierce twitchy moustaches. That kind sometimes found themselves ignominiously being

hauled out of their seat by a khaki soldier and the vacancy being offered to a frau and particularly to a fraulein.

One day I was sitting opposite a thin, pale, half-starved, well-dressed old woman with blue lips obviously ill and exhausted. She was nursing very carefully a small brown parcel on her lap. Then I saw that to them, the almost priceless commodity, milk, leaking out of the package. When I pointed it out to her she was extremely distressed, and when she tried to stop it by turning the parcel to another position, it leaked even more. Then she began to sob bitterly. I did my best to calm her by offering a good-sized slab of chocolate which was to relieve my pangs of hunger till I got back to our billets. She was, of course, grateful for it and told me in perfect English, that she had been visiting her daughter who had managed to save half a tin of milk for her to have as a special treat when she got home. She was convalescing from an illness and the daughter thought the milk she had saved at some sacrifice, would help her.

I did not like the obvious semi-starvation but there was not much we could do about it. We were infested at meal times with starving children waiting outside to get the scraps of food we had left over and as the days progressed the mobs of children became larger and the fights for possession more bitter. Then the parents began to join in. This was too much, and they were warned off. Finally threats of giving the scraps to pigs if they did not behave themselves, produced some semblance of order among our begging children.

Soap was also practically unprocurable on the German market and lusty soldiers soon realised what a powerful weapon soap, chocolate and sweets were in seducing attractive females. Then there was the usual spate of confidence tricks by the Diggers and it was some time before the Germans realised that the tins labelled "condensed milk" had usually previously had their original contents replaced with water and resealed. There was the story of the driver who, with the connivance of some

military police, sold some mules and before the victim had got far down the road was arrested by the same military police who demanded a further payment if he wished to escape the penalty of stealing military property. The profits were duly divided among the perpetrators.

For my part I found life very interesting. I did my guard duty, made arrangements for keeping my evening meal and went off to Cologne. From there I took trips to Bonn, and castles on the way. There was a street tram that started near the square in front of the Cathedral and we could travel free as far as we liked within the military zone. At Bonn there were plenty of touts to show us all the sights including Beethoven's "Museum" in what was his home.

One day I accidentally saw displayed some sheet music for a light opera called "The Pink Lady". As I used to play it at school it was a good "find" which I took at the first available opportunity to play at the Buch's. Incidentally, the two girls were quite accomplished singers and we had very enjoyable concerts. But always the old father would take up his position in a corner and puffing away at his long-stemmed pipe, keep a fatherly eye on his daughters, an understandable procedure when they were entertaining wild foreign soldiers from "some uncivilised place they had never heard about".

The highlights of my stay were my visits to the operas in the Cologne opera house. Certain parts of the theatre were reserved for officers and others for "other ranks". Of course seating had to be arranged so that fraternising was prevented. But the Diggers laughed at this and no one in authority seemed willing to prevent it. Then too the operas had to commence at 4pm, with a long interval for promenading and eating, and finishing at 8pm to get home before the 9pm curfew.

On my first visit I was standing in the entrance of the Cologne opera house trying to find what it was all about when a German approached me and asked me in poor English if I wanted a

ticket. After trying to find out what was on and where the seat was, all I could learn that it was a very good opera and a very good seat. But when it came to the nitty-gritty business of the price, knowing that that sort of entertainment especially was not cheap, I was surprised to find that owing to inflation I had to pay just under the equivalent of one of our five-pence. But there was no doubt about the quality of the opera and the position of the seat. I found I was a lone khaki figure sitting in the dress circle among very well dressed people. While down below on one side of the “pit” were rows of khaki soldiers. However, no one made any move to remove me, so I stayed. Of course it was in German and I was not familiar with it although occasionally I could gather what was going on. Nevertheless, I found it a thrilling experience. Although I had nothing to eat till I arrived back at billets, I resolved to repeat the experience.

It would be tedious to relate all the operas I saw but later the theatre authorities printed an account in English of the details of the current opera on a sheet which was handed out as we went in. Similarly enterprising salesmen sold “cut-throat” razors to us which were engraved with the words “Souvenir of our stay on the Rhine 1918-19”. However, two experiences were outstanding. One was the “Barcarolle” scene from the “Tales of Hoffman” and the Venusberg music in the overture to “Tannhäuser”. The latter simply swept one away on its waves of sound. Perhaps it was also the company I had, and that did not refer to my Digger friend who was with me. We had bought several packets of “Uneda” (sugar) cookies from our canteen to fortify ourselves at the interval, and this time the civilian tickets we had bought gave us excellent seats next to a very attractive fraulein about seventeen years of age whose mother sat on the other side. At an appropriate opportunity I offered the fraulein a cookie which was a bad tactical move, for when she hesitated her mother said something in German and she was about to refuse when I quickly offered the packet to the mother with apologies in English. The mother could not resist, so all the

four of us enjoyed the cookies, and we enjoyed the social conversation that we carried on too. Towards the end I was wondering how we could meet them again and my mate was also entertaining the same ideas too. But “Ma” wasn’t. After the final bars she took her daughter by the hand and almost dragged her away to the exit without even a “goodnight” to us. “C’est la guerre”. I have since heard that Venusberg music played by a number of the world’s best orchestras including the Berlin State Orchestra and the Halle Orchestra but I have never again experienced that musical thrill that the music gave me that evening in the Cologne Opera House.

After a few months this joyriding and sightseeing round Cologne and along the Rhine began to pall. I thought perhaps it might have been the intense cold we were experiencing where ice-floes were coming down the Rhine and the snow was so dry that motor cars used to blow it up in clouds.

Except for ablutions I was never really very cold. Father had seen to that and periodically sent me parcels of the thickest New Zealand woollen underwear. We washed and shaved in cold water and I well remember one morning when first running it directly from a tap on to the ground the water turned to ice as soon as it landed on the ground. Those who had to wash later had to negotiate a sheet of ice to get to the tap to fill their basins.

31 What to do with one’s life

Gradually the idea was becoming more persistent that this army life was shortly coming to an end when we would have to act independently, make our own decisions and decide how we were going to earn a living and what we were going to do with our lives. While we were marching through Belgium I had given this sporadic thought and among other things succumbed

to an advertisement in “Pelmanism at reduced rates for servicemen”. I worked through the course and on the whole think I benefited considerably from it. It did have its weak spots, especially its method of memorising geometrical theorems. I had had considerable experience in learning geometry and knew that their method of learning theorems was hopeless.

Occasionally from time to time I wondered if there was anything in being a motor mechanic and some “school of motoring” in England had distributed colourful brochures extolling the rosy future there was in lorry driving. Then there were fruit farming and bee-keeping to choose from; and so it went on. I finally came to the conclusion that I would like to become a professional electrical engineer. I had previously had it mapped out when, and if, I obtained a “University Scholarship” and now here was a chance to pick up the threads again. I knew that I had to pass the Engineering Preliminary Examination to qualify for university studies. Passing with credit in the University Scholarship Examination gave me credits in all the necessary subjects except French and Drawing. So I took up studying French seriously based on my casual front-line studies. So behold me occasionally memorising French irregular verbs at one end of the mess-table, while some of my mates were playing cards and “crown and anchor” at the other end.

As for Drawing; although I had failed in this subject when I sat University Entrance from the Waimate District High School I did not then attach any significance to the fact, since the rest of the class had also failed. The fact that Mick Lang (our teacher) knew no more about “projection” than we did, did not enter my head. I know that I was pleased when in the class I sometimes persuaded him to my way of thinking, but later instruction provided just how wrong we both were. At this stage however, I considered I had only “to brush my ideas up a bit” and perhaps practice some free-hand drawing. In my initial efforts I found I

had no enough control of my hand to guide a pencil, for instance, over a previously drawn line. But I put that down to war nerves which time would cure.

Then my turn for a fortnight's leave in Paris came round rather late, and after some consideration decided to turn it down, mainly because it would interfere with my studies. I also thought that basically Paris would not be much different from Cologne and I was surfeited with sightseeing. I acquired a certain amount of fame (or notoriety, depending on how you view it) in our Company as "the man who turned down Paris leave".

I was not at all mindful of the special attractions of Paris, but had long ago squared up to the question of sex before marriage and decided in favour of "after" and had managed to keep to my decision. Of course, Old Mother Nature was doing her best to alter that but my keeping one's ideas clear of anything in her favour, the going was not too difficult.

Of course there were plenty of things which whetted one's appetite but frequently they could be avoided or mentally discarded. For instance, one time when we were on picket duty and a brothel had to be inspected room by room, I accepted the chance that the officer gave, to remain in a bier hall while those who wanted to, carried out the inspection.

One night when a mate and I were walking home on the final stage of the journey to our billets following an evening at the opera, we heard a cry for help coming through the dark fog over muddy flats. It was a fraulein in trouble – or was she? We, ourselves, found no difficulty in finding the track to the village so why had she? We saw her to her door and were invited inside. There were her brother in the German uniform and her parents. The brother showed that we were quite unwelcome; but not so her parents. We were invited to call again which we did and were welcomed by the fraulein who now had a black eye. Her brother had hit her with the "Zucker bazin". Then she

took us for a walk in the woods nearby, it being pitch dark. So I said to my mate who had ideas similar to me, "Watch your step, Tom".

"Too true Shack", he said.

The fraulein complained of being tired. Nothing doing, and we took her back home. She offered the following night to bring her friend. Three was too much of a crowd, but I presume she thought that two pairs would offer more scope. But we postponed indefinitely any more visits. A week or two later I was hailed by her from some distance down the street but stepped into the entrance of our billets which was handy; and that was the end of that. I had the idea that life could become filled with too many heartaches and complications. It was complicated enough now without adding to it.

Our billets had now been changed to a large room in a school in Mulheim and returning from an opera trip rather late one evening, I found our room was practically empty. Anyway, it being about "lights out time" I went to bed such as it was. Shortly afterwards the Orderly Sergeant came round with routine orders. His first remark was "where is everybody?" I explained why I did not know and he read the orders out to me to tell the others. When the orders contained instructions for parading next morning and marching to Cologne Railway station prior to entraining for Blighty, the penny dropped.

The morning when we "fell in" there was an unusually large number of "camp followers" who marched with us to the railway station. Then the tears began to fall and the heartache harvest had arrived. I did not pay much attention to it, because rather a big mail had just arrived for me, and sitting on the top rail of the temporary barrier that had been set up against the public, I avidly read my letters.

When we were transferred from Dunwald to Mulheim I had already made my farewells to the Familie Peter Buch who had given me, and sometimes some of my mates, kind hospitality.

Once embarked on the train, our journey, especially across Belgium and France, was comparatively uneventful. We had periodic stops for meals and opportunity was given at special places to relieve our internal pressures. Unfortunately paper was very scarce. But I realised the sight was one that probably we would never see again; of long lines of soldiers with serious expressions on their faces and each one perched on a rail over a ditch which presumably would be filled in again when the operation was completed.

32 England again

Eventually we arrived at a camp in England and when we found out it was Codford, we would not believe it. Codford was the V.D. Hospital for “no-hopers”, and we did not have V.D. We were told that the hospital was on the other side of the barbed wire entanglement which acted as a fence. We were not there very long but one day before we left, I saw through the entanglement a figure slowly and painfully making his way along with the aid of a stick, and that one side of his face was a mess of pussy sores. Then I recognised him. “D___o!” I called out and he stopped and slowly turned, but when he recognised me, he just kept on his painful way again. He was paying a terrible price for dodging the front line.

It was only a matter of a week or so when we were again moved to Sling Camp. Here, after the usual routine of getting settled in, we found the authorities had a marvellous idea for keeping us occupied. We had to remove the soil from a suitable slope to shape a white Kiwi with the chalk which lay about a foot underneath. So one morning we collected picks and shovels,

and remembering our experience in the trenches in France I did not relish working in the chalk. When we arrived on the job a start had been made revealing a deep trench with white chalk on one edge and soil on the other. We then had to throw the top soil off the edge of the trench in to the trench itself and finally dig another deep trench adjacent using the chalk we had dug up, to cover the soil at the bottom of the trench. The weather was dry and our boots and legs soon were covered with chalky dust. We were physically soft and I found it hard going. So I was very relieved when orders came round to enable those who wanted to, to attend education classes.

So I did not dig any more of the Kiwi, but was excused duties to enable me to study for my Engineering Preliminary. Of course the excuse did not extend to necessary parades. So when these were over we went to one or other of the rooms allocated for the purpose. I did most of my French studying in the library which was a very cool and pleasant place, made even more pleasant by the sounds of troops “square-bashing” outside.

However, I was in for a shock too. My instructor was not at all pleased with my French accent, and when I told him how I had persevered with it with the “natives” behind the front line, he informed me I had picked up a Northern France dialect. However, I found I had very little difficulty in translating either into French or back into English, even with the tricky irregular French verbs and idiomatic constructions and phrases. I still kept to my Marlborough’s “French Self-Taught” for it had useful summaries of irregular verbs and rules with the examples, which I memorised verbatim. I had plenty of time.

My free-hand drawing still left much to be desired too and I did not learn much more about how to draw with a square and tee-square, the cubes and prisms standing on their corners or edges, or at least in some unusual and awkward positions. Unfortunately our instructor was an artist and he was more concerned with getting the left hand shoulder and arm natural

looking of an almost full size oil painting of some tin-hat's head and shoulders. And well he may worry, as the portrait was not altogether a pleasing sight and even less flattering.

In the evenings there were the usual and occasional camp concerts to entertain us, but I almost came to look upon them as a waste of time, although apparently others did not. Fortunately, provided we could show a reasonable credit balance in our paybooks we were allowed to go on weekend leaves, but after two or three of them they began to get stale too. The trouble was the theatres were all booked out weeks ahead and we were often reduced to the continuous pictures for entertainment. Even there, there were snags. On one occasion a young woman came and sat in the seat beside me in the dark and shortly afterward put some white powder in her mouth from the palm of her hand. Then she mumbled something to me as though she were drunk and a moment or two later fell across my lap. I pushed her vertically again and immediately left my seat, pushing past the rest of the people in the row and hoping that she would stay straight till I got out. But I never heard anything more about the incident.

As I was only interested in the popular past-times of "crown and anchor" or "two up" as a spectator, watching the eternally-hopeful lose their money, I was never short of funds. Even when an old school mate asked me if I could lend him five pounds as he wanted to marry an English girl before going back to New Zealand, I found I could do it without jeopardising further leaves.

We were being shipped back to New Zealand in order of the reinforcements in which we left for overseas service. When the turn came round for members of my reinforcement, the Twenty-Ninth, I had my departure postponed, as a special examination for the Engineering Prelim., was to be held in London in a month's time. By this time the English spring was well advanced and I took several weekend tours to the Lake District

and Wales, and began to appreciate the beauty of the countryside. So I was not over-worried by my delay in returning to New Zealand, as I considered that once we sailed, I would probably never see this part of the world again.

For the examination itself, we stayed at the Kiwi Club, which, in Southampton Row, had been a club for N.C.O's during the war. The timetable for the whole exam extended over ten days and French was on the first and drawing on the last day, so I had a week of free time in London at the Education Department's expense.

One beautiful day I took a steamer trip up the Thames and on the steamer joined up with an Australian artillery man. There were quite a number of army personnel on board including a group of Americans whose neat, well-cut uniforms and confident and opulent air, aroused the ire of my Australian friend. Then he began to cast aspersions on their qualities as fighting soldiers. To my request to "take it easy Aussie", he told me a story of how his battery had to cover American infantry who had just taken over the front line.

The next evening the Germans put a fairly heavy strafe down on them and apparently they suffered some casualties. But after things had quietened down his gun crew was amazed to find Americans streaming past to the back areas. Enquiries revealed that they considered it was "too hot" in the front line, so they were going back, apparently oblivious to the fact that the Germans could pour over and put the whole sector in a very serious position. The Australian infantry, whom the Americans had relieved, had to be hurriedly returned back to the front line. What happened to the Americans "for desertion in the face of the enemy" he didn't know. He had collected some other stories of a similar kind and was not at all surprised when I told of our experience of Yanks getting battle-hardened in our trenches (already related). "Look Dig", he said, "They can't take it when it comes to the real thing".

The French examination held little difficulty except for the translation of some English prose into French. It consisted of a technical description on the use of the compasses in some geometrical constructions. I had a stab at what I thought might be the French equivalent and I must not have been far wrong because I scored 75% of the possible marks, being second from the top. The man at the top had lived in France (in peace time) for five years.

But I failed in Drawing. I was not surprised. For the “freehand” question, we had to draw a carpenter’s claw hammer, viewed on a drawing board from a certain position. I came to the conclusion that my claw hammer looked more like a rooster’s foot. This failure was a sad disappointment to me. I made enquiries from the New Zealand University representative in England and he said that with the qualifications I already had, I would be granted it, subject to making satisfactory progress in the Engineering Intermediate Examination following my first year at Canterbury College, as it was then.

The next thing was of course to get back to New Zealand, but I was in no hurry and did nothing to expedite my departure. I realised I would be too late to start at Canterbury College but wondered what I could do which would be helpful for my progress when I did start. Walking along Southampton Row one day I saw displayed in a bookseller’s window, a book “Calculus Made Easy” by Sylvanus P. Thompson. Knowing that Calculus would be necessary for engineering I bought a copy and was delighted to find as its motto “What one fool can do, any other fool can” and the initial pages were spent in debunking the idea that calculus was difficult. But all the same I knew I was entering a strange (for me) and fascinating realm in Mathematics. I could hardly wait to return to the Kiwi Club to start.

33 Blackpool

On returning to Sling Camp, I found I had been placed on the next embarkation list to sail on the “Port Hacking” from Liverpool. However, I had ten days leave in London to say goodbye to my English and Scottish friends and still a few more days to fill in. Discussing this at Shakespeare Hut with another New Zealander who was in a similar position, we saw on a notice board, a brochure extolling the delights of Blackpool. But we found it was one thing to make a decision and another to carry it out. There were queues at the station booking office everywhere. So we lined up in the long queue which ended at the ticket office for Blackpool, and after arriving at the window were refused tickets because we did not have train ration tickets. So we lined up at the end of another long queue, got our ration tickets and started all over again at the end of the Blackpool queue. It was about 9am when we first set out, but it was about 6pm by the time we actually got to Blackpool. We intended to stay at the Y.M.C.A. there but it was full. A Y.M. bloke got us into a private boarding house full of civilians, as a temporary measure. We were to transfer for breakfast at the Y.M. the following morning.

The landlady brought us some tea to drink but as the large table was still covered with bread, butter, jam, scones, buns, etc., we decided that the midday meal was the hot meal of the day, and making the most of what was left, practically cleared the table. I could sense there was something unusual in the air, but thought it was probably because they were unfamiliar with colonial soldiers. But it was not till years afterwards that I learned each family supplied its own food and what we had been eating, was not supplied by the landlady and did not form part of the board. Each family had its own supply of food and we had been raiding their supplies ruthlessly. And in their kindness, they never told us how we were upsetting their rationing which was still in force.

Next morning after transferring to the Y.M. and having breakfast, we set out to see what Blackpool had to offer. Our first port of call was the Amusement Park on South Shore and we steadily worked our way through the various amusements. We did not bother to study whether each was worth its cost, but paid our money and went in. We tried a sort of helter-skelter which was a slide with a tortuous and steep route which sent one sliding round the end of a large bowl at the bottom, and as ones speed decreased, ended up in a dishevelled and tangled heap at the bottom of the bowl. My friend I had slowly picked our bewildered selves up and were laughing together, when two girls about our own ages suddenly appeared shooting round the edge of the bowl and before we could get out of the way, knocked us off our feet. We apologised for getting in their way and they apologised for bumping into us. I suppose it was as good an introduction as any other. They were quite attractive and bright; so we joined forces and we spent the rest of the day together. By the time we had done the "Big Dipper" it was lunch and Blackpool was so packed that it was difficult to move along the streets and promenade.

The trouble was that the only thing that was obtainable anywhere was tripe and onions to which I have a strong aversion. The girls knew where we could get hot pies and tea etc., but when we arrived there we had to content ourselves with a kind of afternoon-tea menu. The bill was exorbitant and when I told the proprietor he was robbing us, he asked "You are on holiday, aren't you?" To our affirmative reply he said, "Well you expect to spend a lot of money, don't you?" A peculiar logic that was all on his side.

We spent the afternoon at the Tower and the Winter Gardens. The girls said they had to be home before dark and so we took them to the corner of their street, which seemed to have rather better class houses. But they would not let us take them to their doors. They were neighbours.

We had in London bought tickets for the steamer from Blackpool to Llandudno for the following morning. When we told them, they were fairly obviously disappointed but I could not make out whether it was on account of the fact that they were looking forward to enjoying more of our company or whether they were sorry they had lost a couple of “suckers”, perhaps it was a little of both.

The sea trip to Llandudno was quiet, calm and uneventful in a perfect sunny morning; quite a change from the frenzied efforts of the holiday-makers at Blackpool to enjoy themselves. The attractions of Llandudno were also played to a lower key. There were the usual indoor and outdoor occupations and entertainments of the seaside, but what attracted me more than anything else were the various trips to the famous beauty spots of Wales. True, the chara-bancs were pretty primitive. Most of them were ex-army motor-lorries with wooden wheels, tyred with solid rubber replacing the old steel rims. The seating consisted of sparsely padded forms bolted to the deck of the lorry. But I thoroughly enjoyed relaxing on the forms and taking in the ever-changing beauty of the countryside. It would be tedious to mention all the various places, but I made the most of several sunny days travelling round the countryside thinking, of course, probably I would never see it again. New Zealand seemed to be very far away and the opportunity of returning to this part of the world seemed to be practically nil.

What also left a pleasant memory was the attitude of the people towards us. One evening sitting on a form at Keswick overlooking the Derwent Water an elderly gentleman with a squire-like appearance came and sat beside me. After an exchange of greetings and casual small talk, he asked me what troops I belonged to. When I replied the Rifle Brigade, New Zealand Division, he asked if me I was a native of New Zealand.

“Yes”, I replied. “I was born there”, and for good measure continued “and so were my parents too”.

“Well”, he said. “I am surprised. You speak very good English!”

What did they expect!

To continue with the story of events. I eventually returned to camp and realised there was considerable unrest. It seems that for some nights previously Aussies from a neighbouring camp had joined forces with some of our more irresponsible elements and raided our canteens, sharing the proceeds. Then when the next time the Aussies came proposing another raid and it was suggested that the raids be on the Aussie canteens, the proposals seemed to fall flat. As I kept clear of all that and was really on the outer circle, I do not know what eventuated. But when it became known that the losses from the raids were recuperated from the Divisional Canteen Funds which were for the use of the troops, there seemed to be a complete lack of enthusiasm for any more raids. This feeling was heightened by the non-participants who realised that they also would suffer from the plundering tactics of an irresponsible few.

We had the usual parades, inspections etc., before embarking, and I was rather surprised to find that I did not get very excited about returning to New Zealand. It was just a necessary routine to be gone through to get back to civvy life.

34 Homeward bound

Sailing away from Liverpool with the evening sun glistening on a monument on which a bird was sculptured, the thought passed my mind again “Well I suppose I won’t see this again” and I settled down to trying to make my circumstances as comfortable as possible.

Of course the “Port Hacking” was packed with troops who slept in hammocks slung in all the holds. Special canvas chutes conveyed fresh air to the holds but as these seemed to depend on the motion of the ship for the necessary draught, I wondered what would happen in a following wind. My distaste was heightened by the memories of over-crowded “pill-boxes” in the front line. Anyway I soon found that I would not get much sleep in a hammock and so took mine up on deck. Unfortunately there was not much choice of sheltered positions. Much deck space had been taken up by extra ablution and lavatory super-structures and a very large pile of sacks of potatoes occupied the stern. However, I did find a suitable position and with nothing but the thickness of a blanket and the canvas of the hammock between me and the deck, settled to sleep. I had to beat a hasty retreat in the morning when a gang came round to swab the decks before breakfast. But that enabled me to complete my ablutions before the rush really set in.

The first day was spent mainly on organisation and there was some necessity for it. We found that we were so over-crowded that on a sunny day it was almost impossible to proceed along the decks, as there was no stepping room between the pack of sitting bodies. A parade was held for those wishing to pursue education activities and I was one of a group wishing to study mathematics. The N.C.O taking this subject interviewed each of us in turn, and when he came to me asked,

“What do you wish to study, Arithmetic, Algebra or Geometry?”

“Well”, I replied, “all three I suppose. I want to get some idea of the calculus”.

“That would be alright, but we have no facilities for more than quadratic equations in Algebra”.

“Well, could you not make lessons for more advanced work?”

“No”, he admitted, “I can’t do beyond quadratic equations”.

So, I thought, someone had “wangled” another “cushy” job.

“Actually, I wanted to study the Calculus”.

“Oh, you haven’t a hope!”

“Well I have a text book on it and would at least like the time off to work through it”.

“Right”, he said relieved, “I’ll get you excused all duties to study independently but you must attend the maths classes”.

And so I did.

My work in mathematics at the Timaru Boys’ High School had shown me that success was only obtained by being thoroughly grounded in past work and it was no use attempting a new chapter unless the previous chapters were learned and completely understood; and with that guide I went ahead. I also resolved to finish “Calculus Made Easy” by the time we reached New Zealand. My difficulties however, were external ones rather than those inherent in the book’s exposition of the subject, which I thought was unusually clear. I usually had to study at the end of a mess-table where card games or “crown and anchor” were being noisily played at the other.

There was however, some relief in the tropics, where the heat produced a somnolent lethargic attitude in the rest of the ship’s company and peace reigned for a time. My greatest trouble was that the perspiration that rolled off my face also rolled over my eyebrows into my eyes. If I stopped to mop my face, I frequently lost my train of thought or it sometimes required a greater effort of will to re-start than to endure the perspiration. The answers to the problems were at the back of the book and before we reached New Zealand I had successfully worked to the correct answers. At times I was bogged down, but by working backwards from the answers, got the clue to the difficulty that was hindering me.

However, the voyage was not all study. We had a “Y.M. bloke” aboard who looked after much of our entertainment. He offered prizes for suggestions and I put forward one for community singing at one of his concerts. I gave details of means for ensuring its success including a previously trained chorus to give a lead and suggested current popular songs. I had my name published on a notice board outside his office as having been awarded a prize. With some pleasurable anticipation I duly claimed it; it was a ripe apple. However, my disappointment was mollified by the fact that the whole ship’s company now knew that “55636 Rfm A. J. Shackleton has been awarded a prize”, and through this publicity made contact with three other friends of former Timaru Boys’ High School days. We ultimately formed a card group playing “Five Hundred” throughout the voyage. It was to me quite a relaxation from the Calculus.

An apple turned out to be the actual entertainment value of my suggestion when it was acted upon, partly because there was no strong chorus to give a lead to the popular ragtime song which was played at half speed by the pianist and dragged along to an unlamented demise.

We were, of course, headed for the Panama Canal but it was disappointing to learn that we could only do about 200 miles a day and that, only with a lot of coaxing and stoking. We also had some amateur trimmers in the coal bunkers and as they could not keep pace with the consumption of coal in the boilers, the old tub got occasional uncomfortable leans on.

We arrived safely at Colon on the Atlantic end of the Canal but as the ship was “dry” most of the company had developed a considerable alcoholic thirst. However, I was not aware of this and looked forward to doing whatever sights the place offered. For this my friend Charlie and I engaged a donkey-drawn buggy driven by a negro to show us the sights. These cabs and their cabbies were drawn up alongside the road which lead to the

quay-side. The road was also lined with fruit stalls, and we enjoyed particularly the fresh bananas. We ambled along also through the residential quarters of the American officials “running” the Canal and were intrigued by, to us, the airy cool construction of the houses as befitted the tropics. Somewhere on the way we were approached by a precocious American youngster of about ten years of age, who after asking us a few questions about ourselves, ended up with the then current question about the fate of the Kaiser. We finally asked him what he would do with the Kaiser. “Oh”, he said in a heavy American accent. “I’d put him in the garbage can”.

It was late afternoon when we were approaching the docks area again, when suddenly our “cabby” told us to get out of the cab and terrified, he turned right round and drove off as fast as he could in the opposite direction. And well he may, for suddenly we were confronted by a sight which beggars description. Men stripped off to the waist were beating each other with pieces of wood from the former fruit stalls or with spokes from cab wheels. There was blood everywhere. Almost immediately we were surrounded by men with bleeding heads, faces, shoulders and bodies and tottering around, lashing into what was closest. It took no long cognition to realise that this was no place for me and seeing a gap in the mêlée which lead to a lamp post, I made one dash for it. Unfortunately I had reckoned without the bananas which, formerly of the fruit stalls, now paved the street. So with as much cautious speed as possible I made my way to the post and climbed onto the cross-arms. I had not been up there long before I felt someone pulling at my heels. “Let go”, I shouted, “or I’ll kick your bloody brains out”. “Aw, be a good guy” came back in an American drawl. “There is room for another up there”. I looked down and saw it was an American military policeman. So I made room for him and we both surveyed the carnage from above. For a while the fighting surged around us but gradually worked its way up the street, leaving the bananas and blood and an occasional spoke behind.

When we felt safe, the policeman and I came down and parted, I making my way to the ship as expeditiously as possible. After tea I went on deck and witnessed the “home-coming” of the fighters, limping, helped and carried. But the strangest sight of all was that of the unconscious bodies being slung on board from the wharf in a net, like loading frozen mutton, with the ship’s crane. They had been unwise in assuaging their thirst with the local rum and spirits.

For a while with the bandaged and limping soldiers about, parts of the ship reminded me of a front-line aid post of a casualty clearing station.

Our passage through the Canal was uneventful and in marked contrast to our previous passage through. Then we were among the first to make the passage and the enthusiasm displayed then by everyone on the Canal was now markedly absent. It seemed as though they hoped that we were the last. Not that we lost any sleep over that, for the Canal held plenty of interest to us, from the working of the locks to a sleepy alligator browsing on the nearby shores of the Gatan Lake.

Our leisurely journey across the Pacific was without much untoward incident except the day the engines stopped owing to the steering gear breaking down. It was a hot tropical day without a breath of air and the sea like a mill-pond, for which we felt relieved. But not nearly so relieved as when the engines started up again. I had not noticed when the sacks of potatoes disappeared off the stern but they seemed to have gone rather suddenly. Rumour had it that they did not like the salt air of the sea and died. When putrefaction set in, as with the way of all dead things at sea, they were dumped overboard.

Consequently perhaps, and perhaps on account of the length of our voyage, a few days before we arrived in New Zealand we had drastic changes in our diet. When we protested about what were called “weevils” in our rice and porridge, we were met with a “take it or leave it” attitude. I was loud in my

protestations about having protein mixed up with porridge, but to no avail, so by carefully spooning the weevils out I cut my protein intake to a minimum. What did escape the culling did not seem to have any deleterious effect on my digestion. When the cereal homes for the weevils were used up, we were presented with luxurious meals; nothing, or nearly nothing, but tin fruit. This time from the canteen which we understood had been cleaned up to supply us with food. Now I like tinned fruit but after several meals mainly of this, I lost my enthusiasm. It was fortunate that land was sighted before the canteen was completely cleaned out of anything edible. But when the Lyttelton Heads were sighted we forgot all about the hungry feeling that was beginning to be noticeable.

35 Home

At Lyttelton we found another troop ship had arrived before us (although it left England after us) and had called in at Newport News in the United States where the ships company had been entertained for several days by enthusiastic Americans. C'est la guerre, again.

We soon disembarked with our kits and arrived at Christchurch Station where we were sorted out into our various train loads. But it was not till we had made, I take it, unusually big demands on the trolleys of cakes, sandwiches and teas which were being circulated amongst us did I notice the quietness and peacefulness of the country, that bright sunny day. Considering that we were still alive and coming home, I think we were a very quiet train-load. I was of course on the south-bound train and we stopped at almost every station, where groups of friends welcomed those getting off. There were tears as well as smiles, as we undoubtedly highlighted the reality that there were relatives who would never return. As we approached Timaru I

began to be more aware of what was happening. I had still been conscious of everything as though it was a moving picture, but I was not part of the scene. But as we approached Timaru and I began to see again the familiar sights of my school days, I converged into the events as it were. This was really Timaru. I was going home and this time I was not dreaming it. All the way down the line except for the complete disappearance of the “Elginshire”⁸ of boyhood memories, the country did not seem to have changed much.

As we moved into Studholme Junction the train had not stopped before my waiting parents and brother and sister had flashed past us. But another soldier did not wait and with his kit jumped off the moving train, fell over, was not hurt but my parents, thinking it was I, received rather a shock which was heightened by the fact that, as I was having some difficulty in getting my kit out of the pile on the platform at the end of the carriage, my appearance was delayed. Yes, it was good to see them again but somehow I did not seem to match the happiness they displayed. To me it was just another rather unusual day.

The old Waimate branch railway line had discontinued running and we travelled to the old home in Queen Street by car, in which the conversation seemed to me to be rather stilted. Nobody seemed to know what to say next that didn't seem rather banal. There was the old side-door at the end of the verandah of home which had been decorated with flags for the occasion, but I think my smile, which by this time was becoming rather fixed, was no substitute for the shouts and exclamations of delight with which I should have entered the old home again. I think my mother sensed this and after saying how glad they were that I was back again safe and sound, said, “I'm sure you feel the same”. “Mum”, I said, “I feel like a prayer meeting”. I was deeply thankful to be back. But

⁸ The SS “Elginshire” that was wrecked on a reef off Timaru on 9 March, 1892.

catching sight of the table loaded with all the dishes that my mother knew I was fond of, I realised what loving care and preparation had gone into this welcome: the least I could do was to snap out of this mood, and I tried. But my mind had become numb. What did all this matter?

I made enquiries about boyhood friends and acquaintances, but that did not work too well either. There were too many that would not come back again.

Particularly tragic was "Pie's" history. Pie and I were students at Timaru Boys' High School together and we both did become teachers for the year previous to our enlisting, which we also did together. But unlike me he was chosen for a course of training as a N.C.O. This would delay his departure from New Zealand and his entry into the fighting zone by about six months by which time the war might be over. As he was an only child, this pleased his parents very much. My parents on the other hand were very disappointed that I had not been chosen and that consequently there would be no delay for me. Pie had been only a few days in the front line when he got a bullet through his head.

This was a terrible blow to his parents and I made tentative enquiries as to how they were faring, and whether a visit might help them. But they, terribly upset at their loss, had left the district and no one was sure of their whereabouts.

During our meal the family began to ask about details of events, and partly to make amends for my unaccountable inability to rise to the occasion I began to supply them with the information they required, but still rather unwillingly. However, Father thought that it would be more interesting if I described events in their chronological order, starting with the departure from the Wellington wharf.

So the story went on well towards midnight and I was beginning to flag. But I could not face the experience of being enclosed

between the four walls of my old bedroom when I had lived so much in the open. It was a lovely moonlight night and the air was clear and crisp. So rather to the family's surprise I carried my mattress and blankets outside and slept on them on the ground in the open air. I seemed hardly to have lain down when the bird-chorus at dawn woke me up. I dozed for a while and gradually became conscious of the fact that some members of the insect world had also found my bed a desirable place. So I retreated with my bed in to the house.

At breakfast there was some jealousy among the members of the family arising from the fact that due to their morning preparations they were missing parts of my "narrative" that I had commenced in response to request from others. Dad suggested that I keep any more accounts till he was home again.

I heard that _____c _____n was working in the grocery department of the Waimate Branch of the Canterbury Farmer's Co-operative Association and as we had been some months together in "D" Company, including the front-line, paid him a visit. But it was not a success. After a few enquiries about mutual friends and plans for the future, we had drained the conversational barrel dry and that ended my idea of resuming some permanent companionships.

I was very restless and pottered about in the garden which apparently was waiting for my attention. The tools and gadgets which I tinkered with before the war were still in their untidy and dusty array on the bench that Uncle Sam had made me. So was the Douglas motorbike and also covered in dust and cobwebs! So I got the idea of going for a visit for a day to Uncle Sam in Maheno where, as the village cobbler, his shop was the meeting place for all his cronies round about the district. I had paid him several visits before I went to the war and there were always one or two "oldies" sitting on the form along one wall which was covered with lurid pictures of the Boer War with red and yellow flashes of shrapnel bursting over

figures some of which had prominent blood-red splashes on their uniforms.

But now times were changing. The old “cronies” were dead or so incapacitated that they could not now make their way to his shop and the younger ones had gone to the war and either not returned, or had found other interests. So he welcomed my visit and kept me busy answering his questions. I was sorry for his loneliness and on returning home questioned Dad regarding his bachelorhood. It seems as a young man he was the life and soul of the parties and dances with his violin. He “kept company” with a girl for some years but she got tired of waiting. Apparently it was a blow to Uncle and he did not seem to have made much further effort. But his life was a warning.

I continued the serial of my army life each evening when Dad arrived home but after several days of this I had a very realistic dream of being attacked by Germans in the trenches. My Lewis Gun had jammed and I was yelling out to the others in the trench to “throw your bloody bombs! The gun is jammed!” Then I woke up with my father holding a candle in his hand and peering into my face and my mother stroking my hand and saying, “It’s alright now Allan. The war is over and you are at home now”. But it was quite a few seconds before I could bring myself back to reality.

However, although I came back to my senses I could not sleep and after the family retired again and I ultimately got to sleep, I had strange dreams in which I was on the top of a high mountain from which I fell and continued falling till ultimately in my terror, I woke up. When I again got to sleep I again fell from a height, but after a long period of falling, I again woke with considerable relief. This kind of dream continued at intervals over many weeks till I accepted it as a fact of life realising in my dream that I would wake up soon. Nevertheless, I had, in my early youth, acquired the idea that if you ever dreamed you were falling from a height and landed on the

ground you would die. Well one night I did dream I fell from the top of the steps of a high amphitheatre and kept on falling till I hit the arena and died. No one bemoaned my demise when I was locked up in a coffin and carried off. Realising that this was a desperate situation, I thought I must wake up. I did to the extent of throwing off the coffin hallucination and finding I was still alive but still in the falling process with which I was now fully familiar and woke up in reality after quietly waiting. But it seemed as though I had two stages of waiting to go through that time. On occasional nights after that I would wake up after a “falling” dream with a sense of unreality which I could not come to grips with. But it helped me when I told myself it was probably the result of my war experiences and if I looked after my health they would probably disappear. So there was no occasion for worrying. And they gradually did disappear.

So I avoided reminiscences as far as possible, but especially at night time. I kept in the fresh air and visited several family friends on their farms and that was not much of a success. They too, wanted to “know all about it”.

PART THREE

1 Plans for the future

But the future to me was much more important than the past and I began to make plans for becoming an electrical engineer. Dad was already paying Knox College fees for Ron to become a doctor and Columba College fees for Bernice “to finish”. So I was made aware there was nothing for me. However, I applied to the Repatriation Board for a grant to enable me to attend the Engineering School at Canterbury College as it was then, and was successful. However, as the 1919 session of studies was well-advanced it was somewhat difficult to know what to do. So I decided to go on the motorbike to Christchurch and consult the Head of the Engineering School, Professor Scott.

Shorn of its cobwebs and dust accumulated during my absence, the bike was running well without any serious attention except that now the lubricating oil required replenishing. This I did from a dusty red gallon can of oil in the shed. Incidentally lubrication was effected by means of a drip-feed viewed through a small glass dome on the tank and regulated by a screw which controlled the aperture through which the oil passed.

The journey to Timaru was without incident although there were many changes, not the least being the way the beach at Caroline Bay had been greatly extended. I did think however, that I was using more oil than I had remembered previously, but as everything was running smoothly I thought it was no cause for concern. To cross the Rangitata River one had to divert inland

at Winchester, only one bridge being available for the whole length of the river. The actual crossing was made at Arundel but after that, one was confronted with a maze of unfenced roads. I was advised to take the Maronan road but there were no signposts to indicate it. I took what I considered was a "main road" which consisted of miles of unbroken road metal, the smallest being about the size of a tea-cup. In between these stones was a dense crop of thistles. Obviously the metal was in its virginal purity and had never been touched. On the other hand there were several trios of tracks from which one could take one's choice. Each trio consisted of two wheel tracks with the horse track running down the middle. These tracks were unmetalled and sometimes it was better to try to ride in the ruts formed by the wheels and sometimes on the bumpy middle path formed by the horses' hooves. Sometimes all three were too difficult and so one moved over to another set of three which was running alongside, but separated by a few yards. Fences were practically non-existent and miles of mountainous landscape was broken occasionally by a shelter-belt of trees. If this was the "road" what were the watercourses like? All over the country at this time, if a ford was deep - too deep for a pedestrian - a footbridge was supplied for which a detour to the side of the road was made. If cars were likely to be in difficulty also, the detour had to be made onto a long platform, often without side-railings. Across rivers like the Rakaia and the Waitaki, road traffic shared a bridge with the railways. With small rivers like the Selwyn or the Waihao (South Canterbury) you took a chance - the river might be in flood or dry. However, it was an improvement from Grandmother's day. She told me that a journey from Waimate to Timaru had taken five days. Anyway I managed to get to Ashburton and from then to Dunsandel. The way seemed to be straightforward but at Rolleston, I made a bad guess between two similarly used roads and found myself in the precinct of Lincoln. However, I eventually arrived in Christchurch without mishap.

The next day I discussed my Engineering training with Professor Scott and he strongly advised me to take the course for the Associateship of Canterbury College School of Engineering. After all his verbiage was cut away it seemed to me that the course tried to cover too much ground in too short a time of three years. But most importantly of all it had very little recognition beyond New Zealand, whereas the Degree Course for the Bachelor of Engineering, while it took four years, was recognised as a qualification for Membership of the various Institutions of Engineers in England. Much to the Professor's chagrin, I came solidly down in the side of the Degree Course and in addition persuaded Ivan Hayman, also a Waimate boy, to change from the Associate to the Degree Course. I also arranged to board at Rolleston House, a residential hostel for male undergraduates which was just being established.

After due application I also was granted a professional pass in the Engineering Preliminary examination, but as it was hopeless to commence my new venture halfway through the year's session, permission was given me to commence my practical work at the Addington Railway Workshops in a few weeks' time. Before an Engineering Degree is granted eighteen months practical work had to be done in approved workshops of which Addington Railway Workshops was one.

All this was not finalised immediately and a difficulty with the motorbike arose before this visit was finally concluded. For the return journey home I had to replenish my supply of oil and petrol. Realising that I had been using oil of too thin a viscosity I ordered fairly thick oil, but it was not till I was well out in the Canterbury Plains again, did I realise that I was in serious trouble because the oil was too thick to pass through the dome in the quantity required for adequate lubrication. When I did manage to get some through, the engine became remarkably lively. But right in the middle of the Plains with not a soul likely to be in sight even, the tired engine stopped entirely. Realising it was due to shortage of oil I disconnected the oil

pipe, collected some in a match box lid and fed it into the two cylinders through the holes for the spark plugs. (In those days breakdowns gave a certain sporting element to a trip and a well-furnished tool kit was essential). My initial fear that the pistons would seize up in the cylinders were groundless and after wheeling the bike in gear for about half a mile in the smoothest bit I could find, decided that perhaps I could continue riding again. This I did but when the “tired” symptoms appeared again I repeated the remedy to arrive ultimately in Geraldine and civilisation again. There an old school friend, N---- S----t, lived and as he was a motor mechanic he soon fixed me up by draining all the oil from the tank and replacing it with a lighter oil, and I arrived home without further incident.

Recounting my experiences to my father that evening, he asked me,

“What oil did you use?”

“Out of that dusty red one gallon can”, I replied.

“That”, he said, “is Gargoyle spraying oil and is not sold as a lubricant”.

I knew that Gargoyle was a brand of lubricant but I had not read the smaller, dust-covered print on the can which proclaimed it was “Gargoyle spraying oil” for “fruit trees”. Lesson: always read the small print.

However, shortly afterwards I was able to venture further afield. On our discharge we were issued with passes which enabled us to travel anywhere on the Government Railways for a month of our choosing.

I linked up with Bill B ---- and we did the rounds. I did not enjoy it much, partly because we could not meet the expenses for accommodation. We slept in railway carriages, sheds and at times hospitality from old mates of the T.B.H.S. and France.

We visited most of the main cities and towns. Probably the most interesting experience was a boat trip up the Wanganui River from Wanganui to Pipiriki. We were fascinated by the way a wire rope was passed round the drum of the winch and the boat literally hauled itself up against the rapids. From Pipiriki we went by road to Raetahi and then to the Waitomo Caves where we marvelled at the glow-worms and wondered at the magnificence of the stalactites and stalagmites. But we had already been associated with towns and buildings and travelling and I was anxious to get on with the business of living a normal life. So we cut the trip short and I went back to Waimate.

So as soon as I conveniently could, I found “digs” in Christchurch which I shared with a Canterbury College Engineering student but I soon found our outlooks on life were very different. The idea had been persisting in my mind that I was one of the very fortunate of my generation, rightfully called the “last generation”. I felt that my life had been returned back to me on a plate and it was a privilege that I had, to use to the very best advantage.

Brought up in a strongly religious family, I was fully aware of the advantages and requirements of the Christian ethic. Furthermore, I had seen enough messes that soldiers got into when they were guided only by their inclinations. Also the procession of the seasons in a farming community had kept in my mind the theme-song of that missionary in the sale-yards in Waimate “As you sow, so shall you reap”. I was obviously in the sowing time of my new life so I had to take care that I was doing the right sowing. There was always the question of marriage but in the social climate of the times it was unlikely that a girl would marry a man, and a returned soldier at that, whose only qualifications for earning a living were those of a labourer. I had learned to dig ditches quickly and mix concrete, but little else in the way of accomplishments which would earn me a livelihood. So the obvious thing to do was to get that Degree as soon as possible. I read in an American magazine

“To enter the Get-More Club get a Worth-More ticket”, and that seemed relevant to my situation.

So one Monday morning, I arrived at the office of the Manager of the Addington Railway Workshops and after lengthy explanations on my past I heard someone say, “Well, let him work with Mac in the Boiler Shop”.

So I was introduced to Mac in the Boiler Shop who was manipulating a tourniquet which was fastened to the edges of a large thick steel plate. To my query he replied that he was shaping a firebox for a locomotive. If a strain was put on the plate so that it was distorted it was struck a heavy blow with a sledge hammer, it would retain the distorted shape after the strain was taken off.

For most of the morning I was a spectator who admired the skill which was shaping the plate as required. For quite an appreciable period Mac disappeared and when he came back I offered to take over some of the striking.

“You can't swing a six-pound hammer to strike fairly”, he said, and I recognised a note of derision in his voice.

“Try me”, I said, with memories of my exploits in the trenches at laying duckboards whose supporting piles had to be hit square to drive them in satisfactorily. I passed the test but he warned me of disastrous consequences if the plate of the firebox was ruined by blows producing “half-moon” indentations. During the morning Mac disappeared for a long period, and later the smoked-filled toilets gave me the clue. It seemed it was the general practice. I could not do much more than use the hammer and these periods of idleness bored me.

At the back of the workshops was a rather dense plantation which I found was a good place to eat my lunch, and such was the discipline of the place that I commenced my lunch half an hour before the set lunchtime and did not return to “work” till

about an hour afterwards. After the first day I brought reading material to pass the time of the day.

One of the things that worried me was to what extent had I forgotten what I had learned at school so occasionally I brought text books of likely subjects and revised them. Unfortunately as it turned out, I did very little with chemistry partly because I had no books and did not know whether it would be worthwhile with a new book on a strange subject where methods might be entirely different at College.

One day I accidentally stumbled on four or five foremen playing cards in a scrapped locomotive cab that had been damaged in the plantation. I immediately veered away and I gave no indication in that I had seen them. That seemed to be the “correct” attitude and I heard no more about it.

Later I was transferred to the welding section of the Boiler Shop where I was given the job of filling up holes in iron castings with an oxy-acetylene torch and filler rod. But even my scanty knowledge made me suspect faulty work in moulding the moulds for pouring the molten iron.

Here also, I became initiated with the system of “foreigners” whereby members of various departments made articles for members of other departments, the material, time and machinery being unwittingly donated by the Railway Department.

As I advanced onto the more skilful operations of welding under appropriate tuition, I had more interesting “foreigners” to do, and during the several months before Christmas was kept busy particularly with metal frames for small trucks etc.

In time with other students I made foreigners for myself. A large soldering iron was made from the copper studs of a boiler, a series of dies for threading from an old file, and a model steam boiler which was never finished.

But the most successful one of all was an aluminium mask. This was in the last year of my studies when we engineers set out to make the Capping Procession a good one. But it will suffice at this point to say that I bought a toy paper-mache face mask and coated it with beeswax so that it could be used as a mould for an aluminium casting. The moulder was a bit dubious about it but it turned out alright. He also cast two balls for the eyes. But more about that later.

The trouble was we had to account for all the gas, oxygen and acetylene that we used and that used on foreigners had to be allocated to authorised jobs, care being taken that fictitious quantities had to be roughly commensurate with the demands of the job itself. So every Friday afternoon there was quite a lot of time spent on “fiddling” the gas consumption figures.

In due course, the regular College students arrived and they seemed to be an embarrassment to the staff. To find jobs for them with their at least initial lack of skill was beyond the organisation. However, they were paid no wages, and whatever they did without damage was profit. But profit is a dirty word in a Government organisation. Although I had plenty of bleak times with nothing to occupy me, I found I had been royally treated in comparison with the new students.

I had from time to time made the acquaintance of several other returned soldiers in various parts of the shops and had swapped experiences. But there were not many and some of them were bitter about those who had wangled exemption from the war on account of their “work of national importance”. I found out later that my presence in the workshops had been explained by the erroneous idea that I was a rehabilitation trainee. This was probably fostered by the idea that I was always asking questions and seeking information, a course of action that the younger students did not bother about. It seemed that they were largely concerned with being credited with time spent in the workshops to make up the eighteen months necessary for their Degree or

Associateship. The knowledge and experience available while there, seemed to be only a secondary matter.

But even I was forced to adopt all sorts of dodges to fill in time. A standard practice was to have a sleep in the shell of a boiler or water-tender and at times I conformed to the practice.

But I did not have so much reason for sleeping as some of the others who before going to work ran early-morning milk rounds or were up early tending their glasshouses of tomatoes or flowers which they ran as a side-line. However, on one occasion when I was indulging, I was wakened from a sleep in a tender by voices outside discussing the enlargement of the man-hole in the tender through which I had to pass to get out. After a while there was some sound of activity outside and still thinking the Manager might be about I stayed "put". Then I heard an oxy-acetylene gas torch being lit and a few moments a dull red spot appeared beyond the rim of the man-hole and grew yellow and finally melted with sparks and fumes coming into the tender.

I moved as far away as possible and waited as the welder cut round in a circle hoping that the fumes would not be overpowering. However, I suffered very little discomfort, and as soon as the cut edge cooled down I wriggled through the hole to the amazement of the welder who was just about to wheel his apparatus away.

Much of the time I was in the workshops I was attached to fitters. At one period we were fitting steam pipes under the seats of passenger carriages for steam heating of trains. Prior to this, heating was done by chemical heat. Heavy brass cases about 2 feet 6 inches long contained chemicals and if they were shaken to promote chemical action, gave off heat. That was the theory, so we were told. But the shaker developed more bodily heat through the exercise than he got through chemicals.

The carriages we worked on were shunted to a remote sunny part of the yards and there seemed to be no time check. So we spent plenty of time planning how to avoid bends, “running” joints, etc.

Probably the hardest work I did was helping a fitter replace the bearings in the “big ends” of the connecting rods of the newly-designed A.B. locomotive. These rods were about the limit of what two men could lift and consequently their removal and replacement was very tiring. Time and again the engines would come into the shops with bearings damaged through overheating.

I was very curious about this as the engines were supposed to be a much more powerful and efficient design. As at this time we had already studied at College the design of big ends, I decided to study the blue-prints and see if I could find out the cause. A few calculations soon showed that the intensity of the pressure on the bearings was considerably greater than was the usual practice, and this due to the effect of friction, could cause the build up of heat which melted the bearing metal. Little did I know it then, but this discovery had very definite repercussions for me some years later. But till then I'll leave that part of the story.

I became very interested in riveting in boilers and tenders and took my share of it. One time I became over-confident and allowed the rivet to become too cold with the results that when I finished I found that the soreness which had developed in my hand was due to the fact that I had peeled skin from its palm.

2 College days

As already indicated I took up residence at the men's hostel, Rolleston House which in reality was a collection of five houses

bounded by Worcester Street, Rolleston Avenue and Gloucester Street. It comprised all the houses except one at the end of that block and when I arrived a common room with showers and ablution facilities was being completed.

At first I shared a room, which served as a bedroom and study, with Ivan Hayman and we stayed together throughout our college course. Ivan was also a Waimate boy whose father had been the architect for our house in Queen Street, Waimate. Ivan was also a returned soldier having served from very early on in the War with the Mounted Rifles right through Egypt and Palestine to the end. Before he went to the War, helped by the Repatriation Board and with the approval of his fiancé, decided to become an engineer before marrying. As already indicated in those days it was considered necessary to be in a position to support a wife before entering marriage and Ivan and I were both in agreement on that.

We found there were about ten other returned soldiers at Rolleston House starting hopefully on a University course with the Repatriation Board assistance, but most of them with less than University Entrance or Matriculation Examination qualifications. We of course were considered the old men of the place by the young fry who had come straight through from High Schools. Indeed it was a great surprise to find among the new-comers several boys, whom before I went to the War, I taught at Timaru Boys' High School. They were taking the same lectures as I was.

Lectures were of one hour duration and mainly in the morning with occasional breaks of free periods of one hour. Practical and experimental work was in the afternoons of two or three hour periods. Evenings were theoretically free but in reality were the hardest part of the day when we had to deal with lectures, notes and calculations resulting from experiments. As the Junior University Scholarship was more or less equal to the Intermediate or First Year standard I had thought that except for

Chemistry, it would be largely a matter of revision and refreshing my memory. There was however, one section in Pure Mathematics which was entirely new and incomprehensible to me.

Our Professor G----t started off his lectures on Pure Mathematics on the theory of number “whatever that was”. There were no text books available on it and we had to rely entirely on his lectures. One of the difficulties was that as he lectured he wrote the mathematical symbols on the blackboard simultaneously with his explanation and we had to listen and try to understand what he was saying, follow what he was writing on the board and at the same time get it down in our notes. Unfortunately he wrote and spoke rather rapidly, hardly ever repeated himself and as soon as he had a proof, for instance, down on the board, proceeded to rub it off oblivious to the fact that we had managed to get only half of it down.

I decided the only hope was to try and get his lecture down verbatim and refer to the board only when forced to. So from the beginning to the end of his next lecture, I was busy scribbling my notes down as fast as I could, hardly ever taking my eyes off my note book. And the results were fairly satisfactory, certainly a big improvement on my previous notes. The following lecture produced even better results.

In the next lecture while I was hard at it getting the notes down, I became conscious that some of the words were not part of the lecture. They were,

“Mr Shackleton, I would like to see you at the end of this lecture”.

It took me some time to appreciate the situation and in the meantime the whole class was looking at me. That did not add to my equanimity and out of my confusion I could only stumble, “Er, yes Sir. Er, certainly Sir”.

So he started lecturing and away I started scribbling again till the end of the lecture. When we were back in Rolleston House it was gleefully reported to me that the Professor was glaring at me all the time as though he would kill me and I was not taking any notice. So when the lecture was over I duly reported to the Professor.

“You wished to see me, Sir”.

“Yes, I do! Mr Shackleton, I don't think you should be attending my lectures anymore. You are so intent on getting your private correspondence done, it is a waste of your time and my time attending them”.

“But Sir. I have not been doing my correspondence. I have been taking your lectures down verbatim. You go too fast for me to follow and so if I get them written down I have a chance later to sort out what it is all about.

“What? Do you mean to tell me?”

“Yes Sir. Here is what I have been doing”, and I opened my book and showed him.

“Oh”, he said. “What a big mistake. I apologise most sincerely”

The result was that the next lecture was at a more moderate tempo and when we finally did prove and decide that two and two made four, I found myself entering on the more familiar ground of calculation mathematics and as such I had very little trouble in coping with the work. I was thus able to help Ivan who was finding the going very heavy.

In Applied Mathematics I also had no difficulty. In fact in the examination at the end of the year the working knowledge of the calculus I had acquired on the transport coming home, gave me a big advantage. We had to find the centre of pressure of a plate standing vertically in water, and to do this without the calculus takes two full quarto pages of calculations and explanations. With the calculus this takes about four lines. This gave me the

advantage in that I could devote the time saved to other problems.

Our lecturer in Applied Mathematics was Professor D--n who was also “tutor” in charge of Rolleston House. A few days after the examination he came to me and said,

“Mr Shackleton, where did you learn the calculus?”

“On the transport coming home”.

“Who was your instructor?”

“No one. The mathematics instructor for the Educational classes admitted that he could not go beyond quadratic equations. But shortly before sailing I had seen a book displayed in a bookshop window in Southampton Row, London, and the front page had on it “Calculus Made Easy” by Sylvanus Thompson, and as a sub-title, ‘What one fool can do, another fool can’. Knowing that calculus is necessary for engineering I decided to buy it”.

“Oh, that terrible book! It should not be allowed to be published. It is mathematically unsound”.

“Well I don't know about that. But it does enable you to get things done and that is all that is necessary for engineers, I think”.

However, realising it might not be a good policy to be too dogmatic, I added,

“But I suppose a knowledge of the theory would give one a better understanding of the applications”.

Once I became established in the subject of mathematics and I could work without the fear of something I had forgotten blocking my progress, I began to enjoy it finding in it the satisfactions that one also obtains in solving puzzles. So it was that at the end of the year I found myself one of a trio sharing the Class Mathematics Prize.

In Physics too, partly because so much of it requires the use of mathematics, I found little difficulty. And that again I found was partly due to the good grounding our Physics master, Eric Cockroft gave us in the subject. At that time electricity and magnetism was in rather an elementary state. True we studied electrical effects of current electricity such as magnetism, generation of heat and light etc., all of which had practical applications which made the subject worthwhile. But when it came to static electricity, with its Leyden jars, condensers and Wimshurst machines, all we could see in it was that it was good for particular tricks like picking up pieces of paper, producing long sparks and having fun with balls of pith.

One day I questioned the use of learning about static electricity as it was not much practical use. But Cockroft said,

“It is part of the behaviour of electricity and you have to know it”.

Little did he or I know that in our lifetime the phenomena associated with static electricity would far outweigh the importance attached to current electricity. Rumblings of this upheaval came when a student gave a lecture to the Engineering Students Society on Fleming's newly-discovered thermionic valve which formed the basis for the development of telecommunications and radar. Now of course the valve has been largely supplanted by the transistor which also had its origin in the basic principles of static electricity.

Our Physics lecturer at Canterbury College was Professor Farr who, while he was inclined to be discursive, was rather entertaining. I well remember one morning when he was about to give us a lecture on colour, he blandly announced, “The text for this morning is,

The golden sunset in the azure sky,

Yellow and blue are complementary (the “ary” rhyming with “sky”)

Our laboratory work was taken by Mr Farr who took every care to be of assistance and see that we understood what we were doing.

But my most difficult subject was Chemistry. I had no prior formal teaching in the subject and my knowledge was largely what Cockroft had taught us in order to understand the phenomenon of electrolysis and the operation of batteries of electric cells. Consequently the first lecture by Professor Evans absolutely floored me. Here was a terminology being used that I had never heard of. Half way through the lecture I decided that the best thing I could do was to write down the words that were new to me. These of course were spelt phonetically but when I referred them to a text book, there was nothing very much like them. When I asked a group of friends for help, there were hoots of laughter and after some discussion they usually agreed on what I was trying to spell.

“Anyway”, I said, “whether it is what I meant, I don't know. But it is a new one to me so I had better learn all about it”.

“Gosh”, they commented after a session. “These are basic principles. You've got a hell of a job to catch up”.

With that encouragement I set out on “the job of catching up”. But I never did. As the lectures progressed the gap became wider and it looked as though I was heading for disaster.

Of course not having the requisite theory, my practical work was equally calamitous. Fortunately the demonstrator under whose care Hayman worked was also a returned soldier and occasionally in lulls we swapped war yarns but nothing was too much trouble to explain on the subject of Chemistry. For the Terms Examination we had a practical test in which we had to find three radicals in a mixture. With my incompetent theory I realised I had not a hope, so I decided I would have to take another line of approach. I memorised the whole system of tests and indicators for the analysis and when the fateful day came, I

resolved not to discard one drop of liquid from whatever source till I had done completely everything I could.

Confronted with the mixture I looked at it for clues, but it gave no sign. Then I smelt it and there was the almond smell of prussic acid. Testing for this is rather involved but I successfully produced the rusty coagulation that confirmed it. Good! That was one radical. But what about the others. I looked round my array of about twenty beakers of liquid and saw that one was turbid. That's bismuth, I gleefully recognised correctly. That was two, but I had no idea of the third. Anyway if my story was credible, I passed. And so I did.

Needless to say I failed in the theory papers.

3 Extra-mural activities for the Intermediate Year

Prior to taking up the Engineering Course, I was told that with the state of my nerves after leaving the army, a sedentary student's life was not for me. I should take up farming or fruit growing or some other outdoor activity and get as much fresh air and exercise as possible. I therefore resolved to arrange my student routine to include that activity. However, after the necessary paper work was completed regarding enrolling and after we had been having about a week of regular lectures, I found that I would get shaky and trembly and could not control my writing. So when I told Hayman I was going for a sharp walk round the block to calm things down, he said he was coming with me. So together we had our fresh air and exercise and it was so successful that it became a regular routine.

At frequent intervals we went for runs along Rolleston Avenue about 9.30 p.m., followed by a cold shower and retired to bed not later than 10.30. In the winter months it was not so pleasant

nor convenient. Sometimes the Avenue was blanketed in a ground fog, and we could not see where our feet were going, but above waist-high, the air was perfectly clear with the stars shining brightly above.

Some Sundays in the spring we used to go out walking for the day with a packed breakfast and lunch. Breakfast we would have near the top of Dyer's Pass Road and then follow the track which later became the Summit Road joining the Sumner - Lyttelton Road, where we usually had lunch. We took the tram from Sumner arriving back at Rolleston House about 4 p.m. After a shower and change we sometimes went to Hayman's relatives, the Griggs, who made us so welcome that we soon looked upon the place as our Christchurch home. There were three girls in the family in their teens or early twenties and all had some musical accomplishment. They were kind enough to see that I got more than my share of playing the piano. After tea we used to go to the Methodist Church and return for supper.

I had not been long at College before I realised that if I was going to have any social life there I would have to dance. My infinitesimal knowledge of dancing was that of the "Maxina" acquired at the Y.M.C.A. Hut in Leicester Square, London. So I took lessons at half-a-crown an hour. After about four lessons the Grigg girls learned about it (anyway ten shillings was about all I could afford in that luxury) and offered to teach me; which they did. I was therefore never short of a partner when I wanted to attend a College dance. Actually I had several persistent invitations to large private dances, but I turned them down. There was a very limited amount of time that I could afford to spend on social activities.

However, I think there was an element who did not quite know how to take us returned soldiers. Some were a bit rough and made suggestions which at that time were reprehensible but in this permissive age would be considered more of a joke. One partner I danced with on one occasion took quite an interest in

my soldier history particularly with the Army of Occupation in Germany. She questioned me closely on my reactions to the German civilians and their reactions to us. Were the food shortages as bad as the papers said? And so on. Later I discovered it was not my personal charm which prompted the interest but the fact that she was of German parentage.

As the winter approached I decided to take up playing Rugby, and before long I found myself Captain of a Third Grade Varsity team. But after three weekends I decided also that this activity was not for me. In spite of much time spent on “getting fit”, the aftermath of the games left me stiff and sore. The organisational work also detracted from my precious time. So reluctantly I decided that perhaps I was becoming too old for it, and that anyway, playing Rugby was an extravagance in time that I could not afford. However, there were several other ways of enjoying time still lurking round the corner.

When we commenced our residence at Rolleston House a Common Room was in the process of being furnished. There were newspaper racks, cupboards and an assortment of chairs of all types for the comfort or otherwise of the residents. We formed ourselves into the Rolleston House Association and somehow or other I found myself on the Committee and it was not long before I found the secretaryship in my lap. For reasons already stated I accepted with a fair amount of diffidence but was assured that I would have plenty of help at hand. It was not long before an R.H. dance was mooted and realising the amount of work that would fall on the secretary, I soon pointed out that we had no piano for music. The question of hiring one was ruled out on the score of expense. Even a professional pianist was expensive enough. But I was also missing a piano for my own personal use and so approached the University Council for one. I made a point that what musical ability we had, which involved a piano, was being atrophied and when receiving the approval of my Committee for the correspondence, I had to give

a full explanation of what “atrophy” was. Anyway the Council was kind and we ultimately got our piano.

Now for the dance. Each resident gave me the name of his partner. Lists were made out, invitations issued and posted well in advance. Catering arrangements were made and I and my helpers sat back with a sign of relief awaiting the great night. Furthermore, it looked as though we had easily balanced our budget, supplying a good supper at moderate cost.

About a week after invitations had been posted, casual complaints began to trickle in that partners had not received invitations and I had to face charges of unauthorised vetting. There were about five invitations involved and I thought I had obtained an easy solution by issuing five more. But I did not know how sensitive the female is in the matter of playing second fiddle, especially when a late invitation was probably the result of someone else's refusal.

I blamed the Post Office, and produced my list with the invitations ticked off as completed and sent. It was not till some months later I found the sealed and stamped invitations behind some reference books on our mantelpiece.

But other pitfalls awaited. We had difficulties in obtaining someone to play “extras” while the professional rested and had refreshment. As I had already displayed my shaky prowess in playing such music as waltzes from “The Pink Lady” and the “Quaker Girl”, the popular operettas of the period. I found myself dragged into that duty. When I expostulated that my playing involuntarily departed from the written music I was greeted with,

“Never mind, Shack. But you keep to the beat alright and that's the main thing”.

The dance itself proved to be a great success, which produced two noteworthy points. The Matron was uneasy to find that “sitting out possies” were frequently the study rooms of

residents and she knew that those rooms also contained beds. However, as far as I know, there was never a breath of scandal on that score. The other point of interest was that taxis were strangely absent after the dance. A cushion on the cross-bar of a bike provided a seat for one's partner, while one pedalled and steered to the best of one's ability. Some thought this might affect the popularity of the next dance we held and it might be difficult to obtain partners. But no one received any complaints and several ribald residents suggested that it was because that part of a lady's anatomy is better cushioned than a man's, and the ride might not be so painful for them.

Capping days were of course red-letter days in our College life and in the first year I did not give the day much attention beyond parading in one in an unbroken crocodile formation, several hundred yards long with hands on the preceding member's shoulders stamping in and out of shops and across roads completely interrupting business and traffic for quite a number of minutes till the crocodile had wound its way through. I think most of us enjoyed the liberty we were given and any sign of presumption was quietly discouraged.

When the Terms Exams were finished I went home and found there was quite a number of jobs awaiting me in the garden. I also had plans for my time. I wanted to build a workshop and install a bench, lathes and hand tools. Dad encouraged me in this and suggested I extend it and make an apple store. This we did assisted by Ivan who supplied much of the technical knowledge. It was only a frame weatherboard structure with a dirt floor, but I hoped to make improvements later. In the meantime, I wrote to Drummond Brothers in England for a quotation for a 3½" screw-cutting lathe. As a boy I had pored over their advertisements in the "Model Engineer and Electrician" and now was attempting to make my dreams come true.

I supplemented my stock of hand tools by making some of them at Addington Workshops in the ensuing “holidays” when we did our “practical work,” required for our Degrees.

I became ambitious and decided to make a model steam engine and so started on the boiler. I managed to get some boiler plate rolled to a cylindrical shape and welded the seam, but somehow or other I did not get much further.

I realised how much of a nuisance we were to the men but I unobtrusively tried to pick up scraps of knowledge, much of it I later never used. However, I seem to have established some sort of a standing when the men had thought I was a rehabilitation trainee. Moreover, I was not averse to shovelling sand or coke in the foundry or fetching and carrying when required. It also helped to pass the time. Occasionally I still reverted to the plantation but this time chiefly with chemistry books. But I did not lack assistance or advice.

And so I commenced my First Professional year. I had the subject of Chemistry of the Intermediate year to pass as well as the new subject of Industrial Chemistry for the First Professional Examination. Then our laboratory work was laborious and time-consuming, but we managed to produce some lighter relief.

But time was rushing along far too quickly and I did not slow it down by becoming involved in St Andrew's Presbyterian Young Mens Bible Class. This I found was something that I wanted. Here we worked out the problems of our times with the idea of finding a Christian solution. Our Senior Class included young men from all walks of life ranging from a Gardener from Hagley Park to students of all sorts including lawyers, engineers, commerce etc., and with widely different backgrounds. We studied along the lines of the syllabus drawn up by the Presbyterian Bible Class Union.

The syllabus set out a topic for each Sunday, giving Biblical readings relevant to the topic together with hints for discussion, all to be studied during the week. The previous Sunday a member was appointed to open and lead the discussion. When he had finished various members made whatever comments they wished. The whole proceedings were in the charge of the Leader who conducted the opening and closing periods of worship and usually had his own summing up.

Portions of these various studies have remained with me all my life, the outstanding one being that on what are known as the three temptations of Jesus. We had outlined to us the relevant times and the circumstances. Jesus had just recognised who he was, and the message of the Kingdom of Heaven he had to give to the world. We reckoned that with such a realisation of his life's work, not as a carpenter but to spread abroad principles that would save the world, it was natural to go in a quiet place and plan a campaign. But we thought they must have been tougher in those days to last forty days and forty nights of scheming and fasting.

We had a bit of trouble over the first temptation of turning stones into bread. Initially we could not see what was wrong with turning stones into bread to feed the hungry for instance. But later we saw that people would follow him not for his message but for what benefits they could get. The deeper message would be lost. How often in my lifetime have I seen that taking place where the message has been ignored for the "fringe benefits". It is a mistake to try and attract people to church for some worldly advantage they may receive from it.

But what about Christ feeding the multitudes? We decided that was a secondary necessity and he was moved with compassion. The motive was on quite a different plane from feeding them to gain an audience for his message.

Similarly the second temptation of being rescued by angels after he had thrown himself from a high tower, miracles and amazing

feats would kill the spirituality of his message. We also considered it was a kind of prostitution of his powers to gather crowds who would be looking for more miracles and the exciting atmosphere would smother the things of the Spirit.

But he did effect miracles, we argued. And again we realised that it was from compassion. When the matter was likely to get out of hand after performing the miracle of healing he said, "Go and tell no man".

The core of the third temptation was not hard to grasp. Satan wanted Christ to use the ways of the world. But we, who had fought in the war to end all wars, were beginning to see that in Germany and Russia even more wars were looming. So the World War I had been fought in vain.

So far, as a plan of campaign, the temptations were entirely negative: what not to do. But we ultimately came to the conclusion (not on this Sunday) that Christ spent his whole life (showing us) by deeds and parables what to do to extend his Kingdom.

Pacifism was a red-hot issue with us and I was a great disappointment to some who thought that as a returned soldier I would be an anti-pacifist. For the record we worked it out that pacifism was the only way, but pacifists should be filled with the spirit of Christ, willing to bear all things even death for the principle. Peace would not come along the lines of building armaments, but only when a nation of God-conscious pacifists throws away its armaments. What the final result would be, God knows and leave it to Him. But it would have a tremendous influence in reducing world tension at least; so we thought. Similarly without the Christian Spirit, the oppressed, if freed from their oppression, would in turn become the oppressors and so the evil would go on.

As the year rolled on we were overburdened by unnecessary and time-consuming laboratory work. I kept a record and found that

in one term I had spent over seventy-two hours working out and writing up our laboratory results with its multiplicity of attendant graphs. I was still bogged down with Intermediate Chemistry papers for ten years back, making a note of the topics involved in each question. I realised that certain topics kept recurring about once in every three years, and it was then not difficult to “guestimate” what might come up at the next exam at the end of the year. I also looked round technical journals to see if there were any new developments. Electric furnaces were coming into prominence. So I studied those too.

But three weeks before the exam I was in real difficulty. I could only sleep intermittently for several weeks past, and when I did was again falling over cliffs or from crumbling towers and all the rest of my previous nightmares. In addition, I was finding it difficult to think and write coherently. One night Ivan's brother came into our room when it was dark and I was in the twilight zone between sleeping and waking and he accidentally flashed the light of his acetylene bike lamp on me. What exactly happened then I do not know but I came to my senses with the two of them holding me down on my bed and making soothing noises. Apparently I had been fighting the war again and consequently obtained some notoriety in Rolleston House.

The doctor said I was overworked and had to take two weeks completely away from study, to have plenty of exercise and get out in the fresh air. In vain I protested, but he was adamant. So while the others were working night and day I was “taking it easy”, going for walks and generally enjoying the bright spring sunshine. When I did get down to work again, I was delighted to find that I could think clearly and half-forgotten ideas were readily recalled.

When the exams commenced I had no difficulty with the first three papers, but the fourth was the first part of the Drawing and Design subject. We had to design the big-end for the connecting rod of a steam engine, but for the life of me I could

not get going. I got all sorts of figures on my calculation sheets which did not seem to make sense and as the hands of the clock remorselessly went round I did not know what to draw and ended up with almost a blank sheet for my drawing and apparently useless figures for my calculations.

I returned to Rolleston House very despondent. However, my Chemistry was not up to standard and my Technical Chemistry knowledge was more or less confined to the specialising study I had done and the exam still had to come. At tea the kindly Matron (whose name I have no memory or record) who was an ex-army nurse, was always eager to hear how the ex-servicemen “got on”. Unfortunately the score was not very good as many of us had gone into more optimism than the requisite qualifications. When she asked me about my results I had a very dismal tale and of course moaned about my future prospects too. She knew my past history and the enforced holiday at the doctor's commands, so said,

“Never mind, just before you go to sit the other Drawing and Design paper come to me and I will give you something to steady your nerves”.

The result was that I literally “flew” through the paper. I did all the calculations required, checked them, completed the drawings and then had a few minutes to spare. However, when we left the examination room and began to compare notes, I was beginning to despair again, because I could not find many students who had the same answers as mine. However, some time later in Rolleston House, somebody had a list of the correct answers which had been worked out by a tutor and I found that they more or less lined up with mine. So the Matron and I were both very happy, but with one reservation, how would the previous Drawing and Design paper affect the final result?

However, it was the Intermediate Chemistry paper and the Technical Chemistry paper which caused me the greatest concern. I was in pretty poor shape when I sat down with the

Intermediate Chemistry paper in front of me. I read it through very carefully to see what questions I knew most about and so attempt those. Unfortunately the most I knew about any question did not seem to me to be pass standard. But I struggled through one question and was half way through another one, when the unanswered question hit me hard. "What am I here for and what are all these people doing here?" I felt a bit suffocated and decided some fresh air would do me good. What everybody else was doing was not my concern, so I stood up at my desk with the intention of going outside.

"Are you feeling better now?" and somehow I was being walked round the Quadrangle outside the examination room by one of the supervisors. I never found out what had happened between my standing up at the desk and walking round the Quadrangle. When I made enquiries from the supervisor what had happened and how did I get here he replied,

"There is no hurry. We'll walk for a few more minutes, and then you can go back and finish your paper in your own time".

The best answer I could get even at Rolleston House was that I was not well and "they" took me outside; but no details. It was quite a long time before I ceased to worry and wonder how bad the details were. But back in the examination room I did feel a little more confident about the questions, but still with the awful realisation that I would not make the grade.

It was just too much to hope that I would do any better in Technical Chemistry, so when the fateful day came with the Technical Chemistry paper in my hand and I had to write what I knew, I saw first of all that we had twelve questions to choose from and to answer seven. Then as I read through I found that I had correctly "guestimated" the groundwork of three questions and there also was a question on electric furnaces which I had previously studied. So altogether I could give pretty good answers on four out of the seven and managed sketchy answers on the other three as "makeweights". The other papers

“Descriptive Geometry” and “Mathematics Stage II” had caused no difficulty.

However, we had to wait a long time before we knew the results. In order (I presume) to maintain a standard equivalent to British universities our papers were posted to England and marked up by British authorities. As this was before the days of airmail we had to wait towards the end of February before obtaining results. So when the fateful day came I found that I had passed in Chemistry with the minimum pass marks of forty. And to me the answer to the frivolous question was “Did I pass or was I pushed” was obvious, particularly as the examiners comments on my Drawing and Design papers also seem relevant. My code word was “Bardic” and the examiner’s report was something like this:

“Bardic: I am quite at a loss to understand the performance of this candidate. There is such a wide difference between the two papers, that I am wondering whether they are done by the same person. The first paper was very definitely a failure but the second paper was of such excellence that I have no hesitation (assuming they are done by the same candidate) in recommending that he be granted a pass”.

No doubt the Senate of New Zealand University would also have a report from the Chief Supervisor of my behaviour during the Chemistry examination and would be able to weigh up the situation. So I was passed and had a straight run for my Second and Third Professional examinations.

4 The Bike Tour

Mindful of the advice to take plenty of fresh air and exercise, I took a month off from the holidays and organised a bike tour down the centre of the South Island.

So four of us, my brother Ron, and his friend Alister Brass, Arthur Aitcheson an engineering student friend of mine and I, planned a tour to Mount Cook then Queenstown and back again via Dunedin to Waimate. Three of us set off from Waimate and Brass was to join us at Fairlie. We planned to camp where we could carrying our sleeping and cooking utensils on our bicycles as well as the tent and whatever food was necessary till we could get further supplies. We anticipated we would take about a month but there were too many uncertainties for us to make detailed plans. Mother was a bit dubious and worried about the whole expedition but made us promise to write at least once a week. But in view of the irregular mail services for posting and forwarding we warned her that that would not be much advantage. So we set out in the middle of January travelling up the Pareora River and Gorge where we pitched camp for the night in a fir plantation, enjoyed the novelty of billy tea and made a meal from food Mother had given us.



Allan (left) and Ron (right) start out.

We were tired and slept soundly to be awakened at dawn by falling rain and learned that light tents are not impervious to rain drops from the fir trees. Our blankets were covered with a white wet fungus which had sprayed through the tent. However, all our clothes were not wet and we decided it was not much use waiting there to get wetter. Breakfast was a miserable meal. Everything combustible was wet and we therefore could not light a fire to have a warm meal. So with some more “dry rations” we set out for Fairlie and arrived without incident. But it was still raining and there was no sign of it clearing. We were therefore forced to stay in Fairlie but as our gear was already wet it was necessary for us to have more civilised accommodation. Enquiries at the hotel revealed that there were two grades of accommodation. The lower class being for the shearers and rouseabouts of the outlying sheep stations. Of course this grade suited us and I still remember how good sausages and mashed potatoes tasted washed down by a hot cup of tea after our several meals of dry rations.

The arrival of the one so-called “Fairlie Slow” train from Timaru the following day did not produce Alister so we had another night of sleeping at the hotel.

But this was no way to commence a biking tour whose financial base depended on cheap camping accommodation. However, during the day we had made arrangements to have rations delivered by the Mount Cook Motor Company buses at Pukaki and the Hermitage. Bread was most difficult to carry as no room could be found for its bulk on our already overloaded bike frames, and a most helpful receptionist at the Motor Company offices offered to get the driver of the daily bus to dump bread for us along the road. In addition she offered to buy fresh meat to be delivered to us along the road too but particularly at Tekapo, Pukaki and the Hermitage. As a matter of fact we generated a considerable amount of local interest and we satisfied one continually-recurring question as to what weight our individual luggage was by weighing mine and finding it was

seventy-two pounds. Added to this the locals rather gleefully informed us that there had been floods in the back country and some of the roads were washed away.

However, Alister arrived the next day and we set off on our tour in earnest and in a dismal drizzle but before we had reached the top of Burke's Pass we knew that this tour was going to be as much a walking tour as a biking one. Balancing the top-heavily loaded machines also required that extra effort which was soon in short supply. Even the down-hill parts of the road did not give us much relief; as for safety's sake our speed over the bumpy and scoured roads had to be carefully controlled. Arriving at the top of the pass we recognised the wisdom of the exhortation on a monument to plant trees on the desolate country in which as far as one could see there was hardly any growth worthy of the name of tree. Inwardly I hoped that there was a concealed gully somewhere where some suitable trees or saplings grew; or else how were we to erect our tent?

From the top of the Pass we could see golden clouds and blue sky above the hills in the west and we cheered up considerably. After riding all afternoon we never found a place that produced suitable poles for a tent so pitched our tent as best we could over a plain wire fence bounding the roadside so that one half of the floor space was on the roadside and the other half in the paddock. This left the ends of the tent very much open and to cross from one side of the tent to the other it was easier to go out the end of the tent, climb through a clear part of the fence and go into the same end of the tent on the other side of the fence. There was a clear crystal stream a few yards from the tent and an abundant supply of dry sticks on its banks. Our first cooked meal of fried sausages, boiled potatoes, bread, butter and jam was voted a huge success by the hungry tourers.

The next day we only travelled as far as Tekapo, and we excused our slow pace with the fact that a swagger stopped us and eventually asked us to have some of his billy tea which we

enjoyed seated on his swag. He was in no hurry to break the party up and no more were we. We gave him a small packet of sugar. There was no difficulty about camping in a small plantation on the shore of the lake and the next morning we set out for Pukaki.

The journey over Simon's Pass was rough and tough. In addition to the scouring caused by the heavy rains, some parts of the road had previously been shingled and the wheels of the motor bus had thrown out the shingle, making narrow ruts about a foot wide and a foot deep. It was almost impossible to ride on the shingled parts and the ruts, the remaining alternative, threw us off our bikes when we grazed their sides. But in falling we had to hold the weight of our loaded bikes to prevent the frame crashing to the ground.

On rounding a corner over the crest of a hill, our first view of the Lake [Pukaki] in the late afternoon sunshine was a memorable one. The gleaming snow of Mount Cook caught by the sun's rays was mirrored in the calm blue waters of the Lake while a small island with its sparse collection of tall spindly trees but covered in green scrub broke the blue uniformity of the Lake itself.

We had intended to renew our supply of bread at the Pukaki Hotel but they did not have any and told us that one of the several returned soldiers, who had taken up sheep-runs on the Mount Cook road, would probably be able to help us. To save our diminishing supplies we decided to have a meal at the hotel. If that was "second class" we wondered what astronomical tariff they charged tourists.

We pressed on but had not advanced far along the Mount Cook road on the shores of the lake when we were overtaken by two men in a horse-drawn trap. After the usual greetings and exchange of information we explained our predicament about bread.

“Never mind”, they said, “Come along to our place which is just a few miles up the road, and we'll bake you a batch of scones”.

They went on ahead and by the time we arrived the scones were just about cooked. Their house was a small cottage obviously sparsely furnished with the minimum of accommodation. But we were not worrying about that. They saw by my R.S.A. badge that I also was a Digger” and away we went “winning the war again”. As the other three in our party professed to being very interested, we carried on well into the night. At our first suggestion about pitching our tent somewhere they said,

“No need. There is a roadman's hut on the other side of the road not far from our gate. There are bunks and all that and you come here for breakfast. There are a few rats there but we'll lend you our cat who'll keep them quiet”.

“But what about the roadman?”

“Oh, Jim Smith won't mind a bit”.

When we finally broke up the party they came down to the hut with the cat to see us safely installed. However, when they had departed we decided we had trespassed too much on their hospitality and planned, apart from saying goodbye, to get on the road straight away after we had made our own breakfast

However, what with the rats and the cat pouncing about, we had a broken sleep and were finally awakened by conversation outside the door of the hut. It was our hosts of the night before together with their neighbour who had arrived on horseback from his place about five miles up the road.

They were ensuring that we had our breakfast as originally arranged and the neighbour was taking care that we did not go past his place without calling in for a meal. We insisted that they used some of our rations and by the time the meal was completed I realised that it would be at least lunchtime before we arrived at our new host's place.

However, we did not know then that the whole settlement was agog for the biking students going to the Hermitage. There the routine was repeated and it was well into the night before we left our host and again bunked down in another of the roadman's huts. This time there was no cat to wage war on the rats and we had a much better rest, perhaps because we were very tired or perhaps because there were not so many rats.

This time we made our own breakfast and planned to get to the top of the Lake that day. We had gone very groggily along some of the worst ruts we had met so far and occasionally had to take our foot off a pedal to prevent the bike falling to the ground when Ron made an unsuccessful "save" and his bike with its load crashed flat on the road. That was not very unusual except that that pedal arm was so bent that it could not be rotated and the bike was thus immobile and useless. This was a nice how-do-you-do!

We had rather a wider range of bike tools than usual but nothing designed for this situation. We dismantled the pedal off the bike and saw that the arm was bent in the middle of its length.

We rested the ends of the arm on two suitable rocks and bashed the hump in the arm with the back end of the tomahawk. The first stroke took some of the bend out and the second made it sufficiently straight to be serviceable again. The assembly did not take long and we were off on the road again much more wiser about the dire necessity of still hanging on to the handles and supporting the bike with one foot on the ground when we lose our balance. But it was grinding work. We were glad when we came to the notorious shingle where the stream had changed its course and refused to run under the nice little bridges that had been built to facilitate the passage of the motor buses. And again the buses would have to negotiate the rather steep and high banks that bounded the ford. But owing to the hot dusty roads and the direct and reflected heat from the

burning sun, we were inclined to dally too long refreshing ourselves.

After lunch by one of these streams we were overtaken by a bald-headed man past middle-age driving a horse and dray.

After the usual greetings and we told him our names, he enquired where we came from. On learning that Ron and I came from Waimate he asked,

“Did you know the Collmans who lived there about twenty years ago?”

“Yes”, I said, “they lived just behind our place”.

“Oh! And do you remember them digging a well there too?”

“Yes”.

“And do you remember dropping stones on a bald man digging at the bottom of the well?”

“Oh no”.

“Well you did and that was me, and to return good for evil you can use my huts all the way to the Hermitage. I have a good hut behind the Guides’ huts there and you can have that too. But for that you must call in at my place some miles up the road and have afternoon tea. My wife will be very pleased to see you. Stay as long as you like”.

We were finding the hospitality along this road almost overwhelming and it was cutting our timetable to ribbons.

In the course of the afternoon tea in which among other things there was an almost unlimited supply of pikelets, we learned that one of the trials of living in these parts was loneliness particularly in winter time when it would be weeks before they would see anyone. So in the summertime they make the most of their opportunities. Mrs Smith said that she sometimes had a bus load of passengers for a meal.

Of course we stayed also for the evening meal but got away in time to pitch our tent some miles up the road and settle down for the night.

Before we left Mrs Smith said that we must be sure to call on the Valentine's at the head of the Lake. Valentine had married before taking up his section and they would appreciate our company. It turned out his brother was a classmate of mine at Timaru Boys' High School. However, there was no chance of us passing the Valentines by. He had swung a gate right out across the road and we had to turn up the drive that it usually closed.

But this visit was quite different from the others. After the usual cup of tea and conversation, one of our party drew attention to the piano and it was not long before Ron was playing and we had a sing-song round the piano. In addition to our hosts, another young chap (whom I took to be the rouseabout) joined. There was no question of us leaving when it was time to think seriously about a sleep. We dossed down in the "drawing room" as it was called at that time and were woken by Mrs Valentine calling us to breakfast. And of course we stayed for the greater part of the morning. We were only able to get away by promising faithfully to call in on the return journey down the side of the Lake.

We found Jim Smith's hut at the Hermitage alright, but as it was in proximity to the Mount Cook Guides' huts, we were soon in full conversational flight with them.



The Hutt at Mount Cook. (Allan on extreme right).

At this part of the trip, we intended to have a “rest period” for a few days in which we would “see the sights”. In planning what sights to see we now had of course, the expert suggestions of the guides who recommended a trip to the Malte Brun Hut up the Tasman Glacier. Of course the arrangements had to be made with the Hermitage office who had a very tight schedule for visiting tourists. The office was at one end of the lounge which had all the appurtenances of a deluxe hotel. The contrast with our recent primitive way of living was very marked, a difference which was heightened by the clumping noise my hob-nailed Bill Massey's army boots made on the polished wooden floor. The rest of our party was similarly shod in very serviceable boots and our futile attempts to reach the office as unobtrusively and noiselessly as possible only heightened the polite amusement of the smiling guests in the lounge.

Our rations had arrived from Fairlie according to plan and the next day we set out for the Brun Hut with them and other impedimenta mounted on a horse. We enjoyed the walking along well-worn tracks free of the strain of having to keep our bikes in our balance. We marvelled at the Glacier and its moraines and even more at an ice cave which we entered and saw the muddy water rushing along one side of its floor to help form the Tasman River. Another pleasant surprise awaited us. We found the guide did all the cooking but we insisted at doing all the chores we could.

There were of course no rats in the hut and as the accommodation had been provided for people who expected at least a fair modicum of comfort, the conditions to us seemed luxurious. The hut was some yards beyond the lateral moraine and we had only to scramble across the rocks, large and small, to be on the ice.

We had to be up at 3 a.m. to make an early start to cross the Glacier to the Malte Brun Hut on the other side. This time there were no impedimenta and the guides looked with favour on our "sensible" boots for ice work. Furthermore, as we were quite agile there was no difficulty in jumping across narrow crevasses or straddling ridges between crevasses on our behinds to make safe and sure progress. As the guides cut the steps where climbs had to be made in the ice, all we had to do was to be sure that the ice was solid under our feet.

As dawn had already broken we were only able to show passing interest in the Hochstetter ice fall and we were soon to appreciate the advantage of the zinc ointment on our faces and particularly our noses as well as the use of the sunglasses. Only experiencing it made the amount of heat reflected off the pale blue ice credible. However, we arrived at the hut which sheltered under a huge rock well clear of the Glacier.

For our rations we drew on the store provided at the hut and after a meal, made up for the sleep we felt we had lost. When

we awoke there was still a lot of daylight left and the more adventuresome (but not I) tried to scale the rock with more or less success. However, the same routine had to be followed for the return journey and so it was early to bed for the 3 a.m. start in the morning. For my part I could not look long nor often enough at the huge expanse of the Glacier stretching away below us, with in the other direction, the snow-capped mountains against the azure blue sky.

We wanted to have another day and as the guides were also having an, at least, cosy time, they were sympathetic. But the flow of traffic was organised to a tight strict schedule and there was no knowing what complications might arise if we departed from the specified arrangements.

So we set out again for the Ball Hut passing on the way a party making for the Malte Brun. The rest of the journey to our hut at the Hermitage was uneventful and after staying another day to “do” a local walk or two, we set out again for our trip back down the side of Lake Pukaki.

The headwaters of the Tasman River did not seem to have been able to make up their mind just exactly where to flow along the wide shingle bed they had at their disposal. Some of the road to the Hermitage ran on the side of this bed, the actual road being indicated by lines of large rocks. Unfortunately the traffic did not improve the condition of the road and in this direction we found it sometimes made far easier travel to ignore Mr Smith's delineation.

We called in on our erstwhile hosts but this time for the briefest of visits. We intended to get clear of the Lake before having to camp and found a suitable stream on the road to Marama.

We had hoped to pick up further rations at the Pukaki Hotel but beyond serving us with a meal they had nothing to spare and assured us that at Omarama we could revictual from the store there - about twenty-five miles away.

Next morning we set out for Omarama but in the distance on our right hand we saw a group of people waving. It seemed they wanted us to stop but we ignored them and pressed on. We got to Omarama alright and found that the store was bankrupt and only had barbed-wire left. But again we were encouraged to move on, this time with the story that the accommodation house on the other side of the Pass would be able to supply us. We still had some rations mainly as a result of the surplus at the Hermitage so we again pressed on.

So far the road had been pretty well defined all along the way but this time we came to a fork in the road. One leg of the fork was well formed and along which ran telephone wires; the other three tracks in the other branch of the fork disappearing in the distance in a sea of brown vegetation. Naturally we took the well-formed road and after plugging along against a wind for about five miles found that the road ended at a seemingly deserted homestead of some importance. But in spite of our best efforts we could not get any answer. We were beginning to think that we would have the run of the place when a young man about our own age appeared round a corner with a dog.

After the usual greetings and explanations of our identity and aims, he invited us inside for a cup of tea and regaled us with scones and cakes. When we suggested that we did not wish to make inroads on his supplies he said,

“Oh, that is alright. Everybody has gone off to Christchurch for the races and left me enough till they come back. I've the whole place to myself”.

In fact he gave us some more when we left. It seemed we could either go back to the forks or ride across country to join the grassy track which was the “main road” from now on.

“But it is not all like that, he continued, “The Pass is washed out and is impassable for wheeled traffic. But you would be able to get through with your bikes”.

He assured us too that on the “short cut there were only three or four fences to get over and they “were easy”. He was right and after an hour or so we were on the three-track road whose surface was “easy going”. But the wind had risen to a stiff blow and we made very slow progress indeed. When we got into the Pass proper the scouring of the surface which had taken place made progress even more difficult and slow. Then we came to a place where the road had almost completely disappeared into the stream about fifty feet below leaving a steep ramp down which we could slide our bikes. Not far from the foot of the ramp in the stream was dry shingle projecting into the water and on this we decided to pitch out tent. As our “beds” would only be about a foot above the surface of the water some discussion arose about the action to be taken should the water suddenly rise while we were asleep. However, a cloudless sky with sparkling stars made us feel pretty safe from any danger on that score.

A more pressing matter was our hunger. Our enforced stop before reaching the accommodation house meant that we had to have rations for two more meals and we had not. We decided to allay our hunger with a satisfactory meal before retiring and have a restful sleep. In the morning we would do our best with a tin of salmon and half a packet of “Creamota” which was all that remained after our evening meal was finished. As for the restful sleep, the pukakos and the wekas saw that we had little of that. They were too inquisitive to be comfortable and when we drove them off with a fusilade of shingle they just kept out of our range and squawked a continual defiance at us. However, they must have become tired of it sometime during the night, because when I woke up dawn had long passed. The others too did not seem in any mood to greet the morn with a song.

A tin of salmon and half a packet of Creamota did not do much for the stomachs of four hungry men and we gave verismilitude to a satisfactory meal by drinking copious amounts of tea without sugar or milk.

So we got on the road again but it was so rough and scoured that we could not do much riding and at this point a debate arose as to whether we were on a biking tour or a walking tour. What made the situation more exasperating was the fact that much of the travelling was becoming downhill and had the surface been at all satisfactory we could have coasted, so it seemed, for miles.

Eventually we arrived thankfully at the accommodation house but in answer to our request for a meal and rations - yes! You've heard it before.

"Sorry we have hardly enough for ourselves but Wanaka is only about twenty-five miles and you'll be able to get all you want there".

Our first thought after that was "What sort of miles?" Anyway after much cajoling and even threatening they supplied us with a meal. We reminded them that the first duty of an accommodation house was to supply accommodation and that included meals. If they could not do that, then they should be replaced by someone who could.

Fortified with a good square meal, we faced those miles with equanimity. They were still difficult but we felt equal to them. Unfortunately Alister's bike was not. His front wheel developed an ominous buckle. But as it would still rotate we others shared the load we carried on the handle bars and staggered into Pembroke in the evening light. We got lost trying to find the hotel but eventually found it, where we put up for the night.

Next morning we found that it was not worthwhile tightening up the wheel. The bike was an "old model" and considering its age, had behaved very well. But the wheel had to be replaced. We found a blacksmith who was "wrecking" a bike and selling the parts. Somehow or other it fell my lot to make the changeover and fortunately we had taken the precaution to bring a special spoke-spanner with us.

So with a new rim from the blacksmith I set about making the changeover, while the others went for a cruise over Lake Wanaka. I had hoped to join them in the afternoon, but just as I was thinking I was nearing the end of the job I found that there were more holes in the rim than there were spokes for. The blacksmith had given us the rear rim instead of the front one. All the spokes had to be taken out and replaced on the other rim; a slow and tedious job. It was late afternoon when I finished and got the wheel running truly again. But to compensate myself I did no chores associated with the tent and cooking for that night and the following morning.

The next day we hoped to reach Queenstown where some friends of Ron's had promised us the use of a cottage for a week. All went well till we made our way up the valley. Here the road and the river coincided about fifty percent of the way, both sides of the road being delineated by lines of rocks which would have delighted the heart of Jim Smith. Sometimes the rocks disappeared but by keeping in the bed of the stream we picked up the rocks again. Sometimes we could not believe our eyes because although the rocky shingle bed looked alright for a stream it was not good as a road surface. But we pushed and waded in the water squelching in our boots and the bikes resisting the harsh uphill treatment they were getting. As the volume of the water nearing the source of the stream decreased so did the roughness and steepness increase. At times there was a dry stretch for up to about one hundred yards on the bank, but again we had to make the inevitable descent into our watery way among the rocks. It was a tired and thankful party that eventually emerged on to the Brown Terrace. After a comparatively short run the panorama of the Shotover and the mountainous contoured valley was revealed to us way down below by the road suddenly disappearing over the edge of the terrace. A cautious approach showed the steep zig-zag descent of the road. Our brakes were good but one foolhardy rider gingerly tried to ride down it, but before he had gone more than

a few yards his back-peddalling brake began to smoke. Fortunately he was able to stop easily enough but walking beside our bikes holding them in check was just as hard as pushing them uphill. Eventually we arrived at the cottage in Queenstown we had been loaned, thankful to rest in civilisation again.

The week passed very quickly. Probably the outstanding incident was the trip on the steamer to the head of the lake.

We had hoped to go a mile or two along the Greenstone Track which was then the alternative track to the Milford Sound. But we did not go very far as the track was in a bad state of disrepair. In places it had become overgrown and obliterated so much so that we realised that we would soon be in danger of being lost.



Allan and Ron on top of Ben Lomond, Queenstown.

After a refreshing week, we set out again for Dunedin via Waipori. The interest in Waipori was twofold. Father was the first child born in the Waipori Goldfields area where his father took up farming there. Also we heard the Waipori Power House was worth a visit.

This time we hoped for better travelling as we were now travelling along a well-frequented road. But we were disappointed. The mica schist rock that was used for macadamizing just powdered under the load of the traffic and we had to push through a powder that frequently was so thick that the rims of the wheels became buried in it. And of course the approach of a vehicle was well-heralded by the clouds of dust it stirred up and eventually deposited on us again.

We discovered along this route that there were a number of deserted huts almost in complete ruins but with “ripe” fruit in their orchards. For tea that night we had some of that fruit stewed but it was only edible with copious supplies of sugar. The fruit had grown completely wild and bitter.

Cromwell gave us an interesting experience. Loaded on our bikes with enamel plates, mugs, cutlery, frying pan and billy we advertised our progress with a considerable clatter so that when we arrived at Cromwell we found the blacksmith and the shopkeepers rushing outside to see what was the cause of the noise.

Noteworthy events for the remainder of the trip to Dunedin was the gift of a sugar-bag of peaches from one of the orchards along the route. We had wanted to buy some but as they were already ripe, were practically useless. So we had peaches raw and peaches stewed for the rest of the trip till they became peaches rotten.

Many of the places we passed through had an air of romance for me, such as Clyde, Alexandra, Roxburgh, Millers Flat, etc. In my boyhood I had read and seen pictures in the “Otago

Witness” of the development of these districts and in Waimate we had received cases of fruit from them which had arrived in such a poor condition that Mother had to set to and immediately bottle the good ones remaining right into the middle of the night. That was presumably before they learned the art of picking them green.

We seemed to have been misdirected on the turn-off from the main road because we had nothing but a succession of hills to surmount and although we hoped the one we were on would be the last, there was still another one. The terrible thing was we saw no-one to ask if we were on the right road. Eventually we did arrive at the township of Waipori but we were dismayed to find that there was no power house there. The easiest way to get to the power house was across country, although we were warned that we would have to get our bikes over fences. There seemed to be no direct connection between the two places except in name.

Before setting out again we did find an “old identity” at the store who remembered Uncle Sam but not George, our father. Uncle was remembered for his violin-playing prowess at local dances. The store did not have much beyond biscuits and tinned fish in the way of provisions neither.

So we set out to find the power station. At first the way was along a well-defined muddy track, but eventually that petered out into a very large paddock in which a large herd of black cattle were grazing together. We realised that the general direction in which we thought we should travel was near the herd so we approached them very circumspectly. The nearer we approached the more interest they took in us and when several of them began to move in our direction we veered very much out of their way. It did not take much of a genius to realise that they could easily outpace us bumping on our bikes over a rough paddock. As we drew away from the cattle their interest in us lessened but we still kept bumping along at our best speed of

about five miles an hour. After some time during which we negotiated a plain wire fence, the faint hum of the power station was heard and the Lorelei had nothing on the lure of that sound.

A slight change of direction and we finally came to the edge of a high cliff with the power station way down below. With no road in sight we chose the least precipitous part of the cliff and slid our bikes down on their sides with us sliding on our behinds, behind. And we made it safely.

The next morning there was a bit of a stir among the power house community. We had arrived unannounced and nobody had seen us come up the only access, the Gorge road and would not at first believe our story. Well we saw the power station and its half-full dam but we did not have enough technical knowledge, nor the energy to take more than a tourist's interest in it and so we pushed on to Dunedin.

Ron had recently become engaged to Miss A -----g who lived in Highgate and he was anxious to get there. The rest of us did not have that incentive and so by the time we had arrived at Green Island he left us with directions how to arrive; which we did after dark, fortunately.

We were not altogether in a state in which guests are really welcomed, but I guessed, thanks to the prior knowledge Ron had supplied, the shock was carefully disguised, and we were treated much better than we had a right to expect.

The next day our gang broke up. Alison went back to Invercargill, Ron stayed on, and Aitcheson and I, with an early start, set out for Maheno where we were to stay with Uncle Sam as previously arranged.

Uncle was a bachelor all his life and evidently had given very little attention either to house-keeping or maintenance of the main building and outhouses. The property, together with a blacksmith's shop was situated on the south approach to one of two bridges across two arms of the Kakanui River. In later

years the road was re-routed and passed behind the old “homestead”, which with its outhouses and huge trees was a sizeable property; but Uncle had just let it rip. Even the privy, which still retained the primitive arrangements of a large bucket periodically emptied, consisted of a tottering “little house” whose foundations had so far rotted that it seemed that, if it had not been for the effective supporting screen of huge macracarpa trees, would have blown away in the next strong wind. Similarly Uncle seemed to be a believer in fresh air and as he never shut certain windows, some of the shrubs which, originally planted along the wall, grew through the open windows and flourished in the room, notably the kitchen.

When we arrived Uncle showed us to our bedroom which was clean and the beds really comfortable. After tea we went into the sitting room where there was a harmonium. Yes. It was the one on the Waipori goldfields which used to be carried each Sunday for the hymn singing. And in spite of mounds of borer dust, still did its job. Uncle was very religious and how the ghosts of bygone days must have haunted him when the family were living there and one by one departed for ever. Those ghosts were still drifting through his dreams of the future as evidenced by the hymns he had me play. The Torrey Alexander book of revised hymns was his favourite collection and it was not long before he had me playing the hymn of which these are some of the words:

Over the river faces I see,
Dear ones in glory waiting for me,
Free from their sorrow, grief and despair,
Waiting for me, patiently, there.

Uncle was not at all diffident about asking for it again, in spite of the fact that my piano technique took some time to adapt to the organ and not forgetting the time that the “music” faded away for lack of air when I forgot to keep the bellows going. It

was late when we finished. I did not have the heart to stop what was evidently a special experience for Uncle.

Next morning Uncle had us up early for breakfast and opened the meal with a bowl of “browse” (rhymed with “hose”) which consisted of boiling water poured on raw oatmeal. With the addition of some sugar we rose to the occasion. When this was followed by bread and jam and a cup of tea we felt we had had a good breakfast. As this was the last day of the trip and we were only going to Waimate, a distance of about forty miles, we were in no hurry to get on the road, so Uncle had us back at the harmonium and “over the river” again. However he had his daily routine to follow and we hoped that we had not seriously broken it. So with many thanks for a unique experience we said goodbye to Uncle Sam.

Aitcheson and I did the distance to Waimate in surprising time. The road was comparatively good and in between Maheno and Oamaru what time we lost in walking uphill was largely gained by the fast coasting downhill; and from Oamaru to Waimate was reasonably flat and required no unusual effort. Needless to say we arrived home with very little further incident but greatly to the relief of my parents, especially my mother.

5 Back to my engineering studies

The subject for the Second Professional Examination were Mathematics as for Stage III B.A. Steam Engines, Electrical Engineering Intermediate, Strength of Materials and Mechanical Drawing.

Each of these subjects by its very nature presented its own type of difficulty. In Mathematics for instance we were getting into an advanced stage and success depended on the thoroughness of our previous knowledge. There was however a delightful

measure of uncertainty about it. The examiner was a Professor L----b of Liverpool University (I think) who had been newly appointed and produced his first set of examination papers the previous year. One of our candidates treated them roughly by successfully answering all the twelve questions although we had only to answer seven. We all hoped that when the Professor set our papers he would realise that that candidate was exceptionally gifted in Mathematics and that the Professor would continue the standard of the previous year.

However, I discovered that the Professor had recently published a book on Mathematics. So I took care to purchase a copy to see if I could obtain some lead in my studies. First of all he used a notation for the Calculus which was different from the one which was in current use with us. Then in some of the proofs of theorems which we thought were quite sound, he took care to point out their flaws and supply his own proofs. Naturally I also mastered his proofs.

The extra work involved paid off handsomely. When the actual examination was being inflicted, we soon found that the Professor was not going to have anyone make mincemeat of his paper again and we were really floundering. Of course I used his notation for the calculus and hoped that he would look kindly on my paper on that account. Also I gave him his own version of one of the disputed proofs but knew it was not enough to carry my efforts over the “pass” bar. At the usual inquest outside the examination room, I found we were all in the same state of despair. Truly the Professor had ensured that he would, this time, have his papers treated with respect. To round off the story perhaps it could be added here that I was top of the “pass” list with 37% and only three others were passed. But the irony of the situation was that most of the mathematics used in other engineering subjects was not much in advance of the Entrance standard, and there was practically no indication of how our deep mathematical knowledge could be applied to

Engineering. We had to find out how to apply it ourselves, the hard way.

Studies on Steam Engines, Mechanical Drawing and Strength of Materials did not pose any outstanding problems, whether it involved theory or laboratory work. But Electrical Engineering was again time-consuming especially in the laboratory work. Too frequently we did not know what we were doing and followed instructions, often verbal, of “connecting this terminal to that one”, “put a rheostat in the field circuit”; but where was the circuit for the field? True we sometimes had cyclostyled sheets but again we were very vague about what we were doing because we had not yet studied the theory behind it. However, we all obtained laboratory books made out by students of the previous year and a blind faith in these books supplemented by research as to how the columns of the tables of results and their consequent curves were made enabled us to produce a lab book which was passed as satisfactory.

Nevertheless as the result of this year's work, I was able to enter the Final Year untrammelled by trailing subjects.

The social and extra-mural activities also followed along the same lines as previous years. We had our enjoyable Rolleston House dances but this time I had shed any responsibility except for sometimes playing the extras to relieve the professional pianist. There was also another member, who was an accomplished musician, and being more concerned with the quality of his music did not give enough attention to the “beat”, the rhythm required for dancing. So I did not have much relief from that direction.

The Greigs continued to make Ivan and I very welcome and we had many a pleasant Sunday evening at their place. On the other hand I was not without invitations in a wider social circle. One Sunday afternoon Ivan and I were invited to afternoon tea at Sumner where we found about twenty other young people, of course mainly younger than we were. There, an attractive girl

proved rather vivacious company. We also formed part of her group coming home in the tram. In the course of the conversation I commented on her head gear which was a kind of tam-o-shanter with a long tassel hanging down over the side of her face.

“Yes”, she said, “it is rather cheeky isn't it?”

In that frame of mind I thought the play on “cheeky” was rather clever. Naturally I invited her to the next R.H. Dance and it was a most successful time and she seemed to think it was worth riding home on the bar of my bike for. We said goodnight with the front garden gate between us. In due course, I was invited to a party at her place but there was a very smooth polished young man with the Christ's College brand on him who was also interested in her. Before the evening was out I found I was right out of the running. Coming home alone I finished the situation with “Oh, what the heck anyway!”

Which reminds me that she had a girlfriend whose father had a party where there was dancing and also a display of his new Edison phonograph. It was the old cylindrical type but the very latest model and certainly was outstanding. The climax came when he invited us to go into an adjoining room so that we could hear the music without the scratch! This, of course, was before the days when electronics had invaded the realm of sound production.

I did nothing to reduce the pride of our host in his new delight and I was particularly interested because Dad had bought us a “Cheney” gramophone which justly claimed to be an advance in the art. It used disc records, a wooden horn which was part of the cabinet which gave a sweet note, especially of violins and pianos. It also had a stepped arrangement which allowed three different lengths of needle to extend from the sound box, thus giving three degrees of loudness. Scratch was largely obliterated by the use of fibre needles, but on the other hand the music lost a certain desirable crispness. It certainly gave us

many happy hours and for many years was our only source of good classical music.

In the meantime life progressed. We kept a very steady grind at our studies and escaped in whatever social activities time and circumstances would allow. I had kept up a desultory interest in playing tennis and helped form “foursomes” at afternoon tennis parties.

One activity that Hayman and I did not take part in were raids on College House. This was a hostel similar to Rolleston House (hence the rivalry) which was established by the Anglican Church and gave accommodation mainly to former pupils of Christ's College. Things went a little too far when a particularly unpopular student was thrown into the Avon in his shirt-tails only and, adding to his ignominy and humiliation, had to slink past Canon Hall, the University Women's Hostel on the way home. I did not witness this and only heard about it from later conversations. I understand some non-residential students also took part in this, but it seemed the victim blamed it all on Rolleston House. As he ultimately became the Director of a very important Government Department I often wonder just whether that affected my progress later on.

6 Capping

Capping Day was of course an outstanding day in each year. At this distance it is hard to segregate the events each into its own particular year. Every year saw its decorated lorries placarded with slogans and comments on outstanding events and personalities. Unfortunately witticisms which characterised some of the comments gave place in later years to more and more suggestive innuendoes; in other words the tone deteriorated.

On one particular year all the Egyptian discoveries were being made in connection with Tutankhamen's Tomb. On the Capping day one of the men's lavatories in Cathedral Square was commandeered and labelled "Toot an, come in". At the same time the flagpole above the Post and Telegraph Office in Cathedral Square had a bed-chamber and a tea pot suspended from it. This became a hardy annual. Similarly the statue of William Rolleston in Rolleston Avenue facing down Worcester Street was always embellished with an undergraduates gown and a beer bottle held in his right hand which was originally designed to be striking an oratorical pose.

Then the Christchurch Press "offended" the students and they decided "to bury it". A coffin was made and paraded in the Capping procession in the "night-cart" which in those days served a very useful function especially in smaller communities that could not afford a sewerage system.

The effect was heightened by the "officials" on the night-cart wearing World War 1 gas masks. Mine was one of them and that was the last I saw of it. I was very sorry about that because it was unusual in that I had worn it for a total of over twelve hours in gas attacks. (During a gas-mask inspection towards the end of the War, the inspecting officer queried the time as he had never heard of such long periods of gas. I gave him the dates and circumstances but it seems that all my contemporaries in those attacks had, due to one or other of the War circumstances, left the company). To add to the atmosphere they had borrowed my "tin hat" too and I saw that no more also. I loved that blob of grease on the top of the sacking covering the helmet as camouflage, giving tangible evidence of what were now memories of the joy that we got from reading in 'bivvies' in reserve trenches where the tin hat was used as a candlestick. When the "hearse" arrived at the Press entrance the "coffin," was unloaded with all due pomp and ceremony and finally wedged in the doorway so that it could not be moved nor could

that entrance-way be used. A well-displayed epitaph was nailed to the coffin and ended up with Rude, Impertinent Paper.

One disquieting trend was that, especially among younger students, it was necessary to visit “pubs” in order to maintain that spontaneity which is the feature of a successful Capping procession.

Next year's Capping events were similar too. As I hoped it would be my last, I decided to make it eventful. I designed a huge doll which could be extended to over ten feet high or reduced to about four feet.

I have already mentioned how I had an aluminium face mask cast at the Addington Railway Workshops, together with two balls for the eyes. The balls were mounted on a common spindle and fitted into the eye socket holes in the mask.

A pendulum weight was also rigidly attached to the spindle by a short length of wire so that when the head was moved the eyeballs moved. A very helpful art-student painted the face and eyes and she and I were both proud of the result. A small trumpet was wedged in the mouth and connected by a tube to the lower end of the wooden rod on which the face was mounted. The face was surmounted by a dunce's cap and from the neck a skirt hung to the ground. The skirt was made of a patterned cloth of open weave which allowed me to see through but prevented anyone seeing inside. It was mounted on a wire hoop, crinoline fashion, which in turn was suitably suspended from a belt round my waist so that no matter how much the height of the doll was reduced by moving the pole vertically, the edge of the skirt never dragged on the ground or tripped me. The “dressmaking” was done by my mother.

Two other engineering students in their final year also decided to try and make it an eventful procession. They made an elephant, one man being the back legs and the other the front legs; the back legs wagging the tail and the front manipulating

the trunk. They kept it a secret till the morning of the procession when I was too busy with my own contribution to give much attention to the details of theirs. But apparently the trunk worked very effectively by sucking water from the street gutters and squirting it on cheeky small boys, of which there always seemed to be too many.

Our combined appearance was very favourably received by the crowds but one nervous old gentleman came and warned me to be careful not to touch the live overhead tramway lines as my hat was higher than they were when "I" was fully extended. Similarly there seemed to be some argument among the bystanders as the "how it was done". One boy came and jumped on my toes and it was fortunate I had strong boots on.

"No", he said to the people around, "they are his own feet!"

Too true, they were! My language making it completely clear what I thought of him also indicated they were.

About half-way through the morning proceedings it was customary for the procession to adjourn to the Broadway tea rooms which were on the north east corner of Cathedral Square. The place was packed and in spite of the large number of revellers, seats had been reserved and were occupied by the general public. So the "elephant" and the "giant" disrobed to the denim "boiler suits" we wore and left our "other robes" in convenient corners.

After the welcome tea I again donned my outfit and with some difficulty climbed through an open window onto the fire escape where it took me some time to disentangle myself from the telephone lines. However, once free I looked round and was amazed to see the sea of faces in the Square staring up at me. From various quarters pieces of advice were shouted up at me for it was rather obvious that I was not in complete control of the situation. However, I raised the head to its full height, wagged the eyes and with short blasts played a tune on the

trumpet. Then I swung the head well over the railing of the fire escape bending my body to give it more overhang. I could hear the gasps of the crowd, and someone shouted "he's going to fall". I did look as though I was completely out of balance and in a very dangerous position, but it was an illusion. I swung the upper part round over the railing eventually meeting my friends, the telephone wires again. However, we parted amicably without any damage being done.

So I lowered the upper part to its lowest height and squatted on the upper fire escape doing the tricks with the eyes and trumpet, and eventually made my way back to the tea rooms to the accompaniment of some applause. I looked round to join forces again with the "elephant" and going to the corner, saw its crumpled remains a complete wreck. Some drunken reveller had fallen into it and was so drunk that he could not raise himself without increasing the damage and ruining it.

I joined up with some other "decorated" free-lances and about lunch time we decided to visit the Nurses Home at the Hospital where we were accepted in the best of spirits and given lunch. It was interesting to see what was behind the iron gates over which we had helped our nurse-partners to climb after a Rolleston House dance when they had overstayed their leave passes.

While at lunch several of them decided that they would "souvenir" my clown's hat, but desisted as soon as they found it was a fixed integral part of the costume.

The newspaper reports of the Procession formed an interesting and pleasing epilogue for a successful red-letter day, including the statement that it was the best procession for many a year.

7 West Coast Bike Tour

Before taking the final hurdle to obtain my degree I decided that another bike tour would be in order. But all I could organise was about a fortnight's trip down the West Coast of the South Island with a classmate Harry L ----- r. Harry was a good solid man to have as a companion being the Varsity Heavy Weight boxing champion the previous year. His difficulty was to obtain a bike but eventually when we set out the state of his was not very reassuring. However, we took the train to Arthur's Pass where we weighed our bikes complete with load. Mine was eighty-four pounds and Harry's was similar.

The journey over the Pass was without much incident except that it was raining, was very miserable and we had difficulty in walking with our loaded bikes down the steep and winding slopes.

The rain interfered with the operation of our front wheel brakes which meant that we had to walk down the side of the Pass as well. But the rain improved the scenery in that it intensified the foaming torrents which hung like misty ribbons over the dark green bush-clad precipices. When we got down to Otira we met several ex-College students who showed us over the Otira Power House and eventually we camped the night in a batch belonging to one of them.

The next day the weather cleared and we got on the road to Rumara with halts at different intervals to refresh on the blackberries with which the West Coast is infested. About 16 miles from Rumara, Harry's chain broke and after failing to effect a repair by shortening the chain, replaced the missing part with a rusty staple we found on the road. We travelled some miles with frequent stops on account of the chain coming off (before we got things in good running order again). But a drizzle set in and as there were no empty huts we put up at a hotel.

It was fine next day and we passed through miles of heaps of old tailings which nature was beginning to camouflage with ferns and green scrub, till suddenly rounding a corner in a cutting overgrown with ferns, we saw long lines of breaking surf with the sunbeams dancing on the waves, all framed by the green banks and bush meeting overhead in the cutting. A run of some miles parallel to the Coast brought us over a combined rail and bridge to Hokitika. On the way we passed some ruins, which were the remains of a bridge constructed in the old gold days by an enterprising opportunist who made a fortune by extracting tolls from everyone who crossed the bridge.

In the afternoon we got on the way and arrived at Ross where, at the storekeeper's we made our usual enquiries for an empty house. The storekeeper called a Miss H ----e from across the street, who was the Vicar's daughter, and thanks to her kindness, we were able to use the "old Vicarage". We spent quite a good night there cooking on the open fireplace in the old study and sleeping, one on the old sofa and one on a stretcher. During the course of the evening a Canterbury College student, Osmers by name, called on us and told us something of the road which was not altogether reassuring.

Next morning we realised how right he was. The road was abominable and although the weather was lowering, the scenery made up for it. However, we had hardly bumped and banged over about fifteen miles of this atrocious road when the diagonal brace of the main frame of Harry's bike broke and the top cross-bar folded up. It was of course impossible to go any further and all we could do was to sit on the road-side and hope that some sort of rescue from this situation would turn up. It did; in the form of a loaded timber lorry travelling north.

Seeing our predicament the driver stopped and after explanations suggested that we heave our bikes and their loads onto the timber he was carrying and he would take us back to Ross. But it was a long time before I had another hair-raising

ride like this one he gave us. As we gathered speed the lorry would suddenly veer to one side of the road and with a rapid spin of the steering wheel he would over-correct it towards the other side of the road. That was bad enough when we were going through flat country with just ditches on the sides of the road, but when the road was cut out of the hillside with a cliff on one side and a drop of anything over ten feet it became too much of a nightmare. When we asked him for a reason for the behaviour of the lorry he said,

“Oh the bearings of the front wheels are shot and I can't spare the time to get them repaired. I am under contract to get so many thousand feet of timber out of the bush to the railway within a certain time and I am all behind. The trouble is there is a hell of a penalty on it and I lose a hell of a lot of money if I don't”.

We were glad to arrive in Ross safely and Osmers was so glad to see us that we suggested that perhaps he had been praying hard for our return.

But no repairs could be affected at Ross and the only thing to be done was to remove all the detachable parts and rail the broken and bent frame to Hokitika.

Osmers very kindly offered his bike while Harry's was being repaired at Hokitika. But his rims and some other parts were not in very good order so we changed the corresponding parts from the dismantled frame on to Osmer's bike.

We batched again for the night and set out the next morning with Harry's frame on the rail to Hokitika and Harry on Osmer's bike.

But the day was spoiled for us when in a “tricky” part of the road we saw “our,” lorry in a ditch and leaning against a cliff with its load of timber shot forward and almost crushing the cab; and worse still, although there was a space between the timber and the steering wheel, the steering column was bent.

We never found out what had happened to our helpful driver because whenever we made enquiries no one had heard about it and we were the first to bring news of the accident.

Our next interesting incident was with a contract scrub-cutter. We heard him from the roadside and although he was some distance away out of view we left our bikes and made our way over to him to enquire if he knew of any empty houses where we could doss for the night.

“Oh”, he said, “you are welcome to doss in my hut tonight if you don't mind sleeping on the floor”.

He was literally working from daylight till dark and so sent us on ahead with instructions to get the fire going for his meal. Actually we served up a good hot meal with our sausages and potatoes for which he was very grateful. He said that he was too tired to make a good meal when he came home and after “something to eat” was glad to tumble into his bunk. He was not making any money out of his contract and was hardly “making his tucker”. He was hindered partly by wet weather and partly by the fact that he had misjudged the toughness of the scrub and undergrowth. We made him go to bunk straight after the meal while we washed the dishes and tidied up. But in spite of the unavoidable clatter we made with the cutlery and plates he was asleep shortly after we had started. We bedded ourselves down on the floor for the night but when we woke in the morning our host was gone leaving a note with a list of things to be bought at the Hari Hari store and forwarded to him on the storekeeper's rounds.

We arrived at the Hari Hari store without further incident, mid-afternoon and after passing a large tin shed on our left. On descending the hill to approach the township we saw a lot of activity on our right. A large paddock was decorated with flags and a crowd of people were shouting. Then we realised that what to our untutored eyes appeared to be a bunch of cart-horses being ridden around a paddock really constituted some sort of a

race and at the store the storekeeper confirmed that it was the Harl Hari races and that we had arrived at a very important day in the local calendar which was to be capped by the Race Ball that night.

Enquiries led us to an abandoned house about a mile down the road but before we left the store a bystander who had been listening to our conversation astonished us by asking whether we were going to the Ball. He had presumably seen the loads on our bikes and must have realised that the clothes we were wearing were all we had. I wore a coat, riding strides, Bill Massey's boots and puttees. Harry was similarly clothed and they were hardly formal dress that befitted a Ball. But all the bystanders seemed to be serious so our reply was,

“Oh! Stop pulling our leg”.

“No, fair dinkum, you'd enjoy it”.

“We wouldn't get a look in”.

“Yes you would! You can dance can't you”?

“Yes. But we don't know any girls anyway”.

“Oh, we'll introduce you”.

“You run a risk don't you? You'd make enemies for life”.

“No fear. You're alright”.

“Well, how much are the tickets”?

“Three and six each. Ladies eighteen pence”.

“That's pretty stiff isn't it”?

(In those days one could get good board for thirty shillings a week including washing).

“No. Not for a Ball”.

“Does that include supper and drink”?

“Supper but no booze. If you want that you slip down the road to the pub”.

“What! At that hour of the night”.

“Yes”.

“Well we'll think about it”.

So we moved off to inspect our new quarters which we found without difficulty. It was obvious that there had been numerous previous occupants who had neglected to tidy up after they left and even neglected to close doors for there were plenty of indications round the house where hens and pigs had been. However, we set to, and cleared up the kitchen including the table and a form for seating and got the rusty old Shacklock “Orion” stove going.

After tea we delivered the scrub-cutter's list to the storekeeper and we decided to sit on the form under the verandah and see some of the local night life, if any. We were soon surprised to hear the sound of chorus singing coming faintly across the flats. There were male and female voices, sometimes harmonising and accompanied by one or more guitars. As it approached the store and got louder, it sounded pretty good to us. Perhaps it was the romantic setting but as it came within the light of the store we saw it was a four-horse wagon filled with people sitting on planks along the two sides.

It stopped for a while for several occupants to make purchases at the store and then it moved further down the road, presumably to the “ball-room”.

While we sat there several callers went into the store and although they looked enquiringly at us when we nodded a casual “good evening” to them, they all had something to say when they came out, even if it was only to ask us, “are you going to the Ball”?

When there seemed to be no more activity at the store we decided to go down the road in the direction which everyone had departed to “see what was going on”. We arrived at the large tin shed we had seen on arrival at the township and saw and heard that this was the ball-room. Somebody was playing a “jolly good waltz”, said Harry. So we moved up to put our heads inside the door, but were immediately effectively barred by the leg of the doorkeeper which he swung right across the door from his sitting position on one side.

“Three and six gents. Ladies eighteen pence,” he said.

Again we were assured that our army boots would not matter and he promised to introduce us to some partners. So we paid up and went in. But he was “too busy at the moment” which was obvious enough but persuaded another man to do so. When I was being introduced to my partner the music had already stopped so I hung round trying to make conversation.

When I looked round I saw that the men had formed two groups at diagonal corners of the room. When the piano started again the men made a semi-stampede across the room and literally grabbed their partners and swung into action. My partner was quite a good little dancer although when the hob-nails in my soles caught in some cracks in the flooring, there were some anxious moments, but I successfully avoided stepping on her toes.

While dancing I apologised for my “dress” explaining who we were and what we were doing. I had just about arrived at the now-you-tell-me-about-yourself stage when the music stopped. By the time I had looked round for my partner's seat I found that I was the only man on the floor. (I did not see Harry). The rest had literally dropped their partners “like a hot potato” and rushed to form the groups at the corners again. The girls too had rushed with as little unseemly haste as possible to their seats. But I took my partner's arm in the best “towny” style and

accompanied her to her seat. Before leaving she promised to have another dance with me later on in the evening.

The M.C. was not very clear with his words and I did not understand his next announcement at all so waited to see what happened. It was one of those figure dances something like the “Lancers” but more old-fashioned. So I just sat about taking a more leisurely view of the scene. I went over to the pianist who was finishing off the dance and had a word with her. It appeared that she did not have a very good “relief” and I offered to help out mentioning that I had played extras for dances at Canterbury College. From then on the atmosphere thawed considerably to be interrupted by a shout from outside. It was from a vendor of hot pies. How the frocks got on when touched by greasy hands I could only guess. Neither Harry nor I was going to join the customary rush to the corners when the dancing stopped. There was however, one rush that we were not involved in when a number of ladies rushed to an ante-room. I thought perhaps they might be the supper committee. But no; they were the mothers who had parked their babies in the room and it seemed that one had started to cry. Apparently the pandemonium that would ensue if all the babies were woken up and joined in the chorus, was to be avoided at all costs. As one of the mothers said, “that was not the sort of Ball (bawl) they had come to enjoy”.

When the supper did appear it was on plates which were handed round to the men by the ladies. As the ladies seemed to be short-handed, I offered my services which were gladly accepted.

In due course the dancing proceeded again but I had to be careful to see that I was familiar with a particular dance as my repertoire was not very extensive especially of the old-fashioned dances which seemed to be the vogue here. In one of my blank periods in which I became a wall-flower, a chap about my own age came up to me and after greeting me asked,

“When are you going back to the bush”?

I was rather taken aback but replied,

“Oh. My mate and I are going down to the glaciers tomorrow”.

“And that's not too soon. You leave my girl alone”.

“You can take it from me I do not even know who your girl is and as a matter of fact, I have no particular interest in any girl here, although there are some very nice ones”.

“Alright. But you watch your step”.

As he did not seem to be in the mood to appreciate it, I refrained from telling him that owing to my army boots I had been doing just that all evening.

At the earliest possibility I had a word with Harry and as he was getting even less enjoyment than I was, we decided that we had not got our three and sixpence worth and went “home”.

It took us some time to settle down as we had to check whether we had other company in the house, animal, fowl or human. But it was all clear. I was however, disturbed in the early hours of the morning by sounds of singing being wafted in the wind across the flats by the returning revellers from the “Ball”.

Next morning after tidying and packing up we rode down to the store where there was a group of several young people evidently discussing last night. Beyond a greeting we did not join them although we were given some openings. We replenished our commissariat and got on the road, which continued to be a yellow ribbon of shingled road running through a never-ending green tunnel of trees overhead. While having our lunch we heard some beautiful chimes which had perfectly clear notes. We anticipated that as soon as we got along the road some distance we would turn round into a township whose church bells we heard. But although we rode for miles there was no sign of one, nor was one indicated on the map. What we had heard was now obviously the bell bird. I have heard what is

reputedly called the bell bird but never again have I heard those thrilling notes.

Eventually we arrived at Waiko Gorge and decided to stay at the hotel which was being run by the Graham brothers, two guides who seemed to oscillate between the Gorge and Mt Cook which was over the dividing range. They were very keen to develop the tourist potentialities of this part of the world, but unfortunately the access was rather precarious. Apparently several elaborate bridges had been destroyed and they were hoping that the new ones would withstand the onslaught of the fast-flowing flooding rivers. Past here the road was not much more than a track but readily negotiable on a bike. So we pushed on further south passed the Fox Glacier but finally came to a stop when confronted by a high suspension foot-bridge in which apart from the decking, the structure depended on the strength of fencing wire. This bridge had a notice at the entrance which originally said "This bridge is safe for 12 persons only at a time". The "12" was scored out and replaced by 8 which in turn was replaced by 6, 4 and 2 in succession. The figure "2" showed signs of age also, which, added to the rusty state of much of the wire indicated that the safe crossing was rather a gamble. So we turned back to explore the attractions of the Franz Joseph Glacier.

Gathered round the blazing log fire in the lounge of the hotel was a number of foreigners of several nationalities and the discussion gravitated to Glaciers. In particular one woman praised the attractions of the Grindewald Glacier in Switzerland giving the impression that she was an old hand as far as Glaciers went, but not New Zealand ones. I tried to keep New Zealand's end up by making a few comments about the Tasman Glacier, and although I won on points as far as physical statistics of the Tasman were concerned, I could not compete with the rhetoric with which she had extolled the Grindewald.

There was also the story of the man who had come from a day at the races and a night at the Hari Hari Ball. When he arrived at the Hotel he enquired how much further it was to Hokitika. He was another case of a man who took the wrong turning, this case to the left instead of the right. But he could retrieve his mistake in time.

The next day was spent on a tramp over the Glacier, and we were warned to wear robust shoes and if necessary hire suitable ones from the equipment store. In spite of this, my verbal antagonist of the previous evening turned out in black high-heeled shoes so flimsy as to be hardly suitable for walking along the streets. How she managed to get past the guides and get on the ice I do not know. But when we came to the first difficult part where we had to use steps cut in a steep part of the ice, her distress and danger became quite obvious and a guide bound the remaining parts of her shoes together with bandaging and took her back to the hotel, rejoining us later. When we finally returned to the hotel the braggart had already checked out.

We had intended to go to the Defiance Hut the next day but found we had neither the finance nor the time to dally further.

As it was, by the time we had repaired punctures and remedied broken ball-races and other minor difficulties, it was three o'clock in the afternoon before we were able to set off on the homeward journey. It was a lovely day and the ride along the bush-bordered roads speckled with the rays of the sun gleaming through, was delightful. We called in at the Wataroa store after successfully fording the Watangi again (that means without getting very wet), replenished our rations and enquired for any empty huts. However, about five miles down the road before crossing the Wataroa River we came to two huts each with its own occupant. To our enquiry one said, "Well, what's wrong with dossing in here, Dig. There's plenty of room for you on the floor".

We stayed and we were all happy that he lived off our tucker.

He was a "Main Body" man and we spent most of the night "winning the war". Harry sat there with his mouth open and we seemed to forget about him. Afterwards Harry said to me, "By gosh I never thought it was like that".

Our host was rather down on his luck. He had taken up one of Bill Massey's farms, could not grow anything, got absolutely disheartened and walked off it in the finish. Since then he had been doing anything for a crust and was at present bush-whacking on contract. A telegram from a "cobber" had asked him about the chances of getting a job down there. He had replied that there was nothing doing at all.

"In any case", he told us bitterly, "I wouldn't recommend my deadliest enemy to come to this god-forsaken hole".

That's how things were with him. We enjoyed our stay in his hut but before leaving next morning Harry had to mend his tyre while the mosquitos began to get to work. Two of us on the job soon whipped it through.

We called in at Hari Hari for rations, bought a book to be enclosed with the "Digger" bush-whacker's next lot of supplies and arrived at Ross late afternoon. Harry's repaired frame had arrived from Hokitika but it took us practically all next day to get it ready for the road again.

The following day we set out for Hokitika making detours to visit a sawmill and an American electric gold dredge on the Rimu Swamp. We arrived at Hokitika about three p.m. and boarded the train for Greymouth where we stayed the night at the Railway Hotel. There in spite of our rough appearance, I rather surprised the superior boarders by producing some jazz and a lot of borer dust from the piano.

The next day was spent mostly on the train to Otira but we found it hard work pushing our bikes over the Arthur's Pass where of course it rained. The journey to Christchurch was

uneventful, although however, our ride through the Christchurch streets due to the rattling plates caused some interest and received quite a “rally” at Rolleston House when we finally arrived. The best news I had on arrival was that I had passed my Second Professional Examination in all subjects and had a clear run for my Third and Final Professional Examination.

So when the Third Professional Year commenced I had formed very definite ideas on bringing it to a successful conclusion. I had got myself into a good physical condition, but was worried about the nervous strain. I knew I would have to work to the utmost, but the question was “how far was utmost”?

Ivan and I still kept to our physical exercise routine (weather perhaps permitting) and we still resolutely did no work on Sunday. In fact I got the idea that the Creator had more than one reason for laying down the law “Six days shalt thou labour”. In plain English, I found it paid. That enabled me to keep up with Bible Class work and gave me time to pull my weight in our Class outside activities. We chopped wood, dug gardens, cut hedges and lawns without payment for those who could not afford to pay but definitely needed the service; or alternatively to acquire funds for a worthy cause. For one of those causes we had gathered with considerable effort a good collection of clothes for a jumble sale; but due to an extremely hectic week at College I had forgotten to advertise it in the papers. Fortunately there was an old banner from a previous jumble sale advertising one “next Saturday” which some enterprising members of the class had found and strung across the front of the hall during the week. Consequently although we did not have the frenzied crowds usually associated with the sales we had enough customers to buy out practically our whole stock. The remainder was distributed to needy people. But I can still recall clearly the awful sinking feeling I had on the Saturday morning of the sale when I realised that I had not advertised it and it was too late now.

The subjects for the Final Examination were Advanced Steam and Other Heat Engines, Hydraulics and Pneumatics, Theory of Workshop Practice, Electrical Drawing and Designing and Advanced Electrical Engineering.

While this may seem pretty comprehensive it was in the main related to machines. But I felt that surely some indication of the design and operation of transmission and distribution lines should be included, and this to cover also switchgear design and operation. Furthermore, I was becoming conscious that I was amassing a lot of facts and acquiring a certain manipulative ability with figures. But the question was, "How would I get on when faced with engineering conditions in practice?" Nevertheless I felt I had a full enough programme without asking for any more and in any case the Degree would (without further examination) make me eligible for membership of the English Institution of Electrical Engineers and that would be a good qualification for a worthwhile position. In the term holidays I had gone home to Waimate and worked in the garden on various chores and patched up past studies that I felt I did not know and/or understood very well.

So the year started and I immediately "slipped" on my resolutions by going to the Freshers' Dance. Different people had different reasons for attending College (later called University) and one of them was the opportunity for social contacts. One mother was asked, "What course is your daughter taking?"

Unabashed she said, "Matrimony One".

I had a lurking fear too, that I might meet some girl who would knock me off my feet and seriously interfere with my goal. But it did not happen. I had no money and could only see my way financially to the end of the year.

The work this year was generally similar to previous years except it was at a more advanced stage. Workshop Practice was

a new subject and covered an extremely wide field. The details of the course in the subject, as in most of the other subjects, were tantalizingly vague being confined to four words, "Theory of Workshop Practice". This meant research into past examination papers to find out what lines to study in order to meet the examination requirements. While this was time-consuming, past experience had shown that it had its advantages. What also added to the difficulties was that the delivery of the lectures left, at times, much to be desired. Often it was impossible to note down details and we were content to jot down headings (when we recognised them) and leave the details for further study. On one occasion an assistant who went by the name of "Percy" was standing in for the Professor gabbled along at an unreasonable rate, hardly paying any attention to the punctuation or the meaning of the words. In the midst of this verbal flood, the words "Tell funny story here" were instantly audible and just as quickly were overwhelmed by a further unending flow. It took the students a second to realise the significance of those words, but Percy rushed on relentlessly and blissfully oblivious to the clang of the brick he had dropped. But even the hilarity of his class did nothing to stem the verbal torrent.

Although Percy was no lecturer he was painstaking and very helpful as a tutor/lab assistant. Nor was he above entering into any student pranks we may have undertaken. One afternoon we ran a test on a refrigerating machine and ended up with the inevitable blocks of ice which were of such shape and size that adorned with "wreaths" made from weeping-willow branches took on the appearance of tombstones. When these were suitably placed around the quadrangle it gave the verisimilitude of a grave yard to the students coming out from their afternoon lectures. Of course we further enhanced the sight by posing in our laboratory denim boiler suits.

The special occasion when we as engineering students did try to gain a little kudos was on "Open Day" when the Engineering

School, as it was then called, was thrown open to the public; which then proved to be largely female students. Of course we had all the machines running and all the impressive experiments being carried out. Naturally the Heat Engines Lab with its steam, and the Hydraulics Lab with all its water running about and the pumps going, were the most spectacular and hence the most popular.

8 Final Examination

In addition to the Final Examination in the respective subjects for the Degree, we had a Fourteen Days Drawing and Design Paper. This as the title indicates, lasted fourteen days after the examination on the individual subjects had been completed.

I found it of some concern that it had become the custom to work fourteen nights also and thus the examination became not only a test of ability but a test of endurance. I toyed with the idea of working fourteen eight-hour days, but soon realised that I would reduce my chances of success when weighted against the work of the others who worked well into the night including weekends. So there was no help for it but to slog it out.

We had very little idea of what the subject matter would be but we could refer to any books we desired. In the design classes during the year we had worked through the design of a Direct Current Motor and then drawn it out. I found it difficult to see any underlying method but gradually it all fell into place but not without considerable researching in the library - all time-consuming. The drawing part of it caused no trouble - providing we worked out something to draw.

We were given the choice of designing and drawing out an alternating current generator or an alternating current induction motor. In addition to whatever choice we made we had to

design a potential or voltage transformer. For me owing to work done during the year and a text book on "Alternating Current Design" which I had acquired, the choice for me was definitely for the generator. Ivan also decided similarly but the rest of the class decided on the induction motor.

At the end of the first day Ivan's results and mine differed slightly and as the days passed on the difference gradually widened, but on the whole our progress was comparatively smooth. We compared our results from time to time to find that we were getting two widely-different machines, but by the time we had finished the drawings, we had little time for the voltage transformer. I had only twenty four hours left to mine and Ivan had a day or two more, before the papers were to be handed in at 9 a.m. But I had found that I had come to a stalemate. I did work through the previous night and produced some figures but no drawing. Incidentally, the long night hours were interspersed with occasional gramophone music to keep us awake but I realised that I passed or failed on my generator design.

Added to our difficulties was the dust in the air due to a "nor-wester". The wind was also hot and even our hands perspired and the part of our drawing paper where our clammy hands rested made a good trap for the dust. If we involuntarily wiped the paper with our hands for instance to make a light line more visible, we added to the mess on our paper. As the papers were marked in England I thought the examiner might not know of the ravages of a nor-wester. So I wrote an apologetic note on the corner of the paper explaining why the drawing sheets were such a mess. I do not think mine was any worse than the others, but I thought there was no harm in letting him know the conditions.

There was no supervision of our working methods and after about ten days had elapsed, those who chose the induction motor showed signs of trouble. They had lost their way in their

design and did not know how to proceed further. After considerable discussion a course was agreed on and the work went on. I could never understand the popularity of this question as we had done very little design work on it but two of the brightest members of the class decided on it and the rest seemed to follow.

Nor did I understand their position especially as we had to sign an affirmation when we handed in our results to the effect that it was “all our own work”.

There was a great sense of relief after we had handed in our papers. I finished the day off by sleeping about ten hours and then went home for a fortnight where the usual gardening awaited me.

9 Practical work

I still had some months of “practical time” to do before I qualified for a pass for my Degree and at the same time the Repatriation Board Grant had finished. So Hayman and I persuaded Professor Scott that it was better that we should receive some payment while doing our practical time as then there would be some attempt by our employer to see that we earned it.

So both of us applied to the Manager of the Christchurch Tramway Board for positions in the workshop. He, as we had been previously informed, did what he could for us, returned soldiers. He apologised that he could only offer us positions which were on the payroll as “labourers” at fifty-shillings a week, but assured us that we would have plenty of experience and warned us that we would have to “take the good with the bad”. This we assured him we were quite prepared to do, and were glad to get the money.

We had already obtained board and lodgings with a family in Gloucester Road at thirty shillings a week, and so had a reasonable chance of balancing our budget.

My first job was an unfortunate one. It was to help a fitter to dismantle a wooden water tank on a tower seventy feet high. Realising my mental experiences with heights I did not relish the assignment. I explained the position to the foreman who was inclined to brush it aside, particularly as I was the only one available. He said, "You'll be alright when you get used to it. Take as long as you like getting up the ladder".

Added to my difficulties were the facts that the platform and its surrounding handrail were in a very bad condition and the steel ladder did not lead directly to the manhole in the platform. This made it very awkward getting on to the platform especially at a height of seventy feet.

So I started to climb the ladder and got about half way up before I began to feel peculiar. Nevertheless there I clung for the greater part of the day which was enlivened by a cricket match in Lancaster Park which was plainly visible. The next day I felt better and tried to go higher with some success, and gaining confidence, spurred on by the fitter, tried to get through the manhole. But suddenly I was overwhelmed by that dreamy unreal feeling that I was falling and would wake up in a minute from the dream as I had always done. Almost simultaneously I realised that this was stark reality and managed blindly to grab a rung and hold on. By twining my arms and legs round the rungs I gained time to recover from the shock. That was all I did on the ladder that day.

The next day I found I had more confidence but with great trepidation got through the manhole. The rotten platform floor worried me too and the fitter had removed all the handrails. Slowly I became accustomed to the heights and commenced to enjoy the events below. There was quite a little drama going on over the cartage of coal to the gasworks. At first an unkempt

woman came from her dilapidated cottage to the gate and seemed to pour invective on the lorry driver. This went on for some time and we noticed that after the lorry had gone past there was a large lump of coal lying on the side of the road. We did not keep any check on how many times this happened. We were often too busy keeping our minds on our own business. But I have no doubt the woman acquired a lot of good coal.

The tank was a huge barrel with wooden staves held together with iron bands. Before the staves could be removed, the iron bands had to be undone and we were afraid when that was done they would immediately fly out and sweep us off the platform. However, all went well after the necessary precautions were taken.

But before commencing to remove the staves I was transferred to the electrical shop where there were quite a number of difficulties which seemed to be beyond the efforts of the foreman.

The first was urgent. The Christchurch streets were not tar-sealed; at least not many of them and the dry nor-wester raised so much dust to be distressing to the citizens. In an attempt to remedy this, tanker trams ran through streets spraying water as they went. Water was supplied by pumping stations at strategic places over the system. One important one, that is one supplying an area where important citizens lived, had stopped delivering water. Several attempts had been made to remedy the situation, but the only result was another blown fuse and the motor still refused to budge. Someone suggested to try one of the College blokes, and see if they were any good. It was a last resort and I was chosen as the victim. So a fitter, armed with a bag of tools, and I, armed with three fuses and a screw driver, were sent out with the blessing of the electrical foreman to see what we could do. I replaced the existing blown fuse with a good one while the fitter checked that the motor was free to turn. On moving the handle of the motor starter to the first stud,

there was a loud bang which attracted the attention of the tram-drivers who were waiting to get water. Then advice came thick and fast, some of it uncomplimentary, but none of it useful. I transferred a wire which I thought might be causing the trouble, replaced the fuse and got a similar bang. And I had only one fuse left. So I dismantled the starter panel completely and after tracing the wiring found that someone had put an extra connection in behind the panel and out of sight that had shorted out all the starting resistances. But to remedy all this had taken time and as it was getting near “knocking off time” the fitter went back to the workshops and reported that I was tangled up in a mess of wires.

Nevertheless, I confidently replaced the panel, assured my audience that they wouldn't have to wait long for their water, and with a new fuse in place moved the handle to the first stud in the starter. There was no “bang” except the imitation made by some wag. I moved the starter to the next position and was gratified to see the motor slowly revolve. After finishing the starting operation with the motor running at full speed I was further gratified to hear the water flowing into a tram tank accompanied by the cheers of the waiting trammies. I left feeling that I had successfully made my debut into electrical engineering.

But - when I arrived at work the next morning glowing with the satisfaction of a difficult job successfully completed, the foreman greeted me with, “Why did you not finish the job?”

I retorted with some vehemence that when I left, the water was being delivered to the tanks full bore. But what had really happened was that after about an hour some grass had choked the inlet pipe of the pump till finally the water stopped flowing. However, that was soon remedied and everyone was happy.

The next job was to make a directional relay so that with a reversal of current the relay would trip a circuit breaker and no damage would be done. This was rather more technical and my

first effort was not satisfactory as the relay, although it moved, was not positive enough in its action. That was remedied by more tedious re-winding.

I found I was now permanently attached to the electrical shop. There I had to carry out all sorts of minor repairs e.g., to “jumpers” which make the electrical connection between a car and a trailer, and the replacement of broken lamps in car and trailers.

But there was one job which no-one seemed to be able to repair. It was to tighten up the bronze bars of the commutators in these motors. The bars were clamped by means of a vee ring which held the bars in place, the ring in turn being clamped by axial bolts. Quite frequently trams were being taken out of service because the bars became loose, electric arcing took place and the bars were ruined. Secondly, the bolts were not made tight enough, so a large spanner was made with a six foot handle and two men swung on it. It did keep the motors in operation a little longer but they still came in with the same old trouble. I suggested writing to the agents or the manufacturers direct as to how they made a satisfactory repair.

I was taken off this to do a rush job which required dozens of large holes to be drilled. Without going into technical details I was expected to take a week but it was a very urgent job and the workshop foreman asked me to get it done as soon as possible. This I was happy to do and worked through lunch hour eating my lunch on the job. On the third day the shop steward warned me about breaking the award; no work was to be done continuously for more than four hours at a stretch. However, I managed to get it done satisfactorily well within the estimated time.

Probably the dirtiest job I had was “dropping” the motors from the bogies of the trams. The tram was run over a pit similar to that used in a garage for working under motor cars. In wet weather the sandy mud was splashed everywhere under the

tram-car and when it dried and was disturbed came off in showers. There was no avoiding it. It got in one's hair, down one's neck, in one's eyes and so on. The fitter I worked with got "dirt money" of sixpence an hour. But being officially a labourer, I got nothing. Still I suppose that was implicit in the deal with the Manager.

When the next job was given to me I thought things were really on the deadline. I had to help another real labourer load fifteen hundred-weight cases onto a handcart and take them to another store some hundred yards down the road. It was heavy work for both of us but my mate was an ex-United States Navy man who knew all the tricks about dodging work; which work of course fell back on to me. But he realised I knew a few too and a kind of mutual respect grew up. Life had given him a raw deal, but in my opinion, (which I of course never expressed to him), it was largely his own fault.

As the days rolled into weeks I decided the job was for me a complete waste of time when it occurred to me that my naval mate could show me a few things about knots and ropes. When I approached him tentatively about it he was flattered and I became well-versed in "slinging", that is, passing ropes round objects so that they could be safely lifted by cranes. But I little knew how important this knowledge was to be to me in the future.

10 Success!

One morning at my lodgings I was disturbed by someone shouting up the stairs that my name was in the paper.

"Oh", I asked. "What have I done"?

"Passed your final examination for the degree in electrical engineering" was the reply. I rushed downstairs to verify it for

myself. But there were very few of our final year students in that list who had passed completely. Many of them had failed in one or other of the subjects and would have to complete next year. The financial difficulties this caused were overcome by obtaining part time work round the College in labs, etc. But for me I had only to complete my practical time to be “capped”.

I was now more or less free to start on my career as an electrical engineer, but it was soon borne to me that I was woefully short of practical experience and so looked round to see where I would gain it.

Some months previously I had come across a brochure published by the General Electric Company of America detailing extra post-graduate training for engineers which lead eventually to employment in that company. I had no great desire to go to America but I did like England. So I enquired from the Wellington Office of the Metropolitan Vickers Electrical Company of England whether their company ran such a scheme.

“Yes, they did,” they replied, “but we have so many applications from suitable graduates, that we cannot hold out much hope for you. However, if you would send in your application with references and photograph we would consider it”.

I rightly considered that not only would they require evidence of academic ability but also of personal qualities of leadership, ability to “handle men”, etc. So I systematically set out to emphasise those points in my references. Fortunately those from Timaru Boys High School mentioned those points and I took care that those from Canterbury College did the same, going to the extent of returning one to a Professor for those qualities to be added, assuming he considered they were true. Then the photograph required special attention. During all the time I was Secretary for Rolleston House Association I had given all the photographic work to the Christchurch

photographers, Messrs Standish and Preece. The photographs were always group photographs and the orders they received were therefore very valuable. They had several times offered to take a special photograph of me. Of course, as I surmised, [*part sentence missing from the original script*] as a little encouragement to send the order in their direction.

“No”, I said. “You get the order because I consider you do the best job, but immediately your work does not meet that standard, you lose the order”.

Now, I realised they could help me in return for all the business I put in their way. I told them what I wanted the photo for, and said,

“I know you have not got much to work on and with the limitations of my appearance it may be difficult, but I want the photo to show it had the potentialities of a successful Managing Director”.

And they did not fail me.



“The potentialities of a successful Managing Director”

I spent many nights after work and several weekends polishing up my application, and writing it out in my best hand-writing.

A few days after posting it, I received a reply that these applications have to be considered in England and if I would write them in three month's time they “would let me know”.

Well I thought, I am at least still in the running. After about ten weeks when I thought I should perhaps drop a line to the office, I received a letter from them, indicating that I was successful and asking when could I sail.

This of course depended on the sailings available and after perusal of many sailing lists, decided on the "Jervis Bay" run by the Australian Government under the title of the Australian Commonwealth Line. This was a "one class-tourist passenger-cum-cargo ship". Competition among the various shipping lines was keen. The fare from Sydney to Southampton was 60 pounds with one pound extra from anywhere in New Zealand to Sydney. I booked from Oamaru to Sydney, on a U.S.S. boat the "Manuka" which was due in Sydney five days before the "Jervis Bay" left and I immediately would be transferred and become officially a passenger.

Farewells were rather sad even although nice things were being said about you. Particularly was the connection with the Bible Class and St Andrew's Church noteworthy. In reply to the enquiry from the Class as to what I would like as a farewell gift, I suggested a list of the signatures of all the members. This was readily forthcoming and kept memories green for many a long day. The Church session also had pleasant things to say in a farewell letter.

However, as I intended to stay until the post-graduate course of two years was completed and then return to New Zealand, the poignancy of farewellling was blunted; not like the previous farewells on going to the War when behind it all, was the thought that perhaps that was the last and final farewell.

The voyage across the Tasman was uneventful if you draw the veil over a lingering sea-sickness from which I did not recover till we were twelve hours from Sydney.

Then after the scramble to see our luggage safely transferred, we surveyed our quarters on the Jervis Bay which was to be our home for the next five weeks. I was looking forward to this time with interest, because I had one of the cheapest cabins on the cheapest line and state-owned at that. I always felt that state owned organisations came off second best when compared with what private enterprise had to offer. The comparison between

British Railways in war-time with our own New Zealand Railways confirmed that, even when all points are considered. And once again the saying “Blessed is he that expecteth little for he shall not be disappointed” proved its correctness.



The “cabins” were really cubicles open at the ceiling and on the floor and consequently did little for privacy. Worse than that, a smoker in one “cabin” could pollute the air several cabins away. This was not at all helpful for a non-smoker in rough seas. The question of sex necessitated that the cabins of all single men were in one part of the boat, those of single women in another and married persons in another. However, the more expensive cabins were cosier depending on the price while the deck cabins seemed almost palatial.

Our first evening meal gave us a taste of what was to come. It was “on” very definitely at five o'clock and consisted of bully-beef hash as the main course followed by stewed fruit and custard. Unfortunately they had “forgotten” the sugar for stewing the fruit and the whole meal tasted as though it had become slightly entangled with the oil used for heating.

However, I was hungry and did not let that deter me. The service was slow and in typical Aussie style, rather casual. It was nearly six o'clock when we finished to be told that we could collect our supper, comprising tea or cocoa and a biscuit by seven o'clock. When I expostulated later to our cabin steward, he replied to the effect that they could not play poker if they had to stop and serve supper later on in the evening. When I suggested that the ship did not seem to be run for the benefit of the passengers, he retorted, "What do you think?!" In the interest of future good relations I refrained from telling him what I thought.

However, a relief to our despondency was the number of young people of both sexes at the various tables and I later found that there were, in the ship's company, several Rhodes Scholars and quite a number of post-graduate students such as I on their way to England to further their studies. In addition, there was a number of girls intending to take further studies in the arts, such as drama, ballet, etc.

Mine was a two berth cabin and my cabin mate was also a Canterbury College graduate named Askew whom I had known casually at the College. The cabin was small, and we found it more convenient to dress and wash when the other had finished.

Before disembarking to see the sights of Sydney, we were warned in the interests of safety, to be on board ship at least before dark. A few days later before we sailed, our cabin steward showed us why. Coming back one night he had been "beaten up" and his face was in a terrible mess; so swollen that he could see through his two black eyes only with difficulty.

By the time we had left Sydney we had already organised the evening routine. There was a deck piano which the deck steward put out for us in the evenings when he could be found and there were several portable gramophones among the passengers which supplied music for dancing.

We said goodbye to Sydney with that usual display of paper ribbons and streamers which connected the departing with the stay-at-homes. There was something sad with almost a touch of finality as the distance between the wharf and steamer increased and the streamers broke and fluttered aimlessly and hopelessly into the water. However, having been through the process at Wellington we felt a sense of superiority somehow.

There was of course a repetition of the ribbon ceremony at Melbourne, but our superior disdain for the new passengers embarking there was rudely jarred when a closely knit party of new arrivals monopolised the lounge piano for their raucous singing. Fortunately they disembarked at Adelaide again and a more considerate attitude descended on the ship's company.

But at Adelaide we were delayed a day by a strike which temporarily held up a consignment of apples. Furthermore, the weather which had been calm enough hitherto took a very ominous turn. We left Adelaide in a violent thunderstorm which increased in intensity. We were encountering waves higher than the mast. Of course we were "battened down" and we did not like the way the ship was rolling. We were not seasick but a bag of washing hanging from the cabin wall by long tapes, periodically left the wall entirely till it made an angle of anything between thirty and forty-five degrees from the vertical. There it would hover and tremble as though it did not know whether to increase the angle and continue its movement, which indicated the amount the ship was tending towards overturning. I ceased studies in hydraulics on instability of floating objects determined by the relationship between the centre of gravity and the metacentre. They were not reassuring. However, they apparently did not interfere with my sleep because I was awakened by my head violently striking the head-board of my bunk. Then the engines were slowing down, and finally stopping. What! In a storm like this! Now the mountainous waves will roll us over!

Then the bulk head doors rolled to and isolated our section of the ship. We both thought the situation warranted donning our lifebelts at least, and I waited for the sound of water rushing down the passage-way outside our cabin. But it did not come and after a short interval we heard the welcome sound of the engines slowly “running up” again. Our washing bag was still carrying out its routine of flirting with the wall so we knew the ship was still being tortured by the waves.

After some time our cabin steward appeared (“intercoms” had not yet been invented) and told us that the “bloody captain”, wanting to make up the time that had been lost at Adelaide, did not reduce speed on account of the storm and ran the ship at full speed into a huge wave which had a vertical front. As “water is incompressible” (more memories of hydraulics studies) one part of the deck was “stove in” and some of the ship's crew were washed out of their bunks. The forward hold was flooded, but thanks to the bulk-head doors the flood was contained and the pumps were coping with it. Later we learned that the propeller shaft was slightly bent and that might impede our speed; also that a sheet of canvas spread over the damaged part had helped the pumps to cope with the water.

After a time we realised that everything seemed to be under control, so we repacked our lifebelts, crawled back into our bunks, woke up to be greeted with a relatively calm sea, and our routine returned to normal. We paced around the freshly-swabbed deck with the salty tang of the sea air in our lungs, ready for breakfast.

Arriving at Fremantle we immediately made for Perth, but our enthusiasm for sightseeing was dampened by the hot dustiness of the place and we concentrated our sightseeing on public parks and gardens.

11 Shipboard entertainments

We now faced the longest stretch of sea voyage without the sight of land and threw ourselves whole-heartedly into arrangements for our entertainment. But for the sake of brevity I will deal with all entertainment for the whole voyage in this section. Without doubt we were unusually fortunate in having so much energetic talent on Board which an entertainment committee was zealous in ferreting out. Consequently on the numerous evenings when concerts were being produced they were of sufficiently high and diverse quality to attract even the most amorous from mooning over the deck rails to attend the performances.

For an item for one of the concerts a professional dancing teacher trained a number of us to give a "ballet performance". She chose several of the clumsiest men for the "principals" and on the same basis, the supporting chorus, and I was one of them. We each made our own costumes out of crepe paper with swim shorts as "back up", and the teacher trained both the principals and the chorus in the steps required. These for the chorus were comparatively simple but our clumsy execution "bought the house down". Not only that, but some had miscalculated the strength of crepe paper bodices at the joins with the shoulder straps and the necessity for the back-up of the swim shorts soon became evident. But even more hilarious were the efforts of various members of the troupe trying to carry out their routines with one hand and arm clutching their crepe bodices in an endeavour to retain some degree of respectability.

Of course the combined lazy life and the sea air etc., so stimulated the sex life, especially of some of the company, that the ship's chaplain thought it incumbent on him to include in his sermon at one of the Sunday services something to the effect that life is best savoured to the full when the practices associated with each stage in life are enjoyed during that stage.

Sexual intercourse is reserved for after marriage. I wonder what this permissive age would think of his sermon now. (It was not intentional to include this paragraph under the heading of Shipboard Entertainments!).

We had several professional entertainers of several kinds on board and some of them tried to push their own specialty. For instance we had a producer who had staged several of Gilbert and Sullivan's operas and went round trying to find enough talent to cope with Iolanthe. For those whose capabilities were obvious at a concert he became a pest and we were half way across the Indian Ocean before he finally gave up.

We were able to produce a farce but with some difficulty. It was about a cook who signalled to her soldier admirer that the mistress was "out" and that the coast was clear by placing a pepper-pot in the kitchen window. Its production for some time hung in the balance because no one could be found to take the important part of the soldier. It required quite a lot of memorising and ship board life is not conducive to that. Someone (until then a friend) had said that I had taken part in a school play, but had neglected to say that it was only a minor part and it was quite an inadequate apprenticeship for such a production as was now planned. Probably some mooning over the rail one starlit evening had weakened my resistance but I found myself to be that soldier. Apparently I was not a howling success but I did manage to raise a few laughs as befitted my part, but the score was not high.

There were also dances, plain and fancy-dress. The plain ones were note-worthy for the rash of blazers of the various universities and colleges that came out over the floor, a rash that the increasing temperature of the evening soon removed.

The fancy-dress dances including "gala nights", produced the usual collection improvised from bed sheets, life belts etc., and were inclined to be rather tame. So we four New Zealanders who had gravitated together, decided on what we thought was

some originality. We planned to go as Maoris and give a haka in the “grand parade”. We made some grass skirts, of course with suitable backup, and coated our faces, limbs and that part of our torso that could be seen, with cocoa using vaseline as a “moisturiser”. We had some difficulty with the haka, though. None of us could remember a complete haka but only pieces of one. So we filled in with such phrases as, *cascarasagrada*, syrup of figs, paraffin oil, enos etc. Needless to say we scored heavily in the parade but when the dancing came on, we realised that with this greasy mess on our bodies, it was an insult to a girl to ask her to dance with any one of us. One girl however, who had mooned a lot with one of our members over a rail, realising our predicament offered to dance with this member if he did not mind waiting till she changed into her swimming costume. The offer was tenderly declined. We followed the only course, of retiring to our cabin, bathing and returning to the dance clothed in the right clothes and mind.

The arrival of Neptune on board was, of course, a certainty in the programme for us. Somehow one bright sunny morning he arrived on board accompanied by his motley entourage and passengers went through the routine of being on the edge of the bathing pool with all the slap-stick comedy that could be mustered, to be unceremoniously tipped backwards from their chair into the waiting water below which usefully cleared the masses of soap which covered the faces and bodies of the victims and which the enormous wooden razor had failed to remove.

Although not actually taking place on shipboard, probably the most exciting part of the trip (to me) was the evening spent at the Hotel at Colombo. We all set out resplendent in our blazers and prettiest frocks under the guidance of an overbearing young ship-mate whose company I had never sought. He had spent some time in this part of the world and so he said, “knew how to treat natives”. As soon as we stepped off the launch that ferried us from the Ionic jetty at Colombo, we were surrounded by

gesticulating and vociferous natives who were persistent in the offer of their services of various kinds. Our guide soon cleared a way for us by kicking those in front in the shins, thus confirming his claim. When some of us protested we became “soft marks” for the shrewder of the natives and added to our embarrassment.

However, our guide got us safely into a fleet of rickshaws and away we went to the Hotel. The beauty of the spot with the palm trees reflected in the calm, moonlit sea still vividly remains. It was the kind of view which is now a common typical scene of travel brochures attempting to lure travellers to take up their tropical itineraries. After admiring this extraordinary beauty over drinks outside, we went into dinner and here I had my introduction to luxury. The lighting and decor were striking, and the huge fans quietly rotating in the ceiling and the waiters in white, added to the romance of the evening.

The exotic food also added its contribution to the atmosphere. Particularly noteworthy were the pineapples, stripped of their outer crust, and their inner core replaced by a cool fruity mixture. I have had many similar evenings and dishes since, but never quite regained the thrill of that evening.

Of course some of our party had more drink than they could normally carry and on the way back to the ferry there was a certain amount of unrestrained hilarity which culminated in the “he-man” of the party taking charge of the rickshaws, and putting the girls in the rickshaws and pulling them back to the ferry. Next morning it seems that everyone had arrived home safely, although there were a few vacant places at breakfast.

After that episode the ship's company settled down to the usual routine of promenading on the decks, swimming in the improvised canvas swimming pool, deck games, drinking, card-playing and all the usual shipboard devices to while away the time. But one topic that was occurring with almost monotonous

frequency was the question of whether to go to the Pyramids or not. It seemed it was possible to leave the ship at Aden, go up the banks of the Red Sea by train to Cairo and hence to the Pyramids, regaining the ship at Suez again. All for the sum of nine pounds. Of course the stewards were all for it, as it lightened their workload. But I ruled it out as nine pounds might prove more useful in my pocket in England. The argument, considered by some as very strong, that you might not have a chance to see them again, left me quite unmoved. If I did not see them - so what!

Our passage up the Red Sea was hot and uncomfortable, as the supporters of the Pyramid trip had so often reminded us would be our fate. But somehow I enjoyed it, particularly at night when I endeavoured to scan the land with the German field glasses I had captured on that attack on the Hindenburg Line. So one night focussing on a twinkling light some distance away from the banks of the Canal, I vaguely saw figures moving in and out of the glow. It was a triumph for the glasses which I was informed by a translation of the instructions inside the case, that they were “night field glasses”.

Suez, where we spent the best part of a day was “just one of those places”. We wandered round the town rather aimlessly, but I recall how much I enjoyed the fresh ripe dates.

The passage across the Mediterranean was uneventful except that, not far from Gibraltar the ship suddenly aroused us from our deck chairs by taking a big lurch so that we found it difficult to restrain our chairs, with us in them, from sliding across the deck. At the same time the shore-line misbehaved itself rising up in the sky (as it were) and sliding past us with unaccustomed speed. It did not take very long to realise that we were taking a sudden and sharp turn. It turned out that the captain was taking sudden and evasive action to avoid colliding with a local shipping craft. We had some more disturbing action with rough sea going through the Bay of Biscay only to arrive in the

English Channel in a fog with sirens sounding all round us. This went on well into the night and I eventually fell asleep. But when I awoke the next morning with the sound of land-based noises, we were still groping our way through fog.

It was reported that we had been hove-to for a considerable portion of the night, much to the consternation of some passengers who were being met on landing. However, we eventually arrived at Tilbury and after the usual customs and passport inspection boarded a train for London.

My luggage on the boat consisted of a wooden packing case of effects which I considered I would require in England, a cabin trunk containing changes and articles that would probably be required on the voyage and a suitcase containing my immediate needs. All were insured for a year irrespective of location. The contents of the cabin trunk and suitcase were revamped so that the suitcase contained clothes which I thought would suffice for the first fortnight in England. The wooden box and cabin trunk was put in charge of the L.E.P. Carrying Company.

So I booked in, in a quiet hotel in London which had been recommended to me and the following morning sallied forth to enjoy London again, first of all intending to call at New Zealand House to collect mail and see if I could meet any friends or acquaintances. As the Wembley Exhibition was "on", I decided not to go to Manchester immediately. In order to savour London more keenly I walked to New Zealand House, but on the way was accosted by a New Zealander and as we both wore Returned Service Association badges had a kind of fraternal feeling.

On his approach he said,

"Hullo Dig. Been over here long?"

"No. Just arrived. What about you?"

“Oh, I've been here some time and have just got myself onto a good thing. I'm in the show business and have just got a complete show almost ready to put into production.”

“That is interesting. What sort of a show is it?”

“Oh, it's a revue. Plenty of fun and nice friendly girls. We're rehearsing this afternoon. Come along and have a look.”

“Thanks very much, but I have not the time. I have a lot of business to attend to”.

“Actually it is a winner, and if you like I could get you on it”.

Having got the drift of the conversation, I thought I might as well see how much it would cost me. So I asked, “What would it cost to be in on it?”

“About three-hundred quid. Actually we are short of that amount to finish it off”.

“What!” I exclaimed, “you are sailing close to the wind, if you are putting on an expensive show like a revue and are short of a few hundred quid!”.

When he realised I was not taking the bait, he said.

“As a matter of fact, we are really up against it and even have to watch our living expenses”

As it was nearly midday by now, and there was a Lyons handy, I replied, “Look Dig, the best I can do is to shout you a meal over there”.

He was disappointed, but was willing enough to accept my invitation. After the meal he wanted, of course, to continue the acquaintance. But I shook him off telling him I was going to Manchester that afternoon.

Although I was proud to wear the R.S.A. badge, I decided it would be a good policy to remove it, till I got settled down. It made too good a target for spongers.

At New Zealand House I collected some mail and met two other post-graduate New Zealanders who were busy doing the Wembley Exhibition. It was just the companionship I wanted and I joined them.

The size of the Exhibition impressed me most. It was quite a problem getting about and so we patronised the exhibition railway when necessary. The forward movement of the carriages was obtained from a screw thread on the same principle as a nut travels along a bolt when it is turned. Naturally corners caused complications, and it was several times “out of order” when we wanted to use it. I do not think that, apart from its novelty, it was a very great success.

I had always taken an interest in the development of the gramophone or phonograph from the earliest Edison-Bell machines with its cylindrical records to the then modern machine with disc records (which were a big improvement for storing) with the “horn” concealed in the cabinet. The art of musical reproduction had reached the stage where the sounds to be recorded were trapped in a horn which transferred the sounds to a disc to which was attached a stylus which in turn cut minute indentations, corresponding to the sounds, on to a soft rotating wax disc. By electrolysis a copper plate was made from the wax disc having the indentations corresponding with the sound.

So when I came across a “His Masters Voice” exhibit, my interest was very keen. There was a small theatre with comfortable seating for an audience listening to two gramophones on the stage. By playing both gramophones simultaneously some striking effects were obtained. The best was a bird chirping while “Woodland Scenes” were being played by an orchestra. Presumably it had been impossible to get a bird to chirp into a horn while the music was being played.

The motive power for driving, even the most expensive machine was clockwork, wound up by a crank handle with a reserve of power to play at least two twelve-inch records at a speed of

between 78 and 80 revolutions a minute. A twelve inch record lasted about two and a half minutes so that a programme of music required the constant changing of records.

We visited the “courts” of various countries and compared them with our own, but after my weeks of idleness on the ship, I easily tired and after three days had had enough and began to think about the more serious business of life.

We found the H.M.V. stand a good place to rest our tired and sore feet. But more importantly we enjoyed what we thought was the perfection of acoustic reproduction.

12 The Metropolitan Vickers Electrical Company

I had been told to report at the Export Office of the Metropolitan Vickers Electrical Company when I arrived in London which I duly did after completing the Wembley Exhibition visit. I found that what was meant was as soon as I arrived in London. Consequently the office knowing that the Jervis Bay had already arrived and there was no sign of me, began to think about making enquiries seeing that I had not reported after a couple of days. So I caught a train to Manchester and arrived at London Road Station at dusk. I thought I would have no difficulty in getting a hotel and had not made any enquiries about one. But walking down the ramp from the station with my suitcase I saw a sign “Railway Hotel” on the road which ran by the side of the ramp. It did not look very expensive and for that matter very attractive but I was too tired to bother about much else. So I booked in. I did not go to my room immediately as dinner was being served. The dining room was a bit of a shock. It consisted of two long tables with seating accommodation comprising long forms. The food was plain and I enjoyed it. Most of the guests seemed to be men,

some of which were quite friendly but not unduly and the usual desultory conversation took place. During it I let on that I was looking for a job at Metropolitan Vickers at Trafford Park and wanted to know what tram to take. I got plenty of advice in that score, but one of my hearers warned me about going there because they sack you with very little notice. He recounted the tale (which I have heard about a number of other firms since) of an evangelist who was addressing a crowd in front of Metrovick's main gates on the uncertainties of life. "Yes friends", he said, "We are here today and gone tomorrow".

"Go on", shouted one of his audience, "You don't work at the Metrovick too, do you?"

I found out later the story was quite unjust as later details will show.

I retired to my bedroom at about nine o'clock and there received a series of shocks. There was no lock on the door. There was no electric light, just a candle and matches. When I lit the candle the curtains were filthy and partly in rags. The sheets were fresh, showing the folds, but a dingy colour, and the blankets were also dirty. I toyed with the idea of changing but having slept in worse places before, thought it would suffice for the night. However, I did take the precaution of wedging the back of the chair against the door handle to prevent any visitors. And it was not long before I was asleep.

Some time during the night I heard an attempt to open the door. But as it was unsuccessful as I thought, I immediately went to sleep again. But I was aroused by a young woman with her arm round my shoulder and groping under the pillow. It was with difficulty that I aroused myself, threw her off and told her to get out. She tried some unsuccessful blandishments but when I said that I thought this was a job for the police, she disappeared quickly at the word "police" and did not even bother to shut the door. I think she thought I would keep my money under my

pillow but I kept my watch still on my wrist and my money in my money belt still around my waist.

It may have been my imagination that there seemed to be an unusual interest in my direction at breakfast. However, I paid my bill without comment and arrived at Trafford Park and then Metropolitan Vickers at their gate. I quickly realised there were two gates North and South with a wide road-way connecting them.

I was directed by a uniformed gate-keeper to the Education Department which controlled the training of all apprentices. I was immediately ushered into the main office with cries of "Where have you been?". I explained that I wanted to renew my acquaintance with London before getting down to serious business. But I omitted to tell them that I had spent the previous night in a "hotel" little better than a "doss house". In addition to the clerical staff I was introduced to two instructors and also a New Zealander from the New Zealand Hydro-Electric Department as it was then.

The immediate problem was to find "digs" and they were scarce. The Education Department had a list of all local landladies who were willing to take apprentices at thirty shillings a week but overseas apprentices at thirty five shillings a week due to some misconception that we were richer than the locals. Unfortunately there were no vacancies not even at 108 Moss Road, Stratford, which was known as Australia House as all the Australians and New Zealanders boarded there.

Then someone remembered that one of the Australians was in Scotland on "outside erection" i.e., he was involved in helping to erect an engineering plant and would not be back for a few days. Actually Australia House was full and there did not appear to be any vacancies for some time. So I would have to find "digs" with local people when he did come back. In the meantime it was Australia House for me.

After the usual form-filling, an instructor informed me that I had, for the time being, missed my chance of getting into the foundry and would have to go in the “Starter Shop”. That title had no reference to my newness but to the device for starting motors, that were assembled in that shop.

I approached the work with a certain amount of trepidation, wondering how I would measure up to what was required. My first job was to ensure that a sliding contact in passing over “studs” of brass, would never have a gap of more than one and a half thousand of an inch between it and the stud. Actually the studs had been machine-made and required just a little more “dressing” with a fine file. Having made that discovery, I finished off the pile of starters before the morning was out and went to the foreman for the next job. So as they had already passed on to the inspection bench for checking, he went there to get a report. Then I discovered the inner workings of “piece work” in which a job is worth a specified amount of time which influences the wages. So that if the time to complete a job is reduced, the wages are correspondingly increased. It seemed that what had taken me several hours had a piece work rate of eight hours. This caused some consternation as the rate fixed had allowed too much time and/or the fitters were loafing. That did not make me popular for a start, especially as the rate fixer later received orders to reduce the allowable time on the job. My defence was of course, ignorance of the situation. “Why did you not tell me?” However, they were completely won over when I showed them the trick, and then the rate fixer's allowance still gave them a good margin.

But it was not I who benefited from my quick work but the fitter to whom I had been allotted to help. No matter what I did I still received fifty shillings a week as my wages and the unfortunate fitter's weekly pay packet was reduced by thirteen shillings and fourpence because I was “helping” him. Later I learned that “colonial” college apprentices were popular with

the tradesmen because they usually turned out as much work as, and sometimes more, than the tradesman himself.

When it was found that I had newly arrived the inevitable question arose, "How do you like England (or Manchester or Trafford Park)?" I was rather circumspect but I did bewail the lack of sunshine complaining that I hadn't seen the sun since I arrived up north (which was a fact). One mid-morning a man came rushing to my bench begging me to come quickly. He led me to a corridor where through the window a dirty red orange shone in the sky.

"There", he said, "You say you never see the sun here. What about that!"

But even as I looked, the orange glow began to fade and in a few moments the usual dull grey took over. I said, "Well it does seem to show that the sun is still behind the drab clouds".

I had a comparatively short time in this department mainly on the assembly and adjusting of small mechanisms.

In the meantime I had managed to obtain board in Victoria Road, with a Miss Shaw and her dog at the overseas rate of thirty five shillings a week. There were three other boarders, all Metrovick College apprentices, namely from Belfast University.

I met an Englishman who had graduated from an English University but had strong Indian connections and Hughes, a Welshman from Bangor University.

They made me very welcome although I witlessly at times trespassed their code of behaviour I am afraid. For instance I blacked my own footwear. That was not done. That was one of the duties of the landlady. I was spoiling it for the others. Then I viewed with some disdain the fact that we had sometimes had stewed rabbit for tea. Rabbits at that time were a pest in New Zealand and were absent from the list of meats for any self-respecting New Zealander. But they were considered quite a delicacy in England.

But it was here I was introduced to the wonders of that novelty called “wireless”. Metrovick had a staff store where the staff could make purchases at a very considerable reduction on normal retail prices. Metrovick also produced wireless components under the brand name of “Cosmos” which could also be purchased at the staff store. And so it was that the necessary components had already arrived at our lodgings and after a lot of fiddling with a “cat's whisker” on the surface of a crystal through the medium of one phone of a pair of head phones, I was thrilled to hear Henry Hall's Dance Band playing at the Savoy Hotel in London. And better still it was the best quality reproduction of music I had ever heard.

I was then transferred to the foundry. The foundry had several sections, viz., floor moulding, green sand moulding, machine moulding, starter moulding and brass foundry, all with the attendant furnaces for melting the metal.

I was first introduced to floor moulding and while I took care to absorb so many details as possible, I found that I spent too much time shovelling sand from one part of the floor to the other depending on requirements. Unfortunately the shovelling was done with short-handled shovels and although I could easily hold my own with labourers on this work, I longed to get hold of a long-handled shovel with which I served my apprenticeship, mixing concrete for pin-boxes in front of fires.

So I put the matter to the aisle superintendent pointing out the advantages. But he was sceptical, and in the end I asked him to get me one and I would show him. Later I was presented with one and I proved before his eyes that I could work faster and easier than with the short-handled shovel. Sometimes the sand had to be moved a distance too short to trouble loading a wheelbarrow and too far for one to throw with the short-handled shovels. But I showed it was usually easy to do in one throw with the long handles.

As I was easily doing the work of one man on the floor and someone's pay packet - not mine - was so much the better each week, I found that I enjoyed a veiled popularity, tinged with a certain amount of hostility. The trouble was that I wore a black shirt which had definitely a hostile connotation. I explained that we all wore black shirts on the shop floor in New Zealand, as it was the sensible thing to do to save a lot of washing and that I had nothing to do with Fascism and at that time I hardly knew what it was.

As the shirts were well-worn out from use in New Zealand I replaced them with grey ones. Discussing this with a College apprentice who had a Science Degree in Engineering from Oxford University and who spoke with a marked "superior" accent, he commented, "Oh, you are jolly lucky. It's my bloody accent they don't like, and can't get rid of that like a worn-out shirt!".

13 The Australasian Association

In the meantime I was taken in hand by various members of the Australasian Association and helped to find my way round. There was also another main road in the works; this one running east and west. At the crossroads with the north-south road were some apprentice classrooms with an outside notice board of apprentice activities. At this spot the Australians and New Zealanders (of which latter there were several) used to meet particularly to inform each other when anything of worthwhile interest was going on in the works. So the first morning at the works I was taken to the apprentice rooms and introduced all round as a New Zealander, when I was immediately hailed as a potentially useful member of the Metrovick Rugby Union Football Club. It was in vain that I demurred. Soon I was being introduced to other members of the football club who were not

Australasian, but the Australians kept me well in hand and saw that my defection to Victoria Road in Stratford did not spread any further.

The Association had two aims; social and professional. A few days later I attended one of its more formal meetings. The President of the Association was a Bert Axon who hailed from Queensland. He was also Captain of the Rugby Club and a first class player. Unfortunately in Australia he played under the Rugby League Code and we were always apprehensive that that knowledge might filter to England. That would, in England, automatically debar him from playing Rugby Union. However, our worst fears were never realised.

The landlady at 108 Moss Road was extremely obliging in accommodating our meetings and arranged a special dinner for which I, not being a regular boarder there, was charged one shilling. It was certainly good value for the money even although bread and margarine figured prominently on the menu. At a previous meeting a programme for the various meetings through the year had been arranged but before the meeting was concluded I found I was expected to read a paper on the "Economics of the Design of Distribution Lines" later on in the year. When I protested that I knew very little about the subject, I was told I would know all about it when I had prepared my paper.

When Axon announced that if there was no more business he would close the formal part of the meeting I interrupted and asked permission to say a few words. I merely told them how I appreciated all the help the various members of the Association had given me, and were giving me to become settled in. Then I realised how helpful the papers and discussions at St Andrews Presbyterian Senior Bible Class had been. And also the formal dinners we had run at Rolleston House. The practice was bearing fruit. I could see my relationship with the other members had improved considerably.

As the final event of the evening, there was a singsong round the piano where somebody played the tunes with one finger. Somehow or other the cat got out of the bag and I found myself installed as “official accompanist” It was not sufficient to sing “Waltzing Matilda” and “On the Road to Gungadai” once only but with the help of the beer, we encored and re-encored ourselves, and finally we had to go right through a book of Australian popular songs till we were getting hoarse. And still the landlady did not mind.

In order to obtain some coherence in my story I find I have to abandon an attempt to relate events in their chronological order. Probably the most helpful were visits to places of engineering interest, where football-match timetables allowed it. Consequently most of these visits took place in the pleasant summer months. As examples of these visits I quote Barton Bridge, Barton Power Station (where I had by then taken a very small part in the testing of the station before it was handed over to the Manchester City Corporation), Samuel Lairds Electrical Company and the General Electric Company (GEC) at Witton, Birmingham.

This last visit was a typical one but in order to describe it satisfactorily some background information is necessary. The Association had impressive writing paper with an equally impressive heading and altogether an important appearance. In arranging visits we clearly stated that we were post-graduate trainees from Australia and New Zealand working at Metropolitan Vickers but were anxious to enlarge the scope of our experience before returning to our own countries. In writing to the G.E.C. we said we realised the importance of the G.E.C. in the electrical industry and we hoped a suitable date could be arranged to visit their works and so on. Firms generally recognised that we could be valuable potential customers in the future, and that this would be a chance for influencing us. So they readily made arrangements for a trip to impress us.

At this time the electrical industry was in a state of flux regarding the method of changing from alternating current (A.C.) to direct current (D.C). Alternating current was undoubtedly the best method for generating and transmitting large blocks of power. So far the best method for changing from A.C. to D.C. was by using a rotary converter. But we had heard that the G.E.C. were manufacturing a motor-converter which was said to be cheaper and more efficient than the rotary converter. There were also some factors in the design which puzzled some of our members. So undoubtedly it could be a very informative trip but that depended to a large extent on the G.E.C.

We travelled to Birmingham by train and the trip started inauspiciously by several of our members being fleeced by card-sharpers. The train stopped at various small stations at each one of which a passenger got in. As a group, we were obviously different with our accents and our open-hearted approach to strangers. But I had already learned my lesson about this on my first day in London where somebody suggested “cards”. I did not join in. However, it turned out to be a version of the three-card trick and everyone was winning except me. Suddenly the stakes were raised and everyone lost a lot of money. But by this time, we were slowing up in a Birmingham station and before the train had stopped our affable strangers had vanished among the crowd on the platform, where, to our greater chagrin, there was a notice displayed, “Beware of card sharpers on the trains”.

On arrival at the G.E.C. works at Witton we were met by the Export Manager who after the usual courtesies took us to the canteen, and there, along one wall was a most impressive array of bottles of every “drink” imaginable. It was evidence of the old trick, particularly on inspectors, who came to “pass equipment”. Fill them up with their favourite drink and they will not be so particular. At least that was how we looked at it and were on our guard. But we had one member who had established a reputation among us for being a fairly heavy

drinker and it was to Joe, of all people, that the Manager turned offering a drink and said, "You name yours. It's there".

"Oh no", Joe said, "it is not".

So they had a bet on it.

"Well", said the Manager, "what is yours"?.

"Lemonade", said Joe, and he was right. There was none. So the Manager ordered a steward to bring in a case. But he was nonplussed when we all followed Joe's example and had lemonade.

The result was we all went round the works with perfectly clear heads and did not miss anything. When we got to the motor-converter we were all over it. While the Manager could not explain the finer design points we took mental notes of what we saw and at our next meeting of the Association had a full discussion on it.

Before leaving the works, as we expected, we were invited to the canteen for a farewell drink and we were ready for it. But the Manager had the final laugh. Along the whole wall, where there had been this wonderful assortment of drinks, there was nothing but lemonade. The joke of course, was really on our shoulders but the Manager was too good a diplomat to let us go away disgruntled, and after the joke had been fully appreciated, found all the alcoholic drink that was asked for.

Having given a general idea of the living conditions and the settling in to the new environment, I shall now concentrate on my progress through the various departments of the works and leave the recounting of experiences outside the works till later.

I have already indicated my initial experiences on the foundry on "floor moulding". From there I was transferred to green-sand moulding where a pattern, more or less a replica of the casting required, is placed in boxes which have neither tops or bottoms and sand round it. When all the requirements are met

to give a good casting, the boxes are “broken” or lifted apart, the pattern removed, the boxes again replaced exactly as before except for holes for the molten metal to be poured through and the consequential gases to escape.

I was directed to my mate and, after mutual introduction and weighing up, found that he had such a broad accent, that I had difficulty in understanding him. Later I found that he had just been re-employed after three years on the dole during which time he had to support five of a family including himself. He supplemented his dole by playing an accordion at theatre queues till a gang of big boys threatened him and took over themselves. He then frequented places where people congregated for the commencement of day trips and found that just as satisfactory.

The removal of a pattern of course required the boxes to be separated and as the damp sand was very fragile and easily collapsed, this had to be done without any jar. The manipulation of the boxes required two men, each on opposite sides of the box to be moved and we took care to see that I understood what he wanted before we moved. However, we avoided mishaps and his greater concern was that he had lost his skill. The first castings we did were comparatively simple, but his next job was to cast almost twenty cable-end boxes which had very thin walls. In addition to seeing that the walls were of the correct thickness there was also the difficulty of getting suitable hot metal. If it was too cool the metal would solidify before entirely filling the mould with the resultant waste. When the metal had cooled sufficiently the boxes were broken open at the end of the day and success or failure revealed. I was really sorry for him when the end of the day drew near and he worked himself into a nervous state anticipating poor results. He knew there were plenty more moulders at the works gates ready to take his job. But we got through that quite successfully and I found that I had now to work on my own.

I had to cast iron cylinders five inches in diameter and ten inches long. This was comparatively simple but it introduced another factor for success. The outer shell would solidify first still leaving a molten interior. But as this cooled down it would contract leaving a springy interior full of small holes and without strength. Therefore the molten metal had to be kept moving so that it would cool uniformly and make a good solid casting.

Although I was working on my own I found there was always someone almost waiting to give me a hand. It became so obvious that I was inclined to think that it was a measure of the esteem in which I was held. Later I found that the weekly pay on this floor depended on the weight of cast iron produced that week. These cylinders were so heavy that they gave a big boost to the total weekly weight. And the men were anxious that I should produce as many as possible and consequently gave me every assistance not out of consideration for me so much as for their weekly pay packet.

My next move was to a moulding where a mould was being prepared for the starter of an electric generator for the Mitsubishi Company in Japan. This was about fifteen feet long and about three feet in diameter. It was intricate because in addition to the tunnel for the rotor there were numerous webs for wind passages and hand holes. It was being cast on end, in a suitable pit and owing to the enormous pressure of a column of molten iron about fifteen feet high, had to be braced and reinforced. A few thousand man-hours had already been expended on it and there was much murmuring among the men that the job tackled this way would be a failure. In addition to the hydro-static stresses of the molten iron there was also the extra stress set up by a small explosion from the gases produced by the molten iron coming in contact with the powdered coal which is used in the sand. This coal sand produced a better surface in the iron.

When the eventful day came in which the iron was to be poured, two fifty-ton ladles of molten iron had been prepared and drivers, aloft in their cabins for controlling the travelling cranes which carried the ladles, were awaiting signals. Men were also on the top of the mould ready to direct the flow of molten iron, but I noticed they had escape routes ready across the mouth of the pit to the main floor of the shop. Everything seemed to go according to plan till the critical explosion took place. There was a breathless hush to see if any damage was done; but broken by a shout and the escape routes were necessary. The mould had broken and the molten iron ran into the pit amid sheets of flame. The lamenting of the men for their lost bonus was muted but none the less intense.

Shortly after this the hooter blew for the end of the day and I reluctantly left. Next morning when I returned I found the night shift had left little that was of interest.

I was next transferred to work on first repairing fire-brick linings and then on loading them. From an elevated loading platform several of us had to wheel coke, limestone or pig-iron into the gaping maw at the side of the coupola with the flames shooting past. There were usually men working with us apprentices and we mostly wheeled coke. There was a story of a Chinese college apprentice who lost control of his wheelbarrow and the barrow and contents disappeared into the flaming hole. Coke is light but in order to save time and money, forks were used which owing to the spread of the tynes lifted a much larger amount of coke than that, say of a garden fork. They are therefore much more difficult to manipulate and unless a tight grip is taken on the handle, get out of control; so much so that one of our team, an Indian, accidentally jabbed another one in the leg. Fortunately he hardly broke the skin. But what a “to-do!”.

The victim had to go down to the ambulance rooms some distance away and get it attended to by a full-time staff,

including a male and female nurse, after which he had to sign that he had received treatment. All this was to avoid costly compensation claims.

The men would have liked us to break up the pig-iron bars too, but I refused. And I was not the only one, as there was quite a danger of rupturing oneself.

From here I was posted to the brass foundry and made a name for myself by jumping clear of molten brass from a crucible my mate and I were carrying. The bottom fell out of the crucible dropping the metal on the floor. Fortunately I was able to jump clear before being involved in the liquid metal. I did get a splash on the top of the toe cap of my boot, and after burning its way through the leather and my sock still had enough heat to burn my foot.

My next department was “A” aisle which was renowned for its concentration of female labour. They were mainly employed on winding and insulating copper coils with various types of insulating tape. My chief occupation was to screw clamps on copper bars which had previously been wound with mica insulation. These bars were over fourteen feet long, about two inches square section, and were mounted in screw presses where the clamping was done. Another young man worked on another group of clamps and we assisted one another with the setting up and removing the bars. He asked me quite a number of personal questions such as “Are you married?” which I answered as discreetly as possible as I got the impression that these were tit-bits he relayed to the girls.

There was no indication of how much force had to be applied to the turn-wheels of the clamps, just “tighten them up as tight as you can”. As we were now in the middle of the football season I used to enjoy swinging into those turn-wheels. About a fortnight later I found I had screwed them too tightly and the bars had to have some more insulation.

But by this time I had been posted to “D” Erection Department in charge of three men who had to assemble a generator, switchgear, transformer and high voltage testing equipment for the Witbank Power Station in South Africa. For this sort of work apparently the works usually supplied standard equipment; but in this case the engineer who was responsible for the tender overlooked the fact that the equipment had to be capable of being readily moved around various areas of the power system by means of railway wagons.

The equipment parts had their foundation plates drilled ready to be bolted to matching holes previously drilled on the floor of the railway wagons. That was the general idea. But there was also the personal relations problem too. Two of my mates were ex-servicemen and while waiting in between the inevitable delays, swapped war yarns.

Much of our difficulty arose from the fact that the lifting of the equipment, which was mostly too heavy to man-handle, had to be done by a crane. When a “lift” was required it had to be chalked on a special board in the centre of the aisle. The “head-slinger” worked through the list thus formed and one had to wait one's turn. The same system applied if a labourer was required. One of my first requirements was for four resistance-grid assemblies, each one weighing about twenty five pounds. They had been dumped at one end of the aisle about one hundred yards away and after waiting an hour for them and becoming concerned at the loss of four man-hours in the work decided to go and get them myself. I brought the first one up on my shoulder, but returning for the other three passed a hand-truck which I promptly borrowed and brought them up, so we proceeded to mount them in position. But shortly afterwards an irate labourer came up and told me in no uncertain terms that I was doing him out of his job. My retort was that if he had been on the job I would not have found it necessary to do it. I believe the matter was overlooked by the labourer when he learned that

although I was “an ignorant colonial” I was also a genuine New Zealand ex-soldier.

But I was still in difficulties. A controller box weighing about five hundred pounds had to be lifted on to the wagon and so I put my name down on the slinger's board. After the three of us had been waiting round telling yarns under a wagon for four hours, I considered it was time to see where we stood. There was my name in splendid isolation on the board. We had been passed over and others who had applied later than we did, were being attended to. As each job was completed the name was rubbed off the board leaving blank spaces above and below my name. This was too much for me. I would do the job myself thanks to my experience of slinging controller cases with the Christchurch Tramways Board in New Zealand.

Our controllers were very awkwardly shaped. The top was twice the area of the bottom which was concentrated at one end. There was a jib-crane swinging high above our job so I brought the hook down, passed a rope sling around the controller and crossed the ropes so that the weight of the controller made them bite into the hook and heaved it up in the air where it certainly looked as though it would slip and fall any moment.

Unfortunately, George Bailey, the Works Manager saw it some distance away and I might add in parenthesis, that my mates in previous departments had warned me that when he was around, one had to be busy or at least look busy, for when he started asking questions, anything could happen. The first indication I had that he was on the war-path was when I heard him roaring down the aisle with the head-slinger in tow, shouting, “Who slung that bloody controller up there?” Apparently the head-slinger had disclaimed all responsibility and everyone in the neighbourhood was looking on at what was obviously going to be an interesting interlude in a bleakly monotonous day.

I should mention I had already met George Bailey in perhaps more congenial circumstances so that when I claimed to have

done the slinging his reply was, “What, you again! What did you do it for?”

When I explained that we had already spent twelve man-hours waiting for a slinger and that our turn had been passed over and were therefore likely to waste some more man-hours, I thought it was time to do it myself.

“Well anyway”, he said, “get it down before it falls down”.

“But”, I said, “It won't fall down. It is quite safe”.

However, I “got it down” and removed the slings.

Bailey, sensing I think, that there was more in my slinging than met the eye, asked the slinger if what I had done was correct. Unfortunately for the slinger who seemed to “want to put me in the dirt” said “No”. I suggested that as I had come here to learn perhaps the slinger would show me.

“Good idea”, said Bailey.

When the slinger had shown me his “correct way”, I told Bailey that it would slip. So we raised it just clear of the floor and I gave it a push and it did slip sideways to the floor with a slight bump.

“Now”, I said, “This is what I did”, and proceeded to sling the controller as previously. Having raised it about a foot from the floor I turned to the slinger and said, “Now, your turn”. In spite of his best efforts the ropes stuck to the hook.

“Right”, said Bailey to me. “Carry on”, and to the slinger, “Come with me”.

I noticed the slinger was still around the next day but I heard later that there was a general feeling of pleasure at his misfortune. It seems that his position was one of importance in that he could delay the progress of a job and reduce the piece-rate earnings of anyone who incurred his displeasure.

Actually the assembly of the equipment was more a boiler-maker job than a fitters and my two mates expressed surprise that I always had an answer for them in difficult situations. Apparently I had not wasted my time in the boiler shops at Addington, New Zealand.

We worked all the time from blue-prints and the control panels were delivered with the wiring already done. Without going into detail, our work at Canterbury College on instruments and their wiring was very sketchy indeed, so as this was my first wiring blue-print, I studied it closely. Unfortunately a little of it I could not understand. One day when the engineer responsible for the instrumentation came on the job, I took my courage in my hands and asked him if he could explain it to me. After a moment study, he said, "No wonder you could not understand it. It is wrong. Thanks for pointing it out". He thought I was pointing out the error in a polite way.

My next transfer was to Switchgear Aisle where among other equipment, cubicles and control panels were assembled. I was put on the wiring of slate control panels for Mangahao Power Station which produced a slight nostalgia for New Zealand in which Mangahao could be pronounced. But my fun about pronunciation was turned against me when, idling behind a panel, I heard my mate say, "Hay up! Here's gaffer!"

I did not know that the translation is "Look out. Here's the boss". Fortunately we were not caught, but as a matter of interest I asked what he did when he had nothing to do when the "gaffer" was around. "Oh" he said, "I unscrew the nut off a bolt and screw it back again!"

In this department I obtained experience on wiring. On control panels the instruments, meters, etc., are on the front of the board while the wiring is on the back. But the diagram only shows how they are connected together. So the instruments etc., on the actual panel are shown in the correct position in front but the wiring is in the reverse position from the diagram.

More confusing still, was the wiring diagram for the Belham Substation for the Southern Electric Railways. I was transferred to the Switchgear Drawing Office where I had to draw out the diagram for the control panels. The substation was being designed to convert alternating current to direct current by means of five rotary converters. When a train came on the section of the railway to be supplied by the substation, No. 1 Rotary would start up automatically, then No. 2 and so on until, if necessary, all five would start up in turn. If however, only say three rotaries were required to meet the demand, the next time they were required, No. 4 would start, then carry on with 5, 1, 2 and so on.

I was presented with a schematic diagram of the operation and had to convert it to a wiring diagram with relays and instruments suitable for a wireman to carry out. Needless to say that it was a most confusing work which I required some definite method of operation. Also the diagram engineers kept pushing me to get it done, especially as it seemed I took longer than they anticipated. Eventually the blue prints of my diagrams were sent to the shop floor and wiring commenced in earnest on the panels.

But I was then transferred to Dynamo Test Department where the huge rotors for generators for the Mitsubishi Company were being tested. Part of this test consisted of passing very heavy currents through the windings of the rotors and the magnetic fields were so strong that spanners weighing about three pounds could be attracted off the floor. It was the custom to tie one of these spanners to the floor by means of a short string so that the spanner, not being able to reach the rotor, seemed to be floating in the air like a tethered toy balloon on the end of a string. This was used as a warning signal also because the magnetic field ruined watches and pulled loosely-held steel rules from pockets of overalls.

Another test was the dynamic test for balance so that it would rotate at fifteen hundred revolutions a minute without vibrating. To do this a powerful motor was attached to the shaft, but even then it was not sufficient to get the huge mass rotating in spite of a heavy excess current passed through the motor. It was my job to surge this current through the motor and just as quickly take it off again. So, in addition, three men were employed on the end of a wooden pole whose iron tip levered on the end of a bolt used to couple the shafts of the motor and rotor together. Owing to the huge mass, rotation commenced very slowly indeed and there was plenty of time to remove the pole. But it was my job to see that the motor was supplied with enough current to keep it rotating and gain speed.

The whole operation was under the control of a “balancer”, a man who decided where to fasten weights on the rotor to remove undue vibration. In the initial stages we did not reach full speed before excess vibration forced a shut-down. But stopping rotation was equally difficult, especially when we had reached the full speed. The Ward-Leonard system was used to control the motor both for starting and stopping. When stopping, the huge amount of energy was used to pump power into the electric supply system. But in spite of that the whole operation of starting and stopping with a few minutes of balancing weight adjustment would take the best part of one hour.

From here I took part in a test of very large rotary converters for the New South Wales Railways. These were the largest that had so far been built. Shortly afterwards rotary converters were superseded by mercury arc rectifiers. There had been some manufacturing delays on these machines and as they were under a “penalty contract”, it was necessary to get the testing done as soon as possible. (A penalty contract is one where, if the manufacturer fails to deliver by a certain date, a penalty sum of money has to be paid. The conditions and amount all form part of the main contract of sale).

On the day of the test I was detailed to check and record the performance of the instruments. When the machine started up the needles of the instruments located directly at the end of the machine, began to dance in quite an uncontrolled manner. It did not require years of experience to know that something was radically wrong, so I immediately gave the signal for the emergency shut-down. As the machine slowly rotated to a halt the Test Department foreman came swearing down the aisle in a great rage. When I gave him my reason his only reply was, "Go on! You are winding me up. Start up again".

In spite of my protest, he insisted, and while I was drawing his attention to the instruments there was a terrific green flash, and reflex actions developed during the war had taken me about ten yards down the aisle before I realised it. When I came back to the job I saw that the brush-collecting gear with their holders had completely fused and vaporised. However, there did not seem to be any other damage to the machine, and as these were standard assemblies which were kept in store, it was not long before the machine was under test again and this time without mishap. But it was just because a labourer neglected to remove copper dust from the rotation part of the machine. When the customer's inspector came on the job he seemed to be quite satisfied with the results shown him.

In our periodic inspection of interesting work during lunch hours, happening to be in the Switchgear Aisle, one of the testers working on control boards made a point of telling me that I had made only one mistake in my wiring diagram and they got the whole test through in less than a day. They had a wonderful pay packet as, owing to the large number of wiring mistakes usually to be rectified, one hundred and twenty man hours was the rate allowed. So the fifteen man hours that they took gave them quite a bonus.

My next department was the Transformer Department where I first worked on building iron laminations into cores and then

assembling the winding. After a week on that I went on night shift, first in checking that the windings had been put on correctly, then on to testing the transformers for efficiency. For this, various voltages had to be used which were obtained from a plug rack, which one night was to be my particular concern. I took over from a Scotsman who demonstrated the various plug positions so quickly that I had no chance of remembering what apparently was a tricky operation. Jock was obviously making it difficult for me so I got him to go through the routine again. But this time he over-ran himself and there was an almighty bang and flash followed by small drops of copper rain, which fortunately did not harm us.

But that was nothing compared with the night when we were testing condenser-bushings which took current at 110,000 volts through the transformer and switchgear tanks. To do this we applied to the bushings almost half one million volts which were supplied by machines in a separate bay. On the control panels were several college apprentices including an Australian and a Chinaman. On a panel was a field-switch of a large machine and it is a feature of these switches that the time of opening should be kept as short as possible.

The Chinaman, being of an enquiring turn of mind asked the Australian what would happen if the field switch was opened slowly. The Australian, being on his part, of a sarcastic turn of mind said ironically, "Try it and see".

So the Chinaman, not recognising the danger signal in the Aussie's tone, tried it. The result was that he drew a huge arc (between the contacts of the switch) which floated in a flame across the switchboard and connected together control contacts which were quite foreign to each other with disastrous consequences. First one machine blew up, then another and when we thought the chaos had subsided, another wrapped itself in flame. Finally we surveyed the wreckage. It appeared that the immediate difficulty was that the remote control equipment

for removing the half-million volts from the condenser bushings had largely melted and we had no apparent means of removing those very dangerous volts. To crown it all the work-substation rang up to enquire “what the ---- hell had we been doing?” A whole section of the works was in darkness.

Needless to say we apprentices were more or less unceremoniously and figuratively swept off the test beds and senior staff took over, and we saw little of the remedial work. We did find out that the contacts for the remote control were successfully operated by insulated poles and such were the resources of the works that in a few days things seemed to have again restored to normal.

Shortly after that I was transferred to West Works where Extra-High Voltage Switchgear and metal-clad switchgear was assembled. This latter switchgear is as its name states, is clad in metal, mainly non-magnetic castings, which reduce very much the space required in the substation for its operation. It is particularly advantageous where space is a consideration. Unfortunately it is difficult and expensive to modify and use under conditions differing from the original scheme.

From here I was transferred to the Maintenance Department. Initially I had to design several cable runs to new developments in the Works including extensions to the Extra-High Voltage Testing Laboratory and to the High Speed Test Bed. This latter was for testing rotors at speed much in excess of that for which they were designed. The “bed” consisted of a reinforced concrete structure lined on the inside with heavy baulks of wood to collect the pieces which flew off a rotor if it exploded from over-speed. The motor and controls driving the rotor were, of course, outside the danger area.

The cable run to the E.H.V. Testing Laboratory had a nasty aftermath. The cable had to pass across an area which was later to be covered by a reinforced concrete floor of a large cathedral-like building still to be built. The cable was very expensive and

I decided that it would be cheaper to use extra cable to run round two sides of the building instead of going diagonally across, rather than to excavate the concrete floor should the cable ever become faulty. My foreman thought otherwise and had it run directly across the floor area, with consequently a lot of expensive cable to spare. Black mark for me!

The next thing I had to design was a large storage shed for a special powder which ran like water, and so exerted great side-thrusts on walls used to confine it. This powder was to be used for work in connection with H.V. insulators. Without going into details but applying as much of the design knowledge that Canterbury College had armed me with, my final drawings showed of course, the “weather-boarding” on the inside of the cross-bearers instead of as usually, on the outside. When the shed came to be erected, the carpenters laughed at that New Zealand College Apprentice who put weather-boarding on the inside of a wall and proceeded to “cover up” for my mistake by putting the weather-boarding where they thought it ought to be, on the outside of the bearers and joists. Unfortunately in a large works such as this, once the drawings left one's hands that was the last one saw of it - unless something was wrong.

Some weeks later my superintendent called me into his office and said,

“You remember that storage shed you designed for that porcelain powder?”

Following my affirmative reply he said,

“Well the whole thing has collapsed. You have made a right mess of it”.

“Gosh”, I thought, “Canterbury College has let me down. Everything was in accordance what I was given to understand was good practice”

When I told the Super I could not understand it, he invited me to come with him and see for myself. What a relief it was to arrive

at the “shed” and find that the carpenters had not kept to my design at all. But the Super was not convinced and got my drawings out to check. I was of course completely exonerated, but I was sorry for the carpenters.

In the meantime, I had made contact with the Foundry Department again. A method of making “cores” for castings was being introduced which consisted of mixing an oil with a sand, for moulding the core into the required shape and then baking in an oven so that the formerly fragile shape became solid and porous. The trouble was getting the oil-sand mixture uniform. An attempt had been made to make a device in which the chief component was a propeller. Unfortunately it was not satisfactory as it was not scientifically shaped. What was more, no draughtsmen could be found either in the Foundry or the Maintenance Department, till they thought of me. Could I design a propeller to meet certain conditions? Yes, I thought I could. I had done one at Canterbury College.

After discussing the requirements, I duly produced the drawings which were unintelligible to those unfamiliar with “sectioning”. Fortunately the pattern makers were familiar with the work and a successful propeller and machine actually was produced.

But in the meantime the General Strike of 1926 had occurred and that did not make life easier for I had already moved to lodgings in Urmston with Eales, Crook and Cox. Crook was an Australian and Cox was a New Zealander who was working with Armstrong Whitworths in Openshaw, Manchester.

The strike stopped all public transport which prevented Cox from getting to work with a consequent loss of pay which he could ill afford. So I loaned him my bike while I walked to work along the now inoperative Cheshire Lines Railway track with all the signals “against” any trains.



Walking home to Umston
from Trafford Park along the
Cheshire Lines railway during
the Great Strike.

Although I set out for work earlier than usual I always arrived very late as did everyone else on “the staff”. The workpeople did not arrive at all and the pickets at the gate barred me from going in till I explained I was an apprentice from New Zealand, a point which was confirmed by my accent, and I was duly allowed to pass. Once in the works, except for the late arrivals, work with the staff went on as usual.

There was however, one member of our Department who made life unnecessarily difficult. He was the “handy boy” who ran messages and odd jobs round the office. One of his duties was

to obtain drawings from the Drawing Store some distance from our office. His name was "Ince", and a white Russian. College Apprentices used to call him variously "Eric", "Little by Little" or "Inch by Inch", owing to the extraordinarily long time he used to take over obtaining the drawings in particular. It was very frustrating. So one morning after plenty of previous warnings over his misdemeanours, I put him across my knee in front of the office and "playfully" gave him a whacking.

Just after lunch I was presented by Ince, again in front of the whole office, with a cardboard medal for services rendered.

The medal had on it the markings to denote "Inch" dimensions plus an inscription "Spanare rodem spoilare puemim" with a picture of a master board and a cane.

Anyway whatever the office thought of it, it had the effect of speeding up Ince. In between whiles I worked round variously with a maintenance fitter or electrician on odd repair jobs which gave me ample opportunity to study the layout of the works which showed that present and future activities were dogged by decisions, sometimes unwise, made in the past.

The company and its works were originally a subsidiary of the American Westinghouse Electrical Company working under the name of the British Westinghouse Company which was in turn, at the beginning of the century, taken over by a group of financiers including the Metropolitan Finance Company which with the influence of the Vickers who had a share in the deal, called itself the Metropolitan Vickers Electrical Company.

I do not think the general public, at least not in New Zealand, is aware of the interlocking of financial and manufacturing interests in the jockeying for large engineering contracts. The contract for a new scheme does not necessarily go to the lowest priced tender, but rather to the tenderer who can offer the best financial terms in the way of capital loans, interest and repayments. Hence, a manufacturing company which can offer

the best proposition in the way of finance as well as equipment, is more likely to receive the contract.

But even with the best original layout unforeseen growth usually introduces difficulties.

This was obvious in Metrovick where for instance iron castings had often to be transported some distance to a machine shop where they were machined to suit their assembly. But then they had to be transported to another shop where all the parts were brought together to be assembled. The problem of transportation round the works was an important one.

In the original layout, full gauge railway lines ran down the main aisles usually each about three hundred yards long. But this among other things due to the broad gauge and the necessary side clearances was a waste of space except in the Shipping Department where equipment finally left the works.

Metrovick used an electric traction system where small trucks, capable of taking heavy loads formed a train drawn by a small electric locomotive which could travel anywhere in the works where the floor was suitable - as it usually was. The locomotive was powered by batteries of the nickel-iron type which could take very heavy charges and discharges of electricity. Their capacity was not usually sufficient for them to carry on right throughout their day, so at lunchtime they were given a heavy boosting charge which enabled them to meet all demands. The driver of the loco was not required to leave the loco to open factory doors. The loco just pushed its way through the doors which opened under the loco's pressure.

From there I went to the West Works which was comparatively new for the development of metal-clad switchgear and high voltage switchgear. There I obtained a good insight into the manufacture and assembly of this type of gear, together with their advantages and limitations.

Finally I was transferred to the High Voltage Outdoor Substation Drawing Office and from there as far as the works was concerned events began to move very rapidly, but before this can be appreciated other events must be considered as they played their part.

14 Football activities

I have already mentioned that as soon as it was known that I was a New Zealander, I was considered a potentially-useful playing member of the Metrovick Rugby Union Football Club and I was immediately earmarked for the First Fifteen next Saturday. My argument that I was totally unfit, not having played for about five years, were brushed aside. In the course of the discussions I found that the Club was divided as to whether to play the 2-3-2 scrum or the 3-2-3 scrum, and it seemed to seal the matter for the 2-3-2 scrum when I said, in discussing positions of play, that I played wing-forward for the 2-3-2 scrum. However, I insisted on playing my first game with a lower grade team.

It may be of interest to note that in addition to members from the British Isles (i.e. from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales which latter used to call each other in Welsh), there were New Zealanders, Australians, South Africans, Argentineans, most of whom were College or ex-College Apprentices.

So on the following Saturday, I found myself in the “A” team, not the “First”, to play “away” as they called it at Durkenfield. We travelled as a team by train and tram on a wet, cold, miserable afternoon. The conditions were not very propitious for an enjoyable game. However, after we were changed into our football gear and paraded onto the ground, I was surprised at the small average size of the team. We kicked off and I wondered what the next few minutes would show.

A Durkenfield back fumbled the ball and we were on top of him. But he managed to save the situation with a poor line kick and I realised the standard was not high. I was beginning to enjoy myself and getting stuck into a loose scrum, found myself through it with the ball at my feet. The half-back made a feeble attempt to stop me and before I had realised what had happened I picked up the ball and scored. Shortly afterwards the same thing happened again with another score to my credit. However, I was beginning to feel a bit puffed and so took it easy for a little. But I found that I had only to push a little and I was through to score again.

When walking back through our opponents I heard one of them say "watch that man (me) and don't let him get away". I turned to him and said, "don't bother. I've done enough for one day", at which they laughed.

But next Saturday I was in the "Firsts" to play Manchester A, a team of some standing and we were to play at home.

I was to find that there was quite a lot of informal routine with these matches which added much to their enjoyment; also much good comradeship. For instance one afternoon when the ground was frozen I was collared very hard so that I came down with a jar. When I could collect my wits, I found my opponent standing over me, holding out his hand and saying, "Sorry old chap, so sorry" when he should have been gathering the loose ball to defend his goal line.

I was rather surprised that my concern about physical fitness was not strongly shared by the rest of the Club and advocated more practice also with the various skills such as scrumaging, passing, etc. But in the winter time it was dark when we went to work and dark when we came home. So we did not have much opportunity for practice.

Prior to leaving New Zealand I noticed that an illuminated training ground had been established in Hagley Park in

Christchurch and I saw no reason why we should not establish one for our football club. The idea seemed to be a new one at Metrovick, but all saw the advantage of it. Fortunately there was a suitable piece of ground outside the Works' boundaries which also belonged to the company. It was bounded on one side by the Bridgewater Canal and on another side by the Cheshire Lines Railway connecting Manchester and Liverpool. Eventually I was asked by the Club to approach the Managing Director and ask what could be done about it. He remembered me from the slinging incident in D Aisle and after I had outlined our proposal, he countered with the question as to why the company should go to this expense for us. I was expecting that one, and gave the opinion that that would probably not be very much. But on the other hand it would be a good advertisement for Metrovick as it would be in full view of the passengers in the frequent trains passing by. Ultimately he gave approval on condition that it would not cost too much, and set in motion the resources of the company to get out a design and, if not too expensive, to have the company's employees to erect it. As the cost came out to be only eighty pounds, he gave the go-ahead and in a couple of weeks we had our training ground. It was quite a success except for the fact that our respective landladies were not happy about us coming in about nine o'clock of any evening to remove the mud we had collected on our knees and clothes. We, of course, had no clothes washing facilities on the training grounds.

The Maintenance Department where I was working at this time, installed the scheme and I was told that the estimated cost of eighty pounds actually was three hundred and thirty pounds when erected. My department supervisor suggested I ring up the Cost Department for details. It was found that many unauthorised people had booked time on this job, apparently thinking that I was a "green horn". Much of the time that was booked had no relation to the job at all. An interesting fact was that within half an hour of my request I was supplied all the

names of the workmen and the times they had booked on the job all out of a staff of fourteen thousand employees. The machine was comparatively new and I was told that it replaced over one hundred and fifty costing clerks.

The last year that I played we decided to end up the year with a “dinner” which took the form of a “hot pot supper”, a common form of entertainment in Lancashire. I had already had previous experience of this type of supper, the hot pot consisting of a kind of steak and potato stew. The usual laudatory remarks were made about the various officials and players. Account had been taken of the points scored by each of the players and there was quite a lot of murmuring among the backs when it was announced that I, a forward, had scored the most points for the First Team for the year. I must have been a selfish player, etc. It was not realised that it was due to my position as “wing forward”.

I was rather upset too by the tone that developed after the formal business had been finished. It seemed that members were urging with each other to tell the “smuttiest” yarn they could and unfortunately they had no wit in them to make them clean.

They were just pure filth. I had served an unwilling apprenticeship in the army in this sort of entertainment, but my training was not equal to this, so I unobtrusively retired and went home. Next day I was taunted about not being able to stomach a Lancashire hot pot but I did not think it worthwhile to point out that “it is not what goeth into a man which defiles but what cometh out of his mouth”. However, I had learned many years ago how to deal with the good and the bad, and it did but little to mar the happy days with the Metrovick Rugby Club.

15 General social activities

My entry into the social life of the Works and the district was rather slow. Although I was quite willing, even eager, to take part, there were several things which retarded my progress. As mentioned earlier, on the shop floor and in the foundry I wore black shirts just as we did in New Zealand to save washing. But unfortunately in England they had a political connotation which was not popular with the people I associated with. In addition I was an ex-serviceman of the ordinary rank and file and “you had to be careful about them”.

Then there was another alarming factor which I decided had to be disposed of as soon as possible; and that was that there were gaps in my technical knowledge from Canterbury College which put me at a grave disadvantage. We had never had any formal instruction in algebra and our mathematics lectures never once showed their application to electrical problems. The electrical text books that used vectors, assumed that we were conversant with this method of calculation, and so we groped through the vector diagrams, guessing the theory behind the behaviour of the lines. Unfortunately when I read up the subject in another text book, the theory that I had worked out for myself did not work for the problem in the second text book. However, I did not think the matter was very important and initially relied on a good visual memory to get me through. How wrong I was!

I found they were a very important tool in calculating and so I got down to mastering the subject, which took much spare time.

Then I came across an American text book giving in detail the calculation for the performance of a 220 kilovolt transmission line. This also required an advanced branch of mathematics called hyperbolic functions and although we had several lectures on them I found I still had a lot to learn. Special mathematics tables of these functions were required and I raised quite a lot of interest when I asked for the loan of a copy from

the Research Department library. They had none but eventually found a copy in the Manchester University Library which was borrowed for me on indefinite loan.

If that was not enough to restrict social activities, the Australasian Association invited me into producing a paper on the "Economic Design of Distribution Lines" as previously mentioned, all of which I thought would be useful when I returned to New Zealand.

So Christmas arrived and I, like some other Australasians, had made very little social impact on the community. The Head of the Apprentice Department hearing of this, invited us round to his place on Christmas Day. I don't think he and his wife realised that they were taking on, but they helped us to have a merry Christmas when we could have had a depressing one - for which we were duly grateful.

During the year I became very friendly with a South African named Forsyth and we had many discussions over the colour question. Having been brought up with Maoris I adopted the same amicable attitude to all the coloured people whom I met, including the Chinese and Japanese apprentices. Forsyth could not understand me, but when I heard his side of the question I wonder what we would do if we had ten million Maoris who were uneducated, largely hostile to the whites and out for all they could take, lawfully or unlawfully. But I must leave a discussion on this question for another time.

However, through Forsyth, I found that I was receiving invitations from another different strata of English society altogether. The first one came from the "Hollies", Latchford, Warrington. I found that another New Zealander and his wife May, had also been invited. One Sunday afternoon, we found our way to Latchford and the Hollies which was a lovely old-fashioned house set in acres of shrubs and trees, with flower gardens near the house. The house itself comprised two different periods, seventeenth and early nineteenth century.



“The Hollies”, Latchford, 1929.
Copy of a watercolour by Constance H Broadbent.

We found that our hosts were three sisters who had all lost their fiancés in the 1914-1918 War and were endeavouring to strengthen the bonds by giving us a much wider knowledge and appreciation of English customs and people. That afternoon there were a number of friends of the Broadbent family present also and some days afterwards I realised we had been sounded out on our political and to a certain extent, religious beliefs. Thanks to my activities at the St Andrews Bible Class in Christchurch I had already arrived at definite ideas on topical questions, and we were tactfully questioned on a wide range of subjects. I found that I was having far too much to say and when I began to apologise I was encouraged to continue. When we were departing I again apologised but was assured it was the most interesting afternoon they had spent for a long time.

About a fortnight later I received a formal invitation from Miss Philips of Philips Park, Manchester to afternoon tea and it commenced “Pray, take tea with me” etc. My other New Zealand friends joined me also. We were impressed with the

magnificence of the grounds and the charm of Miss Philips. Those visits were a welcome relief to the rather drab conditions in which we lived.

The following Christmas was spent with the Broadbents. On Christmas day, we had a hockey match in the morning and it produced a lot of fun. It was memorable for me, through an Australian, an outstanding forward of the Rugby Club, rushing after the ball and sending an English girl flying off her feet when he bumped into her. If she was hurt she carefully concealed it, to avoid embarrassing the Australian. Also there was some confusion about the scoring, and uncertainty about who won. But who cared, it was a very enjoyable match.

At dinner that evening we exchanged Christmas presents, the question of presents being a matter of much concern for me. I had very little inspiration so ended up buying a nice box of chocolates. But so did everyone else. But the Broadbents took their six month's supply of chocolates very graciously.

There were speeches at the dinner too, at which the colonial (sorry Aussies) context of the company was emphasised. One of the motives of our hosts was to strengthen the bond of Empire, all the male members of the family having been killed in World War 1.

Altogether it was a memorable Christmas and I am sure the Misses Broadbent will look down from wherever they are now, with considerable satisfaction on the broadening and enlarging of our minds that they accomplished in the realm of human relationships.

In the meantime we were also extending our contacts with the local community, particularly in Urmston and similar suburbs of Manchester and found ourselves invited to local social functions. Of course we returned the compliment. About this time too I had been elected Chairman of the Metropolitan Overseas Association, which had developed from our

Australasian Association. This had proved so successful that the South Africans in M.V. set about forming an association of their own. But it was realised that it was better to have a large strong association than these splinter groups which were forming. So the Metropolitan Vickers Overseas Association was formed, the original basis of membership being born overseas.

Next page: the Metrovick Overseas Association (date unknown).

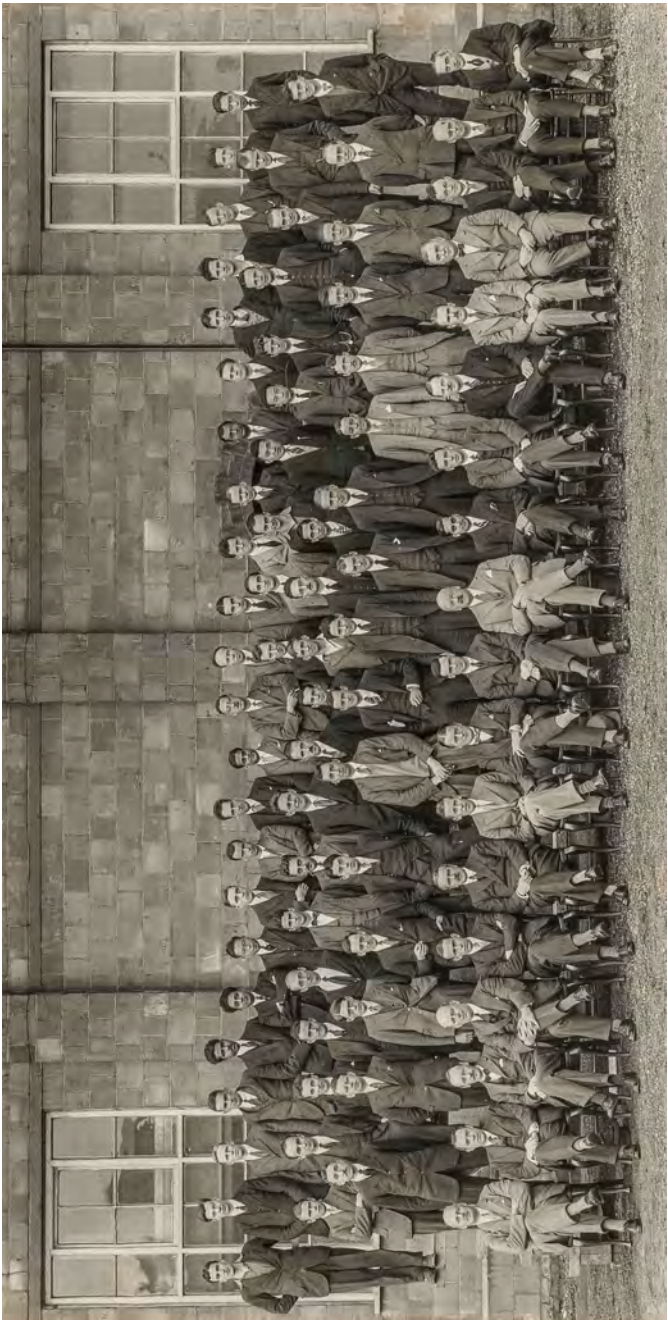
Allan Shackleton, Chairman of the Overseas Association, is 9th from the left in the front row.

Noted on the rear of the photograph in Allan's handwriting:

2nd row from top starting on 6th from left-hand end: Barrett, Plummer, Cuthbert, Ehrenberg.

2nd row from bottom 2nd from right-hand end: Forsyth, above chap in grey suit.

Front row starting from left: Capt. Maxwell (Head of Research Dept & Education, ---- (Export Company), Black (Committee-man), Bailey (Managing Director & Works Manager), George (c.m.), Mc Kinstry (Managing Director of Export Company), Draffin (c.m), Sir Philip Nash (Chairman Board of Directors), me, Captain Hilton (Managing Director), Lobo [Indian] (c.m.), Callaghan (Export Company), Gripper (sec), Whitmoyer (Manager Contracts Department), ----, ----, ----,



16 Looking back

I am now 86 years old and I have not yet put on record much of my adult life; in fact I am about sixty years behind. Further it looks as though I have just about encompassed my allotted span. I find writing difficult and it is some years since I used the typewriter, and owing to the ravages of arthritis in my hands do not expect much success with that now. However, I would like to record some of the influences which have shaped my life. The difficulty is however, my most recent writings are still in storage, pending settling in our new home and I do not know at what point I ceased writing. Anyway I do not think I shall live long enough to give detailed chronological accounts and shall therefore deal with prominent incidents only.

I had arrived in England with the idea of picking up as much engineering knowledge as I could to make up for the four years of experience I had lost due to War service and after two years as a College Apprentice and an extra year as a Special Trainee, decided it was time I was returning to New Zealand. So I resigned from the various organisations associated with Metropolitan Vickers, bought a steamer ticket to New Zealand and began saying my goodbyes.

One day, W.A. Coates, came to me and asked if it was true that I was returning to New Zealand. When I confirmed it and in the course of the ensuing conversation, indicated that three pounds ten at the end of the special trainee course had no attractions for me. When he asked me what salary I would take to stay, I told him he was too late. I had already bought my ticket. He said that M.V. would have no difficulty in getting a refund if I chose to stay and what salary would tempt me to stay. So I said "seven pounds a week". He said, "that is a bit stiff but don't do anything more till I see you again".

He did see me again and offered me a three year contract as a Switchgear and Project Engineer commencing at seven pounds

a week and rising by ten shillings a week every six months. So I became a Switchgear and Project Engineer and ultimately became responsible for the engineering work under this heading for the tenders for the then Public Works Department of New Zealand. I also worked with another engineer on substations for the Bombay-Baroda Railways of India. Then when that finished I was given minor jobs to tackle on my own.

In our section there were five engineers supervised by G. Cluley who had slipped into the job during the war years when there was a shortage of staff. The final price at which a tender was offered to the potential customer was by an arrangement between the various manufacturers who adjusted their prices so that the order would be given to the manufacturer who had the least amount of work going through his factory, in order to keep as far as possible, a steady flow of work through each of the individual organisations.

A tender in which I took considerable interest was for three 110,000 volt substations for Stratford, Hawera and Wanganui in the North Island of New Zealand. What made it more interesting was that the slump was beginning to show its effects on the amount of work available and it was more than usually desirable that we should obtain those orders. Similar substations had already been manufactured and it seemed that our specification should follow well-established lines.

By turning three columns of 110,000 volt insulators upside down I was able to dispense with several forty foot lattice work steel girder and decrease the height of the bays. The Research Department carried out some experiments and okayed the arrangement. This made an appreciable reduction in our price and we were delighted to get the order.

In the meantime owing to the slump, staff were put on short time, being laid off one day a week with the resultant reduction in pay. I had however, received an advance copy of a specification for moving out K2A metal-clad units from

Addington to Timaru Substation in South Canterbury. But the official copy had not been received from our Wellington Office and by thus being ahead we were able to arrange a cheaper official price for our equipment and thus ensure our getting the order. So that kept me occupied for about three months on and off and avoided lay offs.

One day I was given the job of engineering the protective system for the electrical distribution of the Suram Railways. This was a railway network for transporting ore in the mountains in Russia. It was a big scheme and I could see the commercial cost running into over a million pounds, an unusually large amount in those days. I had finished most of the calculations and my specification was beginning to take shape when I received a note from the Chief Engineer of M.V. that all my papers on this job, calculations, diagrams etc., irrespective of their condition, had to be bundled up and taken to M.V. Export Department. I understood that there was a tax dodge involved in the use of the Department. I carried out my instructions and occasionally gave a thought as to what happened to that contract.

A further example of the ramifications of the electrical engineering industry was a tender for the Danish State Railways. One Saturday morning (we worked from 8 till 12) as soon as I arrived I was presented with a half-inch thick, foolscap size specification and told to have it finished by 11.30 so that the commercial section could have it in the post by midday. It was too ludicrous to take seriously. But they meant it. I could have as many stenographers as I liked and any other assistance that I wanted. It seems that I was the fastest worker in our office. Normally it would have taken me all the morning to digest the specification but by sorting out the substations and guessing what ought to go in, with the help of the costing section, got the spec out, apparently much to the relief of the heads of the firm, but on the distinct understanding that mistakes would not be held against me. All the same it had to

be as correct as I could make it. But it was a tired engineer that left the Works that morning.

Occasionally we could see the New Zealand engineers making expensive mistakes in their specifications. The principles on which they based their requirements were reasonable enough but unfortunately they were sometimes unaware of the practical difficulties. One such example was the teeing-in of the incoming cables from Lake Coleridge with the North-South main transmission line in the South Island. The New Zealand engineers required all the incoming power to be connected to the end of the interconnecting busbars and the outgoing feeders to be connected to the other end of busbars so that all the incoming power must pass through the common busbar before it was connected to the outgoing feeder.

Unfortunately the type of switchgear to be used was already determined by previous engineering which was metalised gear. This had the advantage in the substation of requiring little space in the building but in this case had the disadvantage that the heavy amount of current caused heating in the iron in which the gear was encased and required much more expensive arrangements to overcome. I recall that the whole Works was laughing at the absurdity of the position as the men on the testing found that the preliminary design produced enough heat for those on the job to heat their "billies" for their lunch. This was of course eventually rectified but it required seventy-two square inches section of copper to do it, much in excess of that required for normal practice.

When the Waitaki Power Scheme was being developed a new arrangement of switchgear had been developed and put into operation in Great Britain. In addition to the first cost being much cheaper it was easier to run and maintain. So in order to save New Zealand money I engineered two schemes one based on their old-fashioned specification and the other on the new scheme. Apparently the new scheme was a shock to the New

Zealand engineers because in reply to our tender, they indicated that they were losing confidence in M.V. for putting up such a Heath Robinson Scheme and were seriously considering taking their business away from M.V. In later years, when I had left M.V., I saw that the Arapuni Scheme incorporated the bases of this design so I presume the New Zealand engineers were converted.

From this time forward more personal matters began to occupy my attention. Up to the present, much of my time had been spent in plugging what I thought were gaps in my technical education. For instance, when working on the adjustment of house service meters, I had no idea how the mechanical adjustments we were making produced the desired effect. One evening I discussed the matter with my room-mate and he indicated that it was a simple matter to understand, quoting a lot of mathematical formulae in his explanation. When I questioned the basis of his formula he queried, "What did they teach you at Canterbury College, Shack?"

The obvious reply was "not that".

The reason was that engineering students joined with academic students for the subject of mathematics and the combined curriculum left very little room for engineering applications. Consequently I had to spend much time in the evening repairing omissions in my education, the most notable of which was "vectors", which are qualities taking account of direction as well as magnitude. As soon as we started on Electrical Engineering, I ran into them.

(End of Allan's manuscript)

Epilogue.

While he was still living in Manchester, Allan met Mildred Stokes at the Congregational Church, Flixton Road, Urmston, United Kingdom. They were married there in 1929. Allan's parents and his sister, Bernice, travelled by ship from New Zealand to attend the wedding. Mildred's bridesmaids were Bernice; Mildred's two younger sisters, Essie and Joan; and Mildred's friend, Irene Hartley. Allan's Best Man was Josiah Eccles (1897-1967) (also a post-graduate trainee at Metrovick) who in 1957 received a knighthood for his contribution to the British electrical industry.



On honeymoon. A hazy day in Montreux, Switzerland, Sept., 1929.

Not long after their marriage, Allan and Mildred bought a house at Culcheth some 20 kilometres west of Trafford Park, Manchester. Their first child, my elder brother, David Allan Shackleton was born in 1932.



First house at Culcheth c. 1930. (Cost: 675 Pounds Sterling).

For several years, Allan had entertained the idea of returning to New Zealand. He disliked English winters and preferred New Zealand's more temperate climate. Many years later, Mildred explained to me that she too was attracted by the prospect of living in New Zealand because Allan had made it sound like a tropical island paradise.

They became increasingly unnerved by reports of job losses at Metrovick and elsewhere brought about by the Great Depression. So finally, in October, 1934, having been employed by Metrovick for approximately ten years, Allan resigned. They sold their house and, together with David, they

embarked on the *SS Ionic* at Southampton and disembarked at Oamaru,⁹ New Zealand, in mid-November, 1934.

Upon arrival in New Zealand they stayed in Waimate with Allan's parents and his sister, Bernice. According to Mildred, they were not particularly welcoming. Her relationship with them soon became strained – a situation that never improved throughout the years.

On one occasion, George told Allan that Mildred seemed “flighty”¹⁰ with none of the practical homemaking abilities necessary for a good New Zealand housewife. She claimed they were patronising, with narrow-minded and outdated Victorian attitudes.

More worryingly, Allan found that the employment situation in New Zealand appeared worse than in the United Kingdom. All the desirable professional engineering positions seemed to be tightly held by existing incumbents and new project work had come to a standstill. Fortunately, after working as Sales Engineer for Metrovick in Wellington for a year or more, he finally obtained a permanent position as Head of the Engineering Department at Gisborne High School.

Employment as a teacher and administrator in a rather remote New Zealand town was probably not a good career move for a promising professional engineer with a thorough grounding in the design, manufacture and testing of heavy electrical power equipment. But of course, for the time being at least, he had no other obvious choice of suitable employment. He was not to know that after the Depression, the United Kingdom electrical engineering industry was to enter a period of vast expansion.

⁹ According to the *SS Ionic's* passenger list wherein Oamaru is stated as being their “port of disembarkation”.

¹⁰ Modern dictionary definition: “fickle and irresponsible”.

Conversely, following the start of WWII in 1939, New Zealand was a relatively safe place in which to live – well away from the German bombs (and later rockets) which began to fall on Britain. Allan enjoyed helping the younger generation improve their future career prospects but Mildred was more concerned that he should improve his own.

They rented a house at 532 Childers Road, Gisborne, for several years at the fixed price of £5/19/2 per month. In 1936, I was born there.

Motivated by the inevitability of future rent increases and a desire to live in one of Gisborne's more picturesque locations (“far superior to those in Manchester”), Mildred convinced Allan that they should build their own home in the Waikanae Beach area. They were fortunate to acquire a beachfront site which unusually had become available. Such sites were highly sought-after and ownership was tightly-held.

The two-storey house was completed in 1941 despite the acute shortage of building materials and skilled labour that existed during the war. It had magnificent views across the sea to a backdrop of distant hills and the cliffs of Young Nick's Head. But unfortunately it leaked persistently for many months. Until Allan took remedial action, the front windows bulged inwards alarmingly during southerly storms. The occasional but substantial earthquakes in the years following the disastrous Napier earthquake on 3 February, 1931, also increased the number of cracks in our house's pink plaster exterior. According to Allan, the house had been “Jerry built” and was the subject of a number of acrimonious arguments with the “incompetent” architect and builder whose frequently-mentioned names I can still remember.

Shortly after the start of WWII, New Zealand became awash with patriotic fervour. Allan reported that “Tokyo Rose”, in her characteristic sing-song voice, had exhorted Gisborne residents over short-wave radio to, “get those sheep off Darton Field (the

local aerodrome) so we can land our airplanes safely”. The local German dentist was then interrogated and put under house arrest on suspicion of being a spy.

Because of his age, Allan was ineligible for service in WWII, but was required to join the “Home Guard” instead. He regarded Home Guard “games” with some skepticism owing to an acute shortage of conventional weapons in the face of a threatened Japanese invasion of East Coast New Zealand beaches. As he explained, “to try to repulse an invasion with Edmonds baking powder tins filled with dynamite would only be an irritant and would unnecessarily provoke the Japanese.”

On Waikanae Beach, just beyond our boundary, a row of deep “defensive trenches” was dug into the sand hills. Large logs were piled up on the beach to hopefully convince any Japanese surveillance aircraft that the coastline was heavily-defended with anti-aircraft canon. A few concrete “pill-boxes” were also installed in “strategic positions” in the sandhills. At school, we used to practise running into dug-out shelters. Fortunately, a Japanese invasion did not eventuate and the trenches and mock canon were only successful in inflicting superficial injuries on children (myself included) that fell into or off them.

The beach was a wonderful playground for David and me, particularly during the warm summer evenings when the sounds of Allan thumping out Beethoven's “Moonlight Sonata” (or some other favourite) on our piano competed with a mass choir of chirping crickets and the roar of the sea.

Our few trips to Wellington via gorges, tunnels and viaducts were also memorable. We had to struggle awake in the early hours of the morning to travel in our car (an “Austin 7”) over the unsealed winding hill roads to Wairoa, then by diesel-driven railcar to Napier, and finally by steam train to Wellington.

In 1942, one of Mildred's friends, a Mrs Oakden, arranged for a group of United States Army Marines to enjoy a Christmas

“Rest and Recreation” holiday in Gisborne. We billeted two “combat cameramen”, Staff Sergeants Norman T Hatch ¹¹ and John F Ercole, who were very pleased to have been assigned to our home. They could run out of the house and into the surf within minutes. The Marines were very popular with the Gisborne community and their visit was a great success. I recall that around 2 am one morning, “Johnny”, after having been inadvertently locked out of our house, enlisted my help to successfully enter via a downstairs window.

In 1946, Allan was encouraged by a New Zealand representative of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNNRA) ¹² to apply for the position of Industrial Rehabilitation Officer with UNNRA's China Mission. Initially Allan worked in Shanghai but during the onset of the Chinese Revolution, he was posted to Formosa (now Taiwan). Mildred, David and I were en route to join him there when the Formosans rebelled against the corruption and repression of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's military regime. Consequently we were obliged to return home by ship after having flown by seaplane from Mechanics' Bay, Auckland, to Rose Bay, Sydney. More alarmingly, whilst he was living in Taipei, on 28 February, 1947, Allan again found himself in a war zone.

In December, 1947, at the end of his two-year term of duty, he became aware of the possibility of further employment with the United Nations in New York, United States of America. He may have even been made a formal offer. The prospect of career advancement and a glamorous life with the United Nations appealed to Mildred, but much to her chagrin, Allan, perhaps

¹¹ The following year, at the age of 22, Norman was involved in one of his most critical and perilous assignments – filming the pivotal Battle of Tarawa. The film shocked the American nation for its record of the slow, agonising movements of the Marines against the Japanese during three days of carnage.

¹² Cyril Burton who was also living in Gisborne with his family at that time.

because there may have been no certainty of continuing employment after two years' tenure, refused to pursue the opportunity further.



Outside UNNRA's temporary and bullet-ridden headquarters,
Manilla, Philippines.

Soon after his return to Gisborne, Allan was so strongly motivated by “interests of peace, justice and humanity” and the need for the appalling conditions in Formosa to be more widely known, that he commenced to write a manuscript entitled, *Formosa Calling*.

After this was completed in 1948, he made several unsuccessful attempts to publish it. Rather than accept that the market for his work was limited, he became convinced that no publisher would publish anything so critical of our “Chinese Nationalist allies”. The book was ultimately published posthumously in May, 1998, in both English and Mandarin, at the request of the New Zealand Taiwanese Association as being the only authentic eyewitness account of the atrocities that occurred during the “28 February, 1947” incident.

Allan's return after two years' absence overseas foreshadowed the end of our pleasant way of life in Gisborne. His former position as Head of the Engineering Department at Gisborne High School was I suspect no longer available to him and I assume he was obliged to accept a lesser, temporary role. Additionally, Mildred was often homesick over the years and longed to return to the United Kingdom. New Zealand was not the paradise that she had originally imagined. Under these pressures and upset by Allan's refusal to pursue the United Nations' opportunity, she delivered Allan an ultimatum: we were all to return to the United Kingdom. If Allan refused, she would go without him and take David and me with her.

Allan did not refuse.

In 1948, three years after the end of WWII, Allan resigned from Gisborne High School and our family then undertook the usual five-week voyage by ship to the United Kingdom, despite the rationing and the general post-war austerity that still existed there.

We spent several enjoyable but anxious months living near Mildred's youngest sister, Joan, and her family on the edge of the moors in Glossop, Derbyshire, before Allan was appointed Head of the Department of Engineering of the newly-formed Reading Technical College, Berkshire. His responsibilities included input to the design of new premises and the re-design and assimilation of a number of complex courses from various institutes throughout the greater Berkshire area, as well as some courses conducted by the University of Reading. David and I soon became adjusted to our new environment and were happily settled in our respective schools¹³.

Soon after their arrival in Reading, my parents joined the Society of Friends (Quakers) whose friendship, values, and absence of "extravagant religious ceremonies" were greatly

¹³ Leighton Park and Reading Grammar Schools respectively.

appreciated by them both. A number of years later in Dunedin, New Zealand, they became disillusioned by the local branch of the Society, claiming it had been “hijacked by aggressive Pacifists who dominated the Meetings to the detriment of spiritual considerations”.

Unfortunately, much to Mildred’s disappointment, life in her role as housewife in Reading fell far short of her expectations which were largely based on memories of her happy social life in Manchester as a single woman some 20 years earlier. Her life had become rather mundane and she became rather depressed despite her normally-vivacious personality and her aptitude for making friends readily.

Inevitably, after two years’ residency in the United Kingdom, Allan succumbed to Mildred’s pressure to return to New Zealand. He resigned from his position¹⁴ and on 2 December, 1949, together with a number of assisted United Kingdom emigrants, we travelled back to New Zealand via Curacao and the Panama Canal on board the *R.M.S. Rangitiki*.

My parents then sold their Gisborne home and our family moved to Dunedin where Allan held the position of Head of Engineering Department at King Edward Technical College for a number of years.

They enjoyed life in Dunedin where they found a number of “kindred spirits” among the academic community in particular. Mildred even discovered an old friend from her Manchester High School days. Allan was always busy. He seemed to be forever tutoring at “night school”, preparing courses during school holidays, or marking papers at home.

¹⁴ In Allan’s testimonial of 8 November, 1949, Mr J Dimmick, the Principal of Reading Technical College, wrote, inter alia, “Mr. Shackleton is a man of the highest integrity. The development of his department bears testimony to his ability to overcome formidable difficulties. He has made a lasting contribution to Further Education in this area...”

Several years after our arrival in Dunedin, my parents bought a section overlooking Lake Wakitipu on Frankton Arm, near Queenstown (in a District Council ballot), with the intention of building a holiday home there. Owing to the somewhat-exposed nature of the site, the house was never built, but for several years we did enjoy camping on our patch of land among the grandeur of the mountains - whenever the wind stopped blowing.

After approximately 11 years in Dunedin, my parents' next move was to the Kapiti Coast where they intended to retire. However Allan continued working full-time and later part-time at several colleges and other educational institutions in the Wellington region. He finally retired from a career of teaching and administration in 1965 at the age of 69.

An unusual feature of their retirement was that at Mildred's insistence, every 18 months or so they would sell their existing house and buy another in a different New Zealand city or town, often in an area where they had once lived several years earlier. Dunedin was their favourite location. Apart from our original family home in Hawthorne Avenue, they bought and sold a total of four other houses in various Dunedin suburbs. This was not a financially-rewarding activity although the usual inflationary increases in house prices were sufficient to convince Mildred to the contrary.

My parents eventually settled in New Plymouth, Taranaki, to live close to my family. On two separate occasions, Mildred flew to Manchester on her own and stayed with her youngest sister, Joan, for several weeks. Joan reported that Mildred mainly wanted to meet with and to talk about people from yesteryear. Unfortunately Joan was too young to remember Mildred's friends and found it difficult to share in Mildred's enthusiasm for such activities.

Allan died suddenly on 16 July, 1984, at the age of 87. Mildred later went to live in Waikanae to be nearer to us when we moved to Wellington.

My brother David died in Auckland in 1998. Mildred died a year later at the age of 94. Allan and Mildred are buried together in the Servicemen's section of the Te Henui Cemetery, New Plymouth, and are survived by myself, four grandsons, and one great-grandson.

Those few still-surviving ex-students from his former educational institutions may still remember Allan - and their ploy of distracting him from his lectures by cajoling him into talking about "The war to end all wars".

Colin James Shackleton,
New Plymouth,
New Zealand.

April 2015.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS.

Date	Age	Event
1897		Allan born in Waimate, South Canterbury, New Zealand.
1901	4	<i>Queen Victoria dies.</i>
1902	5	<i>Boer War ends.</i>
1908	11	Starts “First Year” class at the Waimate District High School.
1912	15	<i>The “SS Titanic” sinks.</i>
1913	16	Transferred to Form 5 at Timaru Boys' High School.
1914	17	<i>World War I begins.</i>
1915	18	Awarded Dux of Timaru Boys' High School.
1916	19	Schoolmaster at Timaru Boys' High School.
1917	20	Enlists in the Army on 3 April to form part of the 29th Reinforcements (WWI). Embarks at Wellington on “Ruahine” 15 Aug. Disembarks Glasgow, 2 Oct. Hospitalised at the 55th General Hospital, Wimereux (near Boulogne) 23 November.
1918	21	Discharged from General Hospital 5 January. German gas attack outside Ypres.

1918	21	German counter-attack at Lasigny farm 5 April. Attack on the Hindenburg Line at Havrincourt Wood. Allan and “Ossie” Osmers capture a large group of Germans. <i>WWI Armistice, 11 November 1918.</i>
1919	22	Joins Army of Occupation in Germany. Embarks Liverpool on “Port Hacking” 21 August for Lyttelton. Discharged from Army on 17 September.
1920	23	Commences study (Intermediate Year) at Canterbury College, Christchurch.
1923	26	Passes final examinations for the Degree of Electrical Engineering.
1924	27	Starts two-years' post-graduate training at The Metropolitan Vickers Electrical Company.
1926	29	Undertakes a further one-year special training course at Metrovick. <i>Ten-day General Strike throughout the United Kingdom.</i>
1927	30	Appointed Switchgear and Project Engineer, Metrovick, initially under a three-year contract.
1929	32	Marries Mildred at the Congregational Church, Urmston, Lancs., United Kingdom. <i>Onset of the Great (Economic) Depression.</i>
1932	35	First child, David Allan Shackleton is born.
1934	37	Resigns from Metrovick and returns to New Zealand with Mildred and David.
1935	38	Appointed Head of Engineering Department, Gisborne High School.

1936	39	Second child, Colin James Shackleton, is born.
1939	42	<i>WWII begins.</i>
1941	44	Completed building home at Waikanae Beach, Gisborne, New Zealand.
1945	48	<i>End of WWII.</i>
1946	49	Appointed Industrial Rehabilitation Officer, China Mission, UNRRA. Diverted to Formosa (Taiwan).
1947	50	Returns to Gisborne. Continues employment at Gisborne High School.
1948	51	Departs with family for the United Kingdom. Appointed Head of Department of Engineering, Reading Technical College, Berks.
1949	52	Returns to New Zealand.
1950	53	Appointed Head of Department of Engineering, King Edward Technical College, Dunedin, New Zealand.
1962	65	Retires from King Edward Technical College. Starts working for various educational institutions in the Wellington District, New Zealand.
1965	69	Allan finally retires. He and Mildred initially live on the Kapiti Coast (Raumati Beach and later Paraparaumu), New Zealand.
1984	87	Allan dies in New Plymouth, New Zealand.
1998		Elder son, David, dies in Auckland, New Zealand.
1999		Mildred, his wife, dies in Waikanae, New Zealand.